Common Advocacy Statements: the CDAC Network 2022

This document was developed and approved in draft by CDAC Network's Member Advisory Group in August 2021.

Introduction

Since CDAC's inception in 2009, there has been a dramatic transformation in communication, community engagement and accountability. The Network members have been at the forefront of this step change, driving developments in policy, processes and approaches, making CCEA a core component of humanitarian action and building the case for global commitments that now frame the future of accountability.

Though progress has been notable, the value in coming together as a network to deepen impact of CCEA is as important as it was in the first meeting. Year on year, crises are growing in number, impact and complexity. There have never been more people displaced. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the critical importance of getting communication and engagement right. And this global crisis has made multi-stakeholder engagement critical in identifying appropriate solutions.

CDAC's core vision focuses on ensuring people and communities are central to identifying solutions to the problems they face in a crisis. The 2022-2027 vision is:

> *'that communities will have the information and resources they need to determine their own solutions and be central stakeholders in humanitarian and development decision making'.*

Using the collective clout of the network, CDAC seeks to reverse the focus of humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local. This is done through deep engagement with local bodies to strengthen sustainable communication and engagement ecosystems. These national and sub-national platforms support universal access to the decision-making apparatus and the intentional inclusion of marginalised voices.

This document outlines the common advocacy statements of the CDAC Network in support of this vision. It aims to support **CDAC Network's collective influence to promote a common vision of the growth and change needed in CCEA, so that the drive for effectiveness is efficient and well targeted**.

Core statements

People and communities should be driving decisions in a crisis. They act first, they act fast and are best placed to support the most vulnerable.

- Until people and communities affected by crisis are meaningful stakeholders of decisions in humanitarian action, we will continue to get it wrong. This means losing money, time and resources and risks leaving needs unmet and lives lost.

- In order to engage meaningfully, people and communities need access to timely and accurate information, sufficient infrastructure and resources, and clear, safe and accessible channels with which to engage any support needed.

Communication and dialogue saves lives, protects resilience and accelerates recovery. It is as fundamental for survival as cash, food, water, shelter and medicine.

- Being able to communicate with others and access information from all relevant sources builds and maintains valuable support mechanisms in a crisis. Sharing experiences and forging links with others in a similar situation can play a critical role in improving the psychosocial wellbeing of those affected by disasters and displacement.

- Knowing about the humanitarian situation, where danger lies, where and how to access services, how to find missing family and friends allows people to make informed decisions about their lives and livelihoods, allowing people to protect assets, retain resilience and begin recovery. Furthermore, this can help people to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse.

Currently, engagement is notional. Effective engagement recognizes and intentionally includes the broad range of actors in a response.

- Effective humanitarian action requires the engagement with, and collaboration between, diverse actors. Ensuring opportunities to engage effectively means broadening our focus to working with and, where relevant, supporting, locally-driven approaches and adapting global systems.

- Moving from notional feedback mechanisms to more systematic dialogue is critical. People must be able to report their priorities, concerns, and issues and be made aware how these have been taken into account in response planning. Until people affected by crisis have greater influence in the decisions that impact them, humanitarian action will not be accountable.

Accountability to people affected by crises is everyone's business. It should be at the forefront of all humanitarian discussions and decision making.

- Accountability is discussed in silos in humanitarian action and is often an add-on or after thought to programme planning, design and implementation. More needs to be done to understand the barriers to improved accountability to recipients of aid, to assign responsibility and ownership to systemic failings, and to determine actions to improve the situation in the future.

The change we want to see

1. CCEA is embedded in planning, implementation and learning. This change requires a focus on:

a. Continuing to institutionalise effective and efficient CCEA in systems and processes, and promoting the inclusion and participation of people and communities in decision making with a gender, age and diversity lens.

b. Designing programmes that are responsive to people's questions and information needs and that build on available systems to reach all those affected in a crisis

c. Doubling down on efforts to ensure that processes are locally led and participatory to promote better, more sustainable outcomes.

d. Investing more in information preparedness, strengthening networks and building media and other local capacity before, during and following a crisis.

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2. CCEA is adaptive and responsive to the local context and contributes to the fulfillment of commitments on accountability. This change demands focus on:

a. Institutionalising communication that uses multiple and preferred languages, formats and channels of communication and engages in dialogue with individuals and institutions people trust; communication that is designed in response to needs and preferences of people and communities.

b. Matching the considerable efforts in improving collective action at the global level on AAP with investments in local action and improving inclusive and participatory approaches.

c. Learning and adapting policy and practice in relation to innovation and evidence in effective communication, prioritising nationally-appropriate means of engagement.

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3. Partnership and collaboration at country level facilitates meaningful dialogue and engagement with and between relevant actors in humanitarian and development programming. This change demands focus on:

a. Investing in accountability approaches that utilise and strengthen the multiple local- and globally-led entry points for meaningful engagement that can uphold the dignity of people affected by crisis.

b. Committing to collective action and common products and services that facilitate greater engagement of the right people at the right time. Prioritising collective actions to enable platforms that are responsive, flexible and efficient.

c. Promoting linkages between different actors and initiatives across the humanitarian and development nexus, ensuring that efforts to engage diverse local and national actors reflect the communications infrastructure.

4. Global policy on CCEA recognises people and communities affected by crises as critical stakeholders in effective solutions, and focuses on leadership responsibility for greater accountability. This change demands focus on:

a. Holding leadership to account for delivering on commitments to closing the feedback loop. This means identifying actions that ensure that community feedback is acted upon and reflected in humanitarian action, donor engagement and programming.

b. Broadening the conversation on accountability to include all actors in humanitarian and development programming in identifying solutions. All actors include actors at local and international level working on humanitarian and / or development.

c. Identifying systemic blockages to greater accountability, determining solutions and assigning leadership responsibility.

Definitions

Communication and community engagement
An area of humanitarian action based on the principle of 'Communication is aid'. It gives priority to sharing life-saving, actionable information with people affected by disaster using two-way communication channels so aid providers listen to and act on people's needs, suggested solutions, feedback and complaints, and people receiving assistance have a say in and lead decisions that affect them. It also prioritises keeping people in crisis connected with each other and the outside world (Source: *CDAC How to Guide*).

Accountability
The process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power (Source: Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability)

CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors - working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision making – moving from global to local.

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