1. **How do beneficiary feedback mechanisms enhance accountability?**
2. **What about accountability to other stakeholders?**
3. **What is the difference between accountability to communities during emergency responses and during development programme?**
4. **What if we are flooded with complaints?**
5. **Could feedback systems be used to make false allegations?**
6. **We cannot change what's in our logframe and project. So what will we do with the feedback?**
7. **Wouldn't complaints impact our reputation?**
8. **What if the community demands things we can't do?**
9. **Shouldn't communities be grateful for assistance?**
10. **How will this work if it is not in our culture to complain?**
11. **Do communities always know the best solution for their needs?**
12. **What are some other frequently used terms or phrases used to define accountability to communities?**

1. How do beneficiary feedback mechanisms enhance accountability?

Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms (BFMs) provide a method for strengthening aid agencies' accountability to the communities where they work. BFMs provide a channel for community members to easily raise questions, suggestions and concerns about aid activities, and have agreed protocols for action to be taken in response. In this way community members can 'hold an organization to account' for their actions, and ensure their answerability for how resources are used in their community.

Transparency is the foundation of accountability and a pre-requisite to functioning BFMs. For communities to provide relevant feedback, they first need to know what the main services or activities are that they are being asked to give feedback about, who is being targeted, and what commitments or standards the responsible agencies can be held to account to. Community members also need to know that it is their right to provide feedback, how they can provide feedback, and what will happen to their feedback

This helps to redress the power imbalance that often exist between aid actors and recipient communities. Information is power, and so too is the means to bring about change.

2. What about accountability to other stakeholders?

Organizations will work with multiple stakeholders including management, funders/donors, governments, peer agencies, partners, and of course the communities we serve. Accountability to all these stakeholder is very important. There is a need to be more systematic and intentional in our efforts to be accountable to the people we serve. When it comes to accountability to stakeholders such as donors, management and peers, this happens more naturally as our work is governed by policies, protocols, contracts, log frames etc. which allow us to easily measure if project or organizational targets/goals are being reached, if the money is being spent effectively and so on. However, communities do not have similar contracts with us to hold us to account for what we claim to do with our programming in their local context. Therefore, we need to be more deliberate in building in checks and balances in our work processes to ensure that local context, culture, community needs are being respected and their voices and preferences are considered while designing our programmes.

3. What is the difference between accountability to communities during emergency responses and during development programme?

The essence and concept of accountability of communities is to give back power to communities, and this is the same idea regardless of whether it is a disaster or development setting. What varies is the pace of work during disaster responses require relief programming to be speedy and thus our efforts to engage with communities has to be quicker as well. This can be a little more challenging given that trust and relationships take time to build while a fast paced response context demands speed. The context can change a lot during emergencies, so it is important to assess community needs and satisfaction more frequently, and develop a two-way communication system suited to a fast paced changing environment.

4. What if we are flooded with complaints?
An alternative consideration is - what if we don't hear the complaints? How could this effect our reputation, trust in the community and the quality of our programmes?
A fear that we will be inundated with complaints can prevent staff from wanting to set up a mechanism. Sometimes when a mechanism is set up, there is an initial surge in feedback. Often this can relate to a common theme, or systemic underlying problem. For example it could reflect a problem in information provision and the community understanding how the response organization selects its beneficiaries. Once these underlying problems are fixed, complaints taper off.

5. Could feedback systems be used to make false allegations?
Sometimes there are concerns that feedback systems will be misused, for example to raise false allegations. Clearly explaining the purpose of the system and how complaints will be investigated and responded to reduces the chance that community members will try to misuse the system. The benefits of having a feedback system far outweigh the occasional times when it might be misused.

6. We cannot change what's in our logframe and project. So what will we do with the feedback?
If there are unintended consequences from our projects, or ways we can improve them to better meet the needs of communities, we are compelled to take action. When we have feedback data to present to funders, this strengthens our legitimacy to speak on behalf of communities and to explain local realities and request changes. Most donors allow a 10% variation on budget lines without prior approval and many would be willing to consider budget re-allocation where it better meets the needs of the population.

7. Wouldn't complaints impact our reputation?
Feedback systems can actually help our reputation. Firstly, it shows that we are dedicated to understanding and being responsive to the needs of communities. We work in very dynamic and changing contexts, nobody expects that we will get everything right all of the time. What's important is that we are seen to take action in response to any problems that arise, or suggestions for how we can improve. In addition, feedback mechanisms mean that community members can raise concerns directly with organizations rather than through social media or other outlets which could cause more damage to the organisation's reputation

8. What if the community demands things we can't do?
There is an important link between information provision and feedback. Good communication helps communities understand our mandate and parameters for what we

can and can't do. If community expectations are managed, they are unlikely to ask for a new classroom through the feedback system. When we go back to communities and share our response to feedback, we can also explain our decisions and why some proposals from community members couldn't be acted on.

Other times, if requests are in-line with our mandate and consistent issues or requests raised through the community can identify areas that we could work with the community in addressing. Sometimes we need to change our activities.

9. Shouldn't communities be grateful for assistance?

Thinking people should be happy with whatever we give them is contrary to a rights based approach. Even when we are motivated by the best of intentions and do the best work that we can, there are often things that can be done unknowingly which may cause concern for communities. Being accountable gives us the opportunity to enhance our programs and make sure we're always doing the best we possibly can to improve the lives of people we work with, and that we respect their involvement in this process.

10. How will this work if it is not in our culture to complain?

There are many contexts where 'complaint' is not the best word to use. Other options might be suggestion box, help desk or feedback system. We can ask the community what name they feel is appropriate. Even with a different name, it might take a while to build community confidence about their right to provide feedback. They may fear consequences, including that assistance could be withdrawn if they appear ungrateful. We need to sensitize communities to their right to provide feedback, and build their confidence by clearly explaining the system and what will happen to feedback that's received. Once community members have used the system, and had their feedback responded to, they will feel empowered and talk positively about it to their friends, family and neighbours.

11. Do communities always know the best solution for their needs?

Not always. Hand washing is a good example. Communities may not know about the link between washing hands and preventing an outbreak of disease.

However, we can still bring communities and marginalised groups into discussion about the design of activities to promote hand washing. They'll have the best ideas about what will change attitudes and behaviours of their friends, family and neighbours.

12. What are some other frequently used terms or phrases used to define accountability to communities?

Accountability to Communities is sometimes referred to as the following, especially in emergency/disaster programming:

- Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)
- Communicating with Communities (CWC), and Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC)- these focus more on information provision as aid