'WE ARE COMMITTED TO LISTEN TO YOU'

World Vision's experience with humanitarian feedback mechanisms in Darfur

Isabella Jean
with Francesca Bonino

CASESTUDY

ALNAP

C·D·A
practical learning for effective international action

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (**ALNAP**) is a system-wide network dedicated to improving the accountability and performance of humanitarian action by strengthening the humanitarian evidence base through sharing lessons, identifying key issues and, where appropriate, providing leadership to find collective approaches and solutions. **www.alnap.org**

CDA focuses on improving the effectiveness of international actors who provide humanitarian assistance, engage in peace practice, and are involved in supporting sustainable development. **www.cdacollaborative.org**

About the authors
Isabella Jean is Director of Evaluation and Learning at CDA. She joined CDA in 2007 as a field associate for the Do No Harm Program, the Listening Program, and the Reflecting on Peace Practice Program. Isabella led field-based research efforts involving international and local agencies and practitioners in Africa, Asia/Central Asia and the Middle East. With CDA colleagues, Isabella recently co-authored CDA's book 'Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid'.

Francesca Bonino is Research Officer at ALNAP where she covers the evaluation, learning and accountability portfolio.

Illustration credit
Front and back cover image; all inside illustrations: Frits Ahlefeldt, http://hikingartist.com.

Contents

1. About this case study

This case study specifically focuses on World Vision's experience of setting up and using a feedback mechanism as part of the food assistance programme in South Darfur.

It is part of a larger Active Learning Network for Accountability and Humanitarian Performance (ALNAP) and CDA research project on the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms for affected populations in humanitarian contexts. The findings that emerge from this – along with two other case studies in Pakistan and Haiti – will be analysed and summarised in a report that offers evidence-informed guidance on strengthening the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. **Box 1** below explains how this case study fits into the broader research process and explains why it is relevant to explore the use of feedback mechanisms.

Why was the World Vision (WV) Sudan feedback mechanism chosen? It appeared to have been successful in establishing and maintaining some structured ways of engaging with programme and aid recipients to solicit and respond to their feedback, queries, requests for information and so on. The purpose of this research is to substantiate and test some of these effectiveness claims.

The case studies were selected after a:

- **call to the ALNAP Membership** for agencies potentially interested in hosting the research team during the field visit and who would open the door to their programme staff and aid recipient communities
- **preliminary desk review** of documents describing how different agencies have tried and tested various approaches and channels to garner and use feedback from crisis-affected populations
- **final screening and selection** based on the scoping criteria set out in the method paper that informs this research (see **Box 2** on page 6).

The sections that follow discuss, firstly, the operational context within which WV and the food assistance programme in Sudan operate. Secondly, we outline the different communication and feedback channels used by WV in South Darfur. We then present different observations and insights from programme staff and crisis-affected communities and individuals as they relate to the seven feedback effectiveness propositions we set up to test in this research. These are analysed proposition by proposition to draw potential lessons relevant to the design, establishment and more effective utilisation of feedback mechanisms, in the broader aim of improving humanitarian performance. Additional observations and insights potentially indicating areas for further inquiry are then presented at the conclusion of this case study.

Box 1: This case study and the broader 'feedback' landscape

The last two decades have seen a growth in research that seeks to understand and diagnose the challenges of improving humanitarian performance (Adinolfi et al., 2005; ALNAP, 2005; Donini et al., 2008; ALNAP, 2010; Ashdown, 2011; ALNAP, 2012). Many in the humanitarian system have suggested that the quality of programming and aid delivery would be improved by allowing a more active, accountable and meaningful engagement of crisis-affected populations (Borton, 2008; Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012; Barry and Barham, 2012; Darcy, Alexander and Kiani, 2013).

These observations are in line with those from a desk study by CDA (2011) that focused on feedback mechanisms in international assistance organisations and highlighted some of the opportunities, constraints, demands and incentives problems related to seeking, gathering and utilising feedback from affected populations. The study showed that despite a commonly held view that feedback from aid recipients is valued as essential to improving accountability, there are very few 'continuous feedback loops' (CDA, 2011:2), and where present, these tended to focus on 'on project-level information, not agency-wide policies, strategies or programs' (ibid.:14). CDA noted the patchy and scattered nature of descriptive reports, analysis, lessons learned and good practices reviews drawing from the various types of feedback processes that have been tried and piloted to then conclude that recipient feedback mechanisms largely remain an area of emerging research and practice (ibid.:26).

The present research builds on the earlier work by CDA (2011), the Danish Refugee Council (2008), Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) (Levaditis, 2007), Save the Children (Ashraf, Hassan and Akram, 2010) and WV (Wood, 2011a; b) that attempted to systematise practices and develop benchmarks and guidance on complaints handling and feedback mechanisms for affected populations. It attempts to continue reducing the gap in the literature by specifically focusing on the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms, and pushing further the boundaries of available evidence-informed guidance on feedback mechanisms to be utilised by affected populations in humanitarian contexts.

This research project will produce a synthesis and guidance document aimed at programme staff and programme advisors in humanitarian agencies, complemented by field practice insights on designing, setting up and using recipient feedback mechanisms. Researchers' and practitioners' insights and emerging findings from this case study – potentially leading to the identification of good practices – should be treated as preliminary, and the overall nature of this research as exploratory.
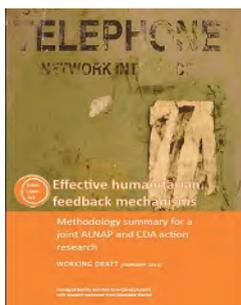
You can find out more about the methodology of this case study, and the overall research process, in the *Effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms: method paper*
www.alnap.org/ourwork/feedback-loop

2. Field visits and research process

This case study primarily focuses on the feedback processes within World Vision Sudan's food assistance programme in South Darfur camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

While convenience and opportunity were among the considerations for choosing a host organisation, there are some important factors that made WV Sudan an ideal choice.

1. **WV's interest and availability** to host the research team and facilitate access to their programme sites, staff, and crisis-affected populations.

2. **Learning orientation** – WV's manifest inclination towards reflecting on, and learning from their recent (and still unfolding) practices with recipient feedback mechanisms. Both WV headquarters and the Sudan country office saw this as an opportunity to generate some evidence about the performance of the feedback mechanism, as well as to catalyse some learning and peer exchange among programme staff in Sudan.

3. **Observation of the mechanism in real time** – WV is currently operating in South Darfur and it was possible for the research team to document how the mechanisms are working in real time and to interview programme staff and different stakeholders, including most importantly the IDPs in the camps who are the 'expected users' of such mechanisms and communication channels.

4. **Possibility of a wide geographical spread**, **and operational and contextual diversity** with the other two field visits conducted in Haiti and Pakistan.

5. **Availability of documentation** – WV International had already produced a number of reports, studies and guidelines covering feedback mechanisms. WV Sudan had produced programme-specific guidelines spelling out the different roles and responsibilities allocated with regards to the functioning of the feedback mechanism (see for instance Nyathi, 2008; World Vision, 2008 a; b; World Vision, 2009; World Vision Sudan, 2012). Some reports also provide examples of the utilisation of recipients' feedback data. This data set was analysed during the desk-based segment of the research. Based on this, the research team believed that it would be able to document decision-making practices based on feedback information, reconstruct the related flow of information, and pinpoint communication patterns with aid recipients.

6. **Good fit within the scoping criteria** established for the research (Bonino and Knox Clarke, 2013). See **Box 2** below for details on the scoping criteria.

Box 2: The scoping criteria

The scoping criteria called for the selected feedback mechanisms cases to:

- operate at project, service delivery, programme implementation level

- operate in the context of on-going humanitarian operations or humanitarian programming, but not necessarily in the immediate phases of relief and response after a sudden-onset crisis

- aim at adjusting and improving some elements of the actions carried out and services delivered

- aim at dealing with a broad caseload of non-sensitive issues (feedback) in addition to sensitive ones (complaints). Mechanisms only dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse allegations were excluded.

The visit to Sudan was conducted between 25 November and 6 December, 2012, and we were hosted by WV. Interviews were conducted with WV staff in Khartoum and Nyala and with residents in Otash, Alsalam and Kalma camps. In addition, the research team met with staff of World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), Oxfam America and Tearfund. We highlight findings from our interviews with WFP and Oxfam staff conducted in Khartoum and Nyala (please see **Mini case studies 1 and 2** on pages 32 and 33). In particular, we emphasise the shared operational and institutional challenges faced by the agencies: these point to important factors that require attention during the design and implementation of feedback mechanisms. Thus, the WFP and Oxfam examples are included to demonstrate additional approaches to gathering and responding to community feedback and how these approaches are evolving in response to different pressures.

Spring 2012

ALNAP and CDA started a research project to study the effectiveness of humanitarian feedback mechanisms

Throughout 2012-13

Comprehensive desk study of relevant literature

November 2012-May 2013

Field visits

Sudan   **Pakistan**   **Haiti**

Two-week-long visits: research team conducted interviews with frontline program staff, senior management and the affected people receiving assistance

Goal of this initiative

To produce evidence-informed guidance for operational agencies on strengthening the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms for affected populations in humanitarian contexts

Captured participants' perspectives and learning and documented what works, and why, when using feedback mechanisms

Another deliberate focus of our research is on utilisation of feedback for program modification and decision-making. As many past research studies have explored, accumulated feedback does not necessarily lead to utilisation (Jacobs, 2010; CDA, 2011; Wood, 2011a; 2011b; Anderson etal., 2012; Twersky et al., 2013). We seek to highlight the features of an effectively complete, or 'closed', feedback loop in which feedback from aid recipients has been acknowledged, documented and responded to.

We note the range of ways that agencies utilise feedback: for on-going internal monitoring and reputational risk management; for accountability to partners, donors and to the affected population; for program modification; for advocacy with donors and more. We describe how feedback from the IDPs has been used for small and on-going adjustments during project implementation to more significant program modifications. In our discussion of these feedback utilisation examples, we do not judge or attempt to measure the magnitude of the change created as a result of feedback utilisation. Our focus is

primarily on whether or not feedback has been used in decision-making, whether it has produced change and how. As much as possible, we trace the pathways through which information (from a single person or aggregated from multiple voices) leads to response and/or action and identify the factors that enable this process.

'complete' feedback loop

Acknowledgement by organisation

Feedback data analysed and shared with relevant parties

Crisis-affected person's feedback

Response, clarification, follow up

Response, clarification and follow-up actions (if taken, or not taken) are communicated back to the community or affected persons.

'incomplete' feedback loop

Disaster-affected person's feedback

Action/decision taken (or not)

The case study also underscores two design-related aspects that have implications for effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. First, an important aspect which is featured in much of the literature on feedback processes is the cultural appropriateness of the feedback channel itself. The Darfur case study points to the importance of taking both the local culture and the context (operational, security, phase of programming, institutional) into account to ensure an appropriate and effective mechanism. The second aspect, which receives a lot less attention in the literature and program documents, is the location of the feedback mechanism within the organisational structure and the level of integration into other organisational systems. We provide further discussion of both of these aspects below in section seven: **Location and formality level of feedback mechanisms.**

3. Feedback in the Darfur context

The overall operational context in Sudan is marked by continued insecurity.

WV has provided assistance to war-affected children and adults in Darfur since 2004. A six-year conflict between Darfur rebel groups and the central government has driven more than 2.7 million people into IDP camps and ended the lives of 300,000 people. To date, provision of food assistance remains WV's largest intervention in Darfur. WV currently provides monthly food rations to approximately 400,000 IDPs in seven IDP camps and seven conflict-affected areas in South Darfur. WV is the largest implementing partner to the WFP in South Darfur and is in charge of food assistance in the IDP camps as well as supplemental feeding programs in temporary schools located in and around IDP camps. In addition to food assistance, WV provides primary health care in several camp clinics, agricultural support, education, peace building, protection and clean water and sanitation (WASH) assistance in select camps and villages. WV supports the education of children in temporary schools and runs child-friendly spaces along with vocational skills training at women's empowerment centers in several Darfur camps.

Establishing feedback loops in restricted and conflict-affected settings requires an added vigilance and sensitivity given the safety concerns for both the recipients and aid providers. Aid workers are increasingly viewed with suspicion by the national government and there are multiple barriers to engaging with aid recipients and soliciting their views and suggestions.

Aid workers are increasingly viewed with suspicion.

Darfur in general is a challenging operational environment due to on-going conflict, security threats and shrinking humanitarian space. When it comes to field monitoring activities and solicitation of feedback from camp residents, the security risks are high for both aid agency staff and aid recipients who want to engage in conversations. This often limits the scope of the conversations that aid agencies can have with the people they aim to support. The nine years of displacement, the decreasing attention and resources allocated to Darfur by the international community and the fragile peace efforts have led to the politicisation of aid and a growing sense of dependency for many people in the camps. Certain topics, such as overall political security, levels of violence in the camps,

and returning to original settlements are considered off limits due to the highly sensitive nature of on-going negotiations between the Government of Sudan and fragmented insurgent groups in Darfur.

Due to Darfur's vast size, many areas where assistance is needed are geographically remote and the on-going conflict has made roads unsafe: access is barred either by the Sudanese army or the rebels. Some IDP camps are easy to access and present fewer obstacles to engaging camp residents during monitoring visits. Others that are located near main towns remain highly politicised, which in turn limits accessibility by aid agency staff. In one such camp we visited, people don't feel safe providing feedback on sensitive issues such as the mismanagement of aid resources by the traditional leadership in the camps for fear of 'gatekeepers' and 'minders' inside the camp who have retaliated in the past. **Aid workers** closely familiar with the socio-political context inside the IDP camps spoke about the

[1]*Sheikh* is an Arabic term that denotes a traditional leadership role: an elder, a leader, a governor, 'the front man of a community or an Islamic scholar.'

"iron grip of the sheikhs[1] in the camps"

which remains a hugely limiting factor when it comes to open dialogue and inclusive and participatory processes.

People don't feel safe providing feedback on sensitive issues.

In Darfur, as in many other humanitarian settings, cultural appropriateness goes beyond mere recognition of existing cultural norms, gender roles and social protocol. Protracted displacement has uprooted villages and communities and has impacted the traditional leadership structures that are increasingly being challenged by young armed men who also exert their influence over aid distribution and decision-making processes in the camps. Both camp residents and aid workers routinely highlighted the importance of understanding the Sudanese and Darfur context, the dominant social norms and the shifting power dynamics and how these must be considered when designing an appropriate feedback mechanism. Given the significant amount of discussion about the relevance of the context, below we share illustrative comments from **program staff** at WFP, Oxfam, Tearfund, and WV who were interviewed for the case study:

"We are concerned about a silent population that is not getting aid and afraid to complain in some camps."

"It takes courage to voice complaints if you know the sheikhs are watching."

"Feedback mechanisms should not interfere or undermine local structures and practices."

"Imported feedback mechanisms do not work. You need to adapt to local realities."

"There is very limited experience with written feedback and a tradition of strong verbal culture. Nobody would write up complaints and use a box, but if you speak with people they open up."

4. Different feedback channels

What are the techniques used by the participating agencies, and how do the designers, owners and users of feedback mechanisms adapt them to the Sudanese context?

Globally, WV demonstrates a long-standing commitment to accountability and has an agency-wide accountability framework (WVI, 2010b). In addition, WV has signed up to, and has met, requirements of several other sector-wide quality and accountability codes and standards.[2] Driven by its global agency-wide commitments, WV country offices are required to establish and use accountability mechanisms and complaints procedures. Besides the existing Accountability Framework, WV's Global Food Programming and Management Group (FPMG) mandates all food assistance programmes to collate, analyse and report on complaints filed by aid recipients and community members (WVI, 2009). Tracing the influences of these agency-wide initiatives is beyond the scope of this case study, but as far as our interest in organisational support and incentives for effective feedback processes is concerned, we discuss a few specific examples which were highlighted by staff in relevant sections below.

[2] These include Sphere, the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), the INGO Accountability Charter and the Disaster Emergency Accountability Framework.

During the field visit, we captured the experiences and opinions of a range of designers, owners and users of WV's feedback mechanisms by interviewing the following people and groups in South Darfur and Khartoum:

- community help desk focal points
- residents in three IDP camps
- members of the food distribution committee
- food assistance programme staff (food commodity and distribution managers)
- humanitarian accountability, monitoring and evaluation specialist who oversees the M&E for the food assistance team in South Darfur
- assistant M&E officers and M&E field assistants responsible for the processing and analysis of feedback data
- program staff in Nyala and Khartoum
- senior management in Khartoum.

Among the IDPs, we spoke with sheikhs, women, men, children, and elderly people. In addition, we visited a school feeding site and spoke to program participants and community facilitators at a child-friendly space which also functions as a women's center.

Community Help Desk (CHD) is the primary channel through which WV Sudan solicits and receives feedback from camp residents about its food assistance. The mechanism was piloted in Darfur in 2009 and has been instituted across all camps where WV distributes food assistance since 2010. In order to better understand how CHDs function in practice we observed a food distribution process at one of the camps and witnessed a CHD in action. According to WV's own definition: 'A help desk is a mechanism for receiving and responding to issues, comments, suggestions and feedback and as such must adhere to the agreed set standards and procedures' (World Vision, 2008a: 1). The primary purpose of the CHD is to allow aid recipients and other community members an opportunity to provide feedback and make suggestions in a non-threatening way. Another reason for establishing the CHD is 'to protect all involved from false accusations of favoritism, unfairness and corruption' (ibid.:2).

The WV Sudan office has produced Community Help Desk Guidelines that clearly state the purpose, core functions and limitations of the CHD. The guidelines stipulate that each camp is required to form a Community Help Desk Committee that is largely made up of IDP representatives. The CHD Committee works closely with the Food Distribution Committee tasked with overseeing and assisting in the monthly ration distribution process (Ibid.: 1-4). The CHD Committee in each camp includes CHD focal points, the food distribution team leader and senior sheikhs (World Vision Sudan,2008a; World Vision Sudan, 2012). Camp residents select their CHD focal points from the camp population guided by the following criteria:

1. honesty and credibility
2. ability to relate to people in a calm manner
3. ability to read and write Arabic.

CHD focal points are unpaid volunteers and receive the same food ration as the rest of the camp population.

In each camp, CHD is staffed by two CHD focal points who are visibly identified by yellow vests imprinted with the words 'Community Help Desk' in Arabic and English. In the majority of cases they are two men but in a few rare instances, a man and a woman. They collect and record feedback from people during food distributions and are trained and encouraged to resolve simple questions on the spot. The CHD is mobile and focal points walk around and interact with camp residents while they wait to receive their rations. Focal points use a logbook to record people's complaints and suggestions in Arabic. The presence of CHD focal points and their role as primary points of contact for questions and feedback allows WV's food distribution supervisors to ensure an orderly and fair distribution process. For urgent issues requiring immediate attention, camp residents can go directly to the WV distribution supervisor, but CHD focal points still record their complaints in order to ensure follow-up. The logbook is transferred to the food assistance monitoring and evaluation team where data processing and analysis are done by a team of eight assistants. More details on how feedback data are digitally logged and analysed are discussed in the following sections.

Community helpdesk focal points: honest, credible, calm and Arabic–speaking

Feedback boxes are another channel used by the food assistance team to gather feedback. The boxes are located outside the temporary school buildings where WV implements school feeding programmes. The feedback boxes are imprinted with the sentence 'We Are Committed to Listen to You' in English and Arabic. In Otash camp, we spoke to the school's principal, teachers, representatives of a parent-teacher association and students. WV provides feedback books containing pre-printed forms in English and Arabic (see **Figure 1** on the next page). The feedback box form invites the pupils and teachers at the school to 'make a suggestion, give feedback or make a complaint related to World Vision's commitments, program or staff conduct.' The Otash school feedback box collects about 150 sheets per month. Users are given an option to remain anonymous, with an explanation that this may limit WV's ability to investigate complaints. The form indicates that a response will be provided within two weeks if the person has requested a response and provided clear contact details.

Informal channels for capturing feedback, requests and complaints from camp residents include the following:

- periodic community meetings and focus group discussions conducted by staff from the food assistance programme and other programme units (including health, WASH and child-friendly spaces)
- feedback gathered as part of post-distribution monitoring visits
- children's committees who facilitate educational and recreational activities and community meetings, and who also use drawings to encourage feedback from children
- direct appeals from IDPs through phone calls and office visits.

There is no formal system like the CHD in place for gender- and child-focused programmes. Each site has a children's committee made up of camp residents and WV staff. Committee members run regular activities for children and women and speak to family members in communal settings and separately in order to listen to issues of concern and feedback. There is no protocol for documenting each comment and much of the feedback and response is exchanged verbally. WV staff write up the summary of conversations and submit it to program supervisors at the sub-office. Some examples of changes made based on feedback received through these informal channels are highlighted in the sections that follow. It is also important to note that there are linkages between the different feedback channels. For example, when local community mobilisers hear about issues related to food rations and nutrition they pass this feedback on to local CHD focal points so that it is recorded and followed up on by the proper WV team.

Figure 1: World Vision suggestion box form

Also available in full size in the **Annex on page 37**

5. World Vision feedback loop in action

World Vision has used feedback from IDPs in Darfur to modify and improve programme design and implementation.

Some of these changes were of small order and were approved at the sub-office level; others were more significant modifications in the delivery of food assistance and required the approval of senior management, FPMG and WFP. Below we highlight several concrete examples of changes in program implementation processes. In many cases, feedback data were supplemented by additional monitoring data before a response or action was taken. Further observations on WV's utilisation of feedback data are offered in section six: **anatomy of a feedback mechanism**.

Improved plastic sheeting – residents in Alsalam camp complained that the heat and direct sunlight had an adverse effect on women and children during food distributions, which often last for several hours while the grain is sorted, measured, weighed and carried away by each family. World Vision responded by providing materials for local residents to build shaded waiting areas. Similarly, during the rainy season, people used the CHD logbook to request better plastic sheeting for aid recipients to share their food in a hygienic environment. The request was immediately addressed as per the WV and donor distribution standards. The changes were made across all food distribution points, not just the one where the feedback was received.

Content of food rations – camp residents across many locations used the CHD logbook to complain about the 'smelly oil' (fortified canola oil provided by USAID) that they received in food rations. They were not able to use it and requested groundnut oil instead. The summary and volume of this feedback was communicated to WFP through weekly and monthly reports and during food coordination meetings. On-site monitoring, post-distribution monitoring and market survey data confirmed that people were selling the unwanted canola oil in the local market to soap manufacturing businesses. After several rounds of discussions with WFP and additional triangulation and verification, the oil was removed from the primary food ration. This modification took over 12 months to be fully implemented and the canola oil continues to be used for cooking breakfast cereal in school feeding programmes. As **WFP staff** explained:

> "Reallocation of the entire supply chain doesn't happen overnight and the response can't always be immediate."

Content of school feeding rations – students at the temporary school used the feedback box to communicate their preferences for grains and the type of food that was provided. There have been several modifications made to the cooking methods to make the meals more palatable to the children, and cooking demonstrations were provided for school staff. One **student** told us:

> "We played a role in changing the sorghum to wheat."

Students also requested a water tank, a hand washing kit and cups, and they received these items. Students also regularly request more sugar to be added to the school feeding rations. World Vision has responded by organising a workshop on healthy nutrition and the dangers of increased sugar consumption.

Enhanced child-friendly programming – children's committees received multiple requests and suggestions for new activities in the camps. New sports and recreational activities were designed after consultations with the wider community.

Improved access for disabled children – disabled children in the camps reported that they were unable to reach child-friendly spaces due to their disabilities. The children's committees communicated this to WV and received several wheelchairs.

Construction of school structures – children's committees received consistent feedback from parents and children about the need to construct additional school buildings and classrooms due to an increase in the number of school-aged children in the camps. The classrooms for 10- to 12-year-olds were filled over capacity. Furthermore, at the time when children should be transitioning to the next grade up, there was no space and children were returning to child-friendly spaces, requesting to stay longer. New construction and expanded classroom space has allowed for enrolment of more children.

Protection – children made confidential reports about child labour practices in the camps to the children's committees. These issues were raised to WV, which organised workshops for parents about children's rights and child labour issues.

Box 3: Going against the grain with milling vouchers

World Vision program staff in Darfur

"Since we started the Community Help Desk we have been able to make changes that we know are aligned with what our beneficiaries want. CHD really helps. Introduction of milling vouchers was because of what our monitoring system and CHD documented."

In 2010, World Vision introduced the Milling Voucher Initiative as part of its food assistance program after repeatedly hearing from IDPs that they were using part of their monthly sorghum ration to pay for milling of the rest of the grain, which must be milled before it is cooked. There are a few grain millers in each camp that provide that service. Due to shortage of labour opportunities in the camps and in nearby towns and the security constraints IDPs face when working outside the camp, many households have no cash to pay for milling. Consequently, people resorted to using part of the food ration as payment. For World Vision, this issue is of critical concern since the food rations are based on a formula that assesses nutritional needs per household. The partial loss of the grain is seen as dilution of aid resources and potentially causes nutritional deficiency.

World Vision monitoring staff picked up people's concerns through post-distribution monitoring visits and by reviewing the feedback data trickling in through the CHD. The cumulative analysis of this data was shared with senior management in Khartoum and with

>>

the FPMG. To assess the feasibility of the proposed milling voucher, additional assessments were conducted to understand the capacity of millers to absorb demand, including a market analysis to understand milling options in the area and to assess how vouchers would work in the local market. Camp residents were surveyed to learn more about their preferences. Negotiations with millers ensued about payment options. Assessment reports were shared with WV Germany, which approached European Commission's Humanitarian Office (ECHO) to fund a pilot to test this new feature. ECHO was interested in supporting voucher programs in order to boost local markets and examine what factors made these programmes successful.

The entire process from identifying the issue to introducing the solution took less than two years. Moreover, this modification required a careful analysis and understanding of how the voucher program would work since its impact extended well beyond the boundaries of the camp or the experience of a single household. At the time of the case study visit, milling vouchers were used across all camps in Nyala. The programme is no longer in a pilot phase and has been an established and approved protocol since 2011. When reflecting back on this experience, WV staff both at the field and capital level felt that a critical factor for success was their ability to present to the senior management a compelling package of information that contained analysis of choices and preferences of IDPs, monitoring data and market survey and other assessment data. The interest of ECHO in funding a pilot was also an important factor for supporting this modification. This experience has informed the strategic decisions taken by the WFP to experiment with several types of food vouchers in Darfur.

6. Anatomy of a feedback mechanism

Our literature review pointed to several features commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms including: design and expectations–setting around the feedback mechanism; feedback collection, analysis and presentation; internal functioning of the feedback loop; and individual and organisational capacities needed for establishing and maintaining the feedback processes.

Below, we discuss our findings related to these features gathered during our interviews and observations in the field.

CULTURAL AND CONTEXT APPROPRIATENESS

World Vision M&E Specialist

"For any intervention, you should be able to design an accountability system. In every community, there is a way. It needs to be explored and built on. This is incremental work and it takes time."

WV has made a decision to rely on CHDs as the primary feedback channel within its largest intervention in South Darfur because 'help desks are most appropriate for distributions… because of the regular community gatherings, which make it easy for help desk members to be available and easily accessible to beneficiaries… Help Desks are most useful for regular distributions with the same communities, due to the community level training required for effective implementation.' WFP staff similarly noted that in a protracted displacement context where IDPs live within established camp boundaries, a CHD is appropriate. In contrast, in a village or urban setting where people are more dispersed, other mechanisms may be more appropriate. During some conversations in Khartoum and Nyala, WFP staff made a distinction between high 'user entitlement' manifested in protracted displacement situations where recipients have long-term experience with aid and develop a set of expectations, as opposed to a population recovering from a single short-term emergency where expectations may be different.

According to WV staff, CHDs are a pre-requisite in WV's food assistance interventions around the world. As one **staff member** commented:

"There is safety and comfort in using a predictable model."

There were some differences in staff's opiniona regarding how much customisation and adaptation of this model had taken place. Some staff felt that there has not been sufficient customisation to local realities in Darfur ('taken from the book'), while others appreciated that the FPMG allowed some space for consultation and listened to the views of Darfur-based staff about what is possible in the local context. We did not hear about an extensive consultation process at the community level, but when asked, the CHD focal points and sheikhs explained that CHD was in accordance with traditional feedback and response mechanisms that have been practiced by the local communities.

They went on to explain that since displacement some of the leadership structures have changed, but people remember the dispute-resolution mechanisms that had existed in their villages. Often these included scenarios where complaints were taken up the chain through the sub-sheikhs and, if not resolved, were forwarded to the senior sheikhs. In Kalma camp, the senior sheikhs explained that sub-sheikhs are still responsible for collecting feedback from their constituents and bringing the critical issues to the attention of the chief sheikh of the camp. The sheikhs also gather feedback from hygiene promotion committees and other community-based associations in the camps. Information is collated, verified by the sheikhs when necessary and the chief sheikh of Kalma camp communicates it to staff at the UN OCHA.
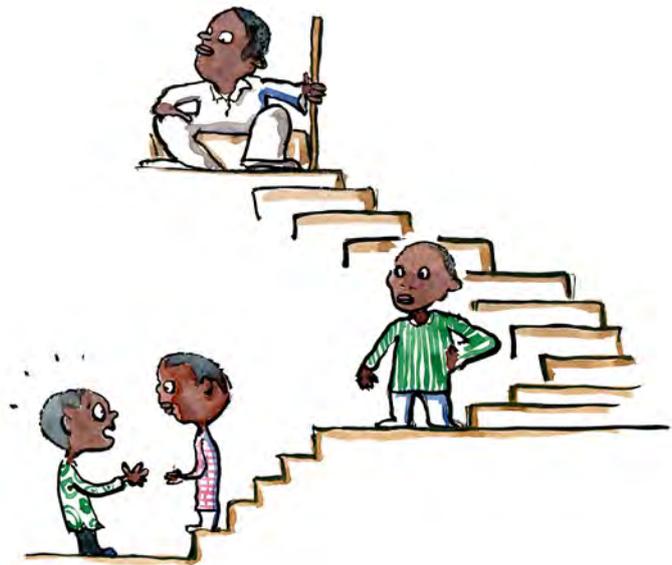
Since displacement some of the leadership structures have changed

We heard requests to World Vision to maintain the CHD and assertions that it works well. We also heard consistent requests for regular face-to-face contact and a few requests for confidential channels (call-in line) to submit anonymous feedback and complaints, due to threats and stigmatisation from sheikhs and rebel groups controlling the communal decision-making in the camps. The issue of potential threats to people who submit feedback is of high concern to WV. Confidentiality and protection is a built-in option, but a lot of the data have to be recorded with personal details in order to ensure follow-up. An additional dilemma for WV is that if they establish a separate confidential channel, an anonymous call line, they may be accused by the government of collecting sensitive information. Conversely, the logbook and feedback data that are stored in databases are non-incriminating because it largely focuses on issues with food assistance implementation.

EXPECTATION SETTING AND KNOWLEDGE

Principal of a temporary school in an IDP camp near Nyala

'Otherwise, how could the donors come here and visit a thousand people? Now we can get our voice through with this system."

To establish CHDs in all camps, WV had to first get the approval of the Government's Humanitarian Aid Commission and to explain that CHD is one of WV's accountability and program quality measures. The critical piece was to set parameters and boundaries for what CHD would and would not do. It was clearly established that CHD is not a mechanism for resolving internal and external disputes and conflicts, which is a sensitive area for rebels and government authorities. WV organised information sessions for camp residents and temporary school staff (teachers and principals) to explain the purpose and process for submitting feedback. Staff continue to frequently remind camp residents about feedback channels and how to use them during camp visits. All CHD focal points attend mandatory training by WV staff and are familiarised with the purpose of CHD and the CHD guidelines. At a temporary school, a principal and a group of teachers explained that the purpose of the feedback box is clear to them. The principal said that when the feedback box is open and the entries are read aloud, the staff help explain to the students which requests are unrealistic.

The camp residents appreciate the ability to raise issues in a predictable and consistent fashion. They recognise that the food distribution process is difficult both for the community and for WV, and that without CHD many issues and complaints would go unanswered. CHD focal points see themselves as connectors between the camp community and WV. One **CHD focal point** shared his understanding of CHD's role this way:

> "The main goal of CHD is to ensure that all beneficiaries get 100% of what they are entitled to"

When asked what motivates him to serve on voluntary basis, he said:

> "Because we are part of the community. Because there are no other options and because we feel responsible for the community."

However, compensation and low motivation on the part of some CHDs were also discussed. CHD focal points have given their feedback on the issue of compensation to WV and have been told that their participation is part of the community contribution to the program. While some have reluctantly accepted this rationale, WV continues to see value in CHDs being run by community volunteers.

FEEDBACK COLLECTION

Principal at a temporary school in Otash camp

> "The suggestion box gives everyone an opportunity to say something positive or negative, and even to say thank you."

Camp residents demonstrate confidence in the CHD by using it to log complaints. In a typical monthly report from WV, 131 feedback entries were recorded from 16 food

distribution points (out of 21). Furthermore, some people use the logbook as a vehicle for submitting additional feedback through hand-written notes (sometimes asking CHD focal points to transcribe these) which are slipped into the CHD logbook. CHD focal points noted that overall people's experience has been that the entries in the logbook are read, acknowledged and responded to.

School staff felt that the feedback box has improved communication with WV. Before it was introduced, when questions arose, they were not sure where to go. One of the **school principals** described it as a channel that is understood and trusted by students and staff and noted:

> **"They open the feedback box in front of us."**

The **school principal** added that they appreciated that:

> **"World Vision collects the sheets and monitors."**

Another person added:

> **"The suggestion box is a good way to get ideas from people. There are lots of complaints about sugar and sorghum. Students and teachers trust that World Vision is taking a record of these."**

The information collected through the feedback box is summarised by M&E staff and shared with the school leadership. School pupils were aware of several ways that response to their feedback is given: collective responses from WV shared by the teachers with the entire school during breakfast time or written responses to individual students. Parent-teacher association members see value in communicating with WV on behalf of the larger parent population. They would like to see similar feedback processes instituted in other programs implemented in the camp other than education and food assistance.

VERIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK INFORMATION

The content of logbooks and feedback forms is logged, coded and tracked using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences database by specialists in the food assistance team. They do the initial anlysis and sorting, separating the entries into several categories:

1. feedback that requires immediate attention
2. feedback that can be resolved locally
3. feedback that needs to be addressed by senior management in Nyala sub office/ Khartoum or by WFP.

The M&E officers review the data for quality control and share the urgent feedback entries with food commodities supervisors immediately. The head of the M&E team produces a monthly report summarising all feedback and shares it with the food assistance manager.

The report is used for follow-up and to track the status of the response to questions, suggestions, issues and concerns. This is part of internal monitoring and oversight of the functioning of the feedback mechanism itself. If there are issues raised through CHDs and feedback boxes that are critical for WFP to see, the report is forwarded to WFP in Nyala.

WFP appreciates the rapid communication of critical issues, as **one staff member** noted:

> "We don't want to wait for the quarterly report for urgent feedback to be submitted. If food is rotten, we need to replace it immediately."

If the issues are not of immediate concern, a summary of feedback and trends is included in regular monthly reports to WFP.

To ensure comprehensive monitoring and reporting, the food assistance M&E team uses several data collection tools, which combined with the CHD entries, help to triangulate and verify data. Data are gathered as part of on-site monitoring, post-distribution monitoring and local market surveys. Typically, WV shares data and analysis from these four data streams with WFP on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. We heard from WFP that they plan to do more to analyse the data together with their own field staff and implementing partners. But WFP also voiced concerns about the credibility of the data and the bias of those who are interpreting it. Specifically, when it comes to using feedback for management and decision-making, WFP staff noted the critical step of filtering the data and the analysis done by M&E staff about what is relevant and what is actionable. WFP recognises that their implementing partners receive both solicited and unsolicited feedback including concerns that fall outside the scope of the WFP and WV mandates. The WFP sub-office manager urges field staff to distinguish feedback that is shared for the greater good of the community from self-interested demands. He added that this type of analysis requires a sensitive and pragmatic approach, as well as on-going mentoring to improve the analytical capacity of the staff.

WFP staff noted the critical step of filtering the data.

Many interviewees said that the analytical capacity of M&E staff can't be underestimated. The WV Nyala office currently has competent M&E specialists that oversee data processing and analysis and are able to effectively communicate important information to the right people at the right time. However, junior M&E staff told us that their capacity could be further strengthened. They want to be able to perform more sophisticated data analysis, to track trends and produce reports based on the aggregated data.

FEEDBACK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, RESPONSE AND UTILISATION

CHD Focal Point, Al Salam camp

"People see clear tangible impact because they know they will get some response whether it is positive or negative. They hear back from World Vision, their feedback is not ignored."

Setting up large-scale food distribution processes in IDP camps amidst an on-going conflict naturally involves some trial and error. Recipient feedback has helped to make the continuing implementation process more responsive and has reduced some of the guesswork by inviting the affected people to comment on what is working and what is not. For example, one CHD registered a spike in complaints about errors with using thumbprints during the distribution process. The staff investigated the issue and came to a decision to stop using temporary/casual staff at distribution points, especially to manage the recipient distribution lists. After the changes were implemented, complaints reduced. As one **World Vision staff member** told us:

"Since we started Community Help Desks we have been able to make changes that we know are aligned with what beneficiaries want."

We heard directly from camp residents about tangible results they have seen after submitting feedback and examples of how it was acknowledged, responded to and acted on. The children we interviewed had mixed opinions about the utility of the feedback box. Most children felt that their opinions are taken seriously and that information is checked and verified. Students who have used the feedback box at the school felt that it played a role in changing the breakfast meal from sorghum to wheat.

Students said:

"We send information and World Vision responds."

When asked to provide specific examples of WV's response and action, some students complained that they have repeatedly asked for increased sugar rations and that they have seen no action. However, we learned from the teachers that an explanation regarding the hazards of increased sugar consumption was indeed provided by WV, along with a team of health workers to present nutritional messages to teachers and older students. However, according to WV's meticulous records, the students continue to request increased sugar rations using the feedback forms.

We witnessed several spontaneous feedback sessions and observed the rapport between IDPs and WV staff. During such interactions, WV staff maintained a calm and friendly composure even when pressed with many questions and requests for assistance. Camp residents' questions and concerns were acknowledged and clear answers were provided to explain the limitations and rationale behind WV's assistance programmes. For example, sheikhs in one camp demanded an explanation for why WV was not building permanent schools inside the camps to support education of more children. The staff person explained in a measured and non-defensive way that WV, and all other NGOs, fall under restrictions set by the Sudanese government, and that they are prohibited from building permanent structures in the camps.

As illustrated by the utilisation examples above, the magnitude of the issues that are raised through feedback channels affects the response time. The availability of supporting data is also an important factor impacting response time highlighted to us by staff. The senior M&E specialist underscored how compelling feedback data can be when they are supported by information from other sources. Together it has been used as an evidence base to ground decisions about follow up actions and responses. **The food commodities team member** told us:

> "As a manager, if I have information about something coming from Community Help Desk and from our own monitoring system, I know there is something to work on here. We have a reliable way to verify data. It gives you a full picture. "

In addition, for decision-makers to act on feedback, it is critical for the team that handles feedback data to identify trends and patterns and to present them to decision-makers in a usable format and on a periodic and predictable schedule. The program quality team noted that summaries of feedback have many audiences within WV. The content of the reports helps to formulate the Program Quality team's discussions with donors, with influential WV decision-makers outside Sudan and national government stakeholders. Within the program quality team itself, feedback reports are shared with all thematic technical experts.[3]

[3] The reports produced by thematic teams, e.g. the food assistance team, often cover other issues (non-food-related) that impact on the whole program. Hence all reports are circulated among all thematic experts.

One of the **food assistance staff** noted that not all monthly feedback summaries and suggestions are actionable, noting that the:

> "M&E team suggests many things, but we often tell them that some are not implementable. "

As a norm, the entire Food Assistance team, including the M&E staff, meets to discuss all operational issues and feedback and jointly develop action plans. Issues that require WFP's response are shared during the bi-weekly food coordination meetings at the sub-office level, where participants also review current trends captured by WV's CHD and monitoring system. This process elevates the utility of feedback to a broader audience beyond WV and WFP. Additionally, WFP is currently establishing a common monitoring system among its partners to standardise data gathered across all operational sites and to use trends and analysis to make its strategic decision-making more effective. WFP has already asked WV to share the aggregated feedback on the nutrition and feeding program received through CHD and other channels. WFP is using this information as part of a larger study on options for scaling up school feeding programmes.

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

Senior manager, World Vision Khartoum

"In Darfur camps, people don't have their basic rights so this is our one way to hear their views. We are aware that we are not hearing it all and that people are afraid. But we have to keep doing it for the sake of accountability, to build trust, and increase transparency."

WV Sudan is clearly committed to improving its accountability to affected communities in South Darfur and to meeting its related agency-wide goals. This is demonstrated by the resources invested into strengthening M&E, accountability and feedback processes. However, staff readily pointed out that the investments and progress have been largely concentrated in the food assistance programme, the largest and well-resourced intervention. As a result, the M&E team within the food assistance program has become very specialised and remains quite insular with its extensive data collection and analysis focused primarily on food-aid-related feedback. To date, this level of commitment has not been matched in other WV programmes in South Darfur. At the time of the case study visit, the program quality team together with the M&E officer were planning a significant campaign of developing capacity and mentoring staff in other programmes to set up appropriate systems for gathering and responding to feedback. However, a deteriorating security situation has delayed these plans.

Currently, the programme quality and human resources teams are working together to embed responsibility for responding to feedback into everyone's revised job descriptions and to include it as a benchmark in staff performance reviews. According to staff championing this push for internal accountability, it is part of an effort to make listening and responding to feedback part of everyone's job and to reduce the perception that this is only the job of the accountability focal point. Additional incentives for all program teams to respond to feedback are planned through a friendly competition between different thematic program teams (e.g. food, gender, health and WASH) to demonstrate progress and compete for an 'accountability prize.'

At the level of senior management, incentives to support feedback processes come from the global WV FPMG. Senior management in-country demand that the food assistance team demonstrates progress in accountability and feedback measures, and do not want to see their country food programme rated as red on the WV global online dashboard. Annual awards are informed by these country program ratings and are given out along the following categories:

1. quality of food programming (includes M&E and accountability)
2. quality reporting and accounting
3. capacity development
4. portfolio growth.

WV Sudan has won the FPMG prize for quality programming three years in a row. Other examples of reputational incentives are linked to the close relationship with WV's largest partner, WFP. WFP does not have its own comprehensive M&E system. When WFP is undergoing an external audit, they rely on WV to provide comprehensive, quality-

controlled and detailed monitoring data, including community feedback. It is therefore in WFP's interest to continue to invest in WV's M&E system because much of the data collection, analysis and reporting is outsourced to WV.

To complement the agency-wide push for improving accountability, there is a parallel bottom-up education effort carried out on a regular basis by the Food Assistance Program M&E staff to strengthen accountability and program quality. Often this takes the form of an internal advocacy and sensitization effort aimed at national staff and program teams who don't have extensive experience with accountability and handling feedback and complaints. In the experience of these internal accountability champions, once local staff understand the rationale behind feedback systems and realise that camp residents have put their hopes into it, staff become more invested in ensuring the information flows and facilitating responses and resolutions and they are motivated by the appreciation from the aid recipients.

The goal is for local staff to support the feedback process not just because the donors or their superiors require it, but because they want to see improvements in the lives of the local people. This is an attitudinal and behavioural change process that takes time because it is rooted in a number of factors, particularly power dynamics. As one seasoned aid worker observed, many of the field staff retain attitudes and mindsets geared towards relief (giving items) versus recovery (engaging local aid recipients).

WV struggles to find suitably qualified staff for programmatic positions. M&E positions in particular require a level of competence with data collection and analysis that is not readily available in Darfur. Retaining capable people in light of high staff turnover in Darfur is an added challenge. The senior M&E specialist reported feeling like an unofficial principal of an 'academy' which he seems to run every two years to train new staff in basic and intermediate M&E skills. Training is also provided to staff during quarterly review meetings with the goal of transferring M&E and accountability expertise to other thematic programs (peacebuilding, gender, WASH, etc.).

In 2009, when CHD was being established, WV accountability staff designed the logbooks and provided a series of workshops for the newly hired M&E team, food distribution supervisors and CHD focal points. The initial perception was that CHD was just another M&E tool and its accountability objectives were missed by some food distribution staff. The food distribution supervisors would often forget the logbook in the field and didn't see how it connected to their work. **Management and the M&E team** continued to explain to the food distribution staff that

"it is for your own benefit, to really know and understand how to improve your programs."

Staff felt that the awareness of the Food Assistance Team overall has increased. This potentially subjective opinion is supported by an analysis of timely response rates to the feedback received in the last six to 12 months.

The M&E department feels like an unofficial 'academy' for new staff.

Within the WV Sudan office, one senior manager said that there is a desire to institutionalise a culture of organisational feedback, but it is a difficult internal process. There are existing channels for providing feedback to peers, to senior management and to the human resources department, but these are not formalised. The program quality team staff would like to make internal feedback processes more intentional for accountability, transparency and risk management purposes, and to have a channel to resolve issues before they turn into disputes. What makes these informal mechanisms functional beyond simply reporting incidents or opinions is that staff refer issues to the relevant department for trouble-shooting. For example, human resources deputies share feedback that arrives through the human resources system with program quality team when it directly relates to program improvement. Similarly, internal feedback and communication channels are very strong at the sub-office level between the M&E and food distribution team staff.

PERIODIC REASSESSMENT AND ADJUSTMENT

The process of reassessment and programme design is not managed solely by the Sudan program team and has to be approved and guided by the FPMG. External evaluations of WV's emergency response and food programming have in the past reviewed the overall contribution of accountability measures and the functions of CHD. Most recently, due to the deteriorating security situation, WV's internal plans to reassess how the various mechanisms have worked to date and to introduce any necessary changes have been put on hold. One of the central motivations underlying the desire to reassess and adapt the mechanisms further is sustainability. WV would like to build processes that last, and outlast, WV presence and to enable people to continue to give feedback on service delivery to local authorities.

7. Location and formality level of feedback mechanisms

The field visit also highlighted additional areas that the research team recommend would benefit from further inquiry.

Location and integration of feedback mechanisms within organisational structures

We made an observation that the location of the feedback mechanisms within the organisational structure and systems at the operational level has an effect on how feedback data are shared internally, on the perception of the feedback process and on data utilisation by operational staff and partners. WV Sudan presents a case where a feedback mechanism is embedded within a dedicated M&E system of one large program intervention. Because of this integration, the distance that feedback data have to travel is short – the head of the food assistance M&E team and food assistance manager are in daily communication and are empowered to solve problems locally before raising them to management in Khartoum. In the case of the food assistance program, the multiple streams of data gathered and analyzed by its M&E team are readily available to food distribution staff, which enables them to respond and act in a timely fashion. The internal communication loop is also built on staff's commitment to and effective practice of regular communication, information sharing and problem solving.

Programme documents and guidelines do not discuss with any frequency or detail the decisive factors that determine where to locate feedback mechanisms. Our literature review and case studies highlight examples where feedback mechanisms are placed within an M&E team, or within a programme team, or as a separate and dedicated accountability team, or as part of a beneficiary communications team. The implications stretch beyond the labels for these functions and positions, to affect the relative leverage staff in these positions have *vis-à-vis* operational programme teams and senior management. In addition, staff members placed in charge of feedback collection and reporting note that they are sometimes aware of being perceived as internal auditors or 'accountability police', which they felt impacts the responsiveness to feedback by programme teams.

Location of feedback mechanisms affects relative leverage staff may have.
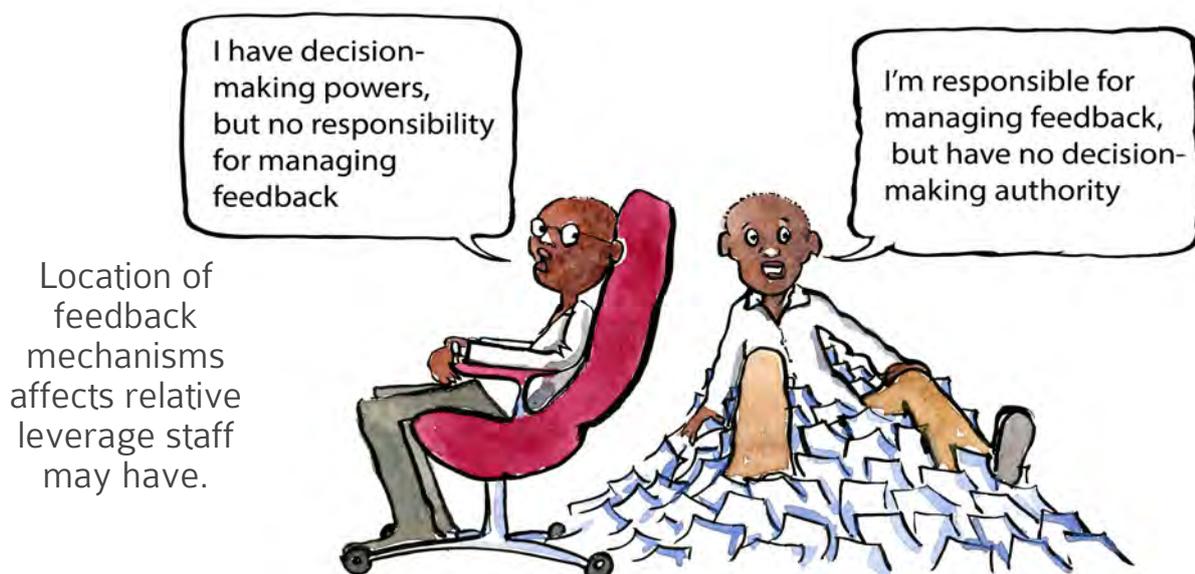
The importance of reporting lines and job descriptions were mentioned to us by a number of WV staff. Originally, the focus of developing accountability and feedback mechanisms was placed solely on the food assistance M&E team and guided by the FPMG from afar. Later, the program quality team intentionally made accountability part of their portfolio and suggested a more direct and regular reporting process between the food assistance M&E and program quality teams. Eventually the humanitarian accountability, monitoring and evaluation officer began attending program quality team meetings to inform their discussions with up-to-date data from feedback channels and monitoring processes. At the sub-office level, closer links were established between M&E officers from the food assistance team and the overall M&E officer responsible for the rest of the programs.

It is clear that the CHD and other feedback channels do not function in a vacuum and that the effectiveness of a feedback mechanism is closely linked to how well other organisational management systems and decision-making processes function. The implication here is that internal communication channels and feedback loops between departments, within departments and between program teams and senior management need to be as strong to enhance broader feedback loops. We will continue to look for evidence to shed more light on the potential linkages between location and integration of feedback mechanisms and their effectiveness.
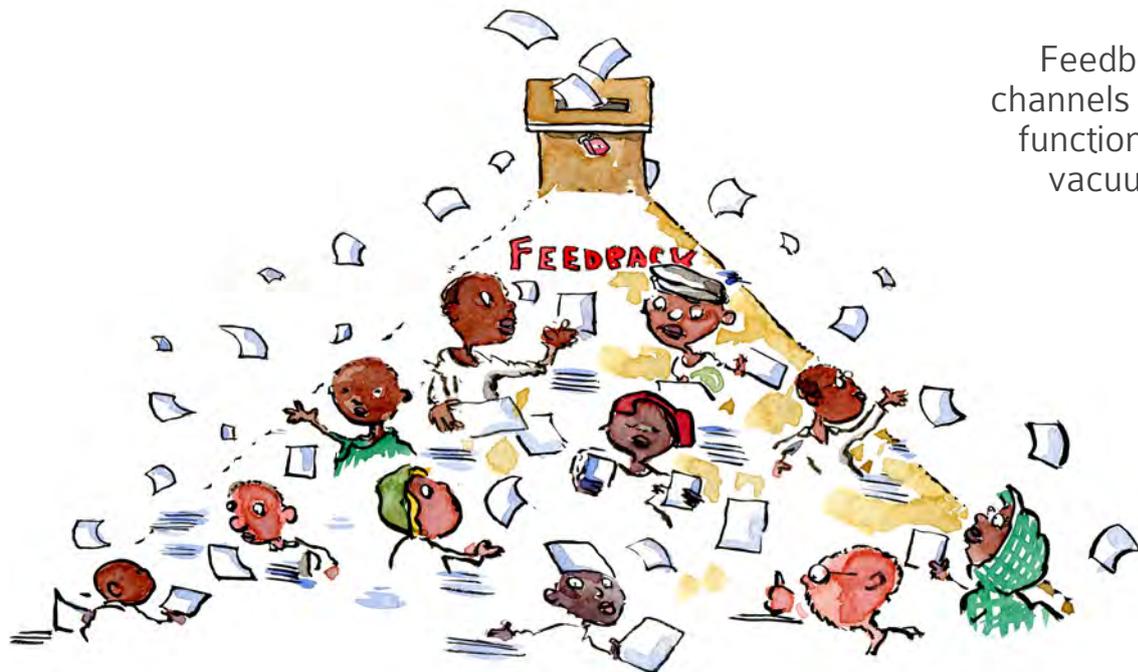
Feedback channels do not function in a vacuum.

Informal and formal mechanisms

Country director in Khartoum

> **"If we had enough staff and were closer to the ground regularly in the camps, and implementing our programs in a more participatory manner, we wouldn't need a Beneficiary Accountability Officer."**

Many agencies we spoke with reported being unable to maintain the desired level of informal and continuous dialogue with the camp residents due to real and perceived security threats, heightened levels of politicisation of aid and violence in the camps, and only sporadic accessibility to certain areas of operations. The importance of having a

regular presence to facilitate meaningful feedback was noted as a critical factor to ensure more responsive programming. In the absence of such, many organisations have resorted to establishing a focal point charged with trying to mitigate a lack of regular engagement and to close 'the accountability gap' with sporadic visits.

The lack of regular communication with aid recipients and external pressures to demonstrate visible mechanisms for accountability to affected populations are resulting in an overall trend of formalising feedback processes that may already exist but are deemed unsystematic and hence hard to track and assess. The related observations are presented in the **Mini case studies 1 and 2** where we describe WFP's and Oxfam's current thinking on this issue in Sudan. Even in the case of WV, where formal feedback mechanisms have been established alongside informal ones, staff and camp residents want to maintain regular communication and face-to-face interactions.

One concern that has surfaced during the interviews and our data analysis is that formal mechanisms and tools – such as feedback boxes, CHDs and call lines – can potentially displace more meaningful participation, engagement and accountability. Aid recipients' demands and complaints raised spontaneously on aid-related issues may fall outside the scope of a narrowly defined feedback tool and be lost or undervalued. There is a tension between a demand-side initiated feedback process (such as face-to-face meetings) and supply-side mechanisms (such as described above) that can narrowly prescribe the boundaries of the feedback process. How well these supplier-driven, formalised feedback mechanisms respond to people's feedback is at the heart of this study on effectiveness.

Recipients' demands and complaints may fall outside the scope

However, it is clear that both accountability and feedback continue to be conceptually and practically defined in both narrow and broad ways, and champions of accountability in humanitarian agencies do not want to overlook that affected people may want to claim their own space to provide feedback and demand better service, instead of just using a formal box or desk. The aid agencies' capacity to respond may well benefit from these mechanisms being formalized as long as they do not displace or undermine other communication channels. This discussion is on-going within many agencies, in particular within rights-based development agencies such as Oxfam. We do not aim to resolve it within the scope of this study but want to flag it as an undercurrent in many of our interviews.

8. Conclusions

Despite the challenging context, WV's commitment to improve accountability to IDPs in Darfur has not waned. In fact, WV staff plan to scale up and enhance these processes across the Sudan operations.

We were inspired to meet the committed WV team in Khartoum and Nyala and to learn about how in their daily work they strive to listen to the camp residents and to respond in a timely fashion.

WV is a very large and complex organisation with layers of organisational commitments, objectives and incentives at every level, global and operational. We do not assume that a single two-week visit can uncover all the factors that impact the effectiveness of its feedback systems. Some of these factors are localised and rooted in individuals' capacities and commitments; other factors are tied to agency-wide agendas, pressures and frameworks that form the backdrop for how feedback mechanisms operate at the field level. In WV's Sudan operations, certain features that we attempted to document are more prominent than others and have made a marked impact on the development and function of WV's feedback system. We think these features are: i) organisational and individual support; and ii) the effective use of multiple sources of data for response and action (analysis and utilisation of feedback).

Finally, from our interviews with other agencies in Khartoum and Nyala and the group debriefing we held with several aid agencies in Khartoum, we would like to highlight the dearth of peer learning opportunities which was mentioned during these discussions. Several agencies in Sudan are in the process of developing and refining their accountability frameworks and formalising feedback mechanisms. Much of this work is taking place in isolation without an existing platform for sharing best practices and lessons. We encourage World Vision to use its expertise and accumulated knowledge in this practice area to engage counterparts in both Nyala and Khartoum in some form of collaborative learning and sharing of effective practices. If other organisations are able to generate reliable and actionable feedback data, it would be in the interest of the entire aid community in Sudan to bring this feedback to the attention of humanitarian country team and others stakeholders in a regular fashion.

We encourage WV to engage counterparts... in sharing effective practices.

Mini case study 1: Oxfam America's feedback processes in Darfur

Oxfam works in Darfur to provide clean water and sanitation and livelihoods assistance in the IDP camps and to support the long-term development aspirations of the local population within the restrictive context of protracted displacement and on-going conflict. Oxfam works through local partners and community-based organizations. In Darfur, Oxfam's feedback processes to date have remained informal and include multiple channels for camp residents to provide input into planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Oxfam's operations and community-based processes. In each camp, elected members of community committees are directly involved in mobilization of camp residents and project implementation. A rotation of committee members is built in to ensure inclusion and representativeness of the camp population.

Committee members are trained to facilitate information-sharing sessions in the camps about hygiene and other topics, to record camp residents' concerns and input and to bring these to the attention of Oxfam staff. Solicited and unsolicited feedback is gathered during one-on-one interactions at the household level and during communal discussions by community committees and by Oxfam staff. In addition, camp residents visit the Oxfam offices in Nyala and El Fasher to submit complaints and discuss issues with staff. Similarly, feedback is shared, discussed and acted on through multiple channels:

- camp management coordination meetings (attended by NGOs, UN staff and local partners and facilitated by OCHA)
- meetings with community committees and partners
- meetings organized at community centers
- camp assessment reports
- phone calls with camp residents
- Oxfam programme team meetings
- annual retreat
- occasional audit meetings with donors.

Oxfam's website allows for feedback on staff performance and quality of programmes. This channel is primarily intended for local partners. The feedback goes directly to headquarters of Oxfam America, where it is sorted and sent back out to the field with follow-up action steps. The country team was not aware of any feedback received through this channel. Oxfam invites feedback on its programmes during regular retreats with local partners. Its partnership model has been recognized by other agencies in Darfur who regularly seek Oxfam's advice on how to engage local communities in WASH programmes in a cost-effective and participatory manner. Oxfam plans to hand over resources to community committees to manage water projects on their own, and this includes managing the community feedback. When camp residents raise questions, issues and complaints to the community committee, Oxfam encourages the committee to resolve issues locally when possible. To date, Oxfam has been able to continue its programming through community committees even in the most remote and insecure areas.

When reflecting on trends in feedback, Oxfam staff said that majority of complaints and suggestions focus on the need for more livelihoods interventions, e.g. support for small trade and enterprise development. Oxfam has limited resources due to reduced funding and cannot meet the demand. Oxfam's senior management have taken this consistent feedback to country-level aid coordination meetings in Khartoum and have shared people's concerns at strategic discussions with the humanitarian country team in an effort to advocate for collective increase in resources allocated for livelihoods interventions. Oxfam field staff also share relevant community feedback at camp coordination meetings with OCHA, WFP, United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur and implementing NGOs at the operational level in Darfur.

Oxfam conducted a baseline assessment and developed a workplan in order to comply with (HAP) standards and to institutionalize accountability principles within its operations. Oxfam Sudan is currently working to formalise its feedback processes and to establish formal complaints and

>> response mechanisms, acting on recommendations that emerged from the HAP baseline study. Oxfam is committed to HAP principles, and the staff see value in a consistent and reliable feedback process. However, they also strongly believe that formal channels do not and should not replace face-to-face meetings and regular and informal interactions. There is a level of uncertainly about how formal a feedback mechanism should be to ensure consistency without displacing existing and trusted methods. Due to the cultural and security constraints, Oxfam is approaching the design of a formal mechanism with care and with consultation from camp residents to ensure their safety and security and in the meantime not to undermine the informal mechanisms associated with high illiteracy rates and preference for face-to-face discussions.

Mini case study 2: World Food Programme and feedback from recipients of food aid

WFP does not have a formal feedback mechanism and relies on its implementing partners for that. However, WFP staff conduct on-site distribution and post-distribution monitoring visits to capture input directly from camp residents and local town residents, assess whether the distributions are carried out according to the plans, monitor the effects of food aid on people's nutrition and track trends. As part of its communication channels, WFP field staff are in regular touch with camp leadership by mobile phones and respond to calls and requests for information when issues arise. In addition to distribution and post-distribution monitoring, WFP in collaboration with Sudan's Ministry of Agriculture conducts three rounds of data collection per year under the framework of its well-established Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS). FSMS helps to triangulate data gathered through its distribution and post-distribution monitoring, market surveys, and from WV post-distribution monitoring reports and other data sources.

During a recent camp re-registration and verification process carried out across all Darfur camps, WFP staff reported having extensive interactions with camp residents. WFP gathered feedback on operational issues during community meetings and individual conversations, but this information was not always documented due to concerns about privacy and security and sensitivity around certain issues, such as returns to original villages. WFP staff felt that the registration process helped establish and reinforce communication channels with new and existing leadership in the camps. However, the registration process proved to be quite challenging due to politicization in several camps. As a result, delegations of sheiks made trips to WFP offices to make formal complaints. People also complained to local media about the verification and registration process and other issues with food distribution. One staff member explained, "Responding to IDP complaints for us is part of risk management and reputational risk." WFP is currently looking into how to make better use of mass media (e.g., a popular local radio station) to reach more camp residents with information about the food assistance and to respond to common complaints and rumours.

As part of its on-going transition to early recovery and rehabilitation, WFP has been piloting vouchers in several areas of North Darfur. The pilot includes a public outreach campaign to inform camp populations about the benefits of vouchers and to respond to people's questions and concerns about reductions and eventual phase-out of food rations. WFP consulted with the Sudanese government and shared market assessment data to jointly determine if the approach was feasible. The process to date included extensive negotiations with camp residents, market surveys and feasibility assessments with traders. In some communities the proposed voucher was met with suspicion and concerns about inflation and insufficient food in local markets to meet demand. In the receptive communities of North Darfur voucher assistance has been implemented successfully. The positive feedback from voucher recipients has been documented through a comparison evaluation between in-kind and voucher assistance conducted in North Darfur in 2013. In South Darfur, where this case study was conducted, WFP is still assessing the market to see if vouchers are feasible.

Bibliography

Click **here** to access the ALNAP resource library listing of all these references.

Abu-Sada, C. (2012) *In the eyes of others: how people in crises perceive humanitarian aid.* Geneva: MSF.

Adinolfi, C., Bassiouni, D., Lauritzsen, H. and Williams, H. (2005) *Humanitarian response review, an independent report commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator & Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.* Geneva and New York: OCHA.

ALNAP (2003) *ALNAP global study on consultation and participation of disaster-affected populations.* Country monograph series: Afghanistan; Angola; Colombia; DRC; Guinea; Sri Lanka. London: ODI/ALNAP.

ALNAP (2005) *Review of humanitarian action in 2005.* London: ODI/ALNAP.

ALNAP (2010) The state of the humanitarian system – assessing performance and progress. ALNAP pilot study. London: ODI/ALNAP.

ALNAP (2012) *The state of the humanitarian system.* London: ODI/ALNAP.

ALNAP (2013) 'Engaging crisis-affected people in humanitarian action'. 29th Annual Meeting – Concept Note. London: ODI/ALNAP.

ALNAP and Groupe URD (2009) *Participation handbook for humanitarian field workers: involving crisis-affected people in a humanitarian response.* Plaisians: ALNAP and Groupe URD.

Anderson, M., Brown, D. and Jean, I. (2012) *Time to listen: hearing people on the receiving end of international aid.* Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

Ashdown, P. (2011) *Humanitarian emergency response review.* London: DFID.

Ashraf, S., Hassan, M. and Akram, S. (2010) *Monitoring and accountability manual: emergency response and recovery program.* Pakistan: Save the Children Monitoring, Evaluation and Recovery Program Unit.

Baños Smith, H. (2009) *The right to say and the duty to respond.* Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Study. Geneva: HAP.

Barry, N. and Barham, J. (2012) *DG ECHO review of existing practices to ensure participation of disaster-affected communities in humanitarian aid operation.* Bruxelles: DG ECHO.

Blagescu, M., de Las Casas, L. and Lloyd, R. (2005) *Pathways to accountability: the GAP framework.* London: One World Trust.

Bonino, F. and Knox-Clarke, P. (2013) *Effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms – methodology summary for a joint ALNAP and CDA action research.* ALNAP working draft paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Borton, J. (2008) 'An overview of humanitarian accountability in 2008', in *The 2008 humanitarian accountability report.* London: HAP.

Borton, J. (2011) *The 2011 humanitarian accountability report.* Geneva: HAP.

Brookings – Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2008) *Moving beyond rhetoric: consultation and participation with populations displaced by conflict or natural disasters.* Bern: Bern University.

CDA (2008) *International assistance as a delivery system*. Listening Project Issue Paper. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

CDA (2011) *Feedback mechanisms in international assistance organizations*. CDA desk study. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

Chapelier, C. and Shah, A. (2013) 'Improving communication between humanitarian aid agencies and crisis-affected people: lessons from the Infosaid project'. HPN Network Paper 74. London: HPN/ODI.

Cohen, R. (2008) *Listening to the voices of the displaced: lessons learned*. Washington, DC and Bern: Brookings Institution and the University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

Darcy, J., Alexander, J. and Kiani, M. (2013) *2013 humanitarian accountability report*. Geneva: HAP.

Davis, A. (2007) *Concerning accountability of humanitarian action*. HPN Network Paper 58. London: ODI.

Donini, A., Fast, L., Hansen, G., Minear, L., Mowjee, T. and Wilder, A. (2008) *The state of the humanitarian enterprise*. Humanitarian Agenda 2015. Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

DRC (2008) *Complaints mechanism handbook*. Copenhagen: DRC.

ECB (2007a) 'Impact measurement and accountability in emergencies: the good enough guide'. Oxford: ECB Project.

ECB (2007b) *Common humanitarian accountability framework for IWG agencies*. Geneva: ECB.

Featherstone, A. (2013) 'Research methodology document', in *Improving impact: do accountability mechanisms deliver results?* Geneva and London: Christian Aid, HAP, Save the Children.

Gostelow, L., et al. (2010) *SCHR peer review on accountability to disaster-affected populations: an overview of lessons learned*. Geneva: Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response.

IASC (2012) *IASC transformative agenda*. Geneva and New York: IASC.

IFRC (2005) *Focus on information in disasters, world disasters report 2005*. Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Jacobs, A. (2010) 'Creating the missing feedback loop', in *IDS Bulletin* 41: 56-64.

Jacobs, A. and Wilford, R. (2010) 'Listen first: a pilot system for managing downward accountability in NGOs', in *Development in Practice* 20(7): 797-811.

Knox Clarke, P. (2013) 'Foreword', in *Improving impact: do accountability mechanisms deliver results?* Geneva and London: Christian Aid, HAP, Save the Children.

Knox Clarke, P. and Mitchell, J. (2011) 'Reflections on the accountability revolution', in Mitchell, J. and Knox-Clarke, P. (eds), Humanitarian accountability [special feature] *Humanitarian Exchange* 52. London: HPN/ODI. 3-5.

Levaditis, A. (2007) 'World Vision Sri Lanka tsunami response: Humanitarian Accountability Team lessons learned – perspectives from communities and staff'.

Lewis, G. and Lander, B. (2011) 'Only as strong as our weakest link: can the humanitarian system be collectively accountable to affected populations?', in Mitchell, J. and Knox-Clarke, P. (eds), Humanitarian accountability [special feature] *Humanitarian Exchange* 52. London: HPN/ODI. 8-10.

Mitchell, J. and Knox Clarke, P. (eds) (2011) Humanitarian accountability [special feature] *Humanitarian Exchange* 52. London: HPN/ODI.

Nyathi, L. (2008) 'Community help desks (CHD) guidelines'. Khartoum: World Vision Sudan, Food Assistance Program.

Ramalingam, B. and J. Mitchell with Borton, J. and Smart, K. (2009) *ALNAP review of humanitarian action: counting what counts - performance and effectiveness in the humanitarian sector*. London: ALNAP/ ODI.

Twersky, F., Buchanan, P. and Threlfall, V. (2013) 'Listening to those who matter most, the beneficiaries', in *Stanford Social Innovation Review:* 41-45.

Wood, A. (2011a) *Overview of NGO-community complaints mechanisms*. Global Accountability Discussion Series 2. Geneva: World Vision.

Wood, A. (2011b) *The community context and complaints handling by NGOs*. Global Accountability Discussion Series 1. Geneva: World Vision.

World Vision (2008a) *Community complaints and feedback field policy & procedures manual*. Geneva: World Vision.

World Vision International (2008b) *Tips for collecting and acting on feedback and complaints*. Singapore: World Vision International.

World Vision (2009) *Complaint and response mechanisms: resource guide*. Monrovia, CA: World Vision FPMG.

World Vision International (2010a) *Community feedback log*. Zimbabwe: World Vision International.

World Vision International (2010b) *Programme accountability framework*. Geneva: World Vision International.

World Vision International (2010c) *Steps in complaints handling*. Singapore: World Vision International.

World Vision (n.d.) 'Collating, analysing and report writing'. Geneva: World Vision.

World Vision (n.d.) 'FFE/CRM coding system'. Geneva: World Vision.

World Vision (n.d) 'Household survey – post distribution monitoring questionnaire (GFD)'. (internal document)

World Vision Sudan (2012) 'Complaints and response mechanism: community help desk report' (internal document) Khartoum: World Vision Sudan, Food Assistance Program.

Annex: World Vision suggestion box form

Feedback BOX FORM
Serial number: _____

World Vision

اســـــتمارة صندوق الافادات

Use this form and place in the Suggestion Box if you wish to make a suggestion, give feedback, or make a complaint related to World Vision's commitments, program or staff conduct.

(ان ارد الاقتراح او التعليق فيما يخص برنامج التغذية المدرسي ستخدم هذة الاستمارة وضعها في صندوق المقترحات)

Name of school: (اسم المدرسة) _____

Date: التاريخ	
Full name: (You can choose to remain anonymous but it may limit our ability to investigate). الاســـم بالكامل	
Grade/class: (Once again, you can choose to remain anonymous but it may limit our ability to investigate). الصــف او المســتوى	
Teacher's Name: (Head of class) (Only provide these details if you would like us to contact you if we have questions, or to give you a response). اســـم رب الـصف	
Suggest, raise issues & give feedback in as much detail as you can: (feel free to write on the back of this paper if you would like to include more detail) المقترح أو الأمـــر/ الموضـــوع الـمعنى بكل التفاصـــيل	
Would you like a response? هل تود الـــرد (رجاء ضع دائرة حول الاجـــابة)	(1) yes نـعـم (2)no لأ
Signature of complainant (unless you have chosen to remain anonymous): توقيع :المقتـــرح	

If your suggestion, feedback or complaint requires a response, and you have provided clear contact details, we will get back to you within after 2r weeks of receiving this form.
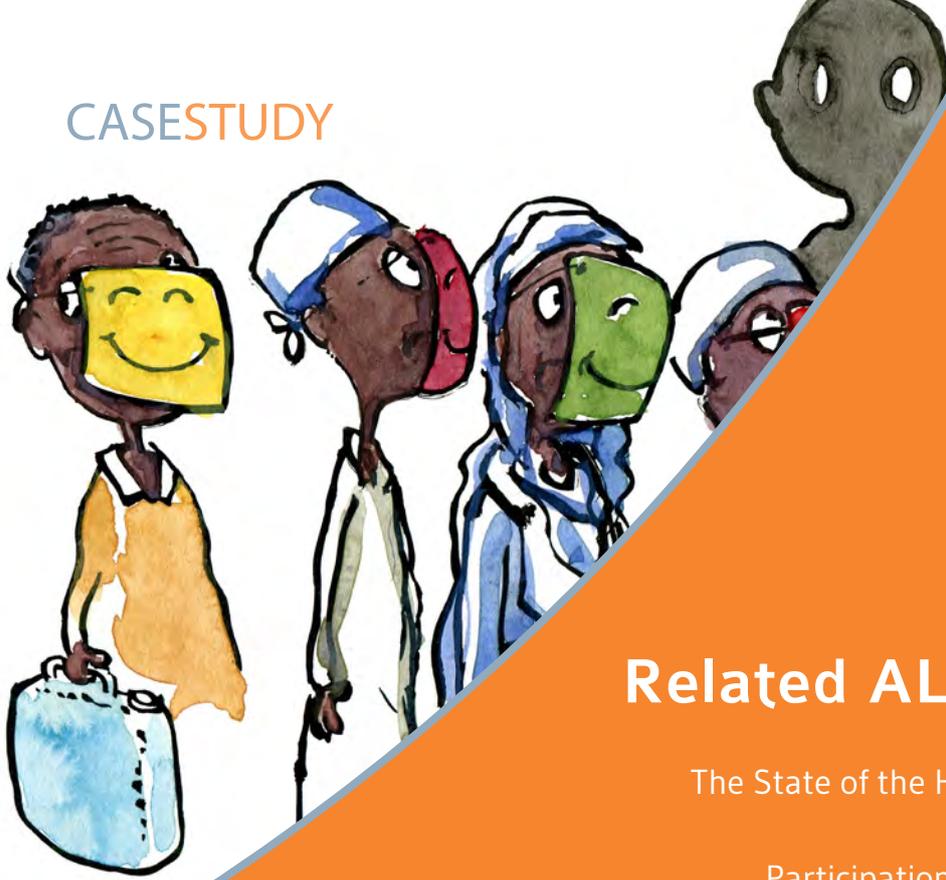
Related ALNAP publications

The State of the Humanitarian System 2012 edition.

Participation Handbook for Humanitarian Field Workers: Involving crisis-affected people in a humanitarian response

www.alnap.org/publications

Related CDA publications

Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid

Feedback Mechanisms in International Assistance Organizations

www.cdacollaborative.org/publications

CDA
One Alewife Center
Cambridge
MA 02140
Tel: + 1 617 661 6310
Email: ijean@cdacollaborative.org

ALNAP
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom
Tel: + 44 (0)20 3327 6578
Email: alnap@alnap.org

german
humanitarian
assistance
·DEUTSCHE HUMANITÄRE HILFE·