HUMANITARIAN COALITION ////

Review of the Humanitarian Response in Nepal

A focus on inclusion and accountability

Executive Summary

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, they raised $7.4 million to address the most pressing needs of Nepal residents following two major earthquakes on April 25, 2015 and May 12, 2015 and the more than 300 subsequent aftershocks.

As part of its commitment to program quality and accountability, the Humanitarian Coalition looked at diverse projects it funded and carried out by Humanitarian Coalition member organizations in response to the earthquakes in Nepal. The goal was 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.

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 review confirmed the importance of looking at accountability and inclusion as core elements of program quality in line with the Core Humanitarian Standard. It also highlighted eight recommendations, relevant for the Humanitarian Coalition and its members, but also for other humanitarian actors.

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.

Inclusion
Who is "in", who is "out" when assistance is delivered, and when decisions are made?
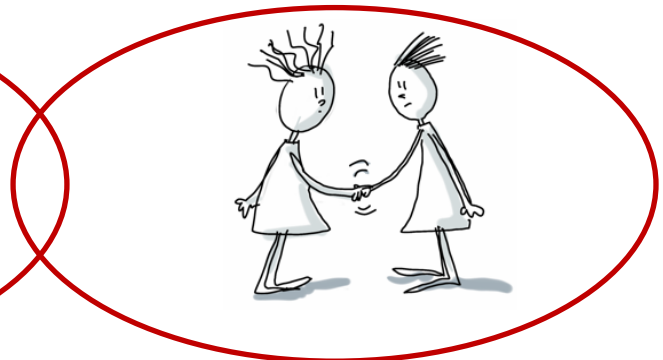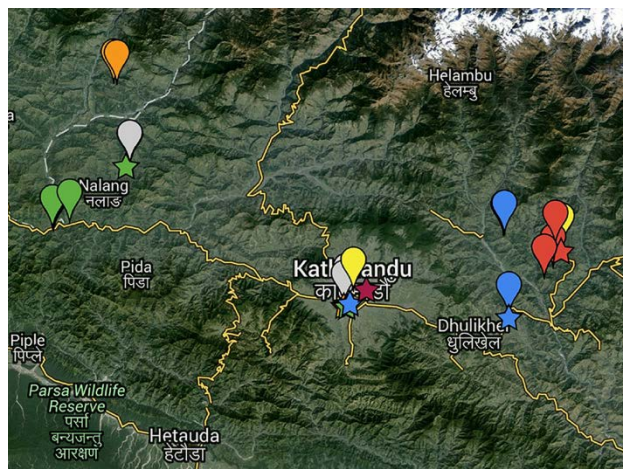
Accountability to beneficiaries
Is assistance based on good and clear "promises", and are they kept?

The review employed a qualitative methodology based on active listening and deep conversations on the ground. Accountability and inclusion were analyzed through two complementary lenses: frameworks spelling out dimensions of accountability and inclusion and the Core Humanitarian Standard.

Because of the immense scale of the response and the diverse and challenging geography of Nepal, this review focused on putting together a snapshot of activities based on visits to accessible locations in two of the most affected districts: Sindhupalchowk and Dhading.

▰▰▰▰ Key Findings

- Accountability and inclusion are not an add-on, they are a different way to work. 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.

▰▰▰▰ 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.