QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY (Q&A) IN RESPONSE TO NEPAL EARTHQUAKE

In brief:
- Trainings on Sphere Standard and Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)
- Community Consultations
- Q&A Challenges
- Distribution of CHS and Sphere Handbooks and Posters
- CHS Briefing and Linking with other actors

1. Q&A Support in Nepal: Overview

Community World Service Asia provided Q&A technical assistance in Nepal in collaboration with Lutheran World Relief (LWR) who hosted a team of two from Community World Service Asia from mid-August to early September. Technical assistance in the form of training, advice, briefing and community consultations were provided to LWR and other agencies in Nepal that are playing an active role in disaster response and early recovery in Nepal. During the period of three weeks, the Q&A team outreached **four INGOs**, **twenty NGOs** with a total of **seventy one aid workers (29 women, 42 men)** in the areas of Gorkha, Chitwan and Kathmandu. The Q&A visit aimed to introduce Sphere Project & Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM) as a way to improve the quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters, and to enhance the accountability of assistance in disaster response. It is the Q&A team's humble view that this aim is achieved given the response from the agencies supported, immediate outcomes observed and the emerging needs identified in consultation with the agencies met in Nepal during this visit. This visit was made possible with the commitment and financial support of Act for Peace (AfP), Australia.

Q&A Challenges As Highlighted by Training Participants:

- Inability to meet communities' demand
- Competition amongst community to receive more aid and assistance
- Poor targeting and selection process that is pre-determined by the government authorities
- Perceived unfair and lack of transparent distribution of relief/services creating tension among community
- Lack of coordination at the grass-root level resulting in duplication; Aid is often concentrated in selected places only.
- Negative perception of communities against aid workers; that aid workers are there for their own needs i.e. visibility.
- Lack of coordination among NGOs and the Government authorities.
- Lack of timeliness in providing assistance due to lack of access
- Inadequate meaningful participation from communities; Increased dependence on NGOs and lack of ownership
- Recurring disaster increases communities' vulnerability; aid agencies stretched to provide assistance

Understanding the operating context in Nepal is key to ensure more effective promotion and application of accountability tools and mechanisms. Agencies that the team met shared numerous examples of how accountability is being promoted and more importantly accounted the real challenges to enhance accountability at various levels given the on-going challenges. The agencies also acknowledged the importance of promoting and more consciously applying accountability in their work. This update provides a snapshot of the different support rendered as well as attempts made to promote accountability tools especially the **Sphere Standards** and **Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)**. A few immediate outcomes following a brief follow up at the end of the visit is also featured in this update.

"We must make government authorities including District Disaster Relief Committee and Village Development Committees understand what accountability is all about. NGOs are accountable to government and communities; likewise government should be accountable to communities. Accountability leads to transparency and that's what we need", said Nripendra Khatri, Catholic Relief Service (CRS).

2. Introducing CHS and Minimum Standard for Age and Disability

Since core standards in the Sphere Handbook have now been formally replaced with CHS, attempts were made to introduce CHS to the participants during the trainings. An overview of CHS and the nine commitments were shared to all participants. In addition, a more in-depth session on complaints response mechanism (CRM) was added to the Sphere training module. In addition to these tools, **Minimum Standard for Age and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action** (pilot version) was also referred to and used in the training with HelpAge Nepal.

3. Training and Community Consultations for LWR

Community World Service Asia being the Sphere regional partner, has past experience working with LWR in the Philippines during the Typhoon Haiyan Response. Focus of the Q&A support was for the early recovery period, with emphasis on Shelter and Settlement, Food Security specifically cash transfer/cash for work interventions. An in-house training to introduce Sphere Standards and CHS was carried out with LWR in Chitwan. This training was participated by LWR and its partners. The attendees were quick to relate their on-going experience to the standards and identified areas where accountability is exercised effectively and areas where more emphasis would be required. community consultations carried out immediately after the training augmented the findings and observations shared during the training. LWR and its partners are committed to continue promoting Q&A.

"My project is related to WASH and the Minimum Standards for WASH are very important, for developing infrastructure of toilet. This knowledge from Minimum Standards also needs to be put in our policies/guidelines", says Ram Devkota, COPPADES.

4. 14 aid agencies exposed to Sphere Standards and CHS in Gorkha

Sphere introductory training was also provided in Gorkha which was participated by fourteen agencies, with thirty-four aid workers. There were more than forty interested candidates, however this number was reduced to thirty-four, and still a large group with a diverse background and experience in Q&A. Ninety percent of the participation was of national agencies (NGOs) that are predominantly working for the first time in humanitarian assistance of this scale. Almost 70% of the aid workers were working for the first time in the non-profit sector,

some fresh graduates. The accountability tools were totally new to most of the participants, however they recognized the importance of accountability tools to increase effectiveness of assistance. Participants were also unaware of the humanitarian architecture and the roles different stakeholders assume during humanitarian assistance. All in all, the two day training was sufficient to raise awareness on the importance of standards, the basic know how of using the standards however inadequate for some of the aid workers to immediately take some steps to change. It was noted that leadership of NGOs should be sensitized on these standards as well. Some of these aid workers are unaware of code of conduct or have not internalized the code of conduct; did not have a clear job description or contract for that matter.

At least 30% of the attending agencies were planning on shelter assistance, however project officers expected to implement the shelter project lacked the technical expertise as well as the standards that are expected of shelter assistance. The training provided some knowledge on shelter standards. Aid agencies that were implementing CRM are unaware of the full extent of CRM i.e. the need for proper response, documentation and analysis. CRM is implemented as per request of some donors.

5. Reference to Minimum Standard for Age and Disability in HELPAGE training

A two-day in-house training was conducted for HelpAge and its partners in Kathmandu. Seventy percent of the participants were new to Sphere and CHS and Minimum Standards for Age and Disability inclusion in humanitarian assistance (MSAD). Since shelter and health were the up-coming interventions, focus on the training was on these. The pilot version of MSAD (soft copy) was made available during the training.

The Q&A team was referring to the MSAD for the first time and found the Handbook highly relevant and appropriate to prioritize the needs of older people (OP) and People with Disabilities (PWDs). Although OP and PWDs are mentioned as cross cutting themes in the Sphere Standard, a stand alone Handbook specific to the needs of this vulnerable groups certainly provides clear steps and guidance for a more conscious effort to consistently take OP and PWD needs into consideration when providing humanitarian assistance.

6. Distribution of Q&A Material

Participants of the orientations and contacts with other agencies were provided with one copy of the Sphere Handbook and one copy of the CHS and CHS posters. Additional copies were also provided to agencies upon request. During the reporting period, 150 Sphere Handbooks, 150 CHS and 150 posters (on CRM, CHS, Q&A Initiatives) were distributed to agencies.

7. Linking with CHS Member in Nepal

There is only one (local agency) CHS member in Nepal, namely National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET). The Q&A team carried out a briefing session for some of NSET's management and programme team, in which an update on CHS process and progress was shared. NSET was an associate member of Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (now replaced with CHS) and is exploring a more pro-active application

of CHS given its role in responding to the Nepal Earthquake. A couple of options as way forward were discussed, and this is expected to be finalized in the coming weeks.

8. Linking with Other Actors
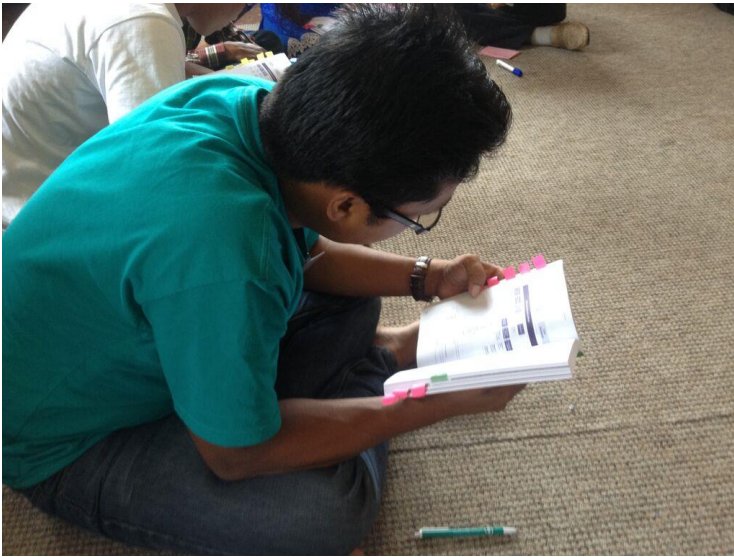
UNOCHA: Prior to the visit, link was made with UNOCHA, specifically with the Communicating with Communities (CWC) and Open Mic Nepal initiatives. The Q&A team is part of the group email of these initiatives. Updates and information through these initiatives informed the Q&A training sessions and these initiatives were shared with the participants. Majority of the participants, particularly from the NGOs were unaware of these important initiatives. The Q&A team sees opportunity to promote these initiatives in the trainings and through the training participants and this was agreed as an action point between the Q&A team and UNOCHA Officer when they met during the visit. It was also agreed that the Open Mic Nepal initiative would add value to the learning of Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG) in Pakistan. The process and modalities of Open Mic will be shared by UNOCHA for this purpose. Continuous collaboration is expected if Community World Service Asia continues the support to Nepal.

Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG) Pakistan: Some of the ALWG members in Pakistan are also involved in the Nepal Earthquake Response. One of the members in HelpAge Pakistan linked the Q&A team with HELPAGE Nepal, in an effort to actively promote the use of standards. Community World Service Asia will share its learning and challenges with ALWG Pakistan. For example, the OpenMic initiative is something new and could be of use in Pakistan.

Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN): Community World Service Asia is full member of ADRRN and through ADRRN a link was made with NSET, which is a member of CHS. ADRRN also linked the Q&A team with Communicating with Communities (CwC) and OpenMic initiatives, implemented under UNOCHA.

DPNet: Contact was also made with Sphere Focal Point in Nepal, namely DpNet. Cross sharing is contributing to cross learning.

Disaster Resource Center (DRC): Being a Nepal-based local agency, DRC was instrumental in providing administrative support to promote Q&A in Gorkha.

9. Immediate Outcomes

Follow up after one week of the trainings suggests that a few participants have briefed their management on the Q&A tools. CRS for example has raised the importance of training the masons on protection principles, standards and DRR principles to ensure high quality assistance consistent throughout the shelter project. CRS Nepal is planning on organizing an in-house training to further augment and formalize its accountability mechanisms. HelpAge management will follow up on the action points developed by its staff and partners, where relevant. At least one agency is revising its CRM policy. For example, COPPADES in Chitwan is in the process of forming a CRM committee to address the complaints received and CRM policy revisions/development will be carried out in consultation with senior management.

10. Emerging needs and conclusions

Agencies are planning for long-term interventions, therefore accountability should also be planned in long term perspectives. Having a pool of Nepal-based trainers to be champions of Q&A would most likely serve this need. At least two agencies have indicated interest for in-house tailor-made Q&A support. Continuous Q&A sensitization programmes for NGOs through trainings, community consultations, project visits, may be planned along with sensitization of government authorities on accountability tools.

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