

# ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP)

## *Using AAP indicators in Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs): A training module for assessment teams and enumerators*

GUIDANCE NOTE | MAY 2020

### ABOUT THIS TRAINING

In 2017, REACH and the Global AAP Task Force developed a [menu of core AAP indicators and questions](#) for inter-agency needs assessments, in support of the Grand Bargain Workstream on Joint Needs Assessments and in line with the [Ethos principles](#) developed by the Workstream. These indicators were piloted in the 2017 Ukraine MSNA and further rolled out in 2018 and 2019 MSNAs. Following an initial review and refinement of the AAP indicator menu, REACH, with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), has produced a training module to assist humanitarian actors in incorporating global AAP indicators in all inter-agency coordinated or joint needs assessments designed to inform the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, such as MSNAs.

The production of this training module also addresses specific AAP criteria outlined in the [Global Public Policy Institute \(GPPi\) methodology](#), which was developed to assess the quality of coordinated multi-sector needs assessments. These criteria include participation, context specificity, and active dissemination.

This two-hour training module is designed for enumerators and assessment teams. The complete package of materials includes this guidance note, presentation slides with embedded facilitator notes, and a case study exercise on AAP in Action. On completing the training, participants will understand the centrality of AAP and why AAP indicators should be included in inter-agency coordinated/joint needs assessments.

Development of the module was informed by an extensive review of relevant literature and standards, as well as ten key informant (KI) interviews with IMPACT/ REACH staff, including both national and international country-based staff in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and headquarters in Geneva.

**This is not a one-size-fits-all training module.** There are certain minimum standards and core competencies with regards to AAP that we expect all enumerators and assessment teams conducting inter-agency coordinated/joint needs assessments to uphold, but contexts vary greatly. The methodology and structure of inter-agency coordinated/joint needs assessments (such as MSNAs) – the final list of questions, as well as the balance of household survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews – will depend on contextual, security and access issues.

This training module is therefore designed to be adapted by assessment teams in-country. It is entirely appropriate and encouraged for you to include case studies and examples from your own context.

### Commitment to Accountability: Putting Affected People at the Centre

It would be wrong to assume that all enumerators and assessment teams are familiar with the AAP agenda, much less international standard-setting initiatives for accountable humanitarian action. In some contexts, assessment teams may be confused about the inclusion of AAP indicators or may view AAP as an “optional add-on.” Multi-sectoral questionnaires like the MSNA survey are usually fairly long, and AAP questions are often removed. In other scenarios, the importance and utility of AAP data is not fully recognized: Teams may see the inclusion of AAP modules as a box-ticking exercise. The deprioritization of AAP is observed at multiple levels, including with enumerators, who may deemphasize or try to skip over questions relating to AAP if they do not understand why these questions are so important.

This training module aims to provide a clear and straightforward explanation of accountability, unpacking three components (taking account, giving account, being held to account). A very brief overview of the major standard-setting initiatives for accountable humanitarian action will locate the concept's history and developing significance, but the focus will be on the practical application of AAP as it relates to real-life activities across the humanitarian programme cycle.

## Collecting AAP Data in the Context of MSNAs

MSNAs are usually major, nationwide data collection exercises. Assessment teams and enumerators can typically access thousands of households within the affected population. By systematically gathering data on AAP in MSNAs, the humanitarian community as a whole can benefit from a broad and relatively resource-light picture of how a large number of affected people feel about a response. MSNAs are set up to inform Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Humanitarian Response Plans and Flash Appeals. Collecting AAP data in the context of MSNAs is a way to support Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams' strategic planning processes around leadership and effectiveness with regards to accountability, and directly inform inter-cluster coordination mechanisms. Gathering high quality AAP data in a systematic and centralized way means that humanitarian programming can be adjusted and adapted to changing realities.

However, an MSNA certainly does not replace a functioning complaints and feedback mechanism, sensitive to age, gender and diversity, and the objectives of the two are very different. Even when MSNAs include KIIs and focus group discussions, due to access and security concerns, the overarching aim is to provide a broad and inclusive overview of the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis to inform humanitarian planning milestones such as the HNO/HRP. Key Informants raised questions about the extent to which including AAP questions in MSNAs meant that enumerators and assessment teams should be trained and equipped to receive complaints and make referrals, especially regarding protection. Others were concerned about mandate, and keen to be realistic about the level of support that would be needed to ensure a full referral system.

**This training module proposes a middle ground.** It is unethical and potentially harmful for assessment teams and enumerators to enter peoples' homes and communities, open up sensitive issues and then leave with no follow up. It is also unethical and potentially harmful for assessment teams and enumerators to assume that they have the professional skillset to address sensitive and illegal issues such as abuse, violence and misconduct.

Capacity to make and receive referrals varies dramatically from context to context. Country Teams should be supported to contextualize referral systems as appropriate, considering a wide range of factors such as: communications channels that are available to and used by the affected population; whether clusters are activated or not and the degree to which they are staffed and resourced; context and culture-specific barriers to seeking redress.

All assessment teams and enumerators will have signed a Code of Conduct and accompanying policies (including child protection; anti-fraud, bribery and corruption; anti-terrorism; grievance; conflict of interest; data protection, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse). Referral mechanisms and pathways will vary by context, but the overarching aim is to build and maintain connections between those conducting MSNAs and other relevant service providers, or at least with a centralized focal point responsible for maintaining contact with other service providers (NGOs, international organizations, local authorities, civil society and community-based organizations conducting complementary actions in-country).

## Closing the Feedback Loop

Including affected communities in each phase of the feedback and assessment cycle – from survey design and data collection, through to analysis, dialogue and course correction – is an essential component of AAP. When engagement with affected communities in the context of MSNAs does not go beyond data collection, AAP efforts can be perceived as tokenistic and driven exclusively by donor requirements, effectively doing very little to correct information and power imbalances in humanitarian action.

Key Informants described promising examples of stakeholder feedback and engagement. These included ensuring that AAP data is analysed jointly with affected communities, where possible; reporting back and discussing findings/conclusions with affected communities (do they validate the conclusions drawn? What do they think is needed now?), and; including affected communities in decision-making around how to “course correct” – how to ensure that feedback

leads to more timely, effective and relevant humanitarian programming, as well as any necessary modifications to the feedback mechanism itself. It is suggested that it would be helpful to document examples of good practice at each stage of assessment cycle and provide teams with formalized guidance on how to contextualize feedback processes and find appropriate ways to engage with affected communities.

## Further Reading

- **Menu of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Related Questions for Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs), REACH and the AAP Task Force, 2017:** <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/menu-accountability-affected-populations-aap-related-questions-multi-sector-needs>
- **Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards:** <https://spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/>
- **Core Humanitarian Standards and resources:** <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>
- **IASC Commitments on AAP:** <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/documents-61>
- **Grand Bargain Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessments Ethos:** [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/ws5\\_-\\_collaborative\\_needs\\_assessment\\_ethos.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/ws5_-_collaborative_needs_assessment_ethos.pdf)
- **Ground Truth Solutions Constituent Voice Methodology™. Available here:** <https://groundtruthsolutions.org/>
- **Constituent Voice Technical Note, Keystone Accountability, 2015.** <http://keystoneaccountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Technical-Note-1.pdf>
- **Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action, ICRC, 2017:** <https://shop.icrc.org/e-books/handbook-on-data-protection-in-humanitarian-action.html>
- **Data Responsibility Guidelines, OCHA, 2019:** <https://centre.humdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OCHA-DR-Guidelines-working-draft-032019.pdf>
- **Accountability to Affected Populations: Community Perceptions of Humanitarian Assistance in South Sudan, REACH, 2020:** [https://www.impact-repository.org/document/repository/0a7205a8/SSD\\_REACH\\_Report\\_AAP\\_Final.pdf](https://www.impact-repository.org/document/repository/0a7205a8/SSD_REACH_Report_AAP_Final.pdf)
- **Somali Citizen Perspectives on Humanitarian Priorities in 2018, Africa's Voices Foundation and REACH, 2018:** <https://www.africasvoices.org/case-studies/reach-somali-citizen-perspectives-on-humanitarian-priorities-in-2018-jmcna/>