



ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PERSONS (AAP) FRAMEWORK



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Introduction

Cohere envisions a world where refugees and their hosting communities are able to live fulfilled lives. Most of our programmes are centred on establishing partnerships with Refugee Led Organisation (RLOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Cohere chooses to work with community led organisations that are committed to improving their communities and only supports and adds value to existing initiatives of refugees. As a humanitarian organisation, Cohere is committed to being accountable to the people it serves through partnerships with refugee led organisations. In the humanitarian community, accountability refers to the commitments and procedures that organisations put in place to ensure that targeted persons or communities contribute meaningfully to decisions that impact their lives. It also entails the responsibility of humanitarian actors to recognise and acknowledge the agency, capacity and dignity of the communities they serve.

Therefore this framework defines key elements of accountability to which Cohere is committed. They include: principles of partnership; governance, antiracism, diversity and inclusion; leadership, feedback and funding. Cohere's AAP values are also outlined in its operation policies such as; Human Resource Manual, safeguarding policy and Partner Engagement Model. The following key components of accountability to affected people are intrinsically linked to each other and are applicable in all Cohere's operations.

Participation

Cohere partners and collaborates with RLOs in addressing challenges that refugees face. Currently, Cohere maintains a light footprint in implementation, with refugee leaders leading the activities in all Cohere's operation areas. In addition, our capacity strengthening and sharing course has been co-designed by our original network of RLOs and we are seeing the beginnings of our scaling strategies bearing fruit in a small number of RLOs delivering capacity strengthening to nascent groups.

Leadership

Cohere has an advisory board of seven refugees, of whom six currently live in East Africa and are guiding us on our new five-year strategy that is to be launched in January 2022. Overall, Cohere prefers terms such as "ownership" or "agency" to "participation" as we see ourselves more as equitable partners whose role is to promote



agency for people affected by crises even if it means ceding our control of resources and idea generation.

Feedback

Cohere goes beyond the concept of gathering feedback from partners and participants for the sake of adapting the projects or activities to their needs and ambitions – since interventions are designed and implemented by the refugee leaders. This is made possible by Cohere’s guidance that enables community leaders to listen and empathise with the most vulnerable in the community, to critically analyse their problems and define strategies to address them. The strategies are then implemented by the community leaders and the participants in an inclusive way, assessed against their co-designed indicators of success in an inclusive way, and re-designed according to the needs, again by all the most relevant constituents. This process is repeated until needs are met and opportunities are realised.

Cohere also has a direct link with all the participants through our physical presence in each location. We can therefore monitor independently and access independent feedback from participants that can be used to support the community-led cycle of co-design from an objective standpoint. Examples of this include feedback and suggestion boxes and a feedback email, anonymous surveys and random outreach to individual participants.

Reforming Cohere

From 2022, Cohere is continuing to reform itself to ensure that our vision, mission, staff and activities are more accountable to the affected persons we encounter. Particularly in the following areas:

- Governance
- Anti-racism, diversity and inclusion
- Funding
- Principles of Partnership

1. Governance



Refugee Advisory Panel

In order to further support our accountability to affected persons strategy, we have elevated the role of our refugee advisory panel. The panel will have as much control over strategy, decisions and resources of the organisation as any of our other boards. The panel will expand to include refugees living in other countries we expand to. The panel enables us to make decisions that are inclusive and ensure accountability to the participants we support. Before embarking on a project or partnership with an institutional donor, we deliberate the approach with the panel and get feedback which we can incorporate into the final partnership or engagement.

2. Anti-racism, diversity and inclusion

Discrimination or prejudicial treatment towards any minority identity group is not tolerated at Cohere and this will continue. What is more, as an organisation we will take active steps to correct past and present imbalances that have left people from marginalised groups with reduced opportunities within the sector. We want to champion marginalised groups as instrumental participants in all our activities and engage a long-term broad strategy to confront the structural barriers that reduce their opportunities within the sector.

This strategy will include the following steps:

- Prioritising conversations about ethnicity, racism and bias, and include diversity and inclusion as a regular topic for our organisational discussions
- Prioritising conversations about gender bias, unconscious bias, and all forms of discrimination against marginalised groups
- Internally recruiting a diverse team. This will demand a re-focusing of job qualifications, such as a leaning towards potential over traditional credentials. This way we will be able to recruit people from marginalised groups, including refugees and people with disabilities and people from socio-economic deprived backgrounds who haven't experienced the same privileges as those who have traditionally "succeeded" within the NGO sector. This will also affect how inclusive our programs and activities are.



- Investing in accessibility measures for our offices, field work and project activities in partnership with RLOs.
- Advocating for more diverse recruitment and inclusive employment practices more widely within the sector. We will share best practices that we observe.
- Enhancing the capacity strengthening and sharing we currently engage in with our partner organisations to ensure that their leaders are also open to being inclusive in their leadership.
- Consulting our key stake-holders, including our full-time staff, on our progress in being more diverse, inclusive and anti-racist.
- Creating a results framework for reforming our NGO which will track progress over the five-year strategic planning period.
- Rewarding contributions to our collective vision that might not be recognised by the commercial market. For example, curriculum vitae credentials, education levels and years of experience in large institutions need not be excessively valued above values such as commitment, potential, clarity of vision and hard work.
- Ambitious recruitment and building a team of diverse team members who each bring something of high value to the organisation.

3. Funding

Our approach to raising funds will not only be used for furthering our accountability to affected persons but will be used to advocate for change within the humanitarian sector by;

- Ensuring local ownership of all the funding we raise and consequently expend. This means control of resources as well as control of the ideas and framing of success for such funding.
- Acting as an intermediary between donors and local leaders (mostly refugee leaders) if this will increase the agency that local communities have over the funding. This will include acting as a fiduciary partner channelling funds to refugee led organisations.
- Ensuring that communities not only have greater control over the resources and agency in results frameworks, but that they also have increased control over the



modalities of funding relationships such as reporting mechanisms and sharing of results.

- Not pursuing funding that will entrench inequalities within our organisation, such as funds that will not cover salaries for refugees, or funds that dictate unreasonable pay for leaders.
- Increasing the total amount of humanitarian funding available by approaching new donors who might not have the same approaches or restrictions to traditional humanitarian funders, and this will include individual donors from all over the world.
- Working with public funding institutions as long as the funding programmes are explicitly motivated by the intent to transfer agency to the communities, and as long as the funding programme explicitly does not promote exploitative interests of a state.

4. Principles of Partnership - Solidarity

Our principles of partnership go beyond “accountability” and “feedback to affected communities”. We feel that these concepts perpetuate a gulf between the “giver” and the “receiver” and suggest that humanitarians make decisions with approval from the people they are trying to help. Following our principles of partnership will help us bridge the gaps between Cohere as an NGO and the communities we are working with. Our partnerships are built on solidarity while at the same time promoting solidarity and the idea of one community that must progress as one. Our concept of partnership sees an end of humanitarianism as an industry, in favour of a culture of mutual support and solidarity that transcends global boundaries.

Over the next five years we will live this out through the partnerships between Cohere and refugee communities. Our main point of interaction will be through the leaders of refugee led organisations and as such we will make the following commitments.

- Prioritise the desire and the capacity of refugees to play a key role in developing their communities, including supporting the most vulnerable, and contributing to society as whole.
- Prioritise the vision that refugees, especially refugees leaders, have for changing their communities, and we will offer our role in supporting this change.
- Not impose our own, slightly different, set of values on what this change and vision could be.



- Promote a culture of sharing and value the benefits we receive from refugee communities.
- When we are in control of certain resources we will not use this exert power over decision making or anything else.
- Withhold from using our identity as an international NGO to exert power or impose influence that is not offered in the spirit of solidarity and level collaboration.
- Not speak on behalf of refugee communities, but we will share an advocacy platform as collaborative partners.