

**Operationalisation of the principles of engagement
throughout the Project Cycle Management (PCM) Phases**

Cross-border humanitarian response

1. Identification & Design (or Programming)

Key applicable Humanitarian Principles: Operational Independence & Impartiality

Civilian Administration Entities should grant humanitarian organizations unhindered access to areas they administrate to allow humanitarian organizations to provide life-saving assistance and services to populations in need. Humanitarian organizations should notify Civilian Administration Entities at the relevant geographical levels about their planned humanitarian activities and provide related publically available organizational information.

Humanitarian organizations should take into consideration the local economic fabric and the existing local service provision and ensure that the planned intervention is complementary with the response of Civilian Administration Entities and other humanitarian organizations or stabilisation actors.

For humanitarian organisations, advanced engagement with Civilian Administration Entities at the relevant geographical levels is important since they may have information (population statistics, needs assessment, availability of facilities, etc.) that can inform needs assessments carried out by humanitarian organisations. Developing common understanding of prioritization criteria (in terms of geographical area, target group and sector of intervention) is instrumental. Engagement and information sharing will reduce risks of tensions between Civilian Administration Entities and humanitarian organizations. Selection of project location is one outcome of this phase and information provided by Civilian Administration Entities should be taken into consideration to avoid duplication and reduce gaps in the overall humanitarian response.

In the case of a disagreement between the humanitarian organization and the Civilian Administration Entities, humanitarian principles and accountability to affected population and local community should be the main criteria to resolve the disagreement. Humanitarian organizations, adhering to internationally recognized methodologies for assessing humanitarian needs and response, cannot allow undue influence over the findings of needs assessments or the response. This is to maintain independence and to assess needs impartially so they are credible and acceptable to the affected population, the local community, and the international community.

Accountability to local communities and affected population:

Direct consultations with local communities and affected populations are conducted by humanitarian actors to ensure that the planned intervention answers the priority needs of the local community identified through a systematic assessment of the context (including existing resilience mechanisms and capacities that could be supported to have a positive and sustainable impact). Such consultations should also be designed to manage community expectations.

Assessments should not pre-assume the needs and the capacities of the population. Assessments are conducted in a holistic, transparent, inclusive and participatory manner to better ensure that they are representative of all affected people, including marginalized and underprivileged groups. Trained data collectors should be male and female, data is disaggregated by age and sex and information is collected, used, stored and shared, with full respect for confidentiality, and in accordance with the “do no harm” principle.

2. Setup and Planning (or Identification and Formulation)

Key applicable Humanitarian Principles: Operational Independence, Neutrality & Impartiality

Humanitarian organisations should consult Civilian Administration Entities on the various plans drafted for the project (e.g. action plan, monitoring plan and operational plan) to ensure a common understanding.

When drafting a plan, the humanitarian organisation should pay particular attention to:

- Activity plan: an activity plan should not be contrary to, and best be aligned to any existing official plan (e.g. school schedule)
- Hiring of project staff: a good practice is to engage in a transparent and consistent manner with Civilian Administration Entities by, for example, sharing the organisation's recruitment policy(ies); while not allowing undue influence to interfere with the process. The degree of interaction on the hiring process will depend on the sector intervention.
- Selection of targeted populations: Civilian Administration Entities should be engaged in the design of selection criteria and then have the humanitarian organization proceed with the selection keeping the Civilian Administration Entities informed. Selection of target groups most in need should be the result of any assessment. Restricting reach to certain groups is considered a breach of the humanitarian principles.
- Risk assessment: a risk assessment should be conducted in consultation with the Civilian Administration Entities, local communities and affected populations to evaluate their resilience to shocks and changes in order to mitigate any possible risks in project implementation (e.g. IDP movement, host community reactions / response, overall security situation etc....).
- Exit: In order to ensure sustainability, the project should contain an exit strategy and should be discussed in advance with Civilian Administration Entities (especially when the project will be handed over to them). A contingency planning should be outlined in case the conditions of the exit change over implementation of the project.
- Guidance on specific technical aspects (curriculum, content of kits/packages, project based salary scales, etc...) of the project should be provided, or at minimum, discussed with the cluster/sector.

The level of engagement in the establishment of selection criteria and monitoring will vary depending on the types of activities being implemented and the Civilian Administration Entities' capacities and understanding of humanitarian principles. Humanitarian organizations will not allow any undue influence on the selection of staff for humanitarian organisations and/or on the selection of affected populations. This is to ensure our independence and neutrality and to make sure that the response is credible and acceptable to the international community and affected populations. In the event of a disagreement between the humanitarian organization and the Civilian Administration Entities, humanitarian principles and accountability to affected population and local community should be the main criteria to find a solution.

Accountability to local communities and affected populations:

Consultations should take place with the local communities and affected populations to ensure that the set-up and planning are participative. Such consultations inform the risk assessment, the process of affected population selection (including criteria setting), the planning of the project's exit and the establishment of relevant mechanisms that enable and encourage affected communities and people to safely express their degree of satisfaction as well as their potential complaints. For meaningful participation, particular attention should be given to groups or individuals traditionally excluded from the decision making processes. These may include women, girls and boys, elderly persons, people with disabilities, minority groups etc. The set up and planning phase should ensure feasibility and complementary with local knowledge, practices and techniques, taking into consideration existing resilience mechanisms and capacities.

3. Implementation

Key applicable Humanitarian Principles: Humanity, Operational Independence, Neutrality & Impartiality

Involvement of Civilian Administration Entities during the project implementation phase may differ according to the nature of implemented activities, the existence of local infrastructures, the ongoing provision of services by Civilian Administration Entities, and the capacities of those entities.

When implementing a project, the following central considerations need to be taken into account:

- Procurement and supply chain management: humanitarian organizations are solely responsible for the procurement process and the supply chain management.
- Human resource management: while carrying out distributions, management of project staff should remain the prerogative of the implementing humanitarian organizations. This is in contrast to projects implemented by sectors (such as health, wash, agriculture, education, etc.) that rely on existing infrastructure and human resources (e.g. teachers, medical staff, water technicians, etc.) already employed by, or part of, the Civilian Administration Entities. In such cases, specific guidance may be provided by clusters/ sectors regarding use of the infrastructures for the project purposes and the use of those already employed by, or part of, the Civilian Administration Entity staff for project implementation.

Humanitarian organisations will not accede to requests by Civilian Administration Entities to:

- Take control of humanitarian stores, commodities or warehouses.
- Take control of assets related to the project
- Provide staff personal bio data
- Pay cash or in-kind administrative costs on aid deliveries or humanitarian services to affected populations.

Accountability to local communities and affected populations:

Consultations are held with local communities and affected populations, including those benefiting and not benefiting from the project, to ensure that the humanitarian response meets their assessed and priority needs and supports existing resilience mechanisms and capacities. Implementation is adapted based on feedback from local communities and affected populations who are continuously kept informed and updated about the response, such as any delays/obstacles that may occur in order to manage expectations and minimize tensions.

4. Monitoring & Evaluation

Key applicable Humanitarian Principles: Operational Independence & Neutrality

Involvement of Civilian Administration Entities in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process strengthens eventual ownership of Civilian Administration Entities and facilitates a potential hand over of the project. Such an involvement should not jeopardize the independence and neutrality of the humanitarian response. M&E mechanisms and tools should be contextually appropriate, adhere to internationally recognized methodologies and include a commitment to humanitarian principles and accountability to the affected population and local community.

Furthermore, the level of involvement may vary depending on the ability or interest of Civilian Administration Entities to be engaged in the phases of the PCM. Evolving capacities of Civilian Administration Entities throughout the PCM should be captured by the M&E tools and their level of involvement should be adjusted accordingly.

A key factor for the successful involvement of Civilian Administration Entities in the M&E phase of a project, is to establish a clear definition of M&E concepts and identify relevant tools. The impact analysis is key to enable identification of good practices and lessons learned.

In technical projects, a way forward is to split the different layers of M&E:

- Project procedures and resources (e.g. mainly administrative and logistical parts of the project) is led by humanitarian organizations; and
- Technical aspects of the project (quality of services, number of affected populations etc...) is led by humanitarian organizations in concert with Specialized Technical Administration Entities. Depending on the nature of the project (e.g. health, education, etc.) there should be an opportunity to jointly monitor and evaluate each other's agreed performance.

Where relevant, humanitarian organizations may agree to allocate resources to Specialized Technical Administration Entities for them to conduct specific M&E tasks related to the implemented project. Prior to agreeing to allocate resources, humanitarian organisations should consult with the respective cluster/ sector. The humanitarian organization should agree with the Civilian Administration Entities on the establishment modalities of a complaints mechanism and ways to raise and address complaints against each other in a safe and accessible manner.

Accountability to local communities and affected populations:

Local communities and affected populations should be involved in the M&E of the project in order to ensure that assistance is provided based on humanitarian principles and the evolving needs and capacities of local communities and affected population. The M&E indicators should allow to track and evaluate their participation and involvement and to adapt the participation mechanisms according to the evolutions of the context.

A feedback and complaint mechanism to evaluate satisfaction of local communities and affected populations, including Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) related concerns, should only be established, if the humanitarian organisation has the capacity and ability to investigate and take corrective actions. Information should be collected in an ethical and confidential manner and systematically triggers or informs prevention and response activities. Lessons learning process should be participatory to ensure the building of project memory and avoid repetition of errors. The local community and affected population should be involved in the implementation of key recommendations.

5. Exit

Key applicable Humanitarian Principles: Operational Independence & Neutrality

The exit phase is key and should be taken into consideration from the outset of the project (identification & design). As with all other PCM phases, Civilian Administration Entities, local communities, and affected populations should be involved in exit discussions to ensure better program outcomes and encourage commitment to program sustainability. In addition, exit strategies can help resolve tensions that may arise between the withdrawal of assistance and a commitment to achieve project outcomes.

Generally, four different scenarios exist for a project exit (recognising that a project can be suspended/terminated if the principles are violated): 1/ natural ending 2/ project transition to other humanitarian organizations, Civilian Administration Entities and/ or local communities and affected populations 3/ rapid exit (mainly for security reasons) and 4/ down-scaling (often for funding reasons).

Different modalities of transition to other Civilian Administration Entities and/or local communities can be envisaged depending on the local context, the nature of the project and the capacities of Civilian Administration Entities, local communities and affected populations. Hand-over of the project can be done directly to the Civilian Administration Entities, or to cooperatives linked to Civilian Administration Entities (especially for agriculture projects).

When exiting, a few considerations should be taken into account:

- At the outset of a project, an evaluation should be conducted to understand the Civilian Administration Entities' and/ or local community and affected population's sense of ownership/commitment to continue program activities, their level of interest in being handed over (phased or fully) the services and their institutional and human resource capacities to continuing to implement the program activities in the longer term.
- Hand-over of relevant assets, commodities and viable provisions of consumable supplies (e.g. food, medical supplies, agricultural inputs, etc.) to Civilian Administration Entities should be part of the project, unless there are reasons not to do so.
- During the exit phase, an up-dated community hazard/ risk assessments and preparedness plans should be established with the Civilian Administration Entities to guide future activities.
- The monitoring of exit strategy benchmarks should be integrated into the overall monitoring and evaluation plan with clearly defined indicators. An evaluation of the exit strategy should also take place after.
- If the establishment of a user fee type system is envisioned after the services are transitioned to the Civilian Administration Entities, ideally a common framework should be agreed on between the humanitarian organization and the Civilian Administration Entities and shared publically to ensure sustainability and social equity with the local community and affected population.

Accountability to local communities and affected populations:

The exit strategy should take into consideration the effects of the project on the resilience of local communities and affected populations and foresee measures in case the project had any negative effects. The exit should ensure participation of communities in the closure decision making process. It should also foresee sustainability of services provided in order to remain accountable to local communities. If projects transition to Civilian Administration Entities, a mechanism should be established to ensure that the needs of the local community continued to be served through the project.