PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES AT ACTIONAID: A PARTICIPATORY INQUIRY

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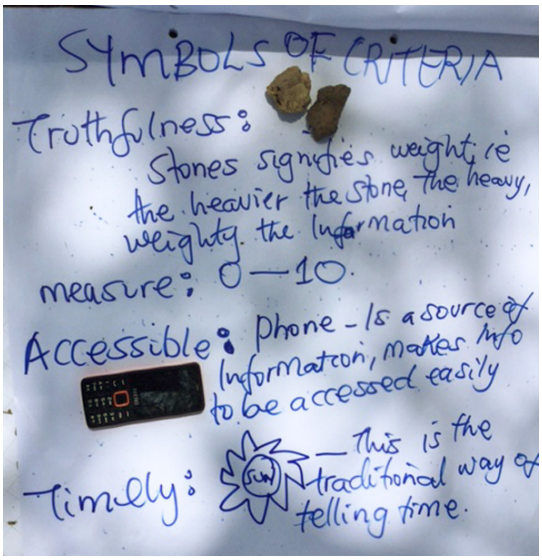

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Executive Summary

Transparency is one of four principles contained in the ActionAid Accountability Charter (2013), and a core value for the organization. Despite its importance, little is known about community, partner and country staff perspectives on transparency. This study represents a first attempt to engage communities, partners, ActionAid staff and other stakeholders such as government officials and the media in a discussion about transparency practices and the benefits transparency are expected to create.

Three countries participated in the study – Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kenya. The study framework and methodology asked a series of questions that could be explored with stakeholders to determine:

- what information needs to be shared,
- how and among whom information is shared,
- how well transparency is actually practiced in specific settings and,
- what impact this practice has on project effectiveness.

The general approach was participatory and action oriented, with research teams in each country using a common framework and methodology to produce their own reports. Settings included projects focused on rights advocacy, agriculture, emergency assistance and education. This report synthesizes findings across the three countries.

The general theory guiding the research suggests that being transparent in the context of development aid involves creating the right conditions and using the right means for all project parties to exchange information on matters of importance to them. It focuses on sharing information about what projects intend to do, how they intend to do it, and what impacts they are having. These can be seen as upstream (goals), midstream (process) and downstream (results) considerations. To achieve transparency with respect to these considerations, shared information should be:

- **Accessible**, in the sense of being easy to understand and reaching all concerned parties;
- **Truthful**, in terms of its reliability and the sincerity with which it is communicated;
- **Timely**, in that it is available when needed.

The report sheds lights on four topics:

1. **Information needs and ethical sharing**

Broadly, communities and partners seemed most interested in upstream and midstream types of project information. This includes things like project purpose, project location and duration, when, where, for how long and who is involved. The usefulness of this information to communities and partners lies in understanding what projects are about and planning how to engage with projects and interact with each other.

By contrast, ActionAid local and national offices seemed most interested in downstream types of project information, namely, the structures of projects (policies, governance, management) and the lessons learned or project impacts. The usefulness of this information to organizations related primarily to how it contributes to reporting and accounting for projects. A few circumstances were identified where the sharing of information could expose individuals or groups to undue harm.

2. **Channels for sharing**

The channels through which information on projects was shared included mechanisms such as the PRRP process and project activities designed primarily with other purposes in mind (training, excursions, etc.). Reflect circles, which are a common feature of ActionAid projects, were the most direct and appropriate channel for sharing and discussing information on the range of information types of interest to community rights holders. The main strength of the circles as a transparency tool was that they gave priority to interpersonal and oral traditions. This went beyond literacy into deeper questions of history and culture in communities where ActionAid is active.

3. **Transparency practices**

Assessments of the extent to which transparency was actually practiced in the study countries generally showed positive results, with some exceptions. Timeliness was the most problematic criteria across many information types (project goals, processes and impacts). This was attributed by many to inefficiencies in the flow of information from one level to the next and power imbalances in some situations (for example, community representatives acting as “gate keepers”). Accessibility – understood mainly as the reach of information – also showed some scope for improvement. Transparency concerns were greatest in emergency projects criticized by some rights holders as lacking truthfulness and timeliness with respect to information on project processes.

More generally, the most prevalent and potentially damaging gap in all three countries seemed to be the poor understanding among rights holders and partners regarding how to safely provide feedback on projects (whether it be on goals, processes or impacts). While ActionAid offices expressed an openness to being challenged or criticized at different stages in the project cycle, rights holders and even some partners did not seem to know when and how to do so. The timeliness of feedback (when it can make a difference to plans) and the extent to which rights holders feel confident they could provide feedback safely, suffered. This gap could be a major barrier for more vulnerable groups such as women and youth, or very poor segments of the population worried that negative feedback could exclude them from benefits of the projects.

4. <u>Transparency impacts</u>

Participation in decision-making; trust between rights holders partners and ActionAid; confidence in project activities; and efficiency in project operations were mentioned by various stakeholders as important impacts of transparent information sharing actually achieved in projects. When information practices lacked accessibility, truthfulness or timeliness, the negative impacts mentioned by rights holders were confusion, doubt and wasted planning effort.

Five recommendations followed from the research:

1. ActionAid and its partners could take a more deliberate approach to sharing information on key project parameters (goals, processes and impacts). The list of information types included under the transparency principles of the ActionAid Accountability Charter provides a reference point which can be tailored to the information needs of different stakeholders in each project context. The research shows that **sharing everything with everyone all of the time** is not necessarily useful and can even lead to breaches of confidentiality. Grounding information sharing in felt needs and in what can be shared ethically, means the information sharing process can focus on making the information accessible (understanding and reach), truthful (reliable to the best of current knowledge) and timely (when it can make a difference).

2. Further research could look at the transparency effects of established ways of working – such as reflect circles and the use of community representatives. Reflect circles seem to provide a communication channel with the widest reach to rights holders and, through explanation and discussion, they offer opportunities to clarify, debate and formulate feedback on multiple dimensions of project plans and impacts. However, they may need greater clarity and more deliberate support from ActionAid so they actually provide

timely feedback on matters of concern to them and in ways that do not expose individuals and groups to undue harm. Attention to safe feedback mechanisms is also needed for community representatives. They need to know how to safely channel feedback from rights holders upwards, and to share with rights holders the information they received from partners and ActionAid. Research should also examine assumptions regarding the role of community representatives in the flow of information, and the conditions under which they can sometimes abuse their power as “gate keepers.”

3. Further attention could be given to the effectiveness of organizational structures and the working culture with respect to the timeliness, accessibility and truthfulness of vital project information. Reducing the rigidity of reporting hierarchies among national, regional and partner staff and fostering the sharing of information across departments (for example, between finance, programs and administration) could help improve transparency by shortening communication channels and reducing the silo effects of complex organizations.

4. The management of uncertainty could be handled with more modesty and truthfulness when sharing information with communities and partners, especially in emergency programmes where unpredictability is an inherent feature. Rights holders and partners are likely to be more tolerant of information gaps, changes in project expectations and funding shortfalls if these are shared as soon as they are known (timely) and the reasons explained in ways that are easily understood and that reach all parties concerned (accessible). Sincerity in knowledge sharing, including recognition of what is not known or fully predictable, can be combined with collaborative risk assessments and contingency planning to build understanding and trust on delicate matters such as budgets and other sources of project uncertainty.

5. Engaging communities, partners and staff in discussions about how ActionAid shares information and why it considers transparency a fundamental obligation in the development process could help enhance mutual understanding and commitment to transparency. Recommendations one and two above, might be the place to start. This would likely make it easier to sharpen the distinction between transparency as a means and accountability as an end in the development process.

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Introduction

Transparency is one of four principles contained in the ActionAid Accountability Charter (2013) and a core value for the organization.[2] In 2013 global annual reporting processes started to ask for information on the degree or extent of implementation of the accountability principles (including transparency) and compliance by members with the Open Information Policy (OIP) established by the federation in 2003. This helped to create a baseline of high-level information on transparency practices needed for more targeted studies. The targeted studies include an ongoing review of the OIP, the development of a theory of change for transparency, a study of the expectations of financial and non-financial supporters with respect to transparency and a crowd-sourced report on the understanding of transparency among some UK-based non-governmental organizations,

[1] In collaboration with Ana Akhvlediani (ActionAid International), Arooj Fatima, Farzana Yasmin and Nazima Shaheen (ActionAid Pakistan), Sarah Ogalleh and Patrick Munyao (ActionAid Kenya), A.S.M Firoz-Ul-Hassan, Rubayat Ahsan, and Tariqul Islam (ActionAid Bangladesh).
[2] ActionAid Constitution – "Honesty and Transparency - being accountable at all levels for the effectiveness of actions and open in judgement and communications with others". P.6

private sector groups and government organizations. ActionAid International and ActionAid UK have both started publishing organizational data as part of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) with a view to actively modeling transparency practices deemed important by these organizations.

Despite these efforts, understanding of the practice of transparency across the federation as a whole lacks detail. The annual reporting questions on transparency are broad and the space available for responses in the web-based template is limited. Furthermore, little is known about community, partner and country staff perspectives on transparency. This study, commissioned by the Transparency and Accountability Advisor of ActionAid International (London), is a response to this gap and demands expressed by communities regarding implementation of the ActionAid accountability principles. It represents a first attempt to engage communities, partners, ActionAid staff and other stakeholders such as government officials and the media in a discussion about aid transparency and its various dimensions.

Three countries were invited to participate in the study – Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kenya – because evidence from annual reporting and commentary from staff suggested that they had already put considerable thought and effort into sharing information about ActionAid projects in various sectors and regions. National offices in each of these countries agreed to contribute, and engaged research teams to conduct the research in their own country. Broadly, the shared objectives were:

- To explore how transparency, as a value and as an accountability principle, is practiced through various pillars of ActionAid's Theory of Change;
- To explore how (if any) transparency efforts made by ActionAid members/country programmes link to more meaningful stakeholder participation and empowerment;
- To explore the extent to which transparency initiatives contribute to greater effectiveness in programme work.

The study framework and methodology, described below, attempted to translate these objectives into a series of practical research questions that could be explored with rights

holders in all three countries and around which findings could be organized.[3] ActionAid International contracted the consultant to design an overall study framework and methodology, provide training in the methodology for research teams, support analysis of country-level findings and create a synthetic report. Individual reports from each country, prepared by national research teams with guidelines provided by the consultant, document the original data and form the basis for the analysis of findings presented here. The study would not have been possible without these grounded country assessments.[4] As an exploratory study, neither the country studies nor this synthesis of findings makes claims regarding the overall performance of any of the participating countries with respect to transparency. Rather, it is the hope of the people and organizations involved that the study helps to inform further discussion on the topic and inspire ongoing transparency practice at the national and sub-national levels.

Study Framework and Methodology

The general approach to this study is participatory and action oriented, and was undertaken in compliance with the ActionAid Research Signature principles. It sought to create the conditions for teams of researchers in each country to engage with community groups, ActionAid partners, ActionAid staff and other stakeholders in structured conversations about transparency. This involved drafting the research methodology, discussing the methodology with the research teams via email and skype training sessions, preparation of guidelines for the analysis of results by the research teams, and iterative review of individual and country reports. The complete draft of this report was also shared with the research teams to correct errors and comment on the consultant's use and interpretation of their findings.

The study was not only participatory and action oriented but also made use of a mixed methods approach to data collection. Each research team interviewed ActionAid staff in the national office to produce a short background paper describing the research sites and the ActionAid projects and sector focus that would form the basis of the study. Countries

[3] ActionAid has developed a Theory of Change for transparency. While this study draws on ideas from that work, the task of creating a methodology for the research produced a particular set and sequence of key concepts and understanding of aid transparency as a practice.

[4] A list of country-level reports is provided in Annex I. They are available, upon request, from the office of ActionAid International

were encouraged to include a mix of development projects on agriculture, rights and education as well as emergency aid projects among the sites collected. This background information provided orientation to the research team regarding who needed to be consulted during the research and a preliminary list of transparency tools and practices currently in use. The primary data collection tool was a detailed participatory action research design developed for the purpose, with adaptations for working with low literacy community groups and for working with partners and ActionAid staff. The key questions included in the design were also repackaged as a guide for a structured interview with stakeholders unable or unwilling to participate in group exercises. While much of the data included in this report comes from the core group-based methodology (applied at the community and organizational levels), the other data sources and methods provided inputs into the triangulation of findings. They also helped provide contrasting views from particular stakeholder groups (mainly government officials and some representatives of the media). All of this had to be done while taking into account the overall objectives of the research and the limited time available to work with stakeholders. The process started in September, 2015 and was completed by mid January, 2016, with most of the field research undertaken in November and early December, 2015. Table 1 shows the distribution of group and individual studies in each country and sector and for each stakeholder group.

Table 1: Group and individual sessions by country, sector and stakeholder.

Country	Community groups	Implementing Partners	ActionAid Staff	Other stakeholders (government, media)
Pakistan	8 (5 rights programmes; 1 emergency; 2 education	4	1	10
Kenya	7 (3 food emergency; 2 education; 2 land rights)	1	1	0
Bangladesh	8 (3 land rights programme, 1 education, 4 disaster management)	1	2	6

The study framework and methodology built on concepts of transparency developed by the author, in collaboration with Jacques Chevalier, a colleague at SAS2 Dialogue. Broadly, this framework suggests that being transparent in the context of development aid involves creating the right conditions and using the right means for all parties concerned to exchange information on project matters of importance to them. It focuses attention on

sharing information about what aid intends to do, how it intends to do it, and what impacts it is having. These can be seen as upstream (goals), midstream (process) and downstream (results) considerations. As such, transparency is a prior condition for aid accountability. Rights holders must know and have some influence over what projects set out to do and how if they are also to have a say in holding aid accountable for results.

To achieve transparency, shared information must meet two basic conditions. First, the information shared must be potentially useful or relevant to those involved, that is, serving a purpose closely connected to ongoing actions and decisions affecting how projects work in real life. Second, the information shared must not expose individuals or groups to undue harm. This condition refers to the ethical obligation to protect peoples' welfare by minimizing the risk that information sharing harms their persons, livelihood or standing in their social context. Confidentiality with respect to personal information tends to be the response to this risk, and is usually obtained by not revealing information that is easily identifiable or stripping it of direct identifiers. Two kinds of exceptions may hold. One is information already in the public domain and therefore no longer confidential. The other is information that should be known because it reveals something that goes against the welfare of the general public. Acts of corruption and threats of violence are examples of situations where the obligation to protect overrides confidentiality. Under these circumstances, the sharing of information is the right or ethical thing to do.

Questions of transparency follow in relation to information sharing that meets these two conditions. To achieve transparency, information that is useful and can be shared ethically should be:

- **Accessible**, in the sense of being easy to understand and reaching all concerned parties. People get it.
- **Truthful**, in terms of its reliability and the sincerity with which it is communicated. It reveals people's intention to speak the truth, without exaggeration or deception.
- **Timely**, in that it is available when needed. The sharing is well-timed.

In this study, these three dimensions of transparency were discussed and used to assess the extent to which transparency was actually achieved by ActionAid in relation to specific

types of information considered useful by the parties concerned and that they believed could be shared ethically.

Finally, the reason to pursue transparency can be understood in relation to the many benefits or impacts that transparency is expected to create. In the ActionAid Theory of Change for Transparency these benefits include participation in decision-making, feelings of empowerment and inclusion, increased trust and credibility and, ultimately, greater aid effectiveness and impact. Figure 1 visualizes the main parts of the study framework and their sequential relationship: i) shared information meets the conditions of potential usefulness and scope for ethical sharing and means are used to share the information; ii) transparency criteria are met; iv) transparency impacts are achieved.

Figure 1: The study framework for transparency research.

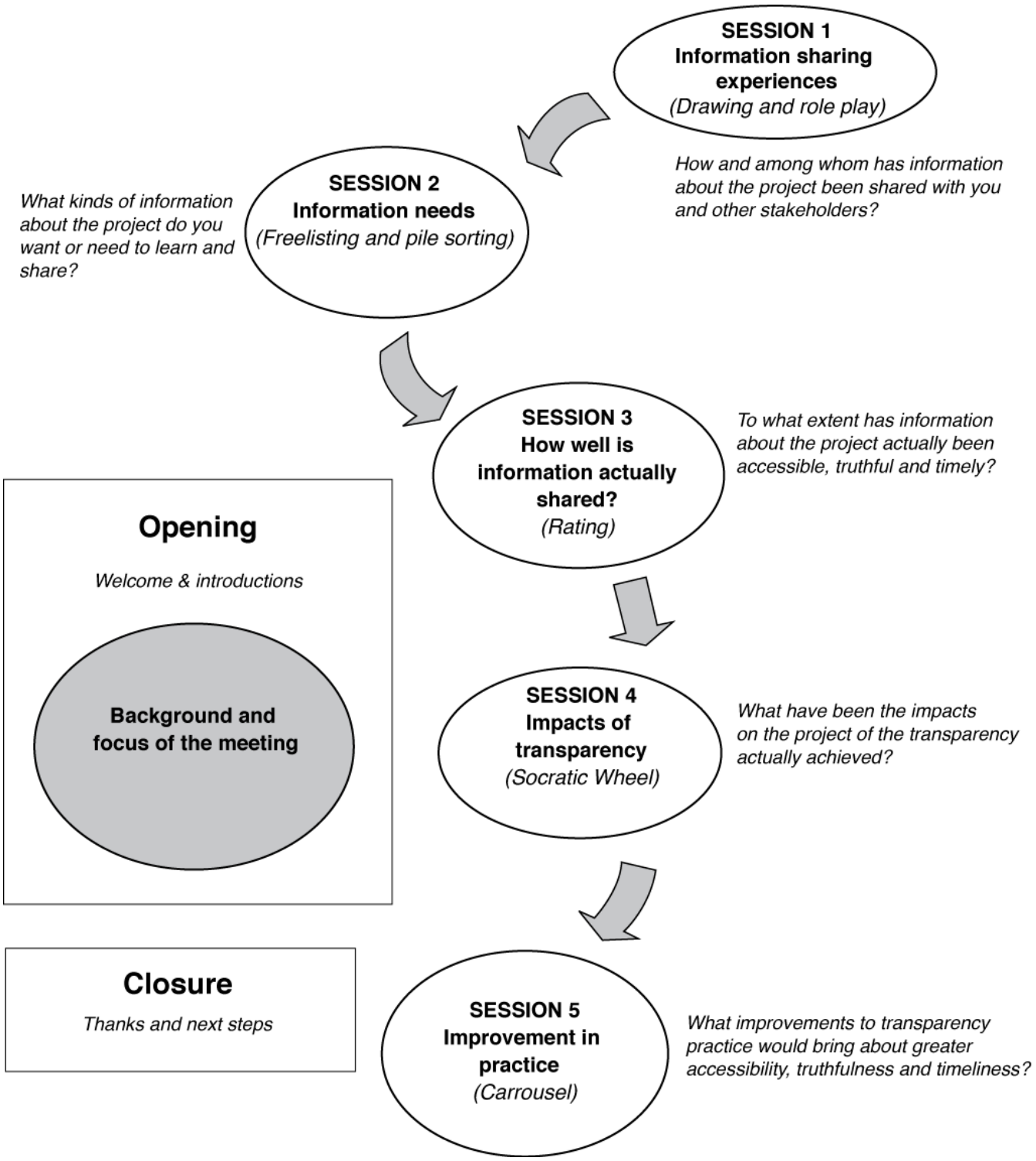
The methodology for group discussion built on these concepts by posing a series of questions eliciting participant views on conditions, means, transparency criteria and transparency impacts (Figure 2). After the introductory discussion on the purpose of the research:

- Participants were invited to narrate or draw images illustrating what sharing of information about the project looked like to them. This was intended as a grounding exercise to show who and how information about a specific project had been shared in the community.
- Participants then listed the different kinds of project information they considered useful to them, and selected a set of 4-5 priority information types for further discussion. The research team also asked participants if they could think of some type or aspect of the project information of interest to them that should **not** be shared because sharing might cause people or groups undue harm.

- This was followed, either in plenary or in small groups, with discussion of the three transparency criteria and application of these criteria to a rating exercise for each priority information type. Participants scored the extent to which information about the project was actually shared accessibly, truthfully and in a timely manner. Participants used a three-point scale (high, medium and low) organized as concentric circles to rate each information type on each transparency criteria.
- Scores were then compiled into a single graph to support a concluding discussion on what benefits or impacts were achieved as a result of the level of transparency actually practiced (Figure 3).
- The final task was to discuss ways the exchange of information could be improved, either locally or through measures put in place by partners and ActionAid. Figure 2 shows the question(s) addressed in each session and references the specific tools used to support the discussion.

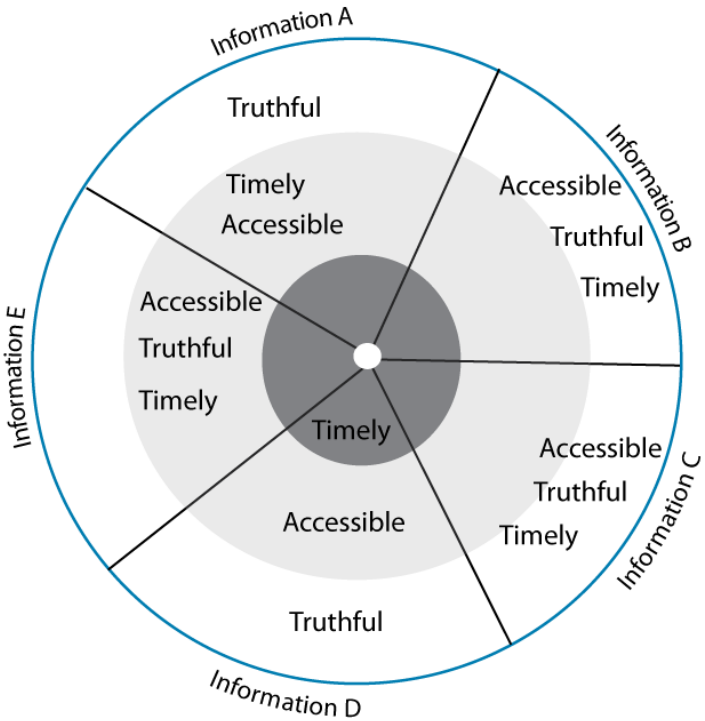
The methodology developed for group work with communities took a similar form for meetings with ActionAid staff, and was adapted by the various research teams to take into account local cultural norms and the time available for each exercise. The presentation of results, below, follows a slightly different logic by first taking readers through the discussion about what information needs to be shared. This is followed by a synthesis of findings on how and among whom is information shared, how well transparency is practiced (a rating exercise) and what impacts this practice has. Given the action orientation of the research, the final section of the analysis focuses on suggestions from participants, researchers and the consultant regarding ways to improve the accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness of information sharing practices at ActionAid.

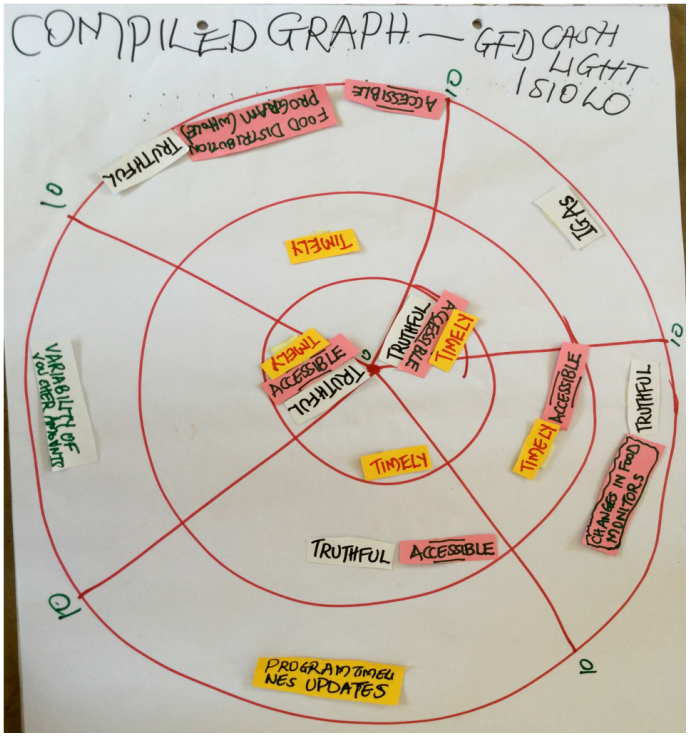
Figure 2: A methodology for participatory inquiry into aid transparency.[5]



[5] Annex II contains the full methodology. Tools for the methodology were adapted by the consultant from a handbook of participatory action research tools by Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel Buckles of SAS[2] Dialogue and available on the web at www.sas2.net.

Figure 3. Graph for compiling results of the rating exercises. Each pie shape is a selected information type while the grey scale represents the level of transparency on each criteria, from low (inner circle) to high level of accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness.





One observation on the research process is needed before turning to the analysis of the results. The study framework was grounded in specific projects and stakeholders involved in those projects and focused the research on the achievement of project transparency rather than on the achievement of project goals per se. This distinction between the transparency of information sharing about project goals, processes and results and the effective communication of project content proved to be difficult to convey and sustain at the community level. The research team tried to emphasize in every session that the research did not involve evaluating project content (land rights, for example) or assessing the performance of ActionAid as an educator (did they do a good job of explaining land rights). A few examples of areas where project transparency might be important to communities were provided in the methodology to help orientate the discussion, such as project purpose, project budgets, project beneficiary selection criteria, and project impacts so far. Nevertheless, discussions at the community level in Bangladesh and Kenya frequently turned to the achievement of project goals (land ownership, school enrollment, etc.) or to the delivery of training related to project goals (for example, how well the project delivered knowledge of what to do in a disaster situation). While these topics led to meaningful discussions with communities relevant to questions of accountability, they could not be scored for accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness in the same way as topics related to the transparency of information sharing. Consequently, findings on transparency from these two country settings are less systematic than the counterparts in Pakistan where all community sessions focused on the transparency of information sharing with respect to project parameters. This raises a fundamental question regarding the topic itself, and the extent to which further attention is needed to clarifying the distinction and determining whether or not communities want to participate in research on transparency. As one Bangladesh team member put it, achieving project goals, and accountability for the achievements, may simply be a higher priority for community rights holders compared to questions of transparency in information sharing. The tendency of community groups in Bangladesh and Kenya to focus discussion on project results seems to support this perspective.

Results

Results from the research are organized under four headings: What information needs to be shared? How and between whom is information shared? How well is transparency practiced and what impacts does this practice have? How can transparency be improved? Each section synthesizes results from the three country study and extends the analysis and interpretation provided by stakeholders and the various research teams.

WHAT INFORMATION NEEDS TO BE SHARED?

The ActionAid Accountability Charter (2013) commits ActionAid to making information available to all stakeholders related to the following dimensions of projects it supports:

1. what ActionAid does and how it does it, including strategic objectives and targets;
2. partners;
3. impact;
4. details of the governance system and management structure;
5. organisational policies;
6. location and duration of main activities;
7. decision making processes and mechanisms;
8. funding sources and allocations;
9. how information is shared;
10. results of evaluations and lessons learnt;
11. complaint mechanisms.

These constitute the types of information about projects ActionAid believes should be shared transparently. The charter updates the list of information types included in the earlier ActionAid Open Information Policy (2003)[6] to reflect a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders both locally and internationally. It also seeks to go beyond the statutory requirements for information sharing and confidentiality that exist either in The Netherlands where ActionAid is registered as an association or any particular legal regime where ActionAid members are legally registered. As ActionAid raises funds on

[6] Details available at: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/open_information_policy_0.pdf

behalf of rights holders, it considers transparency with rights holders with respect to these dimensions of projects and aid delivery of particular importance.

The research provides an opportunity to compare the information types listed in the charter with the types of project information considered useful at different levels in the project system, from country office, to partners and community groups. In Pakistan, communities consistently identified budget allocations, beneficiary selection criteria, project time frames, project geographic focus and mechanisms for providing feedback as information potentially useful to them. Project purpose also appeared frequently in conversations at the community level and in discussions with government officials and the media. Kenyan participants, in cases where the exercise remained focused on process goals, also expressed their interest in and need for information on budget allocations, how updates on the programme are communicated, decision-making regarding the selection of food monitors, the timeframe of the assistance, and project scope and purpose. As noted earlier, findings from Bangladesh are more difficult to interpret in the context of the study focus on transparency. Occasional mention at the community level was made, however, to the need for and usefulness to communities of information on the roles and responsibilities of particular bodies such as school management committees set up by ActionAid partners to manage projects at the local level.

Similar areas of need noted by communities emerged from discussions with ActionAid partners. Partners in Pakistan identified and noted as priorities information on project purpose, project budget, project timeline, project donors, beneficiary selection criteria, geographical coverage and feedback mechanisms. In Kenya, at least in the two regions covered by the study, where ActionAid operates mainly through small Community Based Organizations such as the Malindi Rights Forum (MRF), a group expressed a need mainly for project information on budgets and opportunities to do their own fundraising. Partners in Bangladesh such as Udayankur Sheba Sangstha (USS) also pointed to the need to learn and share information on budget allocations, beneficiary selection processes, the geographic scope of projects, project activities and the project roles and responsibilities of different actors (including government agencies). The concordance of interests between partners and communities may reflect the community character of most of ActionAid's

partners, and their desire to have available to them information that they may need to share with communities.

ActionAid staff in the Pakistan regional office and headquarters, and staff in Bangladesh, expressed a need for information on a set of project dimensions somewhat different from communities and partners. In Pakistan, regional and headquarters staff identified and prioritized information on budgets (resource allocation), linkages and roles and responsibilities with other organizations, findings on impacts, and organizational policies and plans. ActionAid Bangladesh staff also prioritized information on budgets, collective project priorities, impacts or changes brought about by projects, lessons learned and gender-related human resource policies and management practices. A similar pattern was noted in Kenya, although staff and partners there also flagged an interest in knowing more about the feedback mechanisms available to them, a concern also raised at the community level.

The research from Pakistan and Bangladesh provides insight into the information needs of some external stakeholders, namely government officials at the regional level and members of the media. Interviews with five or so of these representatives in Pakistan presented a much-reduced list of types of information potentially useful to them and that they felt needed to be shared by projects. These revolved mainly around where the funding was coming from, what projects were attempting to do (purpose, goals), broad categories of activities, where they are taking place and broad categories of intended beneficiaries. Members of the media had similar interests, and added information on total budgetary allocations to specific projects. In several cases, officials in Pakistan indicated that sharing information on these aspects of projects was a statutory obligation, and that failing to do so would undermine an organizations' mandate to operate in the country. Some government officials interviewed expressly stated that they did not need or want to know the operational details of projects. They also considered confidential details of the governance system and management structure of ActionAid and its partners and most organisational policies. How organizations operate is of no concern to them so long as organizations are transparent about what, where and with whom they work.

Several general observations emerge from these findings. First, most of the information types making up ActionAid's commitment in the Accountability Charter find some

expression in the information types of interest to stakeholders at different levels, and vice versa. Information related to goals, activities, partners, budgets, decision-making processes (for example, participant selection), details of the governance system and management structure (including roles and responsibilities), impacts (including evaluations and lessons) and organizational policies are mentioned in one way or another at different levels in the aid system. Broadly, communities and partners seem most interested in upstream and midstream types of project information, that is, things like project purpose, project location and duration, when, where, for how long and who is involved. The usefulness of this information to communities and partners lies in understanding what projects are about and planning how to engage with projects and interact with each other. By contrast, ActionAid local and national offices seem most interested in downstream types of project information, that is, the structures of projects (policies, governance, management) and the lessons learned or impacts from projects. The usefulness of this information to organizations lies primarily in its contribution to reporting and accounting for projects.

Second, while the ActionAid Accountability Charter includes information about ways to **register complaints** (complaint mechanisms) among the types of information it commits to sharing, communities and partners expressed a broader interest in knowing how to **provide feedback** to higher levels in the aid system (that may include but not be limited to complaints). For example, in the Muzzaffar Abad area of Pakistan members of the Union for Women's Rights (AHEN) made clear reference to the importance of knowing how to provide feedback to decision-makers in projects. These comments did not seem to be focused on ways to register complaints (although this may also have been implied) but rather on the role feedback mechanisms play or can play in influencing agendas and transparency of the decisions on the scope of projects (what is included and what is not). Similarly, ActionAid staff in Kenya expressed a clear interest in having a better understanding of how to provide effective feedback within and among communities, partners and staff. As discussed below, this information need is not systematically addressed in any of the three countries included in the research, at least in the form of a complaint or feedback mechanism people can use safely and without putting their relationship to others at risk.

Ethical Sharing

Questions of ethics in the sharing of information were addressed in some, but not all, of the community meetings and periodically in discussions with other stakeholders such as government officials and the media. People were asked to identify situations where information on some aspect of the project should **not** be shared because sharing might do harm. In Bangladesh, members of one community were very adamant that the project not share their stories of humiliation and deprivation at the hands of local elites (information that can be seen as related to project purpose). They felt that if the stories reached the local elites they could face direct and personal reprisal. Risks to and the need for protection of the identity of whistle blowers was also mentioned as they draw attention to corruption and incompetence. These examples point to cases where information sharing could lead to serious and probable harm, and where confidentiality should be carefully respected by withholding personal or group information and/or eliminating identifiable references.

Other types of information collected at the community level can also raise ethical challenges. Partners and community members said that the names and images of rights holders, and especially women and girl children, should not be shared on social media sites. Permission is required for any use of pictures of people. These conditions, they noted, help to respect the integrity of the person and the societal values of the people involved. The names and addresses of children involved in sponsorship programmes, and linkages to donors, should also be treated very carefully.

Partners argued that sharing information on programme level budgets should also be handled carefully, to avoid misunderstandings that might lead to a loss of social standing for the organization. Programme budgets on their own do not make the critical distinction between expenditures in communities and expenditures related to operational costs and other activities outside of the communities. Even expenditure targets are potentially problematic. Failure to meet spending targets, when they happen for legitimate reasons, can be used by rivals to defame projects and the implementing partners. In short, broad-brush budgets, without disaggregation and full explanation, cannot be shared ethically.

From government officials in the social welfare department in Pakistan the researchers also heard that information about budgets and donors should be handled very carefully and not generally circulated beyond circles of confidence. Doing so could cause harm by feeding into negative rumors and unfounded accusations. Sharing detailed information on budgets such as salaries, overheads and capital expenditures were also mentioned as potentially sensitive information where confidentiality is justified. For example, salary information can be easily misunderstood and undermine morale when there are big differences due to experience, education and seniority.

HOW AND AMONG WHOM IS INFORMATION SHARED?

The research sought to describe the channels through which information about projects travels, who these channels touch or engage and what tools ActionAid and other stakeholders use to make information available and facilitate the exchange of information. It did so first by asking participants in community meetings to describe how they learn about the ActionAid project of concern to them. This usually took the form of drawings showing people, places and communication tools. Occasionally participants acted out a role play illustrating different stakeholders sharing and exchanging information about a project. Both of these types of activities led to discussion in communities about who are the stakeholders and the various ways information is shared among them. In this section data from the community sessions is combined with data from interviews with staff, partners and other stakeholders to create a general synthesis of how and among whom information is shared.

Channels for sharing information on projects have both vertical and horizontal features. The vertical channels are similar in all three countries. ActionAid staff at the national level share information about projects with implementing partners and (in the case of Pakistan) with ActionAid staff at the sub-national or regional level. Partners in turn share information about projects with intermediaries at the community level (traditional leaders and local monitors in Kenya, elected or appointed community representatives and school committees in Pakistan and Kenya, and village committees in Bangladesh) who in turn share with groups of rights holders in the various projects. Groups of rights holders include “reflect circles” in all three countries made up of defined project participants and other

types of small groups organized around project goals or that pre-existed ActionAid project interventions. Citizen forums and women's networks are other forms of organization for rights holders present in all three countries, and through which information is shared.

While generally top down, information coming from higher levels is usually shared simultaneously with more than one actor at a lower level: from ActionAid National to partners and regional Action Aid staff, and from partners to local leaders and local rights holders. The two kinds of community level actors (leaders/representatives/committees and rights holders) share information about the project across their own personal and local networks such as family members, friends and other organized groups (people in other villages involved in other projects, for example). This introduces a horizontal channel operating at the local level important not only to enhancing project transparency but also potentially to the creation of feedback up the channel to partners and eventually to ActionAid staff.

While information about projects mainly flows downwards from ActionAid to partners to communities, both formal and informal communication and information tools allow for iterative and multi-directional discussions about matters of importance to people: what the project is about, how beneficiaries are selected, modalities of project activities, project impacts, future project directions, etc. The formal tools have been established by a history of practice linked to programme planning and implementation using the ActionAid human rights based approach (HRBA). Participatory review and reflection processes (PRRP) are held annually involving people from ActionAid, partners, community representatives and members of rights holder groups. Participants are encouraged to ask questions about projects, share views and plan future project activities. Individuals from other organizations (government, other non-governmental groups) may also be involved in these events. ActionAid, or its partners, may also organize formal participatory planning meetings with multiple stakeholders present. These are meant to support discussion and engagement with and by rights holders. The meetings produce documents with plans and budgets that are shared among staff through email and in simplified forms with the public through annual reports.

Annual meetings with partners convened by the national or regional offices of ActionAid are regular features of ActionAid in Kenya, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The research from

Bangladesh notes that all ActionAid staff and staff from partner organizations attend these meetings, where information is exchanged about annual achievements, challenges and future plans. As community representatives are sometimes involved, conditions are created for multi-directional and non-hierarchical sharing of information about projects. If and when this kind of sharing happens, opportunities are also created to reach other rights holders through their representatives in the meetings. In Pakistan, ActionAid also periodically organizes social audits and public assemblies at national, regional and partner levels to exchange information and perspectives with communities and other interested stakeholders.

Formal tools are in place in all three countries that also serve the function of sharing information on how projects work at the local level. Reflect circles described above are common in ActionAid supported projects and are the most direct channel for sharing and discussing information on the full range of information types of interest to community rights holders. For instance, the rights holders involved in an economic empowerment project in Pakistan are informed by the ActionAid partner about the main activities of the project (the provision of vegetable seed for kitchen gardening, sewing machines, livestock, cash for running beauty parlours, etc.), how many people can access the supports and the financial value of products or cash given each. Final decisions on implementation are not made until and unless the rights holders agree first on the criteria used to determine who are the most deserving of the supports. When situations arise that require members of the circle to contact the partner (for example, when seed germination is poor) the coordinator of the group has a cell phone number to call for clarification and resolution.

ActionAid also uses information boards placed in prominent locations and updated annually. Charts and banners with project information are placed in community centres and at ActionAid regional offices. The content and level of detail is not standardized across countries or projects. It may, but does not necessarily, include the project title, implementing partners, duration, number and selection of beneficiaries, main activities, and budget amount. According to ActionAid Bangladesh staff, these help communities see project goals at a glance and to be informed of associated expenditures. It is important to note, however, that community people in Kenya did not identify information boards or banners as information sharing tools, even though these were prominently displayed in the

halls where the research was conducted. This suggests that while it is a means of sharing obvious to project staff it may not be recognized as such by communities where oral modes of communication are highly valued.

Planned project activities also provide avenues for sharing basic information about projects. Participants in the Golap Samaj Unnayon circle in Domar, Nilphamari (Bangladesh) represented a vehicle in one of their drawings to show a time they went to the Upazila land office to collect information on land rights. While the purpose of the trip was to collect information on land rights (information related to project goals) it represented an informal context in which information about the project process was also shared. They also referenced a “policy book” with information on land rights used by them to discuss and reinforce group understanding of the purpose of the ActionAid project. When projects involve local training activities, such as training on land rights or child sponsorship, informal opportunities are also created to share information on any number of project dimensions. Meetings organized by ActionAid Bangladesh on child sponsorship models of fundraising also provide opportunities to describe how ActionAid operates and the specific modalities of projects it undertakes. Similar views emerged from Kenya, where participants from the Girls Forum in Boresingwaya and the Sauti ya Wanawake women’s networks said that excursions and training events were important means for sharing information about ActionAid and its projects.

Monitoring visits by partner field staff and by ActionAid staff from regional and national offices also combine sharing of information related to project goals with information on project modalities, plans and parameters. These visits often involve formal meetings with rights holders where budgets and activities are shared. When new or additional project information needs to be communicated, project officers follow up by cell phone (and in some cases Skype). These conversations typically happen with local representatives or community leaders who are then responsible for conveying the information to other rights holders.

Partner staff also engaged in multiple short conversations with any number of other local stakeholders (village heads and local government officials, for example), creating additional opportunities to share information on ActionAid supported projects and learn about other projects and diverse community dynamics. The meetings also create

opportunities for feedback upwards to regional staff and national staff. Research from both Bangladesh and Pakistan suggests, however, that government line departments do not reciprocate as much as partners and local stakeholder would like with respect to information about government projects, services and activities. One of the researchers characterized this relationship with government actors as one-sided.

Trip reports by field staff and periodic partner reports on project implementation are tools that could be used to consolidate and share information on project parameters, although this is not done systematically across all countries. The interview data, particularly from Pakistan, also indicates that project information is shared by partners with governments and the media through project documents and informal meetings. When media representatives are invited to project events opportunities are created for sharing information about projects with the wider community. These are also moments when gaps can be filled in the information shared previously through other means.

In sum, findings from all three countries on how and among whom information is shared suggest that opportunities to share information about projects include not only channels and processes designed proactively for that purpose (for example, the PRRP and Information Boards) but also channels and processes designed primarily with other purposes in mind (empowerment through training, for example). Training events, presentations, documents, and meetings organized as part of the routine delivery of project content actually serve as channels for engaging rights holders in discussions about the project process – what are we going for, over what time frame, with what resources, and with what impacts so far. Reflect circles also serve this dual function at the local level, as educational goals are pursued (for example, communities explore some of the main causes of poverty or specific issues they face in their daily lives) and information on project modalities is planned and shared.

HOW WELL IS TRANSPARENCY PRACTICED AND WHAT IMPACTS DOES THIS PRACTICE HAVE?

Project transparency should focus on information that is useful and can be shared ethically through the various channels available to project stakeholders. There is no need to share information that is not considered useful by the parties involved and information with the potential to cause harm to individuals or groups should be treated with care, ensuring

confidentiality when necessary. When these prior conditions are in place, the extent to which transparency is actually achieved can be examined directly.

The research assessed the transparency of various information types participants considered to be useful to understanding how projects work and that they felt could be ethically shared. It did so by rating each selected information type on three transparency criteria supplied through the research methodology: accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness. As explained in the methodology section above, accessibility is achieved if the information to be shared is easy to understand and reaches all concerned parties. Truthfulness is achieved if the information is reliable and presented sincerely, that is, without exaggeration or deception. Timeliness is achieved if the information arrives at a favorable and helpful time.

While concrete, these three criteria are aggregate criteria and needed to be unpacked with the participants to achieve understanding and add local colour to this understanding. The research methodology outlined how to do this, although only information from Kenya and to some extent Bangladesh provides specific details on how these concepts were understood at the local level. More generally, however, the reports from Pakistan also suggest that local understandings of the concepts are not dissimilar to understandings held in the other two study countries. This section starts with these localized definitions of the three criteria, followed by results from rating exercises and discussion of the impacts of the actual level of transparency achieved for different information types.

LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TRANSPARENCY CRITERIA

The research teams typically presented the notion of accessibility as information that is easy to understand and reaches all concerned parties. Community members in Kenya understood this as information that is heard by the wider community, beyond gatekeepers such as village heads. In one setting they used a '+' sign to indicate that the information goes beyond immediate stakeholders. In several other Kenyan settings, and in Bangladesh, participants referenced the cell phone as representative of accessibility with respect to information. It is a common way to hear about or provide information to concerned parties. Children in Kenya suggest that a pen be used to represent the accessibility of information as it "sticks" when it is written and is therefore available over

time (“lasts a long time”). The loudspeaker used in communities by local authorities to communicate and convene was identified by Sauti ya wanawake, a women’s network, as a symbol for accessibility. They noted too that they are vocal advocates and widely recognized as such. As such, the women’s network itself can be seen as representing the concept of accessibility from a local perspective. In another case (a Citizen’s Forum in Kenya) accessibility was represented by a ladder, where each rung indicates a different type of information. Together, the rungs of the ladder allow people to mobilize themselves and reach higher places (community, county and country). A common feature of these various representations is that from a local perspective accessible information reaches people beyond private circles and gives priority to a verbal form of communication.

The concept of truthfulness proved to be a difficult concept to convey in all of its complexity during the time available. As noted previously, truthfulness in this study refers to the reliability of information but also the sincerity with which it is shared. It reveals people’s intention to speak the truth, without exaggeration or deception, even as the facts change over time. As an aggregate concept, definitions and understandings by community participants took on various shades of meaning. In Kenya, one group (the Bidii Farmers Field School in Isiolo) selected a leaf to represent truthfulness because of its true color when freshly plucked from a tree. Even as it wilts, they said, it continues to depict a true color reflecting its actual state or status. This sophisticated explanation seems to correspond well to notions of reliability but also to the lack of deception even as circumstances change. The Food for Assets (FFA) group also in Isiolo selected different sized stones to represent truthfulness, not only because of their solidity (reliability) but also because the varying weights conveyed the idea of more and less important or consequential information. This later aspect can be seen as reflecting relative usefulness built into the concept of truthfulness from a local perspective. In other words, information cannot be truthful if it is not also useful. ActionAid staff and partners in Kenya identified a scale for weighing as a symbol for truthfulness, in that it gives an exact measure of things. A “tick” sign identified for truthfulness by many groups in Kenya and also in Bangladesh meant right and true according to participants. They noted that teachers in school use the tick to show right, appropriate and correct answers.

The concept of timeliness, while apparently the most straightforward, was the least

developed symbolically by community groups. Almost without exception people selected the clock to symbolize time. One group (FFA in Isiolo) identified the sun as the traditional way of telling time. Neither explicitly conveys the notion of information arriving at a favorable and helpful time, as was intended by the methodology. A notable exception, though, was the selection by participants from the Bidii Farmers Field School in Isiolo (Kenya) of the freshly bloomed flower of the Lantana Camara shrub. This flower only blooms at certain times of the year, and consequently evokes a nuanced meaning for information that is timely. It is also evident from the application of the concept of timeliness during the rating exercises themselves that participants did in fact mean something very similar to what the farmers group and the researchers meant when the timeliness criteria was introduced during the exercise. Participants made sense of the criteria and ratings on all three concepts through other explanations that came up over the course of the discussions, presented below.

Community perspectives on transparency practice

Participants in community sessions were asked to rate the extent to which each information type defined as useful to them was actually shared in ways that were accessible, truthful, and timely. Confidence in the rating data is highest for Pakistan and the emergency setting in Kenya where discussions focused systematically on project parameters rather than project results. This section draws mainly on data from these cases, with occasional reference to less systematic findings from other Kenyan settings and from Bangladesh. Interested readers are directed to the community assessments for analysis of project effectiveness, an important but different research question.

Findings from Pakistan suggest that in most cases information on aspects of the program important to communities is shared in a manner that is highly accessible, truthful and timely. Data on the 8 exercises where ratings were completed shows that two thirds (76.5%) of the scores given were high across all three criteria. Accessibility had the largest number of medium ratings (12.5%), followed by timeliness (9%) and truthfulness (2%). No information type was rated low on any criteria. This pattern seems to hold across the three regions in Pakistan where the research was conducted and for the three sectors included in the study (agriculture, emergency response and education). Ratings across the 8

community groups engaged in the research showed a similar pattern, with few differences noted among women and men's groups or for religious minorities (one Hindu group was assessed). The exception was a women's group. They gave many more medium ratings compared to other women's groups and groups where men were in the majority. Accessibility and timeliness were their major concerns, across a number of different information types discussed below.

The overall degree of project transparency achieved in Pakistan is reflected not only in many high ratings on the three transparency criteria used in the study but also peoples' explanations for the ratings. Community participants referenced their own direct involvement in key aspects of program design and delivery such as the development of participant selection criteria. They also noted the responsiveness of resource persons tasked with sharing information on the type and destination of support being provided. Participants in the study repeatedly noted that social networks and communication channels within the village community are close, a situation that supports the sharing of information with concerned people truthfully and in a timely manner from project inception to the present. Very few contradictions between what was said by implementing partners and what actually occurred were mentioned. Even in settings when participants recognized that they could not read and understand most of the printed materials distributed or displayed, they felt they had a good understanding of most aspects of the project, thanks to effective verbal communication by partners and others in the community.

Satisfaction with the transparency of information sharing was reinforced during meetings with community participants when the conversation turned to the impacts of transparency. Participants said they felt high degrees of ownership as a consequence of transparent sharing of information on multiple aspects of the project, including knowing who to contact for certain types of information at the local implementing partner office and in public offices. A feeling of empowerment from this knowledge was expressed. Timely information on budgets and selection criteria, for example, had allowed one group to set realistic expectations and effectively allocate resources to the poorest members of their community. Others noted that they felt well enough informed to be able to share information with other members of the community, and to be able to hold implementing partners accountable when promised elements in an aid package, for instance a gardening kit, were missing. In

several settings participants reported that their experience with ActionAid partners had led them to demand specific types of information from other donors or implementing organizations. One woman said that she monitors new projects in the community and routinely encourages other women to ask for the types of project information discussed during the meeting. Trust in the implementing partner, confidence in their own project activities, and community participation were also mentioned by community people as important consequences of transparent information sharing actually achieved in the project.

As noted above, some information sharing in Pakistan received only medium ratings on accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness. The most problematic information type identified by communities was budget information, which did not always reach all community stakeholders in ways that was understandable. In various settings detailed budget information was shared after most project activities had been planned in detail, an indication of a lack of timeliness. Some groups also felt strongly that changes in budgets due to external factors had not been communicated at the local level when it was known at higher levels, pointing to a gap in truthfulness. Confusion, doubt and a waste of planning effort was linked to these gaps in the accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness of budget information. In another case (an education program) participants said they wanted to know where the money was coming, how much teachers were being paid and how rates were determined for food and transportation. This budget information, they noted, did not reach them. Whether or not it could be shared ethically (without harm) was not part of the deliberation, and their views on this aspect consequently remain unknown.

Information on project time frames, the geographic focus of projects, and linkages with other local actors also failed to reach all concerned according to 3 of the 8 groups for whom rating data in Pakistan was collected. Information on these dimensions of projects was also tardy in several cases, resulting in medium level ratings on the timeliness criteria. An example referring to timeliness and truthfulness shared by one of the groups was a delay in informing people about problems with the viability of seed purchased in the market. While the resource person had heard about the problem with the seed he was unsure about when this would be resolved and consequently delayed communicating with others. Participants said that not knowing early on about the delay, or when fresh seed would be available, meant they did not seek out other seed sources. As a consequence, farms were

not planted at the optimal time. The discussion suggests that from a community perspective even negative or vague information (such as the poor quality of seed and uncertainty regarding when the seed will be replaced) should be shared in a timely and truthful manner (acknowledging the problem and recognizing the remaining uncertainty).

Information on feedback mechanisms (from communities to partners and Action Aid) received a great deal of attention among the information types identified in all three countries. In Pakistan it scored only moderately well in several settings with respect to accessibility and timeliness. Explanations for the weaker ratings focused on lost opportunities. For example, participants in one setting noted that if they had known about how to provide feedback in the very early stages of project development they would have been in a better position to make contributions to project design. They said they would like to have provided ideas for economic empowerment activities other than the kitchen gardening and tuck shop activities of the project, but didn't due to delays in sharing information on the feedback mechanisms.

A more unsettling expression of this gap emerged from the research in Kenya where some participants complained forcefully that their community representatives actively discouraged feedback by saying that community members were not allowed to communicate directly with ActionAid Kenya unless authorized in writing to do so. Citizen Forum members in Kenya also complained that information they hoped to receive from ActionAid Kenya was not shared with them by community representatives acting as "gate keepers" rather than two-way conduits for information about projects. ActionAid staff and partners also acknowledged the lack of transparency regarding feedback mechanisms and the effect of this on project effectiveness. They shared specific examples of community feedback that arrived too late to be useful, delays that undermined their ability to anticipate and correct problems before they had an impact on projects. They argued that better knowledge of the feedback mechanisms available to communities was needed to ensure that feedback would be timely.

Poor access to information on the geographic focus of projects, and even concerns about the truthfulness of information on this vital question, was noted in the Bangladesh study. Participants in some community meetings said that promises made regarding geographic coverage when communities were being consulted in the planning stage proved to be

misleading once the projects started operating on the ground. They considered this a lack of truthfulness on the part of ActionAid and its partner, both in terms of the reliability of the information and the sincerity with which it was shared.

Information on participant selection criteria was usually not problematic in terms of accessibility and timeliness as most groups said that everyone knew what the criteria were before projects were launched, and that they were typically involved directly in determining the criteria for eligibility. Participant selection criteria did, however, present one of the few concerns raised in Pakistan about the truthfulness of the information shared. This arose from two observations. In one case ActionAid did not explain why the household income cutoff used to select the poorest of the poor varied from region to region. In another, seed promised to one selected community was then given to another community, without explanation or justification. The medium rating given by participants on this criteria seems to be due both to the lack of reliability of the information shared and the lack of sincerity or forth-rightfulness regarding the reasons for the variations and the changes in plans. This finding suggests that for transparency to be fully achieved the reasons behind decisions made outside of the community need to be shared along with simply stating what has happened.

Kenyan projects in emergency settings provided the most systematic data on information about how projects work and the extent to which this type of information is actually shared in ways that were transparent. Participants in three emergency settings in Kenya were critical of the degree or extent of transparency with respect to budget allocations (voucher amounts), decision-making regarding the selection of food monitors, the timeframe of the assistance, the project scope, child sponsorship opportunities, and training opportunities. For example, sharing of information on voucher amounts was rated low on truthfulness and timeliness. Participants seemed to accept the fact that the voucher amount would vary from month to month but complained that they didn’t know how much they were going to receive until the last moment, the reasons for the variations were not shared with them and the amount actually received often varied from the stated expectation. They noted that if they were informed in a more timely and reliable manner they could adjust their plans accordingly, including critical decisions on food purchases and other household needs. In a related discussion participants said that the actual delivery dates for food distribution are

often later than dates promised, leading participants to question the truthfulness (reliability) of the information shared on this aspect of the project. They also felt in the dark with respect to the timeframe of project commitments, noting that they had received a new blank voucher card but no indication of when or whether it would be activated. More generally, they felt vulnerable due to their dependency on the project for basic survival, saying that ActionAid could stop or start the project at any time without prior notice. Participants indicated that if they had clear assurances about the timeframe of the emergency assistance they could explore other ventures and opportunities rather than relying solely on ActionAid. These uncertainties, they said, were matters of grave significance to planning family survival strategies. Several emergency groups also noted that information on the feedback mechanisms of the project had not reached them. They asserted firmly that they knew the most pressing needs of the community but did not know how to communicate these needs to ActionAid, a problem resulting in a low score on accessibility to this vital type of information.

A lack of transparency with respect to information on changes in the assignment of food monitors was reflected in low ratings on accessibility and timeliness given for this information type. In one case accessibility concerns referred to the fact that the food monitor assigned to the community could not speak the local dialect, complicating and distorting information shared to and from ActionAid. In another setting participants said that ActionAid introduces some projects without notice and stops others before they are completed, all the while leaving the community in the dark. Overall, participants reported that most of the information on the emergency aid useful to them is delayed or shared when it is too late to be really helpful. They felt this derailed the implementation of longer terms strategies that could enhance livelihoods in the community.

One discussion with participants in a regular ActionAid development program in Kenya relevant to the question of project transparency revolved around the sharing of information about training and seminar opportunities. Participants said that only people in frequent communication with ActionAid come to learn of these opportunities, an observation leading to a medium rating on the criteria of accessibility. Requests from ActionAid for candidates for child sponsorship were also reported to come with extremely short deadlines (medium rating on timeliness), causing stress and errors in the collection of required information.

It is important to qualify the negative findings on the extent to which project transparency is actually achieved in emergency settings in Kenya. Emergencies are inherently complex and subject to many sources of uncertainty that affect the efficiency of aid delivery, regardless of the degree of project transparency. The concerns raised by participants in the study may be related as much to the inherent uncertainty of the situation and the perceived inefficiency in the delivery of emergency aid as transparency considerations per se. The discussion underlines the difficulty of distinguishing the failure to achieve project outcomes from the failure to be transparent about project outcomes (including outcome failures). Nevertheless, it is clear that the people involved in the community-level exercises in emergency situations felt that they have not been given truthful and timely information on project parameters that have a direct bearing on their survival. As noted above for Pakistan, to achieve truthfulness, even in situations of extreme uncertainty, requires that ActionAid staff and its partners be forthright about outcome failures they are responsible for as well as inefficiencies happening around them that are beyond their control. Emergency responders cannot be blamed for not providing access to information they themselves do not have. Nevertheless, truthfulness, in the full sense of the term, refers not only to reliability but also to the sincerity with which information is shared, including admissions of mistakes, gaps in knowledge or having to change plans for valid reasons.

PARTNER AND ACTIONAID PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPARENCY PRACTICE

The research organized meetings with implementing partners, particularly in Pakistan where members of the board of governors of these organizations also participated. In all three countries meetings were held with ActionAid staff, at the national level and in some cases at the regional or sub-national level. These focused primarily on the extent to which information is actually shared **within** the organization in ways that are accessible, truthful and timely.

As reported above, the types of information considered useful to partners were similar in focus to those of interest to communities (upstream and midstream project considerations) while discussion among ActionAid staff tended to focus on a different set of information types (more downstream considerations such as impacts, policies and management issues). Ratings on the three transparency criteria by these stakeholder groups raised a

different set of strengths and weaknesses compared to those raised by communities, pointing primarily to factors affecting the relationship between partners and ActionAid.

Without exception, the four partners in Pakistan expressed a high level of satisfaction with the transparency of information sharing in ActionAid projects. High ratings were given across all information types and all three criteria in the majority of cases. The positive impact of transparency emerged from explanations of the ratings, including reference to the resulting efficiency and effectiveness of their project planning processes and the ease of project implementation. Transparency produced clarity, they said, from the very beginning of projects to the end. They also referred to their ability to answer questions about the projects coming from communities and government officials, which in turn helped to build community trust in the organization and what they were doing.

Interviews with government officials and the media also pointed to important impacts from the transparency actually achieved. Several officials in Pakistan argued that the level of transparency achieved by ActionAid partners helped them do their work of coordinating different service providers operating in the same geographical area. This in turn helped to avoid the duplication of effort in these areas, and in some case led to changes in the location of project activities so that maximum geographic reach could be achieved. Another official, in the Pind Dadan Khan district of the Punjab in Pakistan, said that information shared transparently by the partner Anjuman Refah-e Ama (ARA) helped to create a feeling of “satisfaction” among members of the general public. One of his colleagues in a different ministry pointed out that the purpose of projects is of primary concern to communities and that the information provided to him by ARA on purpose allowed him to cross-check its truthfulness and provide assurances to other actors in the region.

As noted earlier, partners see the information sharing relationship with government officials as one-sided. Moderate ratings were given by partners to the timeliness and accessibility of information on the roles and responsibilities of public organizations (departments and agencies) involved in projects. A lack of transparency on government commitments and organizational arrangements created confusion among implementing staff and weakened opportunities for synergy and efficiency across organizations working on towards a

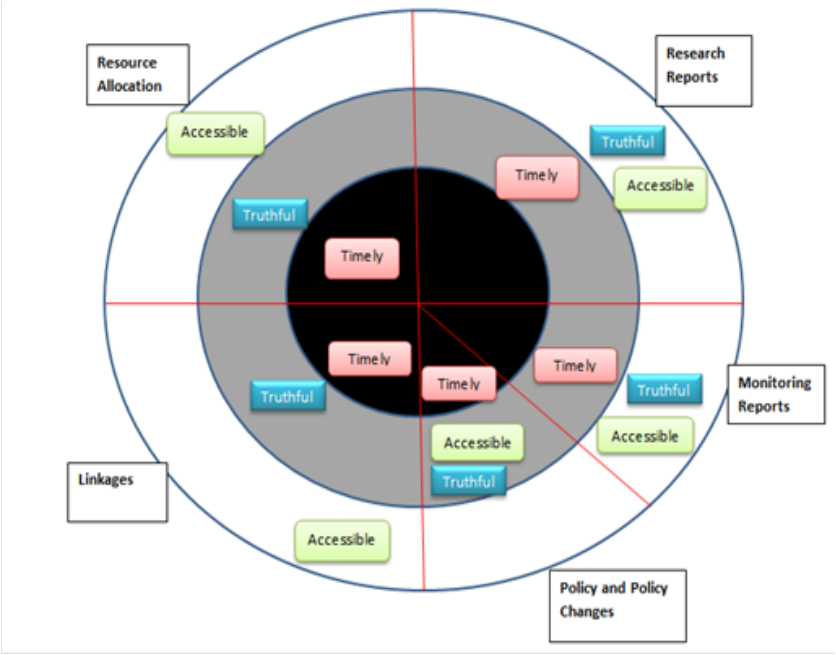
common goal. It also weakened the ability of partners to communicate with communities regarding the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved in projects.

From the perspective of partners in Pakistan, the extent of transparency actually achieved in ActionAid projects did present some other concerns. Board members from Anjuman-e Ripha e Amma (ARA) in Pind Dadan Khan in the Punjab of Pakistan reported that they did not have the project budget information and project timeframe information they felt they needed as governors of the organization. This concern was raised by other partners in Pakistan as well. They reported that the accessibility, truthfulness and timeliness of information ActionAid shares with partners regarding budgetary allocations lacks transparency. Budgets have a direct impact on virtually all other information types of interest to communities and partners (project scope, project geographic location, project timelines, etc.). Their concern seemed to centre around the management of budget uncertainty rather than the uncertainty itself. Partners indicated that they could tolerate the uncertainty of budgets better if they had more timely access to information that would help them understand the factors at play. Information on the severity and dynamics of donor crises was explicitly mentioned, reflecting a debate currently going on within ActionAid but not widely understood or communicated to partners. The concern also reflected at least one past experience where budgets were cut after detailed planning of the project scope. Truthfulness with partners that acknowledges and explains the risk factors, without exaggeration, and information on how these risks are being monitored by ActionAid, might be sufficient to achieve transparency in a complex funding world.

Two other areas of transparency mentioned by partners in Pakistan are worth highlighting. First, partners reported to the research team that it is not always clear how they and village level organizations should provide feedback on project plans. This gap is consistent with comments reported earlier that the flow of information upwards from communities to higher levels in the project system is relatively weak and less structured than flows from the top down. In one example, the Muzzaffar Abad area of Pakistan, a member of a partner organization said they took the time to create formal “resolutions” with suggestions about projects but where not sure they had reached the national ActionAid office and did not know what impact they had on final decisions. This may have been a rare example, however, as the standard procedure is for feedback to be recorded and presented during

quarterly PRRP sessions. Second, partners made many references to the complicated relationship between ActionAid's regional offices and the ActionAid national office, and the impact of the "working culture" of ActionAid on transparency. The accessibility and timeliness of critical project information suffered, they argued, by an over reliance on the ActionAid regional offices as the sole conduit for project information. While partners recognized the important role of regional LRP offices of ActionAid in project coordination, they felt that information held by the national office could be shared simultaneously with both the regional offices and the affected partners. They saw this as a means to "shorten" communication channels and avoid unnecessary delays in the flow of time-sensitive information affecting roles and responsibilities, geographic focus and the channeling of community feedback.

The relationship between the national and regional offices of ActionAid was the focus of two meetings held with staff in Pakistan. In one of these meetings, regional level staff assessed the extent to which five types of information is actually shared **within** the organization in ways that are accessible, truthful and timely (Figure 4). The analysis by participants shows that the timeliness of information sharing is the most problematic, represented by low scores (the inner black circle) for three types of information. This result seems to have emerged from a concern that regional office staff are not as involved as they would like to be in early discussions and decision-making about projects. The negative consequence of untimely information sharing, even when referring to vague or unreliable information, at least from the point of view of regional staff, is that when decisions are eventually made they feel imposed rather than jointly constructed. This accounts for the medium ratings given to truthfulness for information types that are also untimely.



Source: Arooj Fatima and Farzana Yasmin (2015), Transparency Assessment Report: Organizational Part (Regional office and Country office, ActionAid, Pakistan).

The views of regional staff on the transparency of information sharing within the organization seems to suggest that regional offices prioritize timeliness over truthfulness in the sense of reliability, so long as the information shared is the best knowledge available at the time. By contrast, national office staff argued during a similar exercise that sharing information that is not entirely reliable (because uncertain or “immature”) would create chaos and be counterproductive. Of greater concern to national staff was the truthfulness, accessibility and timeliness of information on programme implementation, the management of relationships with partners and reports from the field, aspects of organizationally work they felt were not shared reliably and on time by different people and at different levels within the organization. This tension between regional and national offices, while not acute, seems to have its origins in a lack of agreement around where the decision-making power lies and transparency gaps with respect to the sharing of information on roles and responsibilities. The ActionAid staff in the Pakistan national office also argued that the accessibility of vital project information (in terms of reach) was limited by the silo effect, that is, the flow of information **within** departments at various levels (for example, between the finance departments of national, regional and partner organizations), at the expense of information exchanges **across** departments (among finance, program,

and administration, for example). As a result, people in one department may not learn about aspects of a project important to them but known only in another department. These aspects of the "working culture" of ActionAid – hierarchy and silo effects – merit attention if the accessibility and timeliness of project information is to be improved.

The ActionAid office in Bangladesh also undertook a detailed assessment of the extent to which information is actually shared **within** the organization in ways that are accessible, truthful and timely. The rating exercise was on topic and the findings suggest that the transparency of information sharing, overall, was satisfactory. Scores for 5 different information types were moderate in most cases and high in some. Only one area received a low score: the accessibility of information on programme priorities (Table 2). Truthfulness received the strongest ratings, followed by timeliness and then accessibility.

Table 2: Transparency ratings by staff in the ActionAid Bangladesh office for five information types.

Information Type	Accessibility	Truthfulness	Timeliness
Impact	Moderate	Moderate	High
Budgets	Moderate	High	Moderate
Programme priorities	Low	High	Moderate
Community empowerment strategies	Moderate	High	Moderate
Women's Leadership Policy	Moderate	High	Moderate

Participants in Bangladesh said that complete and final versions of impact reports do not reach all parties concerned. They also noted that the reports are not validated or cross-checked for reliability, a concern reflected in the moderate rating on truthfulness. With respect to budgets, participants indicated that the right information was conveyed but the accessibility and timeliness of the information had gaps. Again, people said that they had to ask for the information repeatedly before getting it, and that updated budget numbers did not arrive in time for community budgeting scheduled in June and July every year. In fact, the planning cycle of communities was out of sync with the information on detailed budgets shared with partners in September-October. The lowest rating in the exercise was given to the accessibility of information on programme priorities. Participants explained

that the information does not get to them easily, making them feel that information on programme priorities is somehow restricted or guarded by higher-level decision makers in the organization or at ActionAid International. Information on community empowerment strategies, a feature that drives the purpose and activities of ActionAid projects, received only a moderate score on accessibility and timeliness. The concept of empowerment and its application to practical activities is complex, and the guidelines provided by ActionAid are theoretical in their orientation, making it difficult to be sure that the understanding of one person is the same as another. Finally, policies on women's leadership, an important human resource management consideration at ActionAid Bangladesh, are not widely understood and the documentation on them is not easily available. Broadly, participants in the exercise attributed many of these failings in transparency to the hierarchical character of the organization, which tends to hold back information available at higher levels in the organization from reaching individuals and groups at lower levels in the organization.

ActionAid staff and partners in Kenya expressed a moderate degree of satisfaction with their transparency practices. Scores for six information types identified by participants as useful were mostly moderate, and high in some cases (Table 3). Only information on feedback received a low score with respect to the timeliness of this information. Participants explained that feedback (within ActionAid as an organization, and between ActionAid and partners) was often not shared at all, and especially when it was considered negative. This represented a lost opportunity to inform programme strategies with information that could have improved their effectiveness.

Table 3: Transparency ratings by ActionAid staff and partners in Kenya for six information types

Info. Head	Timeliness	Truthfulness	Accessibility
Programme Budgets	Excellent	Medium	Excellent
Effective feedback	Below average (low)	Medium	Medium
Audit Reports	Medium	Excellent	Excellent
Evaluation reports	Medium	Excellent	Excellent
Linkages with partners	Medium	Medium	Medium
Action Aid approaches to programmes	Medium	Excellent	Medium

The relatively low ratings on the timeliness of information sharing across most other information types was attributed by staff and partners to disjointed information sharing practices within the organization. Delays in sharing information on funding and delays in the development of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between ActionAid and partners were two key examples. Staff time and resources are wasted planning other activities before this information is available, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the projects. The linkages between ActionAid and stakeholders (partners and communities) normally expressed in MOUs were not well understood and were often unavailable. It was also noted that ActionAid partners in different counties in Kenya are never at par in regards to the information available to ActionAid staff, an inequality behind the medium ratings given to truthfulness, timeliness and accessibility with respect to linkages with partners.

Observations from Bangladesh, Kenya and Pakistan ActionAid offices regarding information sharing within the organization seem to reflect two structural features of organizations. First, information shared vertically inevitably reinforces the reliance of lower levels on higher levels, thereby creating the risk of power imbalances and rigidity in the flow of information due to hierarchy. Delays, and a lack of timeliness in information sharing, is a common result. Comments from participants in communities, partner organizations and ActionAid in all countries noted transparency problems (mainly untimely sharing) created by dependence on a single source for information passed on to them from higher levels. Second, information shared horizontally is subject to forces of fragmentation, potentially creating confusion and uncertainty. Participants in Pakistan and Bangladesh noted that they get different pieces of information at different times through different people. This makes it difficult to see the whole project process and how the various parts interact. Similarly, ActionAid regional and national staff in Pakistan noted that specific types of information are shared among the same departments at different levels (for example, between the finance departments of country, regional and partner offices) without necessarily being shared across departments at all levels (finance, program, and administration). Problems due to these dynamics were expressed in lower ratings on truthfulness (reliability and sincerity), timeliness and accessibility (reach and understanding) of the information shared.

Conclusions and recommendations

The key findings of the research can be summarized under four topics:

1. Information needs and ethical sharing

Broadly, communities and partners seemed most interested in upstream and midstream types of project information. This includes things like project purpose, project location and duration, when, where, for how long and who is involved. The usefulness of this information to communities and partners lies in understanding what projects are about and planning how to engage with projects and interact with each other.

By contrast, ActionAid local and national offices seemed most interested in downstream types of project information, namely, the structures of projects (policies, governance, management) and the lessons learned or project impacts. The usefulness of this information to organizations related primarily to how it contributes to reporting and accounting for projects. A few circumstances were identified where the sharing of information could expose individuals or groups to undue harm.

2. Channels for sharing

The channels through which information on projects was shared included mechanisms such as the PRRP process and project activities designed primarily with other purposes in mind (training, excursions, etc.). Reflect circles, which are a common feature of ActionAid projects, were the most direct and appropriate channel for sharing and discussing information on the range of information types of interest to community rights holders. The main strength of the circles as a transparency tool was that they gave priority to interpersonal and oral traditions. This went beyond literacy into deeper questions of history and culture in communities where ActionAid is active.

3. Transparency practices

Assessments of the extent to which transparency was actually practiced in the study countries generally showed positive results, with some exceptions. Timeliness was the most problematic criteria across many information types (project goals, processes and impacts). This was attributed by many to inefficiencies in the flow of information from one level to the next and power imbalances in some situations (for example, community representatives acting as “gate keepers”). Accessibility – understood mainly as the reach of information – also showed some scope for improvement. Transparency concerns were greatest in emergency projects criticized by some rights holders as lacking truthfulness and timeliness with respect to information on project processes. More generally, the most prevalent and potentially damaging gap in all three countries seemed to be the poor understanding among rights holders and partners regarding how to safely provide feedback on projects (whether it be on goals, processes or impacts). While ActionAid

offices expressed an openness to being challenged or criticized at different stages in the project cycle, rights holders and even some partners did not seem to know when and how to do so. The timeliness of feedback (when it can make a difference to plans) and the extent to which rights holders feel confident they could provide feedback safely, suffered. This gap could be a major barrier for more vulnerable groups such as women and youth, or very poor segments of the population worried that negative feedback could exclude them from benefits of the projects.

4. Transparency impacts

Participation in decision-making; trust between rights holders partners and ActionAid; confidence in project activities; and efficiency in project operations were mentioned by various stakeholders as important impacts of transparent information sharing actually achieved in projects. When information practices lacked accessibility, truthfulness or timeliness, the negative impacts mentioned by rights holders were confusion, doubt and wasted planning effort.

Five recommendations follow from the findings:

1. ActionAid and its partners could take a more deliberate approach to sharing information on key project parameters (goals, processes and impacts). The list of information types included under the transparency principles of the ActionAid Accountability Charter provides a reference point which can be tailored to the information needs of different stakeholders in each project context. The research shows that **sharing everything with everyone all of the time** is not necessarily useful and can even lead to breaches of confidentiality. Grounding information sharing in felt needs and in what can be shared ethically, means the information sharing process can focus on making the information accessible (understanding and reach), truthful (reliable to the best of current knowledge) and timely (when it can make a difference).

2. Further research could look at the transparency effects of established ways of working – such as reflect circles and the use of community representatives. Reflect circles seem to provide a communication channel with the widest reach to rights holders and, through explanation and discussion, they offer opportunities to clarify, debate and formulate feedback on multiple dimensions of project plans and impacts. However, they may need greater clarity and more deliberate support from ActionAid so they actually provide timely feedback on matters of concern to them and in ways that do not expose individuals and groups to undue harm. Attention to safe feedback mechanisms is also needed for community representatives. They need to know how to safely channel feedback from rights holders upwards, and to share with rights holders the information they received from partners and ActionAid. At a minimum, this means keeping the complaints anonymous or untraceable back to the person making the complaint. An

ethically deeper complaints mechanism would require that people know how to register their complaints safely and that they have access to appropriate means of communication (tools that do not rely on high levels of literacy and that allow them to remain unexposed). It would also require some way of communicating back to communities about what ActionAid is doing to address the concerns raised, so that rights holders come to understand that expressing their concerns can make a difference in the project. Research should also examine assumptions regarding the role of community representatives in the flow of information, and the conditions under which they can sometimes abuse their power as “gate keepers.” Scrupulous attention to gender balance and effective training in the responsibilities of group representatives are some ways to manage these risks.

3. Further attention could be given to the effectiveness of organizational structures and the working culture with respect to the timeliness, accessibility and truthfulness of vital project information. Reducing the rigidity of reporting hierarchies among national, regional and partner staff and fostering the sharing of information across departments (for example, between finance, programs and administration) could help improve transparency by shortening communication channels and reducing the silo effects of complex organizations.

4. The management of uncertainty could be handled with more modesty and truthfulness when sharing information with communities and partners, especially in emergency programmes where unpredictability is an inherent feature. Rights holders and partners are likely to be more tolerant of information gaps, changes in project expectations and funding shortfalls if these are shared as soon as they are known (timely) and the reasons explained in ways that are easily understood and that reach all parties concerned (accessible). Sincerity in knowledge sharing, including recognition of what is not known or fully predictable, can be combined with collaborative risk assessments and contingency planning to build understanding and trust on delicate matters such as budgets and other sources of project uncertainty. This might mean being more truthful up front about information that is uncertain or simply not available, while also being diligent about sharing new information with all those concerned in as timely a manner as possible.

5. Engaging communities, partners and staff in discussions about how ActionAid shares information and why it considers transparency a fundamental obligation in the development process could help enhance mutual understanding and commitment to transparency. Recommendations one and two above, might be the place to start. This would likely make it easier to sharpen the distinction between transparency as a means and accountability as an end in the development process. Being accountable for results,

while a central ActionAid value, is not the same as being transparent about how these results are going to achieved (or how failures to achieved them can be safely reported). This distinction may be lost or under appreciated in discussions at both community and organizational levels.

Annex I: Country Case Studies

Pakistan

AAPK1_Community Session_ Overall Report

AAPK2_Organistional Session_Overall Report

AAPK3_MZD_GVMT

AAPK4_MZD_Media

AAPK5_MZD_LRP Staff

AAPK6_MZD_Media

AAPK7_MZD_members of AHEN

AAPK8_MZD_Rights Holders

AAPK9_MZD_Village Organization

AAPK10_MZD_Village Cluster

AAPK11_MZD_Rights Holders

AAPK12_MZD_GVNMT

AAPK13_PDK_ARA Staff

AAPK14_PDK_GVNMT

AAPK15_PDK_MEDIA

AAPK16_PDK_BOD

AAPK17_PDK_Community_Emergencies

AAPK18_Umerkot_CSO_RTP

AAPK19_Umerkot_GOVNMT_Helath

AAPK20_Umerkot_LRP Staff

AAPK21_Umerkot_SMC_Ratnore

AAPK22_Umerkot_Ramsar_Community

AAPK23_Umerkot_GOVNMT_Education

AAPK24_Umerkot_Media

Kenya

AAK1_Community Session_Overall report

AAK2_Organizational Session_Overall report

AAK3_Partners Session_Overall Report

AAK4_Gilrs Forum_Marafa

AAK5_Citizens Forum_Marafa

AAK6_Malindi Rights Forum_Marafa

AAK7_Souti ya Akina Mama_Marafa

AAK8_Cash Light_Isiolo

AAK9_Food for Assets_Isiolo

AAK10_Food Distribution_Isiolo

AAK11_Junior Farmers Field School_Isiolo

Bangladesh

AAB1_Community Sessions_Overall Report

AAB2_Community Sessions_Overall Report

AAB3_Organizational Session_Overall report

AAB4_Contrinution to Overall Findings

AAB5_Wheel

Annex II: Methodology for Understanding Action Aid Stakeholder Perspectives on Transparency

By Daniel Buckles, SAS2 Dialogue[1]
www.sas2.net

General Methodological Approach

The research methodology centers around meetings with defined stakeholder groups, supplemented as needed by individual interviews. The research questions are:

1. What does giving and receiving useful information look like to you?
2. What specific kinds of [defined] program information do you need or want to receive and share?
3. To what extent (degree) is transparent information sharing **actually** achieved in the [defined] program?
4. What difference (impact) has information sharing actually made to whether or not stakeholders meet [defined] program goals?
5. How can information in the [defined] program sharing be improved?

The methodology is similar for village level meetings and institutional meetings. The group dynamics vary, depending on the program focus and stakeholder configuration. Following is the detailed, step-by-step methodology. Supplementary interviews can build on the research questions (above) and definition of transparency (introduction), ensuring that the information described in the background paper guidelines is collected and analysed.

The Methodology

In each of three countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kenya) researchers will facilitate meetings with selected stakeholders in at least 4 village settings (two in each LFP) and in an organizational setting involved Action Aid staff and partner representatives.

Planning for the village meetings requires a stakeholder analysis by the lead staff for selected projects and the research team. First, define the context and programme purpose that brings key stakeholders together in the first place (a project or programme with defined goals, activities and timeframe). For example, in the Singh LFP the education program focuses on girls education (between the ages of 8 and 12). Second, identify the stakeholders to include in the village meeting given the purpose of the education program. These might be the school management committee made up of

[1] Tools for the methodology were adapted by the consultant from a handbook of participatory action research tools by Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel Buckles of SAS[2] Dialogue and available on the web at www.sas2.net.

parents and teachers, members of the village committee, local partners (NGO or government) that are directly responsible for parts of the program, Action Aid staff responsible for management of the program, and women and older girls the program seeks to engage. Researchers should rely on staff and partner expert knowledge to create the list of stakeholders, making sure thought is put into when to combine groups into a single stakeholder category (village women) and when to separate broad categories into smaller groups (village women that are part of the school management committee/other village women and their older daughters).

Avoid a situation where all villagers are invited, regardless of whether or not they have a stake in the particular program, or a situation that brings together people from different programs (education and emergency work) that may not have a shared purpose or shared interest in the same information.

The research process

Session 1: Introduction (Time: 15 minutes)

1. Facilitate introductions and validate with participants the purpose of the meeting. Suggestion: the purpose of the meeting is to discuss what information about the program [insert program name] is potentially useful to you and others that you represent, how you currently receive and give information back, and what difference that information exchange makes to achieving the program goals. Validate that participants are clear and in agreement with the purpose of the meeting.

Note: Avoid using the term “transparency” as this is a buzzword local stakeholders may not be familiar with and don’t need to master for the purpose of the research. You may need to remind people that the meeting is NOT about evaluating the program per se. Also, make the purpose clear when inviting people in the first place.

Session 2: What does giving and receiving information look like to you? (Time: 20 minutes)

1. Option One: Invite people to sit in pairs, triplets or other small groups and provide them with drawing materials. Ask each small group to prepare a drawing that illustrates who has been sharing information about the program (different stakeholders) and how this information has been shared. Invite each group to briefly present their drawing, and explain the story it tells. Ask the plenary what the drawings reveal about who are the stakeholders and the ways of information sharing they use, and paraphrase or summarize as needed.
2. Option Two: Invite people to sit in small groups and briefly discuss who has been sharing information about the program (different stakeholders) and how this information has been shared. Invite each group to present a short play or skit

representing the different stakeholders sharing information in different ways. Ask the plenary what the role play reveals about who are the stakeholders and the ways of information sharing they use, and paraphrase or summarize as needed.

Session 3: What kinds of information about the program do you and others want or need to learn and share? (Time: 20 minutes)

3. The purpose of this session is to identify the kinds of program information participants think are useful to them. If need be, provide participants with a program scenario using examples like local budgets for purchasing supplies, criteria for selecting who is part of the program, the main purpose of the intervention, results from similar intervention in other places, etc.
4. To collect their ideas, start at one side of the room and ask the first person to say what kind of program information they think people in their community or organization should know about, and why this kind of information is potentially useful to them. Once they have shared their idea, continue to the next person, reminding them that people should offer one idea only, AND not repeat an idea someone else has already offered. Continue until no new ideas emerge.
5. Note takers track ALL of the ideas and explanations of why the information is potentially useful. Ask people to say which ones are repeats or very similar, and say which types of information they would like to discuss in more detail. Aim for 4-5 information types, and make a card for each.

Session 4: To what extent (degree) is needed/useful information on Action Aid programs actually shared? (Time: 40 minutes)

6. Explain that the next step is for small groups to assess each information type using three criteria: truthful, accessible, timely. In plenary, present each evaluation criteria one at a time and ask people to identify a symbol or make a picture to represent the criteria. Proceed with the presentation and symbol one criteria at a time: truthful information; information that reaches people and is easy to understand; information that arrives on time.
7. Ask participants to organize themselves into small groups around each of the 4-5 information types. Assign more than one information type to a group if there are few participants in a group (less than 4).
8. Make cards of the three criteria symbols for each group, and distribute the “Score card” (see below) to someone in the group that will be responsible for note taking for the group. Ask them to sit as a group to:
    i. Score how well the information they are talking about was actually shared in reality, using the three criteria (see Score card for details).
9. Research team circulates among the groups, clarifies as needed, and supports documentation of discussions about the reasons for ratings.

Session 5: [Continued in plenary] Summary and conclusions

10. During a tea break, note takers and facilitators compile the results from each group into a single graph, either on the floor or the wall (see “Compilation graph”).
11. Ask participants to gather around the compiled result to discuss how well information sharing was actually achieved in the program overall. Ask what were the strong parts and what were the weaker parts of the information sharing that happened? Discuss until the main pattern is identified. [Tip: if there are many scores in the middle or inner circle then information sharing was not that successful, at least for some information types. Note takers document explanations people provide.]
12. For each information type, ask participants if they can think of a situation where some aspect of the information should not be shared because sharing would undermine someone’s right to privacy or confidentiality. Note and report on the response. This reflects a consideration OUTSIDE of the transparency question.
13. Then ask, what impact did the information sharing that happened or did not happen have on meeting the program goals? Invite people to provide examples of what difference the information sharing made or could have made to the program goals. [Tip: Document what people say about the impacts of the information sharing (negative and positive)]
14. Finally, ask, how the information sharing by the program could be improved, so that it is more truthful, more accessible and more timely. Encourage people to provide very specific practical ideas and recommendations to partners and Action Aid and to each other on how information sharing between different people and organizations can be improved. Document what people say and recommend.

Session 6: Thanks, next steps for Action Aid and closure

Facilitation Materials:

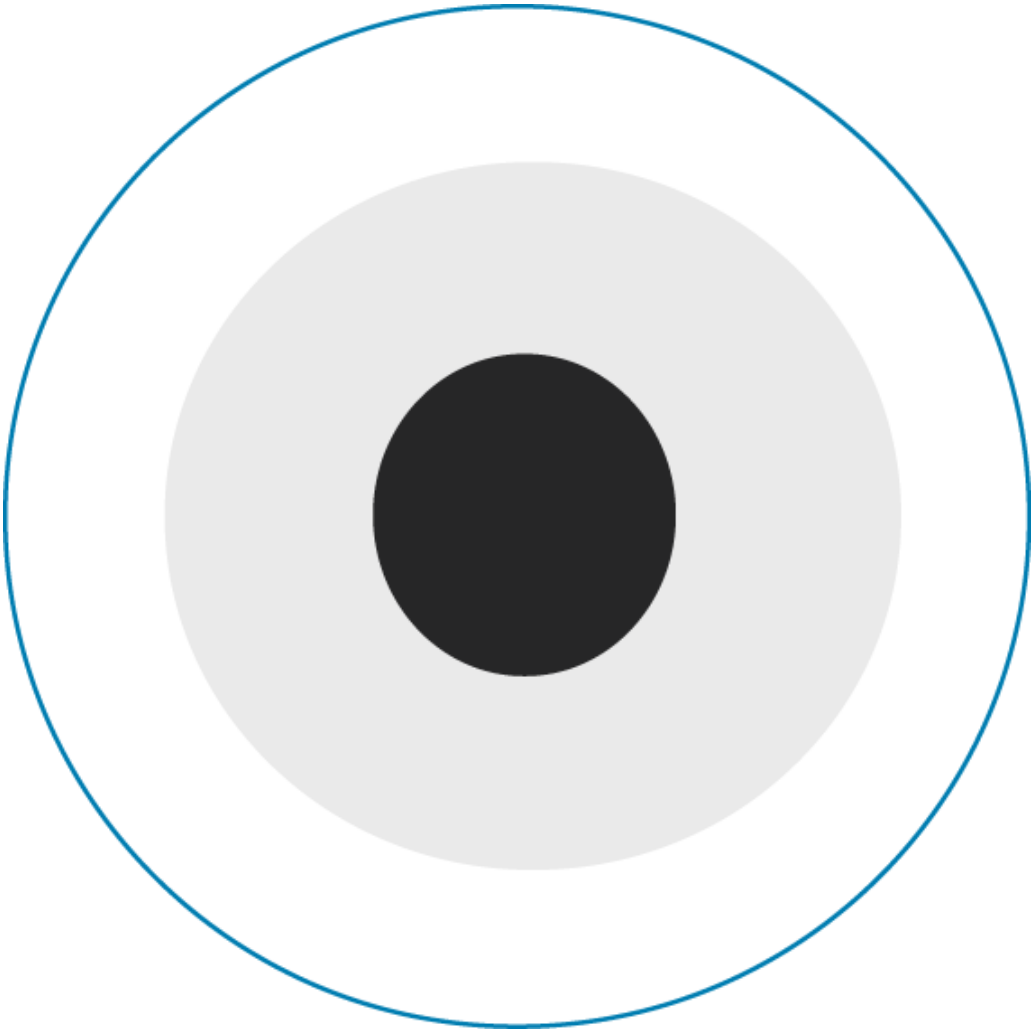
- Score card (translated and formatted for village use)
- Compilation graph (translated for team and village use)
- Cards for information type titles
- Flip chart paper and markers (several colours)
- Tape

Roles of the research team

- Assign roles and responsibilities to each member of the research team.
- Only one person should facilitate at a time, to avoid confusing people with multiple facilitators
- Ensure the note takers record as many details of what people say as possible. Use a tape recorder if necessary to supplement note taking

- Photograph and collect all materials and results (including drawings and the compiled scores).
- Photograph the process and groups, following ethical norms for photographs
- Test and practice with colleagues before going into the field

Small group Score Card for Information type: _____



Truthful information:

- ✓ Place card in outer circle if sharing was truthful in all respects
- ✓ Place card in middle circle if sharing involved some exaggeration or errors
- ✓ Place card in inner circle if sharing was exaggerated or seriously mislead people.
- Note reasons for scores:

Accessible information:

- ✓ Place card in outer circle if the sharing reached and was understood by everyone
- ✓ Place card in middle circle if the sharing missed or confused some important groups
- ✓ Place card in innner circle if the sharing left many out or was very difficult to understand
- Note reasons for scores:

Timely information:

- ✓ Place card in outer circle if the sharing happened at the right time
- ✓ Place card in middle circle if the sharing was later than it should have been
- ✓ Place card in inner circle if the sharing was too late to be helpful
- Note reasons for scores:

Compilation Graph: compile results from each group into a single graph. Write each information type in a pie section and place cards for each criteria in the location indicated by the small groups. See example, below