

# Accountability to Affected People (AAP) guide for integrating AAP activities into programming

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## Introduction

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) says: “Partners that implement activities funded by the AHF are required to address the five Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Those requirements fall under:

- Leadership/governance;
- Transparency;
- Feedback/Complaints;
- Participation;
- Design Monitoring and Evaluation.

“At the project proposal stage, implementing partners are required to describe how affected populations and specific beneficiaries have been and will be involved throughout the humanitarian project cycle. AHF reporting and monitoring procedures verify how this has been applied.”

This document provides suggestions for how partners in Afghanistan can fulfil AHF requirements and, more substantively, insert meaningful Accountability to Affected People (AAP) principles, policies and practices into project proposals and projects themselves. This guidance also can be used generally as a short manual on how to engage people in Afghanistan in all phases of humanitarian projects, so accountability becomes a natural and inseparable part of programming.

## Definitions

Community engagement and AAP are interconnected. Community engagement and two-way communication between your project’s participants and your organisation/project staff are how humanitarians pursue being accountable.

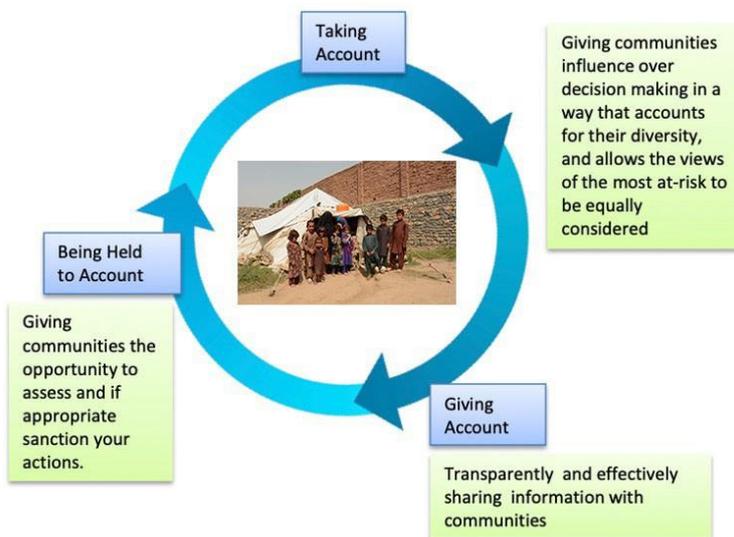
The IASC is a U.N. humanitarian coordination forum that “brings together 18 Principals of United Nations and non-United Nations entities to ensure coherence of efforts, formulate policy, and discuss priorities for strengthened humanitarian action,” according to its website. “The IASC is the primary coordination mechanism for coherent and timely international response to humanitarian emergencies.” One of its five key priorities is “enhancing accountability and inclusion.”

The IASC defines Accountability to Affected People (also called Accountability to Affected Populations) as “an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist.” More specifically, according to the IASC, it can be broken down into three types of accountability to affected people – taking account, giving account and being held to account – which are explained the figure below.

The category of “being held to account” is worth emphasizing as it includes Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). “Sexual exploitation and abuse by anyone associated with the provision of aid constitutes the most serious breach of accountability, and populations should be able to raise complaints and call for appropriate protection measures against such abuse, as well as be informed of the results of investigations on these complaints.”

Figure 1 summarises the three types of accountability according to the IASC.

Figure 1. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) adapted to Afghanistan



## General guidance

Having a strong AAP component in your project is a necessary and important part of all humanitarian programming in Afghanistan. Additionally, your organisation will distinguish its AHF or other funding application if you design specific and meaningful accountability and community engagement activities for the people your project wants to assist.

Figure 2 shows the section of the AHF project proposal that asks for information on your project’s AAP activities, which includes community engagement. (You likely will need more space than the two lines in the application to describe your AAP plans). AHF application reviewers will look for actionable AAP activities that fit your activity, the proposed location where the project will take place, and the communication preferences of the project’s potential participants.

Figure 2. OCHA Coordination-AHF project proposal

| 6. PARTICIPATION OF AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE AFFECTED POPULATION |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Accountability to Affected Persons</b>                         |  |
|   |  |
| <b>Protection Mainstreaming and GBV</b>                           |  |
|   |  |
| <b>GAM Reference Number</b>                                       |  |
|   |  |
| <b>Gender with Age Marker Code</b>                                |  |
| <b>Code</b>   | <b>Target Action Targets a defined group</b> |
|   |  |

The core of accountability to crisis-affected people in Afghanistan – especially those in marginalized groups – is regular two-way communication between your organization’s project staff and project participants as you design, implement and evaluate it.<sup>1</sup> Your project’s participants should have an accessible and confidential way to provide feedback and complaints to your organisation on the project and staff. Similarly, your organisation should have processes for returning to people who submit feedback to give them information, answer questions and provide updates on the progress of complaints made.

Your organisation already might have AAP activities and two-way communication channels that you can integrate into your proposed project. If so, the suggestions below might help you expand or adjust them for this project proposal. If your organisation does not have AAP activities, the suggestions can help you design project-specific, meaningful AAP activities for your proposed project. Strong AAP components will include coordinating with key AAP partners, including the AAP Working Group (Co-leaders Shoaib Sharifi of BBC Media Action ([shoaib.sharifi@af.bbcmmediaaction.org](mailto:shoaib.sharifi@af.bbcmmediaaction.org)) and Randhir Wanigasekara of UNHCR ([wanigase@unhcr.org](mailto:wanigase@unhcr.org)), OCHA AAP advisor and working group coordinator Carolyn Davis, [carolyn.davis@un.org](mailto:carolyn.davis@un.org)), and the Awaaz Afghanistan telephone feedback line and call centre at [awaazafghanistan@unops.org](mailto:awaazafghanistan@unops.org).

### Suggestions for designing your AAP component

1. Consult with the AAP Working Group for information on AAP and two-way communication and community engagement good practices
2. You also can consult with the AAP’s Sub-Working Group Afghanistan on COVID-19 RCCE, the PSEA Task Force, the Afghanistan Protection Cluster and its Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection sub-clusters, and the Disability and Inclusion Working Group to ensure you are including marginalized people in the communities where your programme operates.
3. You can find research on people in need in Afghanistan at:
  - a. the REACH Initiative’s Resource Center page for Afghanistan (<https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/country/afghanistan>) and the AAP WG page on the Humanitarian Response website at: (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/community-engagement-working-group>)
  - b. The AAP Working Group’s page on Humanitarian Info at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/community-engagement-working-group>
  - c. IOM Afghanistan’s reports page at: <https://afghanistan.iom.int/pakistan-returns>
  - d. Awaaz monthly analysis of calls and dashboard at: <https://awaazaf.org>

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<sup>1</sup>Discussions with communities may take place under different circumstances due to necessary precautions to avoid COVID-19 transmission, including social distancing and wearing masks.

## Suggestions for integrating AAP activities into your project

**TIP:** Make sure that a partnership with the Awaaz Afghanistan-410 telephone feedback and complaint hotline (toll-free, nationwide and with male and female phone operators) is part of your AAP project. More information on Awaaz can be found later in this document.

- 1) Hold two-way consultations with target communities throughout your project (including as part of its design). You can consult with communities through Focus Group Discussions, community meetings, household conversations (using COVID prevention measures),
- 2) Ask community members what people and communication channels they trust for giving feedback on assistance and for receiving information about humanitarian assistance.
- 3) Create feedback-and-response channels based on what people say. Also establish a process for safely recording feedback, referring it to Awaaz or another humanitarian agency as needed, and “closing the feedback loop” by going back to people who submitted feedback and updating them on the issue they raised or the complaint they made, or by giving them answers to their questions.
- 4) Raise awareness of affected communities on your organization’s feedback/complaint-and-response mechanisms and on Awaaz and people’s right to make complaints and give other feedback about humanitarian assistance, organisations and staff. You can do this by:
  - a) holding routine community consultations/Focus Group Discussions, community meetings (following COVID-19 prevention measures)
  - b) conducting regular “customer satisfaction” surveys about your project. These surveys can be done in-person as part of project activities and distributions.
  - c) embedding the Awaaz Afghanistan telephone hotline (410) into your design as one way for participants to give feedback confidentially (and anonymously, if preferred) on the project, your organisation, the conduct of your staff and other issues. Your project should have a plan for publicizing the Awaaz phone number to project participants. For more information on Awaaz, contact: [AwaazAfghanistan@unops.org](mailto:AwaazAfghanistan@unops.org).
- 5) Appoint “Participant Representatives” or “Question-and-Answer Officers” (one woman and one man) for your project. These people should be publicised and made available to project participants in a way that encourages trust and confidentiality.
- 6) Remember to protect the privacy and personal information of those who make complaints and give feedback. Securely document people’s concerns and comments. For information on data protection and safe sharing, please refer to the Afghanistan Data Sharing Protocol, available in Dari, Pashto and English at:  
<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-data-sharing-protocol>.
- 7) When creating accountability activities and two-way communication channels, make sure to reach out to participants from marginalized groups, including women and girls, people with disabilities, displaced communities, elderly people and people who are illiterate to get their suggestions on the best ways for them to give you information and to get information from you.
- 8) Follow the principle that humanitarian programmes should never put participants at risk of harm.
- 9) Make your project’s community engagement activities inclusive enough so that people from marginalized groups (or even the more marginalized people within marginalized groups) are involved in project decision making. Ask target communities which marginalized groups are unseen by the response and seek their participation.
- 10) Adjust your project and accountability activities in every phase, including evaluation and learnings, according to feedback from participants.
- 11) Consider designing a participatory evaluation survey or activity so program participants can be part of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities and lessons.
- 12) Share your AAP lessons with the AAP Working Group so members can benefit from what your organization learned about what did and did not work.

- 13) The terms of reference for staff working directly on your proposed project should include implementing two-way communication activities between participants and your organisation's staff and bringing people's comments to programme planners in your organisation or to other organisations as a referral if one of your project's participants has brought a problem to your attention involving another organization.
- 14) Commit to sharing data you collect from community consultations or surveys you do with your project participants with Awaaz Afghanistan or another agency endorsed by the AAP Working Group for response-wide analysis.
- 15) If you don't already have one, appoint an AAP focal point within your organisation. This person should inform Awaaz of up-to-date information about your project's and organisation's activities so the call centre can share it with callers. The focal point also can contact Awaaz Afghanistan with questions about appropriate referral pathways for support.

**TIP:** Be substantive in your accountability and community engagement activities but be realistic about what you will be able to do.

## Additional guidance for specific sectors

### Cash and Vouchers Assistance (CVA) projects

- In the planning phase, conduct community consultations to ask potential participants what their preferred modality of assistance is – cash, vouchers, in-kind, or a combination of those. Also ask them about their preferred payment modality or service delivery,
- Conduct a markets analysis and risk assessment – including access to and from markets by all potential target groups including women, girls, and minority groups) to inform the choice of modality selection – to ensure a do no harm approach to local markets,
- Ensure your project has two-way communication channels for participants to give feedback and make complaints (see examples in “General guidance” section). In addition, integrate regular two-way communications with communities and community leaders in all project phases to ensure CVA is not increasing risks, including of physical violence. This should include designing a communication channel (in-person, phone, post-distribution monitoring, etc.) or routine activities to ask women and older girls whether they have access to cash and/or vouchers and have a say in how the money is spent in their household.
- Ask people during community consultations who in their community might be more vulnerable in any aspect of CVA and should be targeted for support.
- Research protection risks, including programmatic-related risks (gender, fraud, etc.) in your CVA project, including the sources of risks as well as community-based or self-protection ways to reduce or avoid those risks.
- Raise awareness among your staff and project participants that all humanitarian assistance, including cash-based assistance, is free. Propose mitigation measures against elite capture including taxation. No payment of any kind is needed to get services or supplies.
- Raise awareness among your project participants about their right to receive assistance without paying any fee or providing any favor, and their right to make a complaint if they are asked by anyone to pay a fee or provide a favor. In parallel Consult with protection specialists and the Afghanistan Protection Cluster to identify operational and programmatic risks in the target locations ( for example, region or district) where you want your project to operate. Risks can include those that are gender-related, taxation, access to markets, fraud and robbery.
- Ensure that program participants can interact with payment systems without hindrances. For instance, verify that both women and men have access to mobile phones, bank accounts and identification cards as necessary. Ensure all participants can reach registration sites, cash distribution sites and markets.
- In all project planning, design, implementation, and evaluation, consider the role that gender dynamics play within families and what risks and consequences could flow from utilizing cash or vouchers. Evidence globally suggests that tensions and gender-based violence can rise if women participants are perceived as more economically independent. This could be a particular issue in Afghanistan.
- Where necessary and to ensure efficient services to CVA recipients, include training for financial service providers in your CVA project so they understand what AAPis and what their obligations are, including transparent and accurate explanations of the “cash-out” process in clear local languages and in audio or video for those who can’t read.
- Describe how your CVA activities will ensure that financial service providers understand they should not ask project participants to pay them to receive cash-based assistance. Project participants should be informed of the same message.
- Financial service providers’ performance and conduct should be part of your project’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) procedure.

- Before designing your project, talk with Awaaz to confirm a referral pathway for complaints about your project or organisation to be sent from Awaaz to you.
- Include regular awareness-raising on beneficiaries' right to report abuse of power.  
Create data protection protocols, especially if your project is working with the private sector for cash delivery. Protections should be especially strong if gender-based violence (GBV) survivors or people at risk of GBV might participate in your project.
- Design and implement an efficient and effective monitoring framework that includes post-distribution monitoring. This is to ensure that issues are detected and resolved early. In addition, use the real-time monitoring for project control,

**Send your proposals for Cash Voucher WG review to George Bete, coordinator of the Cash Voucher Working Group at [george.bete@wfp.org](mailto:george.bete@wfp.org).**

### Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

- If there isn't one already, use this proposed project to institute a policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment by your organisation's staff.
- As part of your project design, hold group discussions in communities where you want your project to operate and ask people – particularly women and girls – what communication channels they would be most comfortable using to report incidents of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.
- Before designing your project, hold community consultations to check whether your approach matches people's circumstances and needs. Hold men-only discussion groups and women-only discussion groups to create a safe space.
- In all phases of your project, integrate awareness-raising of the conduct your project participants should expect from your organisation's and implementing partners' staff, as well as the commitments humanitarian organisations have made on the conduct of people working for them.
- Make sure your project has PSEA awareness-raising activities that are relevant to different age groups, desired languages and literacy skills.
- Require all your organisation's employees to sign a code of conduct pledging that they will do no harm to participants in any of your organisation's programming and, specifically, in your proposed AHF project.
- Train your staff in what PSEA is, the conduct expected of them, and the obligation to report SEA allegations. Ask the PSEA Taskforce for policies and protocols in Afghanistan.
- Include repeated awareness-raising among programme participants of what behaviour they have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance providers as well as their right to report incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Require your organisation to respond to accusations of SEA against your staff and referring such complaints to appropriate authorities. Have a process for doing that.
- Make sure all awareness-raising materials are available in the languages people prefer and in an audio format for those who cannot read.
- Make sure women are on your project staff. This promotes gender participation and provides a more comfortable way for women to report SEA and other gender issues.
- Include the definitions of AAP and PSEA from the PSEA Taskforce and the AAP WG in all project recruitment, staff inductions, trainings, performance management, partnership agreements and reporting mechanisms.

**For more information on PSEA policies and processes in Afghanistan, contact Janet Omogi, coordinator of the PSEA Taskforce at [janet.omogi@wfp.org](mailto:janet.omogi@wfp.org).**

## RCCE Sub-Working Group

Enhancing and mainstreaming COVID-19 community engagement and risk communication at all levels of the operation and in all regions of the country is a priority in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the following activities can be applied with specific reference to your agency's target communities and should be elaborated in terms of how activities will reach communities in specific locations, or social groups with attention to gender, age, location, ethnicity or vulnerability. Risk communication and community engagement approaches may need to be adapted to mitigate the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the widespread insecurity in Afghanistan currently.

### Activities supporting COVID-19 and other Risk Communication & Community Engagement

1. Using the MoPH approved information about COVID-19 prevention, treatment and vaccines, disseminate and integrate approved messages and information materials to target communities that you work with or which have a specific focus on the local context, or targeting a key community or communities (please specify in the AHF proposal). Please make sure to use relevant and appropriate means to target different groups of the communities. Vulnerable and marginalized groups often need to be targeted directly in order to reach them effectively.

*In case new messages need to be developed for a specific purpose or group, these should be approved by the RCCE SWG (which works with MoPH to seek endorsement). New messages need to be field-tested among a small number of the target population before being widely circulated.*

2. Identify and map local avenues for safe and sustained risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) with local and target communities at risk of contracting or transmitting COVID-19, together with local media channels; provide regular input to central coordination (AAP WG and RCCE SWG) on this.

*The aim is to make sure that we are using the most effective channels of C19 RCCE to exchange information and share information. Partners should commit to updating the RCCE SWG of any developments, lessons learnt or shifting trends impacting effective RCCE practices.*

3. Identify and share RCCE approaches, tools and lessons learned combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Provide regular input and learning to the RCCE SWG.

*Based on community feedback, identify emerging and innovative forms of COVID-19 RCCE and share with the RCCE SWG so the members can benefit from the insights gained. Please also use the tools that the RCCE SWG has developed. The tools can be found on AAP WG website:*

*<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/community-engagement-working-group>.*

4. Build in two-way communication with local or target communities to receive their feedback and share relevant information with them to prevent COVID-19 transmission and promote behavior change.

*Partners should update the RCCE SWG regarding the most effective, respected and trusted channels of information sharing, community engagement and risk communication used. Community feedback should be systematically collected and shared with the RCCE SWG.*

5. Identify communities or members of communities who are particularly vulnerable or at risk of contracting or transmitting COVID-19 and undertake targeted discussions to increase awareness, including of the vaccine, and promote behaviour change to stop community transmission of COVID-19. Please specify the method of communications used for this activity.

*The aim is to prioritise those people most vulnerable to contracting and those people most likely to transmit COVID-19 in order to save lives and slow the community transmission of COVID-19.*

6. Identify key influencers in the district / province or within the communities that you work with; work with them to increase the reach and impact of risk communication and community engagement initiatives; build capacity of these influencers to increase awareness and promote behaviour change to prevent community transmission of COVID-19; provide regular feedback to the RCCE SWG on interactions with key influencers to ensure a coordinated approach; inform RCCE SWG on capacity building initiatives implemented.

*Key influencers are people who are respected, trusted and established sources of information in the community. They may be religious leaders, healthcare professionals, well-known local/national personalities, sports stars etc. or even local midwives etc. Leveraging their influence to ensure that accurate information is disseminated improves the likelihood of behavioural change. This is particularly important with regards to demand generation for the vaccine.*

7. Locally track rumours, feedback, concerns and questions and their sources, and share with RCCE SWG; contribute to closing the loop of this communication by providing accurate information and approved RCCE messages in response to those rumours, feedback, concerns and questions in coordination with the RCCE SWG.

*Coordinate with the RCCE SWG on the tracking and addressing of rumours. The RCCE SWG will develop responses in coordination with RCCE SWG members and will seek to have these responses approved by MoPH. Field teams can use the responses in their daily interactions with people at risk and to develop content for campaigns/awareness raising activities.*

8. Train staff at all levels on risk communication and community engagement to build capacity and ensure RCCE initiatives are cross cutting and sustained within the operation.

*The RCCE Sub-Working Group will support training, briefings and mentoring and offer access to training and skill-building resources to increase staff capacity on RCCE. This training will be compulsory for AHF partners conducting RCCE activities. Partners should ensure that capacity development is cascaded down to the field.*

**For more information on RCCE SWG activities and for RCCE project proposal reviews, contact:  
Petra Samways/WHO at [samwaysp@who.int](mailto:samwaysp@who.int) and Matina Boskou/NRC at [stamatia.boskou@nrc.no](mailto:stamatia.boskou@nrc.no).**

## Resources

*The Afghanistan Accountability to Affected People Working Group web page*

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/community-engagement-working-group>

*Accountability to affected populations: the operational framework (IASC)*

[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy\\_files/AAP%20Operational%20Framework%20Final%20Revision.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/AAP%20Operational%20Framework%20Final%20Revision.pdf)

*OCHA AAP*

<https://gho.unocha.org/delivering-better/accountability-affected-people>

*Assessing Information and Communication Needs: A Quick and Easy Guide for Those Working in Humanitarian Response*

Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network (CDAC)

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20140721173332-ihw5g>

*Other CDAC resources*

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/>

*Cash Delivery Mechanism Assessment Tool*

UNHCR

<https://www.unhcr.org/598c69db7.pdf>

*Community Engagement and Accountability*

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

<https://communityengagementhub.org/guides-and-tools/cea-guide/>

*FAO Guidance Note: Accountability to Affected Populations*

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/emergencies/docs/Guidance%20Note\\_Accountability\\_Publicli.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/emergencies/docs/Guidance%20Note_Accountability_Publicli.pdf)

*Participatory Video and the Most Significant Change*

*Better Evaluation*

[https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/toolkit/participatory\\_video\\_MSC](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/toolkit/participatory_video_MSC)

*UNHCR Emergency Handbook: Accountability to Affected People (AAP)*

<https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/42554/accountability-to-affected-people-aap>