



Review of the Humanitarian Response in Nepal A Focus on Inclusion and Accountability

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Glossary

CDRC	Central Disaster Relief Committee
CFP	Community Feedback Project
CFW	Cash For Work
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
DAO	District Administrative Office
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee (UK)
DLSA	District Lead Support Agency
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HC	Humanitarian Coalition
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INCRISD	Inclusive Community Resilience for Sustainable Disaster Risk Management
NFI	Non Food Items
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizens' Forum

Foreword by the Humanitarian Coalition

The Humanitarian Coalition consists of five Canadian non-governmental agencies (CARE Canada, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam-Québec, Plan International Canada and Save the Children Canada) with decades of experience in humanitarian assistance, aid and development. In times of major humanitarian crisis, the Humanitarian Coalition and its members undertake joint emergency appeals and action. Together, \$7.4 million CAD funds were raised in Canada to address the most pressing needs following the two major earthquakes of April 25, 2015 and May 12, 2015 and the more than 300 subsequent aftershocks.

The Humanitarian Coalition, led by external consultant Silva Ferretti, conducted an in-field final review of its members' projects from February 17 to 26, 2016. Such reviews are a key activity undertaken as part of the Humanitarian Coalition's members' commitment to program quality and accountability. These reviews, often focused on an agreed theme, are also motivated by peer learning opportunities and the drive to do better. This review focuses on "inclusion and accountability". The intention is for recommendations from the review to inform the upcoming recovery phase and preparedness for future similar emergencies.

The Humanitarian Coalition members' programs in Nepal responded to needs of the local communities and the review team found that overall people were satisfied with the assistance received. This was achieved despite the many operational challenges INGOs had to work through, such as remoteness of affected villages, landslide-prone communities during the monsoon season, the constraints imposed by the government in coordinating relief assistance, existing political instability and an ongoing fuel crisis.

Field visits took place in two of the most affected districts: **Sindhupalchowk** and **Dhading**. The objective was not to produce a commentary on the overall international relief effort nor was it a comprehensive analysis of members' overall response. It was rather a timely snapshot of the efforts and behaviors of Humanitarian Coalition members. The projects visited were selected by field staff, with the main criteria being relevance in terms of inclusion and accountability. The team spent one day and a half with each member agency and visited the following projects:

Plan International's shelter project (May 29, 2015-April 30, 2016), Badegaun Village Development Committee (VDC), Sindhupalchowk.

With Humanitarian Coalition funds, Plan International distributed shelter kits, delivered technical expertise and training to affected households, as well as provided earthquake safety construction skill training for masons, construction technicians and the community as a whole.

Save the Children's livelihood support project (rice seed distribution), Thulosirubari VDC and Chautara, Sindhupalchowk.

With Humanitarian Coalition funds, Save the Children distributed rice seeds from May 1, 2015, to July 15, 2016, and storage bins to farmers from September 21, 2015, to February 11, 2016.

Oxfam's food security and livelihood stabilization project, (April 25, 2015- April 24 2016), Dhussa (Ward 1), Dhading.

With Humanitarian Coalition funds, Oxfam has been facilitating cash-for-work activities for community rehabilitation and will be supporting small trader support for local market revival.

CARE's Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention project (April 25, 2015-December 25, 2015), Mubari VDC, Dhading.

With Humanitarian Coalition funds, CARE conducted awareness-raising activities in communities (16 days of activism campaign against gender-based violence organized in coordination with the Government of Nepal Women and Children office). CARE also conducted rapid gender and protection assessments in the first three weeks of response and trained information volunteers on GBV and protection.

It should be noted that some Humanitarian Coalition funded activities (water & sanitation and shelter activities) were not visited due to logistical constraints and the desire to prioritize the review's scope.

The review confirmed the importance of looking at accountability and inclusion as core elements of program quality in line with the Core Humanitarian Standards. It also highlighted a number of recommendations that could help to strengthen the next phase of response in Nepal, as well as learning for future emergencies, relevant for the Humanitarian Coalition and its members, but also for other INGOs.

Executive Summary

This review looks at diverse projects funded by the Humanitarian Coalition and carried out by Humanitarian Coalition member organizations—CARE Canada, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, Plan International Canada, and Save the Children Canada—in response to the April 25 and May 12 earthquakes in Nepal. The goal is to acknowledge successes and derive lessons on accountability and inclusion to inform the next phase of the response in Nepal, as well as future responses elsewhere.

Examining accountability and inclusion requires looking at the process of a response, in a complex context, with a focus on the perspectives of primary stakeholders. The review employed a qualitative methodology based on active listening and deep conversations on the ground. In the spirit of accountability and inclusion, the voices of stakeholders are presented directly through segments of captured video. Learning and two-way communication were emphasized through online mapping, blogging and Twitter.

Accountability and inclusion were analyzed through two complementary lenses:

Frameworks spelling out dimensions of accountability and inclusion.

These dimensions are interconnected, but independent. Breaking down accountability and inclusion helps identify diverse entry points and strategies.

The Core Humanitarian Standard¹

To what extent do accountability and inclusion enhance or hinder achievement of the standards? And to what extent do limitations in achieving the standards affect inclusion and accountability?

The **frameworks** are aspirational, recognizing that achieving inclusion and accountability is a never-ending challenge, affected by the local context and dynamics. On one hand, disaster can transform local dynamics and open new spaces for inclusion and accountability—for example, through the involvement of women or youth, as was observed in some projects. However, integrating accountability and inclusion in the response can also be limited by contextual challenges, such as logistics, geography and government demands. As such, achievements on accountability and inclusion must be viewed in the context of this “tug of war”.

ACCOUNTABILITY

When examining who was involved in making and checking on promises and decisions, difficulties were observed in engaging people outside of local leadership circles due to the politicized environment. Accountability relies on clarity of promises and transparent communication. Those interviewed indicated they knew what assistance would be received but not in detail (e.g. the criteria for allocation was not always shared). Information was communicated through radio and mass media, but this did not always reach all stakeholders. Deeper analysis of local communication ecosystems and

attitudes towards information sharing is needed. Village-level outlets to transparently share information on assistance (about local activities, within and across villages) could be set up. Humanitarian Coalition organizations are already participating in inter-agency initiatives (e.g. Community Feedback Project) to improve communication and accountability. This has involved participation in community social audits involving humanitarian actors and the local government, and should continue.

INCLUSION

Inclusion requires recognizing diversity, risk and circumstances. The response has largely worked “by the checklist”, addressing the specific needs of certain categories (e.g. women, lactating mothers, or people with disabilities) with some contextual considerations (e.g. castes). However, organizations and their partner organizations have the experience and expertise to go beyond these categories to identify further factors for exclusion in a given context and recognize differences within given categories as vulnerability comes from the interrelation of different characteristics. This could be supported by stronger disaggregated data collection linked to participatory vulnerability assessments. The extent to which approaches could be tailored to diverse needs was limited by the government’s insistence on a blanket approach. The tension between “equity” and “equality” had a big impact on the response, and has been challenging to address. Organizations are increasingly sensitized and are moving to more strongly emphasize equity. Some organizations managed to act on existing barriers, for example enabling women to attend masonry courses, or allowing children to engage in reporting. Such initiatives should be expanded on.

¹ <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

This dimension spans both accountability and inclusion. It was found that people were informed about assistance rather than consulted (for example on their preferences for deliverables). As the response progressed, some organizations opened more space for active involvement in decision making (e.g. identification of projects for cash for work; adapting programs based on community feedback). More can be done to utilize organizations' experience and methodologies to further support consultation and participation in decision making in Nepal.

When looking at accountability through the **Core Humanitarian Standard**, the review highlighted some areas to be further explored:

- Invest in data collection, moving from data verification towards the generation of disaggregated datasets – through participatory analysis based on a contextual analysis, and building on new technologies for data collection. [standard 1]
- Address accountability and inclusion early in the response to maximize the opportunities for change created by a disaster. This was hard to achieve in Nepal due to contextual challenges such as the emphasis on a blanket approach, and the time required to train new staff. [standard 2]
- Interventions shouldn't negatively affect inclusion and accountability [standard 3]:
 - "Do no harm" (e.g. raise awareness of groups left behind);
 - Reduce risk and mainstream Disaster Risk Reduction (e.g. preventing livelihood activities on hazardous terrain);
 - Evidence-building and preventive protection activities (e.g. addressing gender-based violence or child exploitation more systematically);
 - Trigger sustainability (e.g. identify early response activities with potential for supporting reconstruction).
- Strengthen awareness of the right to assistance (awareness was not high, particularly in remote areas), and sensitize staff and government to the concept of equity. Improving participation in decision making requires overcoming cultural barriers. A strong investment in communication is needed, particularly to counter rumors about the reconstruction process. [standard 4]
- Strengthen existing feedback mechanisms. A minority of people interviewed was aware of their existence and used them. Conventional hotlines and complaint boxes are not enough. These mechanisms are less effective in addressing group-scale issues, and are less relevant in a society that prefers face-to-face interaction. [standard 5]
- Continue to collaborate. Co-ordination should not be limited to logistics, but should also incorporate accountability and inclusion. [standard 6]
- Invest in learning, particularly for field staff. The field visits observed that people on the ground are very motivated to learn and improve. After action reviews, peer reviews and exchanges should be encouraged. [standard 7]
- Continue to invest in staff. Developing support for learning about accountability, protection and inclusion on the job would be an asset as the expertise in the field is not always available in the aftermath of a disaster. [standard 8]
- Ensure that people affected by a disaster are aware of the resources invested in the response (e.g. budget sharing). [standard 9]

Key recommendations

1. **If lessons are not heard, repeating is not enough.** Accountability and inclusion, even if aspirational, require investment in preparedness and strong internal advocacy and communication
2. **Gender, age, ability, income are characteristics, not vulnerabilities.** Vulnerabilities would be better determined by using multi-variable/contextualized indexes. Stigmatizing should be avoided.
3. **Beware of shortcuts.** Labour is not participation. Targeting is not inclusion. Feedback is not accountability.
4. **Communication is at the intersection of inclusion and accountability.** Need to invest more in new media and increase knowledge of the local communication ecosystems.
5. **Unleash the power of data.** This requires improving data quality through better disaggregation and investment in open data.
6. **Conflict sensitivity: the elephant in the room.** Recognize that tensions exist in Nepal and are not openly dealt with. Conflict sensitivity should be strengthened
7. **Preparedness matters: building on achievements so far.** Organizations should share their achievements on accountability and inclusion (e.g. relations with the government). The importance of sensitizing surge teams to local dynamics was highlighted.
8. **Working together can make a difference.** Many opportunities for collaboration between organizations are still untapped. For example, a forum of like-minded organizations could have a role in promoting issues of accountability and advocacy.

Introduction

A team comprising an external consultant (Silva Ferretti, team leader), a representative of the Humanitarian Coalition (Marine de Clarens) and two representatives of member organizations (Brooke Gibbons from CARE Canada and Urmila Simkhada from CARE Nepal) conducted the review. The fieldwork took place in February 2016, in the districts of Sindhupalchowk and Dhading.

This review studies diverse projects funded by the Humanitarian Coalition and carried out by Humanitarian Coalition member organizations—CARE Canada, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, Plan International Canada, and Save the Children Canada—in response to the April 25 and May 12 earthquakes in Nepal. The goal is to acknowledge successes and derive lessons on accountability and inclusion to inform the next phase of the response in Nepal, as well as future responses elsewhere.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

There are complementary resources.

The report is one of many components of the review, including a blog and a video library. The [review site](#) is the main portal. It also contains the [review field map](#), the [full transcripts of the field notes](#), and the [video footage collected](#). These are all shared online for accountability purposes and to stimulate further insights.

How videos are used in the report.

Relevant video segments from interviews are featured within the report, accompanied by a short summary. Other videos are hyperlinked throughout the text. All hyperlinked text is underlined. As with footnotes, watching them is not essen-

tial to understanding the review, but they help place the evidence in context. The points made in these videos apply broadly. Unless otherwise noted, videos should be seen as examples that are relevant beyond the individual organization featured.

Eight recommendations, but many practical highlights.

The report offers eight main recommendations, but also many other practical learnings and suggestions. These are captured within each chapter, highlighted in boxes.

THE APPROACH

The approach for this review was based on eight key principles:



Appreciative

Highlight achievements
Embrace challenges



Complexity oriented

Look at the "how"
(not only at the "what")



Listening

In-depth conversations
Genuine curiosity



Deep

Deep (thick data)
Rather than broad



Learning

Capture innovation
Rethink approaches



Voices

Amplifying the voices
of key stakeholders



Communication

Diverse audiences
Diverse media



Forward looking

Where can we go
from here?

The [detailed methodology](#) and the rationale behind it may be found on the review website.

In short, the review was based on open and deep conversations. They started from very broad questions (e.g. "What difference had the intervention made for you?") and then explored through extensive dialogue and active listening how change had taken place. The focus was on the process of change, not just results. The goal was to explore how results were achieved in practice, allowing an exploration of local dynamics, successes and challenges.

An emphasis on learning and looking forward generated stimulating discussions with staff and communities on how the challenges of the earthquake response in Nepal could have been better tackled, and how learning could inform future responses. Testimony was captured on video so the findings could be presented through the voices of the people interviewed.

Preliminary findings were presented in Katmandu, where additional validation and comments were received from participants. This also served to strengthen accountability to staff and beneficiaries.

This approach was effective in sparking interest and engagement among those involved. Staff were extremely open to listening and learning. The importance of healthy and open discussions should not be taken for granted in a review.

This [depth of enquiry was appreciated by participating staff](#).

Our analysis:

Gauged inclusion and accountability in context, through frameworks that explored their different dimensions.

Contextual factors supporting or hindering these were considered. Learning and action points are highlighted. The inclusion framework is adapted from the [INCRISD study](#).

Looked at inclusion and accountability through the lenses of the [Core Humanitarian Standards](#). Practical and actionable points are emphasized.

This report consolidates the main findings of the review activities and offers eight recommendations based on those findings.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE RESPONSE

It is important to note the immense scale of the response and the diverse and challenging geography of Nepal. Given those factors, with the time available, this review focused on putting together a snapshot of activities based on visits to accessible locations in two districts. Additional information on contextual challenges and achievements was gained through the literature review and in the inception workshop.

It is also important to note that:

- The priority for this review is achieving depth of knowledge through longer, in-depth interviews with informants and groups, rather than a larger number of brief interviews. Each informant or group was engaged for roughly two hours in order to capture greater detail regarding processes and local dynamics. To limit potential gaps in coverage, staff was given the opportunity to ex-

pand on issues through questions such as: what lessons we might have missed? and how does this compare with other locations?

- The members of the Humanitarian Coalition are engaged in extensive response strategies beyond the projects covered in this review. This report seeks to put interventions in context and gain an idea of the overall intervention strategy.
- The priority was in-depth engagement with affected communities. Input and perspectives from external stakeholders were gained through the literature review and documents available on humanitarian response sites (e.g. on the cluster sites).
- This review focuses on how interventions performed from the perspective of affected communities, rather than on organizational structures and mechanisms.

LEARNING FROM THE APPROACH

The approach taken in this review itself provided some valuable learnings:

- Staff have a genuine interest in opportunities for reflection and after-action review. The learning approach of this review was appreciated for offering such an opportunity. Staff were able to [take immediate corrective action on some of the issues that emerged](#).
- Conducting a review jointly with multiple organizations provides an excellent opportunity to share and cross fertilize practices. CARE and Oxfam coordinated the review visits in Dhading. An inter-organization exchange was initiated for their staff serving as translators. The participants appreciated the initiative: [they learned from exposure](#) and had an opportunity to meet – for the first time – their counterparts. Future reviews could continue to foster sharing and collaboration.
- The use of Twitter, websites and videos helped to raise the interest both of staff participating in the review and stakeholders in Canada. This created a channel for feedback, which strengthened the research and accountability.

Inclusion, accountability: where are we at?

The focus of this review was on inclusion and accountability. The Disasters Emergency Committee/Humanitarian Coalition mid-term review recognized that inclusion (in particular, gender issues) and accountability were an area of concern. A literature review confirmed these concerns. It also revealed how they are rooted in deep cultural practices and in the local modalities of governance.

Gender and accountability (from the HC/DEC Nepal Earthquake Appeal Response Review)

“Early reports of communities’ feedback on the relief effort has been critical. In one survey, over half of respondents said they felt they were not being heard at all, and nearly two thirds said they were seeing no progress in the relief effort. Nearly three quarters (73%) of women said their needs were being met hardly, or not at all. Gender is an issue upon which agencies need to focus more; so is reaching the most marginalized, especially Dalit communities and others considered to be on the fringes of society.”



This review confirmed that inclusion and accountability can be further improved, but that:

- They need to be appreciated in a context where exclusion and lack of accountability are pre-existing, and where humanitarian organizations had limited room to maneuver. They might therefore be hard to contrast at the peak of an emergency.
- Organizations are tackling these issues with diverse tools and approaches. The review observed further room to adapt and improve them, but the commitment to do so is there. The very existence of reliable and up-to-date information on the overall satisfaction of beneficiaries is a new feature of humanitarian response that should be acknowledged. The data reported in the mid-term review was taken from the Community Feedback Project—an innovative initiative for tracking the overall satisfaction of affected communities with humanitarian assistance—that Humanitarian Coalition organizations support and use.

HOW DID WE GAUGE "INCLUSION" AND "ACCOUNTABILITY"?

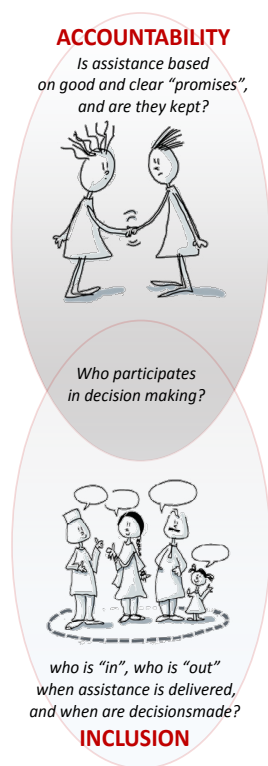
This review looked at inclusion and accountability as separate endeavors linked by a common aspiration: to ensure that affected people (and in particular the most marginalized) are active actors in the response who have a role in decision making on issues affecting their communities. This is in line with the aspirations of the [Core Humanitarian Standard](#).

- For both inclusion and accountability, four dimensions have been identified (as highlighted in the diagram below). One dimension is common to both inclusion and accountability: participation in decision making. Achievements have been assessed along a qualitative scale.
- The scale is an aspirational one: what matters is not to achieve the highest level for all interventions. This might not be possible or advisable in a given context or stage of response. What matters is that there is a good enough fit between the pull factors (operational and contextual challenges) and the push ones (the

humanitarian drive to ensure full dignity for people). For example, in the very early stages of an emergency, challenging social norms might not be achievable. But opportunities to do so might present themselves as the response progresses.

- The dimensions are interdependent, but may be achieved at different levels. High achievements on one dimension (e.g. use of many outlets for transparency) might correspond to low achievements in another (e.g. inclusion of people in decision making). Another example: strong processes for involvement in decision making might only apply to few stakeholders (e.g. local leadership). There are different leverages and strategies available to promote inclusion and accountability.

Note: The scoring below is a broad generalization based on diverse practices. Differences across projects and villages naturally exist, and will be emphasized in the narrative.



Dimension	From low... to very high	
Dimensions of accountability	Who shakes hands? Who is involved in making and checking a promise?	There is "no hand-shake". Assistance is a unilateral decision	Non-representative leaders	Representative leaders (including of the marginalized people)	Everyone – including the most marginalized – could have a say
	Is the promise clear? Is the content of the "promise" clearly spelled out and properly detailed?	The promise is unclear	The core content is clear, but little details are given	The promise is SMART (indicators, budgets, criteria...)	The promise is detailed, including arbitration processes.
	How is it communicated? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the content of the promise and information on the achievement is clearly shared?	There is no active sharing	Some information is provided	Reliable mechanisms for transparency exists (e.g. boards, platforms with up-to-date information)	Multiple, accessible channels exist, to cater for diverse audiences (e.g. non literate...)
Dimensions of Inclusion	Participation in decision making To what extent people have a say and/or are properly represented when decisions affecting them are taken?	People are informed of actions planned Data is extracted from them	People are meaningfully consulted on pre-defined options / with conventional mechanism (e.g. assembly)	People define what options and strategies will best suit them, through well designed participatory initiatives	Local initiatives are fostered and supported through dialogue
	Is diversity recognized? Does assistance recognize that people have different characteristics, capacities, needs, which interplay differently in diverse circumstances?	Assistance is based on pre-determined categories	Pre-determined categories are expanded / adapted to the context	Recognition that exclusion stems from interplay of different categories / role of power is acknowledged	Even hidden, taboo characteristics are taken into account
	Are approaches tailored? To what extent assistance responds to diversity context specific?	Assistance is pre-determined	Assistance is standardized, based on local assessment	Assistance is adapted to the specific capacities / needs encountered locally	Assistance is fine-tuned, up to the individual level.
	Are barriers removed? To what extent does assistance ensure that the barriers preventing people from being included as active actors are recognized and removed?	Barriers are not identified / removed	Main barriers (physical) are identified and tackled	Social barriers are recognized and tackled	Assistance is interlinked to long term support to power / equality.
Dimension	From low... to very high	

INCLUSION, ACCOUNTABILITY: “GOOD ENOUGH?” A TUG OF WAR

Assessing if accountability and inclusion are “good enough” requires understanding the context of the pull and push factors at play. One must also consider at what phase of the response the intervention took place. The demands of the immediate response phase limit what can be achieved. Opportunities to deepen accountability and inclusion, for example by increasing involvement in decision making, increase with time. Several factors were identified in Nepal that challenged the capability of organizations to achieve higher levels of accountability and inclusion. They are highlighted below. As a result, even low achievements on accountability were in some cases all that could be accomplished realistically in a given situation, especially at the onset.

Contextual challenges to accountability and inclusion:

- **The sheer scale of the response**, which was unprecedented in Nepal.
- **Logistical challenges**, and the need to reach locations in very remote and isolated areas of the country, often lacking transport and roads.
- **Terrain (landslides) and climate (monsoons from June to October; winter)** badly affected the response. Some VDCs were cut off and inaccessible.
- **Political instability and the fuel crisis**. The promulgation of a new Nepalese constitution on September 20, 2015 was followed by strikes and demonstrations, which heightened tensions between the government and ethnic groups in southern Nepal. Essential goods and fuel were blockaded at the Nepal-India border. Humanitarian agencies, along with the rest of the country, grappled with limited resources trickling into the country through a few entry points. Vendors struggled to meet contractual obligations; transportation and distribution of relief items to remote areas became increasingly difficult. Prices for fuel and other essential items increased due to the fuel shortage.
- **The strong role of government** in deciding how assistance should be provided. This included the emphasis on a blanket approach rather than a targeted focus on the most vulnerable. The requirement to work through local authorities in some cases delayed approval.
- **Delays in registrations and in issuing guidelines**. The government issued red cards to earthquake-affected individuals for accessing assistance, but due to the challenging context not everyone received them or in some cases single households received more than one card. Verification procedures were needed to ensure access to aid for all those entitled. Several programs are still waiting for the Reconstruction Authority to approve procedures.
- **Limitations on recruiting foreign staff**. This reduced organizational ability to bring in strong expertise, forcing them to rely on local staff with little to no emergency response experience.
- **The requirement to operate through local partners**. INGOs were required to partner with council-approved local NGOs. The selection process was challenging: there are few NGOs registered to work in each district and they tend to have political affiliations. They also often lacked previous experience in disaster response.
- **The politicization of the local governance**, and the need to work around issues of local patronage.
- **A complex social setup**, particularly regarding issues of gender, caste, and ethnicity, and related latent conflicts.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

To be accountable is to pose the question: *is assistance based on good and clear promises that are kept?* Ensuring accountability is not limited to providing feedback mechanisms. One must also examine *how promises are made*. Who is involved, and how?

WHO SHAKES HANDS

Most interventions were coordinated with existing village leaderships, in particular with the VDCs, which are the lowest administrative level of Nepalese government, and their subset, the WCFs. All organizations recognized that [consensus at that level was key for implementation](#). In some cases, even engaging with such structures was challenging

and required support from local NGOs. For example, inactive [WCFs had to be reactivated](#). Nepalese social structures make it difficult to work outside the established leadership. The review team witnessed their [key role in bringing assistance and the loyalties that this creates](#). In the south the context is highly politicized and local parties have a big influence. For instance, Oxfam recognized and worked within this context in 3 VDCs by setting up [Ward Management Committees](#), featuring representatives from all parties. This was a strong accountability measure. In the North the reality was different with less political pressure and women's representation was ensured.

However, this also demonstrates the challenges of negotiating accountability: investing in political representation while also [taking extra measures to strengthen women's representation](#).

THE WCF chose participants based on their own assessment

This WCF member, charged with choosing of participants to train, bases decisions on his own assessment of individual capacity.



Decision making remained largely in the hands of existing power holders. They were often tasked with beneficiary selection, based on their personal knowledge and appreciation of the context (and sometimes based on other, unshared personal or political criteria). The capacity of these community leaders to “think inclusion” needs to be questioned and enhanced.

Who else could be involved? In some locations, meetings were organized for whole villages. Participants indicated that they had an opportunity to express their views in these. There are also other local bodies and key stakeholders beyond the WCF (e.g. [women's groups](#), and health volunteers). They had varying levels of voice and importance in different villages. Fostering such alternative spaces and voices matters. It will be critical in the rehabilitation phase to enable a broader set of citizens to be consulted and to negotiate assistance. This will avoid the problem of existing leaders using relief efforts to bolster their own power.

IS THE PROMISE CLEAR?

Were the promises made both clear and well defined? Overall people had a sense of what organizations intended to deliver, but little knowledge of details. For example, people had not been informed of performance indicators, budgets, or criteria. This absence of information limits their ability to check that assistance is cost-effective and properly allocated (see also: standard 9).

Criteria were only communicated verbally

This local WCF coordinator says that the criteria for delivering assistance were only communicated verbally to them.



[Sharing criteria](#) is particularly important where the government has pushed a blanket approach to delivering aid. Some staff [expressed the importance of detailing criteria and approaches up front](#). It was observed that when the rationale for focusing aid on specific groups was clear and embraceable, people had no problem in [accepting that some people received free assistance](#). The extent to which criteria were clearly defined varied. In some cases, overly loose criteria provided excessive latitude for local leaders to make arbitrary choices. For instance, Oxfam clearly set criteria, but experienced challenges in [communicating them effectively](#) (i.e. verbal communication did not suffice). As a part of learning, Oxfam then issued written criteria before selecting the beneficiaries for the Livelihood grant.

HOW IS IT COMMUNICATED?

Organizations did invest in mass communication through measures such as [logos](#) and visibility boards. Many organizations aired radio programs that people [found useful and informative](#). However, not all of those interviewed had heard these broadcasts. Some individuals [lost their radios in the quake](#). Some had it, but just did not use it. Still suffering from trauma, others [felt overwhelmed, confused and incapable of absorbing information](#).

Some people received free assistance, but there was good reason

This CFW participant accepts that some people got free assistance because they were deserving



As a single woman I do not receive much information

This woman shared that, despite having access to radio and TV, she has difficulty absorbing information from these sources. She also cannot read and write



These examples illustrate the importance of examining local communications capacity and checking the impact of the channels employed. Who has access to communication means? How are diverse people using them? What are preferred ways of accessing and sharing information among different groups? Recent interagency studies have addressed communications issues, such as [The Information and Communication Needs Assessment](#). Organizations can complement them by exploring the communication eco-system at the micro level where they operate.

Recognizing the importance of two-way communication, or-

organizations invested in feedback mechanisms (see standard 5, feedback mechanisms). Additional forums are starting to appear (e.g. women's and youth groups) to bolster two-way communication.

Organizations have good cognizance of other [communication barriers](#). In particular, the challenge of pushing information beyond leadership groups—the VDC and the WCF—to the broader community.

How to ensure that communication is shared beyond the WCF?

This local M&E coordinator indicates they are working to address the challenge of sharing information more broadly with communities, beyond the WCF.



One approach to resolve this involved [keeping exchanges in the open](#). Openness can reduce problems that arise from common means of information sharing. Information is often passed by [word of mouth](#), risking rumors, misunderstandings, or loss of information down the chain. An interagency project called [Open Mic](#) helps by tracking local rumours and perceptions so agencies can address communication gaps. The challenge for the open communication approach is that information sessions are still attended primarily by community leaders. Busy people—in particular women—[have less time, and other priorities](#).

Organizations should invest in establishing information

HOW ARE PEOPLE ENGAGED IN DECISION MAKING?

Valuable consultation exercises were undertaken. Some agencies engaged specific groups (e.g. the [Nepal Children's Earthquake Recovery Consultation](#), by Plan). Humanitarian Coalition member organizations also collaborated with the CFP.

Organizations encountered some operational challenges affecting village-level consultation: spread of communities, distances and access, and existing modalities for decision making. Some organizations noted that [having a prior presence in affected areas aided response](#) as trust already existed, facilitating negotiation.

Villagers interviewed felt generally well-informed about aid, and were involved in delivering it. But consultation happened to different degrees, and many reported having less say in proposing alternatives and options. For example, the content of kits was not negotiated with people receiving assistance. One sample feedback indicated: "Cooking utensils would have been useful, but people were not asked what they needed." In another case where seeds were provided to a commu-

outlets at the village level. It was observed that most villages lacked [a central place where residents can find reliable information](#), such as a notice board. Information was posted in a haphazard fashion, for example with temporary notices by tea shops.

Information must also be shared across villages, not only within them. Communities do watch what happens with neighboring villages, but it is hard for them to access information to verify criteria and assistance.

Efforts to create accountability at the district level were noted (although these tend to inform district-level authorities, rather than creating cross-village opportunities for accountability). This occurred through joint workshops such as the CFP audits, where implementing organizations and government may respond to communities in public meetings, which are filmed and shared with media. Organizations also conduct audits independently. For example, Save the Children organized [district level workshops](#) with external stakeholders to share plans and achievements.

Some organizations, for example Oxfam, worked with local media. This can be built on, [at the cluster level](#). Plan International promoted [youth reporting](#), a very promising initiative to promote both inclusion and accountability.

nity, leaders said [they would have chosen a different variety, but weren't given a say](#). They also indicated a preference for vouchers over seeds, to make their own choices. In another case, [the content of shelter toolkits could have been checked with final users before distribution](#).

They gave us water for the seeds

When the community informed CARE that they lacked water for the seeds, the project was adapted to include installing water pipes.



Oxfam's Cash for Work demonstrated excellent consultation. Projects [were chosen by the community](#), and [were meaningful for them](#). Following seed distribution, [CARE discovered from consultations that a water problem existed](#) which inhibited farming. CARE adapted the intervention to address the issue. Fine tuning and adapting interventions through consultation will be paramount in the next phase of response.

INCLUSION (OF THE MOST MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS)

Inclusion means ensuring the most marginalized people have a say, so response efforts address their needs and aspirations. Context defines how inclusion is achieved, and how the most marginalized are identified, based upon issues discussed below.

Again, participation in decision making straddles accountability and inclusion, and has been already addressed above. The other dimensions of inclusion are:

RECOGNITION OF DIVERSITY

When asked "who should be included?" people tended to refer to the usual checklist: single and lactating women, the elderly, children under five, people with disabilities, etc. The issue of castes was added in the Nepal-specific context.

Women are not a homogeneous group

There must be a recognition that women are not a homogeneous group. They differ on cast, income, age... Yet it remains a challenge to capture the diverse needs of women.

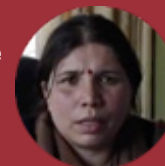


effects of the earthquake on marginalization must be considered. For example, [displacement by small landslides](#) creates challenges for families who lost land and property. Government aided victims of major landslides, however those affected by smaller events risk slipping through the cracks.

- **Avoid blind adherence to categories.** Current checklists risk increasing discrimination and social tensions. Even the Department of Women and Children warns about [the risk of leaving men behind](#), and that [providing assistance by age may discriminate against children](#). This happens when checklist categories are prioritized without ascertaining their actual needs vis-à-vis the rest of the community.

Sometimes men can be left behind

This representative of the Department of Women and Children observed that some groups (e.g. lactating women) occasionally received duplicated assistance, while other women or men were missed.



Yet, it was evident that local staff often had a much deeper understanding of local dynamics and factors impacting exclusion that could have been capitalized on. It was hard to disentangle if the limited recognition of diversity was due to pressure for a blanket approach, to the pressure to respond, or to organizational challenges. Recognition of diversity is improving, with growing acknowledgement that ["not all women are the same,"](#) and ["not all Dalits are the same"](#)—within these are [differing groups and needs](#). Deepening the recognition of diversity will be key to improving inclusion in the next phase.

An example of stigma: leprosy

There are people highly stigmatized in Nepali community, like those affected by leprosy. They were not explicitly targeted in the response.



Positive discrimination for Dalits, for example, is creating resentment. Some non-Dalits might experience more challenges and yet have less access to assistance.

One way forward (discussed in the recommendations), is recognizing that characteristics are not vulnerabilities, per se. A "multi-variable" approach to identifying vulnerabilities is needed (Oxfam is piloting such an approach).

Recognition of diversity must acknowledge not only needs, but different capacities, and tap into them. For example, in a society where age matters in decision making, children and young adults felt left out, despite having been recognized as one of the actors with [most potential in supporting relief and reconstruction](#). This finding is supported by the CFP report [Community Perceptions on Youth](#).

TAILORING APPROACHES

Tailoring approaches means ensuring that assistance is modelled on the specific capacities and needs of excluded people.

There have been many challenges in tailoring approaches, often due to the preference of the government for equality over equity. In some cases, differential assistance for pre-set cat-

This requires a two-pronged approach:

- **Reveal further diversity:** Actively seek those at risk of being overlooked and marginalized. Staff identified "ultra-marginalized" groups which had not always been explicitly targeted in the emergency phase (for example, [leprosy patients](#), and [endangered communities](#)). The

egories could be negotiated. For example, [households with lactating mothers or elderly would receive additional packages](#). But household characteristics weren't always considered. There was no special provision for very large households, for example. They would receive the same number of items as a small household. [Assistance was also not always tailored to the needs of people living at high altitudes](#), despite many cluster discussions about their unique circumstances.

Everyone received the same

Despite many cluster discussions, the winterization package was not adapted to the needs of people living at high altitudes



In some cases, limited assessment of local conditions resulted in standardized approaches that excluded people from assistance. In one example, the government distributed rice to promote livelihoods and agricultural production. [However, not everyone in the communities visited had access to land suitable for rice cultivation](#), and hence were excluded from assistance. Many could have grown other crops (e.g. millet, maize) but were not offered such alternatives. They had to [dig their own seeds from the rubble](#). When the most vulnerable were left out, their voices were often unheard. They simply accepted exclusion.

We had to dig seeds from the rubble

The government choice to distribute rice for planting left out those with no suitable land. No alternative provisions were made. Those who could only grow millet or maize had to dig seeds out of the rubble.



The CFW program mentioned above focused on women, but needed a consultation process to make the program more responsive to them. The demands of the program were difficult for women (although, in the end, participants indicated [feeling rewarded](#)). Men and women developed some adaptations amongst themselves. In one village, [men dug the road while women cleared the rubble](#). [Some women registered and then asked their sons to work](#) (although in some cases [men registered and women did the work](#)). Women expressed concerns about balancing their household/CFW workload, and the [effects of working very long hours](#). It would be valuable to reflect on targeting women for CFW programs that may involve demanding labour, and consider the value of CFW versus unconditional grants. Government seems to have prioritized conditional vs. unconditional grants. Yet, excessively demanding tasks may risk eroding women's time and energy for participation at higher levels.

We should have had shorter hours

This participant in CFW project found it difficult to manage household work and participation in the CFW. She wishes they had shorter hours.



REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

Removal of barriers requires recognizing that, unless barriers to inclusion are removed, people will not be able to fully participate in their communities. Assistance might temporarily satisfy needs, but if barriers are not removed, long-term benefits might not materialize.

Removing barriers is often a long term process. Yet, the aftermath of a disaster can present extraordinary opportunities. Some organizations used the response to disaster to [challenge existing roles, tackling barriers to inclusion](#). Oxfam and Plan opened their masonry training to women; Plan gave youth a voice through reporting. Oxfam also sought to promote women's leadership in CFW by placing them in some supervisory positions. (Note: in the groups interviewed, the [supervisors were men](#).)

Some stakeholders indicated that social barriers to inclusion are strongly rooted in society, impacting the response. Staff faced challenges overcoming the limited representation of excluded groups (e.g. [women's representation in local government](#)), and the lack of sensitivity of decision makers on issues of gender or ability. Government bodies also [lack the know-how to prioritize the most vulnerable](#). Such barriers also affected decision making in the clusters. Overall, [there was little concrete uptake on protection issues](#) beyond the protection cluster, despite the work done to mainstream issues.

Lack of women representation

Women are still under-represented in Government. There is only one woman in the DDRC, and the situation is not improving.



Organizations encountered resistance in targeting excluded groups and remote locations. It took [significant effort to persuade the government](#), whose approval was needed to deliver assistance. Capacity to advocate was affected by a [culturally-ingrained tendency against criticizing government](#). At the community level, people feel they [cannot directly interact with the government, and therefore have to rely on organizations](#). It will be important to create opportunities to

challenge these perceptions in the reconstruction phase.

HC members are to be commended for engaging with local organizations with a strong record of advocacy, who were committed to addressing imbalances.

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

- **Strong data collection and sharing mechanisms**, resulting in disaggregated (acknowledging diversity) and open (proactively shared) data available at all levels.
- **Varied means to consult, share information, and get feedback**, that have been tested in the local context and go beyond standard mechanisms (broad meetings, hotlines, feedback boxes). Work with potentially sidelined groups (e.g. youth, young mothers) should be stepped up.
- **Investment in communication**, as it is a key ingredient of accountability and inclusion. Organizations did invest in mass communication. Further improvements might involve establishing village level outlets, and fine tuning appreciation of communication ecosystems.
- **Go beyond the "standard checklist,"** to identify local drivers of exclusion, to be aggregated in compound indexes.
- **Understand the root causes, dynamics and further risks for exclusion.** Building upon existing experience in organizations in order to better deal with these factors at the rehabilitation phase.
- **Strategic alternatives.** The proposed framework breaks accountability and inclusion into manageable pieces. The dimensions are interdependent but can act upon individually, allowing diverse strategies to promote inclusion and accountability. For example: bypassing local leadership may be challenging, but more investment in communication might help keep them in check. This flexibility will be important to contextualize inclusion and accountability in the response.

Using the Core Humanitarian Standard lens

This chapter will further articulate issues of accountability and inclusion, looking at them through the lens of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). The driving questions are:

- *To what extent accountability and inclusion are enabling or hindering the achievement of the standards?*
- *To what extent are limitations in achieving the standards affecting inclusion and accountability?*

1. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS RECEIVE ASSISTANCE APPROPRIATE TO THEIR NEEDS.

HC members engaged in diverse projects: CFW for small community projects, livelihoods, distributions, training for housing reconstruction, GBV sensitization. Overall, those interviewed judged them relevant. The projects were also part of broader strategies of intervention which had addressed further and diverse needs of the affected population.

The primary need—shelter reconstruction—has not yet been entirely fulfilled. But delays in reconstruction are due to factors beyond NGO control.

Evaluating this first CHS standard entails checking the

quality of needs assessments and context monitoring, and their impact in delivering appropriate assistance. This was a challenge at the outset of the emergency as independent assessments and data collection had been discouraged. Organizations had to rely on the often poor data held by the VDCs. Much effort went into verification rather than assessment. [This data gap resulted in a perceived need for blanket coverage.](#) Additional challenges came from fluctuations in numbers because of population movement, but also because [households split in order to receive more red cards.](#)

Organizations sometimes shared data with local administra-

tions to [locally cross-check data](#). This should be encouraged as it could help improve government records. Improving and cross-checking information is particularly important as the [government is now re-collecting data to check the allocation of red cards](#).

This data will determine future resource allocation. Is the data reliable, sufficiently disaggregated, and does it ensure accountability? The importance of NGO involvement is demonstrated by CARE, which was able to [prevent duplication of assistance](#). And Oxfam fixed cases where deserving people had not received red cards, [allowing them to then receive assistance](#).

Overall, the quality of data available fell short of the investment made in it. Organizations collected a lot of data on their work, and piloted new technologies. Yet, the data has not been systematized and effectively shared. It is a big asset still untapped. The recommendations on "unleashing the power of data" will highlight this potential. Some relevant areas for improvement are:

Move from verification to consolidation and analysis. Significant effort went into verifying data provided by authorities which limited time for consolidating stronger datasets.

Systematic disaggregation of data. Organizations collected data on at-risk categories (e.g. lactating or single women, people with disabilities, the elderly, Dalits). The focus on pre-set categories prevented more systematic disaggregation of data and appreciation of other relevant variables (e.g. household size). There is also untapped potential in inter-linking them (e.g. deriving indexes). Delivery consequently suffered: assistance was sometimes delivered in a ["one size fits all"](#) fashion when more customization would have been beneficial. Partners possess knowledge of diversity in the local context (beyond the standardized categories) which was not capitalized on by organizations.

One size does not fit all

Lack of good data affected response. Sometimes all households were treated equally even when they differed in size. This will need to be seriously considered going forward.



Ensure that data collection is not extractive. Data did not get back to communities in information boards or to inform consultation exercises. Strengthening the capacity of organizations to communicate data with communities could go a long way in supporting evidence-based consultation, side by side with participatory exercises.

The main challenge, however, remains the government directive for blanket coverage. The rationale was that "everyone needs assistance," and that it is not possible to discriminate when most people have lost their homes. In a context where capacities for recovery are indeed different, the debate becomes one of equality vs. equity. NGOs need to be clear about their mandate and resources (as expressed by Oxfam and CARE), and about the different roles of government and NGOs (service provision or right approach). Lines have often been blurred. Some organizations [managed to get around political influence to target the most vulnerable](#), but it was also clear that [humanitarian workers themselves need to be sensitized to the importance of a targeted approach](#).

Humanitarian workers need to be sensitized to the importance of targeted approaches

In a context where most people have been affected, there has been a debate over blanket vs targeted approaches, even within agencies. It is important to educate humanitarian workers about the rationale for reaching the most vulnerable



ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Ensure the investment in data collection can be capitalized on.

From a focus on verification and collection of data in few pre-determined categories, NGOs should move into more systematic disaggregated datasets, to be shared with other humanitarian actors.

Clarify the difference between equity- and equality-driven approaches, and increase awareness of staff about the mandate of humanitarian NGOs (rights, equity) so that they can take a stronger stance on it.

Build on partners' knowledge of the local context in identifying factors of marginalization and exclusion. Local partners had often been working to address these before the crisis.

2. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS HAVE ACCESS TO THE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THEY NEED AT THE RIGHT TIME.

Accountability and inclusion are dynamic processes that need to be adapted to the context of the response. There is no pre-set golden standard, and the challenge is to judge if they are “good enough.” Timeliness is one key parameter to gauge this.

The sooner inclusion and accountability are stepped up, the better. Challenging dimensions like the removal of barriers can actually be better tackled at the outset of an emergency—when there is a blank slate, and acting quickly is what matters most. It is at this stage, [when rubble is cleared](#), that important decisions (e.g. relocation of infrastructures, adjustments in access to land and resources) can be taken. Some can have a very real impact on inclusion and accountability. When communities start returning to normal, barriers, resistance to change, and drivers of exclusion will appear again.

We should have thought how to best clear the land

This video was actually filmed in another consortium evaluation, that of AGIRE; but it related to the CFW project of one of the HC members. It is shown here to make an important point: if people had taken the time to plan before clearing the rubble, they would have done it differently. Early activities, left unplanned, are missed opportunities for doing things differently, and potentially addressing barriers to accountability and inclusion.



speed of response? Often the choice was for the latter. A number of factors could potentially have helped rebalance inclusion and timeliness: disaggregated data and evidence for early targeting (and for advocating on it); a united front to advance inclusion from the outset (which is still absent now—see standard 6); and partnering new staff with experienced workers early in the response (see standard 8). As the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase approaches, there seems to be a growing awareness of the need to address these issues, and willingness to do so.

Cases were observed where the sequence of activities negatively impacted allocation of assistance. In one example, a CFW project (road excavation) took place before a livelihood one (provision of livestock). The CFW was targeted to the most vulnerable households in the village, in dire need of cash. The understanding of villagers and leaders was that: [“those who did not receive assistance at the beginning, will then be prioritized in future projects.”](#) A combination of timing choices and blanket coverage meant that the most vulnerable received quick assets, but did not benefit from longer-term supports. The in-country field staff is re-examining the timing of the intervention: running activities at the same time would have given more options to the most vulnerable.

These who did not receive CFW will receive livelihoods

Those who had not received early assistance are prioritized for future activities. The risk is that the most vulnerable will not receive assistance to support long-term recovery.



Some examples were observed where opportunities to remove barriers were capitalized on (e.g. women in masonry training). But generally it was noted that identifying leverage points to promote inclusion and accountability is a challenging task early in the response. Identifying early leverages could be effectively addressed as part of preparedness for future response. There were examples of such attempts, as in CARE's gender brief.

Overall, an inclusive approach in Nepal took long to materialize. The main challenge was government resistance. Projects not conforming with a blanket approach experienced long delays negotiating with the government, and are only just starting (e.g. the small traders program). Inclusion affected timeliness, and created dilemmas: focus on inclusion or

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Think accountability and inclusion at the very start of the response. It is at this stage that many opportunities exist to challenge social norms or to revise the physical layout of an

area affected by the earthquake. Early planning and consideration of inclusion and accountability might be transformative.

Ensure that delays in tackling inclusion and accountability in the response phase – due in part to the government’s blanket approach – are rectified in the rehabilitation phase.

3. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS ARE NOT NEGATIVELY AFFECTED AND ARE MORE PREPARED, RESILIENT AND LESS AT-RISK AS A RESULT OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION.

Exposure to disaster and shocks is an important factor leading to vulnerability and marginalization. And, in a vicious circle, the most marginalized people are often more exposed to disaster and shocks. Interventions were therefore reviewed to ensure they:

Do no harm. Interventions should not increase marginalization. It was observed that support for marginalized groups (e.g. the Dalits) [had created resentment in other groups](#). These frictions should be mitigated to avoid aggravating inter-caste conflict. Another potential risk: those in power, such as the VDC/WCF, further reinforce their position by controlling resources. This risk is very real, given they are the main decision makers, and there are still few checks and balances to make them more accountable.

Too much priority is given to Dalits

This woman feels humanitarian organizations gave too much priority to the Dalits, ignoring other groups equally affected.



I had no other option than farming on unsafe land

People received no assistance identifying which land was safe. She had no other option than farming on her cracked land.



Reduce risk. Interventions must limit the exposure to risk for vulnerable groups. Nepal is a challenging environment and prone to disaster. Risk and threats had to be addressed as assistance was delivered (e.g. in ensuring access despite monsoons and landslides). Work on “building back better” began, with training for house reconstruction. Quick and broad risk assessments could provide a base for future interventions. For example, livelihood programs [were not accompanied by an assessment of which fields were safe to use](#), so [people farmed land they felt was unsafe](#).

An earlier assessment of areas at risk would be key to 1) better plan the future response from the start (e.g. re-location of services and infrastructure, identification of unsafe land, and methods for redistributing resources), and 2) identify and tackle vulnerabilities generated by the quake (loss of land, increased exposure to risk, access challenges). [Risk reduction](#) is now on the agenda for the rehabilitation phase. But, as discussed in standard 2, ensuring that it happens sooner might open more opportunities to integrate risk management with inclusion and accountability (mainstreaming DRR in early agreements and plans for response at the village level, appreciating diverse risks in communities).

A major lesson learned: the importance of preparedness

One of the key lessons from this response is the importance of preparedness in disaster risk reduction.



Organizations had also been active in identifying social risk, especially gender-based violence. Activities—in particular linked to the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV—were run in

several villages. The [village leaders interviewed were very sensitized to the issue](#). Other women interviewed in a focus group expressed appreciation for the information shared, but indicated [they received little notice of events](#). Overall, they felt that they [had received little additional information](#), compared with previous engagements on the topic. Sensitization is important, but it should be accompanied by more evidence of specific risks presented by the disaster, to avoid the impression of repetition. When looking for evidence of social threats, reviewers heard mostly anecdotal evidence, and it was not clear to what extent threats had increased. The information derived from the CFP was non-conclusive, as it varied largely across different surveys. A broad and informed scoping of social risk remains an important component of future responses. HC members could play an important role in consolidating such information. Existing collaborations between HC organizations and third parties such as local police and other institutions working on GBV, child labor, and exploitative migration practices are important assets for assessing and dealing with social risk.

Create positive long-term effect. Interventions create opportunities to break down barriers to inclusion, and to empower marginalized groups. The capacity for removing barriers, as previously mentioned, is a pre-condition for long-term impact on vulnerable groups. Another factor is the capacity to transition swiftly from interventions that might create dependency, to activities with longer-term impact. Several HC projects

were characterized by such long-term thinking (e.g. support to livelihoods, traders). Some were still in early stages, so impact is yet to be seen, nevertheless this is very positive.

This road is good for us

The road built with CFW will help transport materials for reconstruction.



There was good potential in CFW projects where communities selected activities to help reconstruction (e.g. [a new road that will facilitate the transport of building materials](#)). The masonry training—even if it could not be immediately applied because of delays in the national reconstruction guidelines—provided a lasting asset. [It was very practical, and hence memorable](#). The provision of learning materials for later review is worth emphasizing, because some of the training offered in Nepal was very theoretical and hard to remember. The investment in livelihoods had mixed results: for example [only some of the recipients of rice produced a good crop](#). The activities supporting small traders had just begun, so impact was not yet apparent. However, organizations are positive about them, and emphasize [the importance in ensuring that self-reliance activities can be promoted in the early stages](#).

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Ensure that risk assessment is seen as key component of early response. An early identification of at risk areas—as well as of social factors of risk—might help to devise better options to protect the most vulnerable. At the outset of the response, options for planning land use and managing risk might be easier to achieve, as there is often a blank slate. People might be more responsive to proposed options (e.g. optimal locations for infrastructure) as they are highly sensitized to risk.

Strengthen sensitivity to conflict and local dynamics. Build awareness that resources brought in can lead to competition and conflict, and amplify unequal power relations. Ensure that these dynamics are monitored and addressed.

Monitor social threats for action. Many HC organizations are in a unique position to monitor and provide evidence on social threats (GBV, exploitative labor). Capacity to document and show how disaster affected social threats will allow progress beyond anecdotal evidence to strengthen response strategies.

Encourage investment in activities with a long-term impact.

4. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS KNOW THEIR RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS, HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, AND PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM.

Are people aware of their rights and entitlements? In the village where reviewers discussed this topic in depth, [only one participant felt that people had a right to assistance](#). Most others felt that [it was the goodwill of organizations, to give or not](#).

Elsewhere, people knew that assistance came from abroad and [were deeply grateful for it](#), but did not feel they had a right to question it. When asked "How do you feel about telling agencies 'you gave us something but we would have liked something else?'" they did not feel this would be appropriate. No one had ever explained to them that it is indeed possible, and important to do so.

It is up to the organizations to give or not

In this village, only one person thought that people had the right to assistance. Most believed that it is up to the organizations to give or not. They have no say in or control over it.



Humanitarian workers in Nepal are further aware that rights awareness can be even lower in remote areas that have long been overlooked. For example, [residents of mountainous areas have far less awareness of rights](#). The CFP similarly found that the people living in the most remote areas are the least likely to complain, even when they receive little assistance. They are accustomed to a lack of services and being self-reliant. Inadequate assistance is, for them, a fact of life. In discussions, HC member agencies indicated that addressing these imbalances is challenging because they happen in areas that are harder to reach, and therefore where awareness is harder to build.

The risk is that the most vocal can disproportionately claim assistance even when they are not marginalized—even more so in Nepal's highly politicized environment. As already noted, there is also a risk that the blanket approach favors those better off, at the risk of leaving behind people with less voice and resources, and participation in decision making is still insufficiently inclusive. HC members should therefore further improve clarity and accountability in their own commitment to equity. The focus for accountability should be on principles and mission, as well as outcomes. This entails (as discussed re: standard 1) better sensitizing staff and partners to organi-

zational mandate, and to issues of equity.

Two recommendations for improving adherence to this standard:

Broaden the involvement of people in decision making.

Organizations should seek ways to expand inclusion beyond the VDC/WCF. This might be challenging: many citizens are indeed reliant on local decision makers. Their passivity can be aggravated by post-traumatic stress, an issue that surfaced in many conversations. Many interviewees expressed feeling inertia, confusion, etc. after the earthquake, [making it hard to resume activities](#). This highlights the importance of psychosocial approaches in rebuilding their confidence and social linkages. One way forward could be to involve youth, who have until now been [sidelined and rarely consulted \(apart from Plan's consultation\)](#). In the experience of organizations that work with youth, when young people are sensitized to rights, they are [eager and empowered to take action](#).

Youth are never consulted

Youth feel they are never consulted about their needs and aspirations.



Organizations already have strategies to enable participation of affected communities in planning: it is [time to adapt the methodologies used in DRR to the response phase](#).

Improve communication with affected people. More is still needed—especially at this critical period as the response transitions to the rehabilitation phase, including a sizable investment in housing reconstruction. Many cited a lack of information as one of the main challenges confronting them now: [they need information about housing reconstruction, but feel they only get rumors](#). Most of the information needed relates to procedures and guidelines to be released by the government.

We need information, we get rumours

This woman states that they need information about housing reconstruction, but only get rumours. She feels helpless



ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Promote awareness of the Core Humanitarian Standard among affected populations. The CHS have been written from the perspective of people affected by disaster, and should be promoted among affected communities that have little awareness of their right to receive assistance.

Gear up participatory engagement with stakeholders beyond the VDC/WCF. The rehabilitation phase presents an opportunity to implement mechanisms for decision making that include those outside the VDC/WCF. Organizations have methodologies (e.g. used in DRR) that can be adapted for this.

Act as reliable information brokers. People want reliable information about reconstruction. Building on their presence, and on investment in communications, NGOs could establish their role as reliable information sources by dispelling rumours and ensuring that information reaches the most vulnerable and marginalized people

5. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE AND RESPONSIVE MECHANISMS TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS.

All organizations utilize different means of enabling feedback (e.g. [Plan's mechanism for checking adherence to the CHS](#), or the [system established by Save partner Tuki](#)). Feedback mechanisms [are beneficial to organizations](#), for example in helping revise and adapt programs.

In addition to mechanisms at the individual agency level, HC members are taking part in broader initiatives such as the CFP, which reported good uptake of their work by HC members through participation in public audits. The CFP also cited examples of HC member action in response to the feedback provided. HC members are striving to further improve their systems, and fine tune feedback mechanisms to make them more inclusive. [Even the smallest measures, like lowering a feedback box, can make a difference.](#)

Feedback mechanisms are really helping us

Participants at the inception meeting of this review agreed that feedback mechanisms are really helping organizations



The following areas for improvement emerged from the review:

There is a big investment at the feedback end, but not an equal one in "making the promise." [Accountability is built in](#)

[the planning phase](#). If people are not involved from the start, if they lack ownership, feedback mechanisms might not fully engage them.

Feedback mechanisms in use tend to be "easy to spread and structure" (e.g. hotlines, complaint boxes). More nuanced ways to get feedback (e.g. through participatory interactions, and consultation that captures both individual and group perspectives) are not much in use. Yet a recent survey of the CFP revealed that the best way for people to provide feedback and interact with agencies is face to face.

Responses are sometimes not reaching people. Some people heard responses to their feedback via mass media (e.g. [through radio programs](#)), rather than individualized responses. However, in several interviews, people who shared specific feedback or suggestions indicated they had received no response. One organization made complaint forms anonymous to ensure confidentiality, but this came at the expense of providing individual responses to complainants. And even with anonymous forms, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed—the complaint box publicly visible, a form must be requested, and those who are illiterate often require assistance to fill in the form.

Some responses to feedback were unreliable. Cases were observed where the organization promised to address a complaint, but didn't follow through or the items promised were never delivered. This decreased trust in the organization.

Existing feedback mechanisms may not capture the views of the most marginalized people. Marginalized individuals and groups might [not be aware of the system](#), they might have to [rely on others to lodge complaints](#), or they may feel [that it is not appropriate to complain to agencies](#).

We complain to shopkeepers, not to agencies

This woman would rather get vouchers than assistance. But for her it is easier to complain to shopkeepers than to agencies.



Not everybody is aware of the feedback systems. Feedback mechanisms were advertised, but the information did not reach everybody (or was soon forgotten, for example by those who lost the hotline phone number). In the villages surveyed, very few were aware of the feedback system. Those who were tended to be part of the leadership, or very active community members. Those who had the number in some cases called on behalf of the whole village. This sometimes led to challenges and backlash for these middlemen, [for example when the organization subsequently failed to address issues](#). Agencies should reexamine how communication channels are established: sharing a phone number once is insufficient if marginalized people are not proactively supported in using it. As one man put it: [“If they do not give a number, why should we ask for it?”](#) One staff member summed up the challenge: [“You need to be empowered in order to complain.”](#)

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Improve existing feedback mechanisms. Ensure that they are known by and accessible to a larger number of people, and that timely responses are provided to people using them.

Go beyond the hotline and complaint box. Organizations have well-developed systems for hotlines and complaint

boxes. These should not be considered the exclusive way to get feedback. Ensure a diversity of feedback mechanisms to effectively capture feedback from diverse groups, in particular those who are most marginalized and less prone to use existing mechanisms.

Recognize that feedback mechanisms have some inherent limitations (i.e. it's not just about complaints; the importance of group negotiations). Feedback mechanisms should not be a substitute for other means of consultation: synergies with them need to be created.

6. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS RECEIVE COORDINATED, COMPLEMENTARY ASSISTANCE.

This review examines two aspects fostering accountability and inclusion through coordination: participation in clusters and coordinated action with local partners.

Organizations participated in clusters, sharing information about their activities. But coordination mostly took place at the operational level (i.e. who does what, where; and standardization of aid packages) rather than addressing structural issues. For example, agencies were not strong enough in advocating together for targeting assistance to the most vulnerable, against the government's blanket approach.

Staff members interviewed are keen to have a stronger role in influencing coordinated action for accountability and inclusion. The shortcomings of the blanket approach are becoming more apparent, and the commitment of organizations to focus on the most vulnerable people more solid. HC

members are also starting to play a pivotal role in accountability and coordination initiatives, for example as [District Lead Support Agencies](#). Joint initiatives like the CFP are being established. This is now possible because NGOs (notably including the HC members) agreed on its importance, used its findings, and committed to take part in the social audits.

An area to further strengthen is the inter-cluster collaboration on protection and accountability. As already noted, the protection cluster—as well as actors promoting inclusion—had actively tried to engage in coordination with other clusters, with little result. [It was hard to sensitize them.](#)

International organizations were mandated to deliver assistance through local organizations. The interaction between international and local organizations was therefore key for the response. Overall, local partners expressed satisfaction

about their relationship with HC members. Some partnerships were pre-existing and trust had already been built. But even in newly-formed partnerships, relationships were reportedly strong and satisfactory. One key request from all local partners was further investment in building capacity for response and for preparedness (see standard 7). This presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen work on accountability and inclusion. Accountability systems (e.g. helplines) had already been shared. The next step would be further sensitization to the need for targeting, and on participatory processes for consultation and accountability. Local organizations might adapt some methodologies from HC members.

It was difficult to sensitize other clusters

This government representative was part of the protection cluster. She says that it was difficult to sensitize other clusters on protection issues.



Oxfam and CARE fostered opportunities for sharing and collaboration among their local partners, positively impacting accountability and inclusion. Some examples: [setting shared criteria](#); mutual awareness raising (e.g. [on gender-based violence](#)), and promoting shared learning (see standard 7).

We shared information on GBV amongst partners

Because they received information on GBV from another partner, this organization is able to share information more effectively with communities.



Where there is a local partner common to multiple HC members (such as Tuki, with Plan and Save), the opportunity to harmonize practices across organizations should be seized. In general, local partners tended to [segregate projects by different organizations with different teams](#). There is untapped potential for sharing learning and strengthening collaboration.

We discussed beneficiary selection criteria amongst partners

This staff member of a local partner notes that criteria for the selection of beneficiaries were discussed amongst different partner organizations.



ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Step up coordination on advocacy. Organizations prioritized operational coordination in the clusters, leading to coherent and standardized assistance. It is now important to emphasize diversity and tailored approaches to achieve inclusivity. This requires organizations to join forces on advocacy initiatives.

Increase shared learning initiatives between NGOs and their partners. There is a high demand for capacity building and a strong need to capitalize on the experience of the response so far. Investment in shared learning across organizations and partners can build capacity and relations.

Continue to support system-wide projects on accountability and inclusion. The existence of initiatives such as the Community Feedback Project required the buy-in and commitment from international organizations. Such engagements should feature in future responses.

7. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS CAN EXPECT DELIVERY OF IMPROVED ASSISTANCE AS ORGANIZATIONS LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION.

To what extent did HC organizations support learning on accountability and inclusion? Examples were observed of "learning in" (i.e. from previous responses), for example CARE's gender brief. However, challenges were also noted in ensuring uptake in the early phases of the response (see recommendation 1). Other instances of "learning in" emerged. Plan [identified the need to better address issues of disability](#), and sought experience from other organizations. In discussions with advisors, it emerged that organizations had still a lot that could be adapted to promote accountability and inclusion through participatory approaches. Awareness of the need to do so is growing.

What we could have learned from seed distribution?

A reflection after the seeds distribution might have helped to reveal issues with targeting and inclusion of landless people.



interventions based on learning. Examples include: the [seed bin component of the Save the Children project](#); and Oxfam [was able to provide tool support to women farm groups](#) (rather than on individual basis).

HC members promoted [peer learning and advice sharing among their respective partners](#) (as mentioned re: standard 6), but there was little evidence of cross-organization learning initiatives between partners of multiple HC members. This review indicated that staff is very keen for opportunities to reflect on and learn from the response. However, they may lack the time, and simple and tested practices (e.g. knowing how to conduct after-action reviews), to do so. For example, [there was no after-action reflection in the case of the rice seed distribution](#). Had staff been able to do this, it might have revealed sooner the inclusion and targeting challenges due to the choice of seeds that not everyone could plant.

One very positive observation: many staff used this review process as an opportunity for learning and reflection. Some staff [derived their own recommendations from the field interviews and immediately acted on them](#).

Working with large numbers of newly-recruited staff meant organizations often had to build skills on the job. This will be addressed in standard 8.

Some organizations adapted interventions, based on their own assessments and feedback received. The flexibility of HC funding was very beneficial for supporting the adaptation of

Another partner gave us advice on seeds

This manager of a partner organization recalls an example of partners sharing expertise.



ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Improve the capacity to bring "learning in." Some efforts were made, but ultimately did not trickle down. The last mile—ensuring staff on the ground are exposed to key messages and insights—is challenging

Create space and opportunities for learning. The review proved that staff on the ground is keen for opportunities to "stop, listen, and think," and that they are capable of acting immediately on learning. More of such opportunities are needed, within and across organizations.

8. COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS RECEIVE THE ASSISTANCE THEY REQUIRE FROM COMPETENT AND WELL-MANAGED STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS.

The staff interviewed for this review were extremely committed and motivated. They are indeed a strong asset for the organizations. Many [had invested their own resources for the response, and often started out as volunteers.](#)

A big challenge for NGOs was that, given the scale of the disaster, most of the staff were new to their organization and to humanitarian work. Agencies and partners efficiently guided them, enabling them to respond at a high standard of performance. In many cases, new staff received brief inductions and thereafter they ["learned by doing,"](#) working side-by-side with experienced staff.

New staff learn mainly by doing

A lot of new staff were employed to face the scale of disaster. They were provided inductions, but mostly learned on the job.



One challenge, however, was the lack of protection staff that could be deployed on the ground to support them. This issue was specifically identified by Oxfam. Positive feedback was received about the quality and capacity of surge personnel engaging in communication and accountability. But it was also emphasized that the challenge remains in the last mile: how to ensure that these attitudes and capacities can effectively trickle down and be further operationalized? How to build local expertise on these issues, so that they are locally-owned?

Another challenge identified is that accountability and inclusion rely on a deep understanding of the mandate of humanitarian organizations. This can be more challenging to pass on than operational knowledge (see the debate on blanket vs targeted approach, in standard 1). The importance of investing in staff is highlighted, and in particular the importance of imparting [the soft skills that really make a difference.](#)

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Continue to invest in supporting staff. The response rested on the commitment of local staff, many of whom were new to humanitarian response. This new generation of humanitarian

workers should continue to receive support, to further deepen their understanding of inclusion and accountability.

Bring support and knowledge on the ground. In a context where most learning happens on the job, it is key to have hands-on staff that can support work on inclusion and accountability on the ground. Such staff exist, but largely work at the national level.

9. ORGANIZATIONS USE RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY FOR THEIR INTENDED PURPOSE.

Were communities in a position to gauge the use of resources by international organizations? This standard requires assessing whether "communities and people affected by crisis are aware about community-level budgets, expenditures and results achieved".

In general, communities were not aware of budgets and resources available to them, or of the cost of deliverables they received. Some exceptions were programs such as CFW, where people were clearly informed about the wages paid.

The visibility board observed did not contain financial information. Community representatives and others interviewed were not in possession of this information, either, but some organizations are planning to have this information available once activities are completed.

Some partners recounted their practice of sharing budgets for each action undertaken in the community. Since it was not always possible to do so for emergency programs, they now intend to share information in social audits.

ACTION POINTS: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY AND INCLUSION

Ensure that information on budgets and resources are fully available to the affected communities. This was often not the case in the communities visited, but is an essential component to ensure full accountability.

Recommendations moving forward

1. IF LESSONS ARE NOT HEARD, REPEATING IS NOT ENOUGH.

Issues of inclusion (in particular, gender inclusion) and accountability—and the related need to ensure that people affected by a disaster are active participants rather than passive beneficiaries—have been debated for decades. So why do we still need to talk about them? This review began by posing this question at the inception meeting. Yes, they are still challenges in the humanitarian sector as a whole. And, as the frameworks used in the review emphasize, given the high moral ground and their aspirational nature, they will probably always be. But there was a sense that progress has been made.

This review sought to unpack why inclusion and accountability remain challenges, and identified the following:

They have deep implications. Inclusion and accountability require rethinking how humanitarian work happens, and mitigating top-down approaches that can creep into humanitarian operations. Inclusion and accountability are not “add-ons.” They are a different way to provide assistance.

They are complex. Effectively tackling inclusion and accountability requires touching on deep issues (e.g. social norms, household structure, house ownership, land tenure) that are often not on the radar in emergency response. There is a disconnect between the overall modalities of response—which sometimes sidelined such issues—and the awareness of staff that these must be tackled from the start, to avoid reinforcing existing negative structures (e.g. existing decision-making structures, and land patterns). Examples in the response show there is indeed [potential to challenge existing roles at the early stages of the response](#).

Some people do not believe that women can be masons. We do!

A participant in masonry training says that some people still do not believe that women can be masons. She does and will prove it.



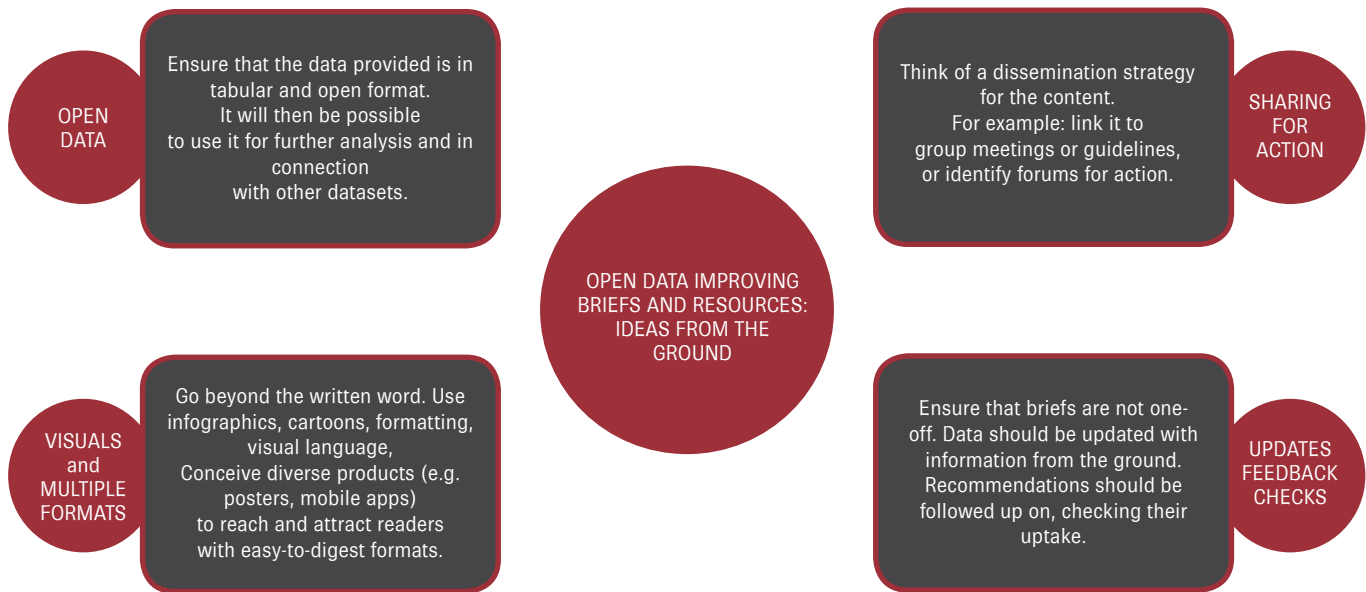
The priority is quantity, not quality. Some of the staff consulted emphasized the risk of quantity and measurables taking priority: “HQ will ask you how many people did you reach? and not who did you reach?” What pressure is felt from above makes a difference. Such pressure can be positive. One organization, for example, mentioned the importance of donors in pushing them to strengthen their skills for working with the disabled.

They have been put in silos. Accountability and inclusion (in particular gender inclusion) are, in theory, mainstreamed. But in practice they have also been addressed as specialized activities. Specialized interventions (e.g. work on GBV) are still hard to link to other programs. And, when mainstreaming, the depth expected by specialists might not correspond to the capacity to achieve that depth on the ground. Simplified understanding might equate gender with the attempt to “count the women targeted”; accountability could be reduced to hotlines and feedback boxes. The balance between mainstreaming and specialization remains a challenge. The best place to address this is on the ground, modelling complementarities.

How to tackle these issues?

Preparedness matters. Because accountability and inclusion are complex and deep, organizations need to ensure that preparedness work incorporates these aspects and that surge teams have the capacity to incorporate them from the outset.

Breaking silos requires effective communication and internal advocacy. For example, briefs on gender were produced and inclusion initiatives were produced, offering useful data and recommendations. However, these products did not subsequently travel to the field and staff were not aware of them. There is appetite among field staff for this type of support, provided that know-how is presented in a practical and applicable form. Staff was not using or aware of these materials for reasons including conflicting priorities (the work on the ground and “the hundreds of emails that require immediate action”) and ineffective communication—for which [staff have proposed solutions](#). The diagram below summarizes suggestions to improve such products.



2. GENDER, AGE, ABILITY, INCOME: CHARACTERISTICS, NOT VULNERABILITIES

Organizations tend to use checklist approaches whereby women, children, the aged, and the disabled are each seen as homogenous categories of vulnerability. This risks stigmatizing entire groups, and [co-opting them into the role of "vulnerable."](#) This needs to be addressed on two levels:

Recognize that vulnerability depends upon many inter-related factors. Categories are not an undifferentiated whole. Being part of one group (e.g. lactating mothers) does not automatically correspond to being vulnerable. It is the combination of different aspects that result in exclusion and marginalization in a given context. Oxfam created an [index to assess vulnerability](#). This is a promising initiative. It recognizes that vulnerability is not one-dimensional, [establishing eight criteria and prescribing that beneficiaries should meet at least five of them to be considered vulnerable](#). But this is not easy to communicate and use at the field level.

I was told I had to work

Because this woman is the sole head of a household, she was told by community leaders that she had to take part in the CFW programme.



Beware of stigmatizing, and build appreciation for capacities: The checklist approach means that whole categories (e.g. single women, people with disabilities) are perceived as "vulnerable" when they might in fact be very capable. This could contribute to their further stigmatization. Inclusion efforts must highlight people's capacities, not only their perceived weaknesses. Interventions should enhance the capacity to act among excluded groups. Plan, for example, did interesting work in this regard with its youth reporting project.

3. BEWARE OF SHORTCUTS! LABOUR IS NOT PARTICIPATION. TARGETING IS NOT INCLUSION. FEEDBACK IS NOT ACCOUNTABILITY.

It was observed that participation, inclusion, and accountability were sometimes equated to the practices intended to foster them. For example:

The contribution of labor is equated to participation. Having women enrolled as laborers in CFW is considered the same as improving women's participation.

Hotlines and feedback boxes are considered tantamount to feedback. And feedback is also often equated to accountability.

Targeting a group for interventions is equated with including it.

Labor, hotlines, and targeting may indeed help achieve participation, accountability, and inclusion. But they alone are not enough. People might still lack decision-making power, which is what should characterize inclusion, participation, and feedback.

For example, in emphasizing feedback mechanisms, humanitarian actors risk forgetting that accountability is stronger when it relies on a promise that is built together. Equating feedback with accountability is problematic, in that it exacerbates a view of affected communities as “clients” or “beneficiaries” rather than as contributors to and co-designers of assistance. Consultation in the design phase is a key element in building better accountability. Also, there is much more to feedback than hotlines: multiple channels are needed to ensure that issues are dealt at the community level, not only at the individual level. Different modalities for interactions are needed to include the most marginalized, as discussed in standard 5.

Equating targeting with inclusion risks making vulnerable groups into passive recipients of assistance. Satisfying the material needs of vulnerable people is not the same as fully

including them. They might receive goods but still be sidelined in decision making. For example, when someone with a disability receives special assistance, but is not supported to participate in meetings, can the intervention be considered inclusive? Or is it simply further stigmatizing her as a powerless citizen? Paradoxically, assisting vulnerable groups might lead their communities to think that their voices need not be heard, as they have already been catered to.

People with disabilities receive goods but do not sit in meetings

This woman explains that, in her village, people with disabilities received extra benefits in distributions. But they had not been able to participate to meetings, for example to discuss GBV.



Even though beneficial in terms of integrating women in decision making and recognizing the importance of interaction between men and women promoted by CFW, equating labor with participation risks overloading women (or other vulnerable categories) with work, reducing their capacity for participation.

Addressing this issue requires ensuring that the understanding of inclusion and accountability does not fall short of engaging people as discussion makers.

4. COMMUNICATION IS AT THE INTERSECTION OF INCLUSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The link between strong two-way communication with affected communities, and accountability and inclusion, has been demonstrated in this review. Getting information and having a voice are essential parts of participation in decision making—the backbone of both accountability and inclusion. Numerous and diverse efforts to communicate with affected communities were observed in this response. Various media and channels were employed, from community meetings to the use of radio, television, and mobile communication. Organizations are aware of the potential and the limitations of new media, and are experimenting around them.

The emerging field of communication with affected communities must not be managed in a silo, but integrated as an essential component of accountability and inclusion. Encouraging progress in this direction was noted. Further improvements could be achieved if organizations:

Continue to creatively experiment with new media. The use of hotlines was a common feature in the response, but they have limitations. It is important that no communication tool is taken for granted, and organizations continue to experiment and combine different avenues of communication.

Increase capacity to assess the local communication ecosystem. Availability of communication media does not equate to propensity of people to use them. Many cases were encountered where people had access to channels of information, but less inclination to use them. Channels for feedback were opened, but people lacked capacity to make use of them. All this highlights the importance of assessing the local communication ecosystem to improve the effectiveness of communication for accountability and inclusion. (See here for [definitions and materials on communication ecosystems in humanitarian response](#).)

Ensure availability of staff experienced in linking communication to inclusion and accountability. Humanitarian organizations and surge teams now tend to include staff with specific competencies on accountability to affected populations. It was observed that in this response they also increased awareness of the importance of communication with affected communities, and this made a difference. It is important that such staff continue to be supported, and that these competencies are strengthened at the national level and among partners.

5. UNLEASH THE POWER OF DATA

Assessment and data collection was a challenge at the beginning of the response, and there was government resistance to independent assessment initiatives. Organizations nevertheless invested significant time and effort in gathering data, to verify the beneficiary lists and monitor assistance. Some organizations adopted novel technology for data collection (e.g. Plan's [use of Poimapper](#)). In a few cases, organizations managed to persuade the government about the value of their own system in assessing vulnerability. Yet the investment in data collection did not translate to better datasets at the local level. [Lists are still unreliable](#).

How we are using Poimapper

This staff member explains how Poimapper and tablets are improving their data collection.



How to capitalize on the investment and fully unleash the power of data?

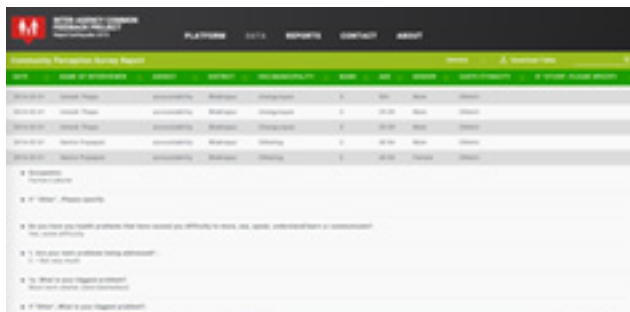
Improve disaggregation: go beyond the household. The unit of reference for many organizations was the household, with little appreciation for its composition (e.g. overall size, gender breakdown, age, ability). Consequently, the seemingly fair blanket coverage left the largest households disadvantaged. They received the same package, regardless of size, and this has not always been rectified with time. Some gran-

ularity was achieved by identifying some set categories such as lactating mothers, the elderly, and people with disabilities, but this still fell short of truly appreciating diversity.

Avoid data burial: share open data. Much of the data collected remained in organization computers, or was not optimally shared (for example, it might only be [shared in paper form](#)). Publicly available disaggregated datasets from humanitarian organizations, capturing data about their achievements or about the locations where they operate, are still lacking. This limits accountability, but also the potential for better planning and analysis of the response. Investment in open data should be promoted. Open data could be shared immediately, with no need to establish centralized systems—only to invest in existing organizational ones. Datasets complying with the [five star deployment scheme for open data](#) and using [P-codes](#) (unique reference codes for VDCs in Nepal) could be used by other governmental and humanitarian actors, improve coordination in clusters and working groups, and feed into better analysis of the overall context and response.

The interagency Community Feedback Project is sharing the results of its accountability surveys as open data. Their data [sharing platform](#) allows access to raw data, and users can perform some analytics directly online. CFP representatives emphasized that if more open data were made available by participating humanitarian organizations not only could better analytics be produced, but the accountability of the

overall system would be increased. However, finding open data remains a struggle.



Tap into data to inform advocacy and accountability initiatives. Availability of data can help organizations and communities to improve accountability in the reconstruction process. For example, it would aid in improving the quality of public records, through data collection initiatives accompanied by processes such as community mapping and participatory statistics. It can also serve to verify reliability of public data. [Examples of organizations double checking government records and rectifying issues exist](#), for example with the red cards. The capacity to monitor the quality and usage of data will be key to ensuring an equitable and accountable reconstruction. Availability of strong data can also back advocacy initiatives supporting inclusion and accountability, led by organizations or local civil society.

6. CONFLICT SENSITIVITY: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

In the latest Community Feedback Survey, 24% of respondents noted an increase in social tensions since the earthquake. Around 30% think that aid is not provided fairly, primarily because of “networks” (e.g. castes, parties). The trend is gradually decreasing (in July 60% of respondents thought that assistance was not provided fairly). One possible explanation for the improvement may be winterization activities. But these tensions remain an issue of concern, especially with the bulk of assistance (livelihoods, house reconstruction) still to come. Popular expectations remain very high (as indicated by the Community Feedback Project), but [are not likely to be fully met](#).

Discussion on standard 3 already highlighted the importance of mitigating the potential for tension to ensure that assistance “does no harm.” This is particularly important given the 10-year civil war that only ended in 2006, and which particularly afflicted the same rural areas affected by the earthquake. Reviewers avoided discussing conflict-related issues, but noticed that [people do not forget easily](#). Animated discussions were observed among people when they remembered that some had received assistance two days before others. One community member noted: *“When assistance does not come for all, they say ‘it is ok’ in front of you, but as you leave, then they will start fighting”*.

Second lot of distribution meant discomfort

This woman still remembers and regrets the discomfort experienced when receiving assistance few days after other villagers.



Interventions tackled gender-based violence, but other forms of conflict sensitivity were rare in the response. It was noted

that mention of conflict and conflict sensitivity was nearly absent from the literature review on the earthquake. Awareness existed on the ground, but only few informants were willing to discuss the issue, and only off the record. Conflict sensitivity in such context must be on the radar and in the toolkits of humanitarian responders.

It will be important to:

Be aware of expectations in the reconstruction phase, and be ready to manage them. The main need of communities – shelter reconstruction – has not been satisfied yet, and there are many expectations. The resources available are unlikely to meet the need. NGOs will need to manage expectations, and proactively ensure that the most marginalized are not forgotten.

Strengthen conflict sensitivity. Be aware of the need to “do no harm” in a context that is politically charged. Strengthen conflict sensitivity with staff and in programs. Some organizations are already addressing these issues. Oxfam, for example, has been very conscious of local dynamics. It ensured that [political parties were openly involved](#) and also [used appreciative inquiry techniques to create consensus amongst diverse actors](#), including local peace groups. It is important that such sensitivity is strengthened across organizations, and practices are shared.

Appreciative inquiry to build consensus

This program manager explains how they used appreciative enquiry to build consensus in a highly politicized arena.



7. PREPAREDNESS MATTERS: BUILDING ON ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

Many [underlined the importance of preparedness](#). Gaps in the response were often due to the fact that organizations (local partners in particular) were simply and understandably not prepared for an emergency of that scale. Only few local partners had previous experience on emergency response, and even then, limited to small-scale and localized landslides. Experience had to be built on the job, in a context where international organizations were asked to rely on local partners and limit the influx of foreign staff.

With the risk of similar disasters in the future, experience in inclusion and accountability acquired through this emergency must be capitalized on. This requires investing in:

Organizational systems and skills. Strengthening capacity for response can result in better preparedness for the future. Creating [rosters](#) for local partners and for local staff, [contingency funds and planning](#), and investment in staff capacity have all been repeatedly mentioned as critical. There is a [strong demand by partners for capacity building](#). It is important that knowledge acquired by staff on the job is now structured, systematized and strengthened through capacity-building exercises (e.g. preparedness planning, training, documentation, and sharing of expertise).

We need to be prepared

This manager of a partner organization talks about the need for preparedness, within organizations (e.g. having rosters, funds) and outside them (e.g. with response plans).



Mutual understanding and accountability. Consolidate what has been achieved, in particular with the government. Organizations invested significantly in determining how best to interact in clusters and with the government. It was not always an easy ride: the methods, priorities, and systems of humanitarian organizations did not align with the government's modus operandi. Yet progress has been made, and there are [grounds for stronger mutual understanding and accountability](#). Organizations must capitalize on and formalize such understanding, to create a better basis for the rehabilitation work and for future emergencies.

We understand the system better

This local government officer explains that understanding NGO systems was challenging at the beginning, but they have a much better mutual understanding now.



Ensure local investment in preparedness is not undone when external teams are brought in and take the lead. This was a thorny issue for the staff and agencies that were operating before the emergency. Compared to other emergency setups, progress was noted in the quality of accountability surge personnel, and in their interaction with ad-hoc working groups (e.g. the communication with communities working group). They did not need convincing that accountability is key, and of its deep linkages to communication. And they were prepared to participate in system-wide engagements such as the Community Feedback Project. But it was also noted that preparedness work—including promotion of inclusive approaches and established collaborations—was not capitalized on by surge staff. Possibly because these depend upon mutual trust and relationship building, and the influx of new actors reset such relationships. A lot of contextual knowledge was lost. The UN organized orientation meetings, but they were poorly attended. Some existing cooperative arrangements were discontinued because some surge personnel claimed: "In emergencies we don't work in consortium." The challenge, then, is to build stronger institutional memory in the preparedness phase to ensure that the relationships and knowledge in place translate into protocols for action. Surge staff must be more sensitive to the importance of local dynamics.

8. WORKING TOGETHER MAKES A DIFFERENCE

At many stages of this review the importance of continuing to work together has been highlighted. It is worth restating again, as the final learning. In visiting the diverse projects, as yet untapped opportunities for sharing learning, collaboration, joint advocacy were noted.

As mentioned under standard 6, organizations had operational coordination in clusters, but limited joint engagement for advocacy initiatives. There was, for example, no joint action to ensure that the most marginalized could be prioritized in the response. Field staff identified the need to create a forum of like-minded organizations (within but also beside clusters) to strengthen advocacy for better inclusion. A collective voice is necessary to [lobby the government about the importance of a targeted approach](#), focusing on the most vulnerable.

Like-minded organizations need to advocate together

This programme manager learned that to efficiently advocate to the government on issues of targeting, like-minded organizations should work together.



More coordination could take place in promoting opportunities for sharing and learning (see the previous discussion on standard 7). In the course of this review, for example, organizations exchanged staff for field visits. Participants welcomed this opportunity to [gain exposure to each other's work](#). It is hoped that this review will contribute to sharing learning and ideas, and create opportunities for mutual engagement.

Concluding remarks

ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSION ARE NOT AN ADD-ON. THEY ARE A DIFFERENT WAY TO WORK.

The eight recommendations presented boil down to one main principle: accountability and inclusion are not an add-on, they are a different way to work. This review demonstrates that there is significant positive progress and change in humanitarian response. Inclusion and accountability are established central issues. Yet some of the recommendations presented require deep and structural transformations in how humanitarian assistance is delivered. For example:

- in the relationship between emergency and local teams;
- in the devising of projects and programs;
- in the relationship with the government—including appreciating the importance of advocacy as a component of response;
- in the integration of DRR and long-term planning in the initial response phase; in the modalities and channels of communication with affected populations.

There are many challenges, but those working on the response who were interviewed for this review are clearly committed to overcoming them. If organizations continue to open up spaces for innovation, learning, and sharing, such challenges can be tackled.