COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (CEA)

POLICY

February 2025

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It

must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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1. DEFINITIONS

The definitions below provide clarity on key terms and abbreviations used throughout this policy. These definitions ensure a common understanding among all readers.

1.1 **Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)** refers here to a way of working that recognizes communities as equal partners, prioritizing their needs, feedback, and leadership in decision-making. It integrates participatory mechanisms, transparency, and responsiveness into programs.[1]

1.2 **Community Engagement** refers here to the systematic process of collaborating inclusively with affected populations to understand their needs, vulnerabilities, and strengths, ensuring their feedback shapes decision-making and program design.[2]

1.3 **Accountability** refers here to the responsibility of the organization to act ethically and transparently toward affected communities, ensuring their needs, rights, and preferences guide decisions and actions.[3]

1.4 **Community** refers here to a group of people affected by the organization's activities, defined by shared geography (e.g., village, region) or identity (e.g., age, gender, disability). This includes both direct beneficiaries and those indirectly impacted.[4]

1.5 **Feedback** refers here to Information provided by community members about their experiences, perceptions, and expectations of humanitarian work, including complaints, suggestions, praise, or questions.[5]

1.6 **Open and Honest Communication** refers to a two-way exchange of accurate, timely, and accessible information between the organization and communities, involving proactive sharing of updates and active listening to community perspectives.[6]

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[1]This definition aligns with the IFRC/ICRC Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (2022), which emphasizes participatory mechanisms and transparency as core to CEA. "Equal partnership" reflects the Movement-wide Commitments for CEA. Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA). Geneva: IFRC/ICRC, 2022. Available: CEA Guide

[2]IFRC. Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability. Geneva: IFRC, 2019 (adopted in 2019 and formalized in 2020). Aligns with the Global CEA Strategy 2023–2025 for institutionalization

[3]Derived from Commitment 5 of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS, 2014), which mandates that organizations prioritize accountability to affected populations. CHS Alliance. Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). Geneva: CHS Alliance, 2014. Available: CHS Website

[4]IFRC & ICRC. Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA). Geneva: IFRC/ICRC, 2022. (See definition 1.2)

[5]IFRC. CEA Toolkit, 2022. Supports feedback mechanisms as part of the CEA Guide's operational framework

[6]IFRC. Global CEA Strategy 2023–2025. Geneva: IFRC, 2023. Emphasizes transparency and two-way dialogue

1.7   **Participation** refers to the meaningful involvement of community members in all stages of program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, ensuring their knowledge and priorities shape interventions.[7]

1.8   **Inclusivity** refers to deliberate efforts to ensure equitable representation of marginalized groups (e.g., women, persons with disabilities) in decision-making processes, addressing systemic barriers like discrimination or logistical challenges.[8]

1.9   **Protection** refers here to actions to safeguard individuals from physical, psychological, or social harm, particularly those at risk of violence or exclusion, upholding their rights, safety, and dignity.[9]

1.10   **Transparency** refers to the commitment to openly share information about organizational goals, processes, and outcomes, enabling communities to hold the organization accountable.[10]

1.11   **PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse)** refers to policies, standards, and actions designed to prevent and address incidents where humanitarian personnel engage in sexual exploitation or abuse of individuals affected by crises. This framework emphasizes accountability, survivor-cantered approaches, and systemic safeguards to uphold the dignity and rights of vulnerable populations.[11]

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[7]IFRC. Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) Operational Framework 2022–2025. Geneva: IFRC, 2022. Highlights inclusive participation in decision-making

[8]Operationalized through the IFRC Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) Policy (2022), which mandates addressing systemic barriers like discrimination and accessibility. IFRC. PGI Policy, 2022. Defines inclusive practices for marginalized groups

[9]Rooted in the IFRC's PGI Policy (2022), which defines protection as safeguarding individuals from harm while upholding their rights and dignity.

[10] Transparency is operationalized through the IFRC's Principles and Rules for Humanitarian Assistance (2015), which require National Societies to publicly share program goals, budgets, and outcomes.

[11] Aligns with the IFRC's PSEA Manual (2022) and the PGI Policy's safeguarding framework, which emphasize survivor-centered approach, confidential reporting and zero tolerance for exploitation.

2. INTRODUCTION

Community engagement and accountability is a way of working that recognizes and values all community members as equal partners, whose diverse needs, priorities, and preferences guide everything we do. We achieve this by integrating meaningful community participation, open and honest communication, and mechanisms to listen to and act on feedback, within our programs and operations. Evidence, experience, and common sense tells us when we truly engage communities and they play an active role in designing and managing programs and operations, the outcomes are more effective, sustainable, and of a higher quality.

Working in partnership with communities is at the core of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. We commit to involving people in the management of aid, holding ourselves accountable to those we seek to assist, and building on local capacity 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 commit to including transparent communication and feedback mechanisms in emergency responses. In December 2019, the first set of 'Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability' was approved at the Council of Delegates.

CEA is not an optional add-on but a systematic approach institutionalized across all levels of humanitarian action. This requires moving beyond transactional engagements to fostering genuine partnerships where communities co-design solutions, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes. Trust is built through consistent, open communication and by acting on feedback, ensuring communities see their input directly shaping interventions.

CEA is central to the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)'s humanitarian mission[12]. By prioritizing dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness, we aim to deliver programs that reflect community needs and foster sustainable impact. This policy aligns with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's commitments and global standards, such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)[13]. It establishes a framework for ensuring that ARCS's programs and operations are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs. By embedding CEA principles into our work, we enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and quality of our humanitarian efforts.

Ultimately, this policy reflects ARCS's commitment to institutionalizing CEA as a cross-cutting priority. Through dedicated resources, training, and leadership accountability, we aim to foster a culture where community voices are not only heard but are the

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[12] Reflects the IFRC's Global CEA Strategy (2023–2025), which institutionalizes CEA as a cross-cutting priority for National Societies.
[13]The CHS (2014) is a globally recognized framework for accountability. Its Commitment 5 specifically addresses the need for communities to shape humanitarian interventions
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driving force behind our humanitarian actions. This aligns with the IFRC's vision of a world where communities are empowered to lead their own resilience-building and recovery, ensuring no one is left behind.

3. PURPOSE

3.1   This policy formalizes the Afghan Red Crescent Society's (ARCS) commitment to embedding Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) as a core pillar of its humanitarian work. It aligns with the Movement-wide Commitments for CEA (2019) and global frameworks such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations[14], and the Grand Bargain 2.0[15]. CEA is not an optional add-on but a systematic approach to ensuring communities are active partners in shaping interventions that affect their lives.

3.2   Through this policy, ARCS in consideration to the Hanafi Jurisprudence (Figh) commits to:

3.2.1   **Empower Communities as Equal Partners:** Integrate community voices into all stages of programming, from needs assessment and design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This ensures interventions are driven by local knowledge, priorities, and capacities.

3.2.2   **Build Trust Through Transparency:** Proactively share clear, accessible information about ARCS's goals, activities, and decisions while creating safe channels for communities to hold us accountable.

3.2.3   **Strengthen Resilience and Ownership:** Foster community-led solutions by systematically involving marginalized groups (e.g., women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities) in decision-making. This approach ensures programs build on existing capacities and promote long-term self-reliance and promote the sustainability of the programs.

3.2.4   **Uphold Ethical Standards:** Operationalize zero tolerance for harm by institutionalizing robust feedback mechanisms to address complaints, including sensitive issues like sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), corruption, and protection risks, using survivor-centered approaches.

3.2.5   **Align with Global and Movement Frameworks:** Adhere to the Red Cross Red Crescent's Code of Conduct,[16] Principles and Rules for Humanitarian

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[14] The IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), established in 2011 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, outline five pillars for ethical humanitarian action: leadership, transparency, feedback, participation, and design. These commitments ensure affected communities shape aid delivery. Available: IASC AAP Commitments.

[15] Grand Bargain 2.0 (2021–2025) is a global initiative co-led by donors and humanitarian organizations to improve aid efficiency. It prioritizes localization, transparency, and community engagement, aligning with ARCS's CEA goals. Reference: Grand Bargain Secretariat. Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework. 2021.

[16] The Red Cross Red Crescent Code of Conduct (1994) establishes ethical standards for humanitarian agencies, emphasizing neutrality, impartiality, and accountability. It prohibits discrimination and mandates respect for local cultures. Reference: IFRC. Code of Conduct for the Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. Geneva: IFRC, 1994.

Assistance, and the CHS's nine commitments, particularly on accountability, participation, and dignity.[17]

3.3   By prioritizing CEA, we aim to create an inclusive environment, address systemic barriers to participation, and ensure our programs are accessible and responsive to all community members. This approach will strengthen our relationships, enhance the effectiveness of our humanitarian efforts, and reinforce our reputation for reliability, accountability, and compassion.

[17] The Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance (2015) provide operational guidelines for National Societies, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and community participation. These rules ensure aid aligns with the Movement's Fundamental Principles. IFRC. Principles and Rules. Geneva: IFRC, 2015.

4. SCOPE AND AUDIENCE OF POLICY

4.1   This Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) policy applies to all stakeholders, including staff, volunteers, and governance bodies. They must integrate CEA principles into their daily activities, especially in humanitarian assistance, healthcare services, and community outreach. All partners collaborating with Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) on projects or initiatives in Afghanistan including Movement partners such as the ICRC, IFRC, and Partner National Societies (PNSs) must adhere to this policy and align their practices with ARCS's CEA standards, ensuring a cohesive approach to community engagement across all operations.

4.2   This policy is particularly relevant for the following departments and areas of work:

4.2.1   **All departments** must ensure meaningful community participation throughout the project/program cycle, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This approach ensures interventions are contextually relevant, sustainable, and aligned with community priorities. CEA principles must be applied at each stage to ensure continuous community involvement and responsiveness to feedback.

4.2.2   **The Program Development team** must integrate CEA principles to ensure community feedback and needs drive service design and delivery, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of programs aimed at alleviating community suffering.

4.2.3   **Teams managing ARCS's health facilities, Mobile Health Teams, and community health initiatives** will incorporate CEA mechanisms to actively collect and respond to community input. This practice ensures healthcare services are accessible, acceptable, and tailored to the specific needs of served populations, particularly in conflict-affected and underserved areas.

4.2.4   The **Disaster Management Department** will integrate CEA principles into all phases of disaster planning and response. By actively engaging communities in risk assessment and preparedness activities, ARCS can foster collaboration where community insights directly inform response strategies and improve overall effectiveness.

4.2.5   **The PMER (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting) Department** will integrate CEA principles into planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting processes. This includes developing CEA-specific indicators, analyzing community feedback trends, and ensuring adaptive management**.**

4.2.6   **Marastoon centers** must integrate CEA mechanisms to align services with the needs and feedback of residents, including orphans and displaced

populations. Feedback channels must be established to ensure participation and uphold dignity.

4.2.7 **WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Teams** must incorporate CEA principles into service design and delivery, prioritizing community preferences. Feedback mechanisms must explicitly address sanitation-related concerns.

4.2.8 **Communication and Advocacy teams** play a crucial role in disseminating information about community engagement initiatives. They must ensure both internal and external messaging accurately reflects ARCS's commitment to accountability and transparency, fostering trust among communities and stakeholders. These teams must use community-collected evidence (e.g., feedback, needs assessments) to strengthen advocacy efforts, ensuring messages are grounded in real community needs and experiences, enhancing credibility and impact.

4.2.9 **Personnel responsible for staff and volunteer Training and Capacity Building** must incorporate CEA principles into their educational programs. This will equip team members with the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with the communities they serve, fostering a sense of joint ownership and responsibility in humanitarian actions.

4.2.10 The **Human Resources department** must integrate CEA standards into recruitment and onboarding processes. This ensures all new staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities regarding community engagement and accountability, creating a coherent organizational culture aligned with these values.

4.2.11 The **Gender Department** must lead efforts to ensure gender-sensitive approaches in all CEA activities, including targeted engagement with women and girls, monitoring gender disparities, and advocating for equitable participation in decision-making processes.

5. KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICY

5.1   The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) reaffirms its commitment to the principles and practices of Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) as reflected in the Movement-wide Minimum Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability (CR/19/R1). These principles guide ARCS's efforts to ensure ethical, inclusive, and effective engagement with the communities it serves:

5.2   **Accountability.** ARCS shall act ethically and responsibly toward the communities it serves. The organization ensures fair access to assistance, protects dignity, prevents harm, and addresses community feedback. Communities have the right to receive accurate information, participate in decisions impacting their lives, and hold ARCS accountable for its actions.[18]

5.3   **Community Engagement.** ARCS shall collaborate directly with communities to understand their needs, aspirations, and challenges. Transparent communication channels and participatory mechanisms enable communities to shape program design, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring relevance and sustainability.

5.4   **Participation.** ARCS actively involves communities in all phases of its work, valuing their knowledge and expertise. Meaningful participation ensures that programs reflect local priorities and empower communities to lead solutions to their own challenges.

5.5   **Inclusivity.** ARCS shall address the diverse needs of all community members. The organization will make all CEA activities inclusive and address the needs of marginalized groups, including women, children, and persons with disabilities. ARCS collaborates with community leaders and local structures to ensure participation reflects the full diversity of households and family units, while actively addressing barriers that perpetuate exclusion. ARCS shall actively recruit and deploy female staff and volunteers, particularly in culturally sensitive contexts (e.g., health programs, women-led committees)[19].

5.6   **Protection.** ARCS shall uphold the highest ethical standards to safeguard all individuals, with particular attention to those facing increased risks of harm or exclusion due to gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, geographic isolation, or intersecting vulnerabilities. ARCS maintains zero tolerance for exploitation, abuse, or discrimination by staff, volunteers, or partners. Individuals in vulnerable situations have the right to safe, dignified, and ethical engagement with ARCS. The organization will establish secure and confidential feedback mechanisms for reporting incidents of exploitation, abuse, or

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[18] Rooted in the IFRC's Principles and Rules for Humanitarian Assistance (2015), which mandate transparency and ethical conduct.

[19] Operationalizes the IFRC's Gender and Diversity Policy (2022), which requires gender parity in culturally sensitive roles.

discrimination, as well as for those facing heightened risks of exclusion or harm. Sensitive complaints are managed through anonymized reporting systems.

5.7 **Adaptability.** ARCS commits to evolving its CEA practices in response to shifting community dynamics, emerging risks (e.g., climate change, displacement), and socio-cultural contexts. Regular reviews will ensure engagement methods remain relevant and accessible to marginalized groups.

6. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

This section outlines foundational principles for applying Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA). Detailed operational guidance, including tools and workflows, will be provided in a separate Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) CEA guide and the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for community feedback.

To translate the Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) into action, the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) will implement the following measures across organizational and programmatic levels. These steps ensure CEA principles are systematically integrated into ARCS's strategies, operations, and daily practices:

6.1 **Organizational-Level Action**

6.1.1 ARCS will ensure that community engagement and accountability are embedded within all organizational strategies, policies, and operational plans, making it a standard practice across all activities.

6.1.2 ARCS shall allocate essential resources specifically for CEA activities, ensuring that at least 5% of annual program funds are dedicated to community engagement and accountability initiatives, including training and staffing. The CEA Technical Unit and Senior Leadership will oversee this allocation.

6.1.3 ARCS shall implement a structured feedback mechanism that allows community members to voice their opinions and concerns regarding the services provided, ensuring that sensitive complaints are managed appropriately.

6.1.4 ARCS shall provide ongoing training for all staff and volunteers on CEA principles and practices, ensuring they have the necessary skills to engage effectively with communities.

6.1.5 ARCS shall develop and implement performance metrics, including the Trust Index[20], to measure community trust and the effectiveness of Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) efforts. Impact metrics (e.g., percentage increase in community satisfaction, reduction in grievances) will be included to assess how CEA efforts improve program outcomes. These metrics will track progress and inform adjustments to enhance accountability.

6.1.6 ARCS will establish a routine process to review and update CEA strategies based on community feedback, ensuring they remain relevant.

6.2 **Programs and operations**

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[20] The Trust Index methodology is detailed in the IFRC's CEA Monitoring Framework (2023), which measures community confidence in humanitarian actors.

6.2.1 ARCS shall meet with communities at the start of programs and operations to explain our identity, expected staff and volunteer behaviour, and what support will be provided. These meetings will promote inclusion of diverse community members, ensuring representation from various demographic groups.

6.2.2 ARCS shall conduct a comprehensive review of existing community information to assess needs and capacities. This process will involve community members in planning the assessment, ensuring accurate representation of their priorities and concerns through participatory methods.

6.2.3 ARCS shall actively engage diverse community members and key stakeholders in program planning. This includes involving diverse community members and marginalized groups to ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. We will facilitate inclusive planning sessions where community representatives can articulate their needs and expectations.

6.2.4 ARCS shall implement the program with transparency and respect for the community. We will clearly communicate the program's purpose, content, and implementation methods while remaining open to community feedback. Systematic communication strategies, such as community meetings and digital updates, will keep everyone informed.

6.2.5 ARCS shall implement customized communication strategies that align with the cultural norms and preferences of the communities we serve. This approach will involve using local languages, respecting traditional communication methods, and ensuring that our messaging is culturally appropriate and easily accessible to all community members.

6.2.6 ARCS shall establish and maintain a robust community feedback system to collect, analyse, and respond to input. This ensures community members understand how to provide feedback and that their input is valued and acted upon.

6.2.7 ARCS shall consistently update community members on program activities. This includes sharing progress reports, challenges encountered, and how community input has influenced the program. Regular community briefings will effectively communicate these updates and ensure stakeholders remain informed.

6.2.8 ARCS shall involve community members in planning the program evaluation. This ensures that the evaluation accurately reflects community perspectives on the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement. We will engage community stakeholders during the evaluation planning stages to shape the criteria based on their insights.

6.2.9 ARCS shall continuously monitor program implementation and make necessary adjustments based on community feedback and monitoring data.

Actions include program adjustments, resource reallocation, or advocacy. This adaptive approach ensures the program remains relevant and effective in meeting community needs.

6.2.10 ARCS shall develop and implement key performance indicators to measure community engagement and satisfaction levels, using disaggregated data to capture insights from diverse demographic groups.

6.3   Community Feedback Mechanism

6.3.1   ARCS recognizes the crucial role of feedback mechanisms in organizational improvement.

6.3.2   ARCS shall engage community members to understand their expectations and preferred feedback methods. This includes diverse groups, including marginalized and vulnerable populations, to ensure inclusive feedback processes.

6.3.3   ARCS shall plan feedback collection, response, analysis, and action, aligning with community preferences.

6.3.4   ARCS shall train all staff and volunteers on the feedback mechanism and their roles, including soft skills like effective communication and listening.

6.3.5   ARCS shall promote the feedback mechanism through various community-used communication channels and ensure that feedback mechanisms are accessible to all community members, including women, children, persons with disabilities and individuals of varying literacy levels.

6.3.6   Adhere to the 'Do no harm' principle, ARCS shall avoid actions that could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or create new risks for communities.[21]

6.3.7   ARCS shall emphasize that providing feedback is a right and all feedback, including negative comments, is welcomed for improvement. Negative feedback will not affect eligibility for assistance.

6.3.8   ARCS shall log all feedback in a system that makes it easy to analyse and act on.[22]

6.3.9   Sensitive feedback shall be handled confidentially and stored separately to protect identities.

6.3.10 ARCS shall implement secure, anonymous reporting channels (e.g., toll-free hotlines, suggestion boxes in clinics/mosques) for concerns about exploitation, abuse, or exclusion. Trained staff shall confidentially process reports, following strict protocols to protect identities and sensitive data.

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[21] Derived from the IFRC's Safeguarding Framework (2022), which integrates "Do No Harm" into program design and feedback systems

[22] Aligns with the IFRC's Community Feedback and Response Mechanisms Guide (2020), which standardizes safe, accessible feedback channels.

PSEA-related feedback shall be securely stored, analysed for trends, and acted upon to ensure accountability and survivor safety.

6.3.11 ARCS shall assign and train dedicated staff, including female operators, to ensure feedback mechanisms are accessible to all community members. Female staff shall be deployed to collect feedback from women and girls. Training shall emphasize cultural competency, confidentiality, and active listening skills.[23]

6.3.12 ARCS shall develop protocols for prompt feedback response, ideally within two weeks, and inform community members about actions taken.

6.3.13 ARCS shall communicate openly about feedback that cannot be acted upon and explain the reasons behind such decisions.

6.3.14 ARCS shall regularly analyse aggregated feedback for trends and insights to inform programmatic decisions. The feedback findings will be shared with relevant staff and volunteers to guide operational and community engagement improvements.

6.3.15 ARCS shall establish referral pathways for feedback requiring action beyond its scope, ensuring community members receive appropriate assistance.

6.3.16 ARCS shall develop and disseminate guidelines to ensure no one is excluded from services. These guidelines will outline proactive measures to identify and reach underserved populations, such as door-to-door outreach, partnerships with local leaders, and tailored communication strategies for illiterate or geographically isolated individuals.

6.3.17 ARCS shall use feedback data to advocate for necessary policy or practice changes with relevant partners and stakeholders.

6.3.18 ARCS shall regularly assess the feedback mechanism to ensure its effectiveness and community members' comfort in using it. ARCS shall adapt the feedback mechanism based on community input and emerging needs, ensuring continuous improvement.

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[23] Aligns with the IFRC's Minimum Standards for PGI in Emergencies (2022), ensuring confidentiality and accessibility for marginalized groups.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Various organizational roles must collaborate to successfully implement the CEA policy. The following responsibilities outline how each group contributes to effective community engagement and accountability:

7.1 Common Responsibilities for All Staff and Volunteers

7.1.1 All ARCS staff and volunteers shall commit to CEA principles. They shall prioritize community needs, preferences, and feedback in their work.

7.1.2 All staff and volunteers must participate in CEA training programs to acquire essential knowledge and skills.

7.1.3 All personnel must actively implement feedback mechanisms to systematically collect, document, and address community input promptly and appropriately.

7.1.4 All staff and volunteers are responsible for gathering information from the community, conducting assessments, and engaging in two-way communication with affected populations.

7.1.5 All staff and Volunteers must play their crucial role in implementing CEA by involving the community in the decision-making process and must ensure that community needs and feedback are integrated into program planning and execution.

7.2 Responsibilities of Senior leadership

7.2.1 Must Ensure the National Society meet the Movement-wide Commitments to Community Engagement and Accountability, with key performance indicators in place to measure progress

7.2.2 Must ensure National Society plans, programs and operations are driven by community needs, priorities, and preferences

7.2.3 Shall allocate adequate human and financial resources for CEA implementation and support the integration of community engagement commitments in strategies, plans, policies, and approaches.

7.2.4 Shall establish cross-departmental coordination mechanisms (e.g., quarterly CEA task force meetings) to harmonize efforts and ensure alignment with ARCS's Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

7.2.5 Shall create an organizational culture of accountability by ensuring good internal communication, increasing staff and volunteer participation in decision-making, and establishing a staff and volunteer feedback mechanism.

7.3 Responsibilities of Staff involved in programs and operations (including regional managers, branch managers, managers, officers, gender department etc.)

7.3.1 Shall ensure staff and volunteers are trained and supported to engage communities effectively in their work

7.3.2 Shall ensure assessments are transparent and participatory, and capture a thorough understanding of the context, needs, and appropriate approaches for community engagement

7.3.3 Shall ensure programs are designed with community input and involvement, including men, women, boys, girls, and marginalized groups.

7.3.4 Shall ensure plans and budgets include activities and indicators that set out and measure how communities will be engaged

7.3.5 Shall regularly share information about the program/ response with community members, using the best approaches to reach different groups

7.3.6 Shall enable active and meaningful community participation in managing and guiding the program or response.

7.3.7 Shall integrate a community feedback mechanism in the program/response, ensuring feedback is analysed, responded to, and acted upon

7.3.8 Shall review, adjust, and improve the program/response regularly, based on community feedback and monitoring

7.3.9 Shall ensure the program/response evaluation involves communities, including asking if they are satisfied and what could be improved.

7.3.10 Regional Manager shall ensure regional offices comply with CEA policy by appointing a responsible person for regional level coordination to oversee implementation and report progress to the CEA Technical Unit.

7.4 Responsibilities of CEA Technical Unit

7.4.1 The CEA Technical Unit, led by a dedicated CEA Coordinator, shall oversee the implementation of CEA principles across all programs.[24]

7.4.2 This unit shall provide technical guidance, develop CEA tools (e.g., feedback SOPs), and support staff/volunteers in applying CEA standards.

7.4.3 The unit shall collaborate with the PMER team to integrate CEA indicators into program monitoring.

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[24] Defined in the IFRC's CEA Institutionalization Handbook (2023), which mandates dedicated CEA staff in all National Societies.

7.4.4 Shall drive continuous improvement in CEA institutionalization by integrating lessons learned into organizational policies, training, and systems.

7.5 Responsibilities of PMER (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting) Team

7.5.1 Shall review all plans and budgets to ensures they meet the minimum actions for community engagement and accountability

7.5.2 Shall integrate community perspectives into planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, including the development of indicators to monitor accountability and the inclusion of community feedback data in monitoring and reporting

7.5.3 Shall produce quarterly feedback trend reports in collaboration with the CEA Technical Unit, visualizing data to inform program adjustments.

7.5.4 Shall support a culture of learning and sharing within the National Society, including ensuring previous successes and failures are used to inform new programs and responses.

7.6 Responsibilities of Human Resources (HR)

7.6.1 Shall support the organization to recruit personnel with the right attitudes and skills to support effective community engagement and accountability, and monitor this as part of appraisal processes

7.6.2 Shall ensure new staff, volunteers and board members are briefed on the National Society's commitments to community engagement and accountability

7.6.3 Shall ensure all staff and volunteers are briefed on, understand, and sign the Red Cross Red Crescent and/or National Society Code of Conduct 25

7.6.4 Shall support investigations into serious complaints raised through community feedback mechanisms

7.6.5 Shall incorporate CEA responsibilities into job descriptions for all roles, emphasizing accountability and community engagement expectations.

7.7 Responsibilities of Support Services (e.g., Finance and Logistics, Procurement)

7.7.1 Shall ensures processes and procedures are flexible enough to allow for changes as community context and needs evolve

7.7.2 Shall ensure processes are adaptable to evolving community needs and contexts.

7.7.3 Shall support programs and operations to respond to issues or requests raised through community feedback monitoring data

7.7.4 Procurement and logistic decisions shall be informed by community preferences.

7.7.5 Align logistics plans with feedback from marginalized groups (e.g., accessible distribution points for persons with disabilities).

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[25] Reflects the IFRC's Code of Conduct (2019), which requires CEA training for all personnel.

8. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THIS POLICY

8.1   ARCS must implement and continuously monitor the CEA policy to fulfil its commitments to communities. The Secretary General and senior management bear overall responsibility for overseeing this policy, providing strategic direction, and allocating the necessary resources to support its execution.

8.2   **Implementation Plan.** To facilitate the effective implementation of this policy, we will create a CEA Action Plan to implement this policy. The plan will include specific steps, timelines, and responsible parties for each action. The action plan will serve as a roadmap, ensuring that all staff and volunteers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Key components of the implementation plan include:

8.2.1   **Policy Briefings:** ARCS shall conduct policy briefings for all staff and volunteers to inform them about the policy, its objectives, and their roles in its implementation. These briefings will emphasize the importance of CEA in achieving ARCS's mission and values.

8.2.2   **Policy Dissemination:** ARCS shall widely circulate this policy document in three languages (Pashto, Dari, and English) through internal communication channels, including email newsletters, intranet portals, and staff meetings. This ensures that all personnel, including volunteers, have access to the information and understand their responsibilities.

8.2.3   **Training Programs:** ARCS shall provide ongoing training for all staff and volunteers on CEA principles and practices. These sessions will equip team members with the skills to engage effectively with communities, collect and respond to feedback, and integrate community perspectives into program planning and implementation. Mandatory CEA training for junior staff and branch-level volunteers will focus on foundational principles such as feedback collection and inclusive participation.

8.2.4   **Resource Allocation:** ARCS shall allocate dedicated human, financial, and technical resources for CEA activities. Including feedback mechanisms, community consultations, and training. A dedicated CEA Coordinator will oversee implementation, supported by focal points in each of ARCS's 34 branches. Training programs will be conducted quarterly to ensure all staff and volunteers are equipped with the necessary skills for effective community engagement

8.3   **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.** ARCS will routinely review and update CEA strategies and practices. This ensures they stay relevant to community needs. This framework will include the following components:

8.3.1 **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** To track the progress of the CEA policy, ARCS shall adopt CEA indicators from the IFRC Indicator Bank, including but not limited to:

8.3.1.1   % of ARCS programs and operations that have community engagement activities and budget included (e.g., information sharing, participation, feedback, CEA training).[26]

8.3.1.2   # of ARCS policies, strategies, and procedures that have integrated CEA (e.g., disaster management, health, gender/protection, staff/volunteer management).

8.3.1.3   # of staff, volunteers, and leadership trained on community engagement and accountability (disaggregated by staff/volunteers, males/females, age range).

8.3.1.4   # of staff and volunteers trained on the community feedback mechanism.

8.3.1.5   ARCS has a community engagement and accountability policy/strategy/and/or plan in place.

8.3.1.6   ARCS has technical and dedicated staff for CEA (e.g., CEA Coordinator, focal points).

8.3.1.7   # out of 34 branches with a CEA focal point.

8.3.1.8   % of program and response plans that include indicators to measure CEA.

8.3.1.9   % of feedback from community received and responded to by ARCS (disaggregated by males/females/age range/vulnerability).

8.3.1.10 # and type of methods established to collect feedback from the community (e.g., hotlines, focus groups, suggestion boxes).

8.3.2 **Annual Evaluations:** ARCS shall conduct annual evaluations to assess policy effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. The evaluation will include input from staff, volunteers, and community members to ensure a comprehensive assessment. Monitoring will use anonymized, disaggregated data to track participation rates of marginalized groups and ensure equitable access to feedback mechanisms.

8.3.3 **Continuous Improvement:** ARCS will establish a routine process to review and update the CEA policy, ensuring that it remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the communities it serves. ARCS is committed to continuously improving its CEA practices to better serve the communities it engages with.

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[26] Adapted from the IFRC's CEA Minimum Commitments (2020), which set benchmarks for institutionalizing CEA

9. RELATED POLICIES, STRATEGIES, PROCEDURE AND GUIDELINES

9.1   This CEA policy aligns with and complements the following ARCS frameworks, policies, and operational guidelines. These documents collectively ensure a cohesive approach to upholding accountability, inclusivity, and ethical engagement across all organizational activities:

-     ARCS Strategic Plan 2021–2025.

-     ARCS CEA Strategy 2024 - 2025

-     Movement-wide Minimum Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability

-     Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alignment Framework.

-     Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (PMER) Guidelines

-     Disaster Response Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)[27]

-     Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) Framework

-     IFRC Manual on Prevention and Response To Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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[27] IFRC's Emergency Response Framework (2022), integrating CEA into all disaster phases.

Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)

Founded in 1935, ARCS is Afghanistan's leading humanitarian organization and a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It delivers impartial aid in crisis-affected regions through seven regional and 34 provincial branches. ARCS mobilizes thousands of volunteers to provide disaster response, healthcare, and social services. Notably, its Marastoon centers offer shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable groups such as orphans and displaced populations. Supported by partners like the ICRC and IFRC, ARCS has strengthened community resilience throughout its 90-year history. It remains a lifeline for millions of Afghans amid conflict, poverty, and natural disasters.

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