NATIONAL SOCIETY PREPAREDNESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Guidance note

June 2024

PREPAREDNESS FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

Community Engagement and Accountability within the Preparedness for Effective Response Approach

Introduction and purpose of this guidance note

This guidance note is intended for National Society (NS), IFRC, ICRC, and partner NS (PNS) staff who are planning to use the Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) Approach. It provides guidance on how to integrate community engagement and accountability (CEA) into the PER approach, either as part of an ongoing response or within long-term programming. It also provides links to useful resources with more information and guidance on how to address any areas identified as gaps using the PER Mechanism.

This guidance note covers:

1. Why community engagement and accountability (CEA) is an important part of National Society preparedness for emergency responses
2. What does it mean to be CEA-prepared?
3. Integrating community engagement and accountability into the PER process
4. Integrating community engagement and accountability into the PER Mechanism
   - Community engagement and accountability benchmarks within PER
   - Community engagement considerations under other PER benchmarks and components
   - Minimum community engagement and accountability benchmarks when PER is used in an emergency response
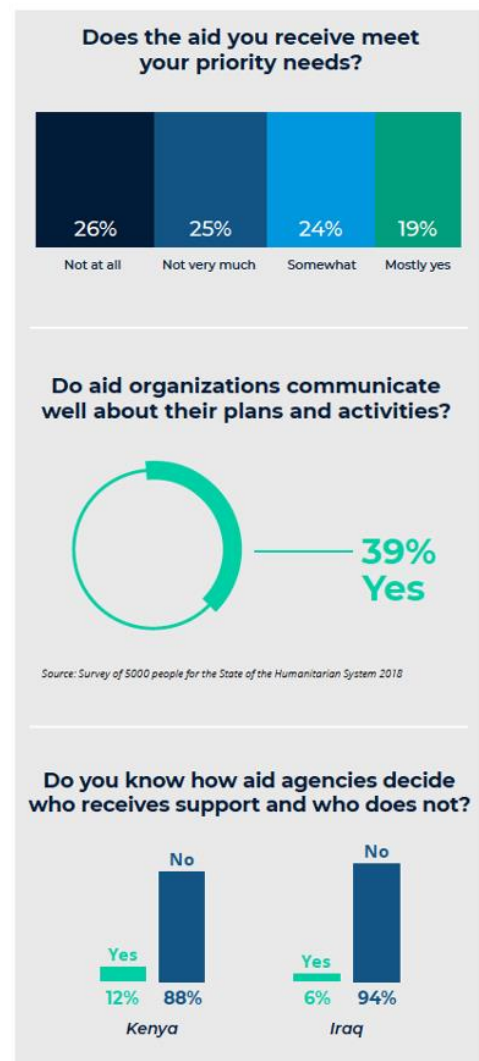5. Community engagement and accountability resources

1. Why community engagement and accountability (CEA) is an important part of National Society preparedness for emergency responses

Evidence, experience, and common sense tell us when we are truly engaging with communities. When communities are playing an active role in designing and managing operations, the outcomes are more effective, sustainable, and of a higher quality. Commitments to being more accountable with communities are enshrined in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief, the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance, and the Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability.

Despite this, 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.

Data collected by Ground Truth Solutions[1] highlights some of these gaps and captures the views of nearly 10,000 people across 10 countries affected by disaster and crisis.[2]

These findings are echoed in research conducted in Asia Pacific to examine DREF operational learnings from 2017 to 2021, as well as in findings from PER outcomes across the region. The research identified a lack of community engagement approaches within National Society responses. For instance, effective feedback mechanisms are commonly not in place, and staff and volunteers tend to lack sufficient awareness, capacity, or skills to engage communities and effectively collect and analyse community data. In many cases, this has led to a mismatch between what is needed and what is provided to communities.

Does the aid you receive meet your priority needs?

26%	25%	24%	19%
Not at all	Not very much	Somewhat	Mostly yes

Do aid organizations communicate well about their plans and activities?

39% Yes

Source: Survey of 5000 people for the State of the Humanitarian System 2018

Do you know how aid agencies decide who receives support and who does not?

Kenya: Yes 12% — No 88%
Iraq: Yes 6% — No 94%

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[1] *Ground Truth Solutions surveyed 4971 people across seven countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Haiti, Lebanon, Uganda, and Somalia). See: https://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/projects/perspectives-on-the-grand-bargain and https://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/themes/cash-barometer*

[2] *ALNAP commissioned GeoPoll to survey 5000 aid recipients across five countries (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Iraq). See: https://library.alnap.org/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report*

The IFRC Africa region conducted [research in 2019 to better understand what is helping or hindering accountability in operations](#). It identified the following common factors:

What helps us to be accountable in operations?
- When staff and volunteers understand the value of community engagement – for example, through trainings
- Leadership buy-in, as well as from the operations manager and the NS as a whole
- Having dedicated community engagement staff.

What prevents us from being accountable in operations?
- Challenges with managing community feedback in a systematic and simple way
- Weak assessments that limit our understanding of local needs and contexts
- Poor two-way continuous communication with communities about the operation
- Community engagement is siloed and not integrated across the operation
- Staff do not understand how to practically engage communities, or their responsibilities and role in supporting good accountability
- Time pressures and the perception that community engagement takes too long.

The best way to address these barriers and ensure that National Societies are ready to engage communities effectively in an emergency is to include community engagement in preparedness and response capacity strengthening efforts. This will require established mechanisms to share information, collect and respond to feedback, and facilitate community participation, with staff and volunteers trained and ready to go, rather than having to start from scratch at the beginning of a response, when time especially is limited.

How has community engagement preparedness supported operations?

⇒ Kenya

Kenya Red Cross has been investing in strengthening community engagement approaches since 2014. This has included staff and volunteer trainings; setting up a national feedback mechanism; adding accountability measures to all new programmes and operations; integrating accountability into the NS strategic plan; and adding community engagement responsibilities to staff job descriptions and appraisals.

These efforts have helped Kenya Red Cross to improve the impact and effectiveness of its responses to drought. A [2023 Operational Case Study](#) into the role of community engagement in anticipatory action found that participatory approaches such co-design of weather advisories helped to build community trust in meteorological forecasts. Having an existing feedback mechanism and strong communication processes in place helped ensure challenges were addressed in real-time and within the short timeframe available for anticipatory action. For example, responding to community requests for different types of seeds and distributing these in time for farmers to plant them and ensure quick germination. Engaging communities in agreeing targeting criteria helped

ensure there were no major conflicts recorded within the community. An evaluation of the 2017-2018 drought response also found the National Society's community-based targeting approach was a key success, seen as fair and transparent by all, including those not selected.

⇒ **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has been working to institutionalize community engagement and accountability since 2010. Significant milestones include launching a national call center in 2017, adopting a comprehensive accountability framework in 2018, enhancing feedback mechanisms through social media platforms, integrating accountability into BDRCS' strategic plan as a fundamental cross-cutting approach, and introducing a Community Engagement and Accountability Policy in 2021. In support of this policy, BDRCS has provided capacity strengthening and training for staff and volunteers on the practical application of community engagement.

An [evaluation of the COVID-19 response](#) found being able to draw on robust communication, participation and feedback approaches was of considerable importance in the response by enabling BDRCS to share messages, dispel Covid-19 myths, and receive and act on community feedback in a timely and responsive manner. This was invaluable in gaining peoples' confidence and trust when difficult decision such as selection and targeting were being taken. In Cox's Bazar, the feedback mechanism is instrumental in addressing major issues reported by the community, such as WASH services improvement, drainage system development, and participant selection processes.

⇒ **Malawi**

In 2018, Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS) embedded community engagement and accountability within the new Planning, Quality and Learning (PQL) department and included increased commitments to be accountable to communities into their 2019–2021 Strategic Plan. Training was rolled out to HQ staff and branches, and a feedback mechanism was established. This raised the profile of the approach among staff and encouraged them to integrate it into programmes and operations.

This approach laid the groundwork for the NS' COVD-19 response. [Research on the impact of community engagement and accountability approaches in public health emergencies](#) found that having a community feedback mechanism in place was highly valuable to MRCS and helped them to adapt their public health and community engagement activities based on the barriers, preferences, rumours and beliefs present in communities. These adaptations increased the impact and accountability of MRCS public health responses, including increasing vaccination rates, improving health behaviours and reducing the effects of rumours and misinformation. This also helped reduce resistance and hostility at community level towards volunteers who were promoting public health measures such as vaccination.

2. What does it mean to be community engagement and accountability-prepared?

The following diagram shows how institutionalizing community engagement and accountability can help us to improve accountability in emergencies and so meet the Movement-wide Commitments. The actions below come from the Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability.

Institutionalize community engagement and accountability

1. Strengthen community engagement understanding and capacity at all levels in the NS through leadership prioritisation, staff and volunteer training (pre-emergency), and having a clear policy and plan to guide efforts.
2. Allocate consistent funding and identify staff to lead community engagement and accountability within the organisation.
3. Integrate community engagement and accountability into NS strategies, plans, policies, and tools – including disaster preparedness and response standard operating procedures and staff and volunteer job descriptions.
4. Establish a permanent community feedback mechanism for the NS, able to support all programmes, operations and activities.

So that emergency operations:

1. Integrate community engagement across the response
2. Understand community needs, capacities, and context
3. Carry out assessments with transparency and respect for the community
4. Discuss response plans with communities and key stakeholders
5. Discuss and agree selection criteria and distribution processes with communities
6. Include community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets
7. Regularly share information about the response with the community
8. Support community participation in making decisions about the response
9. Listen to community feedback and use it to guide the response
10. Include the community in the evaluation

We meet the Movement-wide Minimum Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability

3. Integrating community engagement and accountability in the PER process

The following diagram shows how The PER approach, as part of longer-term response capacity strengthening, follows five phases. Integrating community engagement and accountability in each phase will ensure the NS's capacity to engage communities effectively and do no harm during responses is also strengthened as part of the PER process. If the NS has a community engagement focal point, they should be involved and can support the PER process from the outset. The below actions will help integrate community engagement in the PER process.

PER Phase	Actions to integrate Community Engagement & Accountability
1. Orientation	• Read module 5 in from the Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability and research from Africa which identified what helps or hinders good community engagement in emergencies. • Integrate NS community engagement capacity, staffing, and current practices, experiences and lessons learned in operations, in the PER orientation presentation • During the ambition exercise, consider what role the community should play in a perfect response
2. Assessment	• Gather the information and documents needed to assess if the NS is meeting the benchmarks for community engagement – See the next section of this document for guidance • Consider conducting a community engagement self-assessment (tool 3 in the CEA toolkit) to understand the barriers the NS faces and how well it is currently meeting the minimum actions for accountability • If questions on community engagement are needed for interviews, PER facilitators can use the assessment tool above
3. Prioritization & analysis	• If the NS completed a community engagement self-assessment, use the findings in the root cause analysis • Read the Global and Africa Community Engagement and Accountability Strategies to understand barriers and enablers
4. Work-plan	• If available, use the NS Community Engagement and Accountability Policy, Strategy or Plan to inform the workplan • Use CEA Tools: 4 (Template CEA Strategy), 5 (CEA Workplan), 6 (CEA Budgeting), 7 (CEA M&E), and 22 (CEA Emergency plan) to gather ideas for community engagement outcomes, outputs, activities, timelines, indicators and resources
5. Action & accountability	• Improvements identified through PER should be integrated in the NS Community Engagement and Accountability Strategy, Policy or Plan • The community engagement and accountability focal point should be part of regular monitoring and review processes, including gathering feedback from communities on the impact of changes implemented

4. Integrating community engagement and accountability within the PER mechanism

Community engagement and accountability benchmarks within PER

There are four key benchmarks to measure NS preparedness to engage communities in responses. The guidance below outlines what these benchmarks mean and how to measure performance against them, with links to useful resources to address any gaps identified.

PER BENCHMARK 5.1 *Under Policy, Strategy and Standards – Quality & Accountability Component*	
NS has mechanisms in place to ensure the affected populations are involved in all stages of the response (including decision making) to ensure assistance is appropriate and meets their needs and priorities.	
DEFINITION *What does this benchmark look like in practice?*	**RATING THE BENCHMARK** *How to measure this benchmark using the PER rating categories*
The NS regularly shares information with communities and ensures they can participate in making decisions about the response through approaches such as community meetings, committees, and focus group discussions. Communities should receive information on and participate in: ○ Planning assessments *(i.e., purpose, how, when, who)* ○ Planning operations *(i.e., outcomes, activities, roles, responsibilities, timeline, selection criteria, participation, feedback and communication approaches)* ○ Making decisions during implementation *(i.e., how, where, when to implement activities, selection criteria, targeting and distribution, construction location and design, changes, delays, challenges, feedback issues, closure and exit)* ○ Planning evaluations *(i.e., how, when, questions, who)* **Sources of more information or guidance to address gaps** ○ CEA Guide (p.50-53, 86-90 and module 5) ○ CEA Toolkit (especially tools 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20)	1. **Does not exist** The NS shares very little information and does not offer opportunities for communities to participate in making decisions about its operations. 2. **Partially exists** The NS shares basic information through one-way approaches (i.e., noticeboards) and offers ad-hoc, limited opportunities for participation (i.e., communities answer questions in an assessment but do not make decisions). 3. **Needs improvement** The NS shares information and provides opportunities for participation, but this is not systematic and doesn't happen in every operation, or at all stages. 4. **Exists, could be strengthened** The NS has clear commitments and processes in place to share information with communities and enable participation. However, there are still gaps in implementation i.e., many decisions are still made without community input. 5. **High performance** The NS has clear commitments and processes in place to share information with communities and enable participation. There is evidence this happens to a high standard, in most operations, across all stages of the response.

PER BENCHMARK 5.2 *Under Policy, Strategy and Standards – Quality & Accountability Component*
NS has trained CEA focal points at key branches and headquarters.

DEFINITION *What does this benchmark look like in practice?*	RATING THE BENCHMARK *How to measure this benchmark using the PER rating categories*
The NS has the capacity and skills to implement effective community engagement in its operations. This includes: o Having a staff member at HQ with community engagement and accountability in their job title o Training has been provided to staff, branches and leadership on how to effectively engage communities (i.e., the CEA Foundation Training, Community Engagement for Branches training, or the CEA in Emergencies training) o Identifying community engagement focal points in branches o Responses are supported by a community engagement staff member or focal point and response staff and volunteers are briefed on their community engagement responsibilities and any mechanisms the NS is using for communication, participation and feedback. **Sources of more information or guidance to address gaps** o CEA Tool 8 CEA JDs and responsibilities for emergencies o CEA Tool 25 Briefing on CEA for staff joining an operation o CEA Tool 23 Main tasks for CEA staff in a response o CEA Foundation Training o CEA in Emergencies Training (1 day) or short module o Community Engagement for Branches training	1. **Does not exist** The NS has not provided any community engagement and accountability training to its staff or volunteers and does not have any CEA focal points. 2. **Partially exists** The NS has provided some training to its staff and/or volunteers, but this is not widespread. The NS has a community engagement focal point at HQ, but they have multiple responsibilities and limited time/capacity to drive this forward. 3. **Needs improvement** The NS has provided training to staff and branches and has an informal community engagement focal point, who sometimes supports operations. 4. **Exists, could be strengthened** The NS has provided training to most staff and branches and has a community engagement and accountability staff member at HQ, who supports most operations. Most branches have community engagement focal points. 5. **High performance** The NS provides regular training to all its staff and branches and has a community engagement and accountability staff member at HQ, who is a key member of all operations. All branches have community engagement and accountability focal points. The NS has included community engagement and accountability responsibilities and competencies in the job descriptions of operations staff and volunteers.

PER BENCHMARK 5.3 *Under Policy, Strategy and Standards – Quality & Accountability component*

A NS CEA plan is developed and implemented, standard templates are available, and procedures are included in SOPs.

DEFINITION *What does this benchmark look like in practice?*	RATING THE BENCHMARK *How to measure this benchmark using the PER rating categories*
The NS has: o A community engagement and accountability plan, **or** strategy **or** policy in place o Integrated community engagement requirements in its disaster response SOPs, policies, processes and tools o Included community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets. **Sources of more information or guidance to address gaps** o CEA Tool 2 CEA Policy template o CEA Tool 3 CEA self-assessment and planning workshop o CEA Tool 4 CEA Strategy template o CEA Tool 6 CEA Budgeting tool o CEA Tool 22 Developing a CEA Emergency Plan o CEA Tool 7 CEA M&E tool	1. **Does not exist** The NS has no community engagement and accountability plan, strategy or policy and this is not included in its disaster response SOPs, policies, or tools. 2. **Partially exists** The NS is developing a community engagement and accountability plan, strategy or policy and has high level commitments in its disaster response SOPs, policies, or tools. However, there is limited evidence of community engagement approaches being systematically implemented within operations. 3. **Needs improvement** The NS has a draft community engagement and accountability plan, strategy or policy and has integrated commitments and activities in its disaster response SOPs, policies, or tools. However, these are not consistently implemented. 4. **Exists, could be strengthened** The NS has an approved community engagement and accountability plan, strategy or policy and has integrated commitments and activities in its disaster response SOPs, policies, or tools. These are usually implemented within operations and community engagement activities, indicators, and designated budget lines are usually included within operations. 5. **High performance** The NS has an approved community engagement and accountability plan, strategy or policy and has integrated commitments and activities in its disaster response SOPs, policies, or tools. These are systematically implemented within operations and community engagement activities, indicators, and designated budget lines are always included.

PER BENCHMARK 5.4 *Under Policy, Strategy and Standards – Quality & Accountability component*

Safe and accessible feedback and complaints mechanisms exist to record, refer or respond, and monitor communities' concerns and requests regarding the assistance provided or protection issues (including for sexual exploitation and abuse).

DEFINITION *What does this benchmark look like in practice?*	RATING THE BENCHMARK *How to measure this benchmark using the PER rating categories*
The NS has a functioning feedback mechanism in place for the whole organisation capable of receiving, analysing, sharing, acting on, and responding to, community feedback in operations, including sensitive feedback, for example sexual exploitation and abuse and corruption. At a minimum: ○ Community members have at least two methods of sharing feedback with the NS ○ Clear processes to record, analyse, share and track feedback i.e., a feedback database and feedback reports ○ At least 70% of actionable community feedback is responded to, as per tracking in the feedback database ○ Clear examples of how the NS has adjusted its operational activities as a result of community feedback ○ Safe and confidential processes to refer, manage and provide an initial response to sensitive feedback within 24-48 hours including protection concerns, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), fraud and corruption, and any other breaches of the Code of Conduct. Sources of more information or guidance to address gaps ○ CEA Guide (module 6) ○ CEA Tool 15 IFRC Feedback Kit and tools ○ IFRC Community Feedback Training	1. Does not exist The NS does not have any community feedback mechanisms in place. 2. Partially exists The NS collects feedback informally as part of its operations but does not record feedback or track if it has been responded to or acted on. 3. Needs improvement The NS has a functioning/semi-functioning* feedback mechanism for some of its operations, but not all. Feedback mechanisms are not referenced in disaster response SOPs, policies, processes or tools or Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) / Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies and procedures. 4. Exists, could be strengthened The NS has a functioning/semi-functioning* feedback mechanism which is used in most operations. Feedback mechanisms are referenced in disaster response SOPs, policies, processes or tools and the Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and/or Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies. 5. High performance The NS has a fully functioning* feedback mechanism in place for the whole organisation which is used for all its emergency operations. Feedback mechanisms are referenced in disaster response SOPs, policies, processes or tools and the Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and/or Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies. There is evidence community feedback is systematically used to guide response decisions. *Functioning feedback mechanisms must meet the requirements on the left.*

Community engagement and accountability considerations under other PER benchmarks and components

As well as the four specific benchmarks above, there are also community engagement and accountability considerations under other PER areas and components. This reflects the fact that community engagement is cross-cutting and should be integrated across a response. Links to useful community engagement resources are included to provide more guidance and support to address any gaps identified.

AREA	COMPONENT	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY CONSIDERATIONS
Policy, strategy and standards	**RCRC Auxiliary Role, Mandate and Law**	➢ The NS mandate includes a commitment to being accountable to those it serves i.e., it reflects the Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability resolution *(Benchmark 1.2)* ➢ These commitments are reflected in the organisation strategy, policies, plans and processes *(Benchmark 1.3)*
	DRM Strategy	➢ The NS DRM Strategy includes community engagement and accountability objectives, approaches and indicators i.e., responses are relevant, timely, community-driven, and treat people with dignity and respect and include participation, communication and feedback approaches *(Benchmark 2.1)* See CEA Tool 4 and 7
	DRM Policy	➢ The NS DRM Policy includes commitments to community understanding, participation, communication, and responding and acting on feedback and complaints *(Benchmark 3.2)* See CEA Tool 2
Analysis and Planning	**Hazard, Context & Risk Analysis, Monitoring & Early Warning**	➢ The NS has the capacity to collect primary and secondary data on social relations and communication in communities, including decision-making processes, excluded groups, social cohesion, trusted figures, sources of information and barriers to information and participation, and 2) culture and beliefs, including social and gender norms, religious and traditional practices *(Benchmark 6.2)* See CEA Tool 13 ➢ NS analysis of acceptance, access and security includes understanding community knowledge, perceptions and trust in the NS and Red Cross Red Crescent Movement *(Benchmark 6.3)* See CEA Tool 13 ➢ Community risk assessments map whether leaders, representatives and groups are trusted *(Benchmark 6.7)*
	Scenario Planning	➢ Analysis of scenarios includes the contextual issues above such as community relations, communication, and culture and beliefs and how these impact on the response *(Benchmark 7.1)* See CEA Tool 13 ➢ Response strategies include how communities will be engaged *(Benchmark 7.3)* See CEA Tool 22
	Risk Management	➢ The role of effective community engagement in identifying and mitigating risks is part of NS risk management *(Benchmark 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 & 8.5)* See CEA Guide

	Emergency Response Procedures (SOPs)	➢ SOPs include how community participation, transparent communication, and mechanisms to listen and act on feedback will be integrated in a response *(Benchmark 11.1)* See CEA Tool 22 ➢ Ensuring effective community engagement is part of the roles and responsibilities of responders at all levels *(Benchmark 11.3)* See CEA Tool 8
	Response and Recovery Planning	➢ Response plans include community engagement activities, indicators, and human and financial resources *(Benchmark 12.1)* See CEA Tool 6 and 22 ➢ Response plans are developed with a mix of community representatives, i.e., not only community leaders *(Benchmark 12.3)* See CEA Tools 17, 16 and 18 and CEA Guide (p.50-53 & 86-90) ➢ Response plans are coordinated internally across technical and support teams, to make sure they are complementary and achievable, before any commitments are made to communities *(Benchmark 12.3)* ➢ NS has processes to ensure community feedback is discussed and used to guide decisions and adapt response plans *(Benchmark 12.8)* See CEA Tool 15 Feedback Kit
Operational Capacity	**NS-Specific Areas of Intervention**	For all intervention sub-components *(Benchmarks 14.1 – 14.69)* ➢ Training on how to engage communities is integrated in sector-specific trainings for staff, volunteers and community representatives See CEA Training packages for different modules ➢ Guidance on community engagement responsibilities and requirements is included in sector-specific guidance, tools and templates See CEA Guide minimum actions and CEA Tool 24 ➢ The sector involves communities in designing and guiding sector plans and activities, to ensure they reflect their needs, priorities, and capacities See CEA Tools 17, 16 and 18 and CEA Guide (p.50-53 & 86-90) ➢ The sector regularly shares information with communities about its plans and activities, using the best approaches to reach different groups See CEA Guide (p.93-94) and CEA Tool 19 ➢ The sector uses community feedback to guide decisions and improve its activities and discusses this regularly in team meetings See CEA Guide (module 6) and CEA Tool 15 IFRC Feedback Kit and tools
	Mapping of NS Capacities	➢ NS has an identified community engagement and accountability staff/focal *(Benchmark 15.1)* See CEA Tool 8 ➢ Staff and volunteers are trained on community engagement *(Benchmark 15.2)* See CEA Training packages

	Early Action Mechanisms	➢ The NS early warning early action system is designed in consultation with communities *(Benchmark 16.1)* ➢ The NS engages communities in designing alert messages and determining preferred, trusted and accessible channels for sending them *(Benchmark 16.4)* See CEA Tool 19
	Cash Based Intervention / Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)	➢ The NS CVA preparedness plan includes activities to address any gaps in community engagement i.e., lack of feedback mechanism or participatory approaches to selection *(Benchmark 17.1)* CEA Tool 24 ➢ CVA training includes sessions on how to integrate community engagement approaches in CVA *(Benchmark 17.3)* See the CEA in CVA e-learning and CEA training packages ➢ The NS CVA SOPs include measures to ensure accountability to communities *(Benchmark 17.5)* CEA Tool 24 ➢ NS mapping of CVA delivery mechanisms includes analysis of community preferences and any barriers they could face in accessing cash (digital, physical etc.) *(Benchmark 17.6)* See cash toolkit community questions
	Emergency Needs Assessment	➢ NS templates for data collection and reporting include questions on community priorities, literacy, languages, preferred information and feedback channels, information needs, and any barriers people face in accessing information or participating in decisions *(Benchmark 18.1)* See CEA Tool 13 ➢ NS multi-sectorial assessment team is trained on how to conduct the needs assessment with transparency and respect for the community *(Benchmark 18.2)* See CEA Guide p.84-85 and CEA Tools 13, 14 and 10 ➢ NS needs assessment takes into consideration community capacity, and community leaders and groups and if they are trusted / trustworthy *(Benchmark 18.6)* See CEA Tool 13
	Affected Population Selection	➢ NS communication about selection criteria uses two-way approaches so communities can ask questions, including having a confidential feedback channel *(Benchmark 19.1)* See CEA Tools 18, 19 and 15 ➢ NS agrees selection criteria with a diversity of community groups and leaders whenever possible *(Benchmark 19.2)* See CEA Guide p.89-90 and CEA Tool 18
	IM	➢ NS situation reports include community feedback data *(Benchmark 21.6)* See CEA Tool 15 Feedback Kit
	Testing and Learning	➢ NS simulations and drills include testing the speed and effectiveness of approaches to engage communities during a response *(Benchmark 22.1)* See CEA Guide module 5

Coordination	**Coordination with Movement**	➢ Community engagement issues are discussed in Movement Coordination Meetings, including issues raised through community feedback and participation exercises *(Benchmark 24.2)* See CEA Tool 15 Feedback Kit ➢ Cross-border information sharing includes issues raised in community feedback *(Benchmark 24.3)*
	Coordination with Authorities	➢ NS is part of any interagency working groups that exist for community engagement, accountability and risk communication *(Benchmark 25.4 and 26.1)*
Operations Support	**Operations Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning**	➢ NS framework for emergency operations includes results and indicators to measure if responses are accountable to communities i.e., relevant, timely, respectful? *(Benchmark 31.3)* See CEA Tool 22 and 7 ➢ NS M&E systems proactively check if operations are meeting peoples' needs and being accountable and include data collected through feedback mechanisms *(Benchmark 31.4)* See CEA Guide p.97-99 and Tool 24a ➢ NS evaluations include community members' opinions *(Benchmark 31.6)* See CEA Guide p.100-101 and Tool 7 ➢ NS reporting templates include a section on community engagement and accountability *(Benchmark 31.7)*
	Finance & Admin	➢ NS finance and admin emergency procedures allow changes as community needs evolve *(Benchmark 32.3)*
	Logistics	➢ Pre-positioned relief items are reviewed and updated based on community feedback *(Benchmark 34.5)*
	Staff and Volunteer Management	➢ Volunteers and staff are kept informed of operational plans, activities and changes, so they can communicate accurately with affected communities *(Benchmark 35.1)* See CEA Guide p.37 ➢ Volunteers are involved in planning, managing and closing operations and managers listen to their feedback on what is happening in the community *(Benchmark 35.1)* See CEA Guide p.37 ➢ Responders are trained in how to effectively engage communities *(Benchmark 35.3)* CEA training packages ➢ Staff and volunteers are briefed on the Code of Conduct before signing it *(Benchmark 35.15)* See CEA Tool 10
	Communication	➢ NS advocacy to decision-makers uses community feedback and perception survey data *(Benchmark 36.10)*

Minimum community engagement and accountability benchmarks when PER is used in a response

If PER is used in emergencies, the following questions should be included to assess if the response is being accountable to communities.

AREA	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MINIMUM ACTIONS
Policy, Strategy and Standards	➢ Information is shared regularly with communities about the response i.e., plans, timelines, delays, exit etc ➢ Communities can participate in making decisions about response plans and implementation i.e., activities, roles and responsibilities, timelines, selection criteria and participation, communication and feedback approaches ➢ A safe and accessible feedback mechanism exists to record, refer or respond, and monitor communities' concerns and requests regarding the assistance provided or protection issues (including for sexual exploitation and abuse)
Analysis and Planning	➢ The NS has a good understanding of the context in the community i.e., community leaders and groups and whether they trusted, power dynamics and gender and social relations, cultural and social values, languages, at-risk groups, and capacities ➢ Response plans are coordinated across technical and support teams, to make sure they are complementary and achievable ➢ Response plans include community engagement activities, indicators, and human and financial resources ➢ Response has processes to ensure community feedback is discussed and used to guide decisions and adapt plans
Operational Capacity	➢ The response has an identified staff/focal point for community engagement and accountability ➢ Response staff and volunteers are briefed on community engagement responsibilities and any mechanisms ➢ Emergency Needs Assessments include questions on community priorities, literacy and languages, preferred ways to receive information and share feedback, information needs, and any barriers people face in accessing information or participating ➢ The assessment is carried out with transparency and respect for the community i.e., assessment plans are discussed with key community representatives and assessment teams are properly briefed and able to communicate and answer questions ➢ NS discusses and agrees selection criteria, targeting, and distribution processes with communities
Coordination	➢ Community engagement is discussed in Operational and Coordination Meetings, including how to act on community feedback ➢ NS is part of any interagency working groups that exist for community engagement, accountability and risk communication
Operations Support	➢ M&E systems proactively check if operations are meeting peoples' needs and being accountable ➢ NS evaluations include community members' opinions ➢ Volunteers and staff are kept informed of \plans, activities and changes, so they can communicate accurately with communities ➢ Staff and volunteers are briefed on the Code of Conduct before signing it, so they understand what it means.

5. Community engagement and accountability resources and sources of help

- **The Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability** *(available in multiple languages)*

  The Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability provides practical guidance and support to staff and volunteers across all sectors to integrate community engagement approaches in their work. It includes step-by-step guidance to meet the 18 minimum actions for good community engagement and accountability, case studies and links to tools and training packages.

- **The Community Engagement and Accountability toolkit** *(available in multiple languages)*

  The community engagement and accountability toolkit accompanies the guide and includes templates, checklists, and detailed guidance, including an assessment tool, monitoring and evaluation tool, and template policies, strategies and plans.

- **The IFRC Feedback Kit (CEA Tool 15)** *(available in French, Spanish and Russian)*

  Provides the guidance and tools needed to systematically use community feedback to improve programmes and operations. It includes steps to set up a basic feedback mechanism, as well as guidance on how to conduct community perception surveys, how to analyse qualitative feedback comments, and how to handle sensitive feedback safely.

- **Community Engagement and Accountability Training packages** *(available in multiple languages)*

  A range of training packages aimed at different levels and of different lengths, including the three-and-a-half day foundation training, a one-day and three-hour package for community engagement and accountability in emergencies, and a two-day interactive training package for branches and volunteers. There is also a training package to accompany the feedback kit.

- **The Community Engagement Hub** *(available in French, Spanish and Arabic)*

  The Community Engagement Hub is an open online platform, hosted by British Red Cross, that provides a 'one stop shop' for community engagement and accountability. The hub contains over 300 resources. The hub has a dedicated space for community engagement in emergencies with key actions and links to emergency-specific tools and training. If you have any questions or suggestions about the hub, please contact Laurel Selby LSelby@redcross.org.uk.