

Overview

To ensure accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, it is essential that decision-making power is vested in the hands of those impacted by crises. This approach recognizes people – women, girls, men, and boys of all ages and in all their diversity – as the first responders and active agents in their own relief and recovery¹. It not only empowers individuals and communities but also fosters a deeper understanding of their unique circumstances and needs.

The [Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability](#) (CHS)² and the [IASC Collective AAP Framework](#)³ offer guidance on prioritizing accountable humanitarian action and ensuring that programming is responsive to affected people's needs. OCHA's Pooled Funds – the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Regional Pooled Funds (RPFs) and the Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) seek to enable a more people-centered humanitarian action, exploring innovative ways to gather and respond to community priorities and driving systemic change for a more responsive and accountable humanitarian response. The [CERF Handbook](#) requires "RC/HCs to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are considered throughout the CERF processes and that accountability to affected people underpins allocation's design and implementation". Similarly, the [CBPF Global Guidelines](#) emphasize that the Funds "promote organizational and collective feedback mechanisms across the humanitarian landscape to collect and act upon the voices and expressed priorities of affected people across gender, age, disability and other diversity factors."

Purpose

This guidance note aims to support field offices in operationalizing provisions of the CERF Handbook and the CBPF Global Guidelines that pertain to accountability to affected populations. It provides an overview of strategic approaches and desirable good practices. It also contributes to advancing CERF- and CBPF-supported activities related to accountability to affected populations and to more harmonized approaches across the Funds.

Strategic Approach

Given their positioning and catalytic role in humanitarian contexts, OCHA's Pooled Funds strengthen accountability to affected people by adhering to the following strategic approaches:

- 1. Ensure that communities and people affected by crises take part in allocation and project decisions⁴.** The Funds listen to people's voices in defining priorities and embed accountability principles throughout their allocation cycles. Affected people's feedback and their evolving needs are closely considered when shaping allocation strategies, designing projects, and implementing them. Transparent information about allocations and projects is also provided to ensure people are informed and engaged.
- 2. Promote collective, Fund- and/or project-level feedback and complaints mechanisms.** By supporting a diverse range of mechanisms – from collective platforms supported by CERF to Fund-level channels managed by CBPFs – the Funds empower communities to voice their concerns and priorities. Additionally, all funded projects must have a channel for communities to provide feedback or complaints. Any feedback related to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) will be referred to appropriate systems to facilitate timely action.
- 3. Foster partners' capacities for improved engagement with affected communities.** The Funds work alongside operational partners, including local and national actors, to promote contextually relevant and culturally sensitive responses. Through cross-learning and experience exchange, the Funds also strengthen partners' capacities to engage with affected communities, promoting positive effects and avoiding unintended negative consequences.

¹ OCHA on Message: [Accountability to Affected People](#), 17 May 2023.

² The CHS sets out Nine Commitments that organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. It also facilitates greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis.

³ This framework is a tool developed by the IASC to enable RC/HCs and HCTs to prioritize accountability to affected people and ensure that humanitarian programming is responsive to people's needs.

⁴ All allocations from OCHA's Pooled Funds, whether CERF or RHF/CBPFs, are guided by the priorities and needs of the affected communities. OCHA, along with RCOs when applicable, will facilitate community consultations for CERF allocations, while for RHF/CBPFs, this process may occur through the HFUs.

Practices

The practices are presented under five sections: Fund and Allocation Strategies; Project Design, Implementation, and Monitoring; Capacity Assessment and Capacity Development; Governance and Partnerships; and Communication and Visibility.

Fund and Allocation Strategies

1. **Promote accountability principles in allocations, reflecting the voices of affected communities.** This entails consulting with communities during allocation planning, and with in-country mechanisms and experts, as well as establishing parameters that incentivize partners to actively engage with affected communities.
2. **Use disaggregated data as a basis for decision-making – reflecting the diverse needs, circumstances, and perspectives within the affected population.** By encouraging the collection, analysis, and use of disaggregated data, including on specific vulnerabilities, the Funds foster a relevant, effective, inclusive, and accountable humanitarian response.

Applicable only to RHF/CBPFs

3. **Incorporate accountability to affected people in strategic planning,** reflecting in the HC vision paper how to champion the approach in the use and management of the Fund, ensuring systematic consideration of the views of affected people, and transparent communication.

Project Design, Implementation and Monitoring

4. **Prioritize funding for projects that promote accountable humanitarian action** by giving precedence to projects that are designed based on robust community consultations, and/or incorporate mechanisms for ongoing engagement and feedback such as community awareness sessions, perception surveys, community radios, focus group discussions, and hotlines.
5. **Include relevant indicators in projects to ensure robust accountability components, and to facilitate monitoring and reporting.** Projects will be encouraged to share information on accountability to affected people by including indicators that assess aspects such as level of engagement with communities, affected people's access to information and feedback mechanisms, and how feedback is addressed.
6. **When relevant, consider catalyzing through seed-funding collective inter-agency efforts that enhance response-wide accountability.** This may include, for instance, supporting collective complaint and feedback mechanisms, verification surveys with assisted people, common hotlines, and joint monitoring initiatives. Ensuring sustainability of such mechanisms beyond funding from OCHA's Pooled Funds is recommended. Feedback from affected communities should also inform adaptations to the project and response.
7. **Encourage partners to explore innovative solutions to enhance accountability.** This includes, for example, funding initiatives that strengthen local and sub-national participation and the use of technologies like messaging applications and chatbots. Furthermore, encourage partners to systematically learn from these solutions and replicate them when feasible.

Capacity Assessment and Capacity Development

Applicable only to RHF/CBPFs

8. **Ensure that to be eligible, all direct partners have adequate internal policies on accountability to affected people.** This is reviewed during the capacity assessment process, with feedback to support partners in enhancing internal systems as appropriate.
9. **Contribute to disseminating existing country-level guidance/strategies on accountability to affected people to partners,** in collaboration with the HCT and relevant in-country coordination mechanisms, to promote common approaches.
10. **When relevant, provide guidance and training to partners on accountability to affected people.** This may involve collaborating with in-country mechanisms and subject matter experts and encouraging partners to invest in developing capacities of staff and volunteers to provide accountable assistance.
11. **Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing to encourage adoption of good practices.** This may include, for instance, establishing communities of practice with partners and supporting learning reviews.

Governance and Partnerships

12. **When relevant, leverage the Fund to encourage partners to participate in existing collective approaches to improve the overall humanitarian response**, including joint needs assessments, common feedback, complaint, and response mechanisms, and coordinated information sharing with communities.
13. **Include accountability to affected people as a recurrent item in the meetings of global and local governance mechanisms**. This includes discussions of findings from feedback mechanisms, taking stock of learning from efforts to advance accountability, and identifying opportunities to strengthen accountable assistance at the meetings of the Pooled Fund Working Group, CBPF Advisory Boards, CERF Advisory Group, HCT etc.

Communication and Visibility

14. **Support efforts to profile and give visibility to projects and activities that promote innovative and people-centered response**, highlighting stories of meaningful engagement with assisted communities. Special effort will be made to profile local and national partners including women's organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.