CAFOD Accountability Briefing: *Level 1 (Foundation)*

Information sharing with communities

This Briefing provides a basic step-by-step guide for CAFOD partners on sharing information with the communities they support through development and/or humanitarian projects. For more detailed information and case study examples of good practice and lessons learned, please refer to the Level 2 (Advanced) Briefing.

1. Introduction

Being accountable to the people we support through development and/or humanitarian projects involves ensuring people are aware of their rights and entitlements and have access to relevant and appropriate information about the project to enable their participation and feedback.

Benefits

The benefits of information sharing with the communities we support include:

- *Improved impact and effectiveness of projects*
  - ✓ Effective information provision can strengthen trust, build community ownership and encourage feedback and participation.
  - ✓ Making individuals and communities aware of the support they will be receiving can help them to plan their lives.
- *Reduced levels of corruption and fraud* e.g. by sharing criteria for selection as well as beneficiary lists with local communities, it will be clear who are and who are not eligible to claim aid or support. Similarly, sharing information publically on project budgets with the communities we support and with staff can deter fraud.

A phased approach

In contexts where limited funds are available, or during the early stages of a humanitarian response, it is advisable to adopt a phased approach to information sharing. A basic mechanism may be introduced in the first instance which can then be strengthened and expanded upon to incorporate good practices and approaches (see *Information sharing with communities, Level 2 (Advanced) – in development*).

Basic information sharing mechanism

The following provides a guide for minimum information provision with communities. All community members should have at least one way of accessing project information. *Figure 1* in the following section provides examples of information sharing mechanisms. Verbal channels for communication will be most appropriate in contexts with low literacy levels.

2. Planning information sharing mechanisms

The following provides a structure for planning information sharing with communities.

a) Who requires information?

It is important to consider communication to both those directly involved with the project, as well as the

wider community and other stakeholders who may also want to know what the organisation is doing in their area.

b) What information to share?

The following 'minimum information' should be provided in the appropriate local language:

- ✓ Name and contact details of key project representatives.
- ✓ Short summary of the project including objectives, activities, timescale and intended beneficiaries.
- ✓ Rights of project beneficiaries e.g. right to receive support on the basis of need alone; right to receive support free of harassment including zero tolerance of corruption and sexual harassment; right to express opinions, give feedback or make a complaint.
- ✓ Date of next organisation / community meeting is to be held and its agenda.
- ✓ What to do and who to contact in case of a complaint, including definition of a complaint.

c) What information *not* to share?

Depending on the context, it may be necessary to keep the following types of information confidential: Names and details of supporters, donors, partners or staff; anything that could compromise the safety and security of project staff and beneficiaries; information that could damage the organisation's reputation or that could be used maliciously against them Creative ways of getting around such constraints should be considered e.g. use of a generic contact email address for complaints in the case that publishing individual contact details is not advisable.

d) How to share information?

There are a number of ways in which information may be shared with communities. *Figure 1* below provides a range of examples including the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Public meetings	**Advantages** Use of existing community meetings may be an effective way of sharing information. **Disadvantages** Vulnerable groups may be excluded.
Posters / leaflets	**Advantages** Written information can improve consistency of messages. **Disadvantages** Need to replenish as project information is updated. Not suitable if low literacy levels.
Information board	**Advantages** Single information resource with potentially large outreach. Written information can improve consistency of messages. Can be handed over to the community at the end of the project. **Disadvantages** Time and effort to keep the information timely and relevant. Not suitable if low literacy levels.
Focus group discussions	**Advantages** Opportunity to build trust especially with vulnerable groups. Potential to discuss and clarify information provided and receive immediate feedback. **Disadvantages** Requires an appropriate facilitator e.g. female staff member for women's focus groups.
Time set aside at the project office for community members to visit	**Advantages** Ability for community members to air concerns discreetly in a safe environment. May be convenient for programme staff. **Disadvantages** Requires the office to be within easy access of the community.

Staff being available during field visits to answer questions and receive feedback	**Advantages** Informal - may encourage interaction from vulnerable groups or those less likely to participate in a group setting. **Disadvantages** May affect ability of programme staff to effectively carry out programme activities.
Radio	**Advantages** Can reach wide audiences with minimal expenditure per capita. Can be timely – a quick way to disseminate messages. **Disadvantages** May only reach selected audiences and not the most vulnerable. Requires access to government or private radio station, or appropriate technical knowledge and resources.
Newspaper	**Advantages** Can reach wide audiences with minimal expenditure per capita. Can be timely – a quick way to disseminate messages. **Disadvantages** Not suitable if low levels of literacy.
Use of drama / other forms of media	**Advantages** Can ensure a high level of community ownership. **Disadvantages** Requires an appropriate facilitator.

Fig. 1: *Advantages and disadvantages of information sharing mechanisms*

It is important to select mechanisms that will be easily accessible for all project beneficiaries, including the most vulnerable. As a first step, consider whether existing ways in which information is shared amongst community members (e.g. community meetings) will be an appropriate channel for project information sharing.

e) What resources are required?

Implementation of basic information sharing mechanisms will require the following:

✓ Staff awareness and training as to what information to share and how.

✓ Financial resources to cover the cost of communication materials, activities and staff time, as appropriate.

f) How to monitor if information provision is effective?

✓ Talk to community members – can they tell you information about the project including details of what they are entitled to? Do community members feel they have the information necessary to actively participate in the project?

✓ Observe the project site – what mechanisms have been put in place? Is information up to date and does it cover the 'minimum information' identified in *point b)* above? Does project information appear to be accessible to all community members?

✓ Talk to project staff – what information has been provided

✓ and what are the barriers and constraints?

Appendix 1 provides a case study example of information sharing on CAFOD-funded projects in Aceh, Indonesia.

Further Information:

HAP Transparency Resources
http://www.hapinternational.org/projects/field/case-studies/aspx#transparency

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This briefing has been produced by the CAFOD Programme Effectiveness Unit to support partners in designing and implementing activities to support improved 'downwards accountability' within CAFOD funded and other partner programmes.

Appendix 1:

Case study – information sharing on CAFOD-funded projects in Aceh, Indonesia

Examples of ways in which CAFOD partners in West Aceh share project information with communities include:

- An education programme on a local radio station which invites listeners to call in and give their opinions about local education projects, including CAFOD-funded projects in the area, encouraging a two-way dialogue with community stakeholders.

- Project staff engage with community members by giving a tour of new shelter facilities in addition to provision of booklets containing simple pictorial representations of how to effectively maintain the facilities. Through effective information sharing, the project team is encouraging the participation of community members in the project with the objective of long term sustainability of facilities.

- Project team members wear t-shirts which display the project manifesto for the purposes of awareness-raising amongst community members.

- Partner websites are well developed to facilitate interactive communications with community members, for example through providing staff profiles and contact details including SMS contact details, providing details of rights and entitlements, posting contributions from community members on the website and encouraging interaction through project pages on social networking sites.