



PRACTICAL
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ACTION

**“Accountability is a mirror that shows
not only your face, but also your back.”**

World Vision Ethiopia's Accountability Learning Initiative

Feedback Loops Case Study

CDA-World Vision Ethiopia

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CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

March 2016



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

Suggested Citation: Cechvala, Sarah, and Isabella Jean. "Accountability is a mirror that shows not only your face, but also your back." *CDA-World Vision Ethiopia Feedback Loops Case Study*. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, March 2016.

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CDA Collaborative Learning Projects is committed to improving the effectiveness of those who work around the world 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. This learning process examines what makes feedback loops effective in long-term development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programs in order to generate practical lessons and evidence-based guidelines for enabling feedback utilization in programmatic and strategic processes.

This case study is a result of a learning partnership between CDA, World Vision UK (WV UK), and World Vision Ethiopia (WVE). It documents WVE's experience integrating accountability and feedback loops into long-term development programs. World Vision and CDA collaboratively seek to document emerging lessons on feedback utilization in organizational decision-making, course-correction, and program review and redesign. The 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.

The primary focus of this case is to document lessons learned during WVE's pilot of the Accountability Learning Initiative (ALI) project. The ALI project is a WV UK-funded initiative, which provides funding to several country offices (Pakistan, Nepal, Somalia, and Ethiopia) to examine and improve existing accountability practices in their development programming in order to enhance or improve such practices. In this case study, the term ALI refers only to the two pilots that were observed in two WVE field offices in the Amhara region of Ethiopia.

WVE hosted the CDA team during two separate two-week visits to Ethiopia. During both visits, CDA met and conducted semi-structured interviews with "users" (external and internal) of WVE's pilot feedback mechanisms in two pilot sites, the areas of Yilmana Dinsa and Libokemkem. The CDA team used semi-structured interviews that created space for open-ended discussions that explored people's experiences with and perceptions of ALI.

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)

World Vision Ethiopia 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 during project implementation. The four pillars of WV program accountability are: Providing Information; Consulting with Communities; Promoting Participation; and Collecting and Acting on Feedback and Complaints. For the ALI project, communities helped to determine and prioritize the feedback channels and information-provision processes during the assessment and design phase. These included noticeboards, suggestion boxes, an expanded role for community volunteers, and phone lines.

CDA's case study process examined the elements commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts.¹ These "propositions" 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; and Periodic Reassessment and Adjustment. This summary highlights key observations made about these elements. 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.

¹ Bonino, Francesca and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

KEY OBSERVATION: INFORMATION PROVISION

Both ALI pilot areas use noticeboards to share up-to-date information about WVE and ALI; however, the board's use and community reactions differed between field sites. In one pilot field office, noticeboards were used to convey information about WVE and its feedback mechanisms, which was appreciated by local residents. In the second pilot field office, noticeboards were underutilized by field staff due to concerns about low literacy rates in the community. In this site, some community members said that they did not have adequate information about WVE and its work in their community. While literacy levels were low in both communities, the site that used noticeboards found that even illiterate members appreciated the boards as literate residents shared information with them.

Information provision about WVE's programs and activities increases transparency and can strengthen relations with the community. Noticeboards are not the only method for doing this and WVE should continue to reinforce its systems by using multiple forms of communication, such as community meetings and volunteers. CDA's research indicates that when people understand how accountability processes work, it improves the effectiveness of the mechanisms.

KEY OBSERVATION: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND RESPONSE

The use of multiple channels for feedback collection helped to reinforce WVE's ability to collect a diverse set of opinions from diverse groups within its project area. Response to feedback is essential in maintaining positive relationships between community members and WVE. In one field office piloting the ALI project, feedback collected through ALI channels was aggregated bi-weekly by an ALI focal point who triangulates the feedback and seeks the appropriate response either from his fellow specialists, Kebele administration, or field office supervisor. These responses were turned into FAQs that were shared through noticeboards or volunteers, which the community appreciated. Community confidence in the feedback mechanism was boosted by the consistent protocols around feedback acknowledgement and response. Volunteers felt better equipped to respond to reoccurring questions after receiving training, frequent communication, and consistent information. Program staff also felt empowered to respond to feedback when visiting communities and through monthly meetings.

KEY OBSERVATION: FEEDBACK UTILIZATION

This case documented several examples of feedback utilization and closed feedback loops in both pilot sites. ALI focal points in both programs described how the tracking and aggregation of reoccurring feedback over time allowed them to identify and prioritize challenges that needed more attention. Most of the changes were able to be made at the local level through field office supervisor and their teams, which staff noted was more efficient. Certain changes required approval from Addis Ababa, and were facilitated by engagement of WVE staff at the national level. CDA was impressed with the number of modifications made in response to feedback, ranging in project adjustments to programmatic shifts. However, it is clear that WVE will need to establish more of a system for escalating feedback response as ALI is scaled up across over 20 new area programs.

When discussing the institutional barriers to effective feedback utilization, field staff and managers in Addis Ababa highlighted the lack of flexibility to modify programs in response to feedback. ALNAP-CDA guidance states that it can be counter-productive to set up feedback channels when there is little flexibility to respond to said feedback.

KEY OBSERVATION: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

This case study demonstrates the importance of management support and the commitment of senior leadership in effective feedback and accountability practices. Staff described leadership support as an element that enabled or limited the utility of feedback mechanisms. Effective organizational practices rest on individuals and teams. Field staff described a collective sense of responsibility and ownership as fundamental to ALI's effectiveness. CDA's research demonstrates that feedback mechanisms are more effective when feedback is part of managerial practice and wider organizational culture.¹

¹ Bonino et al. 2014(b).

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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 Ethiopia (WVE). World Vision UK partnered with select national offices to pilot different ways of improving accountability to communities, 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 the mechanisms to their particular context and capacity.² This case study documents WVE's experience integrating accountability into development programs. 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 programs to assess existing accountability practices and provides the opportunity to improve and scale up such practices. In this case study, the term ALI refers only to the two pilots that were observed in two

WVE field offices in the Amhara region of Ethiopia.

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, and program review and redesign. World Vision has a vested interest in evidence-based guidance on strengthening accountability to communities and improving feedback practices in development programs. For CDA, lessons documented in this and other case studies will contribute to a collaborative learning process focused 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 project on feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts. From 2012 to 2014, CDA and ALNAP conducted case studies,³ identified patterns across the cases, and produced practitioner guidance.⁴ Building upon the evidence generated by CDA

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

³ For more on CDA's humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms Research see: <http://cdacollaborative.org/cdaproject/humanitarian-feedback-mechanisms-research/>

⁴ Bonino et al. 2014(a).

and 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 does not represent a final product of our collaborative learning project. While this report may be cited, it remains a working document. The 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 WVE programming. Funding for this collaboration was provided by the Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) with UK aid from the UK government.

The primary focus of this case is to document lessons learned during WVE’s piloting of Accountability Learning Initiatives (ALI). World Vision Ethiopia hosted a CDA team during two separate two-week visits to Ethiopia. The first visit was conducted in August 2015 by CDA’s Isabella Jean and Sarah Cechvala. At the time of the first visit, the ALI project was in a nascent phase and CDA’s focus was on documenting initial design decisions and providing technical support to the staff responsible for ALI implementation and oversight. CDA’s second visit took place in March 2016 and was conducted by Sarah Cechvala. Both field offices were re-visited in order to document lessons from ALI implementation and offer practical recommendations for scaling-up the initiative to other project sites.

World Vision (WV) has integrated 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 in a way that empowers children, communities, and local partners to hold WV accountable. Aligned with WV’s accountability framework, ALI seeks

to enhance WV’s accountability and feedback mechanisms and World Vision UK (WV UK) supported through funding and technical assistance. Between March 2015 and March 2016, ALI was piloted in four WV country offices: Ethiopia, Pakistan, Nepal, and Somalia.⁵

During both visits, CDA met with community members who have used WVE’s accountability and feedback channels and those who have not. We interviewed community volunteers, women’s group members, youth group members; community leaders, and Kebele representatives.⁶ At the sub-office level in Yilmana Dinsa and Libokemkem,⁷ we spoke with Quality Assurance (QA) staff, supervisors of area programs, and regional managers. In Addis Ababa, at the national office, we held discussions with the program design and quality assurance team, WVE specialists in education, health, livelihoods, and protection, emergency and humanitarian program staff, human resources officers, and senior leadership. The team overseeing the pilots debriefed and validated our findings and initial conclusions at the end of each visit.

⁵ See CDA World Vision Pakistan Case Study and Nepal Case Study for more about integrating accountability in development programs in Pakistan and Nepal. For more see: Cechvala, Sarah 2015 and Cechvala, Sarah 2016.

⁶ In Amharic Kebele means “neighborhood.” In Ethiopia, a Kebele is the smallest administrative unit. A Kebele is part of a Woreda, or district, which is the administrative unit for several Kebeles. A Woreda is then part of a zone, which in turn is grouped into one of the regions.

⁷ WVE has its national office/headquarters in the capital city, Addis Ababa. The organization has regional offices in regional capitals. This case study focuses on the Amhara Region, and WVE has a regional office in the capital Bahir Dar. WVE then has sub-level offices or field offices where the organization provides programming for several villages/Kebeles. For this case these sub-offices or area program offices are located in Yilmana Dinsa and Libokemkem.

The visits also offered an opportunity for sharing lessons with other WVE staff and peer organizations. In August 2015, WVE convened a learning event in Addis Ababa supported by CDA. Twelve development and humanitarian organizations attended the event and shared lessons from their accountability and feedback practices. In March 2016, CDA helped to facilitate a two-day Accountability Learning Event organized by WVE in Addis Ababa. This event brought together WVE staff from across the country along and several representatives from other agencies. The event offered an opportune moment to share lessons from the ALI pilots with other WVE staff in light of the planned scale-up of the initiative. During internal sessions WVE staff planned for the implementation of ALI in their regions for 2017.

The methodology for this case study is adapted from CDA-ALNAP's joint research on effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms.⁸ The CDA team used semi-structured interviews that allowed space for open-ended discussions that explored people's experiences with and perceptions of ALI. The case study approach allows for in-depth qualitative inquiry and examination of elements that contribute to effective feedback loops, including 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."*⁹

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 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 decision-making and program quality improvement.

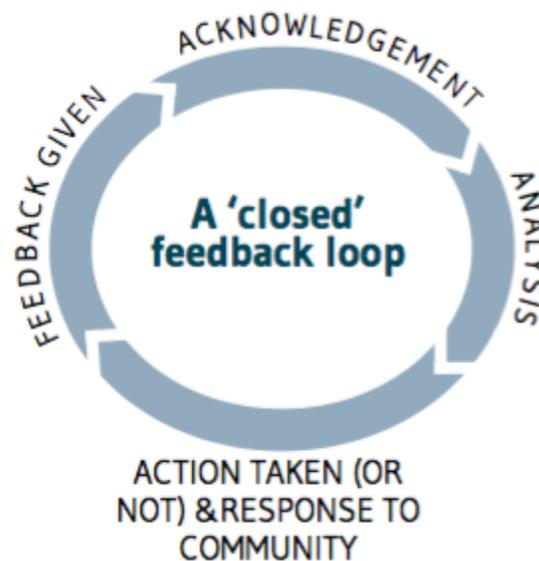


Image 1: Bonino, Francesca, and Paul Knox Clarke 2013.

⁸ Bonino and Clarke 2013.

⁹ See: Bonino et al. 2014(b).

This section considers the political and cultural context in which WVE 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 WVE.

4.1 Operational Context

Ethiopia has long experienced chronic poverty and emergencies and has seen a range of interventions from national and international development and humanitarian actors. The country's continued reliance on humanitarian assistance for chronically food insecure and vulnerable communities is further compounded by a sizable refugee population within its borders.¹⁰ Most of the international aid that Ethiopia receives focuses on addressing rural poverty. UNICEF reports that from 2009 to 2012, roughly 30.7 percent of the entire population was living below the poverty line (living on \$1.25 a day).¹¹ Ethiopia ranks 174th out of 187 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) Human Development Index (HDI), with the average per capita income at less than half the current average in sub-Saharan Africa.¹²

Combating these massive economic inequities has increasingly become a priority for the Ethiopian Government, which plans to reach middle-income status by 2025. Some progress has been seen over the past several years in terms of human development indicators. The country, for example, has witnessed an uptick in literacy rates, with the total literacy rate of 49.1 percent. Women, however, still rank the lower in terms of literacy at 41.1 percent, compared with 57.2 percent of males.¹³ Increasing mobile phone coverage is also seen as a welcome sign of development across the country. While coverage in rural areas is still limited, there are roughly 50 million subscribers across the entire country, and ambitions to double the number of telecom subscribers (to roughly 91 million) by the end of 2016.¹⁴

The Ethiopian Government exerts significant control over development planning at the national, regional, and local levels. The government has placed severe constraints on civil society, the free press, political opponents, and on international actors.¹⁵ Operating in this context can be quite challenging for NGOs. In 2009, the government adopted a Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (CSP), which was the country's first comprehensive law that governed

¹⁰ In July 2014, the country surpassed Kenya and became the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, sheltering roughly 629,718 refugees, most from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritreans. For more see: Divers 2014.

¹¹ UNICEF 2013.

¹² IFAD 2014.

¹³ CIA Factbook 2014.

¹⁴ Yewondwossen, Muluken 2015.

¹⁵ HRW 2015.

the registration and regulation of NGOs. Notably, the Proclamation restricts NGOs that receive more than ten percent of their financing from foreign sources from engaging in human rights and advocacy activities.¹⁶ In addition, this Proclamation restricts the level of administrative spending to 30 percent and defines costs for enhancing staff or volunteers' skills from programmatic to administrative.¹⁷ As a result, CSP has forced many international agencies to remove the "soft" program support and resources, such as capacity building and participatory monitoring and evaluation, and to reduce staff who support community engagement and dialogue processes.¹⁸

4.2 Institutional Context

World Vision has operated in Ethiopia since 1975 and has more than 1,000 employees in its national office and sub-offices across the country. WVE programs reach approximately 244,067 children and their families¹⁹, and counts roughly 1.6 million direct and indirect beneficiaries.²⁰ WVE operates in 55 Area Programs (APs)²¹ as well as non-AP relief response programs that serve 100 districts

across the country.²² WVE is part of multi-agency Joint Emergency Operation Program (JEOP), focusing on food security among Ethiopia's most vulnerable. Its humanitarian and emergency affairs (HEA) team works in three refugee camps within Ethiopia's borders. WVE development programs focus on child protection, education, health, and livelihoods.

Typically, WV stays in an area from ten to fifteen years. In Ethiopia, where several program sites have operated for over thirty years, WV has recently closed some of these longstanding programs. In addition, budget constraints are affecting programs across the country and recent senior leadership transitions have impacted organizational decision-making.²³ WVE's memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ethiopian Government has also been revised. Currently, WVE's MoU with the government restricts direct support for development programs, and instead mandates programs to focus on sustainable initiatives. Staff and community members saw this shift as a challenge as they have become accustomed to a development approach that addresses the

¹⁶ ICNL 2016.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Brown, Dayna 2016.

¹⁹ World Vision International 2016.

²⁰ World Vision Ethiopia 2014.

²¹ Area Programs (APs) is a 10-15 year community development program that is an integrated approach to community development, emphasizing the process of community participation, ownership and sustainability, while addressing the macro and micro causes of poverty to achieve the sustainable well-being of children. For the

purposes of this report APs are also called field offices. For more see:

http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Brief_Overview_Development_Programmes_1.pdf

²² World Vision Ethiopia 2014.

²³ During the yearlong implementation of the ALI project (March 2015-March 2016), WVE experienced significant turnover of senior leadership including: an interim director and then an acting director, a new Program Design and Quality Assurance (PDQA) director, and new health and livelihood managers.

basic needs of the community through direct support.²⁴

At the field office level, WVE utilizes a fairly decentralized structure that allows staff to respond to and act quickly upon community feedback. This flexible and local decision-making allows for faster programmatic modifications based on input from local communities. Even with a relatively decentralized structure that places some decision-making authority at the field level,²⁵ the organization still faces bureaucratic limitations with regards to the speed and agility of making decisions and modifications based on feedback. Staff at all levels described the organizational bureaucracy as an inhibitor to problem-solving. Several staff noted that the myriad templates and forms required to move information through the organization often stifles program effectiveness.

Program quality assurance (QA) steps are embedded into activities at the field level, and QA specialists and program specialists work together to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs. In other WV country offices, it is common for M&E or QA teams to operate separately from the program teams. Conversely,

in Ethiopia, the QA team is an integral part of the field office where they spend 50 percent of their time with specialists supporting them in design, implementation, and monitoring activities. As one field staff member explained, *“Their role is to make the program effective so they [QA staff] almost carry more of the burden than program staff to ensure that the program is effective.”*

There is considerable in-house expertise at World Vision Ethiopia given the longstanding commitment to soliciting and responding to community feedback in WVE’s Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Team (HEA) and the Joint Emergency Operation Plan (JEOP). In its pilot phase, ALI was situated under the Protection and Equity Team within the Program Design and Quality Assurance (PDQA) team, and has been managed by the Accountability and Policy Dialogue Specialist in Addis Ababa. A key consideration for positioning ALI within these teams was the aspiration to use community feedback beyond programmatic changes for internal and external advocacy purposes.

WVE has prioritized the scaling-up of feedback and accountability mechanisms in the coming

²⁴ The shift in approach has been further compounded at the field-level, particularly in Libokemkem, where there are eight other operational NGOs working in the same communities. Many of them distribute school supplies, food, and vouchers. Community members critical and unfavorable comparison of different types of services and benefits has posed challenges for WVE field staff.

²⁵ World Vision’s field offices are called Area Programs (APs). APs report to the Cluster Offices which in turn report to Zonal/Regional Offices overseen by the National Office. For the purposes of this report, APs will be referred to as field offices. AP Supervisors, who are the senior managers of the APs, for this report will be referred to as Field Office Supervisors to keep consistency and clarity.

fiscal year. With the ALI pilots coming to completion, WVE has decided to extend the initiative into at least 20 area programs by the end of the fiscal year. At the moment, this scaling-up effort is managed by a two-person Protection and Equity team in Addis Ababa, but discussions with management indicated that increased capacity to manage a country-wide scale-up will need to be considered.

World Vision demonstrates a long-standing commitment to accountability and has an agency-wide program accountability framework (PAF).²⁶ 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 onto and has met requirements for several other codes and standards regarding both quality and accountability at the sector-wide and global level.²⁷ 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 WVE staff in relevant sections below.

5.1 Existing Channels for Collecting Feedback

“Accountability is not a standalone issue; it is an integrated process that exists in our program cycles.”

– DM&E team member, National Office, Addis Ababa

World Vision Ethiopia collects and uses feedback in both development and humanitarian programs. Food security programs, managed by the multi-agency Joint Emergency Operations Program (JEOP), have distinct mechanisms for collecting and responding to feedback in the 17 Woredas²⁸ where the program operates. Additionally, WVE’s humanitarian emergency affairs (HEA) team, which provides assistance to refugee populations from Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, has camp-specific feedback processes. Development programs implemented by field

²⁶ World Vision International 2010.

²⁷ These include Sphere, Red Cross Code of Conduct, Common Humanitarian Standard (CHS) formerly HAP, INGO Accountability Charter and Disaster Emergency Accountability Framework among others.

²⁸ A Woreda, or district, which is the administrative unit for several Kebeles. A Woreda is then part of a zone, which in turn is grouped into one of the regions.

offices across Ethiopia use formal and informal channels for community feedback and complaints.

The **program design** and subsequent **redesign phase**, which occurs every five years, 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 implementation process and to solicit input from community and other stakeholders. During the **program redesign** phase, community members at the sub-Kebele level jointly create a plan with WV. Additionally, assessments are commonly done jointly with community members, government officials, and partner organizations in order to gather relevant data for the program redesign process. Data from such exercises is also shared with the government and other NGOs working in the communities.

WV staff hold regular community meetings that serve as another informal channel for gathering local input and feedback. Periodic focus group discussions are conducted by health, education, and child-protection teams to hear community perspectives and complaints. WVE’s field staff also coordinate directly with local mothers’

BOX 1 - INFORMAL & FORMAL FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Formal feedback channels are intentionally designed and use systematic and consistent protocols (i.e. logbooks), including a process for providing a response (which could include programmatic redesign). Informal feedback channels are just as important and are often already embedded into the day-to-day programmatic activities and communication between staff and local residents (i.e. face-to-face conversations and feedback exchange).

groups and youth groups in order to engage existing community-based structures whose role is to represent their respective constituencies. Staff also encourage community members to visit the field office if they have feedback or complaints. Until recently, field staff in some program areas lived in an office compound. Recently, management decided to remove staff quarters and has encouraged field staff to live in or near the communities in which they work. The rationale is to foster more informal and direct interaction between field staff and community members.

For some WVE programs, **community volunteers** are another informal channel for information provision and feedback and are used widely across WV program areas in

Ethiopia. Community volunteers are trusted members of the community and are often teachers or local elders. Volunteers have been a crucial feedback channel for the ALI program (for more, see Section 5.2: The Accountability Learning Initiative). They ensure that WVE is kept abreast of what is happening in the community on a daily basis, as well as community perceptions of WVE programs.

Feedback is routinely gathered as part of WVE’s **monitoring and evaluation** process, which uses quality assurance surveys that inform outcome-level indicators. If an external evaluation is conducted at the end of a program cycle, the consultant solicits community feedback as part of an assessment.

Joint feedback efforts between WVE, the government, and other NGOs working in the same communities were described as informal. Joint channels include an annual NGO and government forum, meetings with the government to review WVE’s programs, a monthly NGO forum that meets to discuss on-going work in the communities, and joint monitoring of WVE’s programs with the government and/or other NGOs. WVE staff explained that they commonly use existing governmental processes to supplement their

feedback collection efforts.²⁹ Staff described closing the feedback loop in joint mechanisms as challenging, particularly in light of restrictions placed on WVE by the government.

5.2 The Accountability Learning Initiative

World Vision’s Accountability Learning Initiative (ALI) is a pilot funded by World Vision UK (WV UK) in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Nepal, and Somalia. The purpose of the pilots was to boost the existing feedback and accountability practices in WVE’s development programs. Overall, the central goal of ALI is to empower children and communities to claim program entitlements and hold WVE and other stakeholders accountable to their commitments. The pilot was designed to test approaches for institutionalizing accountability practices and to document, share, and apply lessons from those tests in the field. Staff at the national office in Addis Ababa saw ALI as a mechanism for standardizing and mainstreaming accountability in the organization.

WVE conducted an initial baseline assessment of accountability in March 2015 to identify ALI pilot sites. One component of the baseline was a self-assessment³⁰ that measured the existing

²⁹ For example, health assessments are jointly conducted by WVE health staff and the government health extension workers, using the Service Availability Readiness Assessment (SARA) in order to collect quantitative

community satisfaction data regarding health programming.

³⁰ This is part of WV Programme Accountability Framework self-assessment; an existing tool WV uses to conduct a baseline for accountability.

accountability systems and practices already in place across various program areas. This process was accompanied by focus group discussions with target communities. Findings indicated gaps in accountability as described during community self-assessments, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Notably, WVE’s assessment highlighted that while field offices overall met accountability standards for community consultation, participation, and information provision, there was a clear need for improved implementation and use of feedback mechanisms.³¹ This led WVE to launch ALI in two program areas, Yilmana Dinsa and Libokemkem, where the initiative ran in 2015-2016. The launch was delayed due to local and national elections and thus, the design and implementation did not begin until July 2015. This resulted in a shortened timeframe for design, implementation, and documentation of lessons.

Field offices in World Vision operate with a certain level of autonomy and each pilot site implemented ALI using a different approach. In Yilmana Dinsa, ALI was piloted in three out of eleven Kebeles.³² The team determined that a gradual roll-out of ALI would foster more effective mechanisms and processes. At the time of CDA’s second visit, the Yilmana Dinsa staff were planning to expand ALI into additional Kebeles in the new fiscal year. Conversely,

Libokemkem AP launched ALI in all of its eleven Kebeles using a cluster approach. Designating three Kebeles as ALI focal points, the AP clustered the other eight Kebeles around these three. This allowed the AP field staff to launch ALI in all their communities in the first year. As ALI pilot comes to completion in March 2016, WVE has prioritized accountability and feedback across the organization, and has committed to a similar process of strengthening accountability practices in 20 are programs by the end of the next fiscal year.

In both pilot sites, communities helped to determine and prioritize the feedback channels and information provision processes during the assessment and design phase of the project. These included noticeboards, suggestion boxes, an expanded role for community volunteers, and phone lines (these channels are discussed in further detail in Section 6.3: Feedback Collection).

³¹ World Vision Ethiopia 2015.

³² ALI was piloted in Mosobo, Goshiye and Dambash Kebeles due to the large number of registered children in

each Kebele and their close proximity to the area program/field office.

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In previous research, CDA and ALNAP identified and tested seven propositions³³ commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts, including, in no particular order:

“We know what’s good and bad for us. We should choose.” – A child from a remote rural community supported by WVE

<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 by CDA at later stage)</i>

CDA’s on-going research and advisory work with partner organizations points to these features as also critical for effective 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.

6.1 Cultural and Context Appropriateness

Accountability mechanisms have become a common feature of humanitarian interventions in Ethiopia. People affected by emergencies, and by the humanitarian assistance that follows, have become accustomed to seeing different complaints and feedback channels in their

communities. WVE is among the many agencies that have invested resources into developing context-appropriate feedback collection tools. Despite these accumulated lessons and practice in humanitarian accountability, some program managers at WVE’s national office expressed uncertainty about the feasibility of ALI in development programming. One PDQA manager explained that there has been endemic disenfranchisement of the local population, which has constrained community voice and decision-making in local development. He explained, *“We are not a society that has been educated on accountability to communities...as a society grows socially, [in reference to human development] accountability becomes more critical. But, are we ready for this? We should be asking ourselves, is our society up for asking: is your program accountable to me?”* Despite the skepticism, the ALI pilot benefitted from the existing knowledge base in accountability.

Rural communities have also become more aware about feedback processes as a result of

³³ Bonino, Francesca, and Paul Knox Clarke. *Effective Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms: Methodology*

Summary for a Joint ALNAP and CDA Action Research. ALNAP-CDA, 2013.

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the Kebele administration’s (KA)³⁴ noticeboards and suggestion boxes. During community consultations about ALI, this general familiarity with information provision and feedback channels was noted as important for increasing participation. Residents acknowledged that they rarely use the KA noticeboards and suggestion boxes, but expressed appreciation to WVE for establishing similar channels. One male community member explained, *“We feel comfortable with the processes selected because the government uses the same mechanisms too.”*

WVE strives to increase accessibility and inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable people in accountability processes. The low literacy rate, particularly among women, was an important consideration in design consultations with communities. Interestingly, people did not identify illiteracy as a barrier for using noticeboards and suggestion boxes. Community members explained that literacy concerns can be mitigated by offering both verbal and written methods, and by the children and community leaders who write and read for those who are unable. Yilmana Dinsa residents requested access to a phone line as an additional confidential channel for those who could not use suggestion boxes due to illiteracy.³⁵ Many women do not have personal

mobile phones and use a male family member’s phone. Gender dynamics as well as generally poor mobile coverage in the region could limit the use of phone-based feedback channels. Maintaining a multiplicity of information provision and feedback channels is important to ensure that people can access, at minimum, one channel.

Traditional local norms govern the processes by which communities raise issues to administrative leaders beyond their Kebele. In light of this, community members were familiar and comfortable with relying on intermediaries for accessing information, problem-solving, and as conduits for conveying complaints and feedback. Therefore, the expanded role of community volunteers as part of ALI was discussed positively by all. By the end of the pilot phase, community volunteers were the primary channel through which people provided feedback and received a response. Volunteers’ longstanding partnership with WVE as well as their respected position within the community has empowered them to advance the goals set for ALI pilots. Some field and national office staff were surprised by the high-level of engagement of community volunteers. One field office supervisor noted that Ethiopia

³⁴ Kebele Administration is a small governmental unit that manages local communities.

³⁵ Confidentiality and anonymity are different. Clearly the phone-line cannot provide an anonymous channel for

feedback communication between the community and WVE. However, it can allow for a confidential two-way channel between the community member and WVE field staff.

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does not have a culture of giving feedback, particularly in person, which made the large volume of feedback data channeled through the volunteers seem peculiar.

Most community members said they were consulted in the selection of culturally appropriate channels. Yet there were some discrepancies among program areas. The choice of location and travel distance to consultation sessions precluded some people’s attendance. The WVE program team that used a cluster approach held fewer village-based consultations and instead clustered them into three larger meetings. Consequently, community members in that program area identified limited consultation and access to feedback channels as issues affecting ALI implementation in their Kebeles. This area program has now placed suggestion boxes and recruited community volunteers in all of the 11 Kebeles it supports (although it does not have noticeboards in all 11 communities), but some community members were still concerned about access to information.

6.2 Expectation Setting and Knowledge

Information Provision about World Vision Ethiopia

Information provision represents a fundamental pillar of World Vision’s global program accountability framework (PAF). In recent years,

“Because of increased information, the amount of dissatisfaction has decreased. People feel they can voice their issues and get a response quickly and openly. I’ve seen a positive change.”

– Kebele Administrator in Yilmana Dinsa

“That’s their [WVE’s] job. They’re here for the rights of the community. So, they have to give an ear to the voice of the community.”

– Community member, ALI pilot site

WVE has put an emphasis on ensuring community members’ understanding of WVE’s mandate, vision, and activities. The ALI pilots provided an opportunity to test and improve methods for the provision of accurate and transparent information about World Vision to community members. Unsurprisingly, those regularly engaged in program activities demonstrated better understanding of WVE’s programming and overall mandate and what distinguishes them from other organizations. One staff member explained, *“People should be informed and should have trust in how we provide our programs. Open and transparent is the best way to have confidence in each other.”*

Both ALI pilot areas use noticeboards to share up-to-date information about WVE and ALI. In Yilmana Dinsa, there is a noticeboard in each pilot Kebele. Local residents found the boards useful and those who can’t read ask others for

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help. People appreciated having this additional source of information about WVE and its activities. One community volunteer explained, “[Because of increased information provision, our] understanding of World Vision, how it works, and its priorities are clearer for us now.” A reading camp volunteer said, “It is great. People who are unable to attend meetings still have access to the noticeboard and it gives updates on World Vision, so we know what’s going on.” In our conversations with non-pilot Kebeles in Yilmana Dinsa, we noted enthusiasm for noticeboards, which were described as a useful channel for information about WVE’s programs.

In Libokemkem, where a cluster approach was used, noticeboards were placed only in select Kebeles. At the time of our visit, the noticeboards in Libokemkem listed only WVE’s Code of Conduct (CoC) and did not provide any other information about WVE or ALI. Some

community members said they had never seen a noticeboard and did not have adequate information about WVE and its work in their community. Field staff were aware of limited accessibility, particularly for community members who lived far from a cluster Kebele. The team had decided to install fewer boards due to low literacy rates. As the pilot phase is completed, the positive experience and appreciation of noticeboards at Yilmana Dinsa’s is instructive and needs to be examined. Information provision about WVE’s programs, mandate, timelines, activities, and budgets increases transparency and can strengthen relations with the community. Noticeboards are not the only method for doing this and thus it is important to use multiple forms of communication which can help to allay any concerns, fears, or rumors about the organization.

BOX 2 - INFORMATION PROVISION IN THE CONTEXT OF LOW LITERACY RATES

Information provision channels in areas with high illiteracy rates, such as the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, require special consideration. In similar contexts, organizations found it helpful to use pictographic flyers that can be handed out to community members and posted on a noticeboard. In Nepal, pictures of World Vision International Nepal’s different feedback methods with basic written information have increased community awareness and participation in feedback processes and were seen as a child-friendly information provision tool.

For more see Cechvala, Sarah 2016.

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Information Provision about the Accountability Learning Initiative (ALI):

Community volunteers are integral to information provision about WVE and the ALI pilot. Community volunteers described the feedback process to CDA in detail, noting their role in it, and reported feeling empowered to share information with the community. They provide regular verbal reminders about feedback channels to community members and have utilized Sunday church services to share information and respond to questions about WVE and its programs. Yilmana Dinsa residents had a very strong understanding of how ALI worked and the process used by WVE to review and respond to community feedback. One volunteer in Yilmana Dinsa explained, *“It [ALI] is a transparent system which has increased the transparency of the organization.”* All program staff in Yilmana Dinsa are also knowledgeable and committed to sharing information about ALI during community visits.

During conversations in Libokemkem, CDA noted that not all community members clearly understood the ALI process and how and why WVE was collecting and using their feedback. Most community members could not explain the expected timeframe from collection to response. One community member said, *“There should be an open discussion in meetings and we should be told how exactly we have been instruments of development. We want specific information.”* CDA’s research indicates that when people understand how accountability processes work, this notably improves the effectiveness of the mechanisms. Protocols for responding to sensitive and non-sensitive issues are important to ensure that the process is context-appropriate and to manage expectations. A consistent process leads to more transparency for staff and community members. It needs to be reinforced by presenting the information to community members and staff in meetings, through volunteers, and on noticeboards.

BOX 3 - INFORMATION PROVISION ABOUT FEEDBACK UTILIZATION

Examples of how feedback was used in decision-making increases knowledge about the mechanism. Positive examples of feedback utilization need to be shared to close the loop and to strengthen accountability between WVE and the community. When changes are not possible, it is equally important to inform about these unsatisfactory decisions. Noticeboards are not the only channel for this. All staff could be informed to discuss decisions during visits.

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6.3 Feedback Collection

It was encouraging to hear community members say that providing feedback is one of their fundamental rights. Field staff organized sensitization sessions with community members to review fundamental concepts related to feedback, explain why WVE wants to hear from them, and to clarify how each feedback channel works. A manager described the significance of increased knowledge for empowerment, *“First you need to build the capacity of the community. Accountability means that people should be empowered.”* However, in Libokemkem, a few children mentioned that they did not feel comfortable providing feedback or did not feel that they were given the opportunity to do so. One child told CDA, *“We know that we can ask, but we have not been given the opportunity to do so.”*

Most community members described at least one method by which they can reach WVE with feedback and many people were able to describe more than one channel. People understood they have options and could identify the most appropriate channel for their type of feedback. It is an encouraging sign that most people perceived the available feedback channels as accessible, safe, and trustworthy. This section will examine each channel more closely.

Suggestion Boxes

During design consultations, communities selected suggestion boxes as one of the preferred channels for feedback. One staff member explained that, *“People are most willing to express themselves through writing [as opposed to verbally in a public forum etc.]”* Community members use suggestion boxes for signed or anonymous feedback to WVE. Several children said they appreciated the box because they are not comfortable expressing feedback or complaints in front of adults during public meetings. One child said, *“Everyone speaks when we gather, but the box is a way for individuals to provide feedback.”* Literate residents, including children, have helped to write feedback or complaints on behalf of others in the community. WVE staff is aware that this practice hinders confidentiality. In one pilot site, a phone line managed by the ALI focal point has provided an alternative confidential channel for feedback.

In March 2016, Yilmana Dinsa had three suggestion boxes, one in each of their pilot Kebeles, and Libokemkem had a suggestion box in all 11 pilot Kebeles. There has been uneven use of the boxes across pilot sites. In Yilmana Dinsa, the team attached the suggestion boxes to noticeboards. While this is not the primary feedback collection channel, they receive about between 30-50 feedback entries a month via the box. The ALI focal point established a consistent protocol for opening, reviewing, and

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responding to feedback from the boxes. The focal point and community volunteers open the boxes every two weeks on Friday. After consolidating feedback and discussing it with the field office supervisor and relevant specialists, the ALI focal point returns on Sunday to meet with community volunteers to update them on the frequently asked questions (FAQs) and responses to feedback. CDA was impressed that while the field team validated this process, it was the community volunteers who explained the process to this level of detail.

Despite a larger number of suggestion boxes in Libokemkem, the staff at this pilot site said they have yet to receive community feedback via this channel. During discussions, a few community members told us that they had used the boxes, but had yet to hear a response from the staff. Many community members said that they had little information about the boxes and have not used them. Staff listed a number of possible reasons for limited use, including low literacy rates,³⁶ limited time by community members to provide feedback, cultural restrictions about written feedback, and accessibility of the boxes. There were notable contradictions among the staff and community members’ perceptions and experiences regarding the cultural appropriateness of this channel.

An important hindering factor at this pilot site is the low levels of awareness about how the suggestion box works and uncertainty regarding the process of opening them and using the information. One man said, *“The suggestion box is good, but everyone should participate in opening the box. Right now, we don’t know if has been opened at all.”* Another person was concerned that the feedback provided through a box may be purposefully misplaced, saying, *“If the complaint is about the person opening the box then he might hide the information. But opening it in front of the community will hold everyone accountable.”* At the time of our last visit, the Libokemkem field team had not yet established a consistent protocol for suggestion boxes. Once in place, this protocol and response timeframes should be clearly communicated to residents.

Community Volunteers

People feel comfortable going to community volunteers because they are trusted members of the community. In turn, volunteers explained to us that, *“We spend a lot of time listening to the community.”* Prior to ALI, many community volunteers were already serving as intermediaries between local families and WVE, particularly in relation to child sponsorship. Their responsibilities within the ALI pilots were described as minor extensions of their existing

³⁶ Literacy levels in Yilmana Dinsa and Libokemkem are quite similar.

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role. Underscoring the volunteer nature of this work, one of them explained, *“Although nothing has been done for us, we do it to serve our community.”*

Factors such as age and gender were considered by the field teams when identifying suitable volunteers. In Yilmana Dinsa, for example, each Kebele has four volunteers: one male and one female volunteer, and one male teacher and one female teacher. Volunteers felt that asking women to serve in this role made a positive contribution in reaching more women and girls, who often do not feel comfortable giving feedback to male community members. Additionally, several children noted that having a teacher volunteer afforded them better access to WVE feedback channels.

Staff organized training sessions about ALI for volunteers covering the overall purpose and function of ALI and the volunteers’ role in the process. In Yilmana Dinsa, community volunteers recalled that they were trained on many elements, including: background on WVE, its programs, implementation approaches, WVE partners, what feedback volunteers could respond to, and what might need to be escalated to the ALI focal point in cases of urgent and sensitive feedback. Training included skills for documenting and tracking community feedback in logbooks. All volunteers carried notebooks that are also used by the ALI focal point and QA specialist for analysis and

response. Staff and volunteers discussed notebooks as vital to the effectiveness of ALI. When discussing changes to programming at the local level, one volunteer in Libokemkem said, *“There is change. But it’s us and the community. We engage the community all the time. It is because of us and the logbook that change happens.”*

Volunteers in both pilots said they felt empowered by staff to respond to some feedback on the spot. Some volunteers requested more detailed guidelines on performing their jobs. Volunteers appreciated and wanted more interaction with specialists and field office supervisors. Some noted that field staff should accompany them more frequently during registered child visits, which would help them do their jobs more effectively. Other volunteers requested both capacity development and financial support from WVE. Several suggested that lack of financial support would be a deterrent for people to volunteer in the long-run. One volunteer explained his frustration regarding lack of financial support, *“They [WV] are only here to implement, but we are the implementers and they do not pay for it.”* While we are unable to comment on the impact that these frustrations will have on the effectiveness of the feedback mechanism, if expectations go unmanaged, WVE staff may experience a deterioration in terms of the quality of feedback received through this channel.

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Community Meetings and Face-to-Face Conversations

Community members encouraged WVE to maintain 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 dialogue, and for immediate responses to some questions or concerns. One person pointed out that, *“Change can come through discussion.”* Some people indicated that they travel to the local WVE office in order to discuss issues with the staff directly. In Libokemkem, community members requested more face-to-face meetings to share feedback and discuss issues. One child explained, *“It [feedback] is a two-way learning process.”* At the time of our visit, the QA specialist in Libokemkem had integrated feedback and response sessions into his monitoring visits to help the team reflect upon how they were responding to and engaging community members.

Women and youth groups explained that there are several existing platforms for community leaders (i.e. mother’s groups and youth groups) to hear and respond to feedback. They encouraged WVE to hold WV-specific community feedback meetings in addition to using these existing mechanisms. Overall, community members described the importance of trust-building made possible by frequent and

meaningful interactions between staff and community members. In one community where a WVE field office is considering implementing ALI, people said that they were initially concerned about WVE’s religious identity and their plans in the community. But, as one woman explained, *“Time and relationships have proved that they are working in our interest.”*

Posting ALI Focal Point and Office Phone Number

In Yilmana Dinsa, the ALI focal point provided his mobile number and the office number on the noticeboard so community members can contact him directly with feedback, requests, or complaints. Mobile use is gradually increasing in rural communities due to the expansion of national cellular coverage. Many of the men we spoke with had mobile phones, and several of the women and children owned phones or had access to phones owned by family members. Currently, the phone line is not the primary channel for community feedback. Several community members felt that it should be maintained, because unlike the suggestion box, the phone allows for a two-way conversation and potentially an immediate response.

6.4 Verification and Analysis of Feedback Information

At the field office level, ALI focal points and QA specialists use feedback registries to sort and analyze incoming feedback. The focal points

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“This is not a new concept for World Vision...the understanding is already there. But it’s about intentionality of it. It’s making accountability a process that focuses on the ‘how’ we do our work.”

– DM&E staff at the National office

listed a range of skills required to perform the data analysis effectively: categorizing, analyzing, and identifying patterns and trends in feedback overtime. They felt confident about their abilities to analyze and recommend actions to the area supervisor based on feedback. In Yilmana Dinsa, the ALI focal point and QA specialist present feedback trends that occurred during the month to the entire area program team in a monthly review meeting. The staff and the field office supervisor discuss complaints and feedback, and review feedback trends. This process was described by the entire field team as useful because it serves as another internal mechanism to hold staff accountable. One of the AP supervisors said, *“We are seeing ourselves through a mirror. It’s [community feedback] a helpful tool to help us see ourselves and make changes to our programs.”*

WVE’s goal is to utilize existing M&E and data analysis practices by which community feedback is already being processed and

analyzed, as opposed to generating new systems. However, the process by which aggregated feedback is brought to the attention of regional, zonal, and national managers has yet to be determined.³⁷ Staff indicated that concrete thresholds for determining what, when, and how community feedback is escalated to the next level within the hierarchy are important, especially as accountability processes scale-up.³⁸ One staff member pointed out, *“What we want as far as the data coming into headquarters needs to be better articulated...What to share and not to share will be an important consideration.”*

At the national office, staff would like to receive feedback data with recommended actions that are validated and supplemented by additional data points, in order to make critical decisions or changes based on community feedback. However, some field staff (particularly program staff) do not believe they have the skills or do not feel empowered to pull out key action points and recommendations from which senior management in Addis Ababa can make decisions. As a senior manager in Addis explained, *“Smaller issues need to be identified and addressed at the AP [area program] level. When these types of feedback are not addressed, they can add up, and then the national office is*

³⁷ Community members also expect that when their issue cannot be resolved at the local level, it will be passed to those who could address it.

³⁸ WVE is working with WV UK to develop accountability guidelines for the entire organization which will be mainstreamed across WVE.

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dealing with issues that should have been dealt with by the AP.”

Several managers saw opportunities for sharing community feedback with senior decision-makers. For example, the accountability section of the monthly area program reports could be used for sharing feedback examples, trends, and actions recommended by the field team. A Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DM&E) specialist in Addis Ababa noted that *“the way we are reporting on accountability is totally contrary to the way we are talking about accountability.”* He explained that, currently, accountability sections of the report tend to focus on “hard” data, i.e. the number of community members who attended a meeting as opposed to capturing “softer data,” which would represent community’s perception of these meetings.

6.5 Feedback Acknowledgement and Response

“They hear us. They listen to us. They do all that they can and tell us what they can’t do. And they give us respect.”

– Community member in Yilmana Dinsa

Response is the cornerstone of trust between community members and WVE and essential in maintaining positive relationships. WVE’s methods for responding to feedback include

verbal responses given by community volunteers and staff, the use of written frequently asked question (FAQs) notices posted on the boards, and responses by phone. Community members in Yilmana Dinsa expressed a high level of confidence that they would receive a response to their feedback. This confidence was boosted by the feedback acknowledgement and response steps and the consistency with which these protocols were used by volunteers and ALI team.

BOX 4 - RESPONSE THROUGH FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

In Yilmana Dinsa, feedback collected through ALI channels is aggregated bi-weekly by the ALI focal point who triangulates the feedback and seeks the appropriate response either from his fellow specialists, the Kebele administration, or the field office supervisor. FAQs are then updated on noticeboards to ensure that all community members are receiving consistent responses. Volunteers receive FAQs. Community members noted that FAQs are particularly important as an information sharing mechanism. Even those who cannot read saw FAQs as useful, as residents share the information with each other.

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Empowering volunteers and staff to respond to feedback takes an intentional effort. Volunteers felt better equipped to respond after receiving training, frequent communication, and consistent information all provided by WVE’s field staff. They felt confident responding to reoccurring questions about WVE and its activities. Program staff also felt empowered to respond to feedback when visiting communities. The monthly feedback meetings boosted camaraderie and ownership among the program specialists regarding their role in the process. A supervisor noted, *“I think everyone can do this. It takes passion and understanding of how much this does for the projects and the community. Understanding the need gives us the leverage to be successful.”*

Despite these successful and encouraging practices, we heard a broadly voiced concern by community members and staff about gaps related to response. One manager noted, *“We need to have stronger tools. Staff don’t have the capacity to reflect back to the community. World Vision is a very template-heavy organization, but these tools need to be better based on the context.”* Another manager felt that, *“Often we process information for ourselves and don’t give it back to the community. That link is still missing for us.”* Closing the feedback loop is a common challenge for many organizations. Many community members in Libokemkem pilot sites said they were unsure when they would receive a response from the staff. One woman

explained, *“We have used the mechanism and voiced our concerns...however we are saying we have to see some significant change. But, right now, we haven’t even received a response.”*

Unsolicited feedback that falls beyond WVE’s mandate presents a challenge in terms of response and what to do with the information. Referring feedback to relevant stakeholders requires clear instructions to staff. Referral processes require strong relationships with the government or other actors. There was no consensus among staff about the role of the government in WVE’s accountability process. Some raised concerns and others stressed the importance of including the government, explaining, *“We are not working alone in the communities.”* Some staff suggested that they could share relevant feedback with the government during quarterly NGO fora and include it in meeting reports. Others felt that the government’s NGO focal point should be invited to community feedback sessions. Striking a balance between the need to engage the government with concerns about maintaining safe space for the community to voice feedback is important. As an encouraging example, Yilmana Dinsa has a strong relationship between the field office and the Kebele administration, which allowed WVE’s feedback data to inform the partnership with the government and its integration into the Kebele administration plans.

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6.6 Feedback Utilization

“Yes, they [WVE] have made changes. The small things they [AP staff] do, but the bigger things need to come from higher up.”

– Community member in Yilmana Dinsa

CDA documented several examples of feedback utilization and closed feedback loops in both area programs. ALI focal points in both program areas described how tracking reoccurring feedback and aggregating this information over time allowed them to identify and prioritize challenges that needed attention. The information was shared with relevant program specialists, verified and triangulated with stakeholders when necessary, and then shared with the area supervisor or other appropriate decision-maker. Most of the changes have been at the field level and were enabled through problem-solving led by the area supervisor and the rest of the team. In both pilot areas, community-related feedback focused on service delivery. Some changes made at the field level based on community feedback included the construction of shallow wells and the purchasing of new desks for classrooms.

Staff noted that efficiency in local level decision-making differs from instances where feedback had to be escalated to senior management at the national office. More significant changes requiring approval in Addis Ababa were made

possible by the close engagement of the Protection and Equity Team at the national office. At present, the Accountability and Policy Dialogue Specialist remains largely responsible for raising issues requiring larger programmatic changes to senior management (i.e. changes with medical vouchers and supporting the government in its healthcare coverage program).

CDA was impressed with the number of modifications made in response to feedback. These ranged from small changes to several large programmatic shifts that were underway at the national office level. The following are certain examples of those changes.

Increased Resources for Literacy Camps

In Yilmana Dinsa, children requested more books for reading camps and discussed their concerns with community volunteers and WVE’s education specialist, who also served as the ALI focal point. He worked with the area supervisor and arranged for a donation of books for the literacy camps. Shortly after, volunteers and staff reported a dramatic increase in child attendance. One child recalled, *“We were asked to give feedback about why we weren’t attending the literacy camps. We told them that we don’t have any new books to read, and they made changes right away. Now we attend all the time to read the new books.”* The parents and children greatly appreciated this positive outcome made possible by WV. One of the women said, *“We*

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have seen how children have gotten more support. If they [WVE] don't listen to us [community members] then they don't correct their gaps."

In addition, in Yilmana Dinsa staff also addressed feedback mostly from local elementary school teachers regarding poorly-trained literacy camp volunteers. After validating these concerns with teachers, field staff, and community members, the ALI focal point (with support from the field office supervisor) removed several of the volunteers and hired new ones. The team also instituted an improved training process for the all literacy camp instructors. While it was challenging to let go of several volunteers, the ALI focal point noted that this process was important in order to ensure that field office was listening to community feedback.

Modifying Program Selection Criteria

In Libokemkem, the team made a significant programmatic shift regarding the selection criteria for child sponsorship and the Gardening for Improved Nutrition and Increased Income (GINII) livelihoods program. Community volunteers documented consistent feedback and complaints regarding the process of selecting children for programs and brought it to the attention of the ALI focal point. Volunteers are capable intermediaries between communities and WVE as a result of clearly defined roles, capacity development, and

support from WV staff. Their role as enablers of feedback loops is also a source of pride and empowerment for volunteers. One of them described his role in changing the selection criteria, exclaiming, *"The registration book brought about this change!"*

In order to understand the issue better, the ALI focal point solicited additional targeted feedback from communities about the selection process and criteria. It became clear that the main point of contention focused on *who* was responsible for selecting children and *who* would receive benefits or participate in programs. Community dissatisfaction with the process raised concerns regarding favoritism and nepotism by Kebele leaders in the process. Recognizing the concerns of the community, while also needing to maintain a relationship with the Kebele administration, several program specialists worked together to modify the selection process. The ALI focal point explained the new process, *"Now we are more involved in the selection and the Kebele administration only has to approve and sign off. Community members tell us that we are now doing what we are supposed to be doing."*

At the time of our visit, there was uneven level of understanding about these recent changes. While many community members noted the recent changes, some mentioned that it is unclear why or how the changes came about. Several community members noted, *"We are*

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confused because we don’t understand the selection criteria.” Changes in response to community feedback are valued, however it is equally critical to close the feedback loop and share these programmatic changes with community members using multiple communication methods including community volunteers, noticeboards, and community meetings.

Health Coverage for Registered Children

One promising example of programmatic course-correction was still under review by the national office during our visit. Community volunteers documented feedback and concerns regarding payment for medical care for registered children.³⁹ Currently, WVE’s policy is to reimburse the families of registered children after a doctor’s visit. However, this process poses a financial burden for families who cannot afford upfront costs for medical care. At the field office level, the ALI focal point, QA officer, and health specialists reviewed the feedback with their supervisor and acknowledged that they were unable to address these complaints without the involvement of decision-makers higher up in the organization. The program teams presented the feedback data to the regional directors and the accountability team at the national office (who oversees the ALI

process), who then shared it with senior leadership.

World Vision has experienced similar issues in other contexts and drew from experiences in Senegal and other countries when considering options. To rectify this issue, WVE’s senior leadership began exploring a partnership with the Ethiopian Government. Specifically, WVE hopes to harness the momentum triggered by the 2012 launch of Ethiopia’s national health insurance system, which is slowly being implemented across the country. WVE would like registered children to be included in the government insurance scheme, which would allow them to receive immediate coverage free of charge. WVE would then either identify a payment plan for the family to repay the government for the associated fee, if the family is deemed to have the appropriate resources, or WVE would shoulder the cost to reimburse the government for medical services rendered. WVE’s health manager in Addis Ababa is working with the Ministry of Health to explore this partnership. Such a policy-level shift will require considerable time to finalize. If it is realized, it will impact how WVE covers the health care for registered children across the entire country.

³⁹ World Vision defines registered children as children who are listed as part of WV’s sponsorship program.

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Utilizing Community Feedback at Organizational Policy Level

All staff felt that community feedback should inform decisions across the different levels of the organization and that WVE will need to establish an effective system for doing this as ALI is scaled up. The capacity to aggregate and review reoccurring community feedback for the purpose of policy-review at the senior management level remains a challenge across the international development sector. World Vision Ethiopia is not an exception. CDA team and ALI staff observed real opportunities presented by the ALI for senior management to signal the importance of periodic reviews and utilization of policy-relevant feedback in higher-level decisions. In instances where community’s dissatisfaction with overall programmatic direction or the sponsorship model policies requires a more significant review and a senior management response, the field staff need clear direction and support in channeling these issues up the management chain. Whether or not the response is satisfactory, the feedback loop in this case needs to be closed both internally with field staff and with community members to promote transparency and to prevent further escalation of contentious issues.

⁴⁰ See: Cechvala, Sarah 2016(a); and Cechvala, Sarah 2016(b).

6.7 Individual and Organizational Support

“Accountability is a mirror that shows not only your face but also your back”

– WVE AP Supervisor

“I am not sure I know what accountability means in terms of my job.”

– WVE Manager, Addis Ababa Office

This case study demonstrates the importance of management support and senior leadership commitment in effective feedback and accountability practices. CDA’s case studies of accountability practices in other WV country programs⁴⁰ similarly highlight the importance of institutional support in driving effective practices. Staff described leadership support as an element that enabled or limited the utility of feedback mechanisms. In Addis Ababa, the level of commitment to accountability varied widely among managers. Several managers⁴¹ said they did not understand accountability and therefore were unable to connect it to their work. Conversely, some staff want to see community feedback systematically integrated into how managers develop and review programs. Staff in the national office noted that many on the senior leadership team were highly supportive during the piloting of ALI. Their efforts are credited for the high level of traction the

⁴¹ Most of whom joined WVE after the launch of ALI in March 2015.

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initiative has received within the organization, including the 2015-2017 scale-up. Gaps in some managerial knowledge and support of ALI was described as related to the high turnover of senior staff over a short period of time during the initial design and development of the ALI pilots.

The discrepancy in perception of accountability at the national-level signals an uneven understanding of WV’s Program Accountability Framework and its application in practice. Field staff tasked with implementing ALI will likely run into institutional limitations if the program specialists and program design and quality assurance teams do not have a shared understanding and collective commitment to supporting accountability vertically in the organization. Pilots demonstrated that at the field level, there was a marked difference in the level of commitment and motivation by staff based on how much support, engagement, and problem-solving the area supervisor provided to the team. Managers help to set norms and shape the organizational culture for soliciting and responding to community feedback. One field office supervisor echoed, *“Leadership always has to initiate the importance of this.”*

Effective organizational practices rest on individuals and teams. Field staff described a collective sense of responsibility and ownership as fundamental to ALI’s effectiveness. Program

staff on one team noted the essential nature of community feedback in relation to their duties. The field office supervisor explained, *“The team has to fully understand and support each other and leadership needs to encourage and acknowledge the importance of this work.”* In one instance, when the ALI focal point was away for a week, the livelihoods specialist willingly took over the ALI responsibilities. He explained, *“Leaving accountability to one person alone will get you nowhere.”* Conversely, in another area, staff linked the challenges with ALI implementation directly to limited involvement by leadership and other specialists. A specialist on that team told us, *“I do not work on this [ALI] because it doesn’t relate to my job.”*

CDA’s research demonstrates that feedback mechanisms are more effective when feedback is part of managerial practice and wider organizational culture.⁴² Some WVE staff suggested that accountability should be in the job descriptions of all field staff, noting that it would allow managers to assess staff performance related to accountability and boost staff recognition of its significance. Currently, M&E officers have accountability in their job descriptions and it is part of staff induction for all program staff. WVE is testing a process for analyzing individual staff performance in relation to outputs and teamwork. This framework incorporates accountability as a performance indicator and

⁴² Bonino et al. 2014(b).

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could prove effective for holding staff accountable for their responsibilities in relation to community engagement and feedback.

Among the institutional barriers to effective feedback utilization, staff highlighted the flexibility to modify programs in response to feedback.⁴³ Managers in Addis Ababa noted that WV’s programming model does not offer sufficient space for staff to be accountable to communities. One manager said, *“We are still doing top-down planning. But then I ask you, how can we be accountable to communities when we are the ones defining the needs?”* To change this, some staff suggested that accountability practices should inform WV’s technical programs, which will in turn impact the program design processes. Managers also discussed the need to assuage staff fears that ALI represents something drastically new, particularly as it scales up to at least 20 additional area programs. One DM&E staff member echoed this concern and said, *“Everything is rushed here at World Vision, so people take it as a single event. But, accountability is a process starting right when World Vision enters a community and continues through the program cycle.”*

The optimal location of ALI oversight functions (at the national office) and day-to-day

implementation (at the field-level) is crucial to its effectiveness and impact. At field-level, one pilot site located ALI under the child protection specialist. Staff there noted that the majority of community feedback relates to sponsorship and protection issues. The lack of feedback related to other programs (i.e. health, education) is linked to how the mechanism is perceived. Limited engagement by other specialists has led the ALI mechanism to be seen as a protection feedback mechanism as opposed to a WVE-wide feedback mechanism. This perception was reflected by community members who primarily discussed ALI in terms of child sponsorship and could not comment on how ALI relates to other programs.

BOX 5 - SHARING PRACTICAL LESSONS AND ADVICE

To date, there has been limited collaboration and sharing of experience between the two pilot areas. Joint learning could help generate new options for issues that field teams are facing. As ALI scales up to more sites, it would be beneficial for the initial pilot teams to support their colleagues in other program areas to build confidence and collaboration among staff across the organization.

⁴³ ALNAP-CDA guidance states that setting up feedback channels and asking for community feedback while knowing that there is no margin, or flexibility to modify

programs or make course corrections goes against the purpose of establishing an effective feedback mechanism. See: Bonino et al. 2014(b).

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In Addis Ababa, ALI is currently managed by the Protection and Equity Team. This team of two has done a tremendous job overseeing ALI implementation in two remote program areas and provided a high level of engagement and coaching to the piloting teams. Field staff attributed much of the success of ALI to the support they received from the national team, who organized workshops on improving institutional accountability and feedback practices. As ALI expands, the team will likely reassess the location of the oversight function because the Protection and Equity Team will not be able to offer same level of engagement to the additional 21 program areas.

6.8 Periodic Reassessment and Adjustment

Accountability and feedback mechanisms need to be adapted over time because the information and communication needs and preferences of community members and WVE staff may change. With the completion of the ALI pilots, WVE has an ideal moment to pause and reflect on what has worked well in the pilots, and what can be improved and how.

BOX 6 - INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

An institutional analysis could be very useful in identifying which department(s) have the capacities, skills, and the ability to manage accountability and feedback processes. Analysis should provide a clear picture of internal information sharing pathways and decision-making processes in the field and at the national level. The decision on where to anchor accountability functions is important and carries implications for effectiveness and impact of ALI.

At a time when World Vision’s programmatic approaches around the world are evolving, the Accountability Learning Initiative has provided a timely opportunity to test and grow World Vision Ethiopia’s practice of accountability principles. While WVE operates in a constrained programmatic environment due to restrictions on NGOs by the Ethiopian Government and WV’s own bureaucracy, ALI provided a framework for strengthening WVE’s ability to listen to communities and adapt programming when possible.

Lessons learned from ALI align with much of the existing evidence base about best practices in accountability and community feedback mechanisms. WVE’s experience is a particularly clear illustration of the importance of providing multiple channels to collect and respond to community feedback. In remote and vulnerable areas with low literacy levels, limited mobile ownership, low levels of cellular coverage, and cultural restrictions on public discussions, there can be no ‘one size fits all’ system for collection and response. This highlights the importance of using a combination of approaches, such as noticeboards, suggestion boxes, phone lines, formal and informal community meetings, and community volunteers. Each of these channels appealed to different sections of the population with different levels of access, literacy, and social authority. Children felt most comfortable using the volunteer teachers as a feedback channel, and ended up providing feedback that actually changed how WVE implemented a program. If

feedback mechanisms exclude even one segment of the community, including children, organizations lose valuable information.

WVE’s greatest challenge in these pilots was not with community engagement with feedback channels, but with the management and referral of feedback within the organizational structure. While there are champions of accountability in WVE at every level – from area program offices to Addis Ababa – the understanding of these mechanisms, one’s role in those mechanisms, and the protocol for escalation of feedback was not universal. Certain elements of feedback that address core World Vision programming, such as sponsorship, may need to be escalated to regional or international headquarters. 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.

In addition, when obtaining feedback from across communities with complex challenges, there will occasionally be feedback about issues that go beyond the scope of an organization’s power to respond. Many communities lack channels with which to communicate about other challenges in their lives, and may communicate about a more holistic range of issues when given the opportunity.

Organizations can be proactive in figuring out protocols to pass on this information to relevant governmental or non-governmental actors.

Despite the challenges inherent in short-term pilots, WVE's first two experiences with ALI have proved to be a valuable learning experience for the field staff and WVE country team in Addis Ababa. We were impressed by the amount of feedback collected and utilized in both local programmatic decision-making, as well as more systemic organizational program review. However, the scaling-up of this initiative will require continued investment, management support, and periodic reassessment to ensure that WVE is using the most optimal mechanisms and processes to engage community members and to use feedback internally. We hope this case study contributes to organizational learning and we encourage World Vision Ethiopia team 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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