



GUIDANCE NOTE

## Putting People First: Accountability to Affected Populations in Private Sector Disaster Management

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, businesses of all sizes have increasingly contributed to the humanitarian response to disasters. This is a welcome trend, because as humanitarian emergencies have grown more frequent and complex, it has become clear that helping people in need of urgent assistance requires everyone's support – governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. However, when businesses provide assistance to those in need, they must comply with the international standards and principles that govern humanitarian assistance. One of the key concepts that all providers of aid must be familiar with is “accountability to affected people/populations”, or AAP.

**The basic concept of AAP is that people who receive humanitarian assistance should have the right to say what they need, receive information on what is being provided, and have an opportunity to assess and provide feedback about the assistance they receive.**

For the private sector, AAP should come naturally: getting feedback from customers and ensuring that they are happy is a fundamental part of operating a successful business. But in the context of a humanitarian emergency, AAP goes beyond client satisfaction. The power dynamics between those who provide aid and those who receive it are often unbalanced, hampering trust and collaboration. AAP is designed to address that imbalance and, in doing so, make humanitarian response more effective and efficient.

This Guidance Note is intended to give clear and accessible information to businesses and business networks about how they can best ensure that the assistance they provide is relevant, inclusive and accessible to those who are most in need.

## WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE?

Most businesses are accustomed to making customer’s satisfaction a priority. Clients decide where and how to spend their money, can ask for a refund if they are unhappy with what they have received, and often share public reviews of the businesses they frequent. Those who are affected by an emergency, however, often have no choice when it comes to the type or quality of assistance being provided.

AAP is defined as the active commitment of organizations that provide humanitarian assistance to **recognize power imbalances** and to use their power responsibly by **taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people that these organizations are seeking to assist.**



- **Taking account** means giving affected people meaningful influence over decisions that account for their needs and views.
- **Giving account** means sharing information in an effective and transparent manner.
- **Being held to account** means ensuring communities have the opportunity to assess and, where feasible, alter or approve of humanitarian actors’ actions.

## INTEGRATING AAP IN PRIVATE SECTOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT

This section provides concrete steps that businesses can take to include AAP into their disaster preparedness and response activities.

Note: These recommendations are in line with the [Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#), a coordinated series of actions that help organizations prepare for, manage, and deliver humanitarian response.

Note: This content has been adapted from the [IASC Operational Framework](#) and the [IASC Suggested Actions to Strengthen Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection](#).

### BEFORE DISASTERS: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST WHEN ASSESSING RISK

Identifying risks helps businesses understand how their employees, their suppliers, and the wider community they operate in are affected by emergencies.

- **Try to include the wider community in which your company operates.** When conducting risk assessments, include an analysis of the difference in risks faced by your employees and their families, your customers, and the larger community in which the company operates. Such risk assessments should include exposure to natural and technological hazards, disease outbreaks, conflict and violence.
- **Ensure that sex, age and disability disaggregated data is collected, analysed and used** when designing disaster risk management and humanitarian activities. In other words, when collecting data on risks, ensure that you have separated data between categories (women/men, youth/elderly, etc.), so that the specific needs of women and girls, youth, people living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups can be taken into account.



Transect walk led by mothers in the community to show the extent of damage and recount the events of Typhoon Rai in the Philippines. Photo: PDRF.

### BEFORE DISASTERS: SHARE INFORMATION ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES

Businesses do not operate in isolation. Sharing information with community partners as well as government and humanitarian organizations will help businesses reach the most affected people in a more effective and efficient manner.

- **Build a directory of community focal points, including women.** This can include employees, contacts from regular service providers or suppliers, or volunteers. Maintain regular and active participation of community leaders in relevant emergency preparedness activities and in developing disaster risk management programmes and activities. This will ensure an efficient line of communication with communities and a way for them to channel their feedback on the activities conducted.
- **Include a strategy for “last mile” messaging during emergencies in your crisis communication plans.** Think about how your messages will reach communities who might not have access to mobile phones or the internet, using local leaders, radio or other available means of communication.
- **Ensure that appropriate communication channels for affected people are in place in your crisis communication strategies.**
  - Prioritize information provision for at-risk populations.
  - Think about how to deliver timely and accurate information for affected people.
  - Develop key messages in collaboration with local authorities.
  - Adapt your messages and communication channels to the different sectors of the community. For example, you may reach elderly women through a group discussion with a local leader, while targeting young people through local radio or social media.
- **Identify ways to involve community focal points in regular company exercises and scenario planning.** You can appoint “protection focal points” who will coordinate with community stakeholders and solicit feedback on how to improve exercises and scenario planning.

## BEFORE DISASTERS: PARTICIPATE IN CONTINGENCY PLANNING

By including community partners, government representatives and humanitarian organizations in contingency planning activities, businesses will be able to better articulate what their response objectives are and how will they work with different actors during emergencies.

- As part of your emergency preparedness and contingency planning activities with government and humanitarian partners, **agree on what you mean by affected people and communities.** Understanding who they are, where they are located, how many people need to be taken in consideration, and their specific cultural, religious, or political backgrounds will help you better collaborate with other humanitarian actors and respond to their needs. This will also help clarify the scope or focus of your enterprise’s emergency response activities.

- **Include external coordination with community focal points in business continuity and crisis management plans.** Designate community focal points and include them in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of corporate emergency preparedness and business continuity plans.
- **Share information about common cultural practices or preferences,** identified through your consultations with affected people, or through purchasing patterns, which would inform relevant and effective response activities.

## DURING AN EMERGENCY: ASSESS AND ANALYZE NEEDS

Assessing and analysing the needs of affected people is an important step in determining how businesses can plan their response activities.

- **Ensure that community focal points and other community partner organizations are involved** and regularly consulted in the needs assessment.
- Include questions that **identify information needs, existing local capacities, preferred solutions to needs, and preferred ways to provide feedback/complaints.** For more

### Community-led response and recovery from Typhoon Rai in the Philippines

Typhoon Rai, locally known as Super Typhoon Odette, was a catastrophic typhoon that devastated coastal communities across 11 out of 17 regions in the Philippines. The [Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation](#) (PDRF), a CBI Member Network, worked closely with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council and the UN Philippine Humanitarian Country Team to coordinate support from the local business community.

PDRF conducted consultations and transect walks – systematic walks along defined paths (transects) across the community together with local people to observe local conditions and produce collaborative action plans and program designs.

In partnership with local mothers or “*nanays*”, PDRF produced transect diagrams and gathered information on priority needs, including social protection concerns and mental health and psycho-social support in the provinces of Bohol, Cebu, Surigao del Norte, and Dinagat Islands. The consultations were included in the needs assessment and analysis and were core to the development of the PDRF Odette recovery plan and activities. Almost a year after Odette, PDRF went back to the affected communities to help them work on their business continuity plans.

**STORIES**  
FROM THE GROUND

**FOX HOLES**



**NANAY CERIL**

- 9 children
- Farmer, livestock, and poultry
- Earns 3-4 thousand pesos per month
- Lost all of their livestock and poultry
- Relies on the remaining vegetables they were able to save during the typhoon
- Needs more plants and replacement of chickens

**"ADORELYN WENT HOME"**



**TATAY ARNEL**

- 45 years old
- Fisherman and part time farmer
- Earns 200-400 pesos per day
- Food insecurity during the first week
- Only the machine of the pump boat was lost. He left the boat near the coastline (1 km away) and found it intact in front of his house the next day
- Needs a replacement for the machine and repair damages of the boat

Community profiles presented during the Odette operational briefing conducted by PDRF for the private sector and humanitarian partners. Photo: PDRF.

**“We truly appreciate [PDRF’s] efforts of reaching out to us especially in the time that we need it the most.”**  
**– Riza D. Maglahus, small business owner in Bohol, speaking to PDRF after Typhoon Rai**

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on this topic, refer to the [IASC Menu of AAP-related Questions for Multi-Sector Needs Assessment](#).

- **Try to validate the results of needs assessments with community focal points.** Design and implement feedback and complaint mechanisms in consultation with local communities and inform all stakeholders how they function.
- **When possible, participate in inter-agency assessments.** In countries where there is a [United Nations Humanitarian Country Team](#), consider having company focal points join collaborative assessments instead of designing new assessments on your own.

## DURING AN EMERGENCY: PLAN THE RESPONSE

Once the needs of affected people have been assessed and analysed, businesses can start to develop their response plans as well as identify their objectives and activities.

- **Include inputs from local partners** when designing complaint and response mechanisms. Be sure to consider issues related to confidentiality and protection of the personal information of beneficiaries.
- **Ensure that feedback and complaint mechanisms include** the evaluation of:
  - Quality and relevance of programmes.
  - Targeting of assistance.
  - Handling of complaints such as fraud, corruption and sexual exploitation and abuse.
- **Harmonize and agree on messages** to communicate with affected people and communities about:

### Community voices at the heart of emergency response: Learning from the Central Sulawesi Earthquake response in Indonesia

One month into the response to Central Sulawesi earthquake in 2018, the Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UNICEF and OCHA, published *Suara Komunitas* (Community Voices) which was a monthly bulletin that offered a two-way communication system for community feedback collection and presentation to help humanitarian responders adapt their programming based on the insights provided by the communities.



Cover page of the *Suara Komunitas* Community Voices Bulletin Edition No. 3, March 2019. Source: Reliefweb.

- The conduct to be expected of private sector representatives or focal points who work with the community.
  - The rights of affected people.
  - The means to provide feedback and complaints.
- As part of the organization’s crisis communication strategies, **design a coordinated communications plan** for disseminating messages on what has been delivered (in terms of assistance) and what lies ahead. Include information on **how complaints and feedback have been taken into account.**
  - **Share findings of assessments** with affected communities, local authorities and with humanitarian partners.

## DURING AN EMERGENCY: MOBILIZE RESOURCES

Resource mobilization ensures that response activities are supported by adequate resources, both in-kind and financial, whether obtained through internal corporate resources or through external support from other organizations.

- Where relevant, **form a distribution committee and/or consultative group** that includes local female and male community representatives.

### Supporting local businesses through feedback mechanisms: Lessons from Vanuatu

In April 2020, Vanuatu became the first country in the world to experience a major cyclone during the peak of COVID-19 lockdowns. Cyclone Harold, caused widespread destruction in several populated islands.

The Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC), CBI Member Network in the country, immediately mobilized the local private sector to provide relief to the worst-hit villages.

As part of their early recovery efforts, VBRC and Oxfam piloted a digital cash transfer system using e-voucher payments and mobile phone technology that allow families to choose and easily pay for the goods and services they need. A key element of this recovery program is supporting existing networks of local vendors; therefore, strengthening the local supply chains throughout the recovery phase.

VBRC trained and supported 345 local vendors across three provinces and provided regular face-to-face support for the vendors who are enrolled in the program. A vendor support representative was present in the main shopping areas to help with questions during the mobile app training for the vendors. After the roll-out, VBRC re-engaged with all of the vendors and gathered feedback on the program.



Project recipients shopping with their UnBlocked Cash voucher cards at Au Bon Mache in Freshwota. Photo: VBRC.

**“90% of the vendors reported that the program benefited their business.”**  
**– Glen Craig, Chairperson of VBRC**

- **Inform local partners in advance** about the date and location of distribution / service provision following guidelines for safe and secure distributions.

## DURING AN EMERGENCY: IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

In this phase, response activities are ongoing and are being monitored to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency.

- **Invite local community representatives**, including women and men to take part in monitoring and evaluation processes.
- **Share and discuss findings and results of evaluations** with community focal points.
- **Adjust design of interventions** according to community feedback.
- Ensure **lessons learned on accountability and protection** are documented and taken into account for future planning purposes.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

This Guidance Note was developed by the Connecting Business initiative (CBI), a joint project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dedicated to strategic engagement between the UN and the private sector before, during, and after emergencies. To learn more about CBI, or if you have any questions or suggestions on how to integrate AAP in your company's disaster management activities, please contact us at [connectingbusiness@un.org](mailto:connectingbusiness@un.org).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The development of this Guidance Note was led by Rhiza Nery, CBI's Local Network Coordination Specialist, with assistance from Rachel Maher, AAP Focal Point at OCHA and support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

Last updated 6 September 2022



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### Additional Resources on Accountability to Affected People

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a permanent body that represents the most important humanitarian organizations within and outside of the United Nations, first outlined this approach in 2011. In 2017, the IASC revised and expanded its guidelines on AAP with the publication of the [IASC Revised Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#). On 14 April 2022, the IASC released a [statement affirming commitments](#) to ensure that AAP is central to principled humanitarian action.
- The [IASC Accountability and Inclusion Resources Portal](#) is a go-to hub for tools, guidance, policy, standards, and advice on how to ensure humanitarian response is accountable and inclusive.
- The [IASC Menu of AAP-related Questions for Multi-Sector Needs Assessment](#) offers options which organisations can choose from and adapt for their activities before and during humanitarian responses.
- Watch this short video from OCHA on [The Importance of Community Engagement During a Crisis](#).
- [The Core Humanitarian Standards](#) set out commitments that organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide.