

# Community Participation and Engagement Contributing to Humanitarian the Return Responses

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## 1. Purpose

The ES/NFI Cluster responds to the needs of the displaced in all phases of the displacement, focusing on the emergency phases and supporting progress toward finding durable solutions. Through Regional Technical Working Groups (TWiG), the Cluster has developed an Emergency Shelter Repair package for IDPs who were displaced and returned to their place of origin. Community engagement and participation in all phases of the project cycle are crucial for quality programming to ensure ownership, particularly in the return response where the returns are on the path to recovery and expected to contribute to the reconstruction process.

Return and recovery processes are often centrally planned and implemented and often follow a top-down approach that does not engage affected communities in their recovery process. Given that conflict contexts are particularly difficult environments that can cause large-scale damage, demanding speed in the delivery of humanitarian aid and recovery services, community participation can sometimes be perceived as an additional time-consuming process that adds even more to the challenge of dealing with a crisis. However, experience shows that return interventions can be inappropriate or ineffective when communities are not consulted and actively involved in the process.

## 2. Mechanisms for Community Participation

This section presents a range of mechanisms that can be adopted to promote community participation in return and recovery processes. We should use as many action strategies that can enhance participation and ultimately support the sustainability of the return.

### 2.1 Inclusive Approach

Community consultations and participatory methods must be inclusive and have diverse participants from all groups. Inclusive participation is vital to receiving accurate information and feedback from communities, ensuring all groups, particularly the most marginalized, such as persons with disability. (PWDs), elderly with mobility challenges and other marginalized groups are represented. Community voices from a representation of different groups and avoiding over-reliance on community leaders are critical to inform best the design, implementation, and monitoring of the ESNFI Cluster responses. One of the best practices in focus group discussions (FGDs) is consulting groups separately by gender and age to arrive at the nearest accurate sentiment and feedback specific to the group<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.2 Clear and Continuous Communication

Information and communication underpins all levels of participation. The more transparent the responses process, the greater the levels of engagement and likelihood of success. This requires sharing information and knowledge on all aspects that are relevant to affected communities: Loss and Damage Assessment, planning, implementation, outcomes and results, monitoring, and Evaluation. Clear communication will also allow the beneficiaries to understand their contribution to the reconstruction process and, at the same time, manage the expectation. Partners can choose the modes of communication with the community through practices that are most effective, acceptable, and applicable to the local community practices.

- Using existing participatory structures and mechanisms already in place.
- Engage a broad range of relevant stakeholders at local levels
- Ensures that communities are in the know about the challenges faced, the planned activities
- Close the loop. Decisions need to be communicated back to the community and stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> [Accountability to Affected Populations - AAP Participation Toolkit FINAL.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

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- Knowing their entitlements empowers communities.

### 2.3 Local/community Capacity and Sustainability

While applying the principles and standards of good construction practices into effect, partners should consider using the local/community capacity to leverage acceptance, a sense of ownership, and inclusiveness among the community. This will also contribute to the community's livelihoods as an income-generating activity. Partners are highly recommended to train skilled workers from the community and capacitate them to cascade the good construction practices into the local construction practices.

- Use local workforce resources like skilled, semi-skilled, and laborers to maximize cooperation in the community to help each other and create social cohesion, which accelerates implementing repair kit activities.
- Use local construction materials like stone, mud, grass matting, and wooden poles to maximize and complement cluster partners' ES/repair kit assistance during program implementation.
- Use local volunteer associations in the community rehabilitation, construction, and maintenance of damaged houses.
- ES/repair activities shall be inclusive for all age groups, gender diversity, and people with special needs at all levels of the implementation period.
- Local materials used for maintaining damaged houses shall protect the environment from deforestation, and the quarry sites for stone, sand, soil, and gravel production should be aligned with the environmental protection policy.
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that the affected population are not subject to coercion, i.e., forced or induced to act against their will in ways that may cause them harm or violate their rights.
- Support the affected population's efforts to stay safe, find security and restore dignity, including community self-help mechanisms.

## 3. Household Grouping

Grouping of households is particularly relevant when it comes to returnee and repair kits. The grouping can increase resource utilization (tools and technical knowledge) and social cohesion and maximize community assistance to disabled groups.

- The proximity of households for the repair kit and sharing tools, local resources, and manpower. The people will choose the grouping practices where beneficiary Households will form a group of 5 to 10 households based on the local practices and community choices.
- Grouping households in terms of damage level, less damaged households repair first and optimize the resources for the partially and fully damaged households or vis-versa
- Make a grouping of households to optimize the labor costs, engaging a group of skilled and semi-skilled labor.
- Household grouping creates a sense of togetherness in the conflict-affected community that bonds between its individuals and across its groups, promotes trust in the community, and implements partners for inclusion.
- Grouping of households helps the implementing partner to map the households in terms of the methodology followed for grouping. It eases monitoring and evaluation in terms of which damaged household falls in which type of grouping criteria.
- To increase completion rates, partners can consider putting a condition that all households Must Complete Phase One Activities Before Any Household Receives Phase Two Items.

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## 4. Demonstrating/piloting the project

Implementing partners must have the in-house technical capacity to set up, monitor and ascertain whether all construction works are conducted so that beneficiaries while repairing, retrofitting, and reconstructing, are mitigating their vulnerability to the effects of the conflict. To support the technical soundness and considerations of construction good practices into account, partners are required to demonstrate prototypes of the repair assistance in the community to cascade the standard/good construction practices in the local practices. Damaged houses of people with special needs should be selected for demo purposes in consultation with the community.

- Skilled and unskilled labor in the local communities should be assessed in a technical support framework to identify levels of skills and ensure availability.
- Make sure the damage level and construction methods required are relatively simple and non-engineered, and the beneficiaries have the tradition of self-building to implement the repair works.

## 5. Actions

The main goal of community engagement isn't just to hear what the community has to say and use that input as a catalyst for positive change. Once you've collected and processed the community's ideas and opinions, it's essential to turn words into action, set up an implementation plan, and measure the impact of your efforts. This should be backed up with different field-level technical support, joint monitoring visits and communicated actions.

- Ensure that principles and accountability frameworks are engineered for decision-making while implementing the repair kit activities.
- Ensure that all decisions are well communicated with the community and have adhered to the principles of do no harm.