Client Responsive Programming Framework

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Client Responsiveness at the IRC: engaging people receiving aid and services in the decisions which affect their lives

The purpose of this document is to present the IRC's approach to Client Responsiveness[1]. Client Responsiveness is an organizational priority at the IRC, which reflects our commitment to meaningful participation of people receiving our aid and services, delivered directly and in partnership with others. It also reflects our commitment to promoting the means through which clients may hold us accountable for the decisions we make on their behalf. This document explains the Standards and Practices which our Country Programs are required to apply throughout all stages of the program life-cycle, and the enabling factors which we ask them to strengthen in support of meaningful participation of and accountability to our clients.

What is Client Responsive Programming?

Programming is client-responsive when our clients are engaged in influencing decisions about its design and delivery. Clients may participate in decision making in different ways: they may be consulted for their opinion or the IRC and its partners may collaborate with them to take decisions which affect their lives. To achieve this, IRC Country Programs establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) governing the collection, use and response to feedback from clients and communities, applying best practice as defined by the sector in ensuring that feedback channels are accessible to women and men, girls and boys of all ages with or without disabilities, and marginalized groups according to the operational context.

A client is a person for whom the IRC provides, or intends to provide, assistance or services. We use the term "client", because it signals our belief that the people we serve have the right to decide what kind of aid and services they need and want. We also want to learn from clients whether they have benefitted from the aid and services provided and how we can improve our work to meet their needs.

	Intended Client	A person who is targeted by planned or existing IRC aid / services (e.g. eligible people living in a program catchment area)
	Direct Client	A person who is receiving the IRC aid and / or services (e.g. patients in an IRC clinic)
	Indirect Client	People who are not directly receiving assistance from the IRC, but who are connected to people which are, and therefore might potentially also benefit in some way from the IRC's provision of assistance to those people (e.g. families and dependants of IRC's direct clients)

1   The term "client responsiveness" refers to measures to collect, analyze and respond to affected people's feedback and complaints and supports their participation and engagement in project activities and decision-making processes. The term encompasses similar concepts and approaches used by organizations such as Accountability to Affected People (AAP) or Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).

Why is Client Responsiveness important for the IRC?

Meaningful participation of people receiving aid and services is an essential condition of principled, effective programming at the IRC. Participation promotes empowerment of people, strengthens mutual trust between clients and the providers of aid and services. It is our goal to put clients at the center of aid though Client Responsive Programming.

Involving clients in the decisions about what aid to deliver, to whom, where, when, how and why will make our assistance more:

Effective   Successful in achieving the results and change clients wants to see

Relevant   Suitable for meeting clients' priority needs and expectations

Appropriate   Right for the clients in the context and situation they are living in

Accountable   Responsible to our clients, affected communities and other key stakeholders for the decisions and actions we take

What is the IRC's approach to promote meaningful engagement with clients?

The IRC's approach is to institutionalize Client Responsive Programming and to create and enhance the enabling conditions which promote meaningful engagement and maximize the potential influence clients can have over programming decisions. Based on our experience and extensive research, we know that it is not enough to collect clients' views: we need to have internal processes in place that enable meaningful and effective use of clients' feedback by our staff and coordinate our efforts with other actors. Therefore, IRC developed a two-pronged approach to shift the way we work with and on behalf of clients:

1. From consultation to greater participation and collaboration

IRC implements Client Responsive Programming throughout the whole project lifecycle by putting in place mechanisms to collect, analyze and respond to client feedback and inform our programmatic decisions. In the first place, we seek to ensure that IRC Country Programs are systematically consulting clients through a combination of proactive and reactive channels[2] when making programmatic decisions. According to context, capacity and resources available, Country Programs move from client consultation to client collaboration, as described below in the IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation.

2. Creating an enabling environment

IRC invests in a number of critical internal and external operating conditions to achieve greater participation and engagement of clients.

This includes strengthening our internal organizational structure and processes to ensure adequate **data management** for safe and systematic recording of client feedback for timely decision making; assignment **of roles and responsibilities** to implement Client Responsive Programming at the field, country offices and headquarters levels; **definition of referral systems and pathways** to provide a timely and best possible response to the clients' suggestions and concerns.

It also requires an organizational culture where **Country Program Leaders** build a responsive team and foster a culture of responsiveness at country, regional and global levels by requesting and using clients' perspectives in the decisions they make; and where **human and financial resources** are available to collect, analyze and respond to client feedback and to adapt our activities according to clients' priorities.

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2   Proactive feedback channels are mechanisms through which the IRC is actively soliciting feedback from clients, for example: a survey, a focus group discussion (FGDs), an individual interview, etc. Reactive feedback channels are mechanisms that the IRC provide to its clients and other stakeholders to communicate with us – at the time and subject they choose, for example toll-free line, office walk-in hours, suggestions box, etc.

Our framework also takes into consideration the need for a **coordinated approach** to client and community engagement and participation, especially in context where clients are receiving services from multiple actors. It also recognizes the need to **share and strengthen the capacity of our partners**, in order to uphold the same quality standards in the way we are listening and responding to client feedback.

Increasing Impact on the Decision

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
People in the communities we work in have information about the IRC, the principles we adhere to, how we expect staff to behave, the programs we are implementing and what we intend to deliver.	People in the communities we work in have access to a combination of feedback mechanisms (proactive and reactive) to communicate their concerns, preferences and aspirations to the IRC. The IRC uses their feedback to inform our programming, strategic and / or operational decisions and we provide feedback to people in those communities on whether and how their feedback was acted upon.	People in the communities we work in join and actively participate in IRC decision making processes about the programs that we design and deliver.	People in the communities we work in make decisions together with the IRC about programmatic, strategic and / or operational choices. People and the IRC share decision making power.	People in the communities in which we work take the lead in making decisions about the programs we deliver, with IRC's support and facilitation where required.

Adapted from the IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation (https://www.iap2.org.au/about-us/about-iap2-australasia/spectrum/)

How is Client Responsiveness practically applied?

IRC has developed organization-wide Standards and Practices to be achieved by all Country Programs and a set of resources to support teams in applying Client Responsive Programming. The resources guide the country teams in implementing feedback mechanisms, and systematic consultation and collaboration with clients.

The following key steps are intrinsically linked to the internal business processes and ensure practical integration of Client Responsiveness Programming across IRC Country Programs.

> We specifically focus on engaging vulnerable groups and proactively consider demographic factors like gender and age as well as humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities.

Step 1. Assess current programs against Client Responsiveness Standards and Practices, and prioritize goals and activities to achieve them.

Our ambition to meaningfully consult and collaborate with clients was translated into a set of Standards and Practices that help IRC Country Programs to institutionalize Client Responsive Programming throughout the project lifecycle.

Good and Great Standard and Practices for Client Responsiveness	
STANDARDS	
Good Standard	**Great Standard**
Client Consultation: Clients routinely provide feedback that informs key decisions during project design, start-up, implementation and close-out.	Client Collaboration: Clients collaborate in key strategic and programmatic decisions.

	PRACTICES	
	Good Practices	**Great Practices**
Design Phase	We identify existing client feedback channels or plan new channels that we will use during implementation to inform project adjustments, with specific consideration for women and girls' safety and accessibility in using feedback channels.	We involve our intended clients in co-designing the project. We actively seek women and girls' input using appropriate communication methods.
	We use feedback from past projects or other organizations to inform project design.	

PRACTICES		
	Good Practices	**Great Practices**
Start-Up Phase	We identify existing channels or consult our clients in planning the proactive and reactive channels that we will use to collect feedback from our clients during project implementation.	We involve clients in the process of planning the feedback channels that will be used during implementation. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls.
	We use best practice guidance to plan how they will record, manage and refer the feedback that we collect during implementation, with particular attention for reporting and responding to allegations of abuse & exploitation, including SEA, and other sensitive complaints.	
	We inform our clients about the project, expected staff behaviors and the feedback channels. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners communicate this with women and girls.	
Implementation Phase	We proactively collect and act on feedback at the mid-point for projects of 12 months, and at least once every year for longer projects. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls.	We involve clients in deciding on how to respond to feedback. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls.
	We manage at least one reactive feedback channel through which clients can provide feedback / lodge complaints. Particular attention to be paid to the ability of women and girls to use the reactive channel.	
	We explain to our clients within the timeframe agreed how their feedback was taken into account.	
Close-Out Phase	We interpret the sex and age disaggregated feedback data, identifying its implications for close-out and future projects.	We involve clients in interpreting feedback data and planning future actions to address unresolved issues.
	We explain to our clients how their feedback was taken into account within the time agreed.	

Step 2. Work on the enabling conditions to deliver Client Responsive Programming

Beyond feedback mechanisms, Country Programs improve their internal processes to achieve the Standards and associated Practices that they have prioritized. All Country Programs are encouraged to define Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for collecting, analyzing and responding to client feedback through a combination of selected feedback mechanisms: at least one proactive (ex. FGD, community meeting, satisfaction survey using the Core Feedback Themes[3]) and one reactive channel (ex. hotline, help desk, office walk-in). The SOPs also specify a number of enabling conditions such as data management systems, referral pathways, roles and responsibilities among staff that Country Programs should have in place. Each project should have a Client Responsiveness Plan as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan to align with the measurement activities where possible.

Step 3. Implement accountability mechanisms and measure performance of Client Responsive Programming

Country Programs set up accountability mechanisms though out the whole project lifecycle. They have access to the Good and Great Standard Hub, the organizational web-based platform available in several languages which includes the Guidance and tools to implement Client Responsive Programming. In addition to the resources, Country Programs receive regular technical support from the Client Responsiveness Team at Head Quarters (HQ) that includes but is not limited to contextualization of the tools, set up and operationalization of inclusive feedback mechanisms according to the Standards, integrating client feedback into decision making. Country Programs also receive support from sector-focused Technical Advisors to include Client Responsiveness as part of program quality assurance. The Measurement Team support data management and security, while The Gender Equality Team advise on engagement of women and girls.

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3   The Core Feedback Themes provide a list of key topics (priority needs, preferred activities, and engagement preferences, perceptions of the relevance, quality, impact, access, safety, and respectfulness of the response, as well as perceptions of their voice and empowerment within the response) that all IRC country teams should be collecting and interpreting client feedback on.

How the IRC's approach reflects industry standards and commitments?

The IRC's approach reflects the sector-wide commitment and recent efforts to advance the meaningful participation of and accountability towards people affected by crisis in the way that humanitarian actors design and deliver aid and services.

The IRC's Client Responsive Programming Framework internalizes the goals and commitments made by the sector through the IASC Results Group 2 (IASC RG2) on Accountability and Inclusion, Grand Bargain Participation Revolution (GB PR) and CHS commitments in the design of our approach. In particular the IRC's approach reflects GB PR aspiration to include crisis affected people in decision making processes[4]; CHS Commitment Four that emphasizes the need for safe, accessible and appropriate participation, feedback, and Commitment Five that states that complaints should be welcomed and responded to[5]; as well all five IASC Commitments for Accountability to Affected People (CAAP) on improved leadership, transparency, participation and feedback and complaints mechanisms as well as involvement of affected populations in the design, monitoring and evaluation of programs[6]. We routinely review our achievements and methodology to ensure that we are meeting and exceeding sector standards.

IRC is a member of ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance) and a Grand Bargain signatory. We continue to share learning and the resources developed through our approach to Client Responsiveness amongst colleagues in the sector, as we seek to learn from others. We actively participate in relevant networks and discussions and collaborate with peers in seeking to advance policy and practice across the sector.

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4   IASC. A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives Accessed 10 December 2019.

5   CHS Alliance. The Standard. Available at: https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard. Accessed 10 December 2019.

6   IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. December 2017. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/documents-56