

Joint Standards Initiative deployment to the Horn of Africa

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Numerous factors, including drought, rising food prices, conflict, seasonal floods and localised resource conflicts have been overstressing the coping strategies of rural and urban livelihoods systems in the Horn of Africa.

In July 2011, the Quality and Accountability Initiatives, including the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the Sphere Project and People In Aid, had [called for greater quality and accountability in the humanitarian response in the Horn of Africa](#). An agreement between HAP International, the Sphere Project and People In Aid - with support from ALNAP - was made to collaborate on a joint deployment to the Horn of Africa to assist agencies in responding to the crisis.

An initial assessment was conducted in Nairobi from 15 to 23 August 2011. The consultation process of the assessment mission identified several common themes and trends in relation to the key accountability gaps and the priorities of the current response. Unfortunately, consultations with crisis-affected communities were not possible during the assessment mission. Read more about the [Findings of the Horn of Africa assessment mission](#).

Phase 1: Kenya

On 27 October 2011, the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) deployed to Nairobi, Kenya. The aim of the deployment was to support humanitarian agencies in providing accountable and appropriate programming that meets accepted standards of quality and accountability. The [Terms of Reference for the Joint Standards Initiative deployment](#) have been published. They will be adapted based on the changing needs and further consultations with organisations and networks working in the response.

Overview of activities: 27 October – 16 December 2011

- Provided input into the Horn of Africa real time evaluation as part of the Advisory Group
- Presented to several forums, including the Water and Environmental Sanitation Coordination (WESCOORD/WASH cluster), a national partners training event on accountability tools and a workshop on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)
- Participated in the Emergency Capacity Building Project's flood simulation

- Consulted and engaged with over 25 agencies to identify quality and accountability gaps and emerging issues
- Consulted with the accountability sub-group of the Inter-Agency Working Group on several occasions for strategic guidance
- Signed a memorandum of understanding with the Inter-Agency Working Group to promote better coherence and collaboration
- Conducted an interagency quality and accountability mapping exercise with the in-country PSEA network in Turkana.

Key highlight – Interagency quality and accountability mapping exercise

One of the key activities of the Joint Standards Initiative deployment has been to ensure that the voices of those affected by crises are brought centre stage to ensure action on quality and accountability in the current response. The Joint Standards Initiative collaborated with the in-country network on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (hosted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) to undertake a joint quality and accountability mapping exercise in the Turkana region of Kenya. In total, 25 agencies were represented, 36 staff members participated and 109 host community members were consulted from 8 stakeholder groups.

The aim of the exercise was to raise awareness of the quality and accountability challenges as perceived by crisis-affected communities and gain a better understanding of the state of accountability. Recognising the challenges that crisis-affected communities face helps organisations address central issues that affect the lives of the communities they seek to assist. The exercise provided a capacity building opportunity to programme site staff to increase their understanding and practice of accountability, as well as of issues related to prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The exercise also gave the opportunity to a variety of stakeholders, especially staff and crisis-affected communities, to provide recommendations and solutions.

The following is a summary of findings which have been presented and shared at several forums in Nairobi:

- **Participation and feedback into programme design and implementation:** a common trend that emerged amongst the groups consulted was the lack of participation with crisis-affected communities. This was perceived to have resulted in unsustainable and unsuitable projects with no real impact.
- **Hit-and-run projects:** the need to have sustainable, self-reliant and long-term programmes which lead to community empowerment and ownership was strongly emphasised by every stakeholder group consulted.

- **Sharing of relevant and timely information:** the lack of information on project details, timeframes and beneficiary processes was highlighted. Reports of organisations springing up and then suddenly disappearing were recorded.
- **Access to humanitarian assistance of vulnerable groups:** people with disabilities and the elderly highlighted issues of exclusion, a sense of discrimination and a lack of special effort to ensure their representation in the ongoing project activities. They also highlighted concerns of accessing food distributions and difficulties in transporting food.
- **Role of committees and community leaders:** affected communities highlighted the over-reliance of organisations on the use of committees or structures within the community to select beneficiaries, pass on information and provide feedback on programmes. Wider consultations were needed.
- **Complaints handling and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse:** the community members highlighted that they were not aware about the process through which they could safely raise concerns and complaints with organisations.
- **Rights and empowerment:** the various groups consulted highlighted that they did not have a clear understanding of their rights and wanted to be sensitised so they could hold organisations accountable.

Recommendations from the community consultations included:

Integrate planning with the Government of Kenya, local leaders and communities to develop joint community actions plans. This will avoid duplication of projects (Women's Group Kakuma)

Communities are consulted at all levels of the project cycle from design to evaluation and measurement (Women's Group Kakuma)

Prioritise resources, based on needs, with greater community involvement and conduct joint programming with the communities for sustainable community projects (Staff)

Staff need to receive guidance on when and where to find information about the projects, entitlements, timeframes, and more diverse ways of channelling information (Staff)

Information sharing, involvement and participation should be with the community at large and not only with the leaders (People with disabilities)

Respect the views of the community (Committee members)

The final report will be made available soon. It is currently being reviewed by the participants who facilitated the focus group discussions.

Useful resources

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) has opened a special [Horn of Africa Learning and Accountability Portal](#). The aim of the portal is to allow information sharing and present key learning on the Horn of Africa in

order to improve the quality of the response by encouraging complementarity amongst agencies. In particular, the portal seeks to provide support to agencies by providing them with evaluations, best practice on accountability and key learning from past and present activities.

Next steps and follow-up to the real time evaluation

The detailed real time evaluation identified a number of issues including the lack of a coherent approach to community participation and getting crisis-affected communities feedback on implemented projects. After consultation with the Inter-Agency Working Group based in Nairobi, it has been agreed that the Joint Standards Initiative will undertake a participatory impact assessment with crisis-affected communities in January 2012, as a follow-up of this evaluation. A key priority of the deployment is to bring the voices of crisis-affected communities to the fore. This will enable agencies to reflect collectively on core accountability issues and address problems that affect the lives of those they seek to assist.

On 17 January 2012, the Inter-Agency Working Group will hold a workshop on quality and accountability issues.

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