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Review of the East Africa and Indian Ocean Islands Accountability to Beneficiaries (AtB) minimum standards and actions, toolkit and training curriculum

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Contents

Background.....	2
Highlights.....	4
1. CROIX ROUGE MALAGASY.....	5
Lessons learned and reflections from NS staff.....	7
Feedback from the communities	8
2. SUDAN RED CRESCENT.....	10
Lessons learned and reflections from NS staff.....	11
Feedback from the communities	13
3. General reflections and common themes	14
4. Findings on the AtB Approach and recommendations.....	16
Summary of recommendations	18
ANNEXES:.....	20
ANNEX 1: KENYA RED CROSS, ACCOUNTABILITY TO BENEFICIARIES PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION	20

Background

IFRC EAIOI Regional Office launched an AtB project in 2014 to provide practical support and guidance to IFRC, NS and PNS in the region for incorporating improved beneficiary accountability into their programmes, emergency operations and organisations. Four NS (Burundi, Kenya, Madagascar, and Sudan) volunteered to act as pilot countries to support the development and testing of minimum standards and practical actions along with a supporting toolkit and training curriculum. Each NS identified up to two on-going projects in which to test the standards and materials, and developed an AtB action plan. These action plans identified a number of activities and measures that would be undertaken with the aim of variously improving transparency, participation, handling of complaints and feedback, and monitoring and evaluation. With the exception of the Burundi NS, who decided to suspend the pilot during the increasing conflict in their country, these plans have been being implemented since around February 2015 and became due for review.



This review was therefore commissioned by the IFRC East Africa and Indian Ocean Islands Regional Representation, with the aim to learn;

- How the regional AtB minimum standards and actions, toolkit and training curriculum have been implemented by the pilot National Societies (NS)
- What challenges were faced
- How the AtB materials can be improved, and
- What additional measures could be added to support better AtB in Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations, programmes and emergency operations

This review was not intended as an evaluation of how well the pilot countries were implementing AtB, rather, as it was made clear to each participating NS, the intent was to evaluate how well the AtB pilot approach had equipped them to implement the AtB standards. A secondary goal was therefore to elicit lessons learned by the pilot countries to assist both that NS to make any adjustments, and to allow future implementing NS to benefit from that learning.

The review incorporated the following elements:

- Review of documentation, including the AtB tools, reports, action plans, progress reports
- Participation in a regional AtB review meeting
- Interviews and consultations with regional IFRC staff, NS staff in 2 of the pilot countries, PNS staff in those pilot countries and other stakeholders
- Visits to two of the pilot countries to visit a sample of communities where the AtB plans of action have been implemented
- Feedback and preliminary findings meetings at field, NS headquarters and regional office level

As noted above, due to the escalating security situation in Burundi and the fact that the NS had suspended work on the pilot, Burundi was not included in this review. It should be noted also that the Kenya NS had recently undergone a separate evaluation and it was decided not to repeat the community visits for the purposes of this review. The specific findings of the Kenya evaluation can be found in a separate report, which was unfortunately not available during the writing of this report. The overall preliminary findings of the review were shared with staff associated with the Kenya pilot through the regional office. While this review mostly represents learning with respect to Madagascar, Sudan, and the regional office, its findings and recommendations can be generalised for application across all current and future AtB programmes.



Highlights

- The review visited the regional office in Nairobi, and the pilot projects in Madagascar and Sudan
- Overall it was found that this has been a very well and thoughtfully designed pilot project that has supported National Societies to integrate elements of accountability into the excellent work that they do

Highlights of learning from Madagascar include that:

- The NS worked with the traditional chiefs to build representative village / commune decision making structures that bring representatives from all local stakeholder groups together
- Women are meeting together for the first time as well as being represented on the “KOIF” and representing other stakeholder groups
- These new systems are transforming community dynamics, power structures and building a stronger sense of community cohesion and resilience
- They found that they needed time and some creativity to work with existing power structures to find possible avenues for change.
- Women need to be involved in complaints handling

Highlights of learning from Sudan include that:

- It can't be assumed that a good relationship with communities will translate into their feeling free to complain and give feedback
- Addressing complaints seriously and responding promptly builds trust and deepens the relationship with the community
- All the AtB pillars are interconnected and can't be worked on in isolation, from each other or from the RCRC movements core people related commitments, including gender
- To do AtB effectively involves elements of social transformation.

Highlights of learning about the AtB pilot approach:

- People appreciated the training and retained knowledge well
- The focus on the toolkit should be shifted to a focus on the core principles and skills, with the tools as a secondary resource
- AtB requires additional resources and plenty of follow up support
- Finding a couple of entry points and doing them well may be more effective than setting too many objectives under each of the pillars



1. CROIX ROUGE MALAGASY

The visit to Croix Rouge Malagasy (CRM) in Madagascar took place over one week. Meetings were held in the Antananarivo national office with a mix of NS staff and PNS staff. Due to a last minute change in travel schedule requiring an unexpectedly early departure for the programme visits, a couple of anticipated interviews could not be undertaken. As the bulk of the findings come from the programme site visits, however, and a number of other PNS and NS staff contributed, it is assumed that, while unfortunate, this has not impacted upon the findings.

The programme site visit comprised meetings at the office in Toliara with the programme team and visits to three villages in the southwest region of Antsimo Andrefana, where meetings were either held with the community committee alone, or with the committee along with representatives of the village. Given tight timelines with travel distances and only one reviewer, general protocol of meeting with disaggregated focus groups along the line of age, gender and diversity could not be followed. On occasion this produced some interesting outcomes, as will be discussed below.

The Madagascar NS outlined the following expected results in their original action plan:

Outcome 1: Beneficiaries participate and their views are used in decisions about the programme.

- 1.1. A community committee where beneficiary representatives are chosen by the community and are representative
- 1.2. The members of community committees have agreed on the terms of references that describe the roles and responsibilities
- 1.3. The committee meetings are held once a month to share and discuss information regarding the programme

Outcome 2: The beneficiaries are well informed about project Fanamby

- 2.1. Preliminary orientation and information meetings are held with the community to provide information on the mandate of the National Society and IFRC, and their basic principles, the expectations they have of their staff and volunteers (as described in the code of conduct for staff and volunteers) and their contact details
- 2.2. Information is communicated regularly through appropriate means

Outcome 3: Beneficiaries can complain and give feedback on the programme and we respond and act according to their concerns

- 3.1. Formal complaints and feedback mechanisms are established for the NS, programmes and operations, ensuring that contributions, complaints and feedback from the community are collected and promptly addressed
- 3.2. Beneficiaries are informed of their right to complain and to give feedback
- 3.3. Complaints and feedback are analyzed by the management team to



determine trends and unresolved or underlying problems

Outcome 4: The feedback and opinions of beneficiaries are used to track progress and guide the decisions of the program

4.1. Beneficiaries participate in monitoring and evaluation and received feedback on the outcomes of monitoring and evaluations that they participated in

4.2. Planning and review processes for the programme utilize an analysis of beneficiary feedback to guide decision-making

The action plan had been developed in the context of a pre-existing intention on the part of the programme team to introduce a more contemporary and equitable system of participation and decision-making. The team explained that the AtB training and resources provided them with a structure and guidance that, they felt, significantly improved their approach.

Key interventions as a part of the pilot include that the team

- Worked with traditional leaders and decision makers to gain agreement on an extension to their current systems that would provide representation for a wider cross section of the community
- Developed a new committee system in each participating village called the “KOIF”
- Worked with the community to build consensus on what groups should be represented
- Coupled the introduction of the KOIF with the establishment of “women’s associations” that enabled local women to meet together first and to become accustomed to and prepared for increased participation in decision making processes
- Introduced formal complaints handling processes into the new system, where two members of the KOIF were designated as responsible for receiving and registering complaints
- Built on their approaches to information provision over the radio with the introduction of beneficiary perspectives

“You can’t introduce a new structure to the villages when they already have one, so we reinforced what they have with AtB”



Lessons learned and reflections from NS staff

Strategies to gain support of the traditional leaders

The programme team discovered that they needed some time and creativity when working with the traditional leaders to gain agreement to participate in change. They found that directly suggesting the participation of women in decision making was often the most likely way to elicit initial resistance, so an effective solution was to negotiate representation of all of the different segments in the community, including women. Despite the initial resistance on women's participation, they did negotiate agreement also for the establishment of the women's associations, which seem to have become quite quickly and readily accepted, and which also seem to have had an extremely positive impact for the women, as described below in the community discussions.

Self-determination and social equity

In the process of working with the villages with regard to which segments of the communities should be represented, they came up with a range of groups that started to resemble a union movement. In each village there were variously representatives on the KOIF of pastoralists, farmers, churches, teachers, local authorities, along with groups by age, gender and disability. At this stage it is too early to determine whether this combination is the best to bring the communities closer to social and gender equality, however it is worth following their progress to see what dynamics evolve. There seems a risk that the traditionally more marginalized and vulnerable groups could still remain on the fringes with so many decision making seats being taken by already influential and commercially oriented groups, however, if the communities are able to work towards a gender balance on the KOIF at the same time, this particular mix may serve a positive purpose on other levels.

There is inevitably a delicate balance in facilitating a community to construct a system of participation when the aims include at the time self determination and working towards redressing social and gender inequity. With complete community control over the decisions, the more powerful and central forces within that community may still engineer the maintenance of the status quo. It is with this in mind that the example above flags some potential concerns. Additionally, it was found that each community tended to elect only men as their complaints representatives. Interestingly, one of the communities themselves were beginning to realize that this was not satisfactory (as raised by the male chief) and that it had the effect of reducing women's access to the system. Their solution was to double the number of complaints monitors and to insist on two women along with two men.

Communication strategies

While the programme team already had information strategies in place, in particular through the radio broadcasts, they considered how to augment these as a result of the AtB training. As noted, they included beneficiary perspectives in the radio shows, and



found that this increased listenership as more people tuned in to hear the voices of their own communities. Other ideas to improve information provision were more difficult to implement without additional budget. For example, they would have liked to place noticeboards in the villages with which they work; however the cost of materials for a noticeboard per village was prohibitive.

Creating more demand

The lack of financial resources associated with AtB was also an issue with respect to the increasing demand created through the changes they were initiating. The more positive changes are demonstrated in the participating villages, the more demand they create for support and engagement with neighbouring villages. The chief of one of the participating villages raised this as an issue, suggesting that the villagers themselves needed to get out to their neighbours and share what they were learning. While this to some extent would not bring additional cost, the demand on the CRM for additional support may risk over stretching their resources. Their concern was that if they don't respond to the demand sufficiently, relations between communities may become strained.

The AtB action plan and tools

While the team found the training on AtB very useful and were very clear about how it had contributed to the improvement of their strategy, they also admitted that they hadn't found the action plan or the tools particularly of value. In fact, they noted, that the action plan had taken quite a lot of work to complete, for, on their part, little return. This perspective should be considered in the light, however, of a team with strong leadership that was, as noted, already planning a social equity intervention. The tools and action plan may provide clearer guidance for a programme where AtB may be promoting a newer approach.

Feedback from the communities

The level, degree and type of feedback received from the communities presented strong evidence that the new systems are contributing to a transformation of community dynamics, power structures and building a stronger sense of community cohesion and resilience. While some degree of diplomatically appreciative feedback is expected from communities that value the input they receive, discussion with the groups was enabled at times to delve into areas for which people may not have prepared answers, allowing a more spontaneous dialogue to emerge. This was observed most strongly in one particular community, however some similar elements emerged across the three groups.

Bearing in mind that these "direct quotes" from the community groups were processed from their local language through French into English, following are some examples of what the communities said themselves, in their own (translated) words.



On the impact of the KOIF structure and activities

- Since the new committee structure, everyone participates in activities
- Before it was just the leaders involved in decision making and now all the community are involved
- People mobilise themselves and don't wait as much any more to be told by their leaders what to do
- There were taboo subjects that can now be discussed and addressed, for example regarding the latrines. Bit by bit, everyone was convinced and the village is more clean as a result
- The village is more unified, there is more conciliation

On the impact of increasing representation across the community

- With the wide representation of interest groups, people now resolve problems between themselves
- People realise the young have more capacity to contribute to the life of the village

On the impact of the women's increased participation from the perspective of women

- As a result of the women's associations, we have more initiatives and have started livelihoods projects and can earn some money
- Since the new system, we are more active and the men listen to us more. Introducing women into the decision-making has changed the way things happen
- Since the new system, we are more active and the men listen to us more
- We think more, we have to do research for the decisions, and inform ourselves, for example to help in resolving a conflict

On the impact of women's participation from the perspective of men

- Now we realise that women have a lot to contribute. For example, women remember things that men don't
- Women participate in physical activities we didn't realise they could
- Women help to resolve conflicts even between men in a way that is better. When women contribute, they can moderate tension more easily

The one village that demonstrated the strongest embracing of the changes and in particular, a new role for women, had a particularly visionary chief, who also talked about the need to work with the communes around them to bring a more coherent system. All three villages noted the difference the new system was making, in particular for women. It was in this village with the notably visionary leader, where the men were also able to articulate what they themselves were learning and gaining through the participation of women. At this moment of the men sharing these reflections with the women of their village, the fledgling impact of the CRM programme team's painstaking efforts to implant this system seemed credibly and tangibly apparent.



2. SUDAN RED CRESCENT

The visit to the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) took place directly after Madagascar. Some time was spent at the national office in Khartoum conducting discussions with NS and PNS representatives, and then, once a travel permit was granted, community visits were conducted in the Sinnar (also written as Sennar) region. SRCS staff at the Sinnar office welcomed and briefed the review team on their arrival, accompanied them during the community visits, and then participated in a debriefing discussion at the end. The team, comprising the consultant and a PMER representative from Khartoum, who also acted as interpreter, visited three villages over the period of a day, and as in Madagascar, the travel times and small size of the team meant that focus groups could not be disaggregated. The third village visited actually self-disaggregated by gender lines, however delays en route mean that the team most unfortunately arrived too late to speak to the women, who had had to depart to attend to other business.

The Sudan NS outlined the following expected results in their original action plan:

Outcome 1: AtB is embedded into SRCS ways of working and staff and volunteers have the capacity to respond

1.1 All national staff for the water and sanitation programme are trained on AtB

1.2 Volunteers in local communities are trained on AtB

1.3 AtB plan of action for water and sanitation programme is developed and approved for implementation

Outcome 2: Information is shared with beneficiaries regularly in a way that they understand

2.1 Programme information is regularly shared through community meetings

Outcome 3: Beneficiaries are asked about their opinions and this information measures progress and informs the water and sanitation programme

3.1 A beneficiary satisfaction survey is carried out and results are shared and acted upon

Outcome 4: Beneficiaries can complain and provide comments and we act and respond to their concerns.

4.1 A complaints & feedback system is formalised for use in communities

4.2 Staff and volunteers are trained on using the forms and on handling complaints and feedback

4.3 Logging and analysing complaints and feedback and drafting report for management

4.4 Information on the complaints and feedback system is shared with communities, with community members able to discuss and ask questions



Key interventions as a part of the pilot include

- SRCS have primarily formalised systems of complaints handling and response through the use of a mix of complaints boxes and field officer telephone numbers, combined with formal recording and logging of the complaints received
- Generally people have access to two field officers, and in all cases at the moment, these are men
- Literate members of the communities are available to write complaints for the complaints boxes on behalf of those who can't read or write
- SRCS programme staff went through existing community committees and worked with them to select the type of complaints system they would use, offering them choices between various tools

Lessons learned and reflections from NS staff

The difference that an invitation to complain can make

SRCS staff at headquarters and in Sinnar universally agreed that the introduction of formal complaints handling had been a very useful learning experience. Staff had been surprised to discover that the communities they work with had complaints but hadn't felt able to share them before. They learnt that it cannot be assumed that a good relationship with communities will translate into their feeling free to complain and give feedback.

"If we hadn't talked to them like this, they wouldn't have spoken up"

Other observations from the experience included that addressing complaints seriously and responding promptly had built trust and deepened their relationship with the communities. They felt that the new system had contributed to an increased sense of ownership of the programme by communities, and in a type of feedback loop, as their ownership increased, so did the likelihood that they would speak up if they had something to say or critique. One person commented that the community now complains about "broken promises", seemingly a significant indicator of them holding the SRCS to account.

Immediately that the complaints system commenced, communities began to use them. Initially, they received mostly messages of appreciation for what they do for the community, but then people began to become more bold and added in complaints, demands for more services, and suggestions for the future. A few examples were cited, from the Sinnar area and in the north of the country, where the systems had led to investigations about the quality or behaviour of staff or trainers, eventually leading to personnel changes. It was said that most complaints have been solved at site level and feedback given immediately.



Choices of what AtB intervention to make

An additional activity that had been planned by the SRCS was the implementation of beneficiary satisfaction surveys. It seemed that this had been talked about for the best part of a year, but very poorly implemented, if at all. It may be worth thinking about what has held the NS back from getting started on this, as it may not only be due to lack of time and resources; underlying this, it may be that this wasn't the most appropriate approach to use. This may be an example of a "cart before the horse" approach as is discussed more in section 3 below.

Giving a voice to the demand for more

One of the recurring themes emerging from discussions with staff was the awareness that once they touch a community and start providing them with support, they open up an ever increasing demand for more. The commencement of the complaints and feedback system seemed to be allowing them to focus and channel that feedback more into their planning, allowing them to build a clearer picture of where each community wants to build their skills and capacity. This evidence of the valuing of RCRC support was highlighted in the communities where they had had to work the hardest to get into in the first place. Some communities had quite recently gone from not wanting to work with the SRCS at all, to, in the case of the conservative community visited during the field work, wanting to become experts in their own health care and to share what they do outside of their own community.

The AtB pillars are all interconnected

While the SRCS had decided to focus on one of the pillars of AtB primarily, their experience highlights the fact that to do any aspect of AtB well will, by necessity, involve taking into account all pillars of AtB eventually, along with the equity, human rights and people related cross cutting issues associated with it. To do AtB effectively involves elements of social transformation. For example, the complaints system was bringing some clear positive gains, but at the same time, the reduced access to and use of the system by women was quite evident. The risk with not having a clear and focussed age, gender and diversity strategy woven into AtB work is that the systems established to become more accountable can inadvertently contribute to the further marginalisation of minority and less powerful groups. Staff were aware of this, and discussed how they struggle to overcome how closed some communities are, especially in relation to gender. They are, however, making some real gains in more closed communities, one of which was visited during the field trip. Some felt that AtB is providing some strategies for engaging with them, citing the fact that they have received some complaints from communities they are not serving through people from those communities travelling to villages with a complaints box in order to register their complaint. As the SRCS builds greater trust and increased access to more conservative communities, their obligation to address issues of social equality increase, as they are the ones with this unique access and their target is the most vulnerable.

AtB provides an excellent framework for this, in a gradual and thoughtful way. For example, the conservative, all male group announced they had established a



“committee” one month ago, with 15 members, mostly young men, who would feed ideas and decisions to the traditional leadership group. When asked about the representation of women on the committee, the men laughed sheepishly at the fact that there was only one woman on the new committee. On discussion with SRCS staff afterwards, it became clear that this committee is, for this community, an enormous step forward, and even the space for one woman was a significant step for the leaders to have allowed, not to mention the new voice created for young men. There is a risk that one lone woman may not be able to bear the burden of holding the space open for more women to come down the track, however, in the context of a community that quite recently didn’t want to work with the SRCS at all, cautious optimism is justified. Perhaps in drawing on the experience in Madagascar, nonetheless, it is worth bringing these issues to the fore a little more boldly and a little faster wherever possible; capitalising on the unique position of the RCRC to gain the trust of communities sufficiently to collaborate on transforming patterns of equity.

Feedback from the communities

Complaints working well, with some more work to do

In general, people reported being very satisfied with their ability to give feedback and make complaints. They felt that if women have a complaint they could go to the head of the committee or straight to SRCS, but no community was aware of or suggested a confidential channel that didn’t involve women going to a man. Even in the case of confidence and good community relations, this provides limited options in the event of a serious breach of accountability leading to sensitive complaints, such as sexual exploitation and abuse or corruption. In some villages there was a high ownership of mobile phones, but this varied between a family phone and individual ownership, and therefore confidential access for some people is still limited in some areas.

Participatory processes

People described that if they have “something big to do” they ask all the community to come to an open meeting. The committee members describing this felt that as all segments of the community are expected to attend, and everyone has the right to speak, that all views can be taken into account. The meetings can, however, contain up to 800 people, making the likelihood of many people feeling confident or willing to speak reasonably low. These meetings can also be the place where elections for representatives are held. In small communities, holding elections in such a public forum may cause the elections to reflect more about the power and popularity dynamics in the community, rather than a reasoned consideration of the best people for the job. It is also possible that it prevents new and unexpected candidates from putting themselves forward.

If they were the boss for a week...

Invited to imagine what changes, improvements or decisions they might make if they were the boss of the SRCS for a week, people essentially said that they would have the



SRCS do more of the good things they already do, including training, latrines and health services. One participant commented that the training “has made them something”. Additional ideas included improving the input of young people and increasing the number of volunteers.

Looking to the young men

The young men on the committee in the conservative village were asked what they hoped to achieve for their village from being a part of this new committee. Some focussed on expanding the skills in the village on first aid and health care, while one suggested more training for women. One young man said he hoped that they could build one of the biggest volunteers groups in the country and then take their leadership even beyond Sudan.

3. General reflections and common themes

i. AtB is integrally associated with core values and policies of the movement

Feedback discussions on the fieldwork raised a discussion on the interrelationship between the pillars of AtB and the core values and policies of the RCRC movement. NS staff were aware that AtB wasn't something particularly new, rather a framework to bring certain elements together and to improve them. This framework also provides some concrete direction in applying other policy with regard to human rights, gender and social equity, for example, something that is particularly welcomed by those who acknowledge that...

“the cross cutting issues are being drowned in the noise of (other issues)”.

For example, some excellent insights into basic principles for working on gender and women's participation in particular emerged through the application of the AtB pilot in both countries:

The community needs time to understand and accept change, but the pace of change needs to be continuous and perhaps pushed just a little by RCRC

The traditional leaders need to be on board with sharing power so as to avoid resistance and a backlash

Women need a chance to speak together amongst themselves to gain confidence and gather their thoughts together

Women need opportunities to learn the business of their communities

Women should also have access to roles on committees that are not only about representing all women.

Related to this and as noted in the Sudan section, all the AtB pillars are interconnected; once you start working on one area, issues of the others come up that need to be addressed to avoid marginalizing those outside of the power structures further. This doesn't necessarily mean that it is necessary to tackle all four pillars at the same time. It



seemed that the action plans may have been experienced both as an overwhelming task to undertake in their development, but also too much to handle, particularly in a context of no or little additional funding and resources. From a position that recognizes that all pillars are interconnected, perhaps the NS may prefer to decide upon their entry point, develop that well and gradually build upon that with the other elements as they progress.

ii. The blurred line between volunteers and the community

RCRC Movement staff are all very aware of the strengths and potential weaknesses of working within the model that they do. One of the continuing struggles is with the blurred and constantly changing line between volunteers and the communities from which they come. As more people become volunteers within a community, a number of questions arise that are of relevance to the implementation of the AtB commitments;

- Who are the volunteers?
- Are they also the target beneficiaries?
- Does being a volunteer open the door potentially for increased power and possible abuse of that power?
- How do the NS ensure that the volunteers don't become their customer base?
- How should the RCRC respond to the constant demand from volunteers for visibility materials that make them look like official representatives of the movement?

As noted by a PNS representative,

"The RC volunteers are the better off people in a community. We're trying to reach the vulnerable, not just the better off. There is a tendency to lengthen the gap between rich and poor if we don't do it well"

The volunteers are clearly one of the movement's greatest resources and provide it with one of its most unique edges in the humanitarian and development market. Becoming a volunteer is, for many people, a great way to access new skills and knowledge and to contribute to their communities. But these people are also often the best educated and influential already in those communities, and as the colleague above points out, were not the original target population as end users of RCRC services. Of course, improving the life of a village in many circumstances will benefit everyone. Where the issue lies for AtB is in such questions as whether NS staff interact almost exclusively with volunteers, where people without the education can't access the role because they can't read and write, or whether becoming a volunteer brings additional power and influence with it that may be abused and if there are clear strategies in place to manage this.

"Our greatest advantage and risk is the volunteer network. We need to work closely with volunteers. The risk is that we end up working with the volunteers and they become the beneficiaries. If we are accountable to them, it may not filter down."



iii. Understanding each community, down to the village

A strong theme that emerged through both discussions and visits was the importance of understanding the variations among and between communities, even within a local area, rather than making essentialised assumptions about local or regional culture, beliefs and behaviours. Some of the communes are far more progressive than others, and as has been demonstrated, an open minded or visionary traditional leader can contribute to significant change if identified and partnered with. The RCRC is in one of the best positions to appreciate this given how closely it works with its communities, which would explain in part why this came up so often in discussion. These differences can bear significant consequences for approach and planning, and even for which communities to choose to start working with on more “radical” strategies.

For example, in Madagascar, the village with the visionary chief was a great choice for moving the project of social transformation along, and as this village is likely to have stronger outcomes than some of the others, that could be capitalised upon to start to influence neighbouring communes and to be used as an inspiring case study across the region. On the other end of the scale, the slow and patient work being undertaken by the SRCS with the conservative community is also bearing results, and eventually any gains made there on gender equity and through working with the young men to bring change may be helpful in gaining access and traction with other conservative communities, as is being hinted at by the complaints from other communities not currently being served.

Either way, the outcomes of work with both these communities highlighted the need for some patience at the start for the time it can take to get the communities on board with change. Once they are on board, the potential for that change may be quite significant, and ultimately, something that the communities themselves very much want over and above the concrete services they enjoy.

Participants in the review counselled that this patience is an important thing to impress upon technicians and to build into project planning to allow for the time needed.

“We are investing in AtB and M&E with a goal to improve resilience, but we’re not investing enough to ensure the technicians are doing this properly and monitoring our own mistakes”

4. Findings on the AtB Approach and recommendations

As a general overview, it should be noted that overall, this AtB pilot approach is a really positive and well-constructed initiative that has clearly led to some very positive gains and learning. This is something of which all staff who have been involved in it should be justly proud. All feedback and recommendations herein are intended to suggest how to build on and develop the strategy further.



i. Training and support

Overall, people really appreciated the pilot approach, the materials and the training that they received. The knowledge they gained in the training seemed to be well retained by those who had attended it. The next challenge for the training component is how to get the skills out to the people at field level, who will be most responsible for implementing the commitments.

“The AtB training helped them to understand the inequalities, but if the training is not done at the field level, it remains too theoretical”

In addition to training, there was a strong emphasis on the need for mentoring and follow up support. The fact that visits are planned by staff taking a mentoring role was seen as a good motivational tool to keep people focused on moving forward, but overall it seems that NS staff felt that there could be more remote coaching and support available. A core problem from both ends here is capacity. Everyone is clear about the movement’s commitment to AtB from the highest level and the degree of enthusiasm and support for AtB is strongly evident across the board, however there seems to be an impasse over the need for resourcing to realize the movement’s ambitions.

Some examples of the feedback given on this topic from NS and PNS staff are as follows:

- There is a gap between the Federation and our ability to implement
- There is a lot of enthusiasm, engagement and pride in doing something positive. That creates side effects, energy and activity
- It’s important to understand what AtB is about – it will take some time to internalise and apply. We need constant reminders, guiding and coaching
- There is a need to follow up training
- Don’t rely too much on reading. Unless the documents are translated into local languages, they are not so accessible
- Need more support to the NS, liaise with other agencies and get mentoring
- When we did the training, it was more cost effective to bring people to the capital and therefore a lot of people were unable to participate
- It’s not enough just to do the training – we have to work with the NS over a long period of time

ii. The cart before the horse

People in the humanitarian and development sectors tend to be action-oriented people who feel that their complex work would be far simpler if they only had the right tools to do the job. Tools, however, have a tendency to shape and govern the work that is done, and it was seen in some circumstances that the AtB work was designed around the tools, instead of the tools being a secondary resource drawn upon after there had been a clear problem identification and solution design.

Attempting to take what is complex and boil it down to something simple and predictable, while an important task, can also be risky, as when concepts are over simplified they may be rendered ineffective. This is an ongoing struggle within the



accountability movement and is not unique to AtB within the RCRC movement. A really critical element of installing a sustainable approach to AtB is that staff clearly understand what it is that they're trying to do and why. Once they have the principles underpinning "how we should work around here" then they can look for the resources they need and adapt them to their individual contexts, or indeed, make their own tools, as some of them said they wanted to do.

All the elements appear to be there with the AtB materials and design, the main shift that needs to occur is for the status of the excellent collection of tools to a secondary resource, such as a collected handbook. This would reduce the need for people to "learn" the tools until they understand exactly what problem they are trying to solve with them, and then allow them find a tool that would fit the purpose. In the course of the review, various existing tools were discussed with stakeholders, and feedback and learning from discussions was incorporated into an updating of the toolkit. But overwhelmingly, the most important emergent issue during the review was in relation to the capacity of staff to design more accountable approaches and to solve problems and make improvements along the way.

iii. Tackling all the pillars

As has been discussed, it's quite important to recognize that once one pillar is being worked with in a project, to do it well, the others will need to be considered along the way. For this reason, it may not be necessary for action plans to tackle planned outcomes under all four pillars from the start. This approach appeared to be unrealistic for the pilot countries visited, as in particular, without additional funds, they simply didn't have the resources to take on too much. As they are all interconnected, generally it is worth starting with where there is motivation and energy. In this way, staff are far less likely to feel the pinch of a low budget, as they've already identified their own priorities.

This is not to say that AtB should be introduced too slowly or half-heartedly, and continuous improvement and growth of the approach should be built into planning. In the early days, however, nurturing stories of success, and doing a few things really well rather than a lot poorly, will lead to the building of greater momentum.

Summary of recommendations

Following is a bullet list of the recommendations with respect to the next phases of the AtB roll out.

- To really effectively embed AtB in practice across the region, some modest resourcing is needed to allow for a) more complex accountability systems and b) a greater level of follow and support to go with a training and communication strategy
- In the context of either some or no funds, there is a need for a bolstered strategy for ongoing support and follow up of NS staff implementing AtB in programming. This may require additional staff resources, especially in the light of the recent



loss of a key staff member working on the area, and could also involve greater participation by PNS staff

- Modify the approach to using the toolkit, making it more secondary to learning the basic principles and skills
- Model something like the ECB project “Good Enough Guide” to create a handbook for the tools, so that there is one “tool” rather than in excess of 40 individual documents
- Utilise the existing skill within the RCRC on communications to develop a communications campaign to help reinforce the principles and approaches amongst NS staff
 - Simple set of commitments
 - Posters for offices, for communities
 - Translations
- Fortify the links with people related cross cutting issues and other relevant core IFRC policies in the next phase of the project
- Seek a balance between ensuring the basic principles of the approach are clearly and simply understood versus not oversimplifying it to the extent that it becomes mechanised and formulaic
- Ensure an emphasis on the principles, contextual analysis and unique solutions, as per comments from RCRC staff themselves;
 - “it’s critical to understand right away how the communities work”
 - “you can’t institutionalise a set system – every community has their own specificities”
 - “context analysis and adaptation is vital”
- Work with NS to choose less AtB entry points, but to concentrate on doing those well and to building up the pillars over time



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

ANNEXES:

ANNEX 1: KENYA RED CROSS, ACCOUNTABILITY TO BENEFICIARIES PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION



Evaluation of Accountability to Beneficiaries (AtB) Approach In the Kinango Integrated Food Security and Livelihood Project



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TABLE OF CONTENT

1.0 Introduction.....	22
2.0 Methodology.....	22
3.0 Achievements of the KinangoIFSL	23
4.0 Evaluation of the applied concept of AtB	27
4.1 Beneficiary Participation	28
4.2 Complaints Channel and Feedback Mechanisms.....	29
4.3Beneficiary Communication.....	30
4.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning	31
5.0 Lessons learnt	31
7.0 Recommendations	32



1.0 Introduction

The Accountability to Beneficiary (AtB) approach has been designed and promoted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and National societies in partnership with Partner National Societies operating in East Africa and Indian Ocean Islands. AtB is built on the premise that Humanitarian and development organizations have a responsibility of accountability to those that it aims to assist. The initiative which was launched in 2014 was envisaged to enhance beneficiary communication and also hold organizations accountable not only to donors but beneficiaries of projects as well. The KRCS took this challenge and volunteered to be part of this pilot National Society. Kinango IFSL Project in the coastal province was selected to be the AtB pilot project. The project undertakes an integrated Food Security and Livelihood program through which both health, Water and Sanitation interventions are undertaken. The AtB approach was brought on board in the last six months of the project to realize how well the project has been accountable and at the same time introduce the approach to the stakeholders of the project.

2.0 Methodology

KRCS through this project, piloted the accountability to Beneficiaries approach in the last two quarters of the project. The approach under the flagship of the International Federation of Red Cross proposes minimum standards to be employed within communities during the project cycle. The standards include beneficiary transparent communication, participation, complaints and feedback mechanisms and involvement in M&E. Prior to roll out of the AtB interventions, the Project staffs were trained on the minimum standards of the Accountability to Beneficiaries. The aim of this training session was to ensure that staff and volunteers are equipped with a basic level of understanding of AtB to support their work. AtB assessment was undertaken to understand community information needs and trusted communication channels. This was to ensure that communications to the beneficiaries are passed in a way that they best understand, so as to establish a robust and effective complaints and feedback mechanism for the community.

Specifically, the training package focused on sharing with participants the minimum standards of AtB developed for the region, the practical actions to reach these standards and the tools available to support this process. At the end of the staff training key action points were agreed upon including delivery of the standards, actions and tools; creation of a plan for the AtB



measures that the office intends to implement; assigning of responsibilities for the actions together with agreement on the timeline and budget. In addition, the actions included identification of partners to work with in this initiative and methods of monitoring the approach.

The project teams then sensitized the local community structures on the approach and undertook and initial assessment of the accountability to beneficiaries. This second assessment was thus to assess the achievements of the approach.

3.0 Achievements of the Kinango IFSL

The project staff developed an action plan which outlined short term objectives and key activities to be pursued by the Kinango Food Security and Livelihood Project team. The project accomplishments which were undertaken in reference to planned activities have been described under each short term objective described below:

1. Community committee or beneficiary representatives were agreed on by the community and are representative in nature.

The key activity under this objective was to review the community committee constitution and ensure that it had one-third composition of women. Through awareness creation, the project ensured that the community structures adhered to the one-third gender rule. Further, during the training of CHVs(Community Health Volunteers), the selection of participants considered the one-third gender rule such that 82 men and 61 women were trained.



Figure 1: Community consultation on committee members' selection



2. **Community committees have an agreed constitution which has clearly stipulated roles and responsibilities of key office bearers:**

Under this objective the project planned to undertake regular reviews of committees' constitutions and operations to ensure that the roles of the office bearers were clearly spelt out. The Project committee was supported by the county government Social Services department to draft a constitution in which the roles and responsibilities of officials were clearly spelt out. A dissemination meeting was thereafter planned to educate the general membership on the contents of the constitution.

3. **Community meetings are held monthly to share and discuss programme information with beneficiaries:**

The main activity was to plan and hold monthly meetings with the committees and community members to brief them about the progress of the project. The project supported the community committee to conduct monthly meetings with the community to brief them on the status of farming activities at Nyalani. The CHVs were also coordinated to carry out monthly meetings to discuss issues relevant to their work.



Figure 2: KRCS project team meeting with community

4. **Beneficiary communication activities for programme/operation are developed and include what should be communicated, when and how:**

The planned activities included, plan and integrate communication activities with ongoing Nutrition and Health campaigns as well as WASH and livelihood activities; Meet with stakeholders to develop



exit communications strategy and Implement exit communications strategy. In terms of accomplishment, the project successfully integrated communication activities into ongoing interventions under health, nutrition, WASH and livelihood. The CHEWs and community committee were all involved in planning and rolling out of these activities. A meeting with various stakeholders at County level was held by the project management team to commence discussions on the development of the exit communications strategy.

5. Formal complaints and feedback mechanisms established for KIFSL with input from the community that ensure beneficiary feedback and complaints are collected and responded to in a timely fashion:

The planned activities included, receive feedback from community on mechanisms for complaining/getting feedback that they would prefer; and set up a structured formal complaining/feedback system. Through the AtB assessment the project was able to understand community information needs and trusted communication channels. Based on these results, discussions were initiated and appropriate feedback/complaints channel and structure identified and agreed upon. Resolutions reached following this discussion included: sourcing of a phone and a log book to be used for receiving complaints/feedback from the community and engagement of a volunteer/intern to man the phone and log in complaints/feedback. Prior to establishment of the complaints and feedback mechanism, 2 volunteers and one staff were sensitized on the system. The complaints and feedback system was then rolled out through a *safaricom* platform which gave the community a voice in the project's decision making. The intervention allowed the beneficiaries to share their concerns through short text messages. If repeated complaints were received, the project organized meetings with the concerned community to resolve the concerns. During the implementation period, Between January and June 2015, fifty complaints and feedbacks were registered.. The complaints related to allocation of seedlings and land for farmers, functionality of the irrigation systems, delayed payments, exit plans, markets for products etc. (*details in annex 1*). All complaints were addressed within days through the KRCS county manager. The figure below illustrates the communication flow in the project pertaining to the complaints & feedback mechanism.

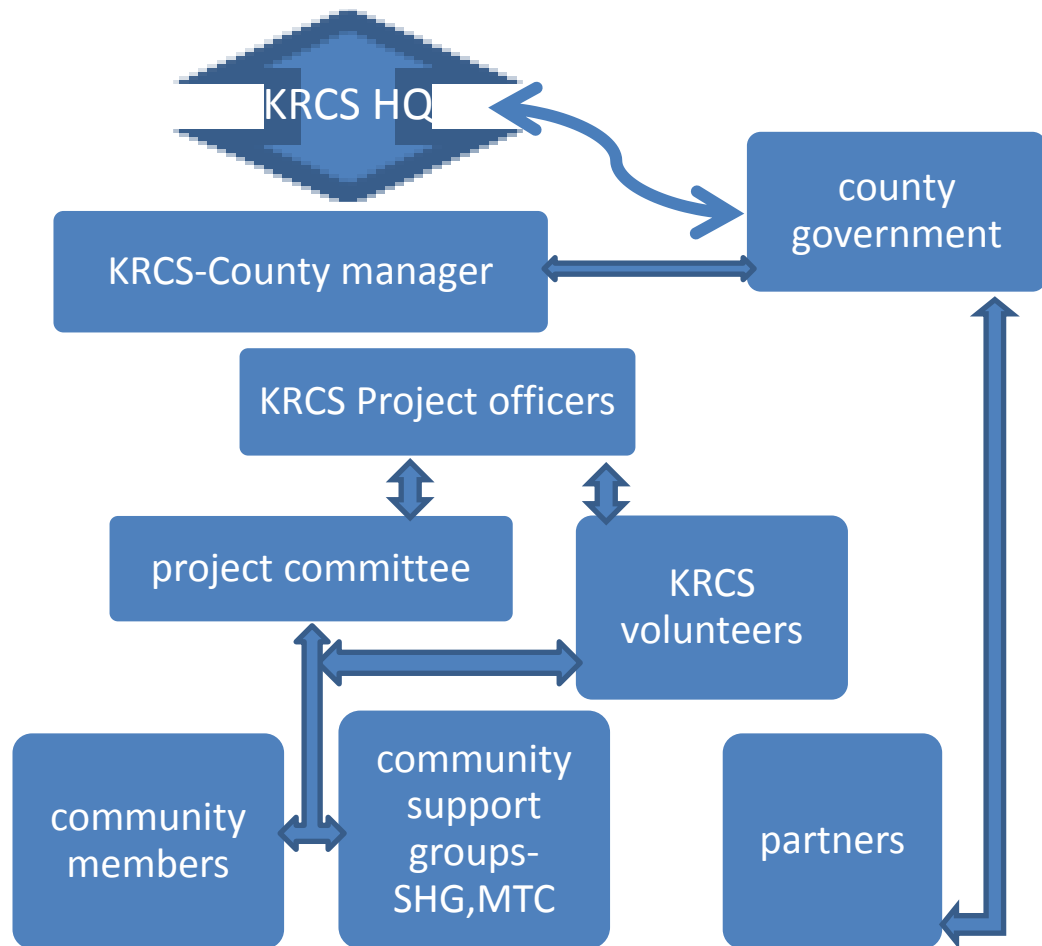


Figure 3: Communication flow(C&F mechanism)

- Beneficiaries are informed of their right to complain and give feedback:** The planned activities included sensitization of the community on the need to complain formally and on the mechanisms they can use to complain. This was achieved through monthly community meetings, monthly CHVs review meetings where the beneficiaries were adequately sensitized on their right to complain and give prompt feedback on issues that were affecting them.
- On M&E,** the project endeavored to meet 3 short term objectives namely: beneficiaries (including men, women, boys, girls and marginalized groups) are involved in monitoring and evaluation, including receiving the results of monitoring and evaluations carried out; Programme plans clearly reflect assessment data, secondary data, learning from previous programmes and sector-wide best



practice and learning; and level of adherence to accountability to beneficiaries minimum standards is measured through monitoring and in evaluations:

Key accomplishments included AtB assessment which was undertaken to understand community information needs and trusted communication channels. This was to ensure that communications to the beneficiaries are passed in a way that they best understand, so as to establish a robust and effective complaints and feedback mechanism for the community. Final evaluation has been done which assessed the involvement of beneficiaries in all the critical stages and processes of the project cycle. The feedback from the community during these assessments was sought.

The project has also consolidated reports for all the meetings held and have equally submitted monthly narrative reports to the M&E unit indicating project progress.

I say thank you because am educated and even this year I planted kales and tomatoes and sold them and am expecting to get a goat. Am grateful since long ago we didn't know anything, and am praying that the society to blessed, for now we are aware that you don't have to wait, you just go to the farm and take tomato and kales then cook for your children. Therefore we are grateful. **A Community Health Volunteer, Banga**

We have formed ROSCOs (similar to table banking) that are beneficial to us where we contribute money. In the event that Red Cross walks away today there will still be continuity of our project, sustainability is ensured and we own the project more. **R8, Mwangani mother to mother support group.**

Mine is to give thanks to this Kenya Red Cross society, at that time we started our project in group we were offered capital to start income generation activities, and we used the money to grow onions, kales and vegetables and we sold them after they were ready. And my thanks is to those who gave us the money to start our own businesses, and we even bought a goat for that society. **R9, Banga CHW.**

Am glad that as a community, we were given an opportunity to raise complaints and feedbacks, this is not formally done with many organizations. **R3, Nyalani group**

The community gave a lot of their time and was not paid for it. The members volunteered their labour throughout the construction phase. **(County Project Manager)**

4.0 Evaluation of the applied concept of AtB

The project has been implementing the accountability to beneficiary approach with a focus on accountability of resources to the donor and beneficiaries; promoting community participation; and providing a mechanism for complaints and feedback. Prior to the roll out, the training component empowered the staff on the concept for effective implementation.



4.1 Beneficiary Participation

According to the County Project Manager for IFSL project, the beneficiaries understanding of the project could be estimated at 70 percent because they have been part of communication and engagement at all levels. The beneficiaries are quite informed about the project; even non-beneficiaries have developed interest, they visit the project site so often because such a project has not been seen in the community before. As part of involvement, the community contributed 130 acres of land for the irrigation project. They further gave another site “the borro site” to provide locally available material e.g. sand and stones for the rehabilitation of the dam. Farmers’ engagement in the farming component also included their involvement in the farm clearing where they have assisted in collection and burning of cleared bushes and fallen trees as well as tilling of the land.

The beneficiaries have been involved in identification and design of the Nyalani irrigation site. The local communities donated 170 acres of land and provided unskilled labour in clearing of the bushes and removing of stumps and shrubs from the farm. After the design and rehabilitation works were complete, the farmers were allocated a quarter an acre for each household to carry out their farming activities. To support farm operations, the Red Cross supplied farm inputs and implements to farmers, trained farm operators and put in place a functioning irrigation infrastructure. An agronomist from Amiran was also engaged to provide extension education to farmers. As a result of this support farmers have started reporting good harvests, improved nutrition and increased income.



Figure 4: Field demonstration for farmers



4.2 Complaints Channel and Feedback Mechanisms

The initial assessment report recommended three channels of passing information to ensure community members hold the project and partners accountable in relation to project delivery areas. The evaluation established that the project had three agreed channels of communication which included use of existing community leadership structures in passing of information, setting up and operationalizing a mobile phone complaints and feedback system and holding monthly community meetings with Beneficiaries. The project incorporated this component as a key strategy in information follow up between the beneficiaries and the project implementers. The evaluation further established the existence of a clear work plan with detailed milestones to be achieved to ensure effective implementation of the concept. The intention was to ensure that the beneficiaries participate in activities and their views are used to make programme decisions. It also intended to ensure the beneficiaries are well-informed about the KIFSL. This concept is currently being coordinated by the KIFSL project team to ensure realization of its objective to the fullest.

The evaluation realized that three community structures are still active in the implementation. These include the mother-mother support groups, community health committees and farmers group. The farmers organize their meetings on weekly basis and during these meetings they receive information about the project and at the same time they pass their complaints to the project. For example one of the critical complaints that farmers raised and the project addressed conclusively was the criteria used to allocate plots to the farmers. Mother to mother groups and community health committees meet on monthly basis and during their meetings complaints and feedbacks are managed.

Complaints and feedback were managed through mobile phone stationed and managed by the project volunteers. A few complaints have been received through this feedback channel, however, most complaints and feedbacks are exchanged during face to face meetings when the groups come together for monthly and weekly review meetings. The farmers in Nyalani have introduced notice boards for communication and exchange of feedback. This process has given the community members a voice in the project's decision making. The project is organized in such a way that if repeated complaints are received, then the project steering team organizes



meetings with the concerned community to resolve the concerns promptly. Some of the issue that have been raised so far are listed in the table of matrix.

For effective accountability to beneficiary component, there is need to empower communities to ensure they are more involved at the initial stage of design. More emphasis should have been put on involvement of beneficiary groups in assessing needs, monitoring and evaluating project components and using them in decision making. Even though this is already taking place through the existing structures, it has not picked quite well. Additionally, there appeared to have been effort made in terms of documentation of complaints, however, written framework and dedicated staff for handling complaints remains areas of concern in the project.

4.3 Beneficiary Communication

The evaluation established that the beneficiaries receive regular information on the project activities, most of the beneficiaries observed that they received adequate information on planned activities, the roles they would be required to perform and the roles that were expected of the project team. The farmers at Nyalani received information on their irrigation activities through the Cooperative society and CHVs, On the other hand the CHVs and mothers got information through the Community Health Extension Workers and mother to mother support networks respectively. During community meetings they received information on project accomplishments and issues arising from the activities were discussed and way forward agreed upon. Public education activities were carried out in form of awareness campaigns that focused on a thematic issue and that these were used to target a certain segment of the community.

All the information received from the community structures, project team and County government sources were all valuable and were used in informing how they could improve their work. The project participants received useful information on new farming methods as well as good practices on nutrition and health. To ensure effective communication, information was relayed to the beneficiaries in a manner that they could easily understand it. Participatory methods were used in most of the sessions to disseminate information to the public; other methods involved use of visual aids, theatre and posters.



4.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

The project has put in place a wide range of measures to ensure effective roll out of its monitoring, evaluation and learning functions. According the beneficiaries, the project has put in place mechanisms of monitoring whether the beneficiaries are satisfied with its activities or not. Through consultative meetings the people are allowed to share their opinions about various aspects of the project. During such public forums they are encouraged to bring out challenges and issues that they are not happy about. The project team would then take note and provide appropriate response whether spontaneously or at later date. Some issues would require management attention and therefore would be relayed to the appropriate officer for action. Furthermore, through the use of *safaricom* platform where the community members raise complaints by way of text messages, the project has monitored the satisfaction levels or lack of it among its target population.

To enhance communication to the beneficiaries, the project disseminates regularly reports of its activities. Results and outcomes of monitoring and evaluation activities are shared widely to help manage complaints or issues arising among the beneficiaries. Moreover activities community strategy approach of the ‘black board’ has provided critical information on the depth of progress and impact project activities are making in the lives of the communities. The black board is displayed in a public accessible place, where community health volunteers supported by the Community Health Extension Workers share the health related indicators with the wider community.

5.0 Lessons learnt

- Open communication with the communities builds trust amongst implementing partners and participation in activities is improved.
- Ownership of projects is enhanced by being accountable to out communities.
- With formal complaint and feedback mechanisms, issues that are sensitive are easily aired and addressed.
- Formal complaints procedures would not only apply to beneficiaries, but would be useful even for the staff and partners.



6.0 Conclusion

At approach in the project has met its objectives during the pilot period. Participation and beneficiary communication has been streamlined and the community has gained confidence in presenting their complaints and feedbacks. Considering that the pilot period was short and that the KIFSL project is coming to an end, the next phase should put more emphasis on involvement of beneficiary groups in assessing needs, monitoring and evaluating program components and using them in decision making.

7.0 Recommendations

1. The project should continue to empower communities to hold projects implementers' accountable. Programming should incorporate capacity building of communities and assist communities to establish a monitoring mechanism at community level through a variety of feedback channels.
2. Considering the positive results of the pilot period, KRCS should develop an AtB framework to be operationalized across all its projects.
3. Complaints handling policy and procedure should be developed to enable managing complaints relating to staff. This would be useful so that the lessons of KIFSL are replicated amongst the KRCS staff as staff complaints procedures should be well defined.



Annex

Table 1: Summary of complaints and feedbacks realized

Mode of complaint	Description	How was it solved
Telephone	query on whether the organization will provide disinfectants for latrines	The project team contacted the area PHO who informed the beneficiary that this would not be possible, advised on local materials to use.
Telephone(this have been several)(5)	Complaints on farmer beneficiary selection	Forwarded complaints to Committee/ explained why replacements had to be done
Telephone	Queries on exiting of the project	Explained what support would continue after exit
Telephone/ meetings (this have been several)(13)	Complaint on marketing of spinach and butternut at the farm	Explained what the management was doing to secure markets. Important lessons learnt to inform Phase 2.
Telephone/ meetings (this have been several)(5)	Stealing of seedlings at the farm from farmers	Committees to engage 2 day watchmen and have the farm under lock down from 6pm-6am.
Telephone/ meetings	Complaint on operators go slow	Escalated to County Manager. KRCS supported in back payments of farm operators to be reimbursed later.
Telephone/ meetings	Complaint on dam restricting water flow to pump	Trenching done by Contractor. Flashing of the dam carried out when dam filled to permanently solve the problem.
Meetings	Query on IGA support for Mother to Mother Support groups reduction	Groups informed on reduction of funds but to be reconsidered in second Phase
Meetings	Query on IGA support of CUs	Groups informed on reduction of funds but to be reconsidered in second Phase
Phone calls.(10)	Late payment of enumerators of ETE	Groups informed of delay due to new systems, eventually paid.