Ten actions to engage communities during emergency response operations

All stages

1 Community engagement is integrated across the response

Minimum
- Brief staff and volunteers on CEA
- Discuss CEA in operational meetings
- Identify a CEA focal point

Advanced
- Train staff and volunteers on CEA

Emergency Assessment

2 Understand community needs, capacities, and context

Minimum
- Secondary data review
- Rapid needs and context analysis

Advanced
- Detailed needs and context analysis
- Interagency joint assessments

3 Carry out the assessment with transparency and respect for the community

Minimum
- Discuss assessment plans with community representatives
- Introduce the National Society and explain the assessment purpose
- Brief staff and volunteers on the assessment purpose and process

Advanced
- Train staff and volunteers on communication and feedback
- Coordinate with external partners
- Verify assessment findings with communities

Planning the response

4 Discuss response plans with communities and key stakeholders

Minimum
- Discuss response plans and ways of working
- Coordinate internally and externally to avoid causing frustration in communities

Advanced
- Use participatory planning approaches
- Cross-check plans with communities before implementing

5 Discuss and agree selection criteria and distribution processes with communities

Minimum
- Explain selection criteria and targeting
- Respond to questions and complaints
- Discuss distribution processes

Advanced
- Agree selection criteria together
- Use community-based targeting
- Plan distributions with the community

6 Include community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets

Minimum
- Plan community engagement approaches with all sectors
- Include activities and indicators in the response plan and budget

During the response

8 **Support community participation in making decisions about the response**

Minimum
- Involve the community in key decisions

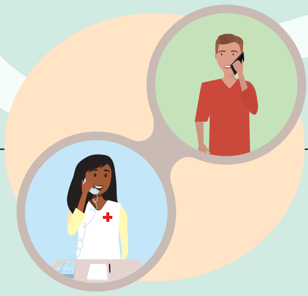
Advanced
- Enable active community participation
- Plan the exit with communities

7 **Regularly share information about the response with the community**

Minimum
- Keep sharing information about the response
- Communicate exit plans clearly

Advanced
- Check communication approaches are effective

9 **Listen to community feedback and use it to guide the response**



Minimum
- Establish a simple feedback mechanism
- Check the operation is meeting people's needs
- Monitor for unintended consequences
- Act on feedback and monitoring data

Advanced
- Improve the feedback mechanism
- Discuss feedback with partners
- Monitor community engagement approaches
- Collect case studies of feedback being used

Evaluating and learning

10 **Include the community in the evaluation**

Minimum
- Evaluate community satisfaction
- Share evaluation findings internally

Advanced
- Communities help plan the evaluation
- Organise a community-led evaluation
- Discuss findings with communities
- Discuss findings with partners

Tools to help

- 7 **Tool 7:** CEA M&E tool
- 8 **Tool 8:** CEA job descriptions
- 10 **Tool 10:** Code of Conduct briefing
- 12 **Tool 12:** CEA Case Study template
- 13 **Tool 13:** CEA in Assessments tool
- 14 **Tool 14:** Q&A sheet for volunteers
- 15 **Tool 15:** Feedback kit
- 16 **Tool 16:** FGD guide
- 17 **Tool 17:** Community meetings tool
- 18 **Tool 18:** Participatory approaches to selection criteria
- 19 **Tool 19:** Communication methods matrix
- 20 **Tool 20:** Exit Strategy guidance
- 22 **Tool 22:** Developing a CEA emergency plan
- 23 **Tool 23:** SOP for CEA in IFRC emergency operations
- 24 **Tool 24:** CEA checklist for sectors and roles
- 25 **Tool 25:** CEA in emergencies briefing

Peru 2020 The Peruvian Red Cross have been distributing food supplies, kitchens and utensils to different Ollas Comunes (spaces self-managed mainly by women, where they organize to cook for their community, prioritizing children and the elderly) in different parts of Lima, capital of Peru. This distribution was in Villa Maria del Triunfo.
© Peruvian Red Cross

MODULE 5
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Despite the increased urgency and complexity, it is still important, necessary, and possible to engage communities in emergency response operations. Unfortunately, there are many examples of operations going wrong because they did not sufficiently engage the local population, from aid items being sold in markets, to volunteers and staff being attacked and even killed, because of fear and misunderstanding in the community.

This module outlines the key minimum actions for community engagement and accountability in emergency response operations, and how to go further if time, capacity, and resources allow. It also highlights the common barriers and challenges to be aware of, as well as the factors that can help to support an accountable response.

What helps community engagement in emergency response, and what hinders it?[80]

WHAT IS WORKING WELL?	WHAT SUPPORTS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?
• Feedback mechanisms are helping to identify areas for improvement • Working through local volunteers is enhancing community trust • Working with local structures and groups is improving speed and quality • Community engagement training is improving understanding and capacity	• When staff and volunteers understand the value of community engagement • Dedicated community engagement staff • Leadership buy-in, from the operations manager and the National Society • When it is made a requirement i.e., by donors or in Movement commitments
WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES?	**WHAT IS BLOCKING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?**
• Collecting and analysing community feedback in a systematic and simple way • Weak assessments limit understanding of the local needs and context • Poor two-way continuous communication about the operation • Community engagement is siloed • Providing support that people don't need because of poor assessments or standardized, inflexible response models	• Staff don't understand how to practically engage communities or what their role is • Time pressures and perception that community engagement takes too long • Difficulties with physical access • Lack of skilled, dedicated community engagement staff at the right level • Poor internal coordination causes confusion and unrealistic promises to communities

Community engagement preparedness

Institutionalize community engagement and accountability in the National Society

The most effective way to have good community engagement in an emergency is to institutionalize it within the National Society, by following the actions in module three of this guide. This will mean mechanisms to share information, collect and respond to feedback and facilitate community participation will already be in place, with staff and volunteers trained and ready to go, rather than having to start everything from scratch at the beginning of a response, when time is limited.

Integrate community engagement and accountability in disaster preparedness and risk reduction

Red Cross Red Crescent approaches to disaster preparedness and risk reduction can help to support good community engagement and accountability. For example:

- The Preparedness for Effective Response[81] assessment process examines a National Society's response system, including any gaps in accountability
- The enhanced vulnerability and capacity assessment[82] can support communities to analyse the risks they face and identify actions to reduce these risks
- Forecast-based Financing[83] works with communities to agree actions to be taken at the first warning signs of an emergency, and who should receive support.

The information gathered and documented during these processes can help to identify gaps in accountability mechanisms, provide valuable secondary data at the start of a response, and facilitate better community participation as there is already an established and trusted relationship.

Democratic Republic of Congo 2019 DRC Red Cross volunteers regularly engage with students, providing critical information about Ebola and how to prevent other major diseases. It also gives opportunities for students to ask questions and provide feedback to volunteers who share this in the community feedback system set up with IFRC and CDC. © Corrie Butler / IFRC

How to engage communities during emergency response operations

How to use this module

The tables below give guidance on how to meet the ten actions all emergency response operations need to implement to achieve an acceptable level of accountability to communities.

Under each action are the minimum measures that should be implemented to meet the action, and advanced measures for when more time, capacity, and resources are available.

The explanation of how to meet each action is short to make it easier to reference when time is limited. However, more detailed guidance on meeting each action is in the accompanying tools or the institutionalization and programme modules

Generally, the minimum measures will apply:

- In the early stages of a response i.e., the first few months
- For smaller emergencies, with a shorter timescale i.e., less than six months
- When there is limited community engagement and accountability experience and capacity within either the National Society, or as surge support
- When there is limited funds and human resources available for the response

Generally, the advanced measures will apply:

- Later in the response, i.e., from month three onwards
- For larger or protracted emergencies, with a longer timescale i.e., more than six months
- When there is a good level of community engagement and accountability experience and capacity, within the National Society or as surge support
- When the response has a good level of funding and human resources.

At all stages of the response

1 Community engagement is integrated across the response

This helps to ensure community engagement is well understood by all staff and volunteers and consistently integrated within all sectors.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Brief all staff and volunteers on community engagement and accountability

All staff joining the response should be briefed on community engagement and accountability, including their responsibilities and the different mechanisms being used within the operation. This supports consistent integration across all sectors. Everyone must sign the Code of Conduct and be briefed on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and corruption.

Tools: 25 CEA in emergencies briefing 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles 10 Code of conduct briefing

» Discuss community engagement issues in operational meetings

Community engagement should be a standing agenda point in all meetings. This includes discussing the quality of community engagement, any gaps, key issues that need to be discussed with the community and how to address issues raised through community feedback and participation.

Tools: 23 SOP for CEA in IFRC emergency operations

» Identify a community engagement focal point

Although everyone has a responsibility to engage communities, a focal point can help to ensure it is not forgotten and properly integrated. This person should have community engagement experience, be at the right level to influence sector leads, and have enough time to dedicate to the role. Ideally, there should be a dedicated staff member.

Tools: 8 CEA job descriptions

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Train staff and volunteers on community engagement and accountability

Provide community engagement and accountability training using the two-day branch level training[84] or the one-day emergency-specific training packages[85].

Examples from the Movement

Training volunteers in Madagascar helps build community acceptance

When Madagascar Red Cross Society (MRCS), with support from Danish Red Cross (DRC), provided unconditional cash grants as part of a cyclone response, the local volunteers were responsible for carrying out home visits, collecting and sharing information and listening to and discussing peoples' concerns, fears, and rumours. To prepare them, the team provided training to the volunteers on the project purpose and aims, and the messages that should be disseminated to community members and how to communicate and respond to questions. The valuable knowledge the community volunteers had of the local environment greatly helped in the formulation of these messages. This ensured community volunteers could talk confidently and accurately about the project, including answering difficult questions about selection criteria. This proved critical when suspicion over the fact that money was being provided for free started to spread. Rumours included that the money was 'dirty' and that accepting the cash would lead to expectations, obligations, or requests to pay it back. The volunteers were able to listen openly to these concerns and address them by providing information about the purpose of the cash grants and why people were receiving them. This helped to reassure the community about a new and unusual practice and ensured the smooth running of the response. Read the full case study[86].

CEA positions added value to the Hurricane Dorian response in the Bahamas

Bahamas Red Cross Society (BRCS) and IFRC planned to provide cash and voucher assistance, but when CEA, PGI, IM and case management staff led consultations with communities during the assessment, they found cash might not be the best option for people. With the onset of COVID-19, many people, particularly older adults, expressed concerns at having to use ATM machines and visit busy markets and shops to buy food. Instead, the operation switched to provide food parcels and hot meals, which reduced risk and better met peoples' preferred way of receiving support. The CEA delegate also ensured communities were included as a key data point in the real time evaluation (which had initially not planned any community visits), and supported and advocated for post distribution monitoring, including training the volunteers carrying out the PDMs to answer questions and listen and record any feedback and complaints shared during the interviews.

Bahamas 2020 The Red Cross is supporting communities in Abaco, Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian. © Robyn-Ryann Barnett/ Bahamas Red Cross/IFRC

During the emergency assessment

2 Understand community needs, capacities, and context

Otherwise, there is a risk the operation will fail to meet people's needs, undermine local capacity, or do more harm than good[87]. This damages the National Society's credibility and leads to a loss of time and resources while mistakes are corrected.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Internal & external secondary data review

Save time and resources, and reduce assessment fatigue in communities, by checking what information the National Society already has about the affected areas. For example, previous programme or operation

» Rapid needs & context analysis

Get a basic understanding of the needs, priorities, and context through simple, fast approaches such as direct observation, secondary data, key informant interviews and speaking to local volunteers. Speak to different community representatives and groups. A basic analysis should capture:

- The main needs and best ways to deliver support
- Who the community leaders are, and if they are trusted
- Main community groups and associations
- Other stakeholders, e.g., other NGOs, local authorities
- Demographics and community profile including, livelihoods, religion, poverty levels, gender roles, ethnic groups, literacy levels, languages spoken and any marginalized or at-risk groups
- Main capacities and strengths in the community and how these could be supported and used as part of the response
- Main channels of communication in the community, what people need information about, and how they would feel comfortable asking questions or raising concerns to the National Society.

Tool: 13 CEA assessment tool

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» In-depth context and needs analysis

Expand the rapid needs and context analysis, to get a more in-depth understanding of the situation. See page 46 for more guidance on context analysis.

» Consider an interagency joint assessment

In larger emergencies, it may be possible to carry out a joint needs and context analysis with other agencies. This can save time and resources and reduce assessment fatigue in communities.

Examples from the Movement

Different approaches to get the information needed in Indonesia

Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) - the Indonesian Red Cross – uses a variety of different approaches to gather the critical data it needs to understand communities and plan effective community engagement approaches. For the COVID-19 pandemic and West Sulawesi Earthquake response, questions were included in assessments to understand who the trusted sources of information in the community are, including amongst women and people with disabilities. PMI also used online surveys to collect information on peoples' perceptions of COVID-19, shared through their social media platforms, WhatsApp, and to all community-based actions teams. Because the surveys also asked for demographic data from those replying, PMI were able to notice that only 1 percent of responses were from people over 60 years of age. To address this, they organised focus group discussions with older people to gain a deeper insight into their needs. Through these discussions, PMI identified that radio is a preferred way to receive information for older people – information that would have been missed through the rapid assessments and perception surveys. For the earthquake response, PMI used data collected by Government to complement their own rapid needs' assessments, as it included information from diverse groups, such as pregnant women and children. This collaboration helped overcome geographical limitations and allowed for a better understanding of the needs of different groups.

Communicating in the right language contributes to a smooth distribution in the Philippines

When responding to Typhoon Mangkhut, the Philippines Red Cross (PRC) included questions in the assessment to understand peoples' communication preferences. When the results showed that people preferred information to be shared in the local dialect, they made sure all community meetings, posters and house-to-house visits were conducted in this dialect. The evaluation found this contributed to community acceptance of the selection criteria and a smooth distribution.

IFRC and Red Cross National Societies support interagency assessment in the Americas

To better understand the information and communication needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, IFRC and Red Cross National Societies took part in a multi-actor, interagency assessment across fifteen countries. The assessment used a mix of consultations with targeted groups, direct interviews, observation, focus group discussions, online self-administered surveys, and secondary data. The results are helping agencies work together to develop information-sharing tools and preventing duplication of efforts. Read the full report and access all the assessment tools used[88].

3 Carry out the assessment with transparency and respect for the community

Start the relationship with the community well by treating people with dignity and respect, listening openly to their needs, answering questions honestly, and not making false promises or raising expectations about what comes next.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Discuss the assessment with key stakeholders in the community

Discuss the assessment in advance with key people in the community, including leaders, heads of community groups and associations, Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers, and local authorities. Ask for advice on how to conduct the assessment and if other organizations have already carried out assessments.

Tools: 13 CEA assessment tool 17 Community meetings tool

» Introduce the National Society and the purpose of the assessment

Organise a community meeting and provide information on the National Society, the purpose and process of the assessment, what happens once it's completed, staff and volunteer codes of conduct and behaviour, and how people can ask questions or raise concerns.

Tool: 14 Q&A sheet for volunteers

» Brief staff and volunteers on the assessment

Brief staff and volunteers on the assessment purpose, process and what happens next, so they can answer questions accurately and avoid raising unrealistic expectations about the response. (Re)Brief assessment teams (including drivers) on the code of conduct, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, anti-fraud and corruption, and how to manage feedback and complaints.

Tool: 10 Code of Conduct Briefing

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Train staff and volunteers on communication and feedback

Train assessment teams on good communication skills and responding to feedback, including how to manage expectations. Use the one-day training on good communication skills and feedback handling[89].

» Coordinate with external partners and local authorities

Attend external coordination meetings to gather information on what others are doing, and discuss assessment plans and findings, to identify areas for collaboration and avoid duplication. This includes attending community engagement and accountability coordination groups.

» Verify your assessment findings and analysis with the community

Share the results of the assessment with community representatives and cross-check they are accurate and discuss anything that is still unclear.

Tool: 17 Community meetings tool

Examples from the Movement

Key groups missed from the assessment led to their needs not being met

During the Bhuj Earthquake in India, staff and volunteers were asked to approach the head of the village or urban community to assess the needs. No other groups were consulted, and the community was not involved in planning the assessment. As the heads were all male, this led to the needs of many groups being overlooked in the response, including women and marginalized Muslim and lower caste groups. A key lesson learned was on the importance of understanding the context before undertaking a community assessment, and of consulting diverse groups so that they are not missed during the assessment.

Listening openly to the community helped identify the real issues in Bangladesh

In Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, the ICRC conducted community meetings to understand practices and challenges related to the management of the dead due to COVID-19. The sessions shed light on challenges in maintaining the communal burial spaces during flooding in the monsoon season. This information led the ICRC to adapt its original plan to distribute materials for safer management of the dead to working with communities to fix the infrastructural issues related to flooding.

Bangladesh 2012 Bangladesh Red Crescent volunteers in search and rescue operation in Chittagong mud slide. © Bangladesh Red Crescent

During planning

4 Discuss response plans with communities and key stakeholders

This can save time and resources by confirming activities will meet peoples' needs, highlight any potential obstacles and identify where the community can provide support.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Discuss response plans with key stakeholders in the community

Discuss response plans with a mix of community representatives including leaders, heads of groups and associations, Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers, and local authorities. Check activities will meet the needs and priorities of the community and ask about the best ways to deliver them. If feasible, discuss what should happen at the end of the operation and how the community and/or other stakeholders could take over activities.

Tools: 17 Community meetings tool 20 Exit strategy guidance

» Ask communities how they want the National Society to work with them

Discuss with key community representatives how the National Society should work with them during the operation, including how, when and what information should be shared, how feedback should be managed, and the best approaches for community participation. Involve the community in planning the feedback mechanism and if different approaches are needed for complaints about sexual exploitation and abuse, or fraud and corruption. See module 6 on page 103.

Tools: 16 FGD guide 15 Feedback kit

» Coordinate internally and externally to avoid causing frustration in communities

Internal planning meetings help to make sure sector plans are complementary and won't lead to duplication. Check with finance and logistics that any plans to provide goods or cash are achievable before commitments are made to the community. Plans should also be discussed with government and other responders to avoid duplication and identify opportunities for collaboration and sustainability. This also reduces the risk of making promises to communities to provide support that goes against government policies e.g., providing cash-based assistance when the government has a policy against this.

Tool: 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Use participatory planning approaches

Use participatory planning approaches, such as community workshops and meetings, human-centered design, vulnerability capacity assessments or activities such as ranking, decision trees, mapping, etc. Engage all groups in the community in planning the response. See page 52 for more on participatory planning.

» Cross-check plans with the community before you start implementing

Organise a community meeting to discuss the final response plan before implementing to ensure it meets community needs and expectations. This is a chance to clarify any misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations, answer questions and agree any contributions from the community.

Tool: 17 Community meetings tool

Examples from the Movement

Community-led approach to recovery planning in Mozambique

Mozambique Red Cross (CVM) and IFRC adopted a community-led approach to planning recovery following Cyclone Idai in 2019. The process began with a community meeting to introduce the Red Cross, explain the recovery assessment process, and answer any questions. Volunteers were trained on good communication, Code of Conduct and PSEA before carrying out a multi-sector household survey. Data collected in the survey was triangulated through focus group discussions, seasonal calendars, vulnerability, capacity and hazard mapping, and transect walks. This included collecting information to help plan effective community engagement approaches. A series of planning workshops were then held with different groups in the community to present the findings from the assessment. Community members ranked the activities they wanted to see undertaken. As part of this, the community also identified which activities they could implement themselves and where they would need Red Cross' support. Community members and the Red Cross team established a timeline to undertake the activities using pictures, color-coded by sector, to ensure full participation by everyone, regardless of literacy. At this stage, an approach for working together with the community was discussed, which included establishing a community committee (voted on by the community and gender balanced) and setting up a feedback system. It was agreed to meet weekly with the committee and monthly with the whole community. The committee was trained on the Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles and PSEA and developed their own terms of reference. Feedback was provided through the committee and a toll-free telephone line operated by WFP. Read the full case study.

Ecuador 2016 Psychosocial support with young people in the Camarones community, Manabi. © Vladimir Rodas / Cruz Roja Ecuatoriana

5 Discuss and agree selection criteria and distribution processes with communities[90]

Communities rarely know how or why aid agencies choose who receives support and who does not, see page 14. This can cause tension in communities and lead to perceptions the National Society is biased or corrupt, affecting the safe access of staff and volunteers.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Explain selection criteria and targeting processes

- Communicate selection criteria widely and clearly to recipients and non-recipients, using a range of channels and approaches. This helps to prevent rumours and tensions from escalating and threatening access
- While it is often easier and quicker to ask community leaders to select who receives support, this exposes the National Society to the risk of corruption and failing to reach those most in need. If community leaders do carry out the targeting, it's important to verify the lists by checking a percentage to make sure they do meet the selection criteria
- Posting recipient lists in a public place supports transparency and can help identify corruption but discuss it with the community first as it could put people at risk of violence or stigmatization.

Tools: 18 Participatory approaches to selection criteria 19 Communication methods matrix

» Be ready to respond to questions and complaints

- A feedback mechanism must be in place to respond to questions and complaints about the selection process. See module 6 on page 103
- The most common complaint will probably be from those who feel they have been unfairly missed out, so have a clear process for investigating these cases and provide an explanation of the final decision to the complainant. Failing to deal with type of complaint, can lead to loss of trust, anger, and even security incidents.

Tool: 15 Feedback kit

» Discuss distribution processes

- Ask community representatives about the best days, times, and methods for distributions.

Tool: 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Agree selection criteria with the community

- If possible, agree selection criteria with the community as they may have different perceptions of who is most in need or vulnerable

- Engage with a wide range of groups, including those who are not likely to receive support
- Keep in mind local power structures and social hierarchies and how they could impact people's suggestions on selection criteria and targeting
- Communities may not agree with or understand why selection processes are needed, so explain why the National Society cannot help everyone equally e.g., limited resources.

Tool: 18 Participatory approaches to selection criteria

» Use community-based targeting

- Depending on the context, it may be possible to carry out targeting with the participation of the whole community. This can help ensure the process is fair and open. However, it's important to discuss this option first and ensure peoples' safety and dignity won't be at risk
- Alternatively, involve different community groups and representatives in identifying who should receive support based on the selection criteria. This is more participatory than relying only on community leaders, but still needs to be cross-checked
- If targeting marginalized groups, ask them how it should be done to avoid stigmatizing them or putting them at risk.

» Plan distribution processes with communities and key stakeholders

- Discuss with community groups and those being targeted, the safest and most efficient ways to distribute support, whether this is traditional goods in kind, or cash-based assistance
- Ask the community to help manage the distribution, including who shouldn't be involved.

Tool: 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

Examples from the Movement

Participatory approach to agreeing eligibility criteria for cash and voucher assistance in Nigeria

Nigeria Red Cross Society (NRCS) established Community Resilience Committees (CRC) to help manage cash and voucher assistance (CVA) as part of a flood response. The CRCs were democratically elected by communities and provided with training on their roles and responsibilities, including communication skills and the importance of accountability and integrity. Selection criteria was agreed jointly between the Red Cross and the CRC members, and a community meeting held to ensure widespread acceptance. The CRC used a mapping exercise to identify who within the community met the agreed criteria. Lists were then posted publicly in the town hall, where community members could view them, and challenge if necessary, through the NRCS toll free telephone line. The CRC was also critical in explaining the eligibility criteria to the wider community, managing rumours, and collecting and helping to respond to complaints. Information was also shared directly with community members on the CVA eligibility criteria, distribution processes, and how to ask questions or make complaints during house-to-house visits and community meetings. NRCS received 134 feedback comments, of which 35 were complaints mainly from households not receiving CVA. In these cases, NRCS explained the rationale for the eligibility criteria including limited resources and the need to reach the most vulnerable.

Simple steps for a better distribution in Zanzibar

The Zanzibar branch of Tanzania Red Cross Society (TRCS) used simple, inexpensive approaches to ensure good community engagement and accountability during distributions of non-food items to 100 households following floods. Local leaders selected the most affected households, but TRCS carried out household visits to verify they met the selection criteria and issued them with cards with the TRCS stamp and branch coordinator's signature. TRCS then shared information on the selection criteria, distribution dates, locations, and how to contact the branch with questions, through community meetings, household visits and megaphones. On the day of the distribution, flipchart sheets were put up with details of what people would receive and the quantity and a helpdesk was set up where people could submit a feedback form or speak to a volunteer.

6 Include community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets

If community engagement is not in the plan and budget there is a strong chance it will be forgotten in the rush and pressure to respond.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Plan community engagement approaches with the whole operations team

This ensures everyone understands how communities will be engaged and the responsibilities within their sector. This is particularly important for feedback mechanisms as all sectors will have a responsibility to act and make changes based on the feedback received, so buy-in from staff and management is critical. Develop a clear plan for how feedback will be shared and discussed internally and acted on.

Tools: 22 Developing a CEA emergency plan 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

» Include community engagement activities and indicators in the response plan and budget

Explain in the response plan narrative and activity plan how information will be shared with communities, participation supported, and feedback managed. There should be indicators to manage this, and funding allocated in the budget.

Tool: 7 CEA M&E tool

Examples from the Movement

Here are some examples of Red Cross Red Crescent emergency plans of action where community engagement and accountability approaches have been well integrated:

Lesotho windstorms disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) appeal

https://adore.ifrc.org/Download.aspx?FileId=446402

The Bahamas Hurricane Dorian Emergency Appeal

https://adore.ifrc.org/Download.aspx?FileId=255686%20

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS FOR OPERATIONS

(for more options see Tool 7: CEA M&E tool*)*

This is a menu of potential operational indicators. Not all of them need to be used, but it's important to include some that monitor progress through the eyes of community members. Data collected from community members must be disaggregated by sex, age, and disability (at a minimum) so any gaps in engaging specific groups can be identified.

Monitor community engagement activities

- # / % of staff and volunteers working on the operation who have been briefed on community engagement and accountability
- The operation is informed by a needs assessment
- The operation is informed by a context analysis
- # of different community groups and representatives consulted on response plans, per geographical location
- # and type of methods established to share information with communities about what is happening in the operation, including selection criteria if these are being used
- # of opportunities for community participation in managing and guiding the operation
- # and type of methods established to collect feedback from the community
- # of operational decisions made based on community feedback

Monitor levels of operation accountability to communities[91]

- % of community members who feel the aid provided by the operation currently covers their most important needs
- % of community members who feel treated with respect by the operation's staff and volunteers
- % of community members who feel the operation has communicated well about plans and activities
- % of community members who feel their opinion is taken into account during operation planning and decision-making
- % of community members who know how the operation decided who should receive aid and who does not
- % of community members, including marginalized and at-risk groups, who know how to provide feedback or make a complaint about the operation
- % of people who received a response to their feedback about the operation

During implementation

7 Regularly share information about the response with the community, using the best approaches for different groups

Not sharing information with communities about the response can lead to rumours, unrealistic expectations, and a breakdown of trust between the community and the National Society.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Keep sharing information about the response through multiple channels

Systematically share information on operational plans, progress, activities, selection criteria and distribution processes, delays and challenges, and people's rights and entitlements. Advertise the feedback mechanism and any opportunities for community participation. Use multiple communication channels, as one channel will not reach everyone, and make sure information is clear, simple and in local languages. Make sure community volunteers are also kept informed so they can share accurate information with the community. See page 61 in the programmes module for more detailed guidance.

Tools: 19 Communication methods matrix 14 Q&A sheet for volunteers

» Communicate clearly when the response is ending and other sources of support

Communicate clearly when the operation is ending, what will be handed over, who the community can contact in case of issues and sources or referrals for ongoing support. Staff and volunteers should be kept informed too, so they can accurately answer community questions. Ending the operation without warning, can harm the relationship between the National Society and the community.

Tool: 20 Exit strategy guidance

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Test and review communication approaches

Regularly check the operation is using the most trusted and preferred channels, approaches, and languages to reach different groups and that the information shared is received, understood and useful. Communication approaches may need to be adapted as the impact of the emergency changes and the situation evolves.

Tools: 7 CEA M&E tool 19 Communication methods matrix

Examples from the Movement

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society overcomes COVID-19 barriers to communicating

Traditionally Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDCRS) would use face-to-face methods to communicate with communities. However, the National Society had to scale up its use of social media when COVID-19 placed limitations on how people could meet. The National Society monitored comments on its social media accounts to understand what specific concerns people had and follow up posts were created to address their questions. For example, when BDRCS' announced the vaccination campaign on its Facebook page, people had many questions about registrations and eligibility criteria, so a follow-up post replied with all the details. Before sharing publicly, posts and messages are sent to BDRCS and IFRC staff, volunteers, and their family and friends, to test whether they are understood and adjusted if needed. BDRCS' Facebook page is a 'Facebook verified' source of information on the pandemic, with each post having an average reach of 87,372 people. Posts include images with text, animation, Facebook live sessions with experts, and other videos to encourage people to register for vaccinations and provide information. Questions received from the public are either answered or referred to the Bangladesh Government's vaccination hotline number.

Good communication in Malawi helps tackle corruption by community leaders

During focus group discussions for a resilience programme, Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS) was made aware of issues with community leaders replacing names on distribution lists, made worse by a cultural reluctance to complain in Malawi. So as part of a cyclone response, the National Society implemented three simple measures to stop this practice happening:

1. Volunteers were trained on community engagement approaches, including people's rights, what information to share with communities and how to collect and respond to feedback
2. Awareness sessions were held to explain the objectives of the response, who would be supported, the items being distributed and how people could confidentially share any complaints or concerns. This information was also shared tent to tent by volunteers
3. Feedback and complaints systems were set up including suggestion boxes, a telephone line and face to face with MRCS volunteers. Help desks were also established during all distributions so that any problems on the day could be captured and resolved quickly.

By ensuring people knew their rights and entitlements and how they could safely and confidentially complain, MRCS was able to prevent several cases of corruption or intimidation by community leaders. As well as rolling out training to all volunteers, MRCS is now briefing community leaders too, to ensure they understand MRCS' mandate and zero-tolerance approach to corruption. Read the full case study[92].

8 Support community participation in making decisions about the response

Participation leads to better operations by ensuring the community and the National Society work together to overcome any problems that arise. Not engaging communities leads to a top-down approach, lack of trust, and potential security and access issues.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Involve the community in making key decisions

Establish approaches, such as regular community meetings or focus group discussions, to involve the community in key decisions about the operation. Consult a representative cross-section of the community including men, women, and any marginalized groups. For example, ask for suggestions on how activities should be implemented, discuss the location and design for any construction, ask for input on selection criteria and targeting recipients, decisions about which activities to keep or cut, and how to respond to issues raised through feedback. See page 64 in the programmes module for more guidance.

Tool: 16 CEA FGD tool 17 Community meetings tool

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Enable active community participation in managing and guiding the operation, including supporting community-led activities and solutions

Establish mechanisms to hand over more decision-making power to communities, for example through community committees or supporting community-led action plans. Discuss ongoing operational issues and ask for community input to key decisions. Check that the committee is trusted and performing its role as the bridge between the community and the National Society. See page 64 for more on community participation and page 122 for more on supporting community-led solutions during an epidemic response.

» Plan the exit with communities

Organise planning meetings with community representatives and members to discuss what should happen after the operation ends and agree an exit plan.

Tool: 20 Exit strategy guidance

Examples from the Movement

Community Based Action Teams in Indonesia plan their own COVID-19 response activities

Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) – the Indonesian Red Cross – regularly work through Community Based Action Teams (CBATs) in Communities. These volunteer groups are trained as first responders in a disaster and act as the link between the National Society and the wider community. To support communities to lead their own response to COVID-19, PMI provided cash grants to CBATs, which they could use depending on the specific needs in their community. PMI provided a broad list of activities the grants could be used for, including contact tracing, health promotion, mask and handwashing station production, disinfection, or surveillance, but the decision on how to use the funding sat with the community. CBATs received orientations and training online, using Zoom and WhatsApp, which covered guidance on the grant, budgeting and monitoring, and prevention of COVID-19. To ensure full community participation in the process, PMI also provided training to CBAT members on how they could receive input, suggestions, and complaints, on how the grants were being used from the wider community.

Using local capacity to plan and manage distributions in Libya

An ICRC Durable Return Programme in Tripoli, Libya, created Community Working Groups (CWG) to help plan and oversee distributions for essential household items. A leaflet detailing the terms of reference was distributed during household registrations to ensure transparency about the CWG purpose and people were asked to nominate themselves. ICRC used meetings with the CWG to share assessment findings and discuss the plan of action. The CWG took care of all the logistical arrangements for distributions, including mobilising the community and helping to manage expectations. They also supported the team in reaching out to community members, collecting feedback, and correcting rumours. Key lessons learned include the positive impact good communication and joint working with the CWG has had on ICRC's level of acceptance. Community members also expressed their appreciation that the organization was honest about the limitations of the intervention. Recommendations for improvements include setting up the CWG during the assessment phase and ensuring a good understanding of the different groups in the community from the outset of the programme.

Libya 2012 An ICRC delegate is meeting with an internally displaced family during a mission to assess needs. © ICRC

9 Listen to community feedback and use it to guide the response

Community feedback is critical to understand if the operation is meeting peoples' needs and where improvements are needed. Community members will have questions, concerns, and suggestions, whether a formal feedback mechanism is in place or not, so it is important to have a method of managing feedback or it can lead to frustration and loss of trust.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Set up and maintain a simple community feedback mechanism

At a minimum, this mechanism should meet the following requirements:

- Have at least two channels for collecting feedback, e.g., face to face through volunteers or passed on by community representatives
- Everyone in the community should know about the feedback mechanism and feel safe and comfortable to use it, including men, women, boys, girls and any marginalized or at-risk groups
- There should be a means of recording feedback, such as an excel spreadsheet, and tracking which issues have not been responded to
- Community members need to receive a response to their feedback
- How to act on feedback should be discussed in response team meetings
- Issues falling outside the mandate of the National Society should be referred to other organizations, government, and partners
- All staff and volunteers need to understand how the feedback mechanism works and their role and responsibility in supporting it
- It should be capable of handling sensitive feedback safely and securely, e.g., sexual exploitation and abuse, corruption, or protection issues
- Analyse if feedback is coming from a broad cross-section of the community and no one feels excluded from using the mechanism.

Module 6, page 103, provides detailed guidance on feedback mechanisms.

Tools: 15 Feedback kit 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles 7 CEA M&E tool 16 FGD guide

» Check the operation is meeting people's needs and reaching the most at-risk

Proactively check the operation is meeting people's needs, reaching the most at-risk groups, and support is being provided in the right way. This can be collected through formal monitoring processes or informally through community meetings, meetings with representatives, or focus group discussions with different groups.

Tools: 7 CEA M&E tool 16 FGD guide 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

» Monitor operations for any unintended negative consequences

Monitor the impact the response is having in the wider community to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences that could cause harm to people. For example, putting marginalized groups more at risk through selection criteria processes or destabilizing local markets through food distributions.

» Act on feedback and monitoring data and use it to guide the response

Discuss community feedback and monitoring data as a standing agenda item in staff, volunteer, and management meetings, with enough time to discuss how the operation should be adjusted to act on issues raised by the community.

Tools: 15 Feedback kit

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Review and improve the feedback mechanism

Conduct focus group discussion to gather feedback on accessibility and trust in the feedback mechanism across different groups and discuss how the mechanism can be improved, for example by adding additional channels or strengthening response times. Review how feedback is being acted upon internally and discuss in coordination meetings how the use of feedback could be strengthened.

Tools: 15 Feedback kit 7 CEA M&E tool 16 FGD guide

» Coordinate with external partners on community feedback

Regularly share feedback insights, reports and/or non-sensitive feedback data with other humanitarian stakeholders via email or in coordination meetings. When needed, advocate in coordination or bilateral meetings for collective action to address broader issues raised in community feedback.

Tools: 24 CEA checklist for sectors and roles

» Monitor the effectiveness of community engagement approaches

Check if community engagement approaches are working well and all groups in the community are satisfied with the quality of information, participation and influence they have over the operation - and make changes when needed.

Tools: 7 CEA M&E tool

» Collect case studies of how community feedback is being used

Capture examples of when programmes have been adjusted and impact improved because of community feedback.

Tools: 12 CEA Case Study template

Examples from the Movement

Bahamas Red Cross set up a hotline for hurricane response

Bahamas Red Cross Society (BRCS), with support from IFRC, established a toll-free, anonymous, and confidential telephone hotline to respond to feedback as part of the response to Hurricane Dorian. The hotline is open from 9.30am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday and operated by three staff in English and Creole. Initially, the hotline was set up to respond to issues related to prepaid visa cards distributed as part of the hurricane response and was operated across several mobile phones, held by BRCS and IFRC staff. However, the line proved so popular that it was upgraded to one toll free hotline that could receive multiple calls at once to ensure no call was left unanswered. The aim of the hotline is to solve each case during the call and several measures have been put in place to support this, including training for all hotline operators, development of standard operating procedures, providing hotline officers with briefings and presentations from programme staff, and preparing and regularly updating Q&As. To ensure all feedback is tracked and analysed, BRCS tried several different ways of documenting feedback, including Excel and Kobo Toolbox, but finally found a digital feedback form worked best as it allowed feedback to be logged in one place, regardless of the channel used. Other good practices include establishing clear internal and external referral pathways for feedback that can't be responded to immediately and separate databases for storing sensitive feedback, which is then handled by PGI staff. All feedback is analysed and shared on a database, which can also be seen by the public. Feedback reports are shared internally and discussed in coordination meetings and follow up discussions are held in community meetings and through focus group discussions. Read the full case study[93], including tools and lessons learned.

Listening to community perspectives to improve the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

DRC Red Cross and IFRC, with the support of US Centres for Disease Control, established a system to systematically collect, analyse and act on community feedback relating to the Ebola operation in Eastern Congo. During house visits and community meetings, volunteers captured concerns, rumours and questions using paper forms. The feedback data is coded and analysed locally and shared with local government-led risk communication commissions and Ebola response leaders as well as regional and global partners, to inform strategic discussions and decisions. By the end of the Ebola response, more than 1 million feedback comments had been collected by over 800 Red Cross volunteers. The feedback data helped the Red Cross operation to respond to community concerns and suggestions in real-time, which built trust and acceptance for health interventions. For example, comments received about family members' need for visual confirmation that their loved one was in the body bag led the Red Cross to acquire transparent bags. Using transparent bags also helped address perceptions that the bags were filled with rocks or dirt because body parts have been removed and sold. For more on the feedback mechanism in DRC, see articles in the Humanitarian Practice Network[94] and Global Health Security journal[95].

A helpdesk helps support distributions of relief items in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS), with support from Canadian Red Cross, used a drought response to try new approaches to managing community feedback. The National Society added a feedback desk to their distribution plans. Community members were informed about the desk prior to distributions and volunteers trained on how to collect and respond to feedback, questions, and complaints and how to log these so they could be analysed later. A system was also put in place to follow up on issues during monthly monitoring field visits. A common complaint was that the support provided was inadequate, so ERCS was able to use this feedback to justify an increase to the amount provided to each household. The National Society also took the opportunity to explain the selection criteria again and the limitations in funding faced. Read the full case study[96].

During evaluation and learning

10 Include the community in the evaluation

Community members should be a key source of information in the evaluation. If the operation has not helped them recover, then it hasn't worked, no matter how many aid items were distributed.

At a minimum *when capacity, time and resources are limited*

» Ask community members for their opinions of the operation

Ask a cross-section of community members if they are satisfied with the timeliness, quality and effectiveness of support provided, the way it was delivered, and what could be improved for future operations. Include these questions in the evaluation survey or if no evaluation is planned, ask these through key informant interviews, focus group discussions or community meetings.

Tools: 7 CEA M&E tool 16 FGD guide

» Share evaluation findings internally

Share evaluation findings with colleagues so that others can benefit from lessons learned and avoid repeating mistakes. For example, through a lessons learned workshop or by emailing the evaluation findings to colleagues.

Advanced *when there is more capacity, time, and resources*

» Involve communities in planning the evaluation

Ask community representatives and members about the best way to carry out the evaluation. See page 69 for more on participatory evaluations.

» Organise a community-led evaluation

Have the community lead and carry out the evaluation process themselves. See page 70 for examples of participatory evaluation tools.

» Discuss evaluation findings with communities

Go back to communities and discuss the findings of evaluations and next steps with them, for instance through meetings or workshops.

Tool: 19 Communication methods matrix

» Discuss and share evaluation findings with external partners

Share evaluation findings with external partners to ensure others can benefit from lessons learned and avoid repeating mistakes.

Examples from the Movement

Kenya Red Cross drought response evaluation has a strong focus on community experiences

Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) used a mix of tools, including household surveys, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and most significant change, to evaluate cash transfers provided as part of a drought response. The evaluation spoke to formal, informal, and religious leaders, men and women, those who received support and those who didn't, as well as other key stakeholders. Topics covered in the evaluation included:

- Relevance and whether the cash transfers met people's real needs
- Effectiveness of the response, including safety, if there were any instances of abuse or corruption, whether people felt the targeting was fair, and if people knew about feedback and complaints mechanisms, which channels they used and if they received a response
- Efficiency of the response, including if it was timely and resources were sufficient
- Impact, on those who received support and those who didn't and whether there were any unintended negative consequences

The community-based approach to targeting was identified as a key success, and seen as fair and transparent by all, including those not selected. The feedback mechanism was also appreciated with 93% saying they received a response. Areas for improvement included having a systematic way to capture feedback shared through local leaders and clearer communication about when the transfers would be ending. Read the evaluation, including methodology[97].

Kenya 2017 Joyce received her 3,000 KES cash grant during a cash transfer program (CTP) through mobile money with MPesa, as part of the Kenya Red Cross drought response. © Pierre Grandidier / IFRC