



# UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

## Beyond toll-free lines and complaints boxes

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*A study of accountability and participation in humanitarian action in Chad*

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*This thesis is submitted for obtaining the Master's Degree in International Humanitarian Action and Conflict. By submitting the thesis, the author certifies that the text is from his/her hand, does not include the work of someone else unless clearly indicated, and that the thesis has been produced in accordance with proper academic practices.*

## List of Abbreviations

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CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
AAP	Accountability to Affected Population
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
AAH	Action Against Hunger
GTS	Ground Truth Solutions
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
SO	Strategic Objective
Sida	Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
CAR	Central African Republic
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

## Abstract

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In this thesis we look further into Oxfam and Action Against Hunger's use of the concepts of accountability and participation, how the concepts are informing the programming of humanitarian interventions as well as their materialization in the implementation of the programs in Chad. The study is based on a literature review with secondary sources as the basis of the research material. Scholars debating the concepts provide for the point of departure and the case study is based on the project and program proposals from the organizations themselves.

The thesis attempts to demonstrate Oxfam and Action Against Hunger's degree of fulfilment of the frameworks relating to accountability and participation currently available, in regards of two ongoing interventions in Chad. The result of the research positively demonstrates that the organization uphold their commitments on paper, and to some extent invites the reader to understand the practical action used to adhere to the concepts. It further indicates a lack of insight into what level of accountability and participation which is upheld prior to the identification of activities and the methodology uses in the needs assessment.

### Keywords

Accountability, participation, humanitarian action, affected populations, Chad

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## Chapter one: Introduction

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### 1.1 Background

According to the Humanitarian Accountability Report published in 2018, improvements have been made regarding the Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability (CHS) since the start of their measurement (CHS Alliance, 2018). The CHS are a set of nine commitments relevant to any implementing organization when it comes to strengthening quality and accountability in their assistance delivery. Out of the nine commitments there are six presenting improvements, there are however three areas which have not demonstrated improvement to the same degree and are thus considered to be falling behind; “Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback; Complaints are welcomed and addressed”; and “Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve” (CHS Alliance, 2018:4). Humanitarianism focuses on saving lives and alleviating suffering, hence it ought to be closely linked to the needs as identified by the people in need. Despite the overall agreement that humanitarian action equals the devotion to assisting people in need, the inclusion of said people in the actual programming of the intervention<sup>1</sup> is lacking. The Commitment of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Framework was implemented in 2011 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the same year Barnett argued that accountability has had a predominating focus on the relationship between donor and implementing organization rather than between implementing organization and recipient of aid, or beneficiaries (Barnett, 2011:185). The Grand Bargain workstream for a Participation Revolution was a result of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and sets out to what is referred to as “meaningful participation” (IASC, 2020).

My intent is that by examining the understanding of the definitions of accountability and participation we become better equipped to analyze the use of the two concepts in humanitarian interventions. I am hoping to establish whether they remain as watered down as Barnett’s statement or if they have developed into something beyond toll-free lines and complaints boxes, informing the programming of humanitarian interventions of today and truly listening to the affected populations.

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<sup>1</sup> The word *intervention* should in this thesis be interpreted as a non-military term or affiliated to the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, but rather as an equivalent to ‘operation’, ‘project’, ‘program’. The term is referencing to the work conducted by non-governmental organizations, both national and international, UN Agencies and/or other organizations acting in a non-military manner in a humanitarian context.

## 1.2 Aim and research objective

The thesis will attempt to understand the concepts of accountability and participation in the context of the humanitarian response. More specifically, it will investigate and present a selection of definitions of each concept to provide a comprehensive understanding of the use of the concepts in humanitarian action. The adoption of AAP and the Grand Bargain Participatory Revolution workstream, two frameworks if you want, which both are supported by a global consensus on the heightened involvement of crisis affected populations, should have an impact on the operationalization of humanitarian interventions – applying a more accountable and participatory approach. The aim of this thesis is thus to establish whether the concepts have materialized and inform interventions of today. Further, attempting to debunk whether actor driven frameworks, workstreams and global agreements remain words on paper or if they assist in pushing the envelope of inclusive humanitarianism. Moreover, the thesis aims not to establish if the use of accountability and participation should be encouraged within the realm of humanitarian action but rather to determine how it is applied based on the frameworks and directives currently in place.

## 1.3 Research questions

The distancing from a top-down approach and set direction of a more horizontal approach in humanitarian interventions indicates that a shift in terms of accountability must be made in the humanitarian system. The shift has been prototyped in instructions, frameworks and statements but the actual operationalization of the shift is not visible through directives – it is enforced through the implementing organizations. In order to understand whether the shift has been implemented in the project and how it has been incorporated the research will focus on answering one main question:

*How are the concepts of accountability and participation informing the programming of humanitarian interventions by Oxfam and Action Against Hunger in Chad?*

While answering the above question make up the core of the thesis, it is impossible to do so without going beyond the mere words and look into the actual understanding of the two concepts. In pursuing an answer to the over-arching query, the thesis will consequently endeavor to provide an answer to the following question:

*Based on the identified definition of accountability and participation, how are the humanitarian interventions by Oxfam and Action Against Hunger in Chad living up to their commitments?*

The intent of the second question lies in the determination to provide the basis for the analysis. After having established how the two concepts inform the humanitarian intervention the focus will be directed towards whether the operationalization is corresponding to the commitments made by the organizations, and how.

## 1.4 Previous research

Accountability and participation in humanitarian intervention have been researched before. Tan et al. (2015) have through their research presented an abundance of interpretations of the two concepts within the humanitarian field. They refer to definitions, superfluous at times, as being an abstract to strive towards and not necessarily as a task to be executed (Tan et al, 2015:269). Klein-Kelly's (2019) research has focused on the relationship between accountability and access and the incompatibility of the two in protection activities set in a conflict context (Klein-Kelly, 2019:302). McKenzie's research goes in line with Klein-Kelly in underlining of the dissonance between being perceived as impartial and being held accountable by the affected population (McKenzie, 2009:340). Bovens and Barnett will be returned to throughout the thesis, both having done extensive research, Bovens (2010) within the area of accountability and Barnett (2011) relating to the dilemmas within the humanitarian sector. De Camargo et al. (2017) have through their research presented a suggested framework for stakeholder participation including that of the affected population. The same has been done by Chynoweth et al. (2018), where the socializing of accountability in humanitarian settings allude to the same findings as Tan et al. In addition, Kabau et al. (2015) have contributed to the research, referencing the humanitarian response during the 2004 tsunami in South East Asia where the uncoordinated communication with the affected population resulted in the spread of misinformation and frustration (Kabau et al, 2015:822). Moreover, they underline that when accountability is not being met, or even not perceived as being met, the negative impact are twofold, regarding the affected population and the implementing organization alike (Kabau et al, 2015:823). CHS Alliance and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) have performed a perception study in Chad in regard to the fulfillment of the CHS. Their study is built up in three stages, involving the beneficiaries, the humanitarian staff and local organizations in the three areas of concern. The study includes results such as "Affected people do not see humanitarian assistance as reaching those most in need, while humanitarian staff are convinced it is" (GTS, 2018:9). When inquired about participation the findings indicate that there is a discrepancy between the perception of the beneficiaries and that of the humanitarian staff where the former believes that they are not consulted enough, and the latter believe that the beneficiaries are not sufficiently

aware of details pertaining to the programs – which would render their participation redundant (GTS, 2018:12).

## 1.5 Justification

There are high reaching ambitions on the global level to increase the participation of, and accountability to the affected population demonstrated through the Great Bargain commitments etc. As mentioned, previous research attest to ample interpretations of the concepts and the perception study conducted by CHS Alliance and GTS reveals how stakeholders consider the fulfilment of the concepts are being upheld. Research has however not delved into how the concepts are utilized in the project proposals per se. Through this thesis we will examine the way in which the two organizations of choice are incorporating and anchoring the concepts in two project proposals for Chad, with hopes of being able to answer up to the research questions guiding the thesis.

## 1.6 Methodology

### 1.6.1 Literature review

In order to structure the trajectory of the thesis as well as providing an understanding of the already produced material and hence knowledge of the concepts and projects, the choice has been made to conduct a literature review. According to Bryman (2012), a literature review exceeds the mere stating of previous research but allows for the scrutinizing of the material already produced (Bryman, 2012:8). As such, while approaching the literature at hand the aspiration is to provide the contemporary understanding of the concepts and thus basis, from which the analysis will depart.

The research strategy used to analyze the material has been of a qualitative nature. In order to dwell on the concepts and their incorporation in humanitarian interventions, it merely doesn't suffice with a quantitative research. As an example, the amount of times “accountability” and “participation” are used in a project proposal does not serve the purpose of decoding the manner in which the concepts are being used and whether the organization is living up to its commitment to implement the use of the concepts or not. Therefore an interpretative and constructionist nature of the research falls well in line with the qualitative research approach and has been used to analyze the material (Bryman, 2012:36).

### 1.6.2 Selection

When approaching the subject of accountability and participation in humanitarian interventions it presents itself as natural to look into the, by implementing organizations produced, project

proposals. Considering the immense figures of completed, ongoing and planned humanitarian interventions around the world, a demarcation and project selection process has been put in place. The thesis will include a series of literature and texts selected according to the following criteria. As the AAP and Participation Revolution were both adopted in connection to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, allowing space for the implementation of the same has been of an innate objective, the selection of projects with proximity to present day has therefore been of an essence. Since Chad, as will be discussed later, is the only country with a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) which includes AAP in its strategic objective, opting for projects/programs in that context provided the rationality sought for. Oxfam and Action Against Hunger have been present in Chad for several decades, which together with their rapport to the concepts make them strong candidates for the study. An added value is that both organizations implement their interventions over the course of several years. The Oxfam multi-year project started in 2018, currently in its last year of implementation and the Action Against Hunger program was initiated in 2019.

## 1.7 Limitations

The thesis is based on a secondary study, which is not entirely unproblematic. The use of secondary material allows the opening of margin of error as the study then becomes limited to the available material. It would have been useful and informative to conduct interviews with humanitarian workers from Oxfam and AAH with experience from the humanitarian response in Chad focusing on insights of potential shifts in regard to accountability and participation since the introduction of the AAP framework and the workstream for a Participation Revolution. Furthermore, conducting interviews with proposal writers directly would be constructive as that would grant a smaller margin of error in the interpretation of the way in which the concepts are being utilized. Furthermore, the chain of interpretation is a limitation in itself. It should be considered that interpretations made in this research do not necessarily correspond to the intent or actions taken by the organizations in the field.

## 1.8 Outline

The thesis is divided into five chapters, out of which this outline provides for the last part of the first chapter – the introduction. The introduction includes a presentation of the formalities of the thesis, research questions, previous research, justification and limitations of the study itself. In the next chapter the concepts used throughout the thesis are presented in order to provide an understanding to the reader as well as laying down the base upon which the thesis departs from.

Moving on to the third chapter the case study of the context in general and the projects in particular are displayed, allowing the reader to comprehend the material at hand. In the discussion, chapter four, the concept and case study come together and are examined through the lens of the understanding of the concepts as presented in chapter two. Lastly, after having discussed at length how accountability and participation are applied in the presented humanitarian interventions, the fifth chapter provides an answer to the research questions as laid out in the introduction chapter. It is also in the conclusion chapter where we permit ourselves to look ahead; identifying gaps that persist and potential future research opportunities which have presented themselves through this study.

## Chapter two: The concepts

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### 2.1 Accountability

While researching accountability, there appears to be a lack of a concrete, broadly agreed upon definition of the word within the humanitarian sector. The lack of an agreed-upon definition of the concept is both freeing and fearsome, and in order to allow for a critical analysis on the subject the following section will discuss a set of definitions and provide for the definition used as a basis of the analysis. Because of the plethora of definitions and areas where they are applied, Bovens (2010) explains accountability as “an ever-expanding concept” (Bovens, 2010:947). As an example, Tan et al. (2015) have successfully listed more than ten definitions deriving from organizations in the humanitarian field alone (Tan et al, 2015:266-267). Since there is no consensus on the definition this thesis will not endeavor to find one definition that holds true for all organizations, sectors etc., it will however discuss and dissect several definitions and attempt to find the essence on what accountability is, and thus decide on a suitable definition to use in order to conduct the analysis.

After concluding that accountability is tedious to pinpoint, Bovens continues by stating that accountability can be understood and separated into two concepts; accountability as a virtue and accountability as a mechanism (Bovens, 2010:947-948). The difference between the two is that the former focuses more on the intent and as a guide to accountable behavior whereas the latter focuses on the relation between the actor (individual or organization) and the accountability forum (individual, superior, journalist or institution etc.) (Bovens, 2010:951).

According to the online dictionary Merriam-Webster, accountability is “an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions” (Merriam-Webster, 2020.1). This definition weighs in on the definition of accountability as a virtue as the base for the definition lies in the obligation or willingness – referring to the intent and guidance to an accountable behavior rather than the relation between the actor and the forum. When trailing the word back to its origin it stems from “to count”, deriving from the French word for counting, *compter* (Merriam-Webster, 2020.2.). Since the initial use, it has developed and branched off from the accounting of checks and balances of economics into the more qualitative sphere of an organization, institution or individual with a focus on checks and balances of the use of power.

Further, there is a duality in accountability, looking upon organizations in the humanitarian sector, accountability exists both between the implementing organization and the donors, upward accountability, as well as between the implementing organization and the beneficiaries, downward accountability (Klein-Kelly, 2018:292). The understanding of upward accountability derives from the development of the Sphere Standards, whereas the understanding of downward accountability comes from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard (HAP) (Klein-Kelly, 2018:292). Barnett argues that “accountability projects have spent more time demonstrating their accountability to their donors than to their beneficiaries” (Barnett, 2011:185). This is something that Klein-Kelly’s research also demonstrate in regards of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Klein-Kelly, 2018:295).

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which adopted the Commitment to Accountability to Affected Populations Operational Framework, base the understanding of accountability on the 2010 HAP. The 2010 HAP Standard states that “accountability is the means through which power is used responsibly” (HAP, 2010:1). In this sense accountability is the agent, it is the tool used in order to be a responsible user of power. The definition adheres more to accountability as a mechanism, where it is the tool to regulate the relationship between the actor and forum. Considering the position that IASC holds in the humanitarian sector it is noteworthy that the emphasis lies more so with the action rather than the notion of accountability. It provides direction insomuch that accountability should not be understood as words on papers but rather a way to deliver an accountable behavior. What is conspicuous here is the presence of power – humanitarian actors are inevitably in an unequal power relationship with the beneficiaries. The definition used by IASC is hence focused on the responsible use of power and seeing that it is the definition used by the AAP-adopting agency it should thusly be the definition incorporated into the framework.

In ALNAP’s report *Rhetoric or Reality* (2014), while discussing engagement with crisis-affected people, they have listed the need of mechanisms, frameworks and processes of accountability. They further state that “most humanitarian agencies’ approaches to accountability include the provision of information, consultation, participation and explicit feedback, as well as the setting up of complaints and response mechanisms to allow people affected by crisis to voice their ideas and concerns and get a response to their feedback of complaints” (Brown et al, 2014:10). Here accountability is described more as a tool box in which a set of tools exist. Should they be used appropriately, it could be considered that

accountability, that is the comprehensive information sharing, inclusion and feedback, can be positively achieved. Alike the HAP definition, what ALNAP are referring to aligns with accountability as a mechanism, considering its direct relation character.

According to the Sphere Handbook 2018, humanitarian agencies commit themselves to “offer our services in the belief that the affected population is at the centre of humanitarian action, and recognise that their active participation is essential to providing assistance in ways that best meet their needs” (Sphere Handbook, 2018:31). Key actions and guiding questions to humanitarian practitioners when it comes to the CHSs are presented. As an example, organizations are encouraged to “use open-ended listening and other qualitative participatory approaches [since] people affected by crisis are the best sources of information about needs and changes in the situation” Further, organizations should “share and discuss learning with communities, asking them what they would like to do differently and how to strengthen their role in decision-making or management” (Sphere Handbook, 2018:74). Another important key action pertains to the adaptability of the organization in meeting the oftentimes changing realities in the contexts where they are present (Sphere Handbook, 2018:55). Further, providing information to affected populations about the organization, its work and principles as well as what should be expected of a humanitarian worker (Sphere Handbook, 2018:55).

Provided the above, we circle back to the initial statement that there is a plethora of ways to look at accountability. However, considering Boven’s distinction between accountability as a virtue and accountability as a mechanism the definitions lean more towards accountability as a mechanism. Barnett and Klein-Kelly alike have come to the conclusion that the previous focus of accountability has been upward, between the donor and the implementing organization rather than the downward accountability, between the implementing organization and the beneficiaries. This indicates a dissonance between the frameworks and instructions put in place and the practical perception of what accountability is and who it should involve – and that is despite the two authors being six years and one World Humanitarian Summit apart. For the purpose of this thesis, however, accountability will be understood as “the provision of information, consultation, participation and explicit feedback, as well as the setting up of complaints and response mechanisms to allow people affected by crisis to voice their ideas and concerns and get a response to their feedback of complaints” (Brown et al, 2014:10). It relates to the understanding of the concept as a mechanism which correspond to the work in making AAP more than just words on a paper and raising the ambition bar for organizations to operationalize the concept while implementing their projects and programs. Hence, it provides

for a practical understanding of the concept of accountability as well as fitting the purpose of this thesis.

## 2.2 Participation

Provided that accountability as a mechanism equates the relation between the actor and the forum it is inevitable, even paramount, to look further into what that relation entails. In addition to this, the understanding of choice for accountability includes participation as an action and together they will guide the pending discussion. However, in order to deepen our understanding, the concept of participation will now be discussed in more detail. The reason behind the choice of the concept of participation is that for a relation to exist – both parties must participate. This does not hold entirely true, as power can be exercised upon someone without their consent. If the baseline of humanitarian interventions aim, however is not to exercise power but to be of assistance, then the participation part is quite critical. The so-called humanitarian system has, alike the AAP-framework developed, through the Grand Bargain a work stream highlighting the importance of active participation and with the aim of increasing the participation of affected populations in the humanitarian interventions, the Participation Revolution work stream (IASC, 2020). This too underlines the system's prioritization of participation.

We once again turn to Merriam-Webster, the dictionary states that one of the definitions of participation is “the action or state of taking part in something” (Merriam-Webster, 2020.3). The dictionary however, does not provide us with more insight to what *taking part* entails. It could be understood, in the humanitarian context, that taking part in something is passive, as indicates the word *state*. To be the mere recipient of food assistance for instance, can be taking part and hence the level of participation as described by Merriam-Webster has been achieved. However, as mentioned above, through the Grand Bargain there is an objective to ensure that affected populations are included and participate to a higher degree than what is included in the word participation as per the dictionary definition.

According to Barnett, the humanitarian system and the organizations therein have been inclined towards what he refers to as “emancipation and domination” (Barnett, 2011:28). Considering that there are a couple of years between Barnett's word and the establishment of the Grand Bargain it provides hope that much have changed in regard to the neo-colonialist tendencies within the humanitarian system. The connection between neo-colonialism and neo-humanitarianism can be highlighted, whereas although guided by principles, Barnett argues that the humanitarian discourse is still being set by the so-called Western states – maintaining what

could be considered a neo-colonial tendency (Barnett, 2011:105). Barnett also underscored that there was a bias toward the donors and that the desires and needs of the affected populations were overlooked (Barnett, 2011:27). Further, these participation levels concerned more so the identification of services needed, but even then, it was within the framework of what was already expected by aid agencies and no other deliverables that could also have been of assistance (Barnett, 2011:184).

The work stream for the Grand Bargain Participation Revolution states, inter alia that “we need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient” (Grand Bargain, 2017:1). Participation should in this sense be understood as the inclusion of crisis affected population in the decision-making processes. It further states that information should be readily available and accessible processes for participation and feedback should be in place. The definition carries in essence not a word in the passive sense but, if the interpretation allows strives for the total immersion in the intervention in terms of information sharing, programming as well as being able to provide feedback and to have that feedback being responded to. What should probably be understood as the definition, albeit not being explicitly spelled out, is that “effective “participation” of people affected by humanitarian crises puts the needs and interests of those people at the core of humanitarian decision making, by actively engaging them throughout decision-making processes” (Grand Bargain, 2017:1).

Kabau et al. apply a human right based approach when discussing participation, citing the Good Humanitarian Donorship consortium in the involvement of affected populations in “the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (Kabau et al., 2015:811). They go as far as saying that organizations within the humanitarian field have an “emerging obligation to involve the local beneficiaries”, but further underlines that “involvement of local beneficiaries” is an arbitrary and flexible phrasing (Kabau et al., 2015:812).

After having examined a collection of definitions of participation, the definition as presented by the Grand Bargain work stream is well suited for the purpose of this thesis. It also presents a holistic approach to the concept where the beneficiaries are engaged in an ongoing dialogue throughout the chain of assistance provision; from design through implementation to evaluation (Grand Bargain, 2017:1).

## 2.3 Accountability and participation

While looking into the concepts of accountability and participation separately it becomes clear that accountability entails participation and that participation is indeed part of accountability. They go hand in hand, the Grand Bargain has incorporated accountability in the work stream for a Participation Revolution, but it is also evident through the AAP-framework that participation is one of the corner stones of accountability. This provides a strong indication that the two concepts should be understood in coherence with each other and that they both carry great importance in terms of the implementation of humanitarian interventions.

It is noteworthy that the two concepts are not described as being optional. These are commitments, and commitments that the humanitarian system shall adhere to. It speaks to the gravity of the implementation and the determination to provide for an essential shift in the system. Bovens however, brings up the accountability paradox that states that too much accountability does not necessarily equate better government (Bovens, 2010:958). Presumably, the rigidity of the AAP and Participation Revolution may result in the missing the target that they are so resolved to obtain.

Ideally, accountability and participation should be operationalized at all levels of the project, from the identification of needs, needs assessment, project design, implementation, evaluation to learning process. Further, including the affected population in all steps reduces the power asymmetry presently between the beneficiaries of a project and the implementing organization. If ownership of project is felt by the affected population that could potentially further the durability of the project as well as heightening the success rate.

## 2.4 Humanitarian principles

It is reasonable to address the humanitarian principles in an analysis of accountability and participation in humanitarian interventions. The use of the humanitarian principles varies between organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement for example have seven principles (Pictet, 1979:4). The generally accepted principles for the humanitarian system were downsized to four and adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1991 and 2004 (OCHA, 2012). Together these four principles are the guiding cornerstones of humanitarian action, adherence to them is required to fulfil the mandate of humanitarian action. We will however remain with Pictet and the Red Cross definition of the principles, as to establish their provenience and why they are of importance when examining the use of accountability and participation.

According to Pictet the principles date back to 1921 but the ones that we are familiar with today were formally established in 1955 (Pictet, 1979:7). Arguably, a principle in the humanitarian context is “simply a rule, based upon judgement and experience, which is adopted by a community to guide its conduct” (Pictet, 1979:8). Together with the humanitarian imperative that states that all who need assistance have the right to receive it, the principles lay down the foundation upon which humanitarian interventions depart from.

The initial seven principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality are divided into three different categories. The substantive principles of humanity and impartiality guiding the *what* of humanitarian action. The derived principles of neutrality and independence which provide for the *how* of humanitarian action. Last, the organic principles, which are unique to the Red Cross, of voluntary service, unity and universality, together they offer an institutional character to the principles (Pictet, 1979:8-9).

<b>Humanity</b>	<b>Neutrality</b>	<b>Impartiality</b>	<b>Independence</b>
Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.	Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.	Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.	Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented

**TABLE 1 THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES (OCHA, 2020)**

Out of all the humanitarian principles as portrayed above, only that of humanity provides for a link to accountability. The phrase “ensure respect for human beings” can be interpreted as a form of participation and accountability.

The humanitarian principles, as presented above are the fundamental corner stones of humanitarian assistance. They are the keys for successful access negotiations, allocation of

funds, prioritization between contexts and vulnerable groups and they serve as protection from thematization and political influence. In this thesis we will therefore go by the understanding that the principles are crucial to include before boarding the subsequent discussion.

Before moving on to the case study we need to dwell for a moment on the concepts presented. They are the backbone of the thesis; however, their general importance is not a given. The reason why such attention is given here are twofold; on the one hand it is important from a policy perspective, the progressive inclusion of accountability and participation on the humanitarian agenda should be taken into consideration and considering that a policy is set, enforcement ought to be ensured. Still, policy perspective aside, the concepts are hollow without the value attributed to them. The argument that it is immoral to provide humanitarian assistance without applying AAP and a participative approach stands. To acknowledge, respect and include the individual or community intended for the intervention ought to be the point of departure and vital to a holistically successful project. The translation from policy to implementation is however not uncomplicated, something which will be clarified in the sections below.

## Chapter three: Case Study

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### 3.1 Chad

Chad, as a humanitarian context has been subject to humanitarian interventions in waves. The regionalization of the Darfur crisis to the eastern part of the country as one example (Sida, 2019:1). In what we could refer to as more recent days the humanitarian needs are geographically located in the western part of the country, and often in direct relation to the Lake Chad and the regionalized crisis including reception of refugees from neighboring Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria and Sudan (Sida, 2019:1). According to OCHA, Chad is harboring 5.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2020:5). All while being a result of the environmental degradation of Lake Chad, a water and livelihood source for populations in all four surrounding countries, it has developed into layered conflicts (OCHA, 2020:11).

Chad has been identified as the context of choice for this case study for three reasons. First, in 2017 OCHA adopted a multi-year (2017 – 2019) Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with three strategic objectives (SO). They are, freely translated from French, to 1) Save and preserve life and dignity of affected populations through a multisectoral and integrated emergency assistance in accordance to fundamental rights and standards; 2) Reduce vulnerability of affected populations covering the reinforcement of community and institutional resilience in order to respond better to reoccurring shocks; and 3) Contribute to the protection of vulnerable populations and enforcement of accountability to affected population (OCHA, 2016:09). The last strategic objective is the first of its kind for an HRP to directly addressing accountability to affected populations on such an over-arching level. The third strategic objective is also included in the recently published HRP for Chad 2020. The fact that the Chad HRP has been pioneering the inclusion of accountability provides for a fruitful setting to examine the concept. Secondly, the CHS Alliance and GTS research on how affected populations as well as international and national humanitarian workers perceive the delivery of humanitarian assistance has been conducted in Chad since 2018. Third, Oxfam and Action Against Hunger have ongoing operations in Chad, both with a multi-year character which ought to allow for a more comprehensive understanding and analysis of the use of the concepts in this context over a period of three year. Looking into how organizations are using the language of accountability and participation in their project proposals in the context where such perception studies have

already been conducted provides for a more rooted analysis. Together, these are the three reasons which answer up to the choice of using Chad as basis of this case study.

## 3.2 Oxfam

Established in the early 1940s in the United Kingdom, Oxfam have historically taken on the mandate of combatting famines but has since then diversified their portfolio to a more multi sectoral response. Oxfam has had a presence in Chad since 1966, and have a vision of change for the country; “A Chad without hunger or poverty, where men and women have the same opportunities to access and control resources, where the most vulnerable are protected from all forms of violence, enjoy full and fair participation in decision-making bodies, and build their livelihoods with a view to achieving harmonious and sustainable development” (Oxfam, 2020:1). A definition of the concept and whether full and fair participation in decision-making bodies includes that of the humanitarian assistance or if it is limited to the local and national governing authorities is however not decipherable.

The project of choice for this study is a multi-year project initiated in 2018. The project is implemented in Chad but does however answer up to the consequences brought on by the regional Lake Chad crisis. The name of the project in its entirety is “Support coverage of basic needs, stabilisation, rebuilding livelihoods and capacity building in host communities, returning and displaced people, impacted by the Boko Haram crisis and other aggravating factors in the Lake Chad region” (Oxfam, 2018:1). As can be deduced by the title, the project has a quite wide range of results to achieve and a set of activities in order to reach the expected results.

According to the proposal, the multi-year project is aligned with all three SOs of the Chad HRP. The project is of a multi sectoral character and focuses on the sectors of water, sanitation and hygiene (Result 1); protection and advocacy (Result 2); as well as food security and livelihoods (Result 3) (Oxfam, 2018:6). There are three expected results and despite not being structured according to the HRP SOs the expected result relating to protection, “The displaced/returning populations and vulnerable hosts are able to identify, respond to and mitigate risks and threats to protection”, relates more strongly to the concepts of accountability and participation when compared to the remaining expected results (Oxfam, 2018:6).

The proposal further lists the activities relating to each result, briefly stating what will be done to reach the results. Under each result in the Logical Framework there are an extensive amount of activities listed, a selection is presented here; drilling of boreholes, implementation and training of water point management committees, training of water point repairers and plumbers,

Setting up of protection committees, construction of 400 family latrines, setting up of sanitation committees awareness raising of good hygiene practices through community structures and community-based malnutrition prevention systems under Result 1. Mass awareness raising sessions, development of women's and young people's citizen action plans, exchange forums between local authorities and the communities, training sessions for protection committees on self-referral abuse victims are listed under Result 2. Distribution of unrestricted cash, household budget management awareness raising, distribution of seed and farming equipment, help formulate a plan for climate change risk management under Result 3. The activity descriptions in the narrative proposal include language which in part conveys a participatory and accountable approach – a definition of the concepts is however not lined out.

Under the section of Oxfam's added value in the country they present their long presence in the country through development and humanitarian projects alike as one (Oxfam, 2018:12). This is later connected to the trust that they argue having built up with the beneficiary populations as well as the accountability framework and participatory approach (Oxfam, 2018:13). Through the accountability framework Oxfam argue that it does "allow stakeholders to send us their feedback", the framework in itself is however not elaborated on further (Oxfam, 2018:13).

According to Oxfam's Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability and Learning (MEAL) plan for the project, there are already accountability committees established which are "in charge of the monitoring activities on the ground, will be trained in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning" (Oxfam, 2018:15) Further, follow-up surveys are conducted a couple of weeks after distribution to evaluate the beneficiary satisfaction with the interventions.

In the application for topping up funding toward the project the title has been slightly altered, "Support coverage of basic needs, stabilisation, rebuilding livelihoods and resilience capacity building benefiting the communities (host, returnees and IDPs) impacted by the Boko Haram crisis in the Lake Chad region" (Oxfam, 2020:1). The main difference being that the word resilience has been incorporated and the phrasing of the target groups has been revised (Oxfam, 2020:1). In the top-up application it is also put forward that virtually all activities during the first year of implementation has had been carried out with a good level of quality and accountability. What is considered as a good level is not reflected upon.

In sum, Oxfam's multi-year program focuses on improving the living conditions for the target population, as well as transferring the activities to two of their local partner organizations (Oxfam, 2018:1).

### 3.3 Action Against Hunger

Action Against Hunger (AAH) was established in France in 1979 and as the name reveals their mission is to overcome hunger, through the prevention, detection, and treatment of malnutrition (AAH, 2020.1). The organization has been present in Chad since 1982 and currently has a team of 277 people on the ground with presence in five areas in the country (AAH, 2020.2).

The program which will be analyzed for this particular exercise was initiated in 2019 and in the initial submission application to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) it shares that the main objective is to “contribute to improving the living conditions and reducing the vulnerability of displaced and returned populations affected by the Lake Chad crisis and the armed conflicts in the Central African Republic” (AAH, 2018:1).

According to the Country Program Proposal for 2019, the program is part of the HRP and answers to the first and second WASH cluster objectives which are argued to be reflected in SO 1, 2 and 3 respectively (AAH, 2019:8). It is however not possible to deduct, neither from the HRP nor from the full submission, the adherence to the strategic objectives of the HRP – whereas the SO 3, relating to accountability to affected populations, has been taken into consideration or not is therefore not possible to say.

The Country Program Proposal for 2020 presents two strategic objectives, “Preparation and responses to the major crises and humanitarian emergencies on all the Chadian territory and Contributing to the reinforcement of the populations’ nutritional security by addressing the immediate and underlying causes of undernutrition by improving the access to basic services” (AAH, 2020.3: 8-9). Together they align with the two out of the three SOs of the HRP, however not SO 3. Despite the non-alignment with SO 3, the proposals for the program brings up both accountability to affected populations and participation.

In the 2019 proposal AAH states that “the definition of needs and the implementation of the project are participatory” (AAH, 2019:15). Further, it presents that “during implementation, emphasis will be put on the effective participation of beneficiaries and local authorities in decision-making” (AAH, 2019:7) A definition of what participation means to AAH or the program is however not provided. The proposal brings up vulnerability, and although not specifically brought up in the humanitarian principle of impartiality, it appears to be applied in a similar manner. AAH argue that, by providing assistance according to vulnerability, they avoid tensions between groups and limit competition and jealousy during the implementation (AAH, 2019:7).

In the 2020 proposal AAH has slightly altered their formulation by saying that “AAH promote a participative approach at all the interventions’ phases (...) AAH use all the mechanisms of accountability, transparency and community participation” (AAH, 2020:13). According to the proposal, there will be assemblies where feedback can be provided as well as complaints committees. It is also put forward that the interventions shall promote the strengthening of participation, aiming at expanding the decision-making capacities (AAH, 2020:13).

## Chapter four: Discussion

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### 4.1 Oxfam, accountability and participation

Through the proposal for the three-year project, Oxfam continuously uses language that relates to the two concepts. We will examine this by looking at a couple of excerpts from the project proposals.

“(…) the discussions with the populations, through focus group discussions (…) conflicts around water points due to insufficient drilling in the sites/villages (…) (Oxfam, 2018:4).

“The locations for boreholes will be chosen in consultation with the communities (…)” (Oxfam 2018:6).

In the needs analysis, it is stated that the lack of water points in the area causes conflicts, the methodology of the needs analysis has been based on discussions with the populations through focus groups (Oxfam, 2018:4). The consultation focuses on the location of the boreholes but relates to the needs as identified through the focus group discussions. According to the definition of choice, consulting the affected population and including their participation is part of accountability.

One methodology that appears to be used to strengthen the participatory approach is the setting up and supporting of various committees. There are three different types of committees planned for Oxfam’s project, water point management committees, sanitation committees and protection committees (Oxfam, 2018:7-8). The water point management and sanitation committees will be selected according to community management structures and the members will be selected during general assembly meetings and comprise of both men and women with a general 60/40 split between the sexes (Oxfam, 2018:7). The committees will receive support from Oxfam in terms of training and practical applications, and beneficiary support as well as a strategy for long-term sustainability will be developed by the support of local authorities. According to the needs analysis made, 69% of the surveyed areas do not have a water point management committee, while the planned activity clearly addresses this, to the objective reader – it is not clear how the communities were consulted (Oxfam, 2018:3). The way in which such a consultation is being made, does naturally impact how free, if you want, the respondent is in the identification of a need. Relating to the circumstantial confinement of the beneficiary, as discussed earlier through the work of Barnett, it is not possible to decipher whether there was a present bias towards what was expected of Oxfam’s ability to deliver upon or if a water point

management committee was indeed identified as a need by the communities. The sanitation committees are not brought up in the needs analysis, it does however refer to the fact that 100% of the population lack latrines in IDP sites and that a gender analysis in 2017 revealed a lack of privacy, especially for girls and women (Oxfam, 2018:3). While the sanitation committees will promote good hygiene in public spaces and awareness raising it does not specifically correspond to an identified need by the communities. It would appear that the committee itself is an initiative deriving from Oxfam, the communities will however be informed of the criteria of the committee prior to the selection of its members. In any case, the needs as identified will be met through other activities tending directly to the construction of latrines. Despite being mentioned in the needs section as an activity the distribution of the so-called dignity kits to ensure female and menstrual hygiene is not picked up as a concrete activity (Oxfam, 2018:3).

According to Oxfam, women have through focus group discussions shared their feeling of unsafety, leading them not to do school work and wash until nightfall. Other protection related needs are identified, and Oxfam demonstrates a collective effort to address identified needs in several of their activities. Two activities are particularly of interest, the gender analysis and protection risk analysis. The gender analysis is supposed to be conducted over the course of two years where a deeper understanding of how the relationship between women and men is constructed, perceived and instituted, including power dynamics (Oxfam, 2018:9). The gender analysis includes MEAL-department, which reiterates to the ambition of doing the same learning exercise as is planned for the protection risk analyses;

“(…) to learn what progress has been achieved in reducing threats of different natures, and to adjust the strategy based on the current threat and risk profile” (Oxfam, 2018:9).

Through the inclusion of the MEAL-department and adjustment of strategy, we are encouraged to believe that the affected population will have their feedback tended to. This strengthens the readers understanding of how affected populations are included in the programming as allowing and inviting feedback per se is one folded However, by incorporating provided feedback and adjusting the program in order to accommodate for the needs as identified by the beneficiaries themselves, Oxfam does demonstrate their commitment to AAP.

Circling back to the MEAL-department, Oxfam states the following;

“Members of the accountability committees (established since 2016), in charge of feedback and the monitoring of the activities on the ground, will be trained in monitoring, evaluation accountability and learning (...) Two or three weeks after each distribution, a follow-up will be

set up to analyse the level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries with the assistance received” (Oxfam, 2018:15).

This section speaks to the already established accountability frameworks where Oxfam point to their commitment to uphold the feedback mechanisms that they have successfully used in Chad since 2016 and to strengthen them further. It alludes to Oxfam living up to their commitments to, not only the policies of accountability and participation, the upward accountability towards the donors, but more importantly the downward accountability toward the affected population. It further relates well to the understanding of the concept of accountability and the definition alike, where the affected population have a feedback forum through which they can voice their concerns, ideas and complaints. How these complaints are incorporated and answered is however not developed any further – apart from in the gender and protection risk analyses.

## 4.2 AAH, accountability and participation

In the program proposal, AAH underlines their commitment to the concepts focused upon in this thesis. AAH speaks of a “localization strategy” which has the ambition of strengthening the local capacities, where the heart is for AAH to be “better accepted and more attentive to the citizens” (AAH, 2019:8). Keeping the accountability definition in mind, under the gender section of the proposal AAH have “beneficiary feedback and complaint mechanisms(that) are gender and age sensitive” (AAH, 2020:8). Further, AAH ensures an equitable and inclusive participation through the continuous consultation with the affected populations (AAH, 2019:8).

Moving on to the first needs analysis relating to the first strategic objective “Preparation and responses to the major crisis and humanitarian emergencies on all the Chadian territory” AAH argue that “local and national authorities, the other relevant actors and as much as possible the communities, will systematically be involved” (AAH, 2020:8-9). What is left out, however, is the instances when community involvement is not possible, and what causes the hindrance in their involvement. It perplexes, considering that the group most likely to be able to identify the pressing needs onset by a crisis ought to be the affected communities, surely at least more than “other relevant actors”. Alike Oxfam, AAH have committees as a part of their response, relating to community water point management and the training committees in charge of the water points and other WASH-related activities (AAH, 2020:11).

Despite not providing a definition of how AAH understands participation and accountability it appears that the language of how the concepts are utilized in the Chad country program corresponds to the understanding as established in this thesis, such as “give voice to the

population and receive feedback” (AAH, 2020:13). What is surprising, however, is the lack of the explanation of how the concepts are materialized. The committees and the dialogues held with the communities are according to AAH going to be defined in “a participatory manner” (AAH, 2020:13), but is however coming short of the way or techniques in which the dialogues are held, or how the selection of committee members is done in order to adhere to the participatory manner.

The section of the proposal dedicated to participation and MEAL bear witness to the expressed commitment. As a couple of examples AAH state that a participatory approach is promoted at all phases of the interventions, that they give

“an effective consideration of the beneficiary populations’ expressed needs” that they use “all the mechanisms of accountability, transparency and community participation to include the targeted populations in the project’s interventions” and that the focus groups will be “regularly established in order to give voice to the population and receive feedback in the implementation of activities”. (AAH, 2020:13).

Albeit hopeful in language, there is, as previously mentioned, an absence of depth in the organization’s understanding and the way in which they see these commitments translate to action. The listed activities in the Logical Framework have not been narratively developed to include the means which they intend to apply achieve them in a participatory and AAP framework friendly way.

While leaving the proposal reader with more to wish for in terms of methodology and practical examples of the concepts AAH does present, under the exit strategy, their philosophy regarding beneficiary involvement. By working closely with local and national authorities and putting the beneficiary in direct contact with the services offered by the authorities they assess that the beneficiary should not be considered as a passive beneficiary but rather as actors (AAH, 2020:15). Something that falls in line with the key action points in the Sphere Handbook 2018 (Sphere Handbook 2018:75).

Considering AAH’s apparent strong commitment to the AAP framework it is remarkable that SO 3 of the HRP has been excluded from the SOs of the proposal – it brings on the speculation on what is missing in order for an intervention to live up to the SO 3 of the HRP standard.

### 4.3 Final reflections on the use of the concepts

Klein-Kelly argues that a humanitarian intervention cannot always take the affected population into consideration beyond the provision of assistance. On account of safeguarding the humanitarian principles and maintaining neutrality *vis à vis* belligerent parties it appears to not be possible to provide an inclusive response with meaningful participation. As mentioned in the introduction, the rigidity of the implementation can hinder a context sensitive analysis and interfere in the provision of a principled response. Should a more adaptive and flexible take on the concepts be adopted, there would potentially be an upswing in the commitment to adhere to the concepts – where possible. This does not mean that the risk of organizations neglecting the concepts will be mitigated.

The Participation Revolution and AAP-framework are endorsed and aspiring (and to some extent successfully so) to be enforced by the humanitarian system both at a global and local level. There has been and still is an increasing drive toward ensuring that humanitarian response is shaped to meet the needs of the affected population. The agenda is to push it even further in order for the response to be shaped by and include affected populations in the decision-making processes as well as providing feedback mechanisms.

## Chapter five: Conclusion

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As we are nearing the end of the thesis we need to return to the initially mentioned research questions and provide the sought-after answers. For this purpose, it is advised to return to the understanding of the concepts as identified in chapter two. While setting out to answer the questions, the understanding of the concepts are central.

### 5.1 Research question one

*How are the concepts of accountability and participation informing the programming of humanitarian interventions by Oxfam and Action Against Hunger in Chad?*

#### 5.1.1 Oxfam

Oxfam states, as a part of their added value that they, through their long-term presence in the country, have built up a well-founded relationship with the beneficiary population. Through the needs analysis it becomes clear that beneficiary involvement is in focus, and that activities, with some exceptions, are related to the, by beneficiaries, identified needs. Oxfam demonstrate the centrality of affected populations in the decision-making processes, as exemplified in the selection of committee members and in the choosing of locations for the boreholes. The existence and inclusion of the MEAL-department and accountability committee strengthen this understanding. In sum, the concepts of accountability and participation inform the programming of Oxfam's project through the continuous consultation, information sharing and through listening to the affected populations complaints and feedback. The underway gender and protection risk analyses hold an element of flexibility and adaption according to the feedback and findings received through the analysis process.

#### 5.1.2 Action Against Hunger

Through the project proposal of AAH it was noteworthy that the same language used in the participation and accountability frameworks was used in the proposal writing. That indicate a successful alignment to the policies in place. It does however not bring any light to how the organization is understanding the concepts and the implementation thereof. Repeatedly, the affected populations are being upheld as the core of the response, the continuous consultation and forums established to accommodate their complaints and feedback are accentuated but not the way in which their materialization is portrayed, which is underwhelming. As such, accountability and participation inform the AAH programming in Chad in a superficial way. However, the way in which they portray beneficiaries as actors rather than passive participants in the section of the exit strategy provides for a hopeful end note.

Pertaining to the first research question it appears possible to establish that the concepts are informing the programming of the humanitarian interventions by Oxfam and AAH to a certain extent but provided the lack of insight in the methodology applied it leaves the reader with an additional set of questions. It is noteworthy that despite the Chad HRP having a clear strategic objective relating to AAP, neither of the two organizations are directing their proposals towards that objective, although claiming to have elements of accountability and participation included in the project outline.

## 5.2 Research question two

*Based on the identified definition of accountability and participation, how are the humanitarian interventions by Oxfam and Action Against Hunger in Chad living up to their commitments?*

### 5.2.1 Oxfam

The alignment with the commitments to the concepts as depicted in the proposal are incorporated in the description of the activities and the way in which the project appear to be set up. Oxfam live up to their commitments on paper and in some instances, they are clearly not tended to until after the fact. What is possible to establish is that involvement of affected populations does happen, and their participation is central to the intervention, but how extensive their involvement is compared to how extensive it has the potential to become is difficult to decipher through a study based on secondary material. It should however be emphasized that Oxfam does provide the reader with an understanding of how they intend to engage and when they are engaging and incorporating affected populations during the underway intervention. As such, Oxfam's project in Chad is living up to their commitment through the concretization of the concepts, the practical dialogue and inclusion of affected populations in the activities, but it is apparent that the majority of the decision-making power, lies with Oxfam.

### 5.2.2 Action Against Hunger

While maintaining an alignment with the identified definitions and using the equivalent language as in the concept frameworks, AAH does on paper live up to their commitments, especially while describing their MEAL-work. The way in which the proposal is presented, however, does not shed light on the needs assessment methodology, nor on how the activities are incorporating the concepts. There is a structure set up on how to integrate the affected population in the intervention and AAH's general way of working has a strong affiliation with a participatory approach in purpose of maintaining a level of sustainability to the project. As such, AAH demonstrate that they, on paper, immerse themselves in the communities and strive

toward beneficiaries being actors and that is how they live up to the commitments regarding the concepts of accountability and participation in this particular intervention in Chad. However, as per the material examined and as previously mentioned, the actual way of doing so is not satisfactorily explained.

### 5.3 Looking forward

Given the above discussion and conclusion, the recommendations laid forward to the humanitarian system as a whole is to always analyze the compatibility of the context at hand and the AAP and Participation Revolution. Upon such an analysis it would potentially be possible to guide the level of accountability and participation suitable to the project, when it should be opted in to a higher degree and when it should be opted out, or not be an extensive part of the project. This does however require both transparency and trust between donors and organizations (the upward accountability chain), the power dynamics are as previously discussed asymmetric but should donor trust be built up in organizations ability to make an informed assessment on when to and when not to live up to the commitments of the concepts a formal understanding of the application of the concepts is potentially avoidable.

A limitation to the definitions has been discovered throughout the process of writing this thesis, they do not guide when the concepts should be applied, there is reference to be engaged throughout decision-making processes, there is however room for interpretation regarding when a decision-making process starts and ends and if it should be applied at the very identification part of activities or if it, as in the case of Oxfam, is plausible when the activity has already been decided upon.

For future research endeavors it would be interesting to look into projects which have a goal or clear alignment with the third strategic objective of the Chad HRP. Further, once the projects subject to this case study have ended, reports produced and so on, it would be interesting to once again look at the use of the concepts and the in- or exclusion of the same. For a more in-depth approach, an analysis of the methodology and the formulation of questions asked throughout the needs identification process, could provide an understanding of to what extent affected populations are involved in the decision-making processes.

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