

Learning Resources

Enabling Poor People to Shape Their Future

IR's Accountability Framework



الإغاثة الإسلامية
Secours Islamique

Islamic Relief is dedicated to alleviating the poverty and suffering of the world's poorest people.

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Part

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1.4 IR Accountability Framework

1.4 IR Accountability Framework

Enabling Poor People to Shape Their Future

Islamic Relief's Accountability Framework

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Introduction

Introduction

Islamic Relief has a strongly held vision and mission – based on Islamic values and the humanitarian imperative – that guides our work and approach. This has led the organisation to develop and accept a code of conduct that guides our staff in delivering the highest quality services to the most needy and destitute communities in the world. We firmly place the needs and rights of the poorest at the heart of our planning and strategising.

But how do we assess the quality and appropriateness of our activities? How do we ensure that our clients; the poorest and most vulnerable, are empowered to access, influence and critically assess the service we provide? How do we know that our work is driven by the needs of poor people and not influenced by competing interests of other stakeholders?

Do communities really know who Islamic Relief is? Do our beneficiaries understand our mandate and what standards and services we are obliged to provide and to whom? Are we transparent to both beneficiaries and donors about the way we utilise resources and the results we achieve?

This manual sets out to introduce, explain and advise on how best Islamic Relief can answer some of the above questions. It sets in place an Accountability Framework in which we can all strive to improve the quality of our work in the eyes of our beneficiaries and the rest of the world.

Explaining Accountability

Explaining Accountability

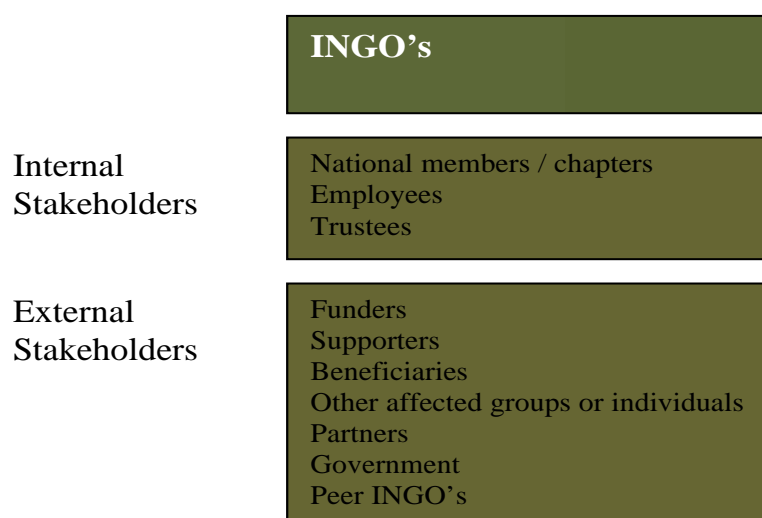
Accountability has been described in a variety of ways by various different authors and organisations. We will first review some of these perspectives and then define what accountability means for Islamic Relief.

The following are some examples of the way accountability has been summarised:

- 'The principle that individuals, organisations and the community are responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others' (University of Warwick, UK)
- 'The obligation to demonstrate and take responsibility for performance in light of agreed expectations ... Responsibility is the obligation to act; accountability is the obligation to answer for action' (Government of Canada)
- 'The process through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment' (One World Trust, UK)
- 'Accountability is the means by which power is used responsibly. Humanitarian accountability involves taking account of, and accounting to disaster survivors' (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, Geneva)
- '...defined as being made up of three components: Transparency, i.e. to account to ones stakeholders; Responsiveness, i.e. to respond to stakeholder concerns; and Compliance, i.e. to act in accordance with standards to which an organisation is voluntary committed, as well as rules and regulations that it is legally bound to comply with (Accountability)

As an overview these definitions, combined with our own values, allow us to formulate an understanding of accountability specific to Islamic Relief. However, we also need to define who we are accountable to.

The One World Trust highlights there are a large number of common stakeholders related to International NGO's, as shown below:



GAP Framework, One World Trust

Are we accountable to all these stakeholders? In many ways, yes we are. However, each stakeholder requires a different level and type of accountability – we must prioritise.

Why be Accountable?

Why be accountable?

In the introduction we highlighted that the users of our services in the field need to remain the principal focus of our accountability, since donors have passed onto us this burden of responsibility as professional aid workers. Red Cross code Principal 9 states that

'We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources'

Islamic Relief views direct and indirect beneficiaries, as well as the communities they live in as the 'true owners' of our aid work. Indeed, a recent British Overseas NGO's for Development (BOND) research project concluded that

'The quality of an NGO's work is primarily determined by the quality of its relationships with its intended beneficiaries'.

In order to create that quality relationship with our beneficiaries and to be responsible for the burden given to us by donors, we must start by increasing our accountability to them.

Accountability to our beneficiaries is not only core to Islamic Relief's vision, mission and beliefs, being held to account is key to our improvement, learning and quality as an organisation.

Commitment

Commitment

Accountability is an increasingly popular subject in International Development and Humanitarian organisations. Much has been written about how INGO's can become more accountable as an industry; critics have highlighted that accountability alone will not redress some of the poor work that has gone on in the past. However, one thing agencies agree about is that for quality in development and aid work to increase, organisations must be fully committed and place quality at the forefront of institutional thinking. Commitment must extend from the trustees throughout the organisation, to the field-based implementation teams who deliver our services.

Commitment is manifested in the way that accountability is embedded in the organisation and how responsive the organisation is to reflect stakeholder concerns. In real terms, if an organisation is unprepared to adjust policies and procedures in light of user feedback, it is neither committed nor accountable. This document and the work that supports it lay out the structure and methods of how Islamic Relief is attempting to prove its commitment on accountability to both beneficiaries and the people and agencies that support our work.

Therefore, Islamic Relief defines accountability as:

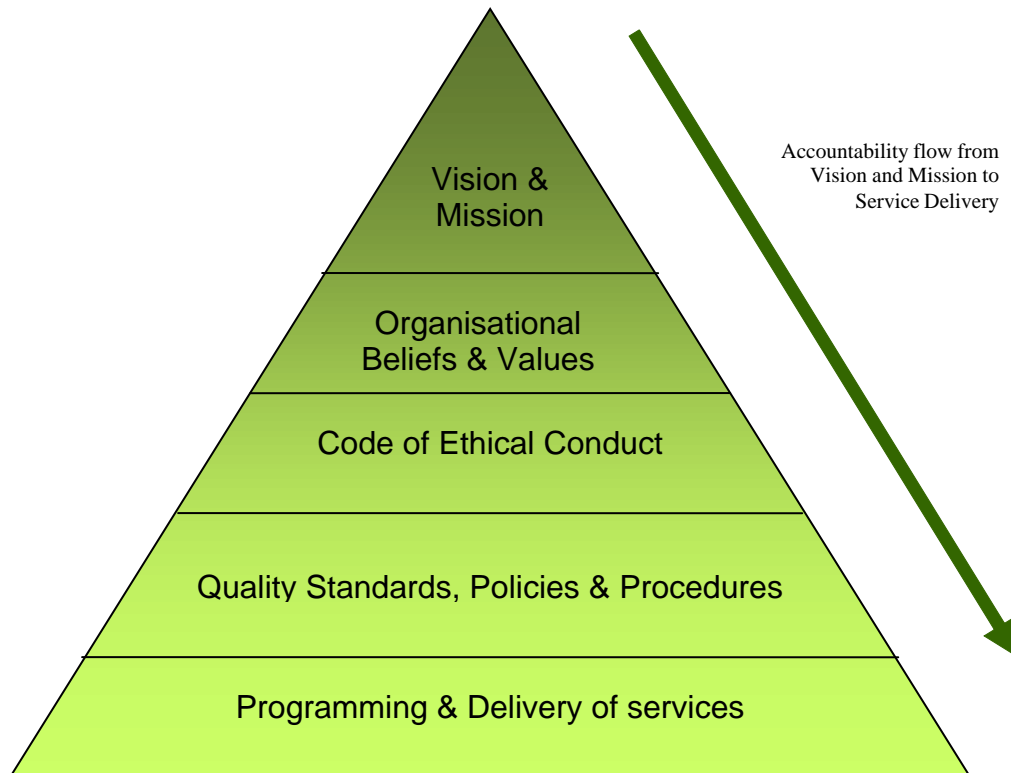
‘The transparency to, and participation of, our beneficiaries in our projects and programmes, enabling them to understand their entitlements, contribute to the design, management, and evaluation of our work; make complaints, provide feedback and receive responses from trained and committed staff’

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

The following section highlights how ‘accountability’ is represented in Islamic Relief’s beliefs and value system. It will also demonstrate how being accountable requires a combination of efforts rather than one particular methodology.

The diagram below shows how various levels of the organisations value system link together to ensure that they are manifested in our programme work



Islamic Relief's Vision, Mission, Beliefs and Values and Codes of Conduct can be found in various internal and external documents including the Islamic Relief website and Islamic Relief Handbook.

For Islamic Relief to be considered accountable to our stakeholders, we clearly must guarantee that compliance to these values form the basis of our measurement of success and quality. To do this, we must ensure that our stakeholders are aware of the benchmarks we set ourselves and can aid us in delivering these commitments in the most appropriate way. They need to be aware that we analyse ourselves against these standards, that they are able to provide criticism, feedback and raise concerns, and should appreciate that our staff embody these values.

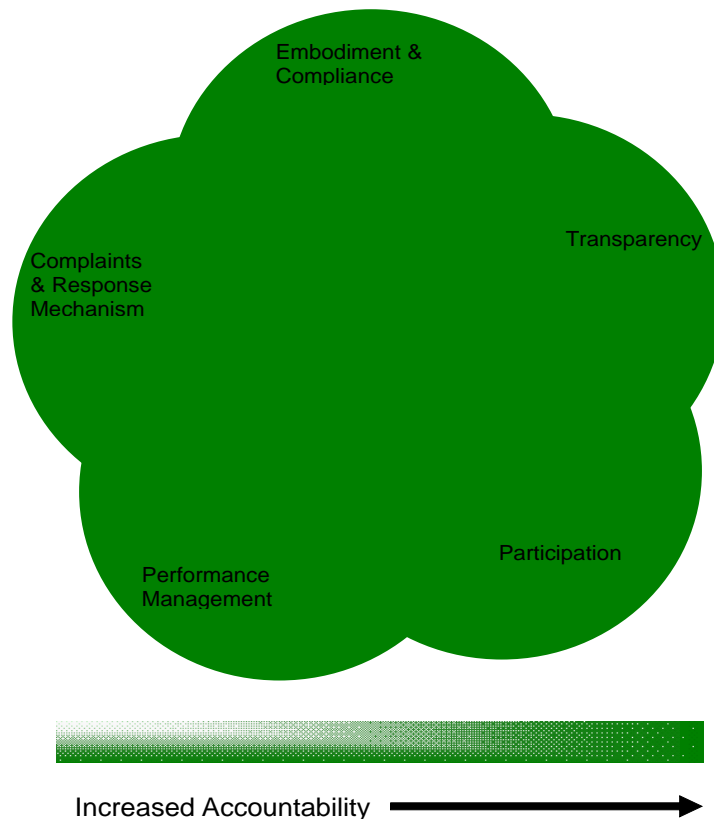
Islamic relief has developed a Quality Management System which along with numerous technical and organisational standards and indicators, establishes overall the management culture necessary to put accountability to users of our services at the forefront of our work.

The diagram below can be used as a visual guide to this manual. It demonstrates how Islamic Relief organises the components that create accountability and how these activities may be carried out inclusively. In other words, each of these areas is necessary to become accountable. Although on their own they are worthy of effort, their value is truly realised when employed together.

Islamic Relief Accountability Framework Diagram

Islamic Relief Accountability Framework Diagram

This model is partly inspired by, and has drawn from that of the GAP Framework (One World Trust) with the addition of learning from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I), Emergency Capacity Building project (ECB) of which Islamic Relief has had consultative status and Mango's Accountability to Beneficiaries: A Practical Checklist



Component 1: Embodiment and Compliance

Component 1 – Embodiment & Compliance

Obviously a first step in achieving accountability has to be the identification with and clarification of, Islamic Relief's core organisational beliefs, values and code of conduct, thus providing the benchmark for measuring our performance by stakeholders. These stakeholders include beneficiaries, funders and regulators, as well as our own staff and those who evaluate our work.

In this section we will explain how the systematic introduction of quality standards of service which reflect our organisational beliefs and values, and their embodiment by staff, delivers a management culture in Islamic Relief offices which places beneficiaries'

interests as our primary focus.

The success of Islamic Relief's move towards becoming more accountable is entirely dependant on the willingness and ability of staff to change and adopt new practice, however great or little that change is. This in turn is often a result of the training provided by the organisation. Therefore the systematic training of staff and their ability to understand, embody and practice systems that underpin accountability, makes up the first component.

The Islamic Relief Quality Management System (IRQMS)

The IR Quality Management System (IRQMS) is a systematic approach to identifying and delivering the standards of service required of IR staff for which they will be accountable. The IRQMS standards go a step further than just establishing **what** beliefs, values and standards the organisation holds itself accountable for, but identifies **how** we are accountable and what performance criteria we use for measuring that accountability.

IRQMS is a tool in the pursuit of total quality management. Total quality management refers to more than just technical performance, but to a broader and more ambitious system for identifying what our users and beneficiaries need and want. It enables the building of appropriate programme strategies to meet their needs, measuring our performance, and involving the whole organisation in the implementation of a deliberate policy of continuous improvement.

IRQMS covers seventeen quality areas and promotes continuous improvement through self-assessment and planning. It helps staff and management identify what the organisation is doing well in and what needs to be done in order to improve. The areas are:

Policy & Governance	Office Management
Quality Area 1: Planning for Quality	Quality Area 9: Staffing
Quality Area 2: Governance	Quality Area 10: Training & Development
Quality Area 3: Management	Quality Area 11: Volunteers
Quality Area 4: User centred Services	Quality Area 12: Financial Management
Programme Management	Quality Area 13: Managing Physical Resources & Assets
Quality Area 5: Administering Projects & Programmes	Quality Area 14: Security
Quality Area 6: Emergency Preparedness	Quality Area 15: Protection
Quality Area 7: Networking & Partnerships	Quality Area 16: Complaints and Suggestions
Quality Area 8: Monitoring & Evaluation	Quality Area 17: Media and Public Relations

Training in Accountability

To enable accountability to become mainstreamed in Islamic Relief, staff must be given training to deliver the key components of the accountability framework. Many of our staff already have strong skills in communication, participation and evaluation. However, as demonstrated by this document, it is the combination of all of the components in the framework that will make us adequately accountable.

Advice about the appropriate tools to implement communication, participation and evaluation activities are provided in the toolkits attached to this document. A toolkit entitled 'Staff Capacity Building and Training for an Accountable Organisation' is included to provide information on how to train staff and managers in the accountability framework.

Attitudes to Accountability

Changes in practice, new activities and procedures are always difficult to accept when staff are already managing a difficult and heavy workload. The work that Islamic Relief does already requires numerous layers of reporting and standards to support programme delivery. The accountability framework however, is core to why we do what we do. It enables our work to be directly linked to the organisations value system and ensure that our beneficiaries are key partners in how and what we implement. It ensures that we reduce the power imbalance between ourselves and those we are working with and enables beneficiaries to provide us with valuable feedback to ensure that we are honest and correct our mistakes.

People in Aid

Islamic Relief is has been a member of People in Aid since 2001 and has made commitments in 2007 to implement the People in Aid code of good practice. The code consists of seven principals that describe how an organisation can manage and empower its staff through the implementation of 'best practice' gained from wider industry experience.

The People in Aid code goes a long way to achieving one of the key objectives of the accountability framework which is to ensure that staff have the correct competencies and attitudes to effectively deliver participatory communication, audit, evaluation and complaints mechanisms.

The following link will enable you to access the People in Aid code of good practice.
<http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/code/code-en.pdf>

Toolkit One

IR Quality Management System

What is the IR Quality Management System?

The IR Quality Management System (IRQMS) is a systematic approach in ensuring that our offices and partners provide a service consistent to the ethics and standards agreed by the Trustees and Board of Management. By being transparent to users of our service about the standards they should expect we believe accountability and quality will be enhanced.

Typically, these are the stages that our offices implementing this quality system aim to follow:

Become aware of the standards: These concern the performance that staff, trustees and users expect from the organisation

Carry out a self-assessment: This means that you compare how well you are doing against these expectations.

Draw up an action plan: This will include what needs to be done, who will do it, how it will be done, and when

Implement: Do the work. This may include training staff in the particular standards and systems involved. It may involve ensuring relevant policies are drawn up and put in place.

Review: At this stage, you check what changes have been made and whether they have made the difference you were hoping to achieve

What will implementing IRQMS provide?

Using the IRQMS will enable offices as well as IR as a whole to fulfil the basic requirements of regulators as well as contractual obligations we are committed to; through such agreements as the ECHO Framework Partnership and our DEC membership.

In relation to the IR organisational beliefs, values, and ethical code of conduct (See section 1.4). IRQMS provides guidance on how they are practically reflected in our operations and work.

Although IRQMS is designed to be a tool to help field offices achieve the standards themselves and self assess their progress, the standards will be used in the systematic external evaluation of IR Field Offices and programmes, thereby assuring accountability ultimately to the IR family.

IRQMS ensures that practical guidance is provided in implementing the large body of IR policy and procedures offices are expected to observe, and helps them map, prioritise and plan their adoption, and assess how far they have got in achieving compliance with them.

Supporting the development of a preventative approach rather than a corrective one

IRQAS covers sixteen quality areas and promotes continuous improvement through self-assessment. It helps staff and management identify what the organisation is doing well in and what needs to be done in order to improve. The areas are:

Policy & Governance	Office Management
Quality Area 1: Planning for Quality	Quality Area 9: Staffing
Quality Area 2: Governance	Quality Area 10: Training & Development
Quality Area 3: Management	Quality Area 11: Volunteers
Quality Area 4: User centred Services	Quality Area 12: Financial Management
	Quality Area 13: Managing Physical Resources & Assets
Programme Management	Quality Area 14: Security
Quality Area 5: Administering Projects & Programmes	Quality Area 15: Protection
Quality Area 6: Emergency Preparedness	Quality Area 16: Complaints and Suggestions
Quality Area 7: Networking & Partnerships	Quality Area 17: Media & Public Relations
Quality Area 8: Monitoring & Evaluation	

Who is responsible and how do we resource the implementation of IRQMS?

The establishment of quality standards and the overall good management of the office is the responsibility of the Country Director. It is essential (s)he is aware of the standards of service required and implements a system of organisational change and improvement. Responsibility for completing the action plan and implementing it will ultimately lie with the Country Director but may be delegated down to a senior member of staff in larger offices. However it is important that staff are made accountable to the Country Director for their performance and completing important bits of work within the action plan.

Resources required

Initially the main investment will be staff time within the senior management team. If capacity is low within the office then Islamic Relief may have to invest time and money in staff training to enable the delivery of standards. There will also be a cost attached to the development and rolling out of policies and procedures such as child protection, security, and communication with beneficiaries. It is important to ensure the required costs are budgeted yearly. Remember these are valid project costs related to good project delivery and can be placed within the programme budget.

Getting Started with Implementing IRQMS

IRQMS is designed to be implemented by offices themselves and should not require external support, except perhaps in training staff.. It gives you a structure for implementing a quality management system and can be implemented over a period of time-anything from 12 months to two years depending on the existing capacity of your office.

It is important to be systematic about it and to have commitment if it is to be successful. Ownership over, appreciation of, and identification with the standards and process by management and staff is crucial for quality to be internalized and properly embodied in our work. If you feel overwhelmed by progressing on all three levels, develop an initial action plan for level one, but make staff aware of other standards, because that may accelerate the process and increase awareness of the management culture required. The following five stages will be helpful in implementing IRQMS

Become aware of the standards. These concern the performance that staff, trustees and users expect from the organisation

Carry out a self-assessment. This means that you compare how well you are doing against these expectations.

Draw up an action plan. This will include what needs to be done, who will do it, how it will be done, and when

Implement. Do the work. This may include training staff in the particular standards and systems involved. It may involve ensuring relevant policies are drawn up and put in place.

Review. At this stage, you check what changes have been made and whether they have made the difference you were hoping to achieve.

Stage 1: Become aware of the standards

The first stage to implementing IRQAS is to help your organisation understand IRQMS and its potential benefits. Read through the standards and become acquainted with the various quality areas and the three levels for each. Then you could organise a training event in the standards required and the use of the IRQMS system. The training of staff in the standards themselves is in itself a huge step towards their adoption, since their understanding, participation and ownership over the process is vital. It will be useful to involve trustees and management committee members (if you have them) at this stage.

Get your management and staff to make a commitment to implement IR global quality standards in service provision. Even though it is best to share the responsibility for implementing quality systems, it is a good idea to have one person or a small group of people take an organisational lead on quality. This will help things to go as planned.

Stage 2: Carry out a self-assessment

The next stage is assess what standards you are already delivering. A useful way of finding this out is to carry out a self assessment against all 17 quality standards.

Photocopy or print off the various assessment sheets and mark off at what stage you are at with each standard. This may be a matter of opinion in some cases, so reach an honest consensus.

IRQMS enables you to appraise how well your office is doing against agreed standards and indicators by offering a method of assessment with four scoring options: **not met, just started, making good progress and fully met.**

Not Met

The office has clearly not achieved this standard in any form

Just started

The activity is planned and there is some evidence of progress

Making good progress

There is partial achievement but further progress is needed

Fully met

All indicators have been achieved to and staff feel this standard has been achieved

Decide which are the quality areas that should be prioritised in the first year. You may want to choose eight or nine quality areas to work on each year or perhaps just deal with level 1 on all areas. Choosing more can be tempting, but experience suggests that using such a system can highlight many areas, which need policy revision or changes in practice. These changes may take time. Offices that try to tackle too many areas at once may become bogged down and lose enthusiasm. Quality is an on-going process.

Stage 3: Draw up an action plan

Now that you've decided which areas you can move forward on, sit with your staff and draw up an action plan based on the format provided, detailing what you can realistically do in the first year. It will be important to assess resources available, most of all staff time, but funding may also be required for training or consultancy. Consult HQ about how they could help provide what's needed.

Start with the quality standards which are most appropriate and urgent to your needs, and put them in order of priority.

Remember it is important to break down the task of delivering the specific standard into activities that will be required to achieve it. For example:

Quality Area 1. Management			
	Standard	Actions Required	Person/team responsible
3.2.3	A wide range of required policies, procedures and systems are in place including security, child protection and complaints, and people know about them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange training in security planning • Write security policy • Allocate responsibilities within the Plan 	HR Manager in consultation with Programme Manager and Area Managers

All organisations should aim to achieve Level 1 in all 17 quality areas within a defined period. By doing this, you will be able to show that you have met your legal obligations and put in basic systems and structures which protect the rights of your beneficiaries, donors and employees. Once the organisation has achieved Level 1 in all quality areas, it can plan further improvements by aiming to achieve Level 2 and then Level 3.

Stage 4: Implementation

An obvious next stage for managers is to make sure actions are agreed with staff and written in to their work plans. There is then an acceptance that this forms part of their tasks and responsibilities. It is advisable to ensure responsibility for developing their particular quality area, such as human resources or security is written into their job descriptions to avoid accusations that extra work is being 'piled' onto them.

Implementing IRMS may include such activities as training staff in the particular standards and systems involved. It may involve ensuring relevant policies are drawn up and put in place. The length of time needed to achieve the different levels in IRQMS will depend on each office's capacity. It is important to be realistic and not to rush the process. It will however be necessary for the Country Director to keep an eye on progress to make sure staff still feel accountable for items of work they agreed to deliver. A steady and continuous approach to implementing quality will result in meaningful change and improvement.

Stage 5: Reviewing progress

As your office sets about making quality improvements, you may need to set aside time to review these improvements to see how well they are working.

Monitoring and reviewing your progress against agreed plans is also important. Try to build your planning reviews into existing structures. For example, it is not always necessary to arrange separate IRQMS meetings; putting IRQMS onto the agenda of staff meetings can be a useful way of keeping the momentum going and keeping everyone up to date.

'Developing quality improvements is a continuous process. It is not something you do and then stop. User expectations are constantly changing and it is important to improve and develop services and activities to meet them. Improving the quality of an

organisation should eventually become part of the organisational culture in which everybody is involved and which leads to measurable results over time' (Pqasso 1999)

The Three Levels

The three levels of compliance with quality management in field offices, gives your office a framework for stage-by-stage improvements to both the quality of their activities and the way their office operates.

Once an organisation has achieved Level 1 in all the quality areas, it can plan further improvements by aiming to achieve Level 2 and then Level 3. In order to achieve Level 3, you should be able to show that you have already met all the criteria for Levels 1 & 2 consistently for at least one year.

The difference between the three levels

Level 1

- Lays down the minimum requirements that any office should meet, below which the organisation would not be fulfilling standards it has committed itself to.
- Helps the organisation to identify and meet all their legal obligations as a service provider and as an employer
- Lays the foundation for effective planning and targeting of activities to help meet organisational objectives

Level 2

- Builds on what has already been achieved in Level 1
- Requires your office to be more strategic in their approach to achieving their aims and objectives
- Requires most organisational policies and procedures to be documented
- Requires more systematic planning and monitoring of results and leads to a more focused outcome.
- Requires that feedback from users is obtained in a variety of ways

Level 3

- Builds on all the good work that has been achieved in Levels 1 & 2.
- Requires the ability to act as a quality leader for other organisations in similar areas of work
- Introduces the potential to compare with other organisations as a means of improving quality

- Requires all aspects of organisational life to be systematically reviewed, with reviews resulting in measurable change

Field Office Action Plan on Quality Standards

Standard	Actions Required	Person/team responsible	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Quality Area 3. Management														
3.2.3 A wide range of required policies, procedures and systems are in place including security, child protection and complaints, and people know about them.	Arrange training in security planning	• HR Manager in consultation with Programme Manager and Area Managers												
	Write security policy	• HR Manager												
	Allocate responsibilities within the Plan	• HR Manager												
Quality Area 4. User Centred Services														
4.1.5 The organisation ensures that information is presented in languages, formats and media that are accessible and comprehensible for users. Organisation name and contact details are provided in all publicly available information	The IR Code of Conduct is translated into local language	• Admin Manager												
	The document is designed and printed in both languages	• Admin Manager												

Component 2: Transparency

Component 2 – Transparency

Transparency, as described in the GAP Framework is:

‘The provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organisational procedures, structures and processes to their assessment’

Given that our focus is on accountability to local field-based stakeholders, this clearly requires Islamic Relief to have in place accessible information about the organisation, the projects and programmes and services available to the communities with whom we work.

Vision, Mission; Beliefs and Values

Information about who Islamic Relief is and why we are working in the area is something that already exists in most of our country operations to a greater or lesser extent. Commonly, during emergency response or at the initiation of development activities, staff either verbally or through the use of leaflets, introduce the organisation to prospective beneficiaries. Less commonly, we provide information or explanation of Islamic Relief’s value system and code of conduct.

Providing this information sets in place a relationship of mutual knowledge sharing and goes some way to redressing the power imbalance. Commonly, prospective beneficiaries provide us with an enormous amount of information about their lives; some of which is very personal. Rarely are they provided with accessible information as to who we are and what drives our work. The name Islamic Relief already shows that we are a faith-based organisation, but without further explanation of our vision and mission, values and beliefs, the organisation can be misunderstood. Although our name is often associated with sincerity and trustworthiness of purpose, it is sometimes associated with negative connotations, so` it is vital to indicate what we stand for and how we embody this in practice.

Projects and Programmes

Communication does not stop at providing information about the organisation. Communication of our programme strategy and the types and scale of projects is also crucial. Communities are often frustrated by NGO’s who are seen to randomly choose who to help and who not to. Obviously, these decisions reflect organisational targeting, most commonly of the most vulnerable, but this is not always the perception of the communities we work in.

Accessible information about a project; who is included and the criteria for their inclusion reduces the frustrations of those who have not been included, as they are provided with clear statements on entitlements. An added benefit is that those households who meet targeting criteria but who have been ‘missed’ by the assessment process, understand their rights to inclusion and can inform relevant staff.

Also important to beneficiary accountability is the inclusion of information about staff

members and structure, beneficiary rights and entitlements within the programme and complaints and response mechanisms (this will be discussed in full in component 4). Often, 'Islamic Relief' as seen by our beneficiaries is commonly one or two field staff members. It is not common for beneficiaries to perceive that the actions of an individual staff member are designed and coordinated by a global team. Although it is not necessary to provide information on the whole of Islamic Relief Worldwide, local information explaining how the local team of Islamic Relief is represented within national structures goes a long way to increasing the understanding of the service that we are providing.

Providing information at project sites about the organisation, the scale and scope of the activities, notice of consultation meetings, entitlements and how to access complaints and feedback services, increases understanding amongst beneficiaries of their rights and reduces any sense of helplessness and anxiety. This in turn can reduce tension and frustrations that may develop.. Local people are thus given the knowledge to judge whether we have delivered on the commitments we have made and the standards of our work. Our relationship can be moved from that of humanitarian / agency / beneficiary; more towards service provider/client or in some cases of partnership.

Accessibility

Throughout this section, the word 'accessible' has been used in a variety of different contexts. In short, 'accessible' means that the information we provide is both received and understood by those it is intended for. In the communities we work in, providing accessible information means we have to use simple and universal words, appropriate languages and take into account the needs of those who are illiterate.

Ensuring that information is understood is more complex than providing leaflets in a local language of our vision, mission, values and service. It requires a specific strategy to be developed to ensure that users can understand who we are and what we stand for. A combination of methods of communication is often successful as is an open and friendly approach that encourages people to speak out and contribute.

Scale

The toolkit entitled '**communication to beneficiaries and local stakeholders**' will provide practical advice and examples of how to be transparent to the communities in which we work. It is important to remember that communication, the passing of information backwards and forwards, is a key tool in project design and development. These activities should already form the basis of good participation and project management and should represent only a small amount of extra work. It is however, a crucial step in increasing the quality of our work.

Some organisations have pioneered the giving of financial information to intended beneficiaries to communicate how much money has been spent and in what way. This increases the accountability of project spending and allows beneficiaries to monitor how money, given on their behalf by donors, is spent. Islamic Relief does not require this, however, it does demonstrate that many innovative approaches can be employed to increase the knowledge of beneficiaries and enable them to judge quality against the same indicators we do. For every project, an assessment should be conducted to ensure that relevant project information is provided.

Toolkit Two

Communication to Beneficiaries and Local Stakeholders

This toolkit will provide information on how to communicate to target communities and local stakeholders in respect to increasing Islamic Relief's transparency and accountability. The toolkit is in support of concepts laid out in the Accountability Framework – Component 1 – Transparency.

Communication of IR Values

Islamic Relief's Vision and Mission should be displayed in an obvious place on all IR offices or buildings. It should be translated into local languages and staff trained in communicating this to local communities and visitors.

At project or programme sites, a notice-board (either free standing or attached to building within which project activities occur) should include Islamic Relief's Vision and Mission in a local language

Logo's of joint partners in project activities as well as international standards to which Islamic Relief is a signatory (currently Red Cross Red Crescent code of conduct, SPHERE and People in Aid) should also be displayed. IR staff should be trained in what these standards mean or the nature of our relationship with partner organisations and be able to communicate these to local communities and beneficiaries.

Communication of Local Office Structure

The Local office structure should be communicated by the provision of a simplified organogram. This should be adapted from the generic template provided.

In addition to this, and security context allowing, the address of the main office, name of regional programme manager and names and role of relevant local staff

Notice boards within local offices could provide a photograph, name and duty of relevant staff in order to increase the 'approachability' of staff to beneficiaries and local stakeholders. This should only be done after a comprehensive security assessment has been carried out to ensure that no undue security risks to the individual or Islamic Relief are taken.

Communication of Project Information

Project information communicated should be as simple as possible whilst still providing information on the sector, region or area covered under the project, numbers of households / individuals included; entitlements, criteria for inclusion and duration.

Information that links this project to Islamic Relief's vision and mission should also be provided which might be the project objectives as given in the Logical Framework.

Communication of targeting criteria

Crucial for enabling communities to understand who has a right for inclusion, is for targeting information to be clear and concise.

It should include details of what services are being provided, when and how; and provide the criteria by which local people may be able to receive services, such as area, household and individual characteristics (i.e. farmers with land under 1ha, those whose only house was destroyed, pregnant and lactating women, the elderly etc)

Communication of Complaints and Response Mechanisms

Details on how to design and establish a complaints and response mechanism are given in Component 4 along with the **Complaints and Response Mechanism toolkit**.

Communication of this system should include what constitutes a complaint or suggestion, where and how to make a complaint or suggestion and what the procedure for responding to complaints will be. It will also provide contact details for the local Standards Officer to enable serious complaints, or complaints about local staff or services to be collected without fear of reprisal from affected staff members.

How to communicate?

The method by which to communicate to beneficiaries, communities and local stakeholders should be defined by local contexts. In many places in which Islamic Relief works, signs are already used to show project sites or attached to Islamic Relief buildings. The templates at the end of this toolkit demonstrate one way to use notice boards to communicate Islamic Relief's vision and mission, local office structure and contact details, complaints mechanisms and project information.

Notice boards are only one way in which this information can be communicated; many offices have used leaflets, posters and the radio to deliver project information or inform communities of Islamic Relief's presence in an area. However, these must ensure that all relevant stakeholders can have access. Often, a combination of methods will provide a better coverage and increased understanding of our activities. Combining notice boards at project sites with a radio broadcast is one example.

At all times, information given in written form should be in local language and dialects accessible to the target population. These communication tools are not for the purpose of visibility or fundraising; they are to ensure that the communities we work with have transparent information to understand what Islamic Relief's activities are in the area and how and when local people may access services and entitlements. They have the added value of enabling the community to hold us to account for the work that we commit to and the work that we actually carry out. We must also be conscious of the need to communicate to those who are illiterate or are unable to access information from outside their household or village (this may apply particularly to women and the elderly who may only receive information through their family / husbands).

Please review the visibility policy in combination with this toolkit to ensure that communication tools are relevant and appropriate and follow IR guidelines. It is also important to note the policy's guidelines for the removal of notice boards after project

completion.

Template for Sub-Field office Notice Board – please zoom in to read content



الإغاثة الإسلامية
Secours Islamique
www.islamic-relief.com

Vision: 'A caring world where the basic requirements of people in need are fulfilled'

Mission: Inspired by Islamic values, Islamic Relief will be a worldwide role model in:

- assisting individuals, groups and institutions to develop safe and caring communities
- helping the poor and suffering to enjoy self reliance with dignity
- making it possible for those who wish support others reach those who need their help

To achieve this, we will raise funds, build partnerships and communicate key messages as we:

- work to mitigate disasters, prepare for their occurrence and respond by providing relief and rehabilitation
- promote sustainable development through programmes in education, health & nutrition, water & sanitation and income generation
- advocate on behalf of the poor and suffering

We will do all this without regard to race, gender or belief, and without expecting anything in return.

"And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive,- (Saying), "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks."
(Qura'an Surah 76 verses 8-9)

Islamic Relief – Bangladesh

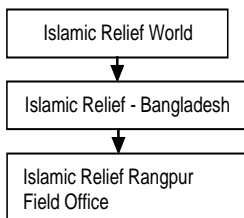
Address 1

Address 2

Address 3

Telephone Number

Islamic Relief Structure



Projects

- Community Action Project
- Islamic Relief Health Centre
- Islamic Relief Training Farm
- Mother and Child Healthcare Project

Do you have a comment or complaint?

Islamic Relief – Bangladesh will accept and respond to complaints about

1. Islamic Relief activities, even if they were conducted by another organisation or company
2. IR staff members, including complaints about staff members who no longer work for Islamic Relief.

Complaints can be submitted to Islamic Relief in writing via the post-box below or a formal verbal submission to a member of the Islamic Relief staff. To enable Islamic Relief to process your complaint, we request that you provide us with your name, address and a way to contact you so that we can respond to the complaint.

At submission, Islamic Relief will provide you with details as to when you will receive a response. Complaints that are not related to Islamic Relief will be responded to immediately.

Should a response be unsatisfactory, it is your right to ask the complaint to be sent to Islamic Relief – Bangladesh in Dhaka where the complaint will be handled by a dedicated member of staff.

Complaints that are serious or criminal in nature will be referred to Islamic Relief – Bangladesh in Dhaka. Your complaint will be confidential and processed by a dedicated member of staff.

Islamic Relief welcomes your comments, feedback and complaints. We believe that without this information, we will be unable to continue to improve the services we provide.

Relevant notices and images

Template for Sub-Field office Notice Board – please zoom in to read content



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Islamic Relief – Bangladesh

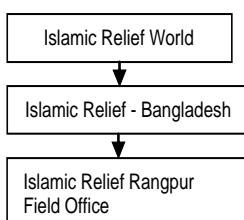
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Islamic Relief Structure



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Islamic Relief welcomes your comments, feedback and complaints. We believe that without this information, we will be unable to continue to improve the services we provide.

Relevant notices and images

Community Action Project (CAP)

- The Community Action project is working in 3 Upazilas of Rangpur District (name, name, name).
- The project works with women's groups called shomities to manage small Micro-credit and savings.
- Islamic Relief has worked with local community leaders and Imams to ensure that women from the poorest households are included in the project.
- Loans are not in cash but are in kind - Islamic Relief works with shomity members to ensure that they are happy with the quality of loan item.
- Islamic Relief has community representatives who manage the relationship between IR and Shomity members and are responsible for agreeing to the loan and for arranging the purchase of the chosen loan.
- Loans that other shomity members include a fattening cow, goats, seeds and fertilisers, chickens and rickshaws.
- This project is ongoing.

Component 3: Participation

Component 3 – Participation

Participation by local people in the design and management of our programmes has multiple benefits; not least that it increases accountability for our actions to beneficiaries. This conceptual introduction is supported by a toolkit called 'Participation for Accountability' which highlights the stages at which participation is crucial to increase accountability. Participatory approaches and techniques have been at the forefront of project management for many years, and as such, there are a wealth of publications and materials on the subject. Key Islamic Relief and external resources on participation are provided as links in the toolkit.

'Participation is an end and not simply a means; the central point of development is to enable people to participate in the governance of their own lives' Allan Kaplan

Participation for Accountability

Participation aids accountability by giving a voice to our users and ensuring effective delivery at each stage in the project cycle and optimal use of resources:

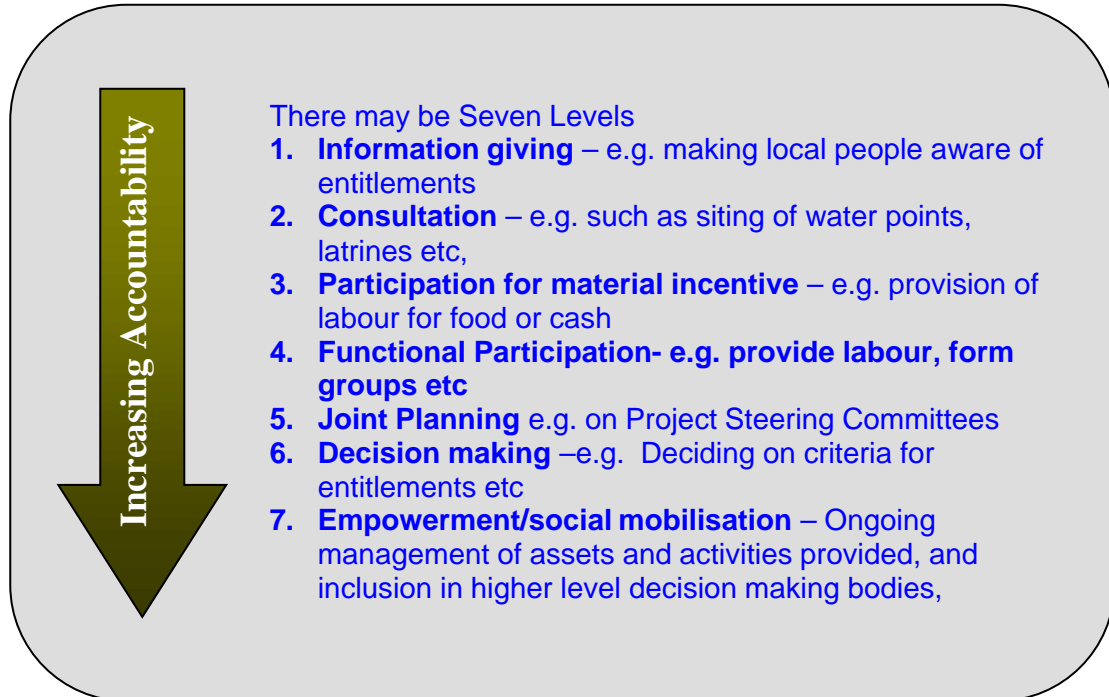
- Assessment and design of projects; the start of our relationship with beneficiaries, is a key stage for ensuring participation for accountability.
- Participation during project design stage enables users to ensure that activities are appropriate and relevant to their needs and priorities. This increases the potential impact of activities and therefore increases the likelihood of meeting our organisational vision, mission and objectives. . It enables those who are included, as well as wider stakeholders, to play an active role in deciding on the best way to deliver services, ensuring that false assumptions are not made.
- Participation should also be used as a tool during implementation. Local people may aid in the distribution of relief items or services, thus enabling the project to react quicker and further afield. Local people will know where needy people live and may also contribute to the management of the project
- Monitoring of projects for various different programming and reporting needs are more effective and efficient using beneficiary and community participation.
- Participation is also crucial for evaluation. The assessment of project outcomes and results can only be considered complete when all stakeholders have been empowered to contribute to the process.

Participation for Learning and Change

An organisation that is accountable adapts to the changing needs of its stakeholders. Participation is both a crucial tool in attempting to understand these changing needs, but also a driver for change itself. Without full participation, we often do not recognise changing contexts from the users' perspective and therefore cannot change our activities or approaches accordingly.

Participation at Monitoring and Evaluation stages allow us as an organisation to understand how well we have performed against our overall vision and mission and which areas we can learn from to improve our services in the future.

Types of Participation



Toolkit Three

Participation for increased accountability

This toolkit will provide advice as to when and with whom to participate to ensure that we are increasing our accountability to beneficiaries and donors. Participatory approaches and techniques have been at the forefront of project management for many years, and as such, there is a wealth of publications and materials on the subject. It is not the intention of this toolkit to review these in-depth, but rather to provide guidance on the techniques which, if conducted within this framework, maximise our accountability.

Participation is a cross-cutting issue within any accountability framework. Although it is one of the five components in its own right, transparency, evaluation and complaints and response mechanisms all require effective participation with stakeholders to ensure that the framework is true to the concepts set out in the introduction.

Below is a framework that shows at which stages of the project cycle participation it is appropriate and where applicable, available resources to advise on appropriate methodologies.

Project Cycle stage	Who to Participate with	Available tools
Situation Analysis	<p>Situation analysis should be conducted in participation with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct beneficiaries ▪ Target communities ▪ National Governments ▪ Local Governments and Authorities ▪ Local partners ▪ CBO's, NGO's and INGO's operating in relevant region ▪ UN and other funding / international organisation bodies 	<p>See section 2.2.4 in the Islamic Relief Handbook</p> <p>Save the Children 'Toolkits' – Tool 1, 12 Islamic Relief Handbook Annex 2</p> <p>'The Good Enough Guide'</p> <p>SPHERE handbook 'common standards'</p>
Project Design	<p>Situation analysis should have highlighted sectoral and geographic priorities</p> <p>Project design in participation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant effected communities (participation with communities in project design is crucial to ensuring that projects are appropriate) ▪ Local and national government agencies ▪ International institutions ▪ CBO's and NGO's 	<p>See Sections 2.2.4, 2.2.5 in the Islamic Relief Handbook</p> <p>Save the Children 'Toolkits' – Chapter 6</p> <p>Section 2.2.5.3 refers specifically to stakeholder analysis in project design</p>

Financing	<p>Communities may participate in financing parts of the project through resource mobilisation locally.</p> <p>Beneficiaries influence allocation of resources through participation in design, review and steering group meetings.</p> <p>Funding partners and organisations should be consulted as to their requirements in project design</p>	
Implementation	<p>Implementation appropriate to communities should have been defined at design stage</p> <p>Local people where possible aid in the distribution of relief items or services, thus enabling the project to react quicker and further afield. They will have vital information about numbers and vulnerability, and know where needy people live</p> <p>Local people often manage projects funded by IR or contribute to the management of the project</p> <p>Local community leaders, & Govt. officials CBOs through partnerships</p> <p>All stakeholders through review meetings and steering committees</p>	<p>See 2.2.9.2 in the Islamic Relief Handbook</p> <p>'The Good Enough Guide'</p> <p>SPHERE handbook 'common standards'</p> <p>Save the Children 'Toolkits' – Chapter 7; Tool 11, 14</p>

Monitoring	<p>Collection of baseline data enables more effective monitoring and evaluation. Baseline data should be collected through participatory methods</p> <p>Participatory monitoring of implementation, often using community monitors is an efficient and effective way of ensuring community ownership, sustainable impact and achieving HQ monitoring requirements</p> <p>Community Feedback meetings are essential to derive information on the appropriateness and quality of services</p>	See: 'How to monitor & Evaluate Emergency Operations' IR Handbook
Evaluation	<p>Participatory evaluation should include the following stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct beneficiaries ▪ Target communities ▪ Partners and contractors ▪ Local Governments and institutions ▪ INGO's and national funding partners (UN etc) ▪ Islamic Relief Worldwide staff <p>Evaluation reports should be 'owned' by the country office and regional IRW desk. Management responses should be received and responsibilities given to enact change</p>	<p>Islamic Relief Evaluation Framework</p> <p>See: 'How to monitor & Evaluate Emergency Operations' IR Handbook</p> <p>Save the Children 'Toolkits' – Chapter 8, 10, 11; Tool 7,11,14</p> <p>Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines http://portals.wi.wur.nl/files/docs/ppme/PPME.pdf</p>

Programming & strategic review	<p>The process of learning lessons from implementation to improve future design</p> <p>Participation with all stakeholders is vital to comprehend differing perspectives and understand lessons gained through monitoring and evaluation processes. Stakeholders crucial for inclusion are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct beneficiaries ▪ Target communities ▪ Partners and contractors ▪ Local government and institutions 	
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Component 4: Performance Management

Component 4 – Performance Management

Performance Management in the context of establishing accountability covers firstly the vital area of clarifying both strategic objectives and outputs to all stakeholders which ensure staff provide the performance criteria for which they will be held accountable. Secondly monitoring, evaluation and audit are used to hold staff accountable for the results and the way resources have been utilised.

Islamic Relief has developed a performance management system to establish clear accountability for the use of resources and enable learning and change to occur.

1. Project Design, Objective setting and agreeing performance indicators

At field level, it is a requirement that all projects have project design logframes and monitoring plans which link field activities to programmatic, and ultimately, country and organisational goals and objectives. Clarifying the project goal, purpose, outputs and performance indicators establishes an accountability matrix both forwards to beneficiaries and local stakeholders, and backwards to donors.

Monitoring and reporting from field staff is directly related to these agreed outputs and indicators which enables project managers to quickly detect project failure, determine the causes and instigate change.

2. Monitoring & Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation framework sets out requirements for the review and evaluation of projects, programmes and country offices. This sets in place an information

flow to stakeholders and programme staff on the performance of the project and ensures strategic review and if necessary, change, to maximise the effectiveness and benefit of the project on the lives of intended beneficiaries.

3. Organisational learning and knowledge capture

The framework culminates in a two-yearly cycle of programme evaluations and field office appraisals conducted by the Performance Improvement Unit (IR-W). Their role is to ensure that organisational goals are being met and to ensure learning is captured. They are also responsible for assisting change in the organisation through the creation of 'best-practice' sectoral guidance manuals, training and the co-ordination of Action Learning Teams (ALT's).

ALT's, and the work of the Performance Improvement Unit are also linked at international level with Islamic Relief's Policy Unit and Training Department. This ensures that experience and learning at field level can be captured within the organisation and made available to staff throughout global operations to enable Islamic Relief to continue to deliver the most dynamic, innovative and appropriate solutions and assistance to meet our vision and mission.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Audit

Along with transparency and participation, the process of monitoring, evaluation and audit are crucial to ensure that projects and programmes are accountable to user expectations. Although distinctly different activities, monitoring, evaluation and audit all perform the same simple function – to ensure that resources have been and continue to be utilised correctly and to optimum advantage in improving the lives of poor people. All three processes are crucial to ensuring organisational learning and the improvement of performance.

This section will concentrate predominately on the area of evaluation. Islamic Relief has a comprehensive system of internal audit to ensure that finances and resources are used in an appropriate way. Information on this system can be found in the Islamic Relief Online Handbook (accessed through the extranet) or from the Internal Audit Department. Audit plays a crucial role in accountability to donors and links with evaluation to ensure that the organisation has transparent 'top-to-bottom' accountability.

Monitoring

Monitoring is the continuous and systematic collection of data throughout the life-cycle of a project or programme to enable an assessment of progress against stated goal and objectives.

Purpose of monitoring

The information collected can be used for evaluation of progress to enable those responsible to decide on any adjustments required to improve the project's effectiveness and to construct reports for forward accountability to local communities and backwards to donors and management.

Participatory monitoring

Monitoring may include feedback on achievement of outputs and activities from Staff and participants through monitoring forms and such tools as photographs, secondary sources, such as health centre records and thirdly through stakeholder feedback. Stakeholder feedback, often in the form of community meetings, is vital to be able to gather vital information on the qualitative impact of activities and whether activities and outputs are being delivered as planned.

For monitoring to be effective and useful it should be planned in a participatory way, involving staff and community members involved in implementing the project to collect only information which will inform decision making and provide for required reports. In this way staff and community members will understand the purpose and importance of the process and take ownership over it.

Monitoring & Audit

Audit normally means the examination of records related to asset and financial management in order to determine whether resources were used effectively and properly. There is a considerable overlap in the requirement of information between project monitoring staff and auditors since both will need to verify whether goods and assets were directed correctly at legitimate beneficiaries. However auditors will rarely venture into the field, but rely on monitoring reports, inventories, and distribution receipt lists etc being collected by staff in the field.

It is essential that managers appreciate the audit requirements of their programmes and make clear to staff audit needs in relation to record-keeping and monitoring information. Audit is a powerful tool in establishing accountability, especially where staff are aware that transactions will be independently scrutinised. There is a common misconception that auditors simply look at financial transactions. In aid work there is usually no point of sale and therefore no sales receipt, so auditors have to examine evidence that goods and services were actually received by beneficiaries.

Audit requires the project team to be able to provide evidence of stated outputs in the form of inventories, activity and distribution receipt forms signed by beneficiaries, contracts relating to employment and results of contracts signed.

Evaluation for Accountability

An evaluation is the assessment at one point in time of the impact of a project, and the measurement and analysis of what has been achieved in relation to the stated objectives of the project. In an emergency project, because of the rapidly changing context, there is an imperative to conduct real-time evaluation during the life of the project as well as possibly an evaluation upon completion. The real-time evaluation methodology involves a process of more frequent review, with the evaluator coming in more as a facilitator to conduct strategic review.

Evaluations are a tool if organised correctly, to maximise a sense of ownership, transparency and influence by beneficiaries over the service, in order to maximise benefit to our beneficiaries. For an evaluation to maximise accountability to beneficiaries and local stakeholders there are several measures that can be taken:

1. Monitoring information must contain feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders
2. Community and stakeholder representation should be organised within the review and evaluation process
3. Evaluations should be facilitated by someone external to the project team to ensure bias and vested interests do not manifest themselves in findings.
4. Monitoring, review and evaluation should measure impact and change and not simply outputs and activities.
5. Evaluation findings should be made available to the community and stakeholders
6. Organisations must respond to findings, learn and change.

The toolkit 'Evaluation for Accountability' demonstrates the steps and methods required to ensure that stakeholders not only participate in evaluation activities but help define performance indicators.

Learning and Accountability

Evaluation is often seen in terms of 'ticking boxes' – a requirement by donors to measure performance – something that just has to be done. This limits the impact that evaluation can have on improving activities to better meet needs or expectations..

As already stated, an accountable organisation must learn and change as a result of findings identified through monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation findings can be of several different 'types'. They can identify possible changes to project activities that better suit stakeholders' needs; they may indicate weakness in programming or procedure or they may equally question organisation-wide strategy. Due to the diversity of findings and recommendations, learning and change can occur at all levels of the organisation.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Although predominately covered in the Participation component of accountability, the following points should be considered when designing and implementing an evaluation system to in line with the accountability framework

Key features of PM&E

- PM&E aims to **empower** local people
- Community members are **fully involved** in the process
- Community members **identify their own** indicators of success
- Methods are **simple, open**, with **immediate sharing** of results
- PM&E is built in from the **start** of a project
- PM&E is **flexible** to fit the local context

Islamic Relief's Evaluation Framework

Below is Islamic Relief's evaluation framework which details the level, requirements, and responsibility for evaluations of Islamic Relief operations. This is in addition to evaluations required for institutionally funded activities.

INTERNAL TO FIELD OFFICE				EXTERNAL TO FIELD OFFICE	
Level	Contains the following	Minimum standards for Internal Field Office Review How often	Led by	Minimum standards for External Evaluation to the IR Field Office How Often	Led by
Project	Project outputs, Impact & effectiveness	Quarterly Project Progress Reviews (QPPR) (or as appropriate)	Project & Programme Managers	Projects with budgets between 100,000-500,000 Euros over three years must be evaluated at least once in their lifetime	Regional Programme Team to organise externally to the project team
				Emergency operations costing over 150,000 Euros must be monitored and evaluated within three months of inception.	Regional Programme team or relevant emergency department to organise jointly with PIU. Evaluation must be led by someone external to implementing team.
		At least one Annual Project Impact Review (APIR) or End of Project Impact Review (EPIR)	Country Director	Projects over 500,000 Euros over three years	External evaluator either to IR or from PIU (Performance Improvement Unit) or another Field Office
Programme	Collective evaluation of groups of similar projects either by sector (ie water Programme), geographic area or by full programme (if small)	Annual Programme Review (APR)	Country Director RPM ideally to attend	Full Field Office Appraisal (FFOA) Every two years. FFOAs contain a rapid Programme Evaluation	Organised by RPM, led by PIU

Country	Field Office Management Appraisal including IR financial audit	Field Office Annual Performance Review (FOAPR) of the Office Quality Assurance Plan	Led by RPM/RPC	Full Field Office Appraisal (FFOA) can be combined with Programme Review. Could be combined with a programme Evaluation	Organised by RPM, led by PIU.
Regional	looking at an integrated strategy for regional effectiveness, co-ordination and impact Facilitated cross learning Inclusion of relevant Fundraising offices	Regional Strategic Review (RSR) between senior country staff within the region at least every three years.	Led by RPM	If external evaluation is deemed necessary then minimum every three years	Organised by RPM, led by PIU or External Evaluator, either External RPM, CD, or external to IR
Sectoral	Review of a particular sectoral activity, ie. Qurbani, Micro-credit, Orphans, Shelter Effectiveness & impact, cost/benefit analysis Cross learning	Internal sectoral review Called for when required by demand. If departmental (such as orphans) then should be minimum every three years.	Organised by Departmental Heads, led by expert in the sector	External departmental/sectoral review	HPFOD
Global	Review of global impact on all strategic aims and objectives Contains a stakeholder survey	Global Strategic Impact Review at the end of each strategic planning period	Performance Improvement Dept.	External to IR only if Trustees or BOM feel it necessary	External

Toolkit Four

Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation

Just as participatory techniques have transformed the effectiveness of situation analysis, project design and implementation, in promoting empowerment and improved accountability, so too have they led to huge improvements in the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation. Clearly the beneficiaries themselves are the best people to judge how effective Islamic Relief's interventions have been and incorporating their

feedback into the ongoing monitoring and evaluation systems has to be a priority of project staff if our work is going to improve in quality.

Listed below are some of the most common techniques for enabling this to happen:

Participation techniques	
Monitoring	Community provide assistance in identifying and providing assessment and base-line data required for M&E and reporting
	Agreeing performance indicators with beneficiaries i.e. amount of water per person per day, standards of latrines, quality and amount of shelter material.
	Involvement in development of monitoring plan
	Collection of information by community members on distributions, impact indicators, contextual changes (i.e. population changes etc)
	Community Feedback meetings
Evaluation	Involvement of local stakeholders in project review and strategy meetings
	Involvement of community in the development of evaluation TORs. How would they measure success and what are the questions they want to ask?
	Collection of data involves qualitative as well as quantitative data from participatory techniques such as focus groups, community interviews, questionnaires, mapping & PRA techniques.
	Evaluation findings are shared with the community and their response is sought as part of the evaluation.
	Evaluation reports are made available to stakeholders.

Component 5: Complaints and Response Mechanism

Component 5 – Complaints and Response Mechanisms

Transparency, participation and evaluation are insufficient mechanisms to ensure that the voice of beneficiaries and other field-based stakeholders are heard at an organisational level. In almost all other industries, not just in the west but globally, users or customers have the right and the opportunity to complain about services that they utilise. In the humanitarian and development world, our 'customers' are often not empowered to realise this right, even if it were available.

The provision of complaints and response mechanisms to beneficiaries is important to redress power imbalances that exist, quite naturally, through the relationship between donor and recipient. Unlike the commercial world, beneficiaries rarely have an alternative choice to the aid that is offered to them, and NGOs rarely have the commercial incentive to respond to user dissatisfaction. The fact remains that without the opportunity to voice concerns over the experience and service that beneficiaries receive from us, they are passive, powerless recipients.

Indeed there is often the fear that complaints against aid workers may bring reprisal action in the form of cutting off of aid or worse. Very often the means how to complain is not communicated to beneficiaries and communities and those handling complaints for an organisation may be those about whom the complaints are directed. This creates real barriers for those with grievances to actually make complaints to the organisation.

Islamic Relief has, through experience gained in many of our offices as well as through recent international initiatives, developed a complaints and response mechanism to increase the accountability to beneficiaries of its staff and operations. Details of this policy and advice as to how to implement it are given in the toolkit 'Complaints and Response Mechanisms'.

Many factors are important to enable a mechanism to collect and respond to complaints. Firstly, the mechanism must have a defined scope. Islamic Relief has two mechanisms; the first being the grievance policy which enables IR staff to raise concerns and make complaints to the organisation. Separating internal and external complaints is important as they require differing approaches in process and response. The grievance policy for IR staff can be found in the online Islamic Relief Handbook (accessed through the extranet).

The second mechanism is designed to enable beneficiaries to feel empowered to raise issues of concern without fear of retaliation or retribution upon themselves or their community; and to enable management to respond quickly to protect the individual's rights, deal with poor performance or worse – corruption amongst staff or partners.

What constitutes a complaint? As detailed in the 'Complaints handling policy of Islamic Relief', we consider a valid complaint to be related to:

- IR activities, even if they were sub-contracted to another organisation or company;
- IR staff members, including those staff members who no longer work for IR

Collecting complaints

It is often considered strange to be proactive about collecting complaints. However, it is important to recognise two factors: other industries have showed us that actively and openly promoting the right of the customer to complain can provide substantial benefit to their service; and that our beneficiaries may not be empowered to utilise their right to make complaints and seek response.

- It may enable the protection of those whose protection has been entrusted to us.
- It contributes to a culture of public service and accountability amongst staff.
- It highlights issues that may have been overlooked.
- It forces us to assess objectively our failings and learn from them,
- It enables us to make decisions that may make our company more efficient
- It enables us to detect abuse or corruption within our operations and staff.

To empower people to make comments or complaints about the services we provide, we must be approachable and clear as to how and why they may do so.

The toolkit below provides an approved method and advice as to how and when to collect complaints. The components for successful complaints collection include communication of the mechanism, accessible information and integration within a transparent and participatory project or programme.

Responding to Complaints

For the stakeholders, the response to the complaint is crucial. Having made the decision to complain, despite the afore-mentioned barriers, they are now waiting to see what Islamic Relief is going to do about the issue. Often, unfortunately this is nothing as complaints get forgotten or prove too difficult to resolve. Commonly, complaints are not responded to as those charged with managing them do not feel that a complaint was warranted and that there is no case to be answered. It is also true to say that complaints can reflect on staff performance or behaviour and therefore vested interests prevent proper processing of complaints.

The first objective of a good complaints mechanism is to provide information at the outset as to the scope and scale of a project and the standards of service being delivered; the method by which complaints can be collected and the type of responses given. With this information, beneficiaries can hold an organisation to account should project activities or standards differ from those stated or not occur at all. Responses should reflect the scale of the complaint. Complaints received questioning inclusion within a project (a very common complaint) can be dealt with swiftly as a response could detail the selection criteria and an explanation of why they have not been targeted. Should complaints of this nature be deemed to be warranted, the system must have sufficient capacity to process the complaint through the system and for the organisation to take remedial action where possible.

Very often the very fact that complaints are being processed in a professional manner enables complainants to feel content to have their voices heard even if the complaint is not upheld and no action is taken.

Complaints are often not processed by staff because:

- a. Resources to investigate complaints and send responses are limited or not available.
- b. Ignorance of the organisation's policy towards complaints amongst staff
- c. A misconception that a response should only be sent if the complaint is upheld.
- d. Staff are not held responsible or accountable for responding

Often an inadequate response to a complaint is the cause of ill feeling rather than the lack of a positive outcome for the complainant.

Serious Complaints

Complaints of a serious nature are often the most difficult to make (from the viewpoint of the complainant) and most difficult to process. Serious complaints can include observations of fraudulent or inappropriate behaviour of staff or in some cases, sexual abuse by staff. Complaints like these should be quickly processed to enable full organisational support for the complainant as well as for maintaining morale in the local office.

Complaints of a serious nature not related to Islamic Relief staff are outside the jurisdiction of the organisation. An example of this would be sexual abuse inside an Islamic Relief managed refugee camp unrelated to IR staff or projects. Islamic Relief has no authority to provide meaningful responses to situations like these but must, instead do all it can to raise the issue with local leaders or authorities and to provide support for the individual. Effective communication of what constitutes a complaint and how complaints are managed should reduce the amount of complaints received outside of IR's jurisdiction.

Toolkit Five

Complaints and Response Mechanisms

This toolkit is based on the Complaints Handling Policy of Islamic Relief which can be obtained from Section 4 of the Islamic Relief Handbook

Tasks and responsibilities

Each IR Country Office should appoint a trained member of staff to deal with complaints. This staff member is known as a Standards Officer. This post could be placed under an existing Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (in larger offices) or be included as part of the responsibility of an existing member of staff, such as Finance officer reporting to the Country Director (in smaller offices). The role could be full- or part-time depending on the type of projects and the size of operations and complaints workload.

The Standards Officer monitors and deals with the complaint handling process from beginning to end, ensuring that timelines are adhered to and written records of all actions taken are made and kept.

The Standards Officer must collect complaints from users and stakeholders on a regular basis, log and collate them and submit them to the Management committee (normally made up of the Country Director, Finance Manager, Programme Manager and possibly the HR Manager).

If the complaint refers to a member of the management committee, they should withdraw from the meeting when discussing and making decisions about the case. If the complaint is concerning or implicating the senior management as a whole then first the complaint should be considered by the committee and responded to. If the complainant is not happy with the response and wishes to pursue it further, they should be provided with the option and the address to redirect their complaint directly to the Internal Audit Office.

In addition, all communication between the complainants and IR goes through the Standards Officer. If the complaint involves the Standards Officer, his or her line manager must manage all communication for that case. In the event of Internal Audit having to conduct an investigation they may choose to communicate with the complainant directly.

Lastly, the Standards Officer prepares a six monthly overview of complaints for the Country Director or Board of Trustees and Regional Auditor. At HQ, the Standards Officer is accommodated within the Internal Audit Unit. In each of the other IR offices, the Country Director appoints the Standards officer or allocates the duties involved.

Complaint Collection

Methods for receiving complaints should take into account fear of reprisal, illiteracy, access and safety to both complainant and Islamic Relief staff. It is better to provide several methods of complaints collection to ensure access to all stakeholders. It must be possible to file complaints in person, by phone, and in writing.

Complaints made in person can occur on a number of levels. However, for IR staff, it is crucial that should a complaint be made, it must be confirmed with the complainant that it is an official complaint and that it will be processed in accordance with the policy (which should already be communicated to relevant communities at project initiation – see Transparency). Complaints should be recorded in the presence of the complainant and read back to them to confirm that the content is correct. Name and contact details should also be taken. Where complaints are made about IR staff to the staff member in question, where possible, another IR staff member should be called to receive the complaint. Where this is not possible, all methods such as written and phone complaints should be employed.

Complainants contacting IR by phone should also be informed of the IR Complaints Policy and provide confirmation that a formal complaint is being lodged. The same information should be collected as for complaints made in person (see Filing a Complaint)

Written complaints are often the most accessible to the communities that we work in as they provide a degree of anonymity and avoid direct confrontation. However, it must be stressed in communication of the complaints handling system (see Toolkit Two) that name and contact details are required in order to process a complaint. Written complaints can be received by post. However, to reduce costs, a drop box should be installed at project sites and IR offices to enable written complaints to be left in a secure place. Drop Boxes must be regularly collected and ensure that only authorised persons can access the complaints deposited.

If a complainant is illiterate, digital recording of the complaint may be required (see later).

Filing a complaint

The complaints procedure will be outlined and communicated as an integral part of our programme initiation activities (See Transparency Component and Toolkit two). Translation of the policy, the appropriate use of language and easy availability of

information is important to enable all our beneficiaries, partners and donors to have access to the grievance procedure

The complaints procedure must be publicly displayed in an appropriate format at field offices and project locations. This is part of IR's communication strategy that aims to provide greater accountability and transparency to users by informing the wider public about Islamic Relief's programmes and their rights and entitlements within it.

Any complainant received is referred to the Standards Officer.

The complaint should include the name, signature and contact details of the complainant and should provide as much detail as possible as to the nature of the complaint. A standard form (developed by the HQ Standards Officer) will be used to record the complaint and enter it into the system. If the complainant is able to complete this form his or herself, it may be provided. In other cases, the Standards Officer should provide assistance or, where necessary, complete the form using details provided by non-written sources. In the case of the complainant not having sufficient literacy skills to complete the form, the complaint may either be digitally recorded or transcribed by the Standards Officer or a member of staff and then read back to the complainant before being signed or marked by the complainant to prove the document is an authentic record.

IR will accept complaints from supporters, beneficiaries and partner organisations up to one year (12 months) after the event, unless the complaint is criminal in nature, in which case there is no formal time limit.

Valid complaints have to be related to:

- **IR activities, even if they were sub-contracted to another organisation or company;**
- **IR staff members, including those staff members no longer working for IR.**

Complaints about IR staff members are only accepted if the complaints concern these staff members in their capacity as staff members. IR will not take responsibility for the private lives of its staff members unless they bring IR into disrepute by using IR vehicles and property. Staff on overseas missions may be considered to be representing IR out of normal office hours. The complaint form has to be dated and signed. It will be helpful in taking action if the name and contact details of the complainant are provided. If the complainant complains on behalf of a third person, the name and contact details of this third person should be provided, or good reasons for not giving those details must be given. All complaints should be treated as confidential. This confidentiality should be integral to all communication within the complaints handling system. If the complainant provides documentation, this documentation is photocopied and the originals are returned to the complainant.

Unwarranted disclosure by a member of staff of confidential information relating to the complaint or complainant is a disciplinary offence.

The Standards Officer explains to the complainant the complaints handling process and provides a copy of IR's complaint leaflet. After the complaint has been filed, the Standards Officer provides the complainant with a copy of the completed complaint form. In addition, the Standards Officer gives a written confirmation of receipt, or sends this

confirmation within two working days by fax, post, or email. In this confirmation, there is an indication of the time span IR expects to need to process the complaint (usually 21 days). If the estimated time lines prove impossible to respect, the complainant is informed accordingly and will receive an update from the Standards Officer every 15 days.

Complaints that can be dealt with immediately should indeed be dealt with immediately, and the response should be documented. **All communication with the complainant is written in a style and language that is easy to understand.**

Processing a complaint

The original of each complaint form and a copy of the confirmation are kept in file.

Within two working days, the Standards Officer logs the complaint and decides whether or not this complaint is acceptable (i.e., is indeed filed by a supporter, beneficiary or partner organisation and is related to the work of Islamic Relief). If not, the Standards Officer states this in a suitable response to the complainant. If the complaint is accepted, the Standards Officer submits the complaint to the next available meeting of the Country Office management committee. In the case of a complaint requiring immediate response a meeting of the management committee may be convened to discuss it and decide on a response.

Letters from solicitors or letters that threaten with legal proceedings must be referred to the Internal Audit Office at IR Headquarters and immediately forwarded to relevant personnel throughout the organisation including the Chief Executive. Complaints from the Charity Commission or a governmental organisation must be referred to the Office of the Chief Executive. Press queries must be referred to the Press Office at IR Headquarters.

The Standard Officer will then deal with the complaint either by sending an acknowledgement, or an apology and details of response. If deemed necessary, the Standards Officer will conduct an investigation and prepare a report. If an investigation is necessary, the Standards Officer sends the complaint to the accused personnel or relevant programme officer and his or her superior or the Head of Department to which the complaint relates. They must provide a written response within 14 days which will be considered by the Standards Officer in consultation with the Officer's superior or line manager. The Standards Officer will prepare a report and deliver it to the complainant, the officer and his or her superior or line manager within 5 working days after he or she had received the response to the complaint. This report reflects on the complaint and the rights of the complainant. It includes an overview of the issues and parties involved and, if appropriate, an apology and/or an overview of rectifying action scheduled or already taken.

The investigative process

In investigating the complaint:

- The persons designated to respond to the complaint will feel free to interview any relevant stakeholders within or outside of the organisation.

- Any persons who are directly or indirectly and partly or fully implicated in the complaint are always heard and assumed innocent until proven otherwise.
- The processes of investigation and remediation take place simultaneously.
- The complainant may be contacted, either to seek more information or to ask for possible solutions. For the purpose of confidentiality in regards to his or her identity, and to avoid the suspicion of intimidation, all contacts have to go through the Standards Officer.
- The Standards Officer monitors the process of remediation to ensure its effectiveness. Since timeliness is vital in this process, the Standards Officer ensures that there is an ongoing positive process of investigation and communication to the complainant and accused right from the onset of investigation to the point where the final report is sent to the complainant.

Remediation and corrective action

- The report to the complainant includes an overview of the issues and parties involved and, if appropriate, an apology and/or an overview of response (rectifying action scheduled or already taken).
- If appropriate, the person designated to follow up on the complaint provides the Standards Officer with periodic overviews of action taken. The number and frequency of these overviews depends on the action required and will be predetermined jointly by the Standards Officer and the person designated to follow up on the complaint.
- The Standards Officer keeps written records of all action taken.

Financial affairs

IR covers any costs involved in the registration, investigation, remediation and feedback of complaints. Complaints concerning Fraud and illegal activity will also be subject to the process contained within the Anti Fraud Policy.

Unresolved complaints

International Offices

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the process of investigation, he or she has a 30-day right to appeal to the Country Director.

The Office of the Country Director will be given a file containing the original complaint together with any supporting documents, all of the information, data and documents collated by the Standards Officer and generated as a result of his or her investigation, a copy of the report prepared by the Standards Officer and a copy of the appeal.

The Country Director or a member of his office will review the matter and prepare a written response. The decision of the Office of the Chief Executive is final.

If the complaint is against the Country Director or relates to the way the Office of the Country Director has handled the complaint, the Regional Programme Manager (in the case of Field Offices) or a sub committee of the Board of Trustees for that country (for legally independent branches) will investigate the complaint and their decision is final.

Complaints concerning HQ services.

In the case of the UK, all complaints should be directed to the Standards Officer in the UK office, unless they relate specifically to a function of HQ services, in which case they may be directed to the Internal Audit Office at HQ. Appeals in the case of HQ related complaints would be addressed to the Chief Executive.