



Learning Mission IRAQ

Collective Accountability to Affected People (AAP) Information Call Centre

In 2015, the Humanitarian Country Team in Iraq established an Information Call Centre to improve two-way communication between displaced people and aid agencies. With over 3 million people displaced across more than 3000 locations, information on the support available through the response needed to be shared with affected people. It was also crucial to obtain feedback from affected people. An interagency approach was vital to improve policies and ensure that limited resources were used in the most appropriate way.

Practical steps for senior humanitarian leaders to put Collective Accountability to Affected People in practice

- Insert a clear statement on accountability to affected population into the Humanitarian Response Plan and cluster priorities.
- Demonstrate active and visible leadership by the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team for collective accountability mechanisms, including mobilising commitment from the clusters and Inter Cluster Coordination Group.
- Advocate for and agree to prioritise common funding and (in-kind) support for collective accountability mechanisms, such as an inter-agency call centre.
- Start the project as quickly as possible – even if an initial pilot - and adapt, adjust, and scale-up based on new information and feedback.
- Ensure soft-ware licensing agreements are economical (free of charge if possible) and user-friendly.
- Negotiate with telecommunication companies for a free-of-charge number for callers.
- Ensure that clusters train call centre staff and provide up-to-date information for operators to provide to callers.
- Ensure that agency leads hold staff and clusters accountable for follow-up on feedback and complaints.
- Ensure, through the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team, that feedback and information from the call centre informs programme development and adjustments in interventions through the work of the clusters and the Inter Cluster Coordination Group.
- Recognise that an inter-agency call centre performs some functions of AAP, but organisations still require their own accountability mechanisms as well as direct engagement with affected people in focus groups and other ways.

Strengthening two-way communication to put people at the heart of operations

The primary role of the call centre is providing information to internally displaced people. Frequently Asked Questions are compiled and updated regularly, together with a Directory of Services, which enables operators to refer callers to relevant organisations and hotlines. The main steps taken include:

Leadership in action:

1. UNHCR and WFP spearheaded the establishment of the centre through political support and critical financial contributions. IOM and OCHA supplemented the contributions with additional funds and in-kind support (technical and human resources). NGOs were supportive in disseminating information about the call centre.
2. The Humanitarian Coordinator provided her personal support to assist with the continuation of the centre through strong messaging on its vital role. She helped secure financial support through the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund.

Setting up the call centre:

3. UNOPS negotiated with telecommunications companies in Iraq to obtain the first free of charge phone numbers ever established in the country.

4. UNOPS negotiated with the government to use a Cisco server which enables efficient and smooth running of the call centre.
5. Cluster coordinators trained the call centre staff in key areas of their work, particularly in recognising and referring protection, sexual and exploitation abuse and gender-based violence cases.
6. Clusters members established partnerships for information sharing and case reporting with clusters.
7. The call centre manager, UNOPS, has ensured gender and language balance among the call centre staff in support of equal opportunities and to ensure accessibility for women and different ethnic groups.

Influencing decision-making and the response

8. Each month the call centre provides humanitarian agencies with a report on trends and findings which they use in Humanitarian Country Team meetings.
9. The Humanitarian Country Team, the Inter Cluster Coordination Group, clusters, and individual agencies use the call centre reports to inform their planning and programming.

Delivering at scale

10. The call centre evolved from a one way, to a two way call centre: 25% of calls are now call backs to callers to ask if the issue was resolved or to provide responses where queries could not be resolved immediately.
11. The call center started as a pilot project in the Erbil governorate and was scaled-up and adjusted based on feedback.
12. The call centre could be used as part of implementation and monitoring. For example, a mine action agency trained operators to provide information to callers returning to their homes but were concerned about explosive devices. Another agency is using the call centre for post-distribution monitoring. The Education cluster briefed operators to ask callers if they had children and to provide information on how to register them for school.

“78 per cent of displaced people in Iraq use mobile phones, however women and newly displaced persons frequently report lack of access to or lack of mobile phones as a challenge to their ability to keep in touch with family members now spread across the country due to the conflict”.

“The call centre is particularly important to internally displaced people living in non-camp settings, who may have limited direct access to aid organisations”.

“It’s important not to put too much expectation on the call centre. We can’t change the entire response, but we can make adjustments at the margins”.

Window of opportunity - Next steps for the response

- Enhance the role of the Inter Cluster Coordination Group to oversee the follow up on the work of the call centre, including analysing of and reporting on trends.
- Develop coordinated or complementary reporting and feedback mechanisms between the call centre, the clusters, and the agencies for the exchange of up-to-date information on ongoing and upcoming humanitarian response activities and on the status of previously referred cases/challenges.
- Consider piloting reporting on the call centre trends as a standing item on the Humanitarian Country Team agenda.
- Seek support from major telecommunications companies for more free of charge phone numbers and technical support.
- Prepare a sustainable hand-over plan for the continuation of the call centre from international to national and local resources and operation if needed.
- Include local actors and organisations in the joint reporting and referral mechanisms of the call centre.