Accountability Capacity strengthening Material support Sustainability

 Democratic Republic of Congo

Report on accountability and self-reliance/sustainability

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Introduction

In the context of our partnership and our collaboration with the various stakeholders, our experience has led us to understand that the principle of accountability is important in the management and execution of our actions, in terms of programmes, projects and/or activities, from the planning stage right through to implementation, monitoring, evaluation and even writing up reports. However, in practice, in the implementation of our partnership and collaboration, accountability seems to be stronger for certain stakeholders, especially those who work closely with communities. We must consider the partner's strengths, which will make it possible to achieve the objective, without forgetting to bear in mind its weaknesses, which could prevent the objective from being achieved. Throughout our activities, we have understood that failing to consider the partner's weaknesses, with the possibility of improvement in terms of **promoting** the partner, **supporting** the partner, **capacity-building** with the partner and **improving** the partner's internal and external communication with the other stakeholders, means that the partnership cannot be effective and sustainable. The principle of the self-reliance or independence of the local or national partner has not been taken into account in terms of capacity-building. That being the case, and taking into account the difficulties encountered in ensuring that the principle of accountability is respected during the implementation of our partnerships with the different stakeholders, the international partners should help the local and national partners to become self-reliant or independent and sustainable in terms of their functioning.

I. SOME POINTS ON ACCOUNTABILITY

The word **ACCOUNTABILITY** seems to us to be a very complex concept, which encompasses or involves a broad spectrum of concepts and terminologies. Here are some key concepts:

- **Agreement or convention:** involves an understanding between parties or a commitment to do or accomplish something agreed between the parties, which the parties believe they have the necessary knowledge, capacity and/or competence to achieve.

- **Mutual trust between parties:** expresses the level of confidence in the partner to achieve the objective of the partnership.

- **Honesty:** a factor in trust-building.

- **Credibility:** a factor of honesty that focuses more on the capacity for a partner to reimburse or demonstrate the results of the credit or investment received.

- **Mutual respect and consideration of the stakeholders:** involves each partner respecting the other in terms of the principles, norms and procedures known or defined in advance.

- **Competence and capacity:** expresses the level of expertise and capacity to achieve the objective of the partnership.

- **Willingness** to carry out and execute the agreement or the thing that the partners have committed to achieving (mission, activity, etc.). It reinforces the capacity for accountability.

- **Commitment:** expresses the level of responsibility demonstrated by the partner to achieving the objective of its commitment.

- **Compliance:** each partner must comply with the principles, procedures or requirements defined in advance within the partnership.

- **Transparency** (at all levels and stages of implementation or execution): in principle, each partner must be open towards the other and must explain its strengths and weaknesses. This should enable the parties to build each other's capacities in order to reduce weaknesses and enhance strengths, so as to become more credible.

- **Knowledge** (of the objective, principles, norms and procedures, hoped-for results, context, stakeholders, etc.): the knowledge of each stakeholder allows the parties to commit to the partnership responsibly, in accordance with the agreements or conventions.

- **Participation:** involves each party participating in the management of the partnership, from the planning of the objective right through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as far as is possible. This enables each party to give and share its point of view on the objective of the partnership, so that it can be effectively accountable without feeling that the terms of the partnership are being imposed on it.

- **Objectivity and execution:** in order to be accountable, the partner must set and describe the objective of the partnership and explain how it plans to execute this during the implementation phase, considering its strengths and weaknesses. This means that each partner must be honest, transparent and self-aware in terms of its strengths, skills and weaknesses, as well as performing a good risk assessment.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** accountability requires each partner to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the extent to which the partnership's objective has been achieved. Accountability involves what each party expects from the other, but also what each party itself has committed to. This means carrying out a self-assessment with regard to the party's own commitment before evaluating the other party. This allows the international partner to understand whether or not it has been accountable for a given aspect of the partnership, without taking the risk of reducing the accountability of the other party (which may become weak or incapable) for certain aspects of its commitment. It also makes it possible to change course part way through the implementation of the partnership's objective, so that each party remains accountable for what it committed to.

- **Feedback, explanations and reports:** involves each party of the partnership having to provide a follow-up, explanation or report to the other partner concerning the objective of their partnership in general and its commitment in particular. This involves communication between the stakeholders.

- **Independence or self-reliance:** accountability requires the partner to be free and independent in its commitment. Each partner must ensure that it is independent to be able to commit to the partnership's objective. It will be accountable to the stakeholders for its strengths and weaknesses in terms of skills, capacities, principles, policies, norms and procedures in force.

- **Motivation:** accountability requires the parties to be motivated to achieve the partnership's objective in order to be more accountable towards one another. It is true that the main motivation is that the partnership's objective be achieved fully and according to plan, and that each party provide feedback to the other. In the context of humanitarian actions, each partner wants crisis-hit communities to receive aid as planned. However, beyond this community-related objective, the parties may also seek to learn something new from each other. This might include learning something from the other party that will help with developing an approach, improving procedures and policies, building capacities to intervene more effectively or sustainably, or operating more permanently. These factors are likely to make a partner more motivated and, therefore, more accountable.

- **Testimony/certification and recommendation:** in principle, at the end of the partnership the implementation partner should receive a testimony or certification that will act as a recommendation to potential future partners.

- **Complaint management:** In order to be accountable to the other, the partner must implement an effective complaint management mechanism and handle any complaints properly, given that complaints may reveal the non-accountability of the partner. This involves analysing complaints and feedback in terms of how to respond to them.

These different concepts depend on the context (humanitarian, development, political, economic, etc.), which each party may develop in its own way, according to its objectives. However, given the importance of this principle of accountability in the humanitarian and development domain, we believe that it is essential that each partner have the tools for monitoring and evaluating accountability to use before, during and after the achievement of the partnership's objective.

By its very nature, **accountability** must be reciprocal between partners (or stakeholders). It is complex and applies to many different aspects of the project, particularly the relational and planning aspects. However, the partners or stakeholders implementing a certain aspect are always accountable to the communities. Accountability means that a beneficiary is considered to be a stakeholder in the roll-out of an action.

In the context of our programmes, CEDIER believes that, in order to show genuine accountability to communities in general and children in particular, that is, to fulfil the obligation of being answerable to them, CEDIER must give them a voice, but also allow them to influence CEDIER's decisions about how it works with them. This also involves giving communities and children the power to make CEDIER accountable in a way that influences our policies, priorities and actions at the local and national levels. This offers a way to offset the power of influence that donors and governments (as those responsible for regulation) have over CEDIER.

Accountability is one of CEDIER's core values.

CEDIER undertakes to:

- Use its resources efficiently

- Achieve the hoped-for results in a measurable way

- Be accountable to its partners (partner organizations, donors and other support organisations, and downstream, key community organisations and beneficiaries) and, above all, to the children who constitute CEDIER's core target group.

We are determined to improve our appraisal (by ourselves and/or thanks to our partners) of the application of our approaches to accountability and other humanitarian principles in all our programmes, projects and activities, with a view to being certified and becoming legitimate and competent in the eyes of our partners.

Accountability is one of the key elements of CEDIER's quality framework and operational management rules. However, in order to become much more effective and sustainable in terms of our partnerships and accountability, we would like each partner to allow us to build our capacities to achieve the partnership's objective, but also to function sustainably and autonomously and to meet certain community needs relating to our mandate in an accountable way. In this way, we believe we are capable of meeting certain needs in terms of collaboration with our partners, even in the absence of their funding.

II. SOME POINTS ON SELF-RELIANCE/SUSTAINABILITY

The words 'self-reliance' and 'sustainability' often go hand in hand, depending on the contexts and/or objectives involved. Self-reliance can lead a partner to function and carry out actions continuously and sustainably, in the sense that the partner has become self-reliant and functions in a sustainable manner. However, if we are referring to the programme/project or the partner's actions, it is difficult to say that a programme is self-reliant, whereas, from a sustainability perspective, we can state that the programme is sustainable or that the actions undertaken are sustainable.

2.1. Self-reliance:

Taken separately, the concept of self-reliance (not to be confused with the humanitarian principle of **independence**, which means that **humanitarian** objectives must be detached from economic, political, military and other objectives) appears similar to the concept of autonomy, which involves mechanisms for building the partners' capacities so that they can function more effectively and meet the needs of the partnership more sustainably. It is a concept that applies much more to the partner than to the programme or the partner's actions. However, it does not appear to be the concern of the international partners, whereas the implementation partner needs it in order to be more efficient and to correctly fulfil the partnership's objective, whilst respecting the principle of accountability.

2.2. Sustainability:

The concept of sustainability, on the other hand, applies to both the partner and its programme or actions. It expresses a continuity of function, but also of production of results or benefits. This means an evolution, an improvement or a development.

The concept of sustainability was integrated into the humanitarian world only recently. It often refers to the programme, the project or the actions carried out to express the continuity of production of benefits, even once the humanitarian assistance or aid has come to an end.

III. CEDIER'S POINTS OF VIEW/SUGGESTIONS

Taking into account various points set out in terms of concepts, approaches, etc., we would like our support and financing partners to take more care to promote us, support us, build our capacities and enable us to improve ourselves. This will help us to be:

- Self-reliant, thus being able to meet the needs in the zone in the partner's absence, thanks to other community development activities. These could make it possible to generate the small amount of income needed for CEDIER to function and for humanitarian actions. This will also increase our capacity to contribute to the budget.

- Sustainable.

- Accountable, in terms of needs, for difficulties and other aspects defined above.