

HPG Commissioned Report

# Collective approaches to communication and community engagement in the Central African Republic

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GROUND TRUTH SOLUTIONS



## About the author

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# Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected People
<b>C4D</b>	Communication for Development
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>CEE</b>	communication and community engagement
<b>CCEI</b>	Communication and Community Engagement Initiative
<b>CDAC Network</b>	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network
<b>CRM</b>	customer relationship management
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>ETC Cluster</b>	Emergency Telecommunication Cluster
<b>FGD</b>	focus group discussion
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>ICCG</b>	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of the Red Cross
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>RRM</b>	Rapid Response Mechanism
<b>S4C</b>	Services for Communities
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Agency

<b>STAIT</b>	Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

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# 1 Introduction

There have been increasing calls to improve accountability to affected people across humanitarian action, including through collective approaches to communication and community engagement. Coming out of the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain's workstream 6 – a participation revolution – seeks to integrate meaningful participation in practice. More recently, the sector has started to explore the added value of collective approaches to communication and community engagement (CCE). This aims to ensure more effective accountability that complements traditional agency- or sector-specific accountability efforts (OCHA, 2016).

In January 2017, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in cooperation with the CDAC Secretariat (Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities), launched the Communication and Community Engagement Initiative (CCEI), a global initiative that aims to 'organise a collective service to address the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to communications and community engagement with affected people' (CDAC Network, 2017a: 1). This was the result of years of convening and engagement by the CDAC Secretariat on the possibility of a common

service model, as well as a year-long, sector-wide consultation in 2015–2016, carried out by UNICEF with support from IFRC and OCHA, and guided by a group of core partners.<sup>1</sup>

This report explores the design and implementation of collective approaches to CCE in the Central African Republic (CAR) and examines how these can be implemented in a complex conflict-related humanitarian crisis.<sup>2</sup> As will be outlined below, due to delays in implementation, this report focuses on the design phase of the collective approach and the early phase of implementation. This paper is part of a larger study, commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the CCEI, that aims to identify solutions to address current bottlenecks and challenges to community engagement, as well as develop evidence of the added value and limitations of collective approaches. Through a number of case studies, the study aims to identify good practices that could be replicated in other contexts.

In 2020, an estimated 2.6 million people will need humanitarian aid in CAR (OCHA, 2019a), compared to 2.9 million in 2019 (OCHA, 2018). A recent perception survey revealed that affected people in CAR do not feel the aid they receive satisfies their basic needs or reaches the most vulnerable people, or that affected people's perceptions are taken into account in decisions

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1 Following gaps in the response to Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines and subsequent disasters, during 2013–2015 the CDAC Secretariat convened inter-agency meetings on the possibility of a 'common service' model in support of humanitarian organisations and clusters. This had the dual purpose of collectively providing information to affected people and collecting, aggregating and analysing feedback from communities to influence decision-making processes at strategic and operational levels. In April 2016, UNICEF, IFRC and OCHA in cooperation with CDAC Network co-hosted a workshop in Geneva with more than 40 organisations to define how to collaborate on collective mechanisms and make them operational. In 2017, the CCEI emerged. The Initiative is led by a core group: UNICEF, OCHA, IFRC and CDAC Secretariat with a wider Steering Group composed of other CDAC Members.

2 The study will explore the same questions in the current humanitarian response to the Yemen conflict, in the 2018 Indonesia Sulawesi response, the 2019 Mozambique Cyclone Idai response, and the current Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

on aid (Ground Truth Solutions, 2019).<sup>3</sup> The humanitarian sector has long struggled to ensure accountability to affected people in large-scale crises such as the one in CAR. In 2017, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in CAR committed to ensuring better accountability to affected people through the establishment of collective mechanisms.

## 1.1 Methodology

The focus of this report is on learning from the early stage of setting up a collective approach rather than the implementation phase. It documents how the collective approach to CCE came about, what triggered the start of the process and how different actors perceive the current design. Therefore, the analysis given here relates to the design and early implementation phase.<sup>4</sup>

Implementation of collective mechanisms for communicating and engaging communities was limited at the time of the study and focused on conducting perception surveys rather than implementing common services. Indeed, a working group (Working Group on Accountability to Affected People (AAP)) responsible for designing and supporting the implementation of a collective approach to communication and community engagement in CAR restarted activities in 2019 after a period of inactivity due to a lack of predictable human and financial resources.

The group developed rapid common messages for the wider humanitarian community during the October and November 2019 floods in CAR but has yet to deploy the full plan for services and mechanisms that make up the collective approach to CCE in CAR. An early recommendation from this study is to

continue documenting and reflecting on the implementation of the approach in CAR in the coming months and years in order to continue learning from it.

This report is based on 19 key informant interviews and five focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in CAR and remotely in November and December 2019. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a government representative and staff from a national non-governmental organisation (NGO), international NGOs and United Nations (UN) agencies based in Bangui. Interviewees were senior level managers in their organisations and most participated in humanitarian coordination structures such as clusters, the HCT, the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group and the NGO Forum. Some interviewees were heavily involved in the Working Group on AAP in CAR and directly contributed to the design and implementation of the collective approach to CCE. Other interviewees were less aware of the Working Group and what the collective approach was, but may eventually become stakeholders of the collective approach. These interviewees were intentionally selected to gauge wider understanding and awareness of the collective approach in CAR. The response rate to interview requests limited the number of interviews conducted, leaving notable gaps in the perspectives that could have contributed further to this analysis, such as from donors and more local and national actors.

The FGDs were held in Bangassou with one group of IDPs (20 women and men) living within an IDP site (Petit Seminaire)<sup>5</sup> and with four groups comprising people from host communities and IDPs living outside an IDP site (a total of 21 women and 22 men in separate FGDs). A number of previous studies have

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3 Two perception surveys were conducted in Bangassou (Mbomou) and Paoua (Ouham Pende) with 1,403 face-to-face surveys (786 in Bangassou and 617 in Paoua) with 751 women (54%) and 652 men (46%). Among the population surveyed, there were 112 internally displaced people (IDPs) (8% in official sites and 19% outside of sites), 449 returnees (ex-IDPs) (32%), 297 returnees from abroad (21%) and 273 members of the host community (19%). Three hundred people surveyed considered themselves to be living with a disability (21%) (Ground Truth Solutions., 2019).

4 This study was commissioned with the assumption that the collective approach in CAR would be at a later stage of implementation. It was decided to go ahead with the study in spite of the delays in implementation and focus on learning from the design phase.

5 On the day of the FGDs, activities in the IDP sites forced the consultant to combine the group of women and men so as to allow them to participate in the activities.

collected the perspectives of affected people in CAR on issues relating to humanitarian aid, community engagement and communication, which inform the analysis below (Internews, 2015; ETC Cluster, 2019; Ground Truth Solutions, 2019; Humanity and Inclusion, 2019). As a result, the FGDs were not meant to be exhaustive or representative but instead act as an example of the affected population's perspectives in one location in CAR on the issues tackled in this report. The findings from the FGDs help refresh and provide further evidence to complement existing reports. Participants did not include people living with disabilities, even though the importance of including them was stated in the original methodology for this study. The research team asked community leaders to have people living with disabilities<sup>6</sup> join FGDs during the awareness raising session but this did not lead to their participation in the FGDs. Time and resources limited further engagement with specialised organisations that could have ensured participation of persons living with disabilities. Other challenges included complications in translating some of the terms relating to community engagement into Sango and difficulty in guaranteeing participation in FGDs due to people's competing priorities. Finally, carrying out more extensive FGDs was deemed to be less valuable in light of the limited progress made so far in implementing the collective approach.

## 1.2 Definitions

The accountability discussion at the global level and policy level is filled with different acronyms and unclear terms (see Iacucci, 2019). Furthermore, as outlined in Section 3.1, a number of interviewees lacked clarity on what a collective approach meant. For the purpose of this report, the research team designed the

following wide-ranging definitions and will use them throughout the study:

A collective approach to CCE is a **multi-actor initiative** that encompasses the humanitarian response as a whole, rather than a single individual agency or programme, and focuses on **two-way communication**, providing information about the situation and services to affected communities; gathers information from these communities via feedback, perspectives and inputs; and closes the feedback loop by informing the communities of how their input has been taken into account. The goal of a collective approach to CCE is the increased **accountability to and participation** of affected communities in their own response.

The collective approach refers to the overall approach taken in a crisis, while collective or common mechanisms for CCE refer to the distinct activities/methods implemented (e.g. perception surveys, feedback mechanisms and listening groups). These mechanisms (in other words, activities implemented by a single organisation) are deemed collective when they serve the humanitarian response and/or its coordination as a whole and not just the remit of a single agency. Such mechanisms support an overall collective approach by feeding into collective listening, collective analysis and collective action for reaching improved collective outcomes. Here the collective approach does not mean the aggregation of data from different players using individual mechanisms; instead, it brings together tools for collecting feedback and perceptions, communicating and engaging with communities, as well as aggregating the information collected.<sup>7</sup> CCE mechanisms can

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- 6 The author and research partners hoped to have some representation of people with disabilities in the FGDs and recognise this as a gap in the study. The author also acknowledges that people living with disabilities are not one homogeneous group and that humanitarian action needs to increase its recognition of different types of disabilities including in how accessible CCE mechanisms are.
- 7 This definition can be controversial – some actors in the collective approach to CCE still consider a collective approach to be where individual mechanisms are aggregated to make collective decisions. For instance, where individual agencies' hotlines aggregate their data to inform collective decisions and actions. However, it is argued here that the next step for fulfilling the promises of a collective approach is one where individual approaches are merged to become a single mechanism.

be common to and/or coordinated among multiple actors, but there is no evidence that they automatically lead to collective action or contribute to collective outcomes in the absence of a commitment to a collective approach.

The author recognises that some stakeholders prefer the term ‘communication and community engagement’ to ‘accountability to affected people’, as the former emphasises communication as a critical aspect in humanitarian response rather than focusing solely on feedback and complaint mechanisms. This is recognising that there is a consensus that CCE in all its forms contributes to AAP and that AAP is an outcome of effective CCE as well as other interventions. However, the ultimate aim of more systematic communication and community engagement is greater accountability to affected people, including their participation in decision-making and their ability to access information about aid and communicate back to humanitarian actors. An initial literature review for the wider study revealed that, despite numerous terms referring to accountability to affected people, differences between these terms were in fact minimal. In addition, while the collective approach deployed in CAR comes under the remit of the CCEI, there was a decision to refer to the Working Group as the Working Group on AAP, as AAP is more

widely understood and used in the humanitarian sector. For the purpose of this report AAP<sup>8</sup> is understood as:

The activities that aim to support two-way communication between affected people and aid providers, the communication needs of affected people, feedback mechanisms including closing the feedback loop, and effective participation by affected people in the humanitarian response, including the ability to influence decision-making with the goal to increase accountability to and participation of affected people.

### 1.3 Outline of report

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the collective approach to AAP, highlighting its genesis and current status as well as outlining its objectives, set-up and activities. Chapter 3 identifies key lessons from the design and limited implementation of the collective approach to AAP so far, including some of the challenges of implementation in a context such as CAR. Chapter 4 examines the implications of the findings for the future of collective approaches before concluding.

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8 The definition used by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is: ‘accountability to affected populations is an active commitment by humanitarian actors and organizations to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to and being held to account by the people they seek to assist’ (IASC, no date: 1). The definition proposed in this report is in line with the spirit of this definition, but focuses on an operational definition to clarify what is included in AAP.

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# 2 Collective approaches to AAP in CAR: an overview

## 2.1 The genesis of the collective approach in CAR

The humanitarian crisis in CAR follows years of political instability, including multiple coups, since its independence from France in 1960. In late 2012 and early 2013, intercommunal violence erupted following the uprising of the Seleka, a majority Muslim armed group, which overthrew the government of Francois Bozize in March 2013. The Seleka's systematic targeting of civilians soon led to revenge killings by the anti-Balaka groups, a majority Christian armed group, turning the conflict into a large-scale intercommunal war. In spite of multiple changes of government, elections and a Peace Agreement signed in February 2019, the security situation in CAR remains volatile (ACAPS, 2019b). Intercommunal violence increased in 2018 and attacks by both ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka groups have displaced at least 50,000 people since November 2018 (ACAPS, 2019a). By late 2019, there remained a risk of a revival of religious tensions generating large-scale conflict in the country (ibid.).

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in CAR is challenging for several reasons. Access for humanitarian actors to affected populations and for affected populations to the goods and services they need is hampered by both security and a chronic lack of infrastructure and inadequate road infrastructure. Air bridges (supplying aid

through aeroplanes rather than road transport) are often necessary due to heavy seasonal rainfall and flooding (ACAPS, 2019b). Indeed, natural hazard- and climate change-related disasters, such as the October and November 2019 floods in Bangui, further exacerbate the fragile lives and livelihoods of a population already affected by conflict. In addition, years of underdevelopment drive a wide range of needs. Indeed, CAR was second to last (188/189) on the Human Development Index in 2018 (UNDP, 2018). The scale of needs is high, with every region of CAR affected. According to CAR's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), 2.6 million people (more than half the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020 (OCHA, 2019a), with more than half a million people still internally displaced in July 2019, in addition to more than 300,000 returnees in need of assistance and 7,000 refugees from neighbouring countries (OCHA, 2019b).

It is within this context that a collective approach to CCE – later renamed AAP<sup>9</sup> – was initiated in 2016 by OCHA in CAR, building on experiences of collective approaches in Nepal, Bangladesh, Iraq and the Philippines (see Figure 1). At the end of 2015, a mission from the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) recommended strengthening AAP to improve the quality of the humanitarian response and to facilitate access through better acceptance of humanitarian actors by affected communities (STAIT, 2016). This led to the establishment of the Working Group on AAP in July 2016 in the country.

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9 The author recognises that CCE and AAP are not interchangeable. However, in CAR the decision was made to rename the working group from 'Working Group on CCE' to 'Working Group on AAP'. In line with this development, this report has adopted the language used in CAR.

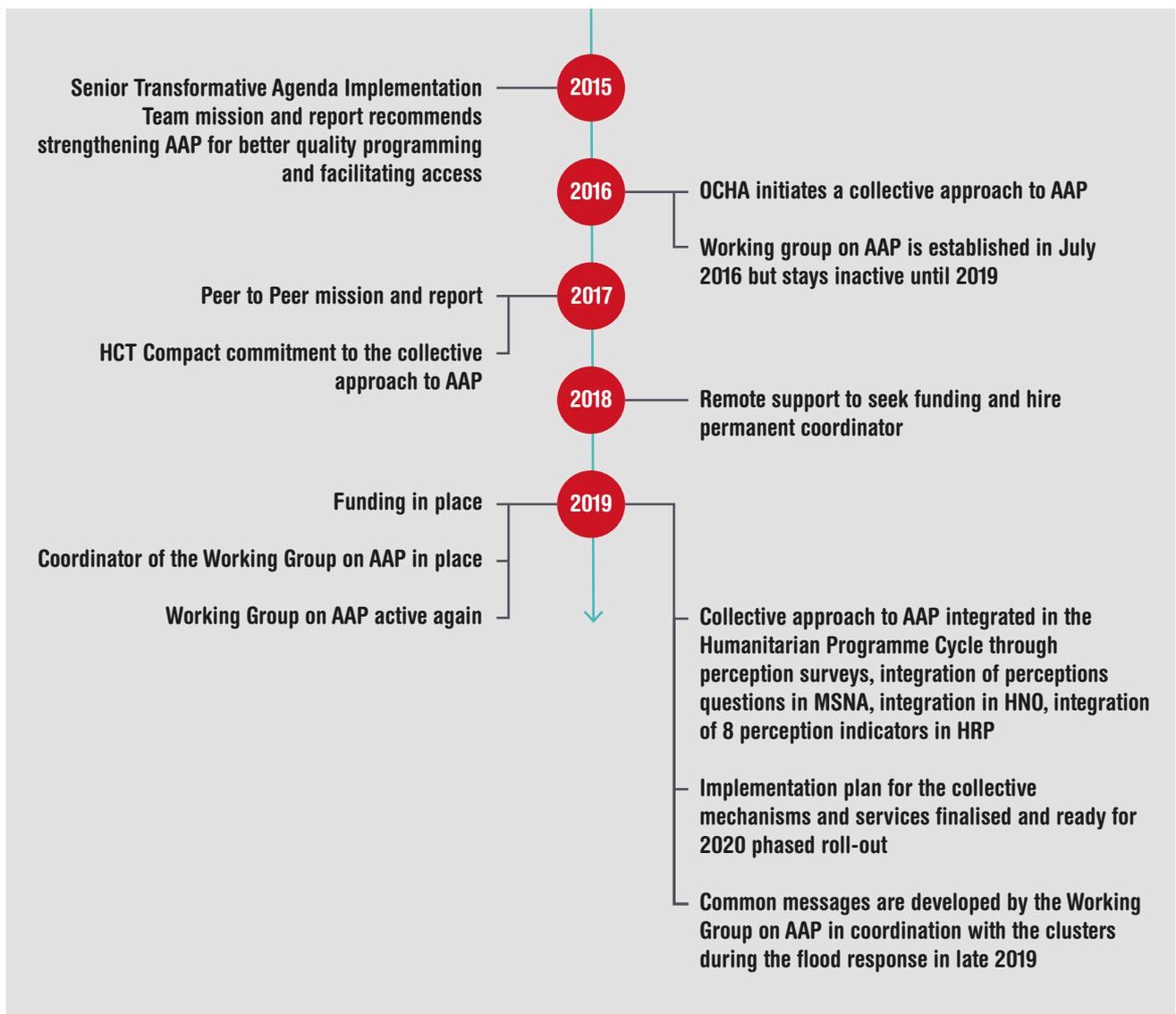
When the Peer-to-Peer mission reviewed the humanitarian response in CAR in October 2017, it referenced a lack of mechanism to ensure better accountability to affected people at a collective level. The conclusions of the mission's report highlighted:

- the negative implications of low-level funding for the quality of humanitarian aid and the low capacity to deliver emergency response;
- the dissatisfaction of the affected population, which negatively affected acceptance of humanitarian actors; and
- the impact this lack of acceptance has on access and security already jeopardised by

general insecurity due to the activities of armed groups (Peer to Peer Support and IASC, 2018).

As part of the Peer-to-Peer mission, the HCT adopted an access strategy that included a strong community engagement and participation component through the implementation of a collective approach to AAP (Peer to Peer Support and IASC, 2018). This commitment was consolidated through the HCT's adoption in October 2017 of a compact with nine priorities, including a commitment to deploy collective mechanisms for accountability to affected people:

**Figure 1: Timeline of the collective approach to AAP in CAR**



Members of the HCT recognize their ultimate accountability is to the people in CAR affected by disasters and crises. HCT members commit to ensuring that affected people are at the centre of any humanitarian response, and that collective mechanisms are in place to ensure that they are able to provide feedback on their own priorities and concerns about humanitarian action, and that these priorities and concerns are considered and addressed in humanitarian action in a meaningful way (HCT, 2017: 3).

Although the Working Group's efforts began in 2016, there were months of inactivity due to challenges recruiting a long-term Working Group coordinator and lack of funding. In 2019 the group made progress in designing and preparing the deployment of collective mechanisms, but implementation remained limited by October and November 2019 (the time of the study). Indeed, the Working Group is active and functioning, and was able to develop rapid common messages for wider humanitarian actors during the October and November 2019 floods, but has

### **Box 1: The eight perception indicators in the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan**

1. Percentage of affected people who think that the aid received covers their most essential needs.
2. Percentage of affected people who perceive that aid comes when they need it.
3. Percentage of affected people who think that assistance reaches those who need it most.
4. Percentage of affected people who think that the aid received allows them to improve their living conditions.
5. Percentage of IDPs who think that the aid received covers their most essential needs.
6. Percentage of affected people who feel safe when they access humanitarian aid.
7. Percentage of affected people who think that humanitarian actors treat them with respect.
8. Percentage of affected people who know how to complain and give feedback.

Source: OCHA (2019a)

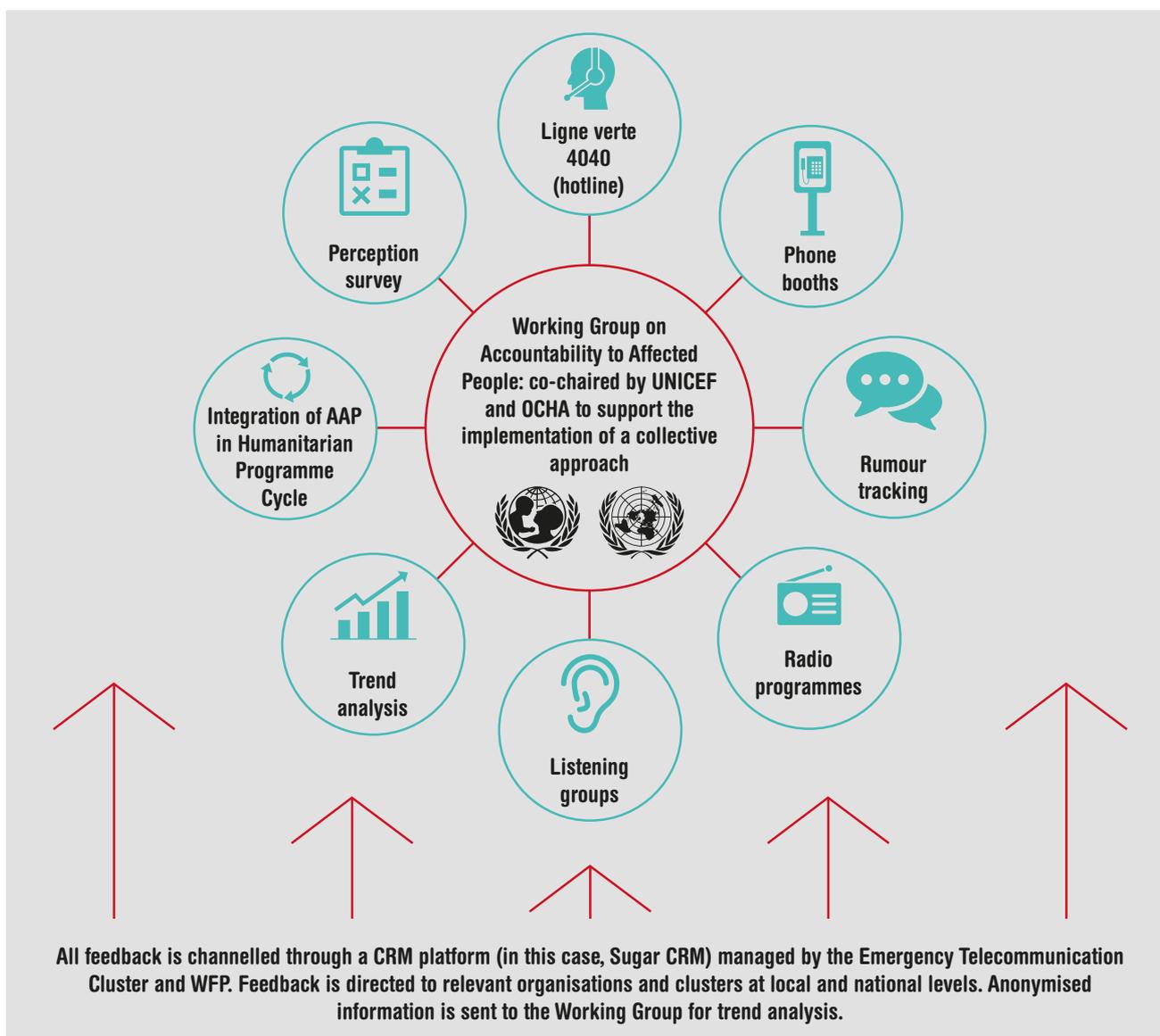
yet to deploy common services and mechanisms in critical areas affected by conflict and internal displacement. Their main activities in 2019 focused on finalising the implementation plan, conducting perception surveys to inform the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the HRP for 2020, introducing perception questions in the multi-sectoral needs assessments as well as successfully developing and integrating eight perception indicators in the HRP (see Box 1).

The Working Group on AAP has finalised plans to build on the activities by Ground Truth Solutions and REACH and start implementing the other mechanisms and services that make up the collective approach. Implementation will begin in 2020 through a phased approach focusing on one location (Bria). To support roll-out of activities, the Working Group on AAP will focus on wider engagement and communication on the collective approach, with the aim of identifying focal points in each organisation and cluster. The phased approach will aim for each phase to provide lessons to inform the next, and to improve implementation as mechanisms are scaled up. Continued tracking of perceptions and analysis of trends from data collected through the collective mechanisms and services will continue to inform the humanitarian response throughout 2020, as well as the activities of the AAP Working Group.

## **2.2 An overview of the collective approach in CAR**

The collective approach to AAP in CAR has two main objectives. First, it aims to 'improve humanitarian response quality and [...] be more accountable to affected people' (no author, 2017: 6). Second, as part of wider objectives of the humanitarian community in CAR beyond AAP, it plans to improve humanitarian access through informing 'acceptance-based access strategies that require a solid and up to date understanding of community perceptions' (ibid.). The collective approach aims to do this by ensuring information returns (via feedback loop) to humanitarian actors to adapt the humanitarian response and programming (see Figure 2; Working Group AA, 2019).

**Figure 2: The collective approach in CAR**

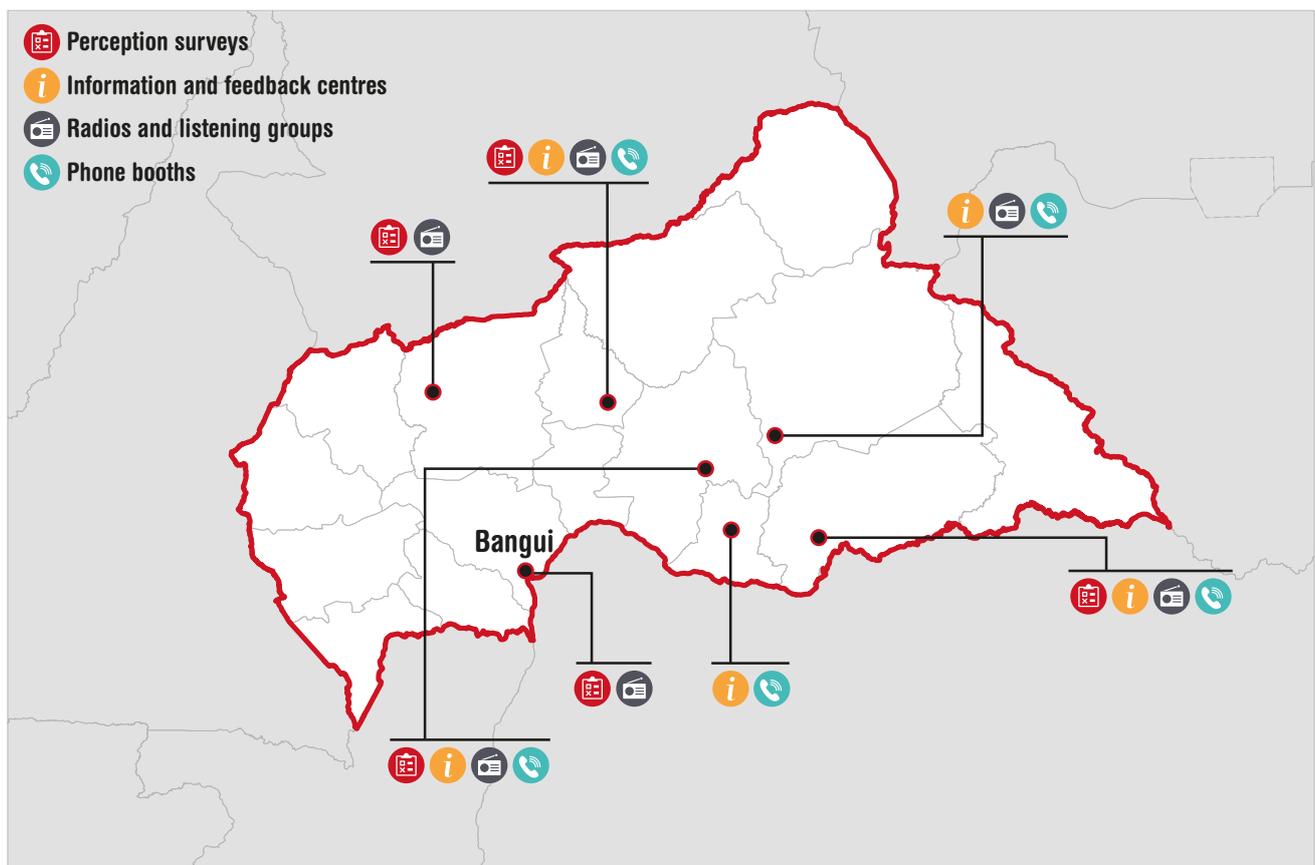


The collective approach in CAR is based on the HCT Compact outlined above, which provides high-level, strategic buy-in and a commitment to the collective nature of the approach to AAP. The Working Group on AAP is responsible for implementing the collective approach (see Figure 2) and supported by a full-time coordinator hosted within UNICEF and funded by the UK Department for International Development

(DFID) (initially through the Country-based Pooled Fund) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA),<sup>10</sup> channelled through UNICEF. The Working Group on AAP is co-led by OCHA and UNICEF. It is positioned at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) level and reports to the ICCG. The objective of the Working Group is to implement activities and services that support the adaptation of

<sup>10</sup> The collective approach to AAP is funded in a number of ways. UNICEF manages funding to support the role of the coordinator, while the work of the AAP Working Group and some of the mechanisms are managed directly by DFID and SIDA. Some of this funding comes through the Country-based Pooled Fund and some directly from the donors to UNICEF. In addition, the organisations in charge of implementing collective mechanisms and services as part of the collective approach have also fundraised and provided resources. For instance, the World Food Programme (WFP), as lead of the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC Cluster), has contributed Sugar CRM software that manages information, through funds from headquarters and will fund the implementation of phone booths.

**Figure 3: Deployment of AAP activities as part of the collective approach in CAR**



Note: Data in this map was up to date at the time of writing.  
Source: CAR Working Group on AAP

programmes and responses based on feedback from affected people across a response (Working Group AAP, 2019). These include:

1. Ensuring the implementation and monitoring of collective activities for community engagement and accountability to affected people.
2. Producing regular analysis of feedback and complaints from affected people in order to identify trends on satisfaction levels, priority needs and rumours. This is with the objective to improve and adapt humanitarian interventions and assistance.
3. Advise partners, the ICCG and HCT on actions to be taken in response to feedback, complaints and rumours from affected people.
4. Ensure the inclusion of accountability in the humanitarian programme cycle and humanitarian action including in needs assessments, communication products and monitoring.

In CAR, the collective approach is made up of multiple mechanisms that provide, collect and analyse information from affected people through one single information management system, which should enable systematic response to feedback and complaints, and trend analyses to inform adaptation of the humanitarian response overall (see Figure 2). As a matter of priority, these activities will be implemented in zones where needs are the highest: Bria, Bangassou, Alindao, Bambari, Kagabandoro, Paoua and the third arrondissement of Bangui (see Figure 3).

The full set of activities<sup>11</sup> (Figure 2) to be implemented in CAR under the umbrella of the collective approach to AAP includes:

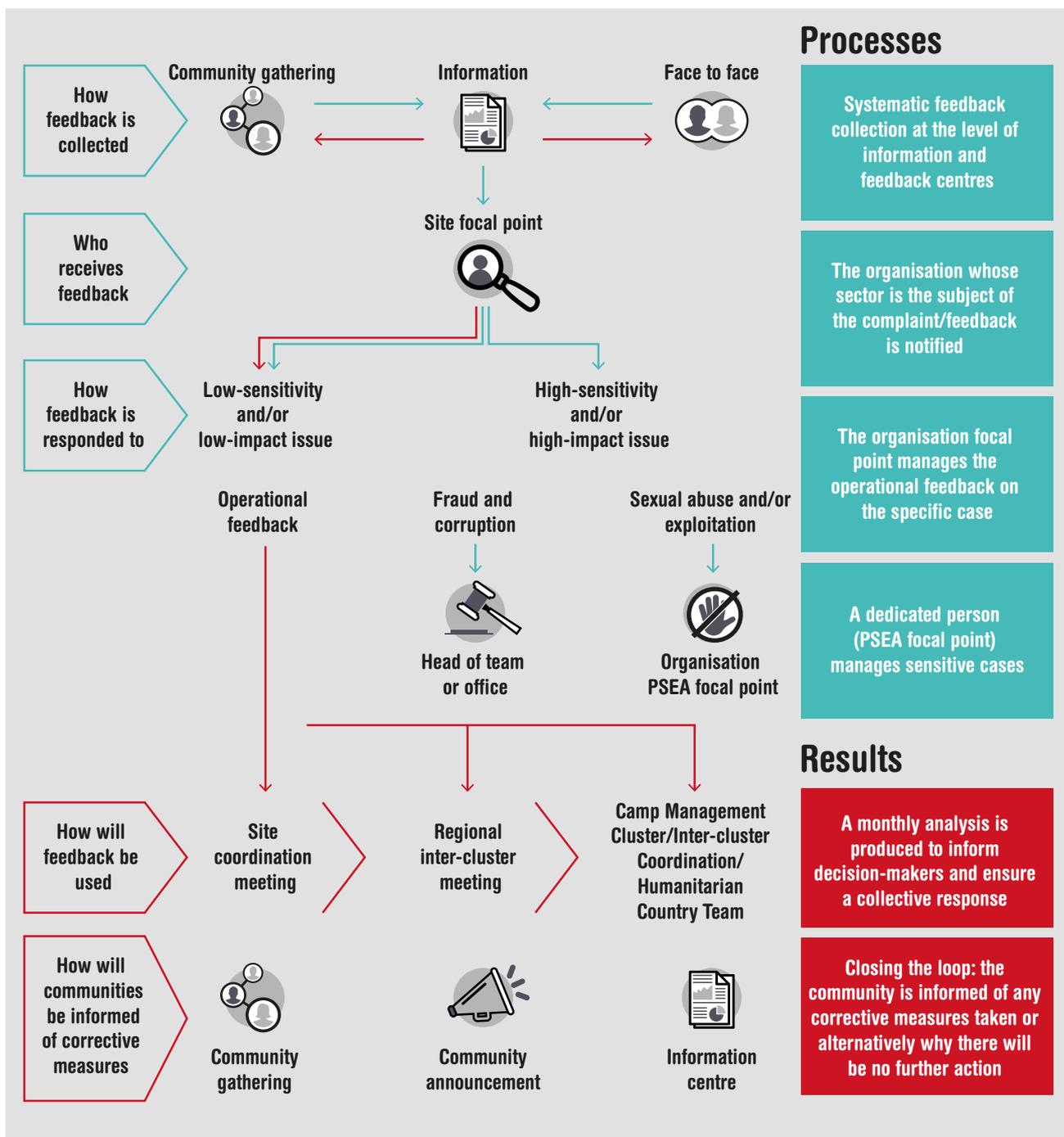
- A customer relationship management (CRM) platform (in this case, Sugar CRM) managed by the ETC Cluster and WFP. All feedback is channelled and directed through this platform to the relevant individual organisations and clusters (at the local and national level) and will feed easily manageable, anonymised (and confidential)<sup>12</sup> information to the AAP Working Group for trend analysis (see Figure 4).
- A ticket system linked to the CRM platform that allows individuals to follow up on their feedback and complaints made through any of the channels outlined below. The system is designed to ensure confidential complaints and feedback.
- Information and feedback centres in priority IDP sites with outreach teams to ensure opportunities for face-to-face engagement, with the aim of providing information and common messages, as well as collecting feedback and complaints such as through engagement of community leaders.
- Expansion of the hotline, Ligne verte 4040, currently managed by the Danish Refugee Council on behalf of the Protection Cluster. This goes beyond its current focus on protection reporting to allow provision of information as well as a channel for feedback and complaints.
- Phone booths deployed by the ETC Cluster to respond to the communication needs of affected people (communicating with family members abroad, for instance) by providing free access to a phone and allow better access to the hotline when needed.
- Rumour tracking and management currently planned to be undertaken by Finn Church Aid.
- Radio programmes, including through mobile radios, to support better information provision. These will also close the feedback loop by using trends in feedback, perception surveys and rumour tracking to inform radio programmes – this is to be implemented by the Réseau des Journalistes des Droits de l’Homme.
- Listening groups to listen to radio programmes and discuss feedback from the programmes.
- Trend analysis conducted by the AAP Working Group based on the information in the CRM platform and the perception surveys from Ground Truth Solutions. These will provide the Humanitarian Coordinator and the HCT with the information they need to adapt the humanitarian response and ensure the ability of affected people to influence decision-making.
- Integration of AAP in the HNO and HRP through including standard AAP questions in the multi-sectoral needs assessments conducted by REACH with the support of Ground Truth Solutions. This integration will also occur through perception surveys conducted by Ground Truth Solutions as part of the humanitarian programme cycle and the development of eight perception indicators in the HRP (see Box 1).
- Continued tracking (through perception surveys) of progress by Ground Truth Solutions towards the eight perception indicators in the HRP; providing humanitarian actors with feedback to improve programming based on the views, perceptions and feedback of aid recipients. Ground Truth Solutions also goes back to communities to conduct community meetings to present and discussion findings as well as collect recommendations on how humanitarian programmes should improve.

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11 The author recognises that this list is ambitious. The need to prioritise these activities in the implementation plan was not raised during the study. Many of these activities are interlinked and build on each other. A number of them are also already ongoing and need to be scaled up or increased in scope to come under the collective approach.

12 A few respondents, in particular those with a protection focus, worried about the issue of data protection and data sharing in the collective approach. It is too early to tell whether the system put in place through the Sugar CRM platform will address these concerns.

Figure 4: The feedback loop in the collective approach to AAP in CAR



Source: adapted from OCHA (2019a)

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# 3 A collective approach to AAP in CAR: lessons from the design and early phases

## 3.1 The value of a collective approach that complements individual approaches

Despite its short lifespan and limited implementation by October and November 2019, the design phase has already led a number of actors to see the added value of a collective approach to AAP. A couple of respondents (aid actors) felt that the main added value of the approach is that it solves a collective problem. This contrasts to individual approaches, which, it was generally agreed, could not inform collective action, strategy and direction. Individual approaches to AAP tend to only focus on the work of one organisation, to be used solely by that organisation and inform that organisation's programming. Collective approaches, on the other hand, are concerned with the whole set of humanitarian programmes in a country, are cross-sectoral and are used by the humanitarian community as a whole to inform the response. In the same way an individual approach cannot inform collective action, a collective approach may not be enough to inform individual action. In this sense, the collective approach to AAP is seen as complementary to individual approaches (rather than working in opposition); that is, its aims and objectives are different as it aims to solve a collective problem and contribute to collective outcomes. As such, a majority of respondents felt that the main added value of the collective approach to AAP, as planned in CAR, was to ensure that the humanitarian community

there was on the same page and able to make strategic decisions at the senior level based on the information collected.

Some respondents mentioned that the value of the collective approach was its cost efficiency. However, it is unclear what this would mean in practice, given the agreement that the collective approach to AAP is a complement to, not a replacement for, individual approaches. Instead, this study argues that the cost efficiency and cost effectiveness of the collective approach is in its ability to have a wide range of mechanisms and services in place that feed into one information system. Where individual approaches to AAP tend to focus on one form of communication or one channel for interaction, collective approaches can combine multiple mechanisms, allowing a more holistic approach to AAP. A collective approach is potentially more inclusive of all people affected by crisis as it offers ways around access issues, for instance for persons living with physical disability or those unable to access a mobile phone to call a hotline, while reducing the burden on communities. The different mechanisms that will be implemented in CAR also involve a range of passive and pro-active communication with affected communities, therefore potentially ensuring better levels of participation from affected people and a more systematic reach.

Respondents also recognised the value of having an approach that is multi-sectoral, as opposed to mechanisms only focused on one sector, such as protection. A couple of respondents also felt that an additional value of the collective approach to AAP was the independence from

implementing organisations, which could allow more honest feedback from affected people as well as support a collective commitment to accepting negative feedback.

While collective approaches to AAP are seen by respondents as complementary to individual approaches, they highlighted the lack of individual mechanisms for AAP in CAR. As such, respondents viewed the collective approach as acting as a reminder of the need for stronger and more systematic AAP at the individual organisational level. A collective approach should not supplant individual approaches; there needs to be both.

Finally, respondents recognised the link between the collective approach to AAP and overall improvement of the quality of aid. This, in turn, supports better acceptance of humanitarian actors by communities and ultimately better humanitarian access. Indeed, this link is strongly made in CAR as a result of the STAIT mission in 2015 and the Peer-to-Peer mission in 2017, where the mission reports called for greater accountability to address issues with the quality of the response and the significant access challenge met by humanitarians in CAR. In making this connection, humanitarian actors in CAR could provide further evidence of the operational validity of AAP beyond its ethical and moral value. Future monitoring and evaluation should examine this further.

Through the FGDs, affected people noted that a collective approach to AAP has value as long as it is complementary to strong individual approaches. When asked directly to comment on the quality of existing communication and community engagement mechanisms, all the focus groups highlighted that current mechanisms were perceived to be satisfactory in terms of people's ability to attend community meetings, receive information from aid providers (even if delayed and distorted) and enable some communication with aid providers. However, several challenges were raised in response to other questions, in particular:

- current mechanisms rely on community leaders who may or may not regularly attend meetings with humanitarians, leading to some communities not having access to information;

- information can be misinterpreted and distorted when relayed to the community;
- information can be delayed;
- feedback is not always met with action or response;
- the lack of a mechanism that enables community members to directly communicate with humanitarian actors without going through community leaders;
- a lack of complaint mechanisms in place from individual organisations;
- the lack of awareness of existing complaint mechanisms; and
- processes and mechanisms to raise complaints and give feedback should be clarified and simplified.

Only the focus group with IDPs living in IDP sites felt that a common communication and community engagement mechanism for all humanitarian organisations would be a good solution as, in their words, it would allow the IDP community to have a permanent hold on the humanitarian community. For this group, a potentially positive collective mechanism would be to have a channel of communication that was simple and reliable. However, other focus groups disagreed with this. The other four groups (which included IDPs living outside of sites and people from host communities) felt that each organisation should establish its own approach to AAP. According to one group, individual approaches would allow people to understand organisations' mandates and messages more distinctly, and avoid confusion with different programmes. However, all focus groups requested better coordination among organisations in their locality in order to avoid information being distorted or confusing. One focus group felt that coordination among organisations worked very well under the leadership of OCHA. This reiterates the complementary nature of individual and collective approaches to AAP, where common tools and channels should be implemented, but individual organisations need to ensure strong individual engagement with communities.

More generally, the FGDs reiterated the preferences of communities already highlighted in

existing assessments (Internews, 2015; ETC Cluster, 2019; Ground Truth Solutions, 2019; Humanity and Inclusion, 2019; OCHA, 2019a; 2019b):

- the need to diversify sources of information, including through face-to-face meetings;
- the pivotal role of community leaders in providing information and communicating with humanitarian actors. This includes community leaders convening the community and holding meetings, but there is also a need to diversify channels of information – at times communities distrust their leaders;
- the preference for radio as method of communication for some people, highlighting the need to rehabilitate the radio network in Bangassou.

This reiterates the need to have multiple channels for communication and engagement between affected people and humanitarian actors.

Most focus groups felt current mechanisms for AAP were inclusive. The focus group in the IDP site, however, highlighted that older people, those living with disabilities, and minority populations such as the Peuhls were not always effectively included in community meetings and consultation processes and consequently left behind. One focus group felt that without direct communication channels (and the exclusive use of community leaders as a channel), the monopoly on formulating complaints rests with the community leaders, adding that not everyone in the community has the same capacity or courage to make a complaint.

Affected people's perspectives clearly call for more coordination, which a collective approach could provide. This reiterates the necessity for each organisation to have strong AAP practices at the individual level and highlights existing challenges around AAP in the humanitarian response in CAR. Finally, these perspectives reinforce the need to ensure a diversification of channels of communication. Although communication via community leaders and radios is crucial, they also highlight communities' lack of direct communication channels to humanitarian actors. Collective approaches must ensure that the mix of channels they choose make it easy for communities to

communicate and address complaints directly with humanitarian agencies without having to solely rely on their leaders.

## 3.2 Lessons on the design of the collective approach to AAP in CAR

### 3.2.1 A top-down approach informed by ground-up evidence

There is no doubt that the collective approach to AAP in CAR is the result of a rather top-down approach. It has been driven by humanitarian sector-wide reform processes, such as the Transformative Agenda and strengthening humanitarian leadership in crisis response. It was triggered by international missions and assessments that called for stronger AAP through a collective approach. However, while its design was informed by global experiences, a number of on-the-ground participatory assessments have greatly influenced the details of the collective approach to AAP.

Indeed, the work of the AAP Working Group was facilitated by assessments conducted by a variety of actors. These assessments informed the design of the collective approach and decisions on what collective mechanisms and services should be in place. This should increase the effectiveness and inclusivity of the collective approach and mean that it is well adapted to the CAR context (Internews, 2015; ETC Cluster, 2019; Ground Truth Solutions, 2019; Humanity and Inclusion, 2019).

The need to deploy different types of information and communication channels through the collective approach in CAR is the result of the lack of infrastructure in CAR, such as radio, phone and network coverage (see Internews, 2015; ETC Cluster, 2019), but it also reflects best practice (i.e. deploying different types of information and communication channels). Careful consideration was needed as to what different channels should be used in the CAR context. Beyond the perception surveys conducted by Ground Truth Solutions and the answers to the standard AAP questions in the multi-sectoral needs assessment conducted by REACH, three main studies have been critical

in informing what activities to include in the collective approach. First, in 2015 Internews conducted a nationally representative media and information survey, which included the first audience survey of its kind to be conducted in CAR (Internews, 2015). An important finding of this study was that: ‘Less than a third of respondents use mobile phones for exchanging SMS. Only 0.3% consider SMS as their main source of information. Only two thirds of SMS users think that SMS are an adequate solution for providing information’ (Internews, 2015: iii).

Second, as part of its Services for Communities (S4C) work, the ETC Cluster conducted a study that aimed to identify the information that matters most to IDP communities and to understand if and how they access information, the technological means of communication and information available to communities, and challenges to accessing information. One important finding was that ‘women’s access to and interest in listening to the radio was significantly lower than men’s and that women are more likely to rely on receiving news from male members of the community’ (ETC Cluster, 2019: 11). The assessment also points out that, while ‘community leaders are a primary source of information on assistance for affected people, [...] the flow of communication between communities and leaders [is] not always reliable or consistent’ (ETC Cluster, 2019: 8).

Third, in 2019 Humanity and Inclusion conducted an assessment focused on persons living with disabilities to understand the barriers they faced to accessing information and communication with humanitarian actors. The assessment revealed that people with disabilities preferred communication channels were neighbourhood and community leaders (69.4%), followed by organisations for people living with disabilities (39.3%), then humanitarian staff (32.5%) (Humanity and Inclusion, 2019).

However, more work could still be done to understand where communities access information generally. One element not mentioned in existing assessments is the use of places of worship as information points. These were raised by three of the five FGDs as being important places for people to find information. Another element not widely found in existing

assessments is the call by communities to appoint an information and communication focal point in each community or neighbourhood to facilitate two-way communication with the humanitarian community.

### **3.2.2 Trade-offs of a limited Working Group membership**

While technically opened to a wide membership, the Working Group on AAP has had a restricted membership in 2019. There are pros and cons to this approach. On the one hand, the limited membership has enabled a focus on technical conversations around how to design and implement a collective approach to AAP. In doing so, it has built on existing capacities and work already done by both national and international organisations. On the other hand, wider engagement has been limited, which may impact future buy-in for the collective approach. A smaller membership of the Working Group is however the best way forward to ensure the Working Group remains task-oriented, so long as the membership is diverse. Wider engagement can be guaranteed through other means than membership to the Working Group.

Membership of the Working Group is currently open to AAP officers, monitoring and evaluation officers from international, local and national NGOs and UN agencies, as well as similar roles found in government, media associations, youth associations, civil society organisations and in the private sector. Active members have included those organisations most involved in implementing one or more collective services, such as Danish Refugee Council, Finn Church Aid, Ground Truth Solutions, the Réseau des Journalistes des droits de l’Homme (a national NGO) and the ETC Cluster led by WFP. For the purpose of what the Working Group wanted to achieve in 2019, the membership was appropriate since the emphasis was on designing the approach and thus a more technical level of membership was needed.

There is a question as to whether the Working Group should expand its membership moving forward. Given the terms of reference, the Working Group will probably continue to work at a technical level for the duration of its work and thus its membership should

continue to focus on this area. However, as well as convening the technical discussion, the coordinator of the Working Group and the OCHA co-chair have to engage with other parts of the response ecosystem and influence their decisions and actions. This includes the HCT, international and national coordination fora, the government and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which often has a parallel coordination. In that sense, there is a question on whether the Working Group should include more influential members. Perhaps the main issue is to ensure that the group's co-chairs have access to the HCT and others and that all actors in the response understand their role.

While the government has been invited to participate in the Working Group, their general lack of capacity (human and financial resources) has restricted effective participation. Instead, the coordinator has bilaterally informed the government of the collective approach to APP. A more general challenge with the Working Group membership has been linked to the turnover of staff in the CAR humanitarian response and their lack of availability to effectively participate and dedicate time (and resources) to the collective approach, including through being an active member of the working group. This tends to affect national and local organisations most.

### **3.2.3 UNICEF is perceived as adding value in driving the collective approach in CAR**

Generally, humanitarian actors interviewed for this study felt that the role of UNICEF in driving the collective approach to AAP alongside OCHA made sense. In fact, several argued that UNICEF has a comparative advantage in taking on this role and was perceived as the right UN agency to lead the work in CAR. There was consensus (including among NGOs) as to the benefits of having a lead from a UN agency rather than an NGO in the lead: this was due to their relationship with donors and because of the strategic role that UN agencies tend to play in a humanitarian response. UNICEF, in particular, was well positioned due to its experience with CCE through its Communication for Development (C4D) programme. UNICEF has also taken a similar collective role through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) and so is

seen as having the ability to work for the wider humanitarian community. Some respondents felt that, while it made sense in CAR to have UNICEF in the lead, in other contexts other UN agencies might be better placed to take on this role. One respondent proposed that a consortium of organisations might be better placed to organise the day-to-day management and implementation of the collective approach.

### **3.2.4 OCHA's role as co-chair of the Working Group is important to secure the collective approach**

The co-leadership with OCHA was raised only by a few respondents, but was seen as an important element in how leadership of the Working Group on AAP was established. OCHA's co-leadership ensures that the collective approach to AAP is not seen as a UNICEF programme. It is also important in anchoring the collective approach in the wider humanitarian community and in the spirit of humanitarian coordination. When asked about the advantage of OCHA sharing leadership with UNICEF, a number of respondents highlighted the need to have an operational organisation that has the experience, tools and structures to implement programmes and form implementation partnerships. However, OCHA was not perceived as having the right experience and structures to do that. Some respondents felt that in other contexts the government could take the role OCHA plays in CAR, but given the government's limited current capacity this would not be possible in the CAR context.

### **3.2.5 More guidance is needed on UNICEF's internal management for hosting the collective approach**

It remains unclear how the role of the coordinator for the Working Group on AAP and the management of the collective approach should be organised. The coordinator and the collective approach are currently positioned internally in UNICEF within the C4D programme and under the C4D programme manager. In that sense, the collective approach is set up differently from the RRM or the clusters led by UNICEF, such as nutrition or WASH. There were questions regarding the

rationale and the practicalities of this set-up. On the one hand, this set-up was said to work well due to good senior management who understood the independence of the coordinator, including in managing budgets. On the other hand, the set-up felt ad hoc and offered little safeguard if management lacked commitment to its independence from general UNICEF programming. For instance, technically the coordinator of the collective approach does not hold decision-making power for budget allocations; instead this is held by the manager of the C4D programme that hosts the collective.

### **3.2.6 Integrating the Working Group on AAP at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group level**

Respondents generally agreed that the positioning of the Working Group on AAP at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group level was the right way to integrate the collective approach in existing coordination mechanisms. For most respondents, this integration model meant that all clusters were involved in discussing, defining and shaping the collective approach. Some actors mentioned how this integration model allowed rapid response when a new crisis arose, such as during the floods in late 2019. In this case the Working Group on AAP worked quickly with the different clusters to define common messages. Respondents also highlighted that this integration model at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group level ensured a multi-sectorial approach within the collective approach to AAP. Indeed, when asked whether the collective approach should sit within a specific cluster, for instance protection or emergency telecommunication, respondents worried that this would narrow its focus. For example, people would see AAP only as a protection concern, and the approach would not get sufficient buy-in from other clusters. Alternatively, if the collective approach sat in the ETC Cluster, it would not harness the right capacities – this cluster could offer the necessary technological support but perhaps not some of the other programmatic elements of AAP.

Respondents mentioned some challenges raised by this integration model. First, the position of the collective approach at the inter-cluster level requires a strong and

healthy coordination practice in country or its implementation could be derailed. In CAR, therefore, this integration model was considered to work well because of the strong role OCHA has had in the country in recent years and a good coordination practice generally. Second, some respondents raised the issue that NGOs (in particular national, local and community-based organisations (CBOs)) are not always present at the inter-cluster level. Instead, UN agencies who lead clusters tend to be present at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group. This could result in low buy-in by the wider humanitarian NGO community. Similarly, international NGO coordination (the Committee de Coordination des ONGs Internationales (CCO) in CAR), national NGO coordination and government were not among the membership of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group. Third, some respondents felt that AAP was not given the right visibility through this integration model and wanted to raise the profile of AAP further and at a more senior level. It was unclear how these respondents would integrate AAP differently in the coordination structure but they argued that AAP should link more directly to the Humanitarian Coordinator and the HCT where strategic decisions are taken. Finally, there was a worry that the visibility of AAP in the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group was overshadowed by a crowded agenda.

### **3.2.7 Effective integration of the collective approach to AAP in the assessment phase of the humanitarian programme cycle**

The integration of the collective approach to AAP in the humanitarian programme cycle has already proved to be effective in the assessment phase of the cycle. Indeed, the close cooperation between the Assessment Working Group and the Working Group on AAP was effective in integrating AAP analysis and providing perception findings for the HNO, as well as developing the eight perception indicators in the HRP in cooperation with Ground Truth Solutions. With full implementation still to come, the critical element will be how the collective approach is integrated into the other phases of the humanitarian programme cycle, particularly in adapting the response according to trend

analysis and informing strategic decisions for the humanitarian response.

### **3.2.8 The critical, but not always effective, role of the senior humanitarian leadership**

The senior humanitarian leadership (the Humanitarian Coordinator and other members of the HCT) is critical in ensuring that the collective approach to AAP leads to collective action and improved outcomes for affected people. However, so far it has not always been effective in supporting wider buy-in and raising awareness on the importance of the collective approach to AAP in CAR.

Almost every respondent highlighted the critical and essential role that the Humanitarian Coordinator must play in supporting the collective approach to AAP. Respondents argued that the Humanitarian Coordinator's role was pivotal as they are the custodian of the humanitarian community in the country and provide the strategic direction of the humanitarian response. The Humanitarian Coordinator's engagement also ensures buy-in from heads of UN agencies and NGOs. The standard terms of reference for HCTs include clear language on the senior humanitarian leadership's role and responsibilities regarding accountability: 'The HC and HCT are ultimately accountable to the people in need' (IASC, 2017: 4). While the HCT and Humanitarian Coordinator have some flexibility in the priorities they set out in their Annual Compact, the standard terms of reference for HCTs outline four mandatory responsibilities, of which a collective approach to AAP is one; this states the aim of 'ensuring feedback to and adjusting the response based on the views of affected people' (IASC, 2017: 4). The commitment to the collective approach to AAP in the HCT Compact in CAR was cited by a number of respondents as a critical, if not essential, step to support the implementation of the collective approach.

According to respondents, the HCT's role is to ensure that the collective approach commitment trickles down through their organisation and to turn the commitment into implementation.

However, the study found that this is where perhaps there had been a lack of commitment from some heads of UN agencies and other representatives of NGO coordinations.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, some respondents felt that the discussion on the collective approach to AAP occurred at the HCT level but few senior leaders had ensured that the information was communicated within their organisation or coordination structures.

## **3.3 Support and capacity needed to implement collective approaches to AAP**

### **3.3.1 High-level commitment and buy-in within the humanitarian response is critical to implement the collective approach**

The study found a number of elements that were either necessary or greatly facilitated the collective approach to AAP. The most important elements raised by respondents were the HCT Compact and the HCT's commitment to AAP through the implementation of a collective approach (driven by the Humanitarian Coordinator). Without this commitment, many respondents felt it would be difficult to implement a truly collective approach. Another element necessary for deploying the collective approach is to have a full-time coordinator in place with clear terms of reference and a long-term contract to avoid turnover. Without this dedicated capacity for the collective approach to AAP, as we have seen in the past in CAR, the approach will not progress.

### **3.3.2 The collective approach needs the right organisations, capacity and groundwork to support its design and implementation**

Another important element was the presence of certain organisations and the availability of certain capacities. Having a UNICEF country office with a strong focus on C4D facilitated their role in hosting the approach as well as giving legitimacy and credibility to the approach through having this comparative advantage

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<sup>13</sup> In CAR, the NGO Forum is mainly dedicated to the coordination of international NGOs and other coordination structures exist that aim to coordinate the work of national and local NGOs.

in country. Similarly, the role of WFP and its leadership of the ETC Cluster was central to deploying the information management system Sugar CRM. Through the work of InterNews over the years, local organisations working on media and communication play a significant role in accountability in the collective approach. Organisations such as Ground Truth Solutions that are specialised in systematically collecting feedback from aid recipients are critical in ensuring that feedback data is available to humanitarian actors to adjust programming based on the views of affected people. The data from and presence of Ground Truth Solutions ensured the development and inclusion of perception indicators in the 2020 HRP. Ensuring that the collective approach to AAP is inclusive of all people, including those living with disabilities or older people, requires the presence of inclusion organisations. One such organisation, Humanity and Inclusion, has played an important role so far in highlighting the specific needs and capacities of people living with disability. However, several other actors are missing, such as HelpAge. It is unclear how to ensure that such organisations can play a role in collective approaches to AAP even if they are not present in the country.

### **3.3.3 The collective approach needs strong coordination, including through OCHA**

Strong coordination and a strong OCHA office are also needed to support the collective approach to AAP. The Peer to Peer mission report highlights that coordination structures are in place both at the national and subnational level and that coordination is improving during sudden onset crises. Coordination among the AAP Working Group is reactive and there is good coordination among international INGOs with national NGOs represented at the HCT (Peer to Peer Support and IASC, 2018). Without wider coordination in place and working, the implementation of a collective approach would be greatly hampered and perhaps the

integration into the coordination system would need to be rethought.

## **3.4 Challenges surrounding the collective approach to AAP in CAR**

### **3.4.1 Designing and implementing the collective approach to AAP takes time**

The first and main challenge linked specifically to the collective approach to AAP is the time it has taken in CAR to design and implement. This is due to the collective nature of the approach, which requires spending a lot of time on consultation, getting buy-in from different stakeholders and communicating back to different coordination structures (for example the HCT, NGO Forum and individual clusters). Ensuring collective and individual buy-in is perhaps the biggest challenge in terms of time. In CAR, the implementation of the collective approach to AAP was also greatly slowed down by the time taken to recruit a permanent Working Group coordinator, demonstrating the lack of dedicated resources at the global level to manage surge capacity. There is also a lack of existing capacity or pool of coordinators that can easily be deployed when a collective approach has enough buy-in.

### **3.4.2 The general lack of awareness of the collective approach to AAP undermines its implementation and could jeopardise buy-in<sup>14</sup>**

The second and quite significant challenge is the general lack of awareness and understanding of what a collective approach to AAP entails. The terms ‘collective’ and ‘communication and community engagement’ are not well known, which led the Working Group to change its name to the more well-known and widely used ‘accountability to affected people’. There is currently no global guidance for those not directly involved in designing and setting up the collective approach to AAP. Heads of NGOs, in

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14 Here buy-in refers to the commitment of humanitarian actors to the collective approach rather than to accountability more generally.

particular, were very unaware of this approach and what it could entail.

Generally, the study found that those actors not directly involved in the Working Group on AAP had a very limited understanding of what a collective approach to AAP was, which could jeopardise wider buy-in and thus implementation. As one respondent said, the interview was the first time they had heard of the idea of a collective approach to AAP. Several respondents directly involved in the Working Group recognised that the concept of a collective approach was not yet well known in CAR and hoped that the implementation will support a better understanding of what a collective approach would be. However, limited understanding of what the approach involves could undermine buy-in from the wider humanitarian community, which is crucial to ensure the collective nature of the approach and the participation of most (if not all) stakeholders. Wider buy-in is also crucial as the success of the collective approach and collective accountability depends on the engagement of individual agencies in taking into account information and feedback collected through the collective approach to inform agency-specific action.

The limited understanding has led to varying definitions of what a collective approach is. Among those actors least involved in designing the collective approach to AAP in CAR, most described it as an approach inclusive of communities and supported from the ground up, reiterating that this was their understanding rather than an informed position. For these actors, a collective approach to AAP should not only be informed but requested by communities rather than coming from the top down (request and commitment coming from the HCT rather than communities). This understanding in some ways contradicts the way the collective approach to AAP has been put in place in CAR, with a very strong commitment from the top of the humanitarian hierarchy, although the approach is informed by multiple on-the-ground assessments.

Among those more involved in the collective approach, a consensus existed in terms of understanding and definition of the collective

approach to AAP. There was no evidence in CAR that the lack of clear definition and consistent terminology (CDAC Network, 2017a) was an operational obstacle. The challenge appeared to be the lack of awareness more generally of the collective approach in CAR. Communicating with the wider humanitarian community in CAR on the collective approach to AAP is and needs to be a priority for the Working Group in 2020.

### **3.4.3 Lack of predictable, long-term, fit-for-purpose funding**

There are three main challenges to funding the collective approach in CAR. First, there is currently a lack of visibility on longer-term funding. Multi-year funding is essential to ensure support from the design phase through to implementation, but it is also important to ensure that funding is available throughout the lifetime of the response so that affected people can have confidence in the approach. Second, there is a lack of guidance on how conflict of interests between funding an individual versus a collective approach should be managed effectively within UNICEF, particularly in ways that safeguard funding for the collective approach. This conflict is one that exists within UNICEF as currently funding is channelled and managed the same way for UNICEF's own C4D programme and UNICEF support to the collective approach to AAP. Third, although multiple sources of funding provide the opportunity for more funds they also risk undermining the collective nature of the approach, a concern raised by a number of respondents. This is because when one donor directly funds one of the organisations implementing collective mechanisms and services, it could mean that organisation follows the demands of the donor rather than the strategic plan established through the collective approach. In that sense, some respondents called for a collective funding solution in order to safeguard the collective nature of the approach to AAP. Indeed, the approach currently relies on very traditional funding, raising the question of whether a more innovative funding mechanism would be more beneficial. However, it was unclear what a collective funding solution could be beyond Country-based Pooled Funds.

Indeed, in some ways, channelling funds through Country-Based Pooled Funds was seen as a way to anchor the collective nature of the approach. However, some respondents felt that such funds did not allow enough flexibility. Respondents argued that each organisation involved in a response should contribute some funding to the collective approach to AAP. However, it is unclear how this will work in practice and whether such a funding arrangement would deter organisations from having wider buy-in. One respondent proposed using a consortium system to fund the collective approach. This could potentially unite the collective nature of the Pooled Fund mechanism with the flexibility required. Some respondents felt that UNICEF could fundraise through their funding mechanisms (the annual humanitarian appeal) to mitigate these challenges.

The study was limited in its ability to better understand the cost drivers for collective approaches as only one organisation gave clear costing for the mechanisms they were implementing. The cost drivers identified in the study included costs associated with:

- establishing and maintaining a collective approach, compiling analysis and ensuring action and follow ups, coordination between the Working Group and the ICCG, the HCT and the clusters, as well as quick response in new crises;
- the implementation of collective mechanisms and services;
- the coordination time in terms of staff and focal points in each organisation.

The development of the Sugar CRM platform, for instance, was difficult to cost, but it mainly involved the time spent developing a contextualised platform for CAR. However, as the implementation of the collective approach progresses, each organisation will require an individual licence to use the platform, which will have a fixed cost per organisation. Another example from the interviews was the expansion of the Ligne Verte 4040 to other sectors beyond protection. The current cost of the Ligne Verte is relatively modest at \$300,000 per year and the expansion to other sectors as part of the collective approach was not expected to raise the cost of running the hotline much higher.

### 3.4.4 Challenges exist to implementing a collective approach to AAP in a complex crisis such as in CAR

There are a number of challenges and implications for the collective approach on AAP that are directly linked to the context in CAR and more specifically this type of crisis (conflict rather than natural hazard-related disasters). First, challenges of access and security mean that communicating and engaging with communities systematically is more difficult as presence within and access to communities is not always guaranteed for humanitarian actors.

Second, the lack of communication infrastructure means that use of mobile phones as a solution to the lack of access is not a feasible way to reach those most affected by a crisis. As an assessment from the ETC Cluster highlights:

Protracted and complex crises present a challenging context to identify and respond to the information and communication needs of a population. Those who are displaced across borders or who have been displaced multiple times have little or no resources to contact family members still in CAR. A lack of access to information and communication is often linked with poverty and illiteracy (ETC Cluster, 2019: 4).

Radio coverage has been greatly hampered by the conflict as radios have been pillaged by armed groups; because of this, radio is perceived as being insecure by humanitarian organisations. CAR's lack of infrastructure also links to the chronic levels of underdevelopment in the country generally, which has greatly affected literacy levels among affected populations. Low literacy and language skills in both French (and for parts of the population in the national language Sango) add another layer of complexity for deploying a collective approach to AAP. According to a recent assessment by the ETC Cluster, only 20% of the population understands a little or some French and, while Sango is the most widely used language, multiple languages are spoken, particularly in rural areas (ETC Cluster, 2019). One respondent raised the issue of language and highlighted that, even where Sango is spoken

by affected people, their level of understanding may not allow them to communicate effectively on complex issues such as humanitarian aid.

Third, a number of respondents highlighted how continuous emergencies distract away from longer-term work, such as the implementation of the collective approach to AAP. They felt that the lack of progress was partly due to the lack of a full-time coordinator in previous years but also recognised that emergencies such as the floods in late 2019 make it difficult to get the right attention and space within coordination systems and in individual organisations to make progress towards implementation. There seems to be a constant trade-off between the necessity to implement the collective approach to AAP for better quality humanitarian response and the need to dedicate all humanitarian capacities to rapid response when an emergency arises. One respondent argued that in CAR there is a permanent state of emergency within the protracted crisis.

Fourth, the lack of progress on the collective approach was felt to be linked to the constant and high turnover of humanitarian staff in CAR. Indeed, one issue in the response generally has

been the short-term deployment of staff. Given the necessity of ensuring buy-in for the collective approach to AAP to work, high turnover of senior humanitarian managers means that it is hard to guarantee the commitment of individual organisations. The collective approach does not only need time, it arguably needs time with the same people with the right expertise. This combination is hard to get in CAR. The collective approach requires time to build consensus and therefore needs stability in terms of human resources as it relies on trust and ways of working that are facilitated by having the same key individuals working together, including the working group coordinator. And indeed, the Peer to Peer mission report noted that high turnover of staff and short-term deployment meant many initiatives are either interrupted or forgotten (Peer to Peer Support and IASC, 2018). High turnover at the programme level means that there are gaps in capacities to support the Working Group. A number of people interviewed mentioned that their organisations had been more active in the AAP Working Group in the past, but since the departure of certain staff, their organisation has been unable to join.

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# 4 Conclusion

The experience so far of the collective approach to APP in CAR clearly demonstrates that more needs to be done at the global level in terms of disseminating existing guidance and awareness materials, such as the CDAC handbook on coordinating collective approaches and trainings (CDAC, 2019). This should be done at three levels. First, more guidance should be disseminated to the wider humanitarian community at the global level (Humanitarian Coordinators, Global Clusters, individual UN agencies and NGOs, including through networks such as the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and InterAction). This would raise awareness of collective approaches to AAP, the CCEI and the support they can offer to country-level deployment, lessons from past experience and existing practices, and existing commitments to deploy collective approaches to AAP. This includes, for instance, rolling out new senior-level training modules, which could be further integrated in corporate trainings for Country Directors within individual organisations. There needs to be more investment in getting global-level buy-in through systematic engagement on the collective approach to AAP. This would be helped by continuing to document country-level practices, including in CAR, and disseminating these examples more widely.

Second, there needs to be more dissemination of information to country-level actors involved in collective approaches, including Humanitarian Coordinators, cluster leads, NGO coordinators, and coordinators of the collective approach.<sup>15</sup> This must include disseminating existing Standard Operation Procedures (to be adapted to country context and to be reviewed as

new learning emerges), terms of reference for different roles and responsibilities, terms of reference for working groups and guidelines for fundraising.<sup>16</sup> Such guidance, of course, needs to maintain flexibility and provide different options and examples so that it can adapt to the specific context and set-up of the response.

Finally, guidance is needed for the agency that takes a lead in driving the collective approach, for example UNICEF. This should include information on how best to manage hosting the collective approach in terms of reporting lines, budget responsibility, standard operation procedures for decision-making and fundraising guidelines. The global level CCEI does not directly support the design and implementation of the country-level collective approach. Support instead comes from individual member organisations – namely UNICEF in the case of CAR – rather than a global body that provides guidance based on experiences in other contexts so far. In that sense, the Working Group does not have a support structure like the one national clusters have through their counterpart Global Cluster teams. Such support is more challenging because the organisation hosting and leading the collective approach differs in each context and global-level support through the CCEI may not always be in tune with a specific organisational set-up.

The CCEI also needs to further think through the funding challenge for collective approaches. This requires more thinking on how best to fundraise, how best to channel money (e.g. via Country-based Pooled Funds, through a UN agency or via a consortium) and how best to manage funding in ways that support the collective nature of the approach. Current

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15 The author acknowledges that some of this work is ongoing as part of the IASC Results 2, who lead on AAP.

16 The author acknowledges that different organisations involved in the CCEI are working to develop some of these documents and guidelines.

approaches in CAR seem to rely heavily on the ability of UNICEF to single-handedly fundraise for the collective approach to AAP. This may not be sustainable enough to guarantee the collective nature of the approach.

A major bottleneck that slowed down the implementation of the collective approach in CAR was the challenge of finding a Working Group coordinator. Increasing the pool of surge and permanent staff that can manage the collective approach to AAP is therefore critical for the future of the approach and the study understands this is in progress. Dedicated funding and resources should be prioritised towards developing this capacity at the global level, which can be done through training AAP advisors in the collective approach with the support of good practices, learning through past lessons (e.g. terms of reference and standard operating procedures) as highlighted above.

Without this high-level commitment, whether from the HCT or the government leading the response, a collective approach to AAP is unlikely to succeed. Recognising the value of ground-up approaches to CCE, the collective nature of the approach requires a strong commitment from decision-makers and those that can influence the direction of the humanitarian response. The commitment made in CAR through the Compact appeared essential to the ability of the Working Group and the coordinator to make progress. Without it, there is a risk that a lot of time and resources are dedicated to implementing common mechanisms and services that are not in fact collective because they do not link to collective decisions and collective outcomes.

From the point of view of affected populations in CAR, there seems to be agreement that coordination to harmonise communication and engagement channels is needed to guarantee a simple and trustworthy flow of information to and from communities. However, community views also highlight the

importance of complementing coordinated AAP efforts with agency-specific channels to avoid confusion between agencies' mandates. Equally, affected communities prefer a variety of communication channels. Face-to-face communication is something they particularly identify as lacking in current AAP channels.

Moving forward, the collective approach to AAP could be further facilitated by:

- Continuing to identify lessons from the implementation of the collective approach to AAP in CAR and disseminate these lessons widely at national and global levels, including for instance conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the collective approach to AAP.
- Reviewing the implementation of the collective approach to AAP in CAR after the full deployment of the collective mechanisms and services to adapt the approach based on lessons, including reviewing the eight perception indicators in the HRP.
- Updating and disseminating guidance and awareness materials to the wider humanitarian community at the global level, country level and within the lead agency hosting the approach, in particular UNICEF.
- Invest in getting global-level buy-in through systematic engagement of key stakeholders on the collective approach to AAP, particularly among Humanitarian Coordinators and potential members of HCTs.
- Invest in training more coordinators for the collective approach to AAP to ensure a pool of candidates is available for surge as well as more permanent capacity.
- Investigate further how collective approaches to AAP should be funded to guarantee the collective nature of the approach as well as ensure stability throughout a response.
- Ensure greater complementarity and coherence between the global-level members of the CCEI and the country-level coordination of the Working Group on AAP.

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