

## Accountability – Key Elements/Core Understanding For ECB Project Agencies November 2010

### Purpose of Paper

The ECB AIM advisors developed this paper to use as the central document and impetus for a shared understanding of the key elements/core understanding for accountability work that we undertake together, under the auspices of the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project. By agreeing on key elements and indicators to establish a baseline for measuring our accountability we are also agreeing what will be the central tenets to all work that agencies undertake together to improve or increase accountability in our humanitarian responses: such as ECB Standing Team deployments, representation work, support to consortia etc. The paper has already informed the baseline assessment of agency capacity to deliver programmes that are accountable to beneficiaries. We plan to use the paper to serve as a basis for defining capacity building areas for the ECB agencies and the ECB consortia with targets relevant to each context.

### Background

The overall goal of the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project is to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve the welfare and protect the rights of people in emergency situation.

To this end three objectives have been set that will operate at different levels and locations within the humanitarian system. This paper is aimed at the agency level, i.e. Objective 2 within the ECB project but is informed by and linked strongly to Objectives 1 and 3. The 3 core themes that the ECB project has promised to deliver against are Staff Capacity, Accountability and Impact Measurement (AIM) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

Evaluations of emergency response frequently highlight insufficient accountability, especially to the people affected by emergencies, such as failure to provide communities with even the simplest information on what programs are there, and why. Country offices often lack clearly defined accountability frameworks and related tools that would enable them to systematically assess performance and ensure their response meets sector-accepted quality standards.

In particular agency-assessed humanitarian responses highlight the fact that all ECB agencies struggle with complaints mechanisms (as opposed to feedback mechanisms that can be quite acceptable), monitoring and evaluating (M and E) and transparency – both with regard to communicating decisions made about programmes and also supplying enough information for participants in a programme to make informed decisions about that programme.

As a result of this rather damning indictment of the current state of play of accountability to beneficiaries (selected) results of Objective 2 of the project are as follows:

- At least 70% of consortium member organizations (including government and community consortium members) in all **five** pilot countries will have demonstrated, either in evaluations of actual responses or through simulations, that they have in place and are using practical tools to meet relevant sector and organizational standards in accountability, especially as it relates to beneficiaries.
- At least **four** of the six IWG agencies will have in place systems to assess their capacity to meet sector and organizational standards in accountability, especially in regard to beneficiaries, as well as pragmatic tools for implementing these standards, as demonstrated by evaluations of emergency operations in at least **50%** of the **30** highest risk countries<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ECB AIM advisors have agreed to raise their expectations of this result to read “all agencies will have in place systems to ...”

During Phase 1, previous discussions and meetings with AIM advisors and field staff it has been deemed most useful to come to a common agreement to adopt a limited number of key elements rather than try to use the whole gamut of standards, principles or frameworks. Measurable indicators would then be agreed to demonstrate improvement (or not) against these core themes.

A very quick mapping process has been carried out within the ECB agencies and agreement, in principle, has been gained for the following themes to be THE central ECB themes for work on accountability.

Key to some of the thinking during the conception of the ECB project was the wish and need to increase and include the voices of beneficiaries in the decision-making, implementation and judgment of humanitarian responses. The key elements and associated indicators, along with some thoughts on Ways of Working to reflect this.

### Proposal of Key Elements and Indicators

The ECB project has defined accountability thus: the process through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment<sup>2</sup>. In the ECB context this means making sure that women, men and children affected by an emergency are involved in planning, implementing and judging the response to their emergency<sup>3</sup>.

Objective 2, agency-level activities and improvement, logically has, as its 'end users', staff (and possibly partners) at field level. The indicators that we agree as being core to all agencies need to be appropriate and measurable at this level. They can also be, we can assume, process or proxy indicators for impact as the ECB project does not, explicitly, commit us (in terms of our collaboration) to having impact.

With this in mind and following the consultations mentioned above we propose that accountability, to ECB members, can be captured by the following 5 key elements, with a small number of indicators per element<sup>4</sup>.

**Leadership/Governance:** the extent to which leaders and managers in agencies articulate what accountability means to them and to the organisation; the extent to which policy and practice is explicit about expectations around accountability and the extent to which accountability is modelled and demonstrably valued by leaders and managers.

### Indicators

- Commitment to accountability is made explicit, as evidenced by one or more of the following ways: inclusion in country strategies, programme proposals, staff inductions, partnership agreements; highlighting in reporting.
- Performance Management of staff at all levels includes how their teams work in ways that are accountable, and managers offer support if performance is judged to be insufficient.
- Senior management follows through on learning and findings from reviews and evaluations.
- Sufficient resources are in place for putting accountability into practice in both programmes and programme support.

<sup>2</sup> *One World Trust*, quoted in ECB Accountability Framework.

<sup>3</sup> From the ECB *Good Enough Guide to Accountability and Impact Measurement*

<sup>4</sup> This may appear restrictive to some agencies. The authors would like to stress that the intention is not to limit the scope of what any individual agency may wish to pursue in their work towards increased accountability. The intention is, explicitly, to find a number of key elements and indicators that all agencies MUST work towards (and be measured against) in order to prove the effectiveness of the ECB project only.

**Transparency:** the provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organisational procedures, structures and processes that affect them. To be transparent an organisation needs to do more than disclose standardised information. It also needs to provide stakeholders with the information they require to make informed decisions and choices. In this way transparency is more than just a one-way flow of information; it is an ongoing dialogue between an organisation and its stakeholders over information provision.

**Indicators**

The following are made public in a way that is accessible and acceptable to all in affected communities:

- Information about an NGOs mission, values, legal status and contact details.
- Information about projects, plans and activities (in particular beneficiary selection criteria and relevant financial information).
- Regular reports of actual performance in relation to previously agreed goals.
- Specific details for making comments, suggestions or complaints about the NGOs activities (preferably a named member of staff).

**Feedback:** (a subset of which is dealing with complaints): the systems, processes, attitudes and behaviours through which an organisation can truly listen to its stakeholders. Feedback is an essential part of the above three dimensions and essential for organisations to understand whether they are meeting the agreed needs / wishes or wants of their stakeholders. An organisation that actively seeks to improve policy and practice on the above three dimensions will decrease, significantly, the number of complaints it receives. Organisations should ensure that they have Feedback Mechanisms in place throughout their programmes, and that these are robust enough to support complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction. Oversight of these mechanisms allows the study of trends and/or areas of concern that will then allow appropriate corrective ‘corporate’ action to be triggered.

**Indicators**

- Agency has a formal, appropriate feedback mechanism in place that is discussed and agreed with key stakeholders and publicly communicated.
- The feedback mechanism employed is appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints.
- Programme managers have oversight of feedback (incl. complaints) mechanism and learn from and react to information received.

**Participation:** the process by which an organisation enables key stakeholders to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them. It is unrealistic to expect an organisation to engage with all stakeholders over all decisions all of the time. Therefore the organisation must have clear guidelines (and practices) enabling it to prioritise stakeholders appropriately and to be responsive to the differences in power between them. In particular, mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

**Indicators**

- Agency has a verifiable record of how it identified interest groups in the affected communities, and the power relationships that exist.
- Agency documents how it speaks with a balanced cross-section of representatives from the affected communities.
- Agency has a verifiable record of how communities (or their representatives) are demonstrably involved and influential in decision-making, implementation and judgement of impact throughout the lifetime of a project.

**Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME):** encompasses the processes through which an organisation, with involvement from key stakeholders, monitors and reviews its progress and results against goals and objectives; feeds learning back into the organisation on an ongoing basis; and reports on the results of the process. To increase accountability to stakeholders, goals and objectives must be designed in consultation with those stakeholders.

#### **Indicators**

- Agency carries out a systematic needs assessment for each project.
- Agency carries out a form of internal learning review for each project.
- Agency has mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate outcomes and impact and these are reported against (incl. to affected communities).
- M and E processes actually measure the levels of leadership, transparency, feedback and participation achieved in projects

Please note: This paper deliberately steers away from defining *targets* for these indicators on the grounds that each agency has made different commitments in their AIPs and CEPs. Evidence for how these indicators (and agency-specific targets) are being met will be gathered through yearly evaluations (following on from the baseline evaluation), standing team deployments, simulations and evaluations carried out in the course of emergency responses.

For further information, please contact the ECB Project Team [info@ecbproject.org](mailto:info@ecbproject.org)

Visit our website: <http://www.ecbproject.org/what/accountability>

## Promoting Accountability Key Elements

November 2010

### Background

An 'Accountability – Key Elements/Core Understanding' paper was written and agreed by ECB member agencies in April 2010. The paper lays out definitions and indicators to five 'core' elements that all ECB member agencies agree to promote and uphold within programmes carried out by their agency.

This paper outlines ideas and options that member agencies can choose to use, some of which we might decide to make mandatory for joint actions, country consortia or standing team deployments.

### Possible uses for the key elements

- . **Trainings:** Use the key elements and their indicators as the basis for all trainings and inductions related to humanitarian programming. Trainings to include those carried out by individual agencies, the Standing Team member training, trainings conducted by Standing Team members or any staff involved in ECB (such as AIM advisors).
- . **Workshops:** AIM-focused workshops will refer to key elements as standard. Materials to support understanding and usage already exist – AIM advisors are best placed to advise what is best in each context.
- . **Evaluations, Peer Reviews, Self Assessments:** Terms of Reference for all evaluative exercises undertaken by ECB member agencies (joint or otherwise) to include, as a general rule, evaluation against the Key Elements and their indicators. Support on this to be provided as necessary by the AIM advisors as standard practice. Recommendations resulting from all evaluations to include, as necessary, those pertaining to key element indicators. Management Responses resulting from evaluations will then include consideration and action on recommendations about AIM.
- . **Technical assistance:** Key elements to be used as a reference point for remote or in-person technical assistance related to accountability. The indicators serve to define the type of technical assistance needed to improve accountable practice. Terms of Reference for support trips to countries, whether they are undertaken jointly or individually, to contain consideration of and support towards understanding the definitions of key elements and adherence to the indicators.
- . **Agency accountability frameworks:** Member agencies incorporate the key elements, definitions and indicators in their agencies' accountability frameworks or other guiding documents.
- . **Partnership agreements, AIPs and CEPs:** Member agencies and consortia incorporate activities that support adherence to key elements, definitions and indicators.
- . **Representing ECB or ECB work:** AIM advisors, ECB project staff, and IWG principals use key elements, definitions and indicators to represent a common 'ECB position' when talking with communities, other agencies, donors, partners and other stakeholders about accountability.
- . **The Key Elements and their indicators, being the most basic building block of accountable programming, are integral to, coherent with and seen, by ECB agencies and their partners, to underpin all agency frameworks and external Quality and Accountability initiatives.**

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