

Accountability to Affected Populations and Cost-Effectiveness in Humanitarian Outcomes

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Question

What evidence is there that Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) cost effectively leads to better humanitarian outcomes? Are some AAP mechanisms more effective than others?

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Overview

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) seeks to ensure that the rights, dignity, perspectives and security of all groups of an affected population are protected, and that gender, age, disability and diversity identify their particular needs. AAP also seeks to ensure that affected populations play a significant role in decision-making processes that concern them and that they can keep account of aid agencies (Brouder, 2017).

Several development agencies, and especially those within the UN system, roughly define accountability to affected populations as “an active commitment by humanitarian actors and organizations to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people they seek to assist” (Brouder, 2017. p5; UNHCR, 2015)

This rapid review summarizes the available evidence on how/if Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is leading to cost-effective humanitarian outcomes as well as if certain AAP mechanisms are more effective than others (although the evidence on the latter is very limited). The review is presented as an annotated bibliography, and includes academic studies, books, Chapters, technical reports, evaluation reports of development/humanitarian programmes (internal and independent), and guidance materials from bilateral and multilateral development/humanitarian organisations.

The search for evidence (i.e. relevant literature) was mainly done using the specific terms of “Accountability to Affected Populations” and “cost-effectiveness” (and variant terms and abbreviations like “cost-effective” and “AAP”) (see Section 2 for further details). Although the search terms were recorded and the review is relatively comprehensive, it is worth noting that this is a rapid review and the search methodology is not systematic. Hence, there are limitations in what can be concluded from it.

Importantly, the broad range of literature identified with the core search terms (i.e. Section 2) was further explored (i.e. the entire contents of the documents) for “cost-efficiency”, “cost-efficient” as well as separately for “cost”, “effective” and “effectiveness” – especially making sure that these words appear close to each other and together with the term “Accountability to Affected Populations” or “AAP”. Although it is understood that these terms (i.e. cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency) do not have the exact same meaning and definition, it is evident that they share some overlap (i.e. since they both relate to the ‘Value for Money’ notion) (DFID, 2011; ADE, 2016). Most of the documents that were assessed rarely provide the definitions they are using for these terms – and it appears that sometimes these two are synonymously used. Nevertheless, some major development agencies make distinctions. For instance, the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) highlights that cost-effectiveness translates to “how much impact does an intervention achieve relative to the inputs?”, while Cost-efficiency implies “how well are inputs converted into outputs?” (ADE, 2016. P4; DFID, 2011). This report also adopts these definitions. Similarly, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) defines cost-effectiveness as “cost per outcome that a program achieves” while cost-efficiency is understood as “cost per output that a program produces” (ADE, 2016. P4).

Although the different array of searches on different databases and archives have yielded a large range of literature, there were very few publications and reports that directly linked cost-effectiveness with AAP. The literature largely fails to provide a detailed cost-effectiveness report for the different AAP mechanisms that are followed by different aid agencies. Further, just a few

papers and reports make a brief (more general) mention that AAP has led to better cost-effectiveness in their intended humanitarian outcomes – and often no details are given on how this has been exactly achieved. Notably, some reports have also highlighted the potential ‘unintended’ costs attached to AAP.

In much of the literature (and those featured in the annotated bibliography in section 3), “AAP” and “cost-effectiveness” were discussed separately within the documents – both as good and important targets (in their own rights) towards which the humanitarian agencies and programmes in question strived to achieve. The pool of papers included here (i.e. those touching on both AAP and cost-effectiveness) don’t also discuss the different types of AAP mechanisms, let alone how the mechanisms differ on cost-effectiveness. However, basic information on AAP mechanisms is available in the broader AAP literature – i.e. if one disregards the “cost-effectiveness” issue.

Overall, AAP has been a well-recognised principle of humanitarian action for two decades. The humanitarian sector has made commitments on five ‘pillars’ of AAP through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and other related forums, namely: leadership and governance; transparency; feedback and complaints; participation; and project design, monitoring and evaluation (IASC, 2012). Nevertheless, a comprehensive review on the ‘state of the humanitarian system’ by ALNAP (2015), discovered that there was ‘no progress in engaging local participation’ and ‘little evidence of affected populations’ input into project design or approach’. Further, much of the available evidence confirms that the humanitarian sector has had a ‘poor record’ in fulfilling its pledge to use power responsibly by taking into account, transparency and accountability of the people it aims to support (UNHCR, 2015; Brouder, 2017).

2. Methodology

While preparing this rapid evidence review, several search strings were used (on different databases and platforms) to find the most relevant information on “cost-effectiveness” and “accountability to affected populations” in humanitarian programming. As relevant information from academic literature was generally limited, a range of grey literature – constituting technical reports, programme evaluations and guiding materials (often stemming from development/humanitarian agencies) – were additionally assessed and included.

The key literature platforms and databases explored include:

- Science Direct database;
- The ‘Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action’ (ALNAP) database – particularly ALNAP’s Humanitarian Evaluation, Learning and Performance (HELP) database;
- Google Scholar;
- World Bank Open Knowledge Repository; and
- Google.

In addition to the above, some key citations and references (i.e. those appearing within pre-identified documents) have been further explored (using the typical keyword searches used in the above databases) and included if they had useful discussions and notes.

Different keywords (and their variations) have been used on the above databases. The specific searches included:

- Science Direct: 'Accountability to Affected Populations' and 'cost effective' (i.e. non-exact search, keywords without quotations). 240 results. Sorted by relevance. Screened first 100.
 - Refining search: "accountability to Affected Populations" (i.e. exact search, keywords with quotations). Seven Results. Screened all results.
- Google Scholar: "Accountability to Affected Populations" AND "cost effective*" AND "humanitarian". 60 results. Sorted by relevance.
 - Refining search: "Accountability to Affected Populations" AROUND(50) "cost-effective*". 57 results. Screened all results.
- ALNAP database: "cost-effective" and "accountability to affected populations". 301 results. Screened first 100.
- Google: "Accountability to Affected Populations" AND "cost effective*". 8,430 results. Sorted by relevance.
 - Refining search: Google: "Accountability to Affected Populations" AROUND(50) "cost effective*". 7,080 results. Screened first 100.

Note: The ordering of search results by 'relevance' (i.e. ranking) follows the default ranking algorithms of Google and the other literature platforms. In cases where the searches returned a large number of results (e.g. Google, ALNAP, and Science Direct), the first 100 reports were screened. The screening process on these reports (still a very large number) was done through a rapid scanning of the documents with the keywords, followed by quick readings of the contents around the keywords and the researcher's own judgement. The core requirement for inclusion of a report/study into this annotated bibliography was a sensible analysis of both "cost-effectiveness" and "AAP" in humanitarian projects, a discussion on how these two are interlinked and how they affect development outcomes.

3. Annotated bibliography: Extraction matrix

Title	Link	Date	Document Type	Author/Publisher	Extract
Designing an efficient humanitarian supply network	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2016.05.012	2016	Journal Article	Aurelie Charles, Matthieu Luras, Luk N. Van Wassenhove, Lionel Dupont	The study notes that donors (who are pledging millions in an economic context that demands cost-effectiveness) are seeking more accountability and cost-efficiency and are less tolerant to the old “fire-fighting mentality” that characterised many (past) relief operations.
Development of a proposal for a methodology to cost inter-agency humanitarian response plans	https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.32933.91367	2016	Technical Report	Jock Baker & Mark Salway Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report noted that there is a need for changing the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) system – and that an overall objective of focusing on the needs of affected populations is closely linked to cost-effectiveness. • There was a general agreement that an ‘enhanced costing approach’ for HRPs should be able to contribute to the overall objective of focusing on the ‘needs of affected populations’ by increasing transparency, credibility and ‘cost-effectiveness’. This was based on evidence collected from interviews, records of discussions,

					<p>Operational Peer Reviews (OPRs), interagency humanitarian evaluations (IAHE) and other relevant research studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report also highlighted that one of the main shortfalls of the current ‘project-based cost system’ is that it emboldens a “summing up” of diverse projects so that HRPs are often perceived more as an expression of agency requirements rather than credible reflections of the response to priority needs of affected populations. • It was stressed that OECD-DAC donors are under growing pressure to validate the use of funds to their taxpayers, and this has added to a drive to more ‘outcomes-based’ commissioning. This has deciphered into pressure on the international humanitarian system to come-up with suitable transparency and ‘cost-effectiveness’ measures. • The report revealed that International non-government organisation (INGOs) networks are also paying increasing attention to cost-effectiveness, including in their accountability commitments to communities affected by disasters. This was exemplified by the ninth commitment of the 2015 Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) – which noted that “communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting
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					<p>them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the UK, for example, all government funding (including by DFID) was divided approximately 50:50 between grants and result-based contracts in 2004. This split now takes place at around 20:80 in favour of contracts based on results (i.e. "Payment by Results") and has been DFID's default standard since 2014. The USAID, ECHO and other donors have similar trends. ○ The World Humanitarian Summit and the High-Level Humanitarian Financing Panel of the UN Secretary-General also provide an opportunity for broad support for a new way of costing humanitarian aid.
Doing cash differently: How cash transfers can transform humanitarian aid	https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9828.pdf	2015	Technical Report	Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Center for Global Development (CGD)	<p>This report is in favour of the expansion of humanitarian cash transfers. It stresses that this mechanism offers an attractive option of helping to accelerate long-standing changes in the humanitarian system.</p> <p>It notes that this (i.e. cash transfer) mechanism helps to break down counter-productive divisions between clusters, enhance coordination, improve cost-effectiveness, work more closely with the private sector, make humanitarian aid more transparent and</p>

					make the system more accountable to its beneficiaries.
Drivers and Inhibitors of Change in the Humanitarian System: A Political Economy Analysis of Reform Efforts Relating to Cash, Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57bad69640f0b6127200000a/Drivers_and_Inhibitors_of_Change_in_the_Humanitarian_System-Full_Report.pdf	2016	Technical report	Julia Steets, Andrea Binder, Andras Derzsi-Horvath, Susanna Krüger, Lotte Ruppert GPPi (Global Public Policy Institute)	In a departure from much of the literature that only echoes the positive aspects of AAP related reforms, this report (among other issues) discusses “the potential effects, including unintended side effects, of the reforms of the humanitarian system. ” In line with this, the authors note that “ real accountability to affected populations could exacerbate local tensions and conflict with humanitarian principles; and stronger protection advocacy will likely put field staff at greater risk. ”
Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide	https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-evaluation-humanitarian-action-2016.pdf	2016	Book (Guide)	Margie Buchanan-Smith, John Cosgrave, and Alexandra Warner ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in	The guidebook noted that ‘ evaluation ’ is one of several processes that can fulfil a humanitarian organisation’s accountability requirements. In other words, it can capture an organization’s responsibility to report to others , such as its board of directors, donors, or the affected population . It also noted that accountability to the affected populations (AAP) is now being given much greater attention – and that development agencies need to first decide if their

				Humanitarian Action)	accountability and AAP mechanism is the most appropriate and cost-effective option.
Evaluation of WFP Policies on Humanitarian Principles and Access in Humanitarian Contexts	https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000072044/download/	2018	Evaluation Report	Julia Steets, Claudia Meier, Adele Harmer, Abby Stoddard, Janika Spannagel WFP (Office of Evaluation)	The evaluation noted that there are overlaps and duplications between the accountability of different actors in the present situation to the affected population mechanisms. The WFP and its partners often maintain hotlines and/or call centres for the same communities, and the WFP itself operates ‘multiple lines’ in the countries where it operates. This lowers the cost-effectiveness of ‘the accountability to affected population’ mechanisms and makes it more difficult for communities to use these systems.
Evidence on implementation of Joint Needs Assessments (JNA) and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) by humanitarian organisations	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d654d71ed915d53aebba6ee/654_grand_bargain_commitments.pdf	2019	Helpdesk Report	Luke Kelly K4D/UK AID	The report recaps that if AAP is well in place , donors will benefit from a greater ability to track implementing agencies and get a better understanding of how to prioritise needs. They may also have more respect from their host governments. Besides, they can benefit from the consolidation of the sector (in which they operate), which reduces costs (i.e. enhances cost-effectiveness). Ultimately, they will be able to better link relief and development. However, this report also offers some warning. For instance, a strong AAP process may make donors “less able to align their aid with their [own] governments’ needs”. Further, donors “may find that the time needed for AAP does not match their funding

					cycles.” Thus, making them “spend more on AAP” – i.e. lowering the cost-effectiveness of AAP.
Health Cluster Coordination Guidance for Heads of WHO Country Offices as Cluster Lead Agency	https://www.who.int/health-cluster/capacity-building/HWCO-Guidance-FULL.pdf?ua=1	2019	Guidance Document	World Health Organization (WHO)	<p>According to this guidance document (prepared for country offices and health cluster lead agencies), the WHO strives to (simultaneously) realise cost-effectiveness and AAP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO is accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (through Resident or Humanitarian Coordinator) for leadership/co-leadership in “delivering an efficient and cost-effective humanitarian response.” At the same time, “WHO also has accountabilities ...to governments, to donors, to affected populations ... and to other stakeholders”
Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013 – 2018)	https://www.unhcr.org/5bc098724.pdf	2018	Evaluation Report	Jock Baker and Iman M. Elawad United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sudan	<p>Some of the recommendations by this evaluation report noted that the UNHCR (in Sudan) and its partners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance accountability to affected populations, refugees and host communities, and promote the dignity, ownership, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of interventions. • Address critical unmet needs in combination with longer-term livelihood support in a targeted way. This transition should include the piloting of cash-based initiatives by, for example, carrying out

					cost-effectiveness assessments and accountability for affected populations (APP) initiatives in combination with selected strategic partners.
The Case of UNICEF's U-Report Uganda (Chapter In Book): Civic Tech in the Global South Assessing Technology for the Public Good	https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27947	2017	Book (chapter)	Berdou, E., Lopes, C. A., Sjoberg, F. M., & Mellon, J. World Bank	Their analysis suggests that a U-Report – i.e. a text messaging system that has succeeded in aiding Ugandans to hold their government or leaders accountable – is a cost-effective way to quickly evaluate what the more educated (i.e. technologically informed) population think about a (development/humanitarian) problem.
The Humanitarian Accountability Report 2006	https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/hap-report2006-lr.pdf	2006	Technical report	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP)	The report notes that a systematic focus on the accountability to beneficiaries (i.e. AAP) is cost-effective. For example, a systematic approach to handling beneficiary complaints is more cost-effective and time-consuming than ad hoc handling. Such a process also provides a more demand-driven and dynamic way of monitoring development/humanitarian programmes.

The Start Fund Annual Report	https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/StartFund_AnnualReport2018_Digital_RGB_pgShort.pdf	2018	Technical Report	Laura-Louise Fairley The Start Network	<p>This report argues that providing people affected by (or at risk of) crises with cash, is a better way for the humanitarian system to meet their needs. It has the benefit of increasing accountability, both to recipients and donors, and reducing the cost of delivering assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite being one of several intervention mechanisms (fulfilling the AAP requirement) – cash programming is an increasingly important component of crisis response, estimated to represent 6–7% of humanitarian expenditure. It is also one of the most researched tools of humanitarian interventions. • This mechanism also supports local economies, markets and incomes, increases the speed and flexibility of humanitarian response, and gives people more choice and control over how the money is spent.
Understanding The Localisation Debate	https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58256bc615d5db852592fe40/t/5cd70fc54ee28d00016f46f1/1557598162107/GMI+-+UNDERSTANDING+THE+LOCALISATION+DEBATE.pdf	2017	Technical report	Koenraad Van Brabant & Smruti Patel GMI (Global Mentoring Initiative)	<p>The report noted that national actors may have relative advantages over international development actors – for instance by being a better fit with the context or having greater cost-effectiveness and greater accountability to affected populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If international organisations retain their control over the financial resources, they are likely to always have superior capacities over national ones. However, by allocating a part of (say 25%)

					<p>of their available funding to national actors, they could create the conditions to test whether, after some years, national actors display more cost-effectiveness and have greater accountability to affected populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ‘World Humanitarian Summit’ in May 2016 resulted in a voluntary commitment of key governmental donors and international relief agencies, known as the ‘Grand Bargain’. One key commitment was to provide “more support and funding tools for local and national responders”. This came to be known as ‘localisation’. • Further, the report notes that the ‘Appropriateness’ criteria (which replaced the ‘relevance’ criterion used in development evaluations) reflect “the extent to which humanitarian activities are tailored to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability and cost-effectiveness accordingly.”
<p>What is appropriate and relevant assistance after a disaster? Accounting for culture(s) in the response to Typhoon</p>	<p>https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2017.02.010</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>Journal Article</p>	<p>Jessica Field</p>	<p>The study notes that the need to account for social and cultural complexity in humanitarian assistance is acknowledged in the OEDC-DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian responses. This is captured by terms such as ‘relevance’ and ‘appropriateness’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Relevance’ is concerned with assessing whether the project is in line with local needs and priorities, as well as donor policy.

Haiyan/Yoland a					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Appropriateness’ is the tailoring of humanitarian activities to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability and cost-effectiveness accordingly.”
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Note: The studies and reports in the table are sorted by title.

4. References

Note: This list excludes the references in ‘annotated bibliography’ in Section 3.

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https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/TOOLS%20to%20assist%20in%20implementing%20the%20IASC%20AAP%20Commitments.pdf

UNHCR (2015), Emergency Handbook (4th ed.). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <http://emergency.unhcr.org>

5. Useful websites for further reading

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC):

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/product-categories/accountability-affected-populations>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

<https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/42554/accountability-to-affected-populations-aap>

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):

<http://www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/accountability-to-affected-populations/en/>

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action

<https://www.alnap.org/search?keywords=Accountability+to+Affected+Populations>

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