BRIEFING:
GETTING ACCOUNTABILITY RIGHT FOR IMPROVED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

ALNAP

It's widely recognised that the humanitarian system should be more accountable to people affected by crisis. But despite collective and individual efforts, tangible change for communities has been limited, and increasingly professionalised accountability to affected people (AAP) functions tends to be treated as tangential to the fundamental humanitarian endeavour. Now, renewed high-level interest and commitments offer a chance to move forwards bolstered by a nascent but growing evidence base showing that effective AAP can improve humanitarian performance.

Improved accountability is emerging as a shared goal, but questions remain around how to get there. Instead of more technical fixes to community engagement practices, AAP needs to be owned by the broader humanitarian system, embedded into its operational architecture, and rooted in its culture. These structural changes require strong leadership-level engagement from donors and operational agencies, and a focus on the specific challenges that have been preventing progress. In addition to providing recommendations for addressing those challenges, *ALNAP's paper provides resources and examples of promising practice* to support donors and operational organisations to progress on this important humanitarian sticking point.

Twelve key recommendations for progress

Core challenges	Issues	Key recommendations
Embedded skills, structures and incentives perpetuate a supply-driven system	Soft skills and social analysis can support better understanding of and connection with communities	1. Donor and agency leadership should **invest more in the time, skills, approaches and partnerships** that support **deeper social and contextual understanding** of communities and marginalised groups within them 2. Operational agencies should **recognise the role of frontline staff, volunteers and local partners in gathering ad hoc community feedback** through their daily interactions, and **develop processes to include these inputs in programme decision-making**
	Adaptive programming and flexible cultures can enable responsive accountability and the closure of feedback loops	3. Humanitarian leaders should **adopt adaptive management and programming approaches that focus on achieving outcomes identified by communities** rather than sticking rigidly to proposal activities and outputs 4. Donors should **support more flexible, outcome-orientated approaches to grant management** for local and international agencies, to enable the latter's use of adaptive programming that is people-responsive

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Shifts in the external content threaten the system's accountability	Effective engagement with longer-term partners and accountability structures can help meet community priorities during protracted crises and displacement	5. Operational agencies should form better **links with those addressing longer-term services** — including development actors, local government institutions and local civil society — to **facilitate joint programming and information sharing** 6. Humanitarian leaders should **support their organisational and staff engagement with challenging issues of politics and advocacy**, to influence local duty-bearers and host governments to help secure the rights of people affected by crisis
	Accountability can play a positive role in prioritisation decisions to maximise the use of scarce resources	7. Donors and operational agencies should consider how to **more effectively and ethically engage the voices of crisis-affected people in making prioritisation decisions** to maximise the utility of scarce resources and avoid exacerbating community tensions 8. Humanitarians should consider how **to balance their measures of need and vulnerability with community perspectives** of what is necessary, fair and legitimate in targeting decisions
Unequal power restricts accountability	Improved incentives for accountability are important in the absence of community power to sanction humanitarian actors	9. Humanitarian leadership should **help embed a culture of accountability as paramount within their organisations** by demonstrably taking complaints and suggestions seriously and being open to external scrutiny 10. Operational agencies should **explore strategies for engaging with the empowerment of people affected by crisis** by reducing the **conception of aid as a gift** and considering how approaches to misconduct could **better interact with local accountability entities that are trusted** by crisis-affected individuals
	Progress on localisation and decolonisation has implications for accountability	11. Humanitarian leadership should **encourage self-reflection and action within their organisations, with the goal of recognising and tackling entrenched attitudes that limit respect for people affected by crisis as knowledge holders and active agents** with capacity in their own contexts 12. Donors and operational agencies should **enable a stronger role for local actors in supporting accountability to affected people**, including providing funding for and learning from local approaches and innovations

Read more in our new report *From tick box to turning point: Getting accountability right for improved humanitarian action.*