Accountability to affected people

Experiences and good practices from
FAO Country Offices

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Acknowledgments

Abbreviations and acronyms

AAP	accountability to affected people
CwC	communication with communities
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDPs	internally displaced people
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KORE	Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience
NGO	non-governmental organizations
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OER	Office of Emergencies and Resilience
PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SEA	sexual exploitation and abuse
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

Accountability to affected people (AAP) is an active commitment to put vulnerable and affected people at the centre of humanitarian action. It stems from past failures of the humanitarian system to meet the needs and recognize the abilities of people affected by crises. Committing to AAP means empowering people to participate in decisions and shape programmes that affect their lives and livelihoods. A set of definitions and commitments pave the way for truly accountable humanitarian assistance now and in the future.

FAO has made progress in implementing AAP across regions and programmes, and has identified a range of experiences and good practices. In 2019, the Leave No One Behind and KORE teams in OER at FAO joined forces to develop a template designed to capture good AAP practices. The examples presented in this document have been identified and documented, in collaboration with FAO Decentralized Offices, using this template.

This compendium showcases various examples from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Yemen, and aims at demonstrating how the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) AAP commitments have been promoted and upheld by various FAO Country Offices. The final objective of this initiative is to share knowledge on good and promising AAP practices, and to incrementally move towards more accountable and protective programming.

Definitions and commitments

Accountability to affected people

The IASC defines AAP as an active commitment by humanitarian actors to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to and being held accountable by the people they seek to assist. Complementarily, for FAO, **AAP is a "people-centred approach to humanitarian action, sensitive to the dignity of all human beings, the varying needs of different segments within a community, and the importance of ensuring that women, men, girls and boys can equally access and benefit from assistance."**

An important part of accountability is protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), the responsibility of humanitarian, development and peacekeeping actors to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by United Nations (UN) and implementing partner personnel, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations, against beneficiaries of assistance and other members of affected and local populations. These responsibilities include setting up accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms, and taking prompt, safe and victim-centred action when incidents occur.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee commitments

AAP has featured on the humanitarian agenda for over two decades. It first gained prominence through the Transformative Agenda (IASC, 2011) and the World Humanitarian Summit (Agenda for Humanity, 2016) commitments, including the Grand Bargain (IASC, 2016). These initiatives helped to develop a shared understanding of AAP within the international community and resulted in a range of collective as well as individual institutional commitments. As an IASC Principal, FAO adheres to the IASC AAP commitments, which aim to translate aspirations into actions and results among humanitarian and development actors.

The four pillars of the IASC AAP commitments are:
• leadership
• participation and partnership
• information, feedback and action; and
• results (IASC, 2017).

The methodological approach section of the template designed to capture the good AAP practices contained in this compendium is structured around these AAP commitments (see Annex).

It is important to note that one of the Strategic Priorities endorsed by the IASC for 2022–2023 is "Accountability and Inclusion" which calls for systematically including feedback and representation of affected communities, proactively eradicating abuse and ensuring that humanitarian action leaves no one behind and reaches those furthest behind first.

Box 1. Inter-Agency Standing Committee accountability to affected people commitments (IASC, 2017)

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals commit to:

1 **LEADERSHIP**

Demonstrate their commitment to AAP and PSEA by enforcing, institutionalizing and integrating AAP approaches in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and strategic planning processes, at country level and by establishing appropriate management systems to solicit, hear and act upon the voices and priorities of affected people in a coordinated manner, including for PSEA, before, during and after an emergency.

2 **PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP**

Adopt agency mechanisms that enable women, girls, boys, and men, including the most marginalized, vulnerable and at-risk people among affected communities, to participate in and play an active role in decisions that will impact their lives, livelihoods, well-being, dignity and protection. Adopt and sustain equitable partnerships with local actors to build upon their long-term relationships and trust with communities.

3 **INFORMATION, FEEDBACK AND ACTION**

Adopt agency mechanisms that feed into and support collective and participatory approaches that inform and listen to communities, address feedback and lead to corrective action. Establish and support the implementation of appropriate mechanisms for reporting and handling of SEA-related complaints. Plan, design and manage protection and assistance programmes that are responsive to the diversity and expressed views of affected communities.

4 **RESULTS**

Measure AAP- and PSEA-related results at the agency and collective level, including through standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standards and the Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA, the Best Practice Guide to establish Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms and its accompanying Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Box 2. FAO Accountability to affected people commitments

Localization is a fundamental ingredient for the successful implementation of AAP. FAO pursues efforts to ensure its programmes, projects and initiatives are people-centred, inclusive, participatory, and build on local capacities and structures in place. With restricted access issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been even more instrumental to partner with and build the capacities of beneficiaries, local civil society organizations (NGOs, community-based organizations, professional associations, networks, etc.) and national governments in technical work and emergency field operations.

Following the global AAP principles, FAO has stated its commitment to AAP in various policy documents, setting the tone for its implementation at field level:

"Engage with stakeholders to make accountability real, by understanding and responding to their views, in the implementation and formulation of strategies and plans." (FAO, 2015a)

"FAO is committed to ensuring meaningful, effective and informed participation of stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of FAO programmes and projects." (FAO, 2015b)

Accountability to affected people: good practice compendium

AAP can be operationalized in multiple ways and needs to be adapted to the work modalities in a Country Office as well as the contextual realities within a certain country. These include the social norms around gender and sexual violence, acceptance of exploitation as the necessary "price" of aid and local legal and community justice frameworks which may criminalize or additionally endanger victims whilst failing to hold alleged perpetrators to account. This section contains examples from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Yemen that promote knowledge on AAP and hopefully inspire uptake of these practices elsewhere.

These FAO experiences and practices have been identified and documented by AAP focal points in FAO Decentralized Offices under the guidance of the Leave No One Behind and KORE teams in OER at FAO. The examples were documented using a good practice template developed by the two teams (see Annex). While the main objective of the initiative was to document good practices on AAP, interesting experiences related to PSEA were also identified and documented as part of this compendium.

These examples and good practices aim at demonstrating how the IASC AAP commitments have been promoted and upheld by various FAO Country Offices. They focus on three key areas of work:

- set-up of feedback mechanisms;
- training among staff and partners; and
- dissemination of information and outreach campaigns.

Particular attention is given to gender-sensitive AAP mechanisms and tools. From 2023 onward, a second round of good practice identification and documentation will be undertaken to cover other FAO experiences on AAP in other countries and regions.

Country contexts

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, four decades of conflict, recurrent natural hazard-related disasters and limited capacity to cope with climate-related shocks and stresses have caused massive population displacements and left millions of people in acute food insecurity.

Between March and May 2022, nearly 20 million people in Afghanistan experienced high levels of acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC] Phase 3 and above). The 2021 political transition prompted a halt to development assistance and freezing of national economic assets. All these factors propelled steep increases in staple food prices, losses of income for many households, and cash shortages.

The deteriorated security situation in the most remote areas of the country, coupled with socio-cultural norms and barriers, pose a huge challenge to the implementation of humanitarian projects in Afghanistan.

Bangladesh

About 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, mostly women and children (88 percent), have taken shelter in Cox's Bazaar, escaping violence and persecution in Myanmar since 2017. The momentum and scale of the influx has transformed this into the world's fastest growing refugee crisis. Highly vulnerable refugees, who experienced conflict and severe trauma, and now living in extremely difficult conditions, are currently depending on humanitarian assistance for food, nutrition, shelter, health and other basic needs. This influx of refugees has taken shelter in two extremely poor and densely populated subdistricts in Cox's Bazaar, putting pressure on host communities' already limited resources.

Nigeria

An armed insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has gripped the country for over a decade. Persistent conflict, recurrent flooding and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated socioeconomic indicators, hampering commodity trade and economic activities, including farming and food production.

Since the first quarter of 2020, more than 2 million people remain displaced by the crisis across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe – the worst affected states. Acute food insecurity and the prevalence of global acute malnutrition are also grave causes of concern in the region.

Yemen

The conflict in Yemen, which began in 2015 as a manifestation of complex political, socioeconomic and historical dynamics, is connected to the scarcity of key resources, including water. Even prior to the conflict, Yemen was one of the poorest and most water-stressed countries in the world.

The armed conflict has further damaged much of the country's critical water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, exacerbating water scarcity. Often touted as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, the conflict has negatively affected the livelihoods of millions of Yemenis.

Mainstreaming accountability to affected people throughout the FAO project cycle

AAP can be mainstreamed throughout the project cycle, from beginning to end. Below is a non-exhaustive set of recommendations that illustrates how to mainstream AAP in projects and programmes. It is important to note that these recommendations need to be adapted to best fit the context of each project and programme.

Project cycle step	Recommendation on how to mainstream AAP in each step
1. Identification	• Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design and baseline of the project. Perspectives and preferences of all groups in the community should be considered.
2. Formulation	• Include AAP indicators across different levels in the logical framework. • Ensure that a specific budget is allocated for AAP staff and activities.
3. Appraisal and approval	• AAP can be appraised during the Project Document review with criteria such as: "How does the Project Document outline how feedback/complaints will be solicited, handled and responded to?" Available complaint mechanisms should be SEA inclusive and this may require additional and/or differentiated engagement/reporting and response/referral mechanisms.
4. Implementation and monitoring	• Encourage affected people from all groups within a community to provide feedback on the assistance received, the accessibility and effectiveness of available complaint mechanisms, and the quality and effectiveness of the programme in all its stages.
5. Evaluation	• Hold participatory meetings with all stakeholders on the evaluation process and discuss: what issues to study; what instruments to use; how to collect data and from whom; how to analyse the data; and how evaluation results are shared to those who took part in the exercise.
6. Closure	• Ask people in affected communities about their satisfaction with how the exit process has been communicated and whether complaint mechanisms have been useful around closure as well as evaluation of the project/programme. • Share this information immediately with project teams and partners/contractors so they can act quickly to address any final pressing concerns. • Use the lessons learned from the project to inform existing and future programmes.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Below is an example from Afghanistan on the ways in which FAO developed a holistic AAP project cycle approach.

- **Integrating AAP clauses in Letters of Agreement**
  Clauses on AAP principles and methods have been added to all letters of agreement which are signed with implementing partners at the start of the project.

- **Mainstreaming AAP in assessment questionnaires to inform the design and inclusion of context-relevant AAP mechanisms in all FAO interventions**
  Questions on AAP and feedback mechanisms are included in questionnaires and surveys of all assessments along with a consent form. These questions concern the beneficiaries' preferred communication channel to provide feedback or complaints, which may include:
  - asking about the selection criteria;
  - understanding the amount of cash a beneficiary will receive with an unconditional cash transfer or cash for work;
  - reporting problems faced during the distribution of inputs;
  - seeking information on the distance to the distribution centre; and
  - rating a beneficiary's satisfaction level with the programme.

- **Running AAP training with FAO staff and partners**
  FAO staff and partner project teams go through an orientation training on AAP and PSEA principles and their implementation on the ground. Moreover, the implementing partners conduct trainings and mobilizations with beneficiaries on the call centre and other feedback mechanisms.

- **Using vulnerability-based criteria for beneficiary targeting**
  The targeting of project beneficiaries is always done based on FAO's vulnerability-based criteria for beneficiary selection. This is a participatory approach to targeting, using criteria and a process that streamlines AAP questions in the questionnaires.

- **Establishing feedback mechanisms**
  FAO and partners have established effective feedback and complaints mechanisms through which beneficiaries can communicate problems they encounter and seek assistance during project implementation. These include:
  - in-person visits of FAO staff;
  - synergies with implementing partners' complaints mechanisms;
  - sharing of dedicated mobile numbers;
  - complaints boxes;
  - call centres with toll-free numbers; and
  - WhatsApp communications.

- **Managing the feedback mechanism**
  Complaints and feedback are handled through a standard methodology. The focal points in charge of registering the complaints

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and feedback of beneficiaries either through phone, WhatsApp, or visiting the beneficiaries in person, record the complaint using a specific form and an excel database. They share it with the pertinent Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) officer for further follow-up, where all feedback is stored in an excel database that is password protected with restricted access. As soon as it reaches the Country Office, a decision is made on who should deal with the various feedback and is referred to accordingly. In addition, FAO has an agreement with Awaaz Afghanistan, the country's first countrywide inter-agency humanitarian call centre, so that beneficiaries can relay their complaints or feedback through a toll-free number. Awaaz shares registered cases with the FAO Country Office for further follow-up.

- Running AAP outreach campaigns with implementing partners
  FAO and implementing partners regularly distribute outreach materials in different districts and provinces. Each beneficiary receives a single package of leaflets with the contact details for such mechanisms in all projects during all distribution and training activities. As of 2022, the process is ongoing and the dissemination of these materials is expected to increase.

- Integrating AAP in post-distribution monitoring tools
  Post-distribution and outcome monitoring tools have a comprehensive section about AAP.

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Setting up feedback mechanisms

Local perspectives and contexts change. As such, FAO needs to incorporate opportunities for two-way communication to listen and respond to feedback and make adaptations to ensure that the interventions implemented are effective and appropriate. Two-way communication engages communities in dialogue by managing the information both sent to and received from beneficiaries and integrating beneficiary feedback into the decision-making process of programmes.

A feedback and complaint mechanism should be set up as an integral project feature, but it is often overlooked in responses to rapid onset emergencies. An effective feedback and complaint mechanism is one that is trusted by beneficiaries, communities and personnel. It is a mechanism that supports collection, analysis and a timely response, and ultimately closes the feedback loop. Feedback and complaint mechanisms come in different forms: they can be formal and informal; institutional or community-based. Before setting up these mechanisms, it is paramount to understand the communities' preferred channels of communication and to ensure that they are accessible to everyone. Identifying and addressing common barriers to participation is similarly important. Below are examples from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Yemen.

Experiences from Afghanistan

IASC COMMITMENTS UPHELD

Awaaz Afghanistan is the country's first countrywide inter-agency humanitarian call centre. It ensures that vulnerable people in Afghanistan, including host communities, returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and those affected by conflict and natural hazard-related disasters, can voice their concerns and receive critical information and support in times of need across all 34 provinces.

As of August 2021, Awaaz Afghanistan has successfully handled more than 120 000 calls answered by female and male operators from all over the country since its launch in 2018, with the highest volume of calls related to food security and agricultural support. Overall, 20 percent of the calls have been received from female callers, including girls under the age of 18.

The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster in Afghanistan is receiving and handling the referrals related to food security and livelihood support via the Awaaz referral sheet, and further disseminates the requests with FAO. In March 2021, FAO signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office for Project Services regarding the Awaaz referrals, where FAO and its implementing partners will directly receive the livelihood related referrals

and complaints through Awaaz Afghanistan. Most of the referrals are urgent inquiries for livelihood support in areas of great vulnerability. Since the FAO resilience unit and other development projects are actively and continuously providing livelihood assistance to vulnerable farmers in different provinces, Awaaz provides thorough information related to the queries.

The Awaaz referral mechanism provides an opportunity for FAO to understand, determine and address community-level information on its assistance in real time. This also overcomes barriers to direct contact with beneficiaries due to security and accessibility obstacles. In addition to the Awaaz referral mechanism, FAO has an in-house feedback and complaints grievance redressal mechanism where dedicated phone numbers have been created for each of the eight regions of Afghanistan. These phone numbers along with pertinent information materials are shared with beneficiary households at each inputs and/or cash distribution site and at community level in the project areas. A scalar redressal mechanism with corresponding responsibilities at each level of the subnational and national office has been established by FAO in Afghanistan for addressing any feedback and/or complaint received via these phone numbers.

Beneficiaries displaying the Awaaz materials after AAP orientation sessions in Herat province

Experiences from Bangladesh

As of 2022, FAO is in the process of establishing a comprehensive and centralized grievance and feedback mechanism covering the entire programme in Bangladesh. The SOPs for the mechanism have been developed in a participatory manner and approved by the FAO Representative.

In the absence of a centralized grievance and feedback mechanism, FAO Cox's Bazar suboffice has established a complaints hotline for the emergency response to the humanitarian Rohingya crisis. The hotline is attached to a database capturing the date of receipt, the details of the issue and the status of the response. Calls are anonymous unless specifically requested otherwise. The project has captured several complaints related to cash-for-work programming and on quality and usage of items distributed. All complaints are investigated through meetings and discussions with the targeted community and are followed up on until they are resolved. Thus, the complaints have all been addressed individually and programmatic changes implemented where required.

Since 2018, FAO has been enhancing the livelihoods and resilience of Rohingya refugees and host communities through appropriate, market-driven inputs and training opportunities. Environmental impacts are being mitigated through reforestation, land stabilization and restoration of the natural resource base. Community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities are being implemented through cash-for-work programmes to mitigate natural hazards and provide income sources.

AAP trainings in Cox's Bazaar

Due to the protracted crisis and extreme volatility in northeastern Nigeria, since 2019 institutions have significantly scaled down extension and advisory services to rural farming communities across the region, particularly impacting communities in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. As a result, most households have been facing a significant knowledge gap on good agricultural practices, particularly impacting women and other vulnerable groups.

Prior to the input distribution of the 2019 rainy season intervention, households were informed about FAO, its role, the resource partners who funded the intervention and the selection criteria. A FAO toll-free number was highlighted in presentations, and all beneficiaries were assured that complaints raised would be treated with the highest level of confidentiality. Beneficiaries were encouraged to leave a message or directly call the toll-free hotline and were informed that no cost would be incurred when calling.

Beyond the hotline, FAO and its partners established complaint desks at each distribution point, where beneficiaries could go to make enquiries about the interventions. There were also opportunities for households to share their feedback and concerns with FAO and implementing partner staff during field visits and post-distribution monitoring.

These feedback channels assure anonymity of beneficiaries and do not compromise their selection for future assistance. The most common complaints received were related to:

- Quality of inputs
  The quality of groundnut seed was considered suboptimal and was the subject of a number of complaints. FAO engaged the supplier and performed additional quality tests. Ultimately, FAO penalized the supplier and will no longer procure seed from the company.

- Expansion of beneficiary selection criteria
  Requests were received from farmers who had not been selected for assistance, stating that they were just as in-need as farmers in the communities targeted by FAO. FAO engaged its agronomist, operations and

logistics teams to explore the possibility of including these communities and concluded that it was possible to support these communities with dry season distributions.

- Reporting cases of nepotism and favouritism
  There were several complaints of nepotism/favouritism on the part of village leadership. In one community in particular, women complained about 'favoured' persons being selected for multiple assistance while others had received no support. FAO reviewed the targeting process and found no discrepancy, although it was still likely that some households were collecting on behalf of others due to their association with influential members of the community. Consequently, FAO enhanced its post-distribution monitoring in the area and doubled efforts to improve the targeting process, while raising the issue with relevant traditional leaders.

FAO leaflet with toll-free number, ©FAO

A multichannel call centre serves as the primary feedback and complaints mechanism in Yemen for FAO's emergency and resilience interventions. It is integrated into the frameworks of different projects and the details of the feedback mechanisms channels have been added on project products to redress grievances and enhance accountability to beneficiary populations.

The FAO SOPs on the beneficiary feedback mechanism in Yemen also streamlines PSEA and includes a section on how to handle cases related to SEA. As per current protocol, complaints or allegations of SEA must be directed to the Office of the Inspector General as soon as possible.

The call centre operates under the monitoring and evaluation unit of FAO in Yemen. The unit is also engaged in remote monitoring activities including during- and post-distribution monitoring, cash transfer monitoring, collecting baseline and endline data and verification of beneficiaries' eligibility. A call centre assistant is specifically tasked with receiving feedback and complaints via calls, SMS, email and WhatsApp. The call centre assistant also records the feedback, forwards it to and follows up with the concerned colleagues, maintains the database and communicates back to the complainant.

Through the continuous monitoring by the call centre and project staff, FAO was able to take corrective actions when required. For example, based on the feedback received, FAO increased the number of female beneficiaries receiving poultry packages; this allowed conflict-affected households to produce nutritious food close to their homes and earn much-needed income with the sale of eggs and/or meat.

The system proved to be efficient and effective in the context of Yemen. Since the beneficiary feedback mechanism was established, as of 2021 there were more than 1 400 feedback and complaints recorded, with around 1 155 (83 percent) cases resolved and 245 (17 percent) still ongoing. Rising numbers of feedback indicate an increased public awareness of the existence of the channels. More complaints were received soon after the cash and input distributions.

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Awareness campaigns through field visits to inform farmers in Ja'ar, Abyan about desert locust, how to control them and how to report any presence of desert locust through the toll-free hotline

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Training among staff and partners

Awareness raising training sessions with staff and partners ensure a better understanding of AAP and PSEA among personnel that directly work in humanitarian field operations with affected communities. During interaction between aid providers and beneficiaries, it is particularly important to uphold the principles of AAP and to act in compliance with them. Through these trainings, staff and partners are better equipped with the tools to enhance their engagement with communities. Community Engagement (CE) is defined as "a two-way dialogue between crisis-affected communities, humanitarian organizations and, where possible, within and between communities." (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2015). It is a means of promoting the accountability of development and humanitarian actors by facilitating and structuring ongoing communication on the appropriateness and effectiveness of initiatives and engaging men, women, boys and girls directly in the planning and measurement of activities. It is a participatory process, in all its forms: gender-sensitive, context-specific, risk-informed, localized, inclusive, responsive and bidirectional. Below are examples from Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Experiences from Afghanistan

IASC COMMITMENTS UPHELD

FAO trains staff and partners regularly on AAP principles and related topics in orientation sessions. Implementing partners then conduct trainings with beneficiaries on the various feedback mechanisms, such as a call centre.

Until the end of April 2022, FAO was an active member of the AAP working group in Afghanistan sponsored and led by OCHA in Afghanistan. As of May 2022, the Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief and Development has become the co-lead of AAP working group. The AAP working group has three subworking groups aimed at supporting accountability practices, policies and activities that turn national and global commitments into local action, which engages even the most marginalized of communities in Afghanistan. FAO leads the communication with communities (CwC) sub-working group together with the British Broadcasting Corporation Media Action since March 2021. FAO has played an active role in improving this sub-working group by providing

support to the development of drought-related messages and presenting findings to AAP and subworking groups members. FAO also takes part in developing messages, organizing joint focus group discussions with IDPs in Herat province and regularly attends monthly and ad hoc meetings.

In 2021, FAO developed protection messages and trained all implementing partners at the beginning of each project in Afghanistan to increase safe access and meaningful participation of female beneficiaries in all stages of the project. This exercise contributed to raising awareness of FAO's "zero tolerance" policy towards SEA, as well as of implementing partners' right and responsibility to report challenges or problems concerning FAO's humanitarian operations. All these trainings and messages are now an integral part of all humanitarian response projects of FAO in Afghanistan.

Focus group discussion among FAO staff and women working as daily-wage labourers in the agriculture research farm managed by FAO's partner Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

Gender-sensitive programming and inclusive staff engagement in Afghanistan

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Training session of female beneficiaries on use of Awaaz and FAO complaints, feedback grievance redress mechanisms in one of the districts in Herat province in western Afghanistan

Due to cultural and traditional norms, men in Afghanistan mostly work in agriculture and livestock farming while women are not able to pursue economic activities outside the home. Women and girls are largely excluded from community dialogue, decision-making, assessments, surveys and other services in the country, while in most communities their needs and challenges are not taken into account. In Afghanistan, FAO thus strives to address and transform gender relations in the field while improving gender equality in its office.

Engaging local female staff, who can work as knowledge brokers and intermediaries to communicate and consult with female beneficiaries, facilitates the inclusion of women and their perspectives and priorities into humanitarian programmes. The FAO office in Afghanistan established a women's working group with all female staff based in different provinces and regions of the country. The working group conducts meetings to discuss and address their roles and responsibilities. Through this forum, some major challenges have been discussed, including, increasing the recruitment of female staff and adding women panelists during the recruitment process, and allocating allowances for *Mehram* (a guardian figure) and transportation to female staff to encourage them to get involved in field missions.

This working group has the potential to also improve female engagement at the project level, because

due to cultural sensitivities and barriers most female beneficiaries are reluctant to share and discuss their issues openly with male colleagues, which results in the suppression of these problems. To the extent possible, FAO has retained and increased female staff in regional offices and partner agencies to facilitate personal meetings with female beneficiaries. On several occasions, FAO and partner staff visited women in the presence of their relatives to conduct interviews and to collect beneficiary feedback.

In the summer of 2020, FAO conducted a COVID-19 assessment in which female staff members interviewed women in the field. This gender-sensitive assessment allowed to determine the major challenges women were facing not only in the agriculture sector, but also in relation to gender-based violence across the country.

FAO is also part of the UN Gender in Humanitarian Action working group in Afghanistan, which aims to determine and address PSEA and gender equality issues in the country through the active participation of government counterparts and other organizations. FAO takes part in different gender-related fora from different line ministries and supports various events, including International Women's Day and World Food Day. These events provide a wider platform and an enabling environment for women across the country to demonstrate their achievements and success.

FAO in Bangladesh aims to have effective systems in place for preventing and responding to incidences of SEA among the most vulnerable populations. FAO is a member of the PSEA network for the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar. Through the network, PSEA materials have been developed specifically for the context of the response in the Rohingya language.

FAO Cox's Bazar PSEA trainers have rolled out a training programme for staff, volunteers, community service providers, government and implementing partners. The training has raised awareness around PSEA to a high level, with all staff mainstreaming the messages and knowledge into their work in fisheries, livestock, forestry, crop production and DRR programming. All staff members have also completed FAO's online training on PSEA. Institutional coordination is required between agencies to ensure that the messages for PSEA are consistent.

In 2020, training on detailed PSEA mechanisms was conducted with 105 implementing staff members (*Shushilan*) within four subdistricts (Cox's Bazar Sadar, Ukhia, Teknaf and Ramu). FAO staff were also given training in PSEA within gender mainstreaming training sessions in 2021. FAO coordinates regularly with other UN agencies through a PSEA network. Within this network, meetings are held where UN, national and international agencies get up to date regarding the PSEA reporting and referral mechanism and related activities that FAO is involved in. FAO's PSEA focal points have received training on PSEA-related issues and plan to engage with the network of other UN agencies if required.

AAP and PSEA training in Cox's Bazaar

Disseminating information and outreach campaigns

Information and outreach campaigns provide key messages to community stakeholders about the objectives of a project and scope and steps of its implementation, as well as the modes of beneficiary feedback mechanisms. They can also contain messages that suggest protective behavioural changes or safety warnings, for example: "Wash your hands with soap as a preventive measure against COVID-19" or "Do not touch unexploded ordnance! Stay away, do not touch unknown objects! Go and tell others!"

These adaptable and localized campaigns use processes that allow for the dissemination of life-saving information, and do not typically consult with beneficiaries. They are efforts that fall under the CwC mandate since they help to meet the information and communication needs of crisis-affected people. CwC is based on the principle that information and communications are critical forms of aid, without which the affected populations cannot access services or make the best decisions for themselves and their communities. The CwC approach utilizes all available communications channels, including leaflets, newsletters, mass media and SMS. Various Country Offices have used information campaigns as an integral part of their programme implementation to improve communication with beneficiaries. Below are a few relevant examples from Afghanistan, Nigeria and Yemen.

Experiences from Afghanistan

IASC COMMITMENTS UPHELD

As of 2022, FAO and implementing partners distributed over 100 000 outreach materials on PSEA and gender-based violence across all 34 provinces. Each beneficiary received a single package of leaflets with the contact details for such mechanisms in all projects during all distribution and training activities. These awareness raising tools were developed in two national languages (Dari and Pashto).

FAO complaint and feedback mechanism leaflet, ©FAO

Experiences from Nigeria

IASC COMMITMENTS UPHELD

Project sensitization and community feedback session in Nigeria

FAO has been implementing a series of AAP mechanisms since the inception of the FAO office in northeastern Nigeria in 2015. Various activities have been carried out, including community-based participatory planning and community awareness-raising and sensitization through the delivery of communication materials, banners and fliers. Moreover, FAO promoted the establishment of a complaint feedback mechanism, such as a toll-free line, as well as learning sessions and capacity development of staff and implementing partners. These actions were implemented across all FAO programmatic areas of interventions like crop, livestock, aquaculture, agribusiness and safe access to fuel and energy. This has enhanced community participation, empowerment and PSEA.

Northeastern Nigeria is traditionally a patriarchal society with rigid gender norms. In some communities, women are less likely to express complaints, ideas or general interests in the presence of men. Mixed gender meetings and community consultations with women, men, girls and boys are typically disaggregated by sex to ensure full and meaningful participation and to break the norms that discriminate against women.

To restore livelihoods and meet the extensive needs of households engaged in agriculture, in 2019 FAO in Nigeria developed con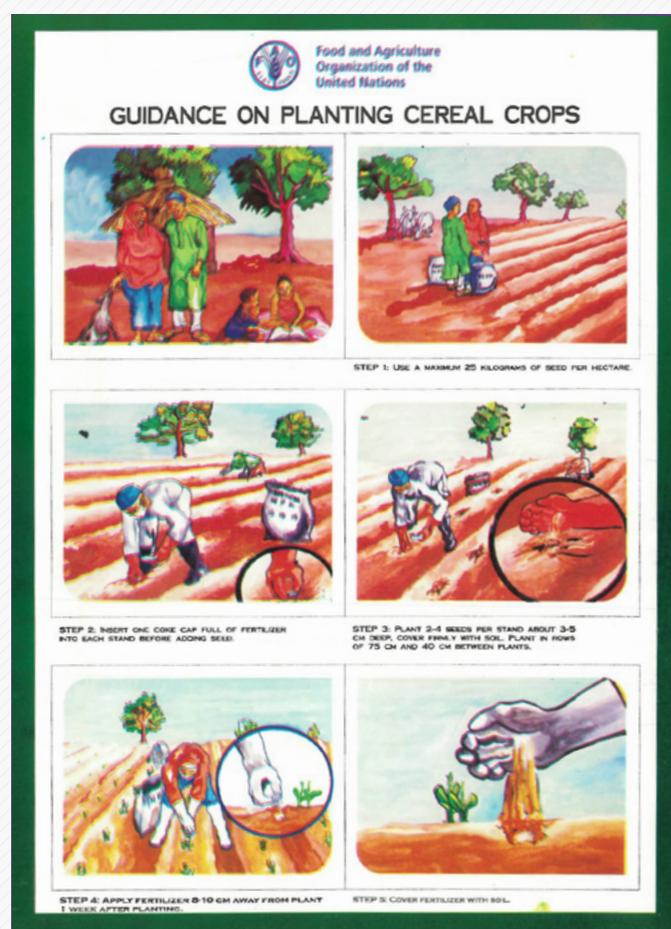flict-sensitive extension guides on crop production to support its organizational commitment to accountability, which promotes transparency and two-way communication as well as fair and representative participation. In addition, materials took the form of a pictorial extension guide booklet with limited, but essential messaging in English, Hausa and Kanuri. Some of the pages were also used to develop posters and stickers. The booklet aimed at:

- disseminating information on good agronomic practices for successful crop production across all the major crop types in northeastern Nigeria (e.g. cereals, vegetables, pulses and legumes);
- raising awareness on rights and how to seek redress in case of violation, specifically in relation to sex in exchange for inputs, labour for inputs and money for inputs;
- providing and offering guidance and tips on mine action awareness, including how to farm safely and decrease the likelihood of triggering explosive devices;
- providing an overview of the intervention, including information on FAO, the government and other partners; and
- disseminating FAO reporting mechanism including a toll-free number so that beneficiaries could provide feedback and report complaints.

To ensure that the extension guides were relevant and appropriate to the local context, FAO sought the feedback of a test group including women leaders, farmers from the FAO farmer field school programme, local leadership in the region and implementing partners. During the process, several changes were made to the draft material, including minimizing the text due to low literacy levels (even in local languages) and correcting grammatical changes in the local Kanuri language. The aesthetic of the characters was also changed to reflect a more suitable style of dress and the local landscape.

FAO and its partners distributed the extension guides during the rainy season, in conjunction with crop seed and fertilizer distributions to communities across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. Prior to the start of the distribution, FAO and its partners went through the booklets, posters and stickers with beneficiary households, explaining both the instructions for good planting and mine action awareness, as well as important protection messages related to exploitative phenomena such as cash for inputs, sex for inputs and labour for inputs. Based on previous experiences, it was concluded that the most useful way to deliver the materials, while having good two-way communication with women, was through gender-disaggregated meetings where possible, given the dynamic and often volatile realities of delivering in affected communities.

FAO guidance on planting cereal crops and mine action suggestions for farmers in Nigeria, ©FAO

Since 2015, FAO has scaled up its assistance to Yemen's agriculture sector, supporting farmers, pastoralists, fishers and other vulnerable groups to restore livelihoods and strengthen resilience. Given security concerns, imposed movement restrictions and limited access to communities, the FAO office in Yemen established a mechanism that allows beneficiaries to provide feedback and complaints on FAO's support through a call centre. Beneficiaries can access the call centre through four channels: SMS, a toll-free hotline, email and WhatsApp.

This multichannel call centre mechanism was launched in 2018, covering seven governorates; it was subsequently introduced to other FAO programmes and projects across the country. Awareness of the mechanism is currently raised through the dissemination of flyers in Arabic with contact details during various events, including the distribution of inputs and cash, as well as through announcements in public consultation meetings. The contact details are also shared through various communication materials and banners used at the distribution sites. As of 2022, FAO in Yemen is planning to include stickers with the contact details of the call centre in the items provided by FAO.

In the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, additional information, education and communication materials were developed to raise awareness of the pandemic and its related containment measures. This included posters, banners and brochures translated into Arabic and featuring local characters explaining common mitigation strategies to a range of livelihood actors. The information, education and communication material was complemented by media campaigns and radio broadcast spots featuring Yemeni actors, as well as clips using testimony from farmers.

©FAO

Farmers involved in the awareness campaign in Ja'ar Abyan, Yemen, about the danger of desert locust, how to control it and the ways of reporting to FAO

Key learning

- The AAP good practices presented in this compendium can be replicated, adapted and scaled up in multiple local contexts and humanitarian settings. Most importantly, before a practice is replicated and adapted to a new environment, it is important to conduct a solid context analysis, identifying particularly vulnerable cohorts and marginalized groups.

- Including AAP from programme/project design to closure offers multiple benefits in terms of long-term communication and trust-building with communities as well as an increase in programme quality and impact.

- It is essential to maintain solid partnerships and to strengthen the capacities of implementing partners and third-party monitoring agencies to ensure that FAO's AAP commitments are upheld until the very last mile.

- Widespread consultation and communication through active engagement, dissemination of leaflets and other channels raises awareness of the feedback mechanisms in place, which increases use by beneficiaries. Based on the collected feedback, FAO can make informed decisions, search for solutions and adapt programming.

- Setting up a collaborative multichannel and inter-agency feedback and complaints system is particularly relevant in fragile and humanitarian contexts due to the challenging security situation, insufficient mobile networks, limited access to vulnerable populations and rigid gender norms. Contextualized multichannel feedback systems have been implemented in various countries, highlighting their sustainability and user-friendliness.

- Increasing female staff during interactions with communities generally allows better access to female beneficiaries in rural areas and facilitates a better understanding of their needs and concerns – especially on sensitive topics such as PSEA.

- To counter telecommunication network limitations and accessibility issues, alternative face-to-face solutions should be taken. These can include scheduling check-ins during site visits as well as field monitoring and distribution sessions with beneficiaries to hear their feedback, complaints and needs.

- Exploring innovative and creative solutions is critical for integrating AAP-related actions in programming, particularly humanitarian response programming.

- Localization, which encompasses meaningful collaboration with national and local authorities, local NGOs and other key actors, is essential for the successful implementation of AAP, community engagement and project ownership. Local stakeholders have a good understanding of the local context, traditional knowledge and culture, preferred languages and communication practices.

- Localized AAP information materials are successful in raising awareness of the importance of AAP and in mainstreaming PSEA messages in humanitarian programming. A strong understanding of the local culture and society is extremely important to ensure that messaging is both effective and appropriate.

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Annex: Guidelines and template

This annex is intended as a guide to assist you in the documentation of AAP experiences. The annex includes:

- the definitions of AAP and PSEA;
- a non-exhaustive list of examples of implementation of measures under IASC AAP commitments; and
- the good practice template used to document the AAP good practices contained in this compendium.

Definitions

Accountability to affected people (AAP)

FAO is accountable to the women, men, boys and girls whose lives it aims to improve and places this responsibility at the core of its humanitarian policy. As a matter of human rights and meaningful programming, AAP is "an active commitment by humanitarian actors and organizations to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to and being held to account by the people they seek to assist". By being more accountable to affected populations – increasing their participation and feedback in programme identification, design, delivery and lesson learning – FAO achieves programmes of higher quality, with greater and more sustainable impact. It increases the space for communities to shape their own recovery and for FAO to better deliver against its commitments to stakeholders, including the people FAO assists and the resource partners who make assistance possible.

As an IASC Principal, FAO adheres to the IASC AAP commitments which aim to translate aspirations into action and results among humanitarian and development actors: leadership; participation and partnership; information, feedback and action; and results. The methodological approach section of this template is structured around the AAP commitments, in order to assess how they are implemented through the good practice. Examples of implementation under each commitment are listed in the Annex.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another, while sexual abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Examples of implementation under Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) accountability to affected people (AAP) commitments

IASC AAP Commitment 1. Leadership

- Establishment of a culture of accountability.
- Taking action based on feedback from affected communities.

IASC AAP Commitment 2. Participation and partnership

- Training and capacity development for FAO and partner staff on engaging affected populations.
- Engagement of affected populations at the time throughout the project cycle.
- Fair and representative participation including the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Considering and planning common barriers to information and participation (literacy, time of day, accessibility, language, etc.).
- Coordination of assistance with other partners to avoid confusion or duplication; and ensure complementarity.
- Proper handling of and response to beneficiary feedback.

IASC AAP Commitment 3. Information, feedback and action

- Information provision to affected people about the intended humanitarian support, partners, timing of delivery, selection of beneficiaries, funding and feedback mechanisms.
- Feedback mechanisms for people to provide both positive and negative feedback, and issue of a timely response. Options: hotline or SMS-based system, feedback box, consistent community meetings and randomised household follow ups.
- Two-way communication channels that are suited to the local context and that promote transparency through feedback collection and response are established.
- Prevention of SEA means to consider the receipt and handling of sensitive information, such as complaints.

IASC AAP Commitment 4. Results

- Measure AAP and PSEA related results at the agency and collective level: Core Humanitarian Standard and the Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA.
- Best Practice Guide to establish Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms and its accompanying Standard Operating Procedures.

AAP good practice template and guidelines

This template is designed to collect good practices on AAP from FAO Decentralized Offices in order to share knowledge and foster exchange on this topic, and to incrementally move towards more accountable and protective programming.

To assist you in documenting good practices in AAP, use the guiding questions provided in the template as a checklist to verify that the necessary areas are covered. Although not all questions can be answered, we encourage you to review them carefully as they can give indications for future replication and upscaling of the good/promising practice.

Element	Instructions/guidance
Title	Formulate a title that includes the name of the practice and the type of context in which this practice is implemented. The title (or the subtitle) should also indicate the region/country where the practice is implemented.
Subtitle	Identify a suitable subtitle that indicates a key achievement towards more accountable programming.
Is it a promising or a good practice?	To answer this, consult the definitions of each term, which are available here.
Author(s)	Provide (each) author's name, title, division/stream and email address.
Categorization	**Indicate type of shock(s) or crisis (crises)** Conflicts and protracted crises, natural hazards or food chain crises. **Indicate relevant resilience thematic area(s) or tag(s):** Risk and food security information systems, disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, social protection, sustaining peace, pastoralism and livelihood systems, Anticipatory Action, gender, etc.
Key AAP dimension	Describe very briefly what the good/promising practice is and how it contributes to strengthening AAP. This is a key paragraph synthesizing the AAP dimension.
Geographical coverage	In which country, region, province and/or district has the good practice been implemented and replicated? (include a map, if available)

Actors and stakeholders	Who are the implementing partners, such as national government bodies and/or service providers? Who are the financial partners?
Beneficiaries	Who are the target (direct or indirect) beneficiaries of the practice? How many are there (include available sex, age, and disability disaggregated data)?
Cross-cutting theme	Are any aspects of the practice related to gender? If yes, please briefly describe how, or use this space for information on protection, disability, age or any other cross-cutting issue particularly relevant to the practice.
Context	What was the initial situation, specific context or crisis? What has FAO been doing and since when?
Challenge	What are the specific AAP challenges the practice is trying to address? Are there specific gender-related challenges the good practice is trying to address?
Implementation and objective	Within what intervention/programme/project was the good practice implemented? When was the good practice implemented? What is the aim/objective of the good practice?
Methodological approach	How would you describe the good practice, and how was it implemented? How are the AAP commitments implemented through the good practice? Provide examples of implementation under each IASC AAP commitment: 1 – Leadership, 2 – Participation and partnership, 3 – Information, feedback and action, and 4 – Results.
Result(s) and impact(s)	What are the results/outputs of this practice? What is the impact (positive and negative) of this practice on the beneficiaries' situation? How has AAP improved/deteriorated/evolved in the respective context? How were men and women affected? Were there changes in gender roles, women's work burden and/or women's access to information, resources, services, markets or decision-making? How have beneficiaries' livelihoods been improved economically, socially and environmentally? Were there any nutrition-related impacts? Has the project evaluated any positive impacts on local conflict dynamics? What is the level of evidence in your practice: are results supported by data (with sources and dates)?

	How was the project impact monitored and evaluated? Is the project based on a Theory of Change? If so, how was it developed?
	Are these impacts validated by data in monitoring and evaluation studies? If so, please list them in the section on References below.
Sustainability	To what extent has the practice been institutionally and socially sustainable?
	Are there any cost/efficiency indications? If applicable, what are the total costs incurred for the implementation of the practice? How much time is needed for the investment gains to exceed the investment costs? If applicable, indicate the cost-effectiveness of the practice.
Replicability and upscaling	Has this practice been replicated in the same context or in different contexts?
	What are the required conditions to replicate and adapt the practice in another context/geographical area? What are the required conditions to replicate the practice at a larger scale (national, regional, international)?
	What are the possibilities of upscaling the good practice? Is there any ongoing/preparation work to extend this good practice to other areas?
Key learning	In conclusion, what are the key learning aspects across all sections documented above? What are the lessons learned worth highlighting to different audiences for programming, adaptive management, policy making, etc.? Was this learning generated through a monitoring and evaluation systematic process or a participatory consultation?
Testimonies	Collect stakeholders' testimonies and use this anecdotal evidence of a beneficiary or a group of beneficiaries to show the benefit of the practice (with names and dates).
Related resources	Provide a list of references relevant to the practice (training manuals, guidelines, pictures, video, websites, etc.)
Contact details	Please provide the following details of the person to be contacted for more information: name, title and email.

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Contact

Office of Emergencies and Resilience
KORE@fao.org | www.fao.org/in-action/kore/

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy