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The 2011/12 DEC Accountability Framework Assessment

findings from the external
evaluation and peer review
process

**Alice Obrecht, Christina Laybourn,
Michael Hammer & Stéphanie Ray**

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About the One World Trust

The One World Trust is an independent charitable research organisation that conducts research, develops recommendations and advocates for reform to make policy and decision-making processes in global governance more accountable to the people they affect now and in the future, and to ensure that international laws are strengthened and applied equally to all.

About the Evaluators

The 2011/12 DECAF assessment was conducted by Christina Laybourn and Alice Obrecht, both Senior Researchers at the One World Trust, with support from the Executive Director Michael Hammer and Research Assistant Stéphanie Ray.

All members of the consultancy team, under Alice's lead, contributed to the final report, for which The One World Trust takes responsibility as the consultant. The One World Trust would like to thank the staff from all Member Agencies who contributed to the validation process for their participation, in particular the Leads tasked with organising their Agency's submission. The DEC Secretariat staff, through their openness to engagement and challenge, contributed invaluable to their own accountability assessment as well as to the Member Agencies' peer review workshops. The consultants are particularly grateful to Cait Turvey Roe for her active involvement and guidance throughout this process.



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One World Trust
Suite 301, 3rd Floor
109-111 Farringdon Road
London EC1R 3BW

Telephone: +44(0)20 7713 6790
Email: info@oneworldtrust.org
Visit: www.oneworldtrust.org
Charity Commission No 1134438

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DEC Accountability Framework: findings from the external evaluation and peer review

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Introduction

Each year, members of the British public place their trust in the Disasters Emergency Committee to transform their donations into life-saving assistance for people affected by disaster. The Member Agencies of the DEC honour this trust by committing themselves to processes that support and challenge them to meet the highest standards in humanitarian accountability and performance. One of these important processes is the DEC Members' annual self-assessments against their shared Accountability Framework.

This Report summarises the findings from the 2011/12 DEC Accountability Framework (DECAF) assessment process. The purpose of the DECAF assessment is to review the policies, practices and assurance systems through which Members meet best practice in their humanitarian work using funds raised through the DEC. In order to lend focus to the assessment, Members are asked to provide supporting evidence for their self-assessments from two countries in which they are currently using DEC funds to assist disaster-affected people. For the 2011/12 assessment, these countries were selected from the Pakistan Floods Appeal, for which a total of £71 million was raised from the British public, and the East Africa Crisis Appeal, which reached a total donation level of £79 million and has been used to assist more than 1.3 million people.

Through the DECAF assessment process, Member Agencies hold one another to account for mutually-recognised standards, providing a unique forum for peer challenge and horizontal accountability. They are also held to account by external evaluators, who review the evidence-based self-assessments submitted by Member Agencies, thereby supporting the external legitimacy of the Accountability Framework.

The Accountability Framework Assessment targets the underlying systems and policies that are needed to support Members in their delivery

of effective and responsible aid. It does not assess the quality of the DEC Members' humanitarian response. As such, this Report is a complement to the system of oversight of Members' plans and programme reports as well as the Real-Time Evaluations (RTEs) and other external evaluations that accompany each DEC appeal.¹

Raising the bar: the DEC Accountability Framework (DECAF) II²

The 2011/12 DECAF process has been marked by a period of transition for the Disasters Emergency Committee. The DEC welcomed Plan UK as a new Member Agency this year, bringing its membership to 14 Agencies. DEC Members also revised significantly their best practice standards, or, Ways of Working in humanitarian service (Ways of Working). The new framework, DECAF II, was adopted in April 2011 and implemented for the first time in this year's DECAF assessment process. The framework is a dynamic model based on four accountability priorities that are considered most likely to drive improvement:

- 1) We use our resources efficiently and effectively.
- 2) We achieve intended programme objectives in accordance with agreed humanitarian standards, principles and behaviours.
- 3) We are accountable to disaster affected populations.
- 4) We learn from our experience—taking learning from one emergency to the next.

These are enumerated in 21 specific Ways of Working which reflect best practice standards (see Appendix I). The revised Ways of Working in DECAF-II offer a substantial step change from the previous framework and, in several key areas,

1. Evaluations funded by the DEC are independent and are made publically available through their Appeals page:

<http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals>

2. DEC Accountability Framework, <http://www.dec.org.uk/node/1951/>

raise the bar for standards of accountability and performance across the humanitarian sector. For the 2011/12 assessment, the Pakistan and East Africa Appeals presented unique opportunities and challenges for meeting the strong accountability and performance standards set by DECAF-II. Members' commitments to maintaining beneficiary participation in all cycles of programming were strong in countries covered by the East Africa Appeal, while assurance processes for value for money and detecting and responding to suspected fraud were well-implemented in Pakistan.

The Assessment Process

On an annual basis, each Member Agency assesses itself against each Way of Working. This assessment targets three broad areas of performance:

- 1) Policy or procedure
- 2) Application of policy in a particular humanitarian context (practice)
- 3) The assurance systems that Members use to ensure the quality and consistency of their work across responses.

As external evaluators, the One World Trust team asked Agencies to submit evidence for policy, practice and assurance in support of their self-assessments for five selected Ways of Working:

- 1.3** Programme design and procurement processes maximise value for money - balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response
- 1.4** Incidences of actual/suspected fraud or loss are investigated and actioned
- 2.6** Programmes contribute to disaster risk reduction and build the resilience of communities, partners and governments
- 3.3** Disaster affected populations participate in programme assessment, design, implementation and evaluation
- 3.4** In consultation with disaster affected

populations appropriately designed and described complaints handling procedures are implemented

Focusing on these five standards offered a view into how Agencies are engaging with timely issues in their donor environment and making progress on long-standing commitments, such as accountability to beneficiaries, in new and challenging contexts.

After reviewing the submitted evidence, the One World Trust facilitated a series of Peer Review workshops, in which Members summarised their self-assessments and received challenges and questions from their peers, the One World Trust team and representatives from the DEC Secretariat. At the end of each workshop, each Member's self-assessment was discussed and confirmed by Peers and the One World Trust team. In some cases, a Member Agency was requested to submit further supporting evidence for an area of performance (policy, practice and/or assurance).

Findings & Conclusion

Broadly speaking, three performance perspectives on each Way of Working emerged throughout the assessment process: a conventional perspective that represents where most Agencies are at with respect to a Way of Working and common themes or strategies; a perspective of innovation that reflects the novel interpretations of a best practice and the new frontiers being explored by some Members; and a perspective of improvement that embodies the challenges Agencies faced in meeting a Way of Working and the strategies some Members are using to catch up with their peers or move to the front. These perspectives are represented in a diagram at the beginning of each Way of Working summary and are discussed in greater detail in the text of each section.

The One World Trust team found that, overall, performance across the five Ways of Working



examined for the assessment met many best practice standards, with strong policies and frequent examples of humanitarian best practice being met in Pakistan and East Africa. However, performance on assurance was mixed across the five Ways of Working: there were some examples of strong quality assurance mechanisms but the process of strengthening or developing ways to assure quality and monitor the consistency of their performance continues. Innovation and the active development of new systems to enhance accountability and performance are high across all 14 Members.

Way of Working 1.3: Programme design and procurement processes maximise value for money—balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response

“Evidence should demonstrate that we have a clear organisational position on what ‘value for money’ means and how this should be assessed. As a minimum, quality, cost and timeliness should be analysed together—rather than in complete isolation to each other—during the planning, implementation and evaluation phases.” *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*

Perspective of innovation

- Embracing the opportunity to engage in and lead the discussion on how value for money should be conceptualised for humanitarian aid
- Specific attention paid to value for money considerations in *programme design*, not just procurement
- Actively pursuing a holistic integration of VfM across all aspects of organisation

Conventional perspective

- Has position paper outlining organisational definition of value for money
- Has strong assurance mechanisms for assessing costs, evaluating quality, and monitoring timeliness, however there is no overarching mechanism that unifies all three into a single decision-making or review process
- However: confident that procurement and programme design on the ground are being guided by a holistic balancing of costs, benefits and value added

Perspective of improvement

- Organisational documents feature value for money as a term, but do not define it in detail.
- Working groups established to develop an organisation-wide approach
- Value for money will be an active area for improvement in 2012/13, with plans for developing tools, indicators, and/or rolling out new performance systems

Continuous Improvement



Background to this Way of Working

Value for money has become a dominant concept in the UK donor and aid environment in recent years. The case for value for money as a best practice standard is relatively straight-forward: Given the limited amount of resources available to them, aid organisations ought to accomplish the most they can with these resources, by maximising the value achieved by every unit of cost. In practice, however, value for money standards raise important and complex questions, such as how to assess the value and financial cost of intangible or longer-term outcomes, or how to compare value for money across organisations that use different approaches to assessing quality and to balancing quality against cost and timeliness. The evidence submitted by the DEC Members reflected a shared commitment to achieving the very best with their limited resources, showcasing a diverse set of approaches to how organisations are conceptualising and measuring value for money in their work.

The Conventional Perspective:

The Peer Review workshops addressed the question of whether a Member Agency needed to have a defined approach to value for money outlined within the organisation in order to be considered to meet minimum standards of best practice. Members felt that they all should have a clear position paper or approach to value for money and many submitted papers that outlined their approach to value for money in programme design.

There is evidence that Agencies are using considerations of cost, timeliness and quality to guide programming. At present, however, evidence of value for money in practice focuses on the procurement of goods and services: evidence primarily consisted of assessments of bids or documentation of vendor selection, demonstrating how these procedures are regularly guided by a unified decision-making process that looks at all three dimensions of cost,

timeliness and quality of product.

The Perspective of Innovation:

Measuring and demonstrating value for money presents a number of challenges, which Members are overcoming through innovation. Value for money is sometimes viewed as a top-down accountability priority in which aid organisations must direct field staff to make decisions that can be justified as cost-effective and efficient to donors. This challenges Members to find ways to bring intended beneficiary groups into the conversation on value for money. ActionAid is meeting this challenge by re-framing value for money as a participatory concept, asking community members to assess the value of an intervention or project. Christian Aid has also used a bottom-up approach to defining the value of its outcomes, for example, by asking beneficiaries to assess the performance and quality of contractors.

Some Members reported that their organisations were looking at mainstreaming value for money considerations across multiple departments. Oxfam, for example, is implementing a Value for Money Organisational Programme, with projects across multiple organisational functions including Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL), fraud response, organisational analysis, and data sharing. CARE UK has developed a Value for Money Framework that identifies guiding principles for all parts of the organisation, examining value for money through different ‘lenses’ based on organisational level. CARE’s Framework goes beyond program quality and management to include broad guidelines for partnership, advocacy and policy, and safety and security.

The Perspective of Improvement:

For some Members, improvement will involve bringing together the different perspectives and bodies of data, currently housed in different ‘silos’ within their organisation, that are necessary for



forming sound value for money assessments. Other Members will focus on composing a position paper or otherwise ensuring that there is a coherent understanding of what value for money means throughout the organisation in order to back up the current systems which are believed to deliver it.

Further Questions

How important is the 'value for money' terminology?: Some Agencies explained that their organisation had made a conscious decision to refrain from mainstreaming the language of value for money, or using this phrase with field staff, in order to avoid confusion. ActionAid, for example, is using the term 'cost-effectiveness,' while Merlin has defined value for money as "Delivering the right interventions, to the right people, at the right time and at a cost appropriate to the context" and will use only this broader phrasing with their field staff.

Is the lack of a shared definition of value for money an opportunity or a constraint?: Some Members indicated that the absence of a fixed definition for value for money presents a useful opportunity to shape a crucial debate over what constitutes 'value' in a humanitarian response. Agencies can contribute to this debate by articulating the value added by non-governmental organisations or the importance of intangible goods such as participation.

The One World Trust team noted that this opportunity, while valuable, also presents a challenge: if Agencies engage with value for money by developing their own organisational definitions, it may become more difficult to translate the different approaches and benchmark progress on value for money across organisations.

Does value for money call for a paradigm shift, or just repackaging?: In the workshops, many Agencies expressed the view that, rather than setting out a new standard of practice, value for money as an accountability standard merely

requires Agencies to re-package their existing processes of cost-analysis in a new way. This implies that progress on this Way of Working is therefore largely a matter of translating on-going practices into a new language.

At present, it remains to be seen whether re-packaging is all that is necessary for all Members to meet value for money best practice, or whether some Members may find it useful to pursue a deeper set of changes. Given the diversity of organisational systems and strategies across the Members, there is unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' answer to this question.

Regardless of how well the Members are internally placed to respond to value for money requirements, it remains important to articulate how strong internal systems inform choices and strategies at a higher level within each organisation. The principles of value for money are intended to direct Agencies to consider how much it costs them to achieve certain impacts. Such considerations ideally support organisations to make more informed choices on those impacts they choose to pursue and the best method of achieving them. Insofar as current practice across the Agencies emphasises the achievement of "economy"³ in procurement processes over assessments of the cost-effectiveness of entire programmes and projects, Members could do more to articulate their ongoing commitment to value for money and how this commitment guides their programme and project design.

3. Dfid's Approach to Value for Money, p.4:
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/DFID-approach-value-money.pdf>

Way of Working 1.4: Incidences of actual/suspected fraud or loss are investigated and actioned

“Evidence should demonstrate that we have a definition of fraud and loss and a procedure which ensures action is taken promptly by responsible persons.” *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*

Perspective of innovation

- Public reporting of fraud, the amount lost, and actions taken by the organisation
- Extensive preventative work to proactively engage with the potential for fraud, e.g. staff trainings, extensive risk assessments of potential partners

Conventional perspective

- Strong policies and mechanisms on the ground for reporting and investigating suspected fraud
- Strong and reliable assurance mechanisms for identifying and responding quickly to suspected fraud or loss pertaining to funds provided by UK office or by DEC

Perspective of improvement

- Re-drafting organisational policy or re-training field staff on new practices following the Anti-Bribery Act
- Working on relationships with international and other national offices to improve lines of reporting on suspected fraud and loss to UK office





Background to this Way of Working

Protecting the resources entrusted to them is a high priority for all Members of the DEC. Managing the risk of fraud is particularly challenging in the fluid context of humanitarian emergency response, and therefore requires well-established and routinized systems to assure that funds are not misallocated. All 14 Members provided extensive evidence of such systems in place at their organisation and, where relevant, in their broader international families.

The Conventional Perspective

Given the potential impact that a single case of fraud can have on an organisation's programmes, public reputation and its ability to secure funding, it was unsurprising that all Agencies performed strongly on this Way of Working. All Members were able to provide evidence of explicit Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption policies, as well as of processes for providing systematic oversight of the implementation and enforcement of these policies. These included internal audits, site visits by individuals responsible for monitoring fraud, and risk registers.

Assessing fraud risk and responding quickly and appropriately to fraud is a particularly important aspect of Agencies' relationships with implementing partners. Agencies that work heavily or entirely through partnership discussed the range of strategies they used to ensure controls over the appropriate use of funds. For several Members, partner organisations are required to commission an external audit, in most cases, employing a local auditor. Partner assessment mechanisms also draw together analysis of the partner's financial stability and solvency, governance mechanisms, financial management and project cycle management, as well as an overall risk assessment.

The Perspective of Innovation:

Anti-fraud best practice is fairly standardised and

the DEC Members all performed highly on this Way of Working. As a result, there were few areas of innovation or examples of novel techniques pertaining to anti-fraud policies and systems. One example of innovative activity is Age UK's decision to revise its anti-fraud policy in light of the UK Anti-Bribery act, and its plan to roll out a new programme of staff training in 2012 based on the revised policy. Another potential innovation discussed across the workshops was increasing public transparency around levels of fraud and loss.

The Perspective of Improvement:

As this Way of Working was already an area of strong performance for all Members, there were few examples of Agencies striving to improve their policies or practices. The primary challenge for some Agencies lies in shaping the relationships their UK office has with partners and other members of their International families to ensure reliable and complete reporting of suspected fraud from the field. Several Members discussed how they might seek to strengthen these lines of reporting in order to receive further information in a timelier manner.

Further Questions

Should the standard for assurance be higher for fraud and loss than for other aspects of performance?: Given the particular sensitivity of fraud investigations and the importance of their successful resolution, it may be the case that assurance standards for detecting and responding to fraud should be stronger than assurance standards for other areas of humanitarian best practice. While indirect reporting relationships may be sufficient to assure consistent good practice on other Ways of Working, such as beneficiary participation, the nature of fraud might indicate that reporting and assurance lines between DEC Members and other parties (members of its international family, partner organisations) should be more direct.

Way of Working 2.6: Programmes contribute to disaster risk reduction and build the resilience of communities, partners and governments

“Evidence should demonstrate how we integrated DRR and resilience into our work: ensuring that we ‘build back better’, build DRR capacity and target advocacy work on this topic.” *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*

Perspective of innovation

- Disaster risk reduction and resilience building is measured on a regular basis in order to monitor whether resilience is actually built, with recommendations issued on the basis of assessment
- Disaster risk reduction work incorporates the appropriate role of government, different members of the community, and, where relevant, partners
- Considerations of disaster risk reduction are reflected in the early stage of the response

Conventional perspective

- Disaster risk reduction or resilience building is mainstreamed throughout organisational operations, as reflected in a strategy or policy.
- Considerations of disaster risk reduction are captured in planning for the intermediate or later phases of a response
- There are members of staff tasked specifically with disaster risk reduction or resilience building.
- Current resilience or risk reduction practice sits more at the planning and implementation stages of the programme cycle

Perspective of improvement

- Disaster risk reduction is defined and done in some measure, but not currently mainstreamed
- Moving to develop indicators and ways of measuring disaster risk reduction
- Working primarily with communities

Continuous Improvement



Background to this Way of Working

Disaster risk reduction and resilience building for future disasters have become increasingly mainstreamed concepts throughout humanitarian good practice. While disaster risk reduction (DRR) is now a common principle of humanitarian work, this Way of Working reflects the more demanding nature of DECAF-II, which requires Member Agencies to engage not only with communities in DRR work, but also with partners and governments. It was agreed that the spirit of the Way of Working was best interpreted as expecting Members to work with or in support of partners and governments in order to build the resilience of communities. The text boxes in this sub-section discuss in greater detail examples of DRR work with specialised communities (Text box 1), governments (Text box 2) and partners (Text box 3).

The Conventional Perspective:

Performance on this Way of Working was consistently strong, but with room for further growth. All Members make a commitment to DRR or resilience building in a policy-level document. Many have identified DRR or resilience as a key strategic objective or programmatic theme.

The Perspective of Innovation:

Agencies using innovative approaches to this Way of Working submitted evidence demonstrating the ongoing evaluation and measurement of progress against DRR indicators. CAFOD has conducted baseline assessments on DRR and plans to roll out assurance mechanisms in 2012 that will contribute to an improved implementation of best standards practice. Islamic Relief submitted an Evaluation template measuring disaster risk reduction that it will use to assess its Ethiopia response this year. Oxfam has a DRR Benchmark that is measured regularly in its RTEs.

Tearfund, which performed strongly against this Way of Working, includes DRR as one of their cross-cutting Quality Standards for emergency

Text box 1: Working with specialised communities: Age UK, Plan, Save the Children, and World Vision

Age UK, Save the Children, World Vision and Plan UK have adopted specialised approaches to DRR due to the unique beneficiary groups with whom they work—children in the case of Save the Children, World Vision and Plan UK, and older people in the case of Age UK.

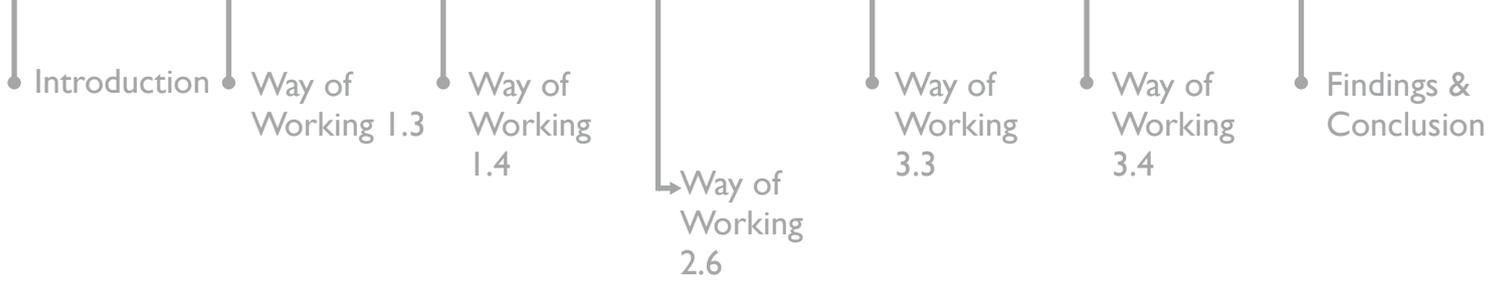
Age UK's DRR work flows out of their central commitment to involving older people in processes of development and relief. Their DRR-related projects are therefore focused on the engagement of older people's groups in disaster risk planning for their communities.

Plan has included children in its advocacy work on disaster risk reduction so as to ensure their perspective is represented in the global agenda on DRR. World Vision and Save the Children carry out DRR trainings targeted towards children, and encourage children's input on the development of community disaster risk plans.

response used in the monitoring and evaluation of their partners. They are currently using two sets of indicators (for fast onset and slow onset disasters) as the basis for assessing partner capacity and identifying areas for capacity building.

The Perspective of Improvement:

Demonstrating success in disaster risk reduction and resilience building requires a reliable and well-structured assurance system that is capable of reviewing organisational progress against long-term goals. All 14 Members have well-structured assurance systems for monitoring long-term progress, however, in some cases these systems did not provide Members with the confidence that resilience building activities are being systematically implemented and monitored. Assurance mechanisms specific to resilience building and disaster risk reduction varied in strength across the 14 Members, and a range of potential improvements were set out. These



Text Box 2: Working with government: Merlin & Concern

Concern WW UK is shifting its approach to DRR towards the adoption of a longer-term perspective, which has led them to engage more with government authorities. For instance, in Ethiopia, Concern WW is increasing its work on nutrition and strengthening their working relationship with the Ministry of Health. Merlin has worked for years with government ministries to strengthen healthcare systems. Merlin views resilience as integral to its work as a provider of healthcare and, in turn, treats its relationships to local government as integral to resilience. In Pakistan, Merlin is currently working with the Ministry of Health to undertake extensive nutrition work, while also trying to identify and tackle the root causes of food insecurity.

included building on existing monitoring and evaluation systems, which could soon provide a consistent organisational check on resilience building projects, and hiring members of staff tasked specifically with implementing disaster risk reduction programming.

Further Questions

Where does DRR belong?: Throughout the workshops, it was questioned whether an Agency’s approach to disaster risk reduction was viewed within its organisation as part of its later phase/development work, or as an integrated part of its humanitarian response work. While most Agencies’ DRR and resilience staff worked under the umbrella of humanitarian response, for some, these functions fell under the remit of their development teams. For many Members, linking their development and humanitarian efforts through a common theme of resilience building remains an important area of growth.

Are we clear on our concepts?: Many Agencies raised the point that the terminology of resilience and

disaster risk reduction is often exchanged with the term “disaster preparedness”, despite these three phrases referring to distinct approaches and types of activity. This indicates the importance of maintaining a shared understanding of resilience building, to ensure discussion of similar approaches and activities, which could otherwise hinder meaningful comparison for this Way of Working.

What did we learn from the Horn of Africa crisis?: Several Members submitted reports and assessments on the Horn of Africa crisis, such as A Dangerous Delay (Save the Children, Oxfam, joint briefing paper), which emphasised the importance of early action to prevent major food crises . The particular complications of aiming to build resilience when working in refugee camps also suggested that the very conditions of humanitarian work in certain contexts may be in tension with long-term resilience building.

Text Box 3: Working with partners: The British Red Cross

The British Red Cross works with other Red Cross/Crescent National Societies (within the Red Cross Movement) as its Partners on disaster risk reduction. For example, in their work with the Kenya Red Cross Society, the British Red Cross has directed a significant amount of funding towards longer-term programming designed to reduce vulnerability.

Way of Working 3.3: Disaster affected populations participate in programme assessment, design, implementation and evaluation

“Evidence should set out our understanding of what participation means (e.g. minimum level of consultation, engagement of women and men, adults and children, older people etc.) and our approach to ensuring this is maintained through all phases of the response..” *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*

Perspective of innovation

- Use of creative and novel approaches and tools to engage beneficiaries in deep forms of participation, including in the design stage of programming
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation processes assess the organisation’s performance on beneficiary participation

Conventional perspective

- Strong policy-level commitment to beneficiary participation, typically included under an Accountability Framework or tool, sometimes in Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL) guidelines
- Difficulties in executing participation in practice, with evidence of application tipped strongly towards implementation and needs assessments than towards deeper participation in design and evaluation
- Weak assurance mechanisms: discovery of performance level on participation comes about largely through DECAF process than through ongoing organisational monitoring

Perspective of improvement

- Evidence of application difficult to find for the DECAF submission, indicating a significant need to improve documentation of participation occurring
- Depth of participation is often low and rarely goes beyond needs assessments interviews



Background to this Way of Working

Accountability to beneficiaries is traditionally seen as a challenge for humanitarian organisations because they work primarily with survivors of disaster. This means their relationships with intended beneficiaries are sometimes transient and are often shaped by the serious trauma that has been experienced by the survivors. DECAF-II's Way of Working 3.3 expresses a significant commitment to beneficiary accountability, moving beyond soliciting and responding to beneficiary feedback to a vision of participation that involves disaster affected populations in all stages of programming, from design to evaluation. This mirrors the 2010 HAP⁴ standards for beneficiary accountability and is evidence of how DECAF-II's more demanding Ways of Working place it at the front of best practice standards in the humanitarian sector.

The Conventional Perspective:

Evidence at the policy level for this Way of Working was strong, reflecting the status of beneficiary accountability—and participation as a core component of this—as an entrenched standard in humanitarian work. Many Agencies outline their approach to accountability to beneficiaries, including participation, in an Accountability Framework. Agencies that do not have a distinct Accountability Framework provided documents from their Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) systems that included sections on involving beneficiaries throughout the programming cycle.

Participation is but one component of accountability to beneficiaries, and, in the context of emergency humanitarian response, it is arguably one of the more challenging criteria to meet. While there were many good examples of involving beneficiaries in the implementation of projects, the more difficult forms of

participation—in design and evaluation—were harder to evidence.

Evaluation, both in terms of using participation in assessments of projects, and in terms of assessing the use of participatory approaches, is a significant area of growth for Members, with many seeking to improve how they evaluate progress against their Accountability Frameworks.

The Perspective of Innovation:

Of all the components of beneficiary accountability, participation in particular necessarily involves building a relationship between an Agency and the communities whom it aims to serve. As a result, this standard is more amenable than other Ways of Working to individualised approaches across the Member Agencies that reflect each Member's organisational identity. It is therefore a highly fertile area for innovation.

World Vision provided examples of application for all four components of this Way of Working. In Pakistan, beneficiaries participated in programme design and in the identification of selection criteria for a livelihoods project, and child beneficiaries worked with World Vision staff to develop Children Hygiene Action Plans. World Vision's LEAP system requires participation throughout all phases of programming and their rapid assessments support this commitment by assessing participation from the first week of response onwards.

CAFOD is rolling out an innovative tool to improve its accountability to beneficiaries, called the Vulnerability and Inequality Analysis (VIA) toolkit. The VIA toolkit was developed as part of CAFOD's work in HIV/AIDS and uses power analysis to understand a situation from the perspective of the beneficiary and monitor the project through the lens of empowerment, measuring how the project changes the original

4. Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, www.hapinternational.org



power dynamics over time. VIA is driven primarily through participation, involving the beneficiary in order to understand the initial context and to assess progress throughout the life of a project.

CARE’s Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF) includes benchmarks on beneficiary participation, with a set of corresponding indicators. CARE has been using Rapid Accountability Reviews as an assurance mechanism to assess implementing partners’ performance on involving beneficiaries in programming. Age UK is in a similar position, having recently rolled out its Accountability Framework and Evaluation Pack, which together comprehensively address beneficiary participation throughout the programme cycle. Age UK has undertaken baseline assessments on beneficiary participation and plans to measure and monitor progress against their framework on a quarterly basis.

ActionAid remains a leader in this field with respect to fully integrating participation into its programming with its Action Learning Participation System (ALPS) and its Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP). ActionAid involves beneficiaries in programme design, budgeting, and evaluation, and feeds beneficiary-written reports into its shared organisational learning system, which senior management is required to monitor regularly for their own reporting. It was observed during the peer workshop that, while ActionAid’s innovation is now several years old, other Agencies were largely unaware of it and interested to learn more on how ActionAid’s processes work, in particular around learning from beneficiary participation. It might be useful therefore for ActionAid, as well as other Members, to share information on their approaches at a future DEC cross-learning event.

The Perspective of Improvement:

As mentioned above, several Agencies found in

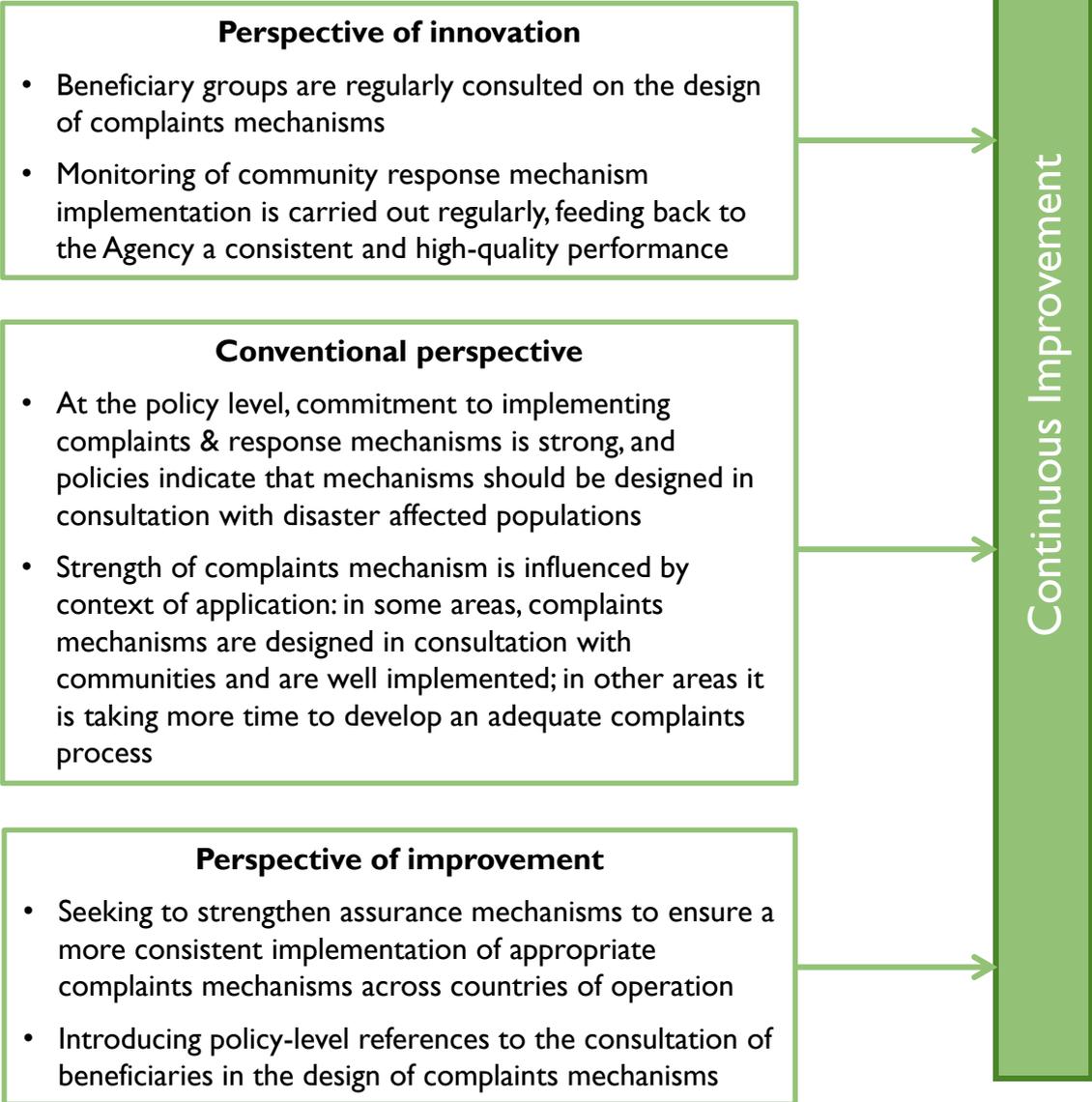
their self-assessment that they have strong policies on involving beneficiaries in programming, yet implementation of these policies varies across different responses. According to some Members, one of the challenges in demonstrating performance in this Way of Working is the absence of documentation which evidences participation, as opposed to the absence of participation itself.

Further Questions

Is it reasonable to expect beneficiary participation in all phases of programming?: Despite this Way of Working being revised and agreed upon by all Member Agencies in the development of DECAF-II, there was still some debate about the expectation of integrating beneficiary participation throughout all phases of programming, especially in design. Given the short time-frame that Members have to write a project proposal in response to a rapid onset emergency, some felt that involving beneficiaries in the design phase may be unrealistic.

Way of Working 3.4: In consultation with disaster affected populations appropriately designed and described complaints handling procedures are implemented

“Evidence should demonstrate what our complaints handling procedures are, how these are contextualised for individual responses, in consultation with communities, and how we ensure all complaints are responded to. We should be clear about how the leaders in our organisation set the tone so that we are open, and respond, to complaints.” *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*





Background to this Way of Working

Participation and Complaints & Response are both components of an Agency’s approach to its accountability to beneficiaries, and therefore evidence at the policy and assurance level for this Way of Working shared many overlaps with Way of Working 3.3. Providing those affected by a project with the opportunity to complain is now a common practice across humanitarian work. Inspired by a similar requirement in HAP, the revised DECAF-II requires that Agencies not only implement reliable and well-functioning complaints handling mechanisms, but also design these mechanisms in consultation with beneficiary groups, so as to ensure they are context-sensitive and thus useable.

The Conventional Perspective:

All Members have organisation-wide complaints policies and evidence of CRM established in at least one of the countries examined for evidence of practice. Many also make policy-level commitments to consulting with beneficiaries in the design of their complaints and response mechanisms. Assuring that these mechanisms are implemented systematically across all countries of operation was a common challenge identified as an area for future improvement.

The Perspective of Innovation:

Agencies that are innovators in this Way of Working were those that not only had policy documents specifying that beneficiaries consult with staff on the design of CRMs, but also provided strong evidence of this consultation occurring in the field. For example, Save the Children has a 10-step Guideline on how to set up a CRM that includes a step on involving communities in the design of a mechanism. In Kenya, this approach was implemented separately with child and adult beneficiary groups, resulting in the development of two separate complaints mechanisms. Children preferred to use a complaints desk set up in one of Save the Children’s Child-Friendly Spaces in the Dadaab

camps, whereas the adult beneficiaries preferred to establish a representative group that would bring complaints to Save the Children on their behalves.

The Perspective of Improvement:

On the basis of this year’s assessment, several Members indicated they would seek to strengthen beneficiary consultation in their approach to establishing CRMs. Many Members indicated they are planning to revise their complaints policies and guidelines in 2012/13 to include beneficiary consultation in design.

Further Questions

Is consulting with beneficiaries necessary to ensure complaints mechanisms are appropriately designed? There was some discussion as to whether context-sensitive and appropriate complaints mechanisms could be designed without consultation, in cases where field staff have developed strong knowledge of the surrounding community and can identify the optimal means for beneficiaries to file a complaint. However, the requirement to go beyond appropriate design to specifically include beneficiary consultation was upheld. First, the revision of this Way of Working was inspired by a similar revision in HAP, and included the language of consultation specifically to match the step change reflected in HAP’s revised standards. A second point cited by some Members in support of this requirement was that, from their experience, requiring input from beneficiaries as a regular procedure led to observable improvements in the usability of their complaints mechanisms. While in some cases field staff are able to design and implement a context-appropriate complaints mechanism without consulting beneficiaries, the requirement of consultation better ensures the achievement of a context-appropriate complaints and response mechanism.

Findings & Conclusion

The One World Trust team evaluated the 14 DEC Member Agencies' performance against their Accountability Framework-II by reviewing the evidence submitted in support of Members' self-assessments on five Ways of Working. After discussion of the Ways of Working and submitted evidence in the Peer Review workshops, further evidence was required to confirm one third of the self-assessments. In a few cases, the original self-assessments of a Member Agency were revised in light of the evidence in order to provide a more accurate reflection of their performance. At the end of the assessment process, the One World Trust team concluded that the final assessments validated for the Members on the five Ways of Working are a true reflection of their performance.

Overall, policy-level performance against the demanding DECAF-II standards was very strong, reflecting the ability of the DEC Members to effectively convey evolving humanitarian best practice standards at policy level. The assessment process also found evidence of innovative application of policy, despite the challenges presented by working in the context of humanitarian crisis. Performance on assurance was mixed across the five Ways of Working. As discussed, assurance processes for preventing and responding quickly to suspected fraud were very strong across all Members. Across the other four Ways of Working, assurance mechanisms for some Members are very strong, while other Members are still in the process of strengthening or developing ways to assure quality and monitor the consistency of their accountability performance.

The challenging nature of the revised DECAF-II standards played a significant role in the contrast between the mixed assurance performance of the Members and their strengths in evidencing policy

and practice. Policy and on-the-ground practice are able to respond more quickly to significant step-changes in accountability and performance expectations than assurance systems, which place greater demands on organisational resources and take longer to design and implement. As discussed in each of the above sections, all Members are currently taking on innovations or improvements in their assurance systems for one or more Ways of Working. We therefore expect that assurance performance against the DECAF-II standards will see marked improvements over the coming years as the DEC Members endeavour to further strengthen their standing as UK leaders in humanitarian accountability and performance.

Appendix 1: DEC Accountability Priorities and Ways of Working

1. We use our resources efficiently and effectively	2. We achieve intended programme objectives in accordance with agreed humanitarian standards, principles and behaviours	3. We are accountable to disaster affected populations	4. We learn from our experience – taking learning from one emergency to the next
1.1 Documented processes are in place at the appropriate level governing the use and management of funds	2.1 The agency has defined and documented processes for programme management which are underpinned by a clear statement of standards	3.1 A defined and documented Accountability Framework is in place governing accountability to disaster affected populations	4.1 A documented process is in place at the appropriate level to ensure that learning is systematically captured, shared and utilised
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	2.2 Programmes respond to clearly defined needs and are adjusted as needs change	3.2 Information on agency background, programme timelines, beneficiary entitlements and selection criteria is communicated to disaster affected populations	4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders
1.3 Programme design and procurement processes maximise value for money - balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response	2.3 Staff and partners understand and integrate agreed standards in to their programmes	3.3 Disaster affected populations participate in programme assessment, design, implementation and evaluation	4.3 Key learning (including from evaluations) is incorporated into processes and programmes in a systematic and timely manner
1.4 Incidences of actual/suspected fraud or loss are investigated and actioned	2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	3.4 In consultation with disaster affected populations appropriately designed and described complaints handling procedures are implemented	4.4 Agencies contribute to peer and sector learning in humanitarian response
1.5 Partners are consulted and their capacity is assessed, utilised and developed where appropriate	2.5 Unintended programme impacts and outcomes are identified and acted upon in a timely manner	3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	2.6 Programmes contribute to disaster risk reduction and build the resilience of communities, partners and governments		