



PRACTICAL
LEARNING
for
INTERNATIONAL
ACTION

“For them, with them.”

Building Accountability Systems in Post-Earthquake Nepal

Feedback Loops Case Study

CDA-World Vision International Nepal

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CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

January 2016



Cover Photo: Sindhuli District, Nepal – January 2016. Credit: Sarah Cechvala

About CDA

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA) is a non-profit organization committed to improving the effectiveness of those who work internationally to provide humanitarian assistance, engage in peace practice, support sustainable development, and conduct corporate operations in a socially responsible manner. An electronic copy of this resource is available on the CDA website. CDA is keen to hear how you are using our materials. Your feedback informs our ongoing learning and impact assessment processes. Email your feedback to feedback@cdacollaborative.org

About this Case Study

This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences. Not all the documents and examples shared with us have been made public. When people in the area where a field visit has been conducted have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those examples private.

CDA collaborated with World Vision International Nepal and World Vision UK to produce this case study. This collaboration was made possible with funds from World Vision UK and UK Aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

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CDA Collaborative Learning Projects is committed to improving the effectiveness of those who work internationally to provide humanitarian assistance, engage in peace practice, support sustainable development, and conduct corporate operations in a socially responsible manner. CDA is widely recognized as a thought leader on effective listening and feedback processes, with evidence-informed recommendations on improving community engagement and accountability practices. Our collaborative learning process examines effective practices amidst operational and organizational challenges in order to generate practical lessons and evidence-based guidelines for enabling feedback utilization in programmatic and strategic processes. We are learning what makes feedback loops effective in long-term development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programs.

This case study is a result of a learning partnership between CDA, World Vision UK (WV UK), and World Vision International Nepal (WVIN). It documents WVIN's experience integrating accountability and feedback systems into long-term development programs. World Vision and CDA collaboratively seek to document emerging lessons on feedback utilization in organizational decision-making, course correction, program review, and redesign. This case study represents a snapshot of the experiences and viewpoints shared at the time of the field visit. Broad generalizations cannot be made from a single case study; it is meant to contribute to a larger learning process on feedback loops.

The primary focus of this case is to document lessons learned during WVIN's pilot of the Accountability Learning Initiatives (ALI). The ALI project is a WV UK-funded initiative, which provides funding to several country offices (Pakistan, Nepal, Somalia, and Ethiopia) to examine, enhance, and improve existing accountability practices in their development programming. WVIN named their ALI pilot the "Strengthening of Programme Accountability in Nepal" initiative. For this case study, WVIN hosted the CDA team over the course of a two-week field visit to Nepal, during which CDA met with "users" of WVIN's pilot feedback mechanisms. The CDA team used semi-structured interviews that created space for open-ended discussions that explored people's experiences with and perceptions of ALI.

World Vision International Nepal collects and uses feedback in both development and humanitarian programs. Globally, World Vision's Programme Accountability Framework (PAF) sets the direction for organizational accountability to the children and communities with whom WV works, and outlines WV's commitments to accountability as a minimum set of standards and criteria for program implementation. The "Strengthening Programme Accountability in Nepal" pilots seek to build upon the accountability practices that were established in many field offices by humanitarian response teams after the 2015 earthquake. This case highlights WVIN's experience leveraging accountability

systems established during the earthquake response in order to strengthen their existing approaches in development programming.

For the purposes of this case, “a feedback mechanism is seen as effective if, at minimum, it supports the collection, acknowledgement, analysis, and response to the feedback received, thus forming a closed feedback loop. Where the feedback loop is left open, the mechanism is not fully effective.” See: Bonino et al 2014(a)

CDA’s case study process examined the elements¹ commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts, which include: Cultural and Context Appropriateness, Expectations Setting and Knowledge, Feedback Collection, Verification and Analysis of Feedback, Acknowledgement and Response, Feedback Utilization, Individual and Organizational Support, Partnerships, and Periodic Reassessment and Adjustment. Key highlights based on our observations of these elements are outlined below. However, this does not capture the full richness of the case, which provides a more comprehensive account of the voices of those who participated in CDA’s action-research process.

KEY OBSERVATION: VERIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK INFORMATION

WVIN has initiated its information provision phase, which is vital for effective feedback practices (and is further discussed in Section 5.2: Expectation Setting and Knowledge). However, given the nascent phase of the pilot, WVIN has not yet instituted an internal referral system in which to verify and analyze feedback. Feedback verification processes are important especially when addressing conflicting data or highly sensitive information.¹ Internal systems for verifying and analyzing feedback are as important as the channels for collection and response. Field staff tasked with implementing the pilots will likely become overwhelmed by an influx in feedback if these processes are not established, which could also lead to user mistrust in the mechanism. Striking a balance between “proceduralizing” feedback documentation and empowering field staff to respond immediately to resolve issues is important for the mechanism to work effectively.

¹ Globally, World Vision has a strong policy and process to address issues of sexual exploitation and abuse.

¹ Bonino, Francesca and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

KEY OBSERVATION: INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Given the need to quickly staff the efforts to respond to Nepal's 2015 earthquake, WVIN seconded staff working on the nascent ALI pilots to lead its humanitarian accountability. Now in the post-emergency phase, these staff are returning to development programming with new experience and understanding of feedback mechanisms. Lessons learned and successes working with community feedback on the humanitarian side, while often different, are being built upon to advance institutional capacities and knowledge for accountability in development programs. While WVIN's response and development team are still separate departments, this knowledge transfer is a positive advancement in breaking down the silos between teams and preserving institutional learning.

KEY OBSERVATION: INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

This case study demonstrates the importance of leadership's active support for effective accountability practices. WVIN staff described leadership support (including: the of setting norms and shaping the organizational culture) as an element that enabled the utilization of feedback mechanisms. In order to demonstrate this priority, WVIN established an internal staff feedback mechanism. Staff indicated that their needs and concerns were being heard and responded to, and in some cases, acted upon, which had a positive contribution to staff morale.

Organizational commitment also comes in the form of resource allocation. Effective feedback systems need to be planned to ensure that they have the human, technical, and financial resources to function properly. Organizations often overlook staff time and skills as critical and potentially costly components of an effective feedback mechanism. As WVIN intends to scale these mechanisms into all its development programs, it needs to ensure that adequate resources are dedicated to this effort.

KEY OBSERVATION: PARTNERSHIPS

National policies mandate that all international organizations must implement their programs through a national non-governmental organization. Currently, WVIN's program model requires them to research and design programs before identifying local partners. In its current form, this process limits partners' involvement in the initial stages of program design and development, which can reduce their understanding and ownership of the project and its associated accountability structures.

Discussions also highlighted partners' limited awareness of WVIN's initiative to increase accountability to communities. We observed a lack of concrete channels to share feedback between agencies limiting the sharing of information. Feedback will likely be lost or overlooked by WVIN and partners if a clear system to gather, track, share, use, and respond to community feedback is not developed between the organizations. The consequences of these gaps will be most strongly felt by community-facing staff of both WVIN and local partner organizations. In addition, these practices may inhibit the development of local capacities in the area of accountability.

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This case study is a result of a learning partnership between CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), World Vision UK (WV UK), and World Vision International Nepal (WVIN). World Vision UK partnered with selected national offices to pilot different ways of improving accountability to communities by providing technical support, capacity building, and funding. These pilot projects, called "Accountability Learning Initiatives" (ALI), enabled national offices to integrate accountability into long-term development programs, while adapting to their particular context and capacity.² World Vision is applying lessons from the pilots to provide direction for accountability work in other operational areas around the world. The Accountability Learning Initiative is not a specific methodology or a consistent approach used across the country pilots; rather, the initiative allows WV country offices to assess existing accountability practices and provides WV the opportunity to improve and scale-up such practices.

The purpose of this case study is to contribute to the growing evidence-base on feedback loops and accountability practices in development programming. World Vision and CDA collaboratively seek to document emerging lessons on feedback utilization in organizational decision-making, course

correction, program review, and redesign. World Vision has a vested interest in building its evidence base on accountability and feedback practices in order to strengthen organizational accountability to communities. Lessons documented in this, and other cases, will contribute to a collaborative learning initiative led by CDA, which focuses on factors that enable effective feedback loops in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programs.

CDA started its research on feedback loops in 2011 and later joined the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) in an action-research initiative on feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts. From 2012 to 2014,³ CDA and ALNAP conducted case studies, identified patterns across the cases, and produced practitioner guidance.⁴ Building upon the evidence generated with ALNAP, CDA has expanded the scope of its inquiry to examine effective feedback loops in development programs. Overall, CDA's objective is to generate practical lessons and evidence-based guidelines for enabling feedback utilization in programmatic and strategic processes.

This case study documents WVIN's experience integrating accountability systems into

² Other pilot countries in 2014-2016 include: Pakistan, Nepal, and Somalia. More information about WV UK, Accountability Learning Initiatives can be found at: <http://www.worldvision.org.uk/our-work/accountability/#section04>

³ For more on CDA-ALNAP humanitarian feedback mechanisms research see: <http://cdacollaborative.org/cdaproject/humanitarian-feedback-mechanisms-research/>

⁴ Bonino et al. 2014(a).

development programs. In Nepal, the country office named their ALI pilots the “Strengthening Programme Accountability in Nepal,” which, for the purposes of this case, will be called the accountability initiatives or pilots. Globally, World Vision (WV) integrates key elements of accountability into its participatory program planning process. WV uses a Programme Accountability Framework (PAF) to ensure that programs are designed and implemented to empower children, communities, and local partners to hold WV accountable.

Aligned with WV’s global accountability framework, WVIN’s accountability initiatives seek to enhance organizational-wide accountability and feedback mechanisms (both within the organization and directly with WV’s beneficiaries), which also represent a pillar of WVIN’s 2016-2020 Country Strategy.⁵ The pilots were launched in two field locations⁶ and ran from 2015-2016 with the intended goal “to strengthen and integrate community accountability systems and practices in WVIN programming.”⁷ In addition, the pilots seek to

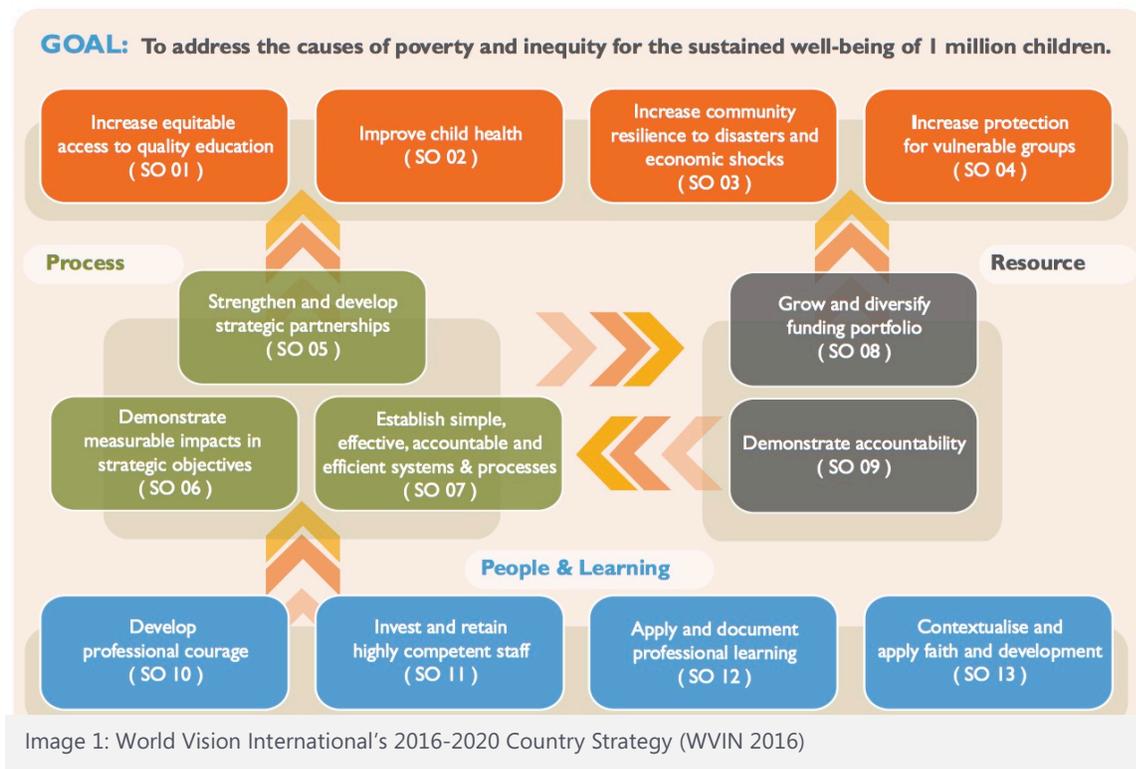


Image 1: World Vision International’s 2016-2020 Country Strategy (WVIN 2016)

⁵ WVIN 2016.

⁶ One pilot is in the Sindhuli district, located in the central region (hill region) of Nepal, 135 kilometers (roughly five hours by road) from the capital Kathmandu. The other piloting region is

Kailali District in the Terai plain in the far west region of the country. This case focuses on the pilot in Sindhuli.

⁷ WVIN 2015(b).

build upon the accountability practices that were established in many field offices by humanitarian response teams after the 2015 earthquake. This case highlights WVIN's experience shifting humanitarian accountability mechanisms and processes into their development programming, while simultaneously bolstering their existing development-related accountability approaches.⁸ Based on the learning that emerges from the pilot, WVIN plans to expand these accountability and feedback practices into all its field programs by 2017.

World Vision International Nepal hosted Sarah Cechvala, a Program Manager at CDA, during a two-week period in January 2016. During the visit, CDA spent time in Sindhuli District (one of the pilot locations)⁹ and at the national office in Kathmandu.¹⁰ During the visit, CDA met with community members who have used WVIN's accountability and feedback channels and those who have not. CDA also interviewed members of mothers' groups, youth groups, local leaders, district-level government

officials, and international organizations operating in the same region as WVIN. In addition, CDA met with staff from WVIN's local partner organizations.¹¹

At the district level, we spoke with WVIN education and protection specialists, humanitarian emergency staff, development coordinators, the Monitoring Communication Documentation Coordinator (MCDC) staff, and the manager of the field office.¹² At the national office, CDA spoke with the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) team, education, protection, and communication managers, emergency and humanitarian program staff, human resources officers, and senior leadership.¹³ The team overseeing the accountability pilots debriefed and validated CDA's findings and initial conclusions at the end of the visit. CDA also spent time in Kathmandu meeting with other organizations who have committed efforts and resources toward improving feedback and

⁸ While this case does capture some experiences of WVIN's accountability response team, this is not the primary focus. Therefore, conclusions and specific lessons cannot be drawn from the response experience.

⁹ For the purposes of this case study, the accountability initiative refers only to the pilots that were observed in the WVIN field office in Sindhuli District.

¹⁰ CDA then spent six days in the Sindhuli District. Three days were spent visiting the field office, the offices of implementing partners, and government officials in the district capital, Sindhulimadi. CDA also spent three days visiting community members, volunteers and staff from partner organizations, and WVIN's field staff in six field program communities including: Khangsanbesi village, Solpathana village, Chandibhanjyang

village, Tinmane village, Bhuwaneshwari Gwaltar village, and Bhuwaneshwari Deuralitar village. CDA spent the final days in the district capital with field staff to validate and test the feedback and information heard during the visit.

¹¹ CDA met with staff at all levels of the organizations, including volunteers, field staff, and board members.

¹² World Vision's field offices are called Area Development Programs (ADPs). In Sindhuli, WVIN calls the office the local program area (LPA), which combines several ADPs.

¹³ The second week of the visit was spent in Kathmandu at WVIN's National office so CDA could speak with national level staff about the accountability initiative project and other internal mechanisms used by WVIN to gather and use feedback.

accountability practices.¹⁴ WVIN joined CDA during these meetings to enhance cross-organization collaboration and innovation. Emerging lessons derived from these conversations are captured as vignettes throughout this case study in order to highlight the experience of other agencies.

During the last two days of the visit, WVIN's MEAL team convened an Accountability Learning Event supported by WV UK and CDA. This event offered an opportunity for sharing lessons with WVIN staff and peer organizations. Several development and humanitarian organizations shared lessons from their accountability and feedback practices. Field staff working on the accountability pilots shared their experiences of integrating feedback into programming with other staff in order to support the scaling-up of accountability systems into all development programs. A final session offered time for WVIN staff to plan to design, test, and implement feedback and accountability practices in their programs in the coming fiscal year.

This case study does not represent a final product of our collaborative learning project. While this report may be cited, it remains a working document. This case study represents a snapshot of the experiences and viewpoints shared at the time of the field visit. Broad

generalizations cannot be made from a single case study. Instead, it is meant to contribute to a larger learning process on feedback loops. This case study is not an evaluation of WVIN's programming. Funding for this collaboration was provided by the Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) with UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

¹⁴ CDA and WVIN met with Save the Children, Care Nepal, International Alert, Accountability Labs, and Local Interventions Group.

The methodology for this case study is adapted from the CDA-ALNAP joint research on effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms.¹⁵ CDA uses semi-structured interviews that create space for open-ended discussions to explore people’s experiences with and perceptions of the accountability initiative. The case study approach offers an in-depth qualitative inquiry and examination of features that contribute to effective feedback loops, including the use of feedback in decision-making. For the purposes of this case, *“a feedback mechanism is seen as effective if, at minimum, it supports the collection, acknowledgement, analysis, and response to the feedback received, thus forming a closed feedback loop. Where the feedback loop is left open, the mechanism is not fully effective.”*¹⁶

CDA has documented the use of feedback for internal monitoring and reputational risk management, for accountability to partners, donors, and communities, and for program modification and advocacy with donors. In our analysis of feedback utilization, we do not judge or attempt to measure the magnitude of change created as a result of utilization. This focus is primarily on whether or not feedback has been used in decision-making, whether it has produced change, and how. When possible, CDA attempts to trace the pathway through which information (from a single person or aggregated from multiple voices) leads to

response and/or action and to identify the factors that enable this process. As past studies have demonstrated, accumulated feedback does not necessarily lead to utilization. It is CDA’s hope that this case will contribute to the evidence-base on how development organizations utilize community feedback in their decision-making.

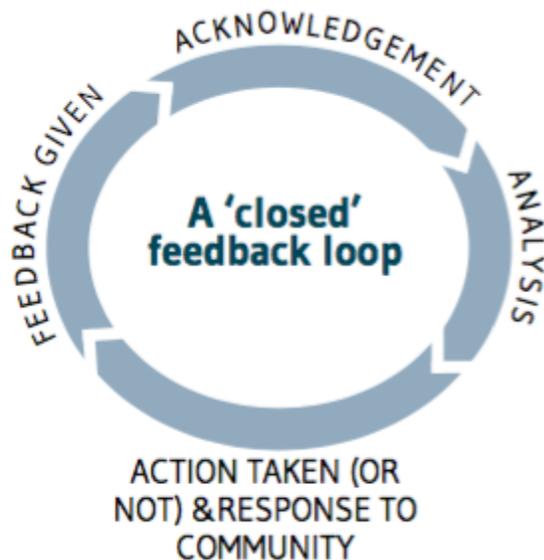


Image 2: Bonino, Francesca, and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

¹⁵ Bonino, Francesca, and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

¹⁶ See: Bonino Francesca et al 2014(b).

This section considers the political and cultural context in which WVIN operates and focuses on factors that may hinder or advance accountability commitments and practices. We also consider the institutional context and the factors that enable or deter effective feedback processes at WVIN.

3. 1 Operational Context

In recent years, Nepal has experienced a rapid transition from monarchy to democracy. The country was newly minted a secular, federal republic with the establishment of its 2015 constitution.¹⁷ Historically, it has experienced weak governance structures, which has more profoundly affected the rural poor.¹⁸

Nepal has three distinct geographical zones: the plains (Terai) in the south along the Indian boarder, the hills cutting across the country from east to west, and the mountains across the northern region. Roughly half the population lives in the Terai, with approximately 43 percent residing in the hills (with many living in very remote regions), and seven percent in the

mountainous region.¹⁹ The World Bank estimates that, currently, roughly 81 percent of the population lives in rural areas of the country (See Image 3).²⁰

With vast populations living in rural areas,²¹ UNDP estimated in 2014 that roughly 24 percent of the population was living below the national poverty line.²² Rugged terrain across much of the country has isolated many communities, making it difficult to promote economic activities or deliver services. Poor communication networks, limited infrastructure, and vast population growth in many remote areas further exacerbates national resources and constrains the delivery of services.²³ It is estimated that about 80 percent of Nepalese live in rural areas and depend on subsistence farming for their livelihoods.²⁴ Further compounding issues of poverty is the historic concentration of land by the monarchy under a feudal system, which has made land access in rural areas extremely limited for much of the population (See Box 1: Operational Context in Sindhuli District).²⁵

¹⁷ Kashyap 2015.

¹⁸ Political influence from neighboring countries, such as India has had an impact on the political dynamics and policies of Nepal. During the time of this case study, for example, the Indian Government had placed a blockade on the borders of landlocked Nepal, halting the movement of fuel across into the country spurring an energy crisis within the country. New Delhi's dissatisfaction over the passing of Nepal's new constitution is said to be at the core of this crisis. For more see: <http://time.com/4115801/nepal-india-border-blockade-madhesh/>

¹⁹ WVIN 2015(a).

²⁰ The World Bank 2016.

²¹ Nepal is experiencing urbanization and city populations are projected to increase over the next decade. The Kathmandu Valley (home to the capital Kathmandu), for example, is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in South Asia. The valley is growing at a rate of four percent a year. See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/04/01/mana-ging-nepals-urban-transition>

²² WVIN 2016.

²³ IFAD 2013.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

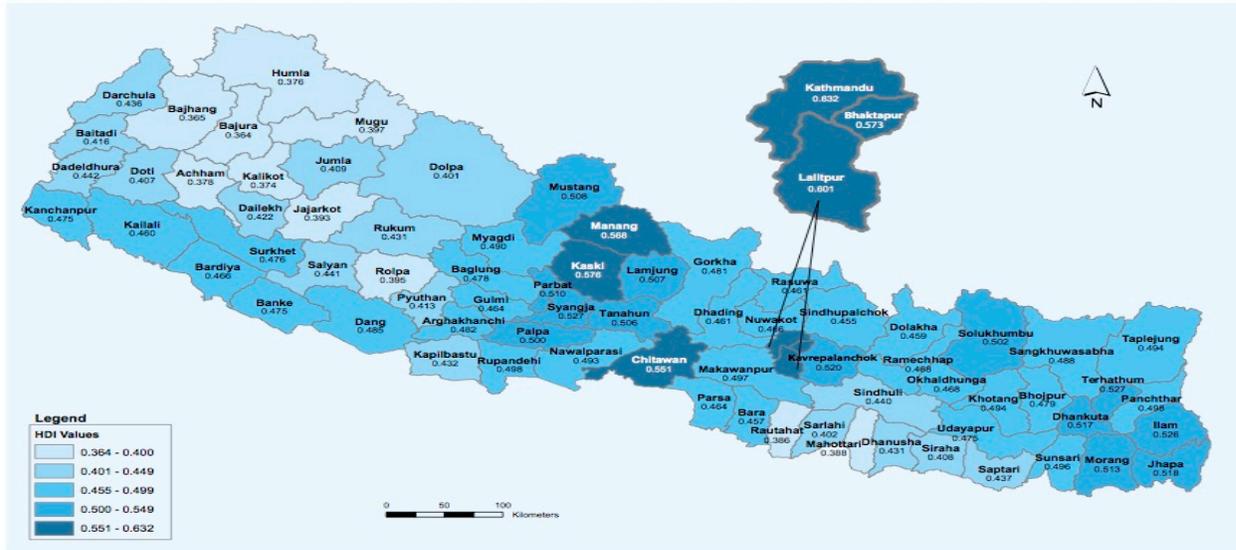


Image 3: HDI Values across districts, 2011. (WVIN 2016)

BOX 1 - OPERATIONAL CONTEXT IN SINDHULI DISTRICT

In Sindhuli District¹, the hilly topography, sparse population, and weak infrastructure isolates many communities. Annual impacts from the monsoon season makes many communities susceptible to significant flooding and landslides. In addition, even with a high rate of mobile phone usage by the population, the geography of Sindhuli district makes coverage spotty at best, which is a further isolating factor. Sindhuli is also described as one of the most heavily politicized regions in the entire country. Political parties have a profound hand in all local and district level decision-making, which often undermines elected officials and polices at the local level. Over the past several years, however, aid agencies have limited the 1 way in which they distribute aid, primarily due to lack of funding. World Food Program (WFP), 2 for example, has changes its distribution methods 3 and now provides only to those identified as “most vulnerable.”

¹ This case study focuses on Sindhuli district, which is situated in the central, hill region 135 kilometers (roughly five hours by road) from the capital Kathmandu. In 2008, the total estimated population in Sindhuli District was 320,954 people, with a population density (persons per square km) of only 112.

UNDP estimates that there are roughly 103 distinctive caste and ethnic groups and 92 spoken languages throughout Nepal.²⁶ Overall, most Nepalese are Hindu, who make up roughly 81.3 percent of the population.²⁷ Social discrimination of groups, particularly the Dalits (“untouchables”) and indigenous people, is embedded in social constructs and has further marginalized many of Nepal’s rural poor.²⁸ The Muluki Ain law (National Code of 1854),²⁹ for example, introduced a national caste system allocating a specific rank to each ethnic and religious group, which was determined by the Hindu doctrine.³⁰ Geographical factors coupled with systemic isolation has limited the population’s access to education, which has contributed to a high level of illiteracy across the country. Vast disparities exist between the literacy rates of men (roughly 71.6 percent) and women (roughly 44.5 percent), which more dramatically affects rural populations.³¹

Nepal’s sluggish development is also compounded by the country’s proclivity to being affected by natural disasters, including flooding, landslides, and earthquakes. It is projected that these natural disasters will only be worsened in coming years due to the effects of climate change. Globally, Nepal ranks fourth in vulnerability to climate change, 68th in

communities’ susceptibility to natural hazards, and 54th in terms of the country’s lack of capacity to address those issues.³² The country’s greatest natural hazard is earthquakes. According to the Global Report on Disaster Risk, Nepal ranks 11th in terms of earthquake risk globally (See Box 2: April 2015 Earthquake).³³

3.2 Institutional Context

World Vision International Nepal has been operating in the country since 1982. Initially the organization’s country-presence was limited to donating to local health-related organizations; however, with the 1988 earthquake and 1993 floods World Vision engaged in humanitarian response activities. In 2001, WVIN formally started its long-term development work throughout Nepal.³⁴ Prior to the 2015 earthquake, WVIN was operating in 11 districts (covered by nine field offices) with roughly 200 employees, 60 of whom were located in the national office in Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu. During this time, WVIN’s programs were mostly long-term development initiatives. After the April 2015 earthquake, however, the organization rapidly grew its humanitarian department, and added roughly 150 additional staff to their response team.

²⁶ UNDP 2009.

²⁷ CIA 2016.

²⁸ IFAD 2013.

²⁹ UNDP 2009.

³⁰ For more, see: Ghosh, Partha S 2007 and Thapa, Kanak Bikram 2010.

³¹ IRIN 2012.

³² WVIN 2016.

³³ Government of Nepal 2016.

³⁴ For more see: <http://www.wvi.org/nepal/about-us>

BOX 2 - APRIL 2015 EARTHQUAKE

Due to its position on several significant fault lines, Nepal has experienced vast damage from earthquakes. On April 25th 2015, Nepal experienced a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, which was the country's most devastating natural disaster since the 1934 Nepal-Bihar earthquake. With the epicenter 81 miles northwest of Kathmandu, the earthquake caused extensive damage in Nepal's most populous urban area, and affected 39 out of the 75 districts¹. The devastating impact of this earthquake was worsened by several high magnitude aftershocks in the following weeks. This natural disaster killed over 8,000 people, displaced roughly 2.8 million, destroyed approximately 473,000 homes, and damaged many national historic sites across the country².

¹ WVIN 2016.

² Goldberg, Mark Leon 2015.

National policies, such as the Social Welfare Act 1991 of the Nepal Government,³⁵ mandate that all international organizations must implement their programs through a national non-governmental organization.³⁶ In Sindhuli, for example, WVIN has three partners responsible for implementing their health, education, and livelihoods programs in 14 Village Development Committees (VDCs)³⁷ throughout the district. Staff from implementing partners work closely

in the field and at the district level with WVIN field staff. Partners in this context are relatively new to WVIN, since many programs have just begun the implementation phase.³⁸ In addition, staff at WVIN note that WV's Christian identity has historically raised concerns among the predominately Hindu population. Suspicion of proselytization has, in some cases, created a barrier to effectively implementing programming.

³⁵ For more see:

<http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Nepal/Social.pdf>

³⁶ In the case of emergency response, however, this legislation was waved.

³⁷ A Village District Committee (VDC) in Nepal is the lowest administrative part of its Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development. Each district has several VDCs, similar to municipalities but with greater public-government

interaction and administration. There are currently 3157 village development committees in Nepal. Each VDC is further divided into several wards depending on the population of the district; the average is nine wards.

³⁸ There are 2 ADPs in Sindhuli LPA (Sindhuli east and west) both the ADPs are in implementation phase. Sindhuli East ADP started implementing its program from 2014 and west from 2016.

Budget constraints have forced WVIN to consolidate several field offices. Combining field offices has expanded the geographical scope of many programs, but has also reduced the number of staff in various field offices. At the field level, WVIN utilizes a fairly decentralized structure that allows staff to act quickly in response to community feedback. This flexible and local decision-making allows for faster programmatic modifications based on input from local communities. Program quality assurance steps are embedded into activities at the field level. In other WV country offices, it is common for M&E teams to operate separately from the program teams. Given the small size of many of the field offices, the WVIN M&E staff supports specialists in the design, implementation, and monitoring activities.

Currently, the accountability initiative is managed by the MEAL team at the national office, which is composed of nine staff members including two accountability team members. At the field level, the Monitoring Communication Documentation Coordinator (MCDC) manages the initiative with supervisory support from the field office manager.³⁹ Partner organizations directly implement all programs, with support from field staff, including cross-cutting initiatives such as the accountability pilot.⁴⁰ Image 4 depicts the organizational structure,

and highlights how the accountability initiative was managed within WVIN.

WVIN's 2016-2020 Country Strategy is one catalyst for the advancement of accountability as an organization-wide priority, which calls for *"increased accountability to communities, increased accountability internally, greater space for innovation, simplified processes and procedures."* At the national level, the organization has a staff feedback system with an explicit process that senior leadership adhere to closely. For the purposes of this report, this internal feedback system will be called the staff feedback mechanism. Feedback and accountability systems outside the organization are also a priority. Building upon the lessons learned from the accountability pilots, WVIN plans to expand the initiative to all field offices by the end of the next fiscal year.

³⁹ In Sindhuli, this manager is called the LPA (Local Program Area) manager. This is the senior staff member of the field office who oversees all WVIN's programs in the LPA. For the

purposes of this report, the LPA manager will be called the field office manager,

⁴⁰ Partner staff includes social mobilizers (SMs) and community volunteers.

III - Operational and Organizational Context

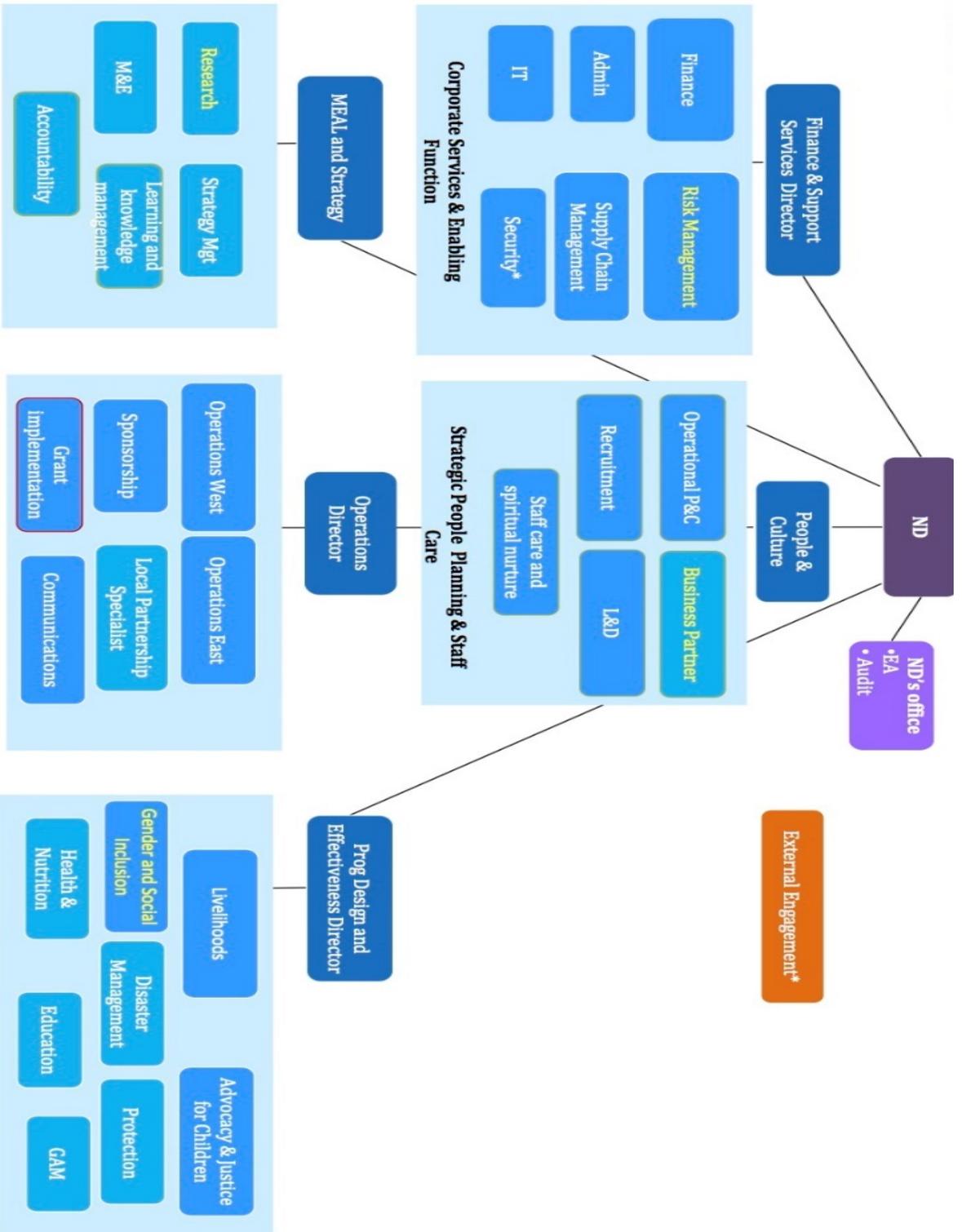


Image 4: WVIN Interim Structure (at the time of the visit in January 2016).

World Vision has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to accountability and has an agency-wide program accountability framework (PAF).⁴¹ The PAF sets the direction for organizational accountability to the children and communities with whom WV works, and outlines WV's commitments to accountability as a minimum set of standards and criteria for their implementation. The four pillars of program accountability embedded in WV's approach to development programming are: Providing Information; Consulting with Communities; Promoting Participation; and Collecting and Acting on Feedback and Complaints.

In addition, WV has signed on to and has met requirements for several other quality and accountability codes and standards at both a sector-wide and global level.⁴² Driven by its agency-wide commitments, WV country offices are required to establish and use accountability mechanisms and complaints procedures. Tracing the influences of these agency-wide initiatives is beyond the scope of this case study. CDA's interest is focused on examining organizational support and incentives for effective feedback processes, and therefore, we will discuss several specific examples highlighted by staff in relevant sections below.

⁴¹ For more see: http://9bb63f6dda0f744fa444-9471a7fca5768cc513a2e3c4a260910b.r43.cf3.rackcdn.com/files/1814/4069/6145/Integrated_Programme_Accountability_Framework.pdf

4.1 Existing Channels for Collecting Feedback

World Vision International Nepal collects and uses feedback in both its humanitarian and development programs. The humanitarian emergency affairs (HEA) team has distinct mechanisms for collecting and responding to feedback in the 20 communities where the program operates. After the 2015 earthquake, the HEA team instituted several feedback mechanisms including: a national hotline (not toll free), a district office phone number, and suggestion boxes and help desks at distribution sites.

For WVIN's development work, there is a **program design** and subsequent **redesign phase** that occurs every five years. This process involves reflection time with the community and the evaluation team in order to ensure that feedback is incorporated into programming decisions. This approach reflects WV's overall commitment to regular reflection and dialogue with children and communities, which aims to enhance local participation and ownership. **Program implementation** directly involves the community through a broad consultation to discuss the process and to solicit input from community members and other stakeholders. Feedback is also routinely gathered as part of

⁴² These include Sphere, Red Cross Code of Conduct, Common Humanitarian Standard (CHS) formerly HAP, INGO Accountability Charter and Disaster Emergency Accountability Framework among others.

WVIN's monitoring and evaluation process, which uses quality assurance surveys that inform outcome-level indicators.

WV staff hold **regular community meetings** that serve as an informal channel for gathering local input and feedback. Periodic focus group discussions are conducted by livelihoods, education, and child-protection teams to hear community perspectives and complaints. WVIN also places development coordinators (DCs) in the field to live and work with the community. In Sindhuli, for example, WVIN has four DCs who live among community members. Formal and informal communication with the field staff offers community members a constant and secure feedback channel. Field staff also coordinate directly with local mothers' and youth groups as well as local leadership in order to engage existing community-based structures who are representatives of their respective constituencies.

Implementing partner staff also live and work in the community and provide an additional informal information provision and feedback channel. Many partner staff are seen as trusted members of the community, and often come from the communities they are serving. Furthermore, the number of partner staff in Sindhuli outnumber WVIN field staff. The sheer number of partner staff, coupled with their

personal connection to the community, often makes them an easier channel for community members to access and engage.⁴³

4.2 Strengthening Program Accountability in Nepal Initiative

World Vision International Nepal is committed to enhancing the organization's feedback and accountability practices. The "Strengthening Program Accountability in Nepal" initiative is being piloted in two field areas (Sindhuli District and Kailali District) and runs from 2015-2016. The pilot is intended to bolster feedback and accountability measures in WVIN's participatory development approach.

Preliminary assessment of community accountability practices commenced in January 2015. However, the roll-out of the initiative was delayed due to the April 2015 earthquake, after which WVIN focused its efforts on the humanitarian response. Recently, WVIN has scaled back its humanitarian response efforts and has refocused on its longer-term development programming. As part of this transition, the MEAL team has resumed the piloting of the accountability initiative in the two field areas.

With humanitarian feedback channels in-place in many of the pilot communities, WVIN

⁴³ There is one development coordinator (DC) for every three village development committee (VDCs) areas and there is usually one partner staff (social mobilizer) per every two VDCs.

continued to use several of these channels for the development-oriented accountability initiative. In Sindhuli, for example, the team maintained the office phone line and suggestion boxes from the response efforts. In addition, the team also used existing formal and informal Building on the response feedback channels was further enhanced by a strong “human bridge” forged between the response and development sides of WVIN. When the 2015 earthquake occurred, WVIN shifted the accountability manager from the development programs to the humanitarian response team in order to bolster organization learning and knowledge transfer between the two departments. As the organization scaled down its humanitarian efforts, this same manager shifted back to development programming in order to spearhead the accountability initiative. Creating internal bridges will help WVIN share institutional learning and bolster staff capacities, which will be discussed further in Section 5.6: Feedback Utilization and Section 5.7: Individual and Organizational Support.

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In previous research, CDA and ALNAP identified and tested several propositions⁴⁴ commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts, including, in no particular order:

<i>Cultural & Context Appropriateness</i>	<i>Expectations Setting and Knowledge</i>	<i>Feedback Collection</i>
<i>Verification & analysis of feedback</i>	<i>Acknowledgement and Response</i>	<i>Feedback Utilization</i>
<i>Individual and Organizational Support</i>	<i>Periodic Reassessment and Adjustment</i>	<i>Partnerships (added at a later stage)</i>

CDA’s ongoing research and advisory work with partner organizations, such as World Vision, points to these features as critical for the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms in development programs. This section presents CDA’s findings regarding these features based on desk review, interviews, and observations in the field.

In addition, partnerships are an emerging area of consideration for organizational accountability practices. Given Nepalese legislation regarding implementing partners, findings related to feedback and accountability between WVIN and its partners are of particular interest to program effectiveness. These

relationships will also be explored more in Section 5.8: Partnerships.

5.1 Cultural and Context Appropriateness

Following the April 2015 earthquake, accountability mechanisms were quickly instituted into most interventions. People affected by the emergency and the humanitarian assistance that followed became accustomed to seeing different complaint mechanisms and feedback channels in their communities. WVIN is among the many agencies that has invested resources into developing context-appropriate feedback collection tools. Many community members have used one or more of these feedback mechanisms during the earthquake response.

The 2015 earthquake occurred before the WVIN MEAL team was able to elicit feedback from the community regarding the most culturally appropriate channels for the pilots. Community engagement in the selection process for information provision and feedback channels was therefore limited. One male community member noted, “*World Vision has not asked us about the best way to give feedback. But it’s a good idea because people have different ideas. They should meet with us and ask us.*” He emphasized that while participation by everyone in group meetings is not realistic,

⁴⁴ Bonino, Francesca and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

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WVIN currently does not host community meetings frequently enough to gather varying perspectives. Field staff echoed this sentiment and explained that, *"More consultation with the community is needed. The best way to choose a feedback channel for them is with them."*

Speed and urgency limited the HEA team from undertaking a context analysis and assessment for the accountability mechanisms used during WVIN's earthquake response effort. One staff member explained, *"We immediately used the mechanisms that we had and knew. We did not get a chance to consult with communities about the appropriate channels. We rolled out a standard format everywhere."* As the response effort advanced, WVIN accountability staff noted that they had to adapt the channels immediately implemented in the aftermath to conform with community preference.

Launching the accountability initiative from existing humanitarian response channels, therefore may raise concerns about the usability and cultural appropriateness of the channels. In this case, however, the community's concerns related more to the limited consultation of community members about their preferred channels, rather than concerns about the appropriateness of the channels themselves. In fact, overall, community members noted that they were happy with the various channels. However, several indicated that high illiteracy rates are inhibiting the use of suggestion boxes. In addition, while most community members

have mobile phones, the limited mobile network coverage has hindered the use of this channel. Sindhuli's landscape (comprised of vast distances between communities, few paved roads, limited mobility during the rainy season, and mountainous terrain) has limited WVIN field staff's ability to regularly gather in-person feedback. The geographical issues have also posed challenges to reliably collect and respond to feedback from the suggestion boxes. Gender dynamics within some communities has also excluded some women from in-person meetings with field staff. One mothers' group member explained that the men in the community interrupt during meetings, and, in some cases, husbands do not allow their wives to participate in feedback sessions due to cultural norms.

Traditional local norms govern the processes by which communities raise issues to village development committees (VDCs) and district-level government. The community comfort level with providing feedback to other institutions also varies greatly. For example, one male community member explained that he had provided feedback to the government, but *"the government does not listen."* Another echoed, *"No other institution asks for feedback, but they should, it's a good way to share information."* However, some local groups, such as mothers' groups were seen as quite responsive to community feedback. In some cases, when feedback is brought to these groups, they work with the government officials to address the

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request.⁴⁵ Others indicated that they had also provided feedback to WVIN’s local partners, but did not always receive a response. The completion of the accountability pilot offers an opportunity to reassess community preferences for information provision and feedback channels and to solicit input from different socio-economic classes, genders, and marginalized groups.⁴⁶

5.2 Expectation Setting and Knowledge

Information Provision about WVIN

We know about World Vision because of their response to the earthquake and their distribution in our community.

– Male Community Member

Information provision represents one of the fundamental pillars of World Vision’s global Program Accountability Framework (PAF). The accountability pilots provide an opportunity to

test and improve methods for the provision of accurate and transparent information about World Vision to community members. Unsurprisingly, those who regularly engage in program activities demonstrate a better understanding of WVIN’s programming and overall mandate.

Most community members could not differentiate between WVIN’s response-related activities and its development programming, and many also were unable to distinguish WVIN from its implementing partners. All community-facing activities and staff were seen to be part of WVIN. One partner organization’s board member explained, “People think everything is done by World Vision.” The community’s lack of distinction between WVIN and its partners signals the need for improved communication and presents both an opportunity for collective accountability and a potential challenge in ensuring accountability within a partnership model. If, for example, the community becomes frustrated by the behavior of partner staff, the community response could be directed at WVIN, given their perception of organizational boundaries and collective responsibility for staff and partner conduct. To improve communication about organizational roles and responsibilities, all implementing partners

⁴⁵ For example, one mothers’ group provided feedback to the government about providing trainings on family planning and nutrition at a health post. The VDC allocated money in the budget to provide the trainings.

⁴⁶ At the time of CDA’s visit, community members were unable to distinguish between WVIN and implementing partners, and

therefore, did not provide options regarding how they could best provide feedback about partners to WVIN. However, this is an important topic for WVIN to include in its follow-up with communities after the pilot phase.

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agreed that providing information about both organizations on noticeboards would be helpful. This would also assist in informing community members about the different roles, responsibilities, and the organizational mandates of WVIN and its local partners (see more in Section 5.8 – Partnerships and see Box 4: Noticeboards for Information Provision).

Community members raised concerns regarding WVIN's Christian identity and fears of proselytization. One member said, *"It's ok that they're Christian. They are working here, and that's good. But we want to know their real*

objectives in our community." Another noted, *"They are running small programs here, but we don't know if in the long-run they want to convert us."* Limited information about WVIN's programs, mandate, and vision can exacerbate these fears. Several community members noted that they received information about WVIN, but they have since forgotten the organization's messages. These anecdotes highlight the importance of repetition of information to ensure that clear and consistent information is accessible to community members (See Box 5: Repetition of Information).

BOX 4 – NOTICEBOARDS FOR INFORMATION PROVISION

WVIN does not have noticeboards in all its communities in Sindhuli District. Instead, WVIN has placed some noticeboards at various VDCS offices, each of which represents roughly seven to nine wards (villages) depending on population size¹. Community members and partner organizations both noted that more noticeboards would be useful to share information and could help mitigate confusion. Several suggested erecting the boards in schools and central locations (near the VDC office) to increase accessibility. However, WVIN should carefully consider the location of noticeboards, given geographical challenges and heavy political influences in the region. Translating messages into local languages and using images as a means to convey information will also improve accessibility for community members. Recognizing the high level of illiteracy among communities, noticeboards should not be the only medium through which information is communicated to communities.

¹ VDCs where WVIN has had longer engagement tend to have noticeboards, whereas, locations newer to the organization do not.

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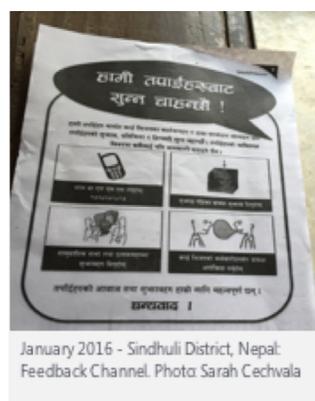
BOX 5 – REPETITION OF INFORMATION

In one community, female members explained that, "In the beginning, five years ago, we thought that World Vision was here to preach the Christian religion." Over time, WVIN returned to the community and repeatedly spoke with residents, and eventually placed a field staff member to live in the community. Another female community member explained, "We got to know him, and after three years of responding to us and giving us information, we realized we made a mistake. Now, we feel badly about how we treated World Vision when they first arrived." The field staff placed in that community verified this story, and explained that in the beginning, he spent most of his time clarifying the organization's mission and countering the suspicions related to proselytization. While tiresome, he noted that he was eventually able to build trust and understanding with community members. Now, he no longer receives inquiries about the organization, its religious status, or its intended goals in the community. Community members commented that he is now seen as part of the community, and they feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences with him.

Information Provision about WVIN's Feedback Mechanisms

Given the nascent stage of the accountability pilots, the dissemination of information about the feedback channels is new for community members. It was encouraging to witness the MEAL team disseminate a pictographic flyer about WVIN's feedback channels while verbally sharing the information with community members. Afterward, staff answered any immediate questions regarding the feedback channels. The flyer includes images of each channel and information in Nepalese about how to use them. Given low literacy rates in the

area, this flyer was well received by community members. MEAL staff also noted that they plan to hold these consultations regularly with program participants to ensure that everyone is aware of the feedback channels.



January 2016 - Sindhuli District, Nepal: Feedback Channel. Photo: Sarah Cechvala

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5.3 Feedback Collection

“ World Vision wants to understand the Nepalese people better. Feedback will help them to consider our priorities. ”

– Female Community Member

Community members' level of comfort in providing feedback varied in pilot sites. It was encouraging to hear that some community members felt that providing feedback is one of their fundamental rights. However, others mentioned that they did not feel comfortable providing feedback or did not feel that they were given the opportunity to do so. Several community members noted that giving feedback is outside of cultural norms.

Most community members described at least one method by which they can reach WVIN in order to provide feedback. Overall, people understood they have options and were able to identify the most appropriate channel for their type of feedback. One community member said, “World Vision encourages us to speak up.” It is a promising sign that most people perceived the available feedback channels as accessible, safe, and trustworthy. The section below will look at each channel more closely.

Posting Field Office Phone Numbers

WVIN uses several phone channels, including a national (not toll-free) number (which is a fixed line), the field office number (also a fixed line), and the mobile numbers of those overseeing the accountability initiative. A toll-free phone line in Nepal requires a person to call from a land line, which many community members do not have access to. WVIN's response team had ruled out a toll-free hotline for this reason. Therefore, no toll-free hotline was in place as the accountability initiative re-launched. WVIN staff, however, explained that community members will call and hang up and wait for WVIN to call them back to avoid the fee.

Overall, community members (men, women, and children) indicated that the phone is their preferred feedback channel. One male community member explained why: “...because sometimes we cannot meet staff and over the phone they can give feedback immediately.” Another female community member noted, “We like the phone calls. It is the best way to talk. In-person is the other best way to talk to World Vision if our phones don't work. Everyone has access to a phone.” However, some community members, particularly several women and children, noted that they did not have a phone nor did they have access to one. Cost and access to phones are inhibiting the use of this channel. In addition, community excitement about mobile phone channels raised a contradiction related to the real and perceived functionality

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of this channel, particularly given the low mobile coverage in the area. Staff noted that the national uptick in mobile technology may be one contributing factor to community members' interest in using this channel. Retaining a multiplicity of channels and not treating the phone line as the sole channel is important.

Suggestion Boxes

Suggestion boxes were categorized as the best channel through which to provide confidential feedback. However, community members said that they rarely use the boxes due to low literacy rates. In some cases, literate residents, including children, have helped to write feedback or complaints on behalf of others in the community. Local leaders noted that they preferred two-way communication channels (e.g. meetings or phone calls) over the boxes

because they can receive an immediate response.

World Vision has suggestion boxes in 21 pilot communities in Sindhuli (located in the community that houses the VDC office). In each community, the box is located in or near the village development committee's (VDC) office, which is generally in a central area in the village and, in some cases, between villages. Placement of the boxes near VDCs led to questions of ownership and who will read and respond to the feedback. Concerns that feedback will be read by political leaders is inhibiting community use of the boxes (See box 6: Location of Suggestion Boxes).

Knowledge about the suggestion box process (including opening, reading, and responding to feedback) varied among communities. WVIN currently has not established a streamlined system to monitor the frequency with which the

BOX 6 – LOCATION OF SUGGESTION BOXES

Location of suggestion boxes can inhibit their use. Close proximity to government offices can limit confidentiality and reduce community comfort level. In remote regions, community members may have to travel long distances to access the boxes. In Sindhuli, the distances community members and staff have to travel to access the boxes should be identified in order to find the most appropriate location. Moving the boxes away from the VDC offices and attaching them to noticeboards will also offer more clarity about ownership and the process for collecting, responding to, analyzing, and using feedback.

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boxes are opened, who keeps the key, who opens them, who reads the feedback, and who responds to it. In one community, for example, a local partner staff explained that she opens the box and shares the feedback with WVIN on a monthly basis. In another community, WVIN's MCDC explained that he has the key and opens the box and takes the feedback to the field office. Instituting a consistent process and clearly communicating it to communities (through multiple formats) will mitigate confusion and increase community confidence in this channel.

Community Meetings & Face-to-Face Discussions

We learn more with face-to-face interactions.

– Female Community Member

Community members encouraged WVIN to maintain its regular community meetings, which are seen as the best way to ensure that the community is informed. Many people prefer meetings because it allows space for conversation and an immediate response to inquiries. One male community explained, *"When we see staff, we get a response."*

Spending time with community members is essential for building relationships. Unsurprisingly, communities that have field staff as residents noted a higher level of confidence in providing feedback and receiving a response. In other communities, people noted that field staff do not allocate enough time to speak with community members, which can diminish confidence in providing feedback. One mothers' group noted that because field staff only visit the community three to four times a month, they are not always able to speak with many community members. A female community member said, *"Staff should frequently collect our feedback in person. This will improve their work and our understanding."* Another community member mentioned that WVIN needs to reach the most vulnerable and remote communities to ensure that their feedback is consistently collected. Field staff explained that their time is limited in communities because they are managing about 14 VDCs, which span large distances, which they usually travel by foot (See Box 7: Face-to-Face Feedback Channels).

Recording feedback in logbooks ensures that it is tracked and is not lost. Currently, field staff do not have logbooks, and only some partner staff and volunteers are recording feedback in personal notebooks. During the piloting of the accountability initiative, WVIN can enhance feedback collection through in-person interactions by supplying staff and partners with logbooks. Skills for documenting and tracking community feedback through logbooks will be

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essential for staff and partners. Training sessions about the accountability initiative and the role of field and partner staff is also important for enhancing both the channels and the use of the logbooks (See Box 8: Child Friendly Feedback Channels).⁴⁷

recommended that WVIN use Facebook and email as feedback channels. However, some explained that limited access to the internet in the region will hinder the usability of these channels. Poor infrastructure, limited network coverage, and the remote nature of many of the communities raises questions about the viability

BOX 7 – FACE-TO-FACE FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Community requests for increased presence in the community by WVIN field staff and partners will increase trust, confidence, and enhance feedback practices. Ensuring that there are frequent opportunities for both formal and informal conversations where communities can provide feedback and receive immediate responses is important. Some ways to increase community confidence through conversations include:

- Building time into the end of community engagements and incorporating time into the MEAL team’s periodic household surveying to gather and respond to questions.
- Meet with existing community groups, such as the mothers’ groups, political leaders, youth groups (such as children’s club), and VDCs monthly to collect and respond to feedback. Share the responses with the community at meetings. These groups have their finger on the pulse of local community issues and dynamics, so engaging them in the feedback process will be important.
- Several men suggested that communities should appoint a person at the ward level to share feedback and information with WVIN on a regular basis.

Technology-Based Feedback Channels

Technology-based feedback collection channels are a burgeoning topic with the growing international conversation on accountability practices. In Nepal, young people

of technology-based feedback channels for communities in Sindhuli.

WVIN’s senior management discussed modifying existing mobile rapid response surveys and needs assessment tools as feedback

⁴⁷ Including sessions on the background on WVIN, its programs, implementation approaches, WVIN partners, what feedback field staff and partners can respond to, and what might need to

be escalated to field offices in cases of urgent and sensitive feedback.

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BOX 8 – CHILD-FRIENDLY FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Children expressed that games, such as quizzes or musical chairs, are a good way for WVIN to engage them actively, while also gaining feedback. Several children explained that they do not want to sit in a meeting to provide feedback. During the piloting of the accountability initiative, it is important for the WVIN to consider how they are engaging children. Drawing, writing poems, singing songs, and making videos were also recommended to WVIN as good channels for children to express themselves and safely provide feedback.

channels once the organization has expanded and embedded accountability feedback practices into all its development programs. This technology may help staff capture data more easily while ensuring a systematic process that allows information to be immediately cataloged and shared among staff (in the field and in Kathmandu). Leaders emphasized the need to find innovative ways to use existing technology, particularly in a climate of constricting budgets. One senior manager said, *“We could just use [the] old suggestion box of yester-year. But, we need to be asking ourselves, how do we make it effective?”* Trends indicate that organizations are investing more in new technology (i.e. SMS surveys or mapping technology) to improve their accountability systems. However, the most effective feedback mechanisms are built from systems that use channels that are preferred and well understood by all “users” in a given context

(See Box 9: Technology and Save the Children Nepal’s Experience).⁴⁸

5.4 Verification and Analysis of Feedback Information

For the pilot, WVIN’s MEAL team is modifying an existing feedback registry, used by the humanitarian team, to aggregate feedback from the long-term development programs. Establishing a basic sorting procedure and feedback registry for incoming complaints and feedback will help WVIN to track, analyze, package, and use feedback. Feedback verification processes are important, especially when addressing conflicting data or highly sensitive information. However, WVIN does not yet have a systematic process to verify feedback, particularly for sensitive issues relating to staff and partners.⁴⁹ Some community members noted that WVIN should use existing

⁴⁸ Bonino, Francesca et al 2014(a).

⁴⁹ Globally, World Vision has a strong policy and process to address issues of sexual exploitation and abuse.

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BOX 9 – TECHNOLOGY AND SAVE THE CHILDREN NEPAL’S EXPERIENCE

Information management is critical for effective utilization of feedback. During conversations with Save the Children Nepal (Save Nepal), the MEAL team described their information management database that is used to aggregate data points across a number of areas related to monitoring and evaluation visits. The hope for this system is, as one MEAL team member noted, “to empower staff to use feedback in the next program design phase, because the information is readily available.” In addition, this software has also allowed the MEAL team to identify gaps in program accountability, which has triggered several areas for further research. For example, consistent feedback from partners, community members, and government representatives about the quality of early childhood care centers became apparent due to analysis by the software. Frequent feedback on this topic prompted the MEAL team to further explore these centers, some of which are managed by the community, others by private organizations. Save Nepal wanted to explore which type of institution was performing better in order to improve overall program effectiveness. While technological approaches need to also be contextually appropriate and adaptable, Save Nepal noted that this system has been quite successful, particularly in terms of increasing institutional learning.

community groups, such as mothers’ and youth groups, as an entry point to begin the verification process. One child explained, *“It’s better to come to the community to verify because sometimes we can point to others without any reason. So, World Vision should work with us to look into the problem.”*

Internal systems for verifying and analyzing feedback are as important as the channels for collection and response. When organizations collect feedback, but lack clear processes for tracking, analyzing, and verifying the data, it

undermines the purpose of the feedback mechanism. Given the nascent phase of the pilot, WVIN has not yet instituted a system in which to verify and analyze feedback. Information provision must be complemented with internal verification and analysis systems. Field staff tasked with implementing the pilots will likely become overwhelmed by an influx in feedback if verification and analysis processes are not established. This could lead to dissatisfaction with and potentially distrust in the mechanism by users if feedback is not verified, analyzed, responded to, and utilized for

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decision-making. Striking a balance between "proceduralizing" feedback documentation and empowering field staff to respond immediately to resolve issues is important for the mechanism to work effectively. A senior manager explained, *"We often like structured mechanisms...But, having someone like the MEAL team to hear things that are happening and making adjustments on the spot is critical too."*

5.5 Feedback Acknowledgement and Response

*"We know you think it [community feedback] is important because you respond to our feedback and take action on it."
– Female Community Member*

Feedback response is the cornerstone of trust between community members and WVIN, and is essential in maintaining positive relationships. WVIN primarily responds to feedback during in-person discussions. Community members' confidence in receiving a response to feedback varied. While some noted that field staff have provided an immediate response to their feedback; others argued that they have never received a response from the organization. Field staff related incongruences in feedback response to whether or not they have the answer to the inquiry when it is asked. One field staff noted, *"We are getting a lot of feedback from the community, and at some level I can*

respond, but at a higher level I cannot respond. So, I need support from the higher level."

Sluggish response times and inadequate answers can increase community frustrations, which can exacerbate tensions between field staff (WVIN and partners) and the community. Lack of response can also weaken the confidence level that community members have in the feedback mechanism. For example, one community member noted that if WVIN does not respond to feedback, many in the community would view providing feedback as a waste of time. She continued, *"It is only a formality if they don't respond."* Implementing partners noted that when WVIN does not respond to feedback, it puts an additional burden on their staff who live in the community. One partner staff explained that the community often blames them when inquiries go unanswered. She noted that community members have asked her, *"We [the community] have provided feedback to you. Why don't you respond? Why don't you give the information to WV?"* (See Box 10: Frequently Asked Questions).

Community members said that are happy to receive a response, even if it is unsatisfactory. It was encouraging to see WVIN working on a referral process for feedback beyond its mandate and programs. WVIN's current referral practice is ad hoc and based on existing relationships with local and international organizations and government representatives. However, field staff noted that without clear and

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consistent referral process, community members expect that WVIN will eventually respond to their needs. One staff member noted, *“People in the community feel that even when we say ‘no’ we actually mean ‘yes.’”* Managing community expectations is critical in order to curb frustrations when requests go unmet. One way of managing feedback that cannot be acted upon is aggregating feedback data that can be referred to other agencies, the government, and implementing partners that may have the ability to respond. Sharing basic contact information for the government and partners on the noticeboards can also mitigate these challenges (See Box 11: Feedback Referral & Expectation Management Example).

BOX 10 – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Frequently Asked Question (FAQs) flyers work effectively as a way to share information and equip field staff and partner staff with up-to-date responses to reoccurring feedback. Developing FAQs in conjunction with field staff, partners, and the community may help WVIN enhance community confidence in their feedback response process. Identifying the questions that communities are consistently asking will better equip community-facing staff with the appropriate answers. This may also mitigate the influx of issues that come to WVIN’s field offices as well as the national office. To be effective, FAQs should be updated often, as questions evolve and change. Other CDA case studies on World Vision’s accountability pilots have highlighted the effectiveness of using FAQs to respond to feedback.¹

¹ See Cechvala, Sarah 2016 and Cechvala, Sarah and Isabella Jean 2016.

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BOX 11 – FEEDBACK REFERRAL & EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT EXAMPLE

Community members in Sindhuli consistently provided feedback related to humanitarian response efforts, particularly relating to housing and infrastructure damaged during the 2015 earthquake. While outside of WVIN’s development programs, these unmet issues are a priority for the community. This situation is further exacerbated by: 1) the government’s slow response to housing and infrastructure reconstruction projects;¹ and 2) the scaling-back of response efforts by the international community.

Given the general level of satisfaction with WVIN’s work, the community has a high level of confidence that WVIN will address these issues of housing reconstruction. However, if these expectations remain high and the issues go unaddressed, tensions could arise between WVIN and the community. Staff noted that this could inhibit their ability to effectively implement their programs. A field manager explained, “How am I to discuss [with community members] the programming they want in their schools, when their schools are damaged and still not safe for students to attend class?”

Implementing a robust feedback system can help WVIN’s staff monitor the frequency with which they receive feedback regarding infrastructure needs. Over time, WVIN could use this feedback, supplemented with additional data points, to advocate for an increase response effort focused on shelter and infrastructure reconstruction in Sindhuli. Feedback data could be shared internally with the WVIN’s response team or externally with the government or other agencies who are working on shelter response across the country. One male community member noted, “You [WVIN] are an international organization. If you highlight these issues maybe other organizations can come and address them.”

¹ Kumar 2016.

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5.6 Feedback Utilization

Given the nascent stages of bolstering accountability within development programming, the examples of WVIN feedback utilization discussed by staff and the community relate to humanitarian response efforts. While the intended purpose of this case is to capture the experiences of integrating feedback and accountability into WVIN’s long-term development programs, CDA was able to meet with the humanitarian accountability team. The HEA team highlighted the accountability systems established by the response team, and several examples where feedback has been utilized by the response team in order to improve programming and service delivery. However, given the focus of this case, these experiences and lessons were not triangulated with or verified by local communities.⁵⁰ We were encouraged that those leading the pilots are planning to adapt and modify many of the humanitarian accountability systems and processes based on the experiences of the response team. At the time of the case, however, these plans were only in discussion, and therefore, we cannot comment on this process.

Most of programmatic changes that have occurred on the response side have taken place at the field level and were enabled by field

staff’s problem-solving abilities. Staff shared examples of altering the types of services provided during the response based on community feedback. For example, community members complained about the quality of the sleeping mats distributed post-earthquake. WVIN verified the poor quality of the materials, and responded to the feedback by canceling the shipment and providing blankets instead. Community members also described this change, and noted that they were happy that WVIN quickly responded to the issue and made swift changes based on the feedback.

To ensure that community feedback is used, the HEA team has instituted a humanitarian feedback report, which summarizes community-based feedback and is shared every 15 days.⁵¹ This report presents key feedback points from community members and provides actions points for decision-makers. One humanitarian accountability staff member explained the process: *“In these reports, we analyze it [community feedback] and look at reoccurring issues. The accountability team then makes recommendations to the senior leadership and sector leads.”* Another team member notes, *“We want to hear directly from the beneficiaries. M&E only reaches the surface level. We want to see people from the community level, so they can share their feelings, and so we can incorporate*

⁵⁰ Particularly because CDA did not meet with all communities impacted by WVIN’s response efforts.

⁵¹ While WVIN is phasing out their response efforts, at the time of CDA’s visit the HEA team was still issuing a feedback report.

This report focused on the response efforts that are still active in a limited number of regions throughout the country.

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those and revise our plans." Turning feedback data into something that is actionable for senior managers is commonly the biggest challenge for effective feedback mechanisms. One senior manager explained, *"I don't want to see a bunch of data. I want to see the meaning of the numbers."* She continued, *"If I am trying to change the business model, I need convincing evidence."*

Institutional learning and knowledge transfer is also key as WVIN augments its accountability practices in development programs. Given the need to quickly staff the response efforts, WVIN seconded staff working on the accountability pilots to lead the accountability initiatives in WVIN's humanitarian portfolio. In this case, flexibility in staffing (i.e. staff working on humanitarian response and development) provided a strong foundation for reflection and institutional learning between departments. Lessons learned and successes working with community feedback on the humanitarian side, while often different, are being built upon to advance institutional capacities and knowledge for accountability in development programs. While WVIN's response and development teams are still separate departments (and are currently set up in different offices), this knowledge transfer is a positive advancement in breaking down the silos between teams and preserving institutional learning.

Benefits from this institutional "human bridge" have already had an impact on the

accountability pilots. For example, staff are planning to use the humanitarian accountability report as a template for presenting feedback from the pilots. It was encouraging to hear that there are plans to share these reports with managers on the development side in order to inform planning, programmatic, and organizational decisions. Working on both sides of the organization has enhanced the capacities and skillsets of several accountability managers. This includes analytical, listening, and facilitating skills which are crucial for effective accountability practitioners. Staff working on both sides of the organization were able to cultivate and bolster such skillsets during the response efforts, which can now be transferred to the development programming (See Box 12: Joint Feedback Utilization – Accountability Labs' Experience with the Nepal "Open-Mic").

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BOX 12 – JOINT FEEDBACK UTILIZATION – ACCOUNTABILITY LABS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE NEPAL “OPEN MIC”

In the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake, Accountability Labs¹ launched several common accountability channels that could be utilized by everyone working on the humanitarian response effort. Channels included a government hotline, surveys, mobile citizen helpdesks², and the “open mic.” The “open mic” channel works to “address information needs by using minimally structured qualitative data-gathering approaches to surface trends in community conversations, identify key concerns, misunderstandings and toxic/corrupted information, and to redress them with the provision of reliable and verified information as speedily as possible.”³ Volunteers working for response agencies, including many journalists, implemented the “open mic” channel in order to capture community perceptions to eliminate information gaps between media, humanitarian agencies, and local people⁴. Overtime, the “open mic” captured a lot of information. Accountability Labs and partners began to disseminate and share this data freely in a monthly online “open mic” report.

Accountability Labs staff noted that they have heard that organizations have been able to use the monthly reports emerging from the “open mic” to develop their programs, provide information to beneficiaries, bolster internal needs assessments, and share information in their external communications and promotional materials. Staff noted that they have seen organizations change the focus of their response based on the “open mic” data. However, CDA’s experience notes that the collection and analysis of feedback is more likely to be used when it is tailored to the audience who receives it. As one Accountability Labs staff member explained, “Unless organizations have direct incentives to use the data and make course-correction, it is difficult to see how this information [from the “open mic”] will be used.” Little research has been done to track how community feedback data from the “open mic” is used by organizations. Discussions highlighted that tracking feedback utilization based on the “open mic” reports would be a useful topic of study, as it would help to inform how to best present, collect, and jointly share feedback. One staff member exclaimed, “We are sitting on a treasure trove of information. What the hell are we going to do with it? Data needs to be easily digestible and more simple. There is all this talk about open data; however, our experience should make the industry think more about how are we going to use all this data?”

¹ Accountability Labs

² Established within 36 hours after the disaster, the helpdesk deployed over 100 volunteers to assist citizens around the country to help those affected by the disaster identify where they could receive assistance.

³ Internews 2016.

⁴ For more about the “open mic” project see: <http://www.quakehelpdesk.org/openmic.php> and

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5.7 Individual and Organizational Support

“ Our core values drive us to be more accountable to communities. Faith is the basis that drives everyone in the organization to be more compassionate to people. ”

– Humanitarian Accountability Manager
WVIN National Office

Leadership Support for Accountability

This case study demonstrates the importance of management support of and commitment to effective feedback and accountability practices. CDA’s case studies of accountability practices in other WV country programs⁵² similarly highlight the importance of institutional support in driving effective practices. WVIN staff described leadership support as an element that enabled the utilization of feedback mechanisms. Staff explained that leadership has been an essential element in changing the tone across the organization to improve accountability systems. One national office staff member said, “Leadership set up this culture [culture of feedback and accountability] ...She [the national director] has created a space to speak, and she encourages us to be courageous and speak.” (See Box 13: Feedback Demand and Supply)

BOX 13 – FEEDBACK DEMAND AND SUPPLY

CDA’s experience suggests that senior staff should not expect feedback data and information to trickle up to them from the field. Rather, when leaders regularly request that their staff gather and report on community feedback, it emphasizes the importance of the data. In addition, when senior managers request feedback data, it forces field staff to proactively seek and share feedback in order to meet leadership demands. When leaders engage in this type of practice, it can highlight the importance of maintaining a culture of feedback for staff, which can have an impact on the entire organization’s accountability practices. In previous cases, CDA has seen such practices increase the consistency with which feedback was collected and then used by organizations.

⁵² See: Cechvala 2016 and Cechvala, Sarah and Isabella Jean 2016.

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CDA's research demonstrates that feedback mechanisms are more effective when feedback is part of managerial practice and wider organizational culture.⁵³ Managers help to set norms and shape the organizational culture for soliciting and responding to community feedback. Senior staff noted that in order to have strong external feedback mechanisms, the organization needs to put internal accountability systems into practice. In order to demonstrate this priority, WVIN established a staff feedback mechanism. Staff provide feedback to senior management via an online form. Feedback is anonymized by a MEAL staff member, shared with senior leadership, and is responded to within two weeks. It was encouraging to see the strong commitment by

leadership to provide a clear and timely response to internal feedback. Several staff indicated that their needs and concerns were being heard and responded to, and in some cases, acted upon, which had a positive contribution to staff morale (See Box 14: Ensuring All Users Understand Feedback Systems).

Effectively Resourcing Accountability & Feedback Systems

Effective feedback systems need to be planned to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately.

Organizations often overlook staff time and skills, which are critical and potentially costly

BOX 14 – ENSURING ALL USERS UNDERSTAND FEEDBACK SYSTEMS

Clearly communicating feedback practices to all users is essential for effectiveness. Understanding of the staff feedback mechanism varied between national and field-level staff. Most staff at the national office had positive comments about the internal mechanism. Conversely, at the field level, some staff noted that the mechanism did not apply to them or that they were unclear about the feedback process. For the staff feedback mechanism to be effective, WVIN will need to ensure that all staff are appropriately sensitized about the mechanism and their rights to use it. Modeling a functional staff feedback system may also have an added benefit of highlighting the significance of feedback practices for those outside of WVIN, as well as the skills and tools needed for such systems to work effectively.

⁵³ Bonino, Francesca et al 2014(b).

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components of an effective feedback mechanism. WVIN's commitment to augment its accountability practices should be mirrored in how it resources the pilots and the eventual scale-up into all development programs.

At the field level, staff raised concerns about the time needed to effectively implement the pilots. While budget constraints have reduced the number of field staff (at the district level and in the field), they have not shrunk the organization's geographical scope. In some cases, funding restrictions have forced field offices to merge, reducing the number of staff, but doubling the office's geographical scope. Field staff noted that they do not have adequate time to build relationships with communities and partners because they are working in too many communities (most of which are highly remote and challenging to access). Effective feedback systems are rooted in trust between the organization and community. Developing and maintaining relationships during a climate of limited funding and staffing constraints may raise questions as to how WVIN can effectively be accountable to the communities it serves.

Accountability staff must have the skills to interface with communities and adequately analyze feedback data in order to have effective accountability mechanisms. In several cases, the piloting of WVIN's accountability initiative has expanded the skillsets of the staff managing the process. However, there is still room to grow: field staff raised concerns about their limited

capacity to track and analyze the feedback data. When discussing concerns about staff's ability to critically analyze feedback and the organizational capacity to integrate feedback into program design and redesign, a manager noted *"I don't think we're there yet."*

We were, however, encouraged to see strong processes and structures for humanitarian accountability. One staff noted, *"We [the WVIN HEA team] have good structures within the organization. Everyone has clear roles and responsibilities. This helps us maintain clear policies and guidelines, which are accountable and transparent to everyone."* Utilizing the human link between the humanitarian and development teams will be important as the organization focuses on enhancing its development-related accountability practices. Reflection on how to adapt these systems for development programming will also be important, since the processes need to fit within the existing structures (See Box 15: Effectively Resourcing Accountability).

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BOX 15 – EFFECTIVELY RESOURCING ACCOUNTABILITY

In Sindhuli, the staff member managing the pilots is considered a generalist. Skills related to accountability and feedback practices are generally new to this position. In addition, taking on the pilots dramatically expands the role and responsibilities of this staff member. If strengthening accountability is a national-level strategic goal, then bolstering the capacities of those working in this role will be essential. This might include: 1) creating a new field-level position focused on accountability with skills such as listening, facilitating, analysis, and reporting; or 2) identifying ways to build current staff’s skills to match their new objectives.

Effective organizational practices rest on individuals and teams. Generally, all staff exhibited an understanding of the organization’s commitment to advance accountability and the role of the pilots in achieving this goal. Unsurprisingly, field staff’s level of commitment to the accountability initiative directly correlated with their involvement in the planning and implementation of the pilots. Many staff members who regularly interface with communities noted that the pilots weren’t as much a new concept as an enhancement of their existing work. When discussing the purpose of the pilots, one field staff member exclaimed, *“I am already doing it!”* Other CDA case studies about accountability practices in other WV country programs⁵⁴ suggest that feedback mechanisms are more effective when

staff can see how feedback practices supplement their existing roles and responsibilities. Managers discussed incorporating language about feedback and accountability into field-level job descriptions in order to improve staff’s commitment to the practice. (See Box 16: Considerations When Scaling Up Accountability)

⁵⁴ For more see: Cechvala 2016 and Cechvala, Sarah and Isabella Jean 2016.

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BOX 16 – CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SCALING-UP ACCOUNTABILITY

In advance of scaling-up accountability into all WVIN’s development programs, WVIN should review the resource and cost implications of the pilots. This process can help determine the rate of expansion and the areas that will require more investment. In addition, a mapping of staff skills related to accountability and feedback practices will help to guide where and how to build staff and institutional capacities.

5.8 Partnerships

In the Nepal context, maintaining robust local partnerships is fundamental for effective programming.⁵⁵ In Sindhuli, WVIN works with three Nepali partners who directly implement programs designed by WVIN. Many of WVIN’s development programs in Sindhuli are young, roughly one to three years old, which means that the partnerships between WVIN and its local organizations in Sindhuli are also very young.

Programs are developed based on an initial two-year assessment phase conducted by WVIN’s technical staff. After this period, WVIN issues a Request for Proposals in order to identify a partner to directly implement this program. In its current form, this process limits partners’ involvement in the initial stages of program design and development. Precluding

partners from the assessment and design phases can reduce their understanding or ownership of the project. One partner explained the relationship between WVIN and partners, “*NGO partners are just a body for [the] implementation activities of World Vision.*”

Given this program design and implementation process between WVIN and partners, communication between the two entities is fundamental for effective programming. However, several partners noted that they do not have clear information about WVIN’s mandate and programs, which can make it difficult to discuss WVIN with community members. Another partner noted language also creates a barrier between WVIN and partners. Materials are often shared in English, which can decrease local partner staff’s ability to translate and interpret the content. In order to improve clarity between organizations, it is encouraging

⁵⁵ Partner agencies have several staffing levels, which include: volunteers, office staff, and field staff who directly implement programs and live and work in communities, and board

members, whose role is often seen as an indicator of political status rather than a functional position (though this is not true for all partners).

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to see that WVIN field staff have developed activity one-pagers in Nepali (See Box 17: Partnership Agreement Example).

Partners' understanding of feedback processes varied dramatically. While some had their own feedback channels, others said they have never tracked or used feedback. Field staff from partner agencies discussed informal feedback channels, particularly during community meetings and program activities, as the most common way to gather and immediately respond to feedback. It is encouraging to hear that partner staff feel empowered to respond to feedback. However, partners noted that staff rarely track feedback or share it internally or with WVIN.

The piloting of the accountability initiative has highlighted partners' limited awareness of WVIN's commitment to increase its accountability to communities. Most partners did not know about the initiative, and several asked why WVIN was collecting and using feedback. Field staff tended to have a better understanding of WVIN feedback practices than board members, given how closely they work with WVIN staff. These limitations could also be explained by the newer relationship between WVIN and its partners in Sindhuli. Partners described practices of accountability as a recent, but growing, area about which they had limited knowledge. In general, partners related much of their understanding about feedback and accountability to their experience with various

BOX 17 – PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT EXAMPLE

Partners explained that agreements with WVIN are in English, which can pose a challenge due to some partners' discomfort with the language. One partner expressed that when signing contracts, they felt that they are signing something that they did not understand. One board member explained, "How can World Vision be accountable to communities when asking them to sign something they can't read? If they want to be more accountable to communities, all documents should be in Nepali." Additionally, WVIN staff described a new finance system as a mechanism intended to ease the process of financial agreements between WVIN and partners. Partners, on the other hand, suggested that they had a hard time using the system because of issues with technology and because the system is in English. Another board member noted, "Accountability is related to our finances too. Budgets and proposals are in English. How can we be accountable to communities when our staff doesn't have a good understanding of English?" Ensuring that partners have access to platforms and materials that are comprehensible is critical for program effectiveness. Enhancing mechanisms to share feedback between WVIN and partners is essential in order to quickly catch and address issues, such as those which could otherwise strain relationships.

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international NGOs' response to the earthquake. Partners also discussed geography as a factor that limited their understanding of WVIN's accountability practices. Due to the relative distances between communities, WVIN field staff can only spend a limited amount of time with partner staff. While communication between WVIN and partner field staff occurs via phone conversations, the limited mobile coverage in the area further exacerbates discrepancies in communication.

Given this, the lack of concrete channels to share feedback between agencies has made the process of exchanging feedback sporadic. Some partners said they share information monthly via emails, while others do so via reports, and others do not share feedback-related data with WVIN at all. In addition, in cases where community members are able to distinguish between WVIN and its partners, there was limited understanding about how feedback is shared between agencies. Feedback will likely be lost or overlooked by WVIN and partners if a clear system to gather, track, share, use, and respond to community feedback is not developed between the organizations. The number of redundant systems operating in tandem, but isolation, will also dramatically increase without concrete internal processes between partners and WVIN. Identifying ways to link these tangential accountability processes will be imperative for the pilot to be effective. In addition, all community-facing staff will likely face challenges in implementing programs if

community members lose confidence in their ability to provide feedback and obtain appropriate responses (See Box 18: Joint Feedback Handling Committee).

Flexibility in agreements between WVIN and partners is also critical to ensure that programmatic changes can be made based on feedback. Partner staff noted that currently, partnership agreements for program implementation have very little flexibility for mid-course correction. For example, one partner described the process of implementing a water program. After the design phase, the partner shared the plans with the community and requested feedback. Adjustments were made to the plans to accommodate community requests, including the size and location of the water pipe. However, when the partner

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BOX 18 – JOINT FEEDBACK-HANDLING COMMITTEE

Developing a functional feedback sharing-process for all who engage with community members is critical in this context. WVIN is currently planning to implement a joint feedback-handling committee that will allow field staff and partner agencies to review community feedback together. Instituting a joint committee aligns well with partner requests for regular meetings to share feedback and collectively identify solutions. One board member said, “It would be helpful to have more regular meetings with World Vision so we can collaboratively plan, solve problems, and share what’s going on in communities.” The development of this committee is still in its initial phases and should be fully functional later this year.

submitted an updated plan to WVIN, they were only able to make some of the smaller modifications as opposed to the larger changes requested by the community, given contractual limitations. CDA’s experience demonstrates that it is counter-productive to set up feedback channels and ask for community feedback if there is no margin, or flexibility to modify programs or make course corrections.⁵⁶

As WVIN expands its commitment to accountability and mainstreams feedback processes into its programming, it is important to consider how to better integrate their implementing partners into this process. This may include enhancing partners’ capacity to jointly or independently manage feedback systems, or supporting the development of their

own feedback processes. With its accountability and feedback practices in a nascent stage, this is a ripe moment for WVIN to consider how to integrate local partners in a way that also strengthens their skills and improves their practices. As one local NGO board member said, “*World Vision will leave, and at the end we will be the ones in the community. So, we need our own feedback mechanisms and accountability systems, and World Vision should support us in developing our own efforts.*” (See Box 19: Enabling Effective Partnerships – Experiences of International Alert Nepal).

⁵⁶ Bonino, Francesca et al 2014(b).

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BOX 19 – ENABLING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS – EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL ALERT NEPAL

Working on a broad-range of peacebuilding and democracy and governance issues throughout the country, International Alert (IA) is another international NGO that implements programs through local partners. IA staff noted that collecting, responding to, and using feedback from their stakeholders is essential for effective programming. One staff member noted, “If we don’t use feedback, then we will not understand the context. Contextual knowledge is fundamental to our work.” Staff also noted that effective feedback utilization rested on several “enabling factors,” including a relatively small team (including partners)¹ that works in a collaborative manner. One staff member noted, “There is no hierarchy, this allows us to make decisions quickly and share information freely.” The importance of teamwork is also reflected in IA’s partnership model. Partners are seen as team members who often have more intimate knowledge of the context and programs. Staff noted, “We work with our partners, we don’t just give them a task and send them off. Accompaniment gives us both [IA and partner organizations] a broader insight on our work...We don’t wait every quarter to hear from partners about what is working and what is not.” Another staff member noted, “We go with our partners to elicit feedback...We don’t wait for issues to get worse. When we have enough feedback, we collaboratively discuss the challenges and identify solutions as a team.” Such practice has simultaneously enabled partners to build their own capacities, and learn from IA in a collaborative manner.

¹ At the time of the meeting, IA’s staff size was seven people. Partner organizations are usually smaller.

5.9 Periodic reassessment and adjustment

Accountability and feedback mechanisms need to be periodically assessed and adjusted because the information and communication needs and preferences of community members, WVIN staff, and partners may change with time.

WVIN plans to expand the accountability initiative from development programming in two field offices to all programming across the organization (in 11 field offices) next year. Given this, it is critical for WVIN to build in time to reflect on the pilot process, what worked well, and what needs improvement. Scaling-up in other areas should be based on lessons from the

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pilots. This should include steps to support documentation, internal learning, and adaptation of practice. This will also encourage WVIN to address competing priorities, particularly the need to increase staff capacities and understanding of accountability and feedback practices.

World Vision International Nepal's Strengthening Programme Accountability Initiative provided a timely opportunity for integrating accountability principles into the organization's development practices. Transitioning the organizational focus from humanitarian response efforts back to long-term development initiatives, has offered WVIN with the opportunity to bolster its internal capacities and reflect upon effective practices.

Establishing an effective feedback mechanism is challenging in any circumstance, and Sindhuli's sheer geography presents an additional set of barriers. Despite these geographic and topographic challenges, WVIN has succeeded in setting up a number of feedback channels. Utilizing existing channels, has allowed the accountability team to adapt several channels for WVIN's development programs in the pilot communities. In-person feedback is made possible through local partners, meetings, and phone conversations. Suggestion boxes have also been established to provide an anonymous feedback channel.

Behind every mechanism is a network of people; and those internal systems need to function well if the feedback loop is to be closed. WVIN has several important advantages in the "human systems" behind its feedback mechanism. Perhaps most importantly, WVIN has a strong organizational culture of accountability. Staff not only noted the support given by WVIN leadership, but also the existence of an internal

staff feedback mechanism. While not all staff understand the mechanism fully, it sends a clear message about how seriously WVIN takes accountability, internally and externally.

Yet valuing feedback is not enough: WVIN needs to develop systems to verify, analyze, utilize, and effectively refer feedback to relevant actors (within WVIN and outside of the organization). This also means investing in institutional mapping and building the skills of staff that interact directly with communities and handle feedback data. The fact that there has been a lot of cross-over between earthquake response departments and development programs is advantageous in that lessons learned can be shared and skills can be transferred. However, these lessons need to inform institutional learning and not remain the experience of several accountability staff members. WVIN's January 2016 Accountability Learning Event demonstrates a strong step towards institutional knowledge transfer. Collaborating with agencies investing in accountability practices, either through joint systems or sharing experiences and lessons learned, will further bolster WVIN's ability to effectively implement accountability practices.

It is often said that 'the last mile' of reaching any community is the hardest. In Nepal, it is WVIN's local partners who are the most present on the ground with communities. In order for local partners to take ownership of not only the project but the accountability systems, they

need to be involved in the project design, and have adequate training and information about WVIN's accountability systems. Building strong partnerships involves a shared understanding of systems and goals. Mapping existing accountability practices and building upon those to reinforce strengths and correct gaps will help partners and WVIN enhance their feedback systems. Seeking ways to jointly track, analyze, and use feedback will also increase collaboration and inherently strengthen the project impacts. Not only will this also help to build functioning collective feedback systems, but will build the capacity of local partners to continue these systems after WVIN one day leaves. WVIN has demonstrated its commitment to building and maintaining feedback mechanisms despite challenging circumstances; they and their local partners should continue to reassess and reinforce their accountability systems over time.

Despite the challenges inherent in short-term pilots, WVIN's experiences with the accountability initiative have proved to be a valuable learning experience for the field staff and WVIN country team in Kathmandu. Our evidence shows that effective accountability practice requires an intentional approach and key investments. It requires the presence and actions of capable and committed managers who support staff development, engage them in joint problem-solving, model feedback loops inside the organization, and create incentives for staff to meet accountability commitments.

We hope this case study contributes to organizational learning, and we encourage WVIN to continue documenting good practices, challenges, and decisions that help to strengthen accountability and feedback practice in its current and future programs.

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