Designing for a Change in Perspective

Embracing Client Perspectives in Humanitarian Project Design

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

There have been repeated and increasing commitments for over twenty years from the humanitarian community to increase its engagement with crisis-affected populations. These commitments include pledges to listen, collect and use the views and perspectives of crisis-affected populations to inform decision making at all stages of the programme cycle. However, studies and analysis conducted over the past years[1] have shown little progress in the way people affected by crisis can effectively influence what, how, where and to whom aid and services are being delivered. Humanitarian agencies still face a number of operational and conceptual challenges to develop and implement client-responsive programming and to be participatory in the design, implementation and evaluation of their project interventions. These challenges are particularly pronounced during the design phase of humanitarian interventions.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is implementing the project, Designing for a Change in Perspective, under its commitment to strengthening the client-responsiveness of its programming and influence and support changes amongst its peers and donors across the humanitarian sector. The project, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), intends to better enable humanitarian agencies to collect and reflect the perspectives of those they serve – their clients – in their project design decisions.

This report shares the IRC's learning about the current practices, opportunities and the challenges humanitarian agencies encounter in collecting and using client perspectives in the design of humanitarian projects.

The study builds on existing knowledge arising from previous studies conducted by a range of organisations and individuals into levels of client engagement in humanitarian and development decision making *(Chapter 1)*. It provides an analysis of the responses that the IRC collected through an e-survey *(see Annex 3)* that was shared in July 2017 with hundreds of humanitarian actors in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, as well as staff working at headquarters. 120 staff from different international and national agencies and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement working in a range of positions (senior management, programme, technical units, and monitoring and evaluation) responded to this survey. The survey results were complemented by 15 key informant individual interviews *(see list in Annex 2)* with humanitarian aid staff conducted in August and September 2017, which obtained additional qualitative information *(see interview questionnaires in Annex 4)*. The results of those consultations are presented in *Chapter 2.*

The findings of this report are intended to trigger further in-person and remote consultations with humanitarian actors between October and December 2017. Together, these will inform the collaborative development of a set of guidance which aims to support country and programme teams to improve their current practices, alleviate the barriers they face and seize opportunities to collect and use client perspectives in the design of their project. *(See Chapter 3: What's Next?)*

OPPOSITE: An IRC community health worker consults with clients in South Sudan in 2011, immediately prior to independence.
Yolanda Barbera/IRC

Chapter 1: Existing Knowledge and Previous Studies

There has been a recent resurgence in support and commitments from the humanitarian community for greater engagement of affected populations in the design and delivery of humanitarian aid, and accountability for humanitarian actors' decisions. Most recently, the Grand Bargain has committed the sector to *"include the people affected by humanitarian crises in our decisions"* and to ensure that *"design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people."* [3] However, despite those normative and system-wide commitments, the degree to which humanitarian agencies consult and engage affected populations varies considerably throughout the humanitarian project life cycle. While many humanitarian organisations gather information from clients during needs assessments and project implementation, the very phase at which the most significant decisions are taken – the design phase – is where clients are typically least involved.

A report from ALNAP [4] (Knox Clarke and Darcy, 2014) suggests that *"the amount of consultation does appear to differ from one phase to the next, with the greatest amount of engagement tending to occur at the assessment phase, where aid agencies are gathering information on needs, but not always on existing capacity.* ***Engagement drops off significantly during the design phase, when key decisions are made.****" (Figure 1).*

OPPOSITE: Women listen at a public health awareness meeting in the new town hall, Yeala village, Lofa County, Liberia.
Blake Dagwert/IRC

Engaging with affected communities and targeted clients during the design phase of a humanitarian project is the time where they could have the highest level of influence on the type and modalities of aid and services they receive. It would provide an opportunity for clients to influence the major decisions that are taken and defined during project design, which may not substantially be reviewed during the implementation phase. Clients would, for instance, be able to express their views about their priority needs and aspirations for how they would like their lives to improve. It would also allow clients to express their preferences for the type of aid and services that they would like to receive and how they would like to communicate with the agencies and participate in decision making.

Figure 1: Levels and Types of Engagement at Different Phases of the Project Cycle [5]

Project Phase	Diagnosis	Design and Preparation	Implementation	Monitoring	Evaluation
Degree of Engagement					
Type of Engagement	*Consists mainly of providing data*	*Very rare*	*Frequent in the form of in-kind contributions or labour*	*Rare*	*Extremely rare, although the trend is to encourage more involvement*
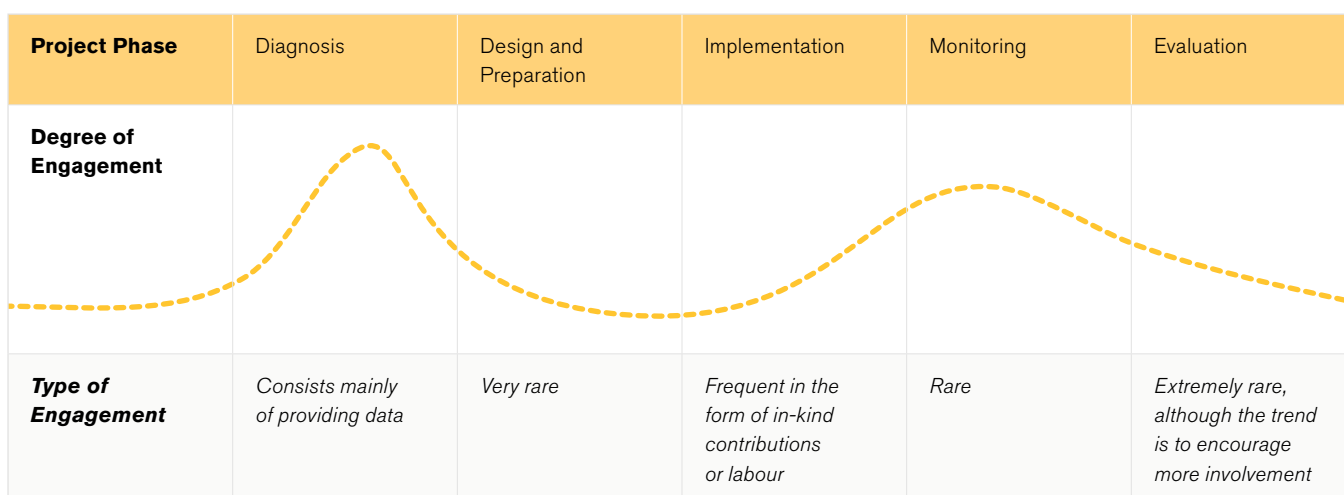
The project design phase also tends to be the point at which agencies face considerable time and budget constraints in developing the project design, budget and proposal. The Listening Project, a four year-long listening exercise organised by CDA Collaborative in 20 countries with the support of 400 staff from 125 international and local organisations, found that *"To get funding, proposal-writing agencies… make some essential decisions before they can even put staff on the ground. Recipients say that donors and agencies talk about participatory development but do not provide time or financial resources to allow it. They ask why they see no procedures (and funding for them) for engaging recipients before proposals are submitted and funding allocations are decided. Further, because funding depends on proposals with a logical framework, conceived and elaborated by aid agency staff who, then, must submit donor reports demonstrating that their plan was 'right,' little space remains for people on the receiving side to insert their analyses."*[6]

ABOVE: Refugees who want to resettle first declare their interest to do so with the UNHCR. In Southeast Asia, those bound for the United States are then assisted by the IRC's Resettlement Support Centre, which help them prepare paperwork, facilitate interviews with government officials, and, once they are accepted for resettlement, schedule medical screening and provide cultural orientation classes. Here, IRC caseworker Shaheen Lim interviews a Burmese refugee in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.   *Peter Biro/IRC*

It is however a critical phase where to ensure that we engage with our intended clients. Clara Hagens from the Catholic Relief Services explained: *"It is incomplete to set up a feedback mechanism to listen to community voices during project implementation if the project design wasn't participatory and didn't engage with the community. Whose project is it?"*

The main obstacles for humanitarian agencies to engage with crisis-affected population have been well documented [7] and span operational (inter alia cost, access, capacity, attitudes and skills) to conceptual challenges (centralised approaches needed to save more lives in emergency responses, or the paradigm that participatory approaches are political tools aiming at a shift of power and hence not appropriate to humanitarian actions).

According to Grunewald and De Geoffroy, *"Engaging with the population throughout the project cycle, especially at the design and monitoring phases, can be like opening a 'Pandora's box' – aid standards and approaches can be challenged; the humanitarian sector's priorities can be turned upside down; the logical framework of the operation might have to be changed over and over again…"*[8]

This resonated well with the views shared by Martin Omukuba[9] from the IRC in South Sudan when he said that ***"collecting and using client feedback to inform programming is about changing the mind-set of humanitarian aid workers; it is about shifting the power from us to the communities."***

Chapter 2:   Research Findings

1   Agencies' Current Practices

a   Humanitarian Project Design and Perceived Importance of Client Perspectives

The process of designing a humanitarian project varies across different agencies, geographical contexts and in response to different funding announcements. Opportunities for agencies to collect and use client perspectives in their project design vary according to the time, resources and access they have to consult with their intended clients and their communities *(as explained in more detail in Section 2 on existing barriers, below).* The design of humanitarian project activities are primarily influenced by each agency's strategic action plans in the targeted regions and by the priorities and scope of donor agencies' call for proposals. However, it is worth noting that **97% of humanitarians who responded to the survey perceived client's perspectives to be very important to informing project design.**

In most agencies interviewed, the responsibility for collecting client perspectives sits primarily with staff at the front line of operations, while more often than not, the staff who write the project intervention logic and proposal are usually based at the country office or even at headquarters. The challenge with this separation of duties is that the information collected is not always accessible or retrievable in a way that is usable to inform the project design. *(See also Section 2 b below on the challenges and barriers to using client feedback.)*

ABOVE: An IRC community health worker in Uganda
Yolanda Barbera/IRC

Figure 2:   Responses to the survey question: "In your view, how important are clients' perspectives to informing the design of a project/preparation of a proposal?"

3%   Somewhat important

97%   Very important
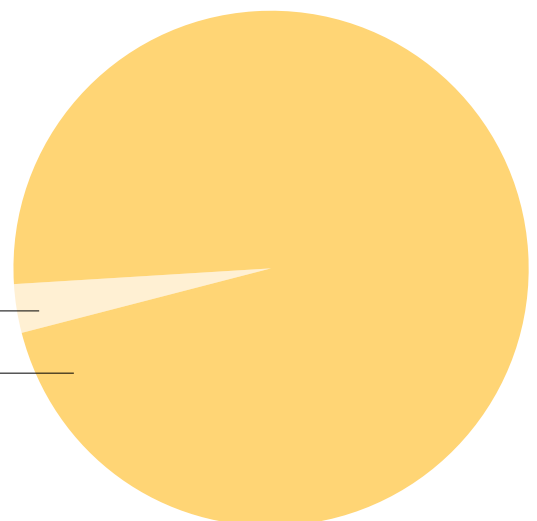
Figure 3:   Responses to the survey question: "How often do you collect the perspectives of your intended clients and their communities during the design phase of a project?"

2%	*I don't know*
1%	Never
37%	Occasionally
34%	Frequently/most of the time
26%	Always

b   Feedback Collection

26% of survey respondents stated that they always collect client perspectives in their project design, while 34% reported that they do so frequently, and 37% that they do so occasionally.

In most agencies, client feedback is collected by front-line staff and teams working in programme, technical and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) units. Information is primarily collected from community leaders and representatives (84% of cases), followed by specific consultations with intended client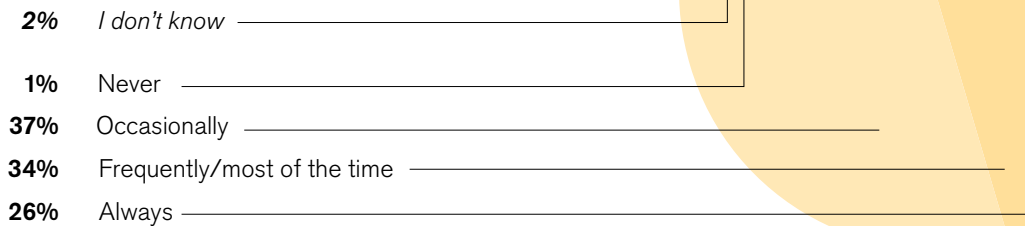s (59%) and community members at large (53%). Agencies also pay specific attention to consulting with specific groups within the community, primarily with women (64%), youth (29%), people with disabilities (19%), minorities (18%) and children (14%) Beyond direct proactive consultations, agencies also rely on other sources of information about clients perspectives when developing the design of their project interventions, primarily indirect sources (government surveys, other agencies' or cluster assessment data) as well as information routinely collected by their staff during the implementation of previous/other ongoing projects. Front-line staff or volunteers who are part of the targeted communities can be great sources of information for project design. *"Our added value within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is our volunteer-base in the community. We are strengthening their capacity to conduct assessments, surveys and to conduct consultative meetings with the community but also to share their own views,"* said Ombretta Baggio from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).
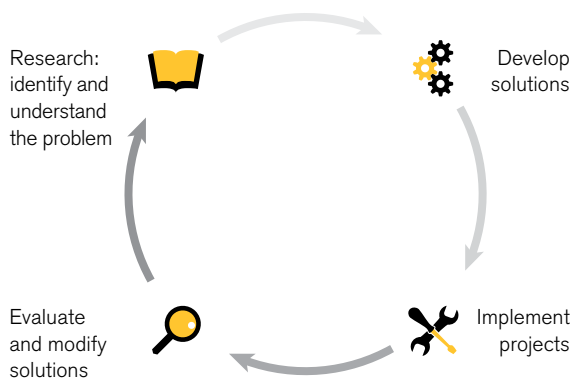
The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)

10 years ago the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement developed the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment that uses diverse participatory tools and approaches to *"enable local priorities to be identified and appropriate action taken to reduce disaster risk and assists in the design and development of programmes that are mutually supportive and responsive to the needs of the people most closely concerned."* [10]

Figure 4: **The Action–Research Framework of VCA in a Project Planning Cycle** [11]

- Research: identify and understand the problem
- Develop solutions
- Implement projects
- Evaluate and modify solutions

The ability and quality of information that teams are able to collect is also highly dependent on how clients trust the agency and on the quality of the relationships between the agency and the community and its leaders. *"One needs to dispense a sense of integrity to gain the trust of the community. We are working closely with religious leaders, respected in their community, to provide and collect information from our clients,"* explained Edward Ishaku from the IRC Yolo field office in Nigeria.

c Use of Client Feedback in Project Design

The main source of information that agencies are using in the design of their project is information collected from focus group discussions with their intended clients and the wider community (70% of the respondents), followed by secondary sources of information (68% use data collected by government or other agencies and/or cluster assessment data, and 57% use feedback and information received from staff through their routine interaction with clients). Client feedback collected through surveys, individual interviews or focus group discussions during previous projects is also used by 47% of the respondents.

Some organisations have made specific efforts to systematically capture and record that feedback. *"We are recording and tracking feedback and recommendations shared by clients through routine interaction with our staff or during monthly community meetings and use this data to inform our project design"* said Ghida Ananiof ABAAD, Resource Centre for Gender Equality, in Lebanon. Others, like the IRC Education programme in Lebanon are systematically reviewing client perspectives on the on-going programme implementation on an annual basis in order to inform the design of the next programme phase.

Samer Houshaimi from the IRC in Lebanon explained: *"We were asking teachers the reasons for the low levels of school attendance and they explained that some parents don't understand the importance of education and that the timing of the school was conflicting with the time children needed to support getting livelihood for their families. As a result, the programme revised the parenting curriculum to emphasise the benefits of education and was able to change the timing of the school sessions."*

The ability for agencies to use client feedback data in project design also depends on where the responsibility for data collection and analysis lies within the organisational structure and how it is integrated in the decision making process. According to Clara Hagens from CRS, *"We need to optimise the involvement of the MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning) team during the initial assessment phase, as a strong assessment relies directly on MEAL technical skills. It is a lost opportunity when MEAL is only involved at the proposal/concept note drafting stage"*. For client feedback data to be useable, they need to be recorded, analysed and presented in a format that can inform decision making during project design.

In order to ensure that client feedback data collected are being used, the IRC in Lebanon developed a system where they focus on collecting the information that they need and can use.

Community Level Information Forms (CLIF)

The IRC in Lebanon developed a systematic process to collect and use client perspectives to inform project design and other programmatic decisions. The data analysed are presented to the intended clients in a user-friendly format to inform them about the results and discuss with them how this can be channelled and addressed by the IRC. CLIF also provides the possibility for ideas and concepts developed by Senior Management, the technical and programme teams to be specifically discussed with intended clients of the project so that their views can be obtained and taken into account. This shows how clients can be a critical and systematic part of one agency's programme information system.

Figure 5:   The Role of CLIF in Project Design
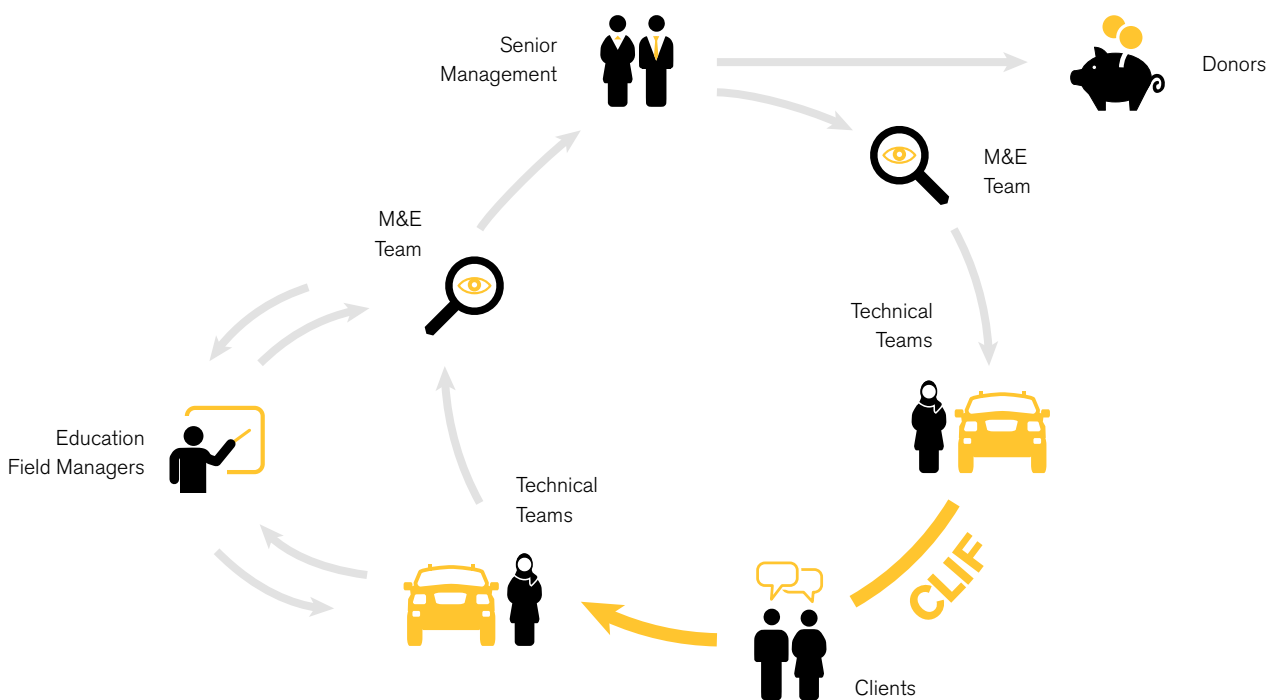
Project design concepts are developed by senior management, programme and technical teams and presented to the clients for their input/feedback to be included and forwarded back to the programme and senior management teams to finalise project design and submit the proposal to donors.

SOURCE: Adapted from the work of the IRC in Lebanon

2   Barriers and Challenges

a   Feedback Collection

Agencies are facing a number of challenges and barriers in collecting client perspectives for humanitarian project design. In the e-survey, 73% of the respondent rated the time available to design the project as a significant or a very significant barrier to collecting client perspectives. Human resources and financial resources were respectively rated as significant or very significant barriers by 52% and 47% of the respondents. Collecting feedback can also be a significant challenge in conflict or protracted crisis contexts, where access is restricted or constrained: 29% of the respondents rated access as a significant or very significant barrier to collecting feedback.

According to Kai Hopkins from Ground Truth Solutions, *"the challenge starts even before the collection of clients' perspectives. To collect pertinent data, we need to know who our targeted clients are. At the design phase of a project, it is often extremely difficult to capture the right variety of views and to ensure that the multiple perspectives at community level (quiet and loud voices) are taken into account"*.

The most important barrier raised by agencies to collecting client perspectives in project design is the **limited time** they have at their disposal during the project design phase. Denis Igua at the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Yemen explained: *"Beneficiaries are generally willing to share their perspectives during the design of a project; it is the humanitarians who seem not to have the time to hear them out or are sometimes limited by access constraints"*. Given that many humanitarian projects are funded by bi-lateral or multi-lateral donor agencies, timeframes for designing projects are largely dictated by donors' procurement regulations and the often limited timeframe between the funding announcement and the submission due date. *"If the time we have to design the project and submit the proposal is limited, we are not able to conduct specific consultations with targeted communities, the concept note is based on information we have already, data from previous project implementation and assessments"*, said Roderik Gross at the IRC in Burundi.

Isabella Jean at CDA, explained that they have advised donors to reflect on how their grant procurement timeframes may best support donors' ambitions for value for money and accountability to affected populations, recommending extended timeframes which allow their partners enough opportunity to integrate client perspectives into their project designs. It is worth noting that some agencies have access to unrestricted funding that allow them more flexibility in designing their projects and the ability to dedicate more time to collecting the perspectives of their clients. Knowing that donor funding cycles, especially in protracted crisis, tend to be released on similar terms from one period to the next, other agencies collect client perspectives on a regular basis in order to have this information available as and when the calls for proposals are released. The main challenge here is for agency staff to ensure that the feedback data that they have previously collected are retrievable and easily accessible to the departments and agency staff leading the development of project proposals.

The second most significant barrier to collecting client feedback is the **lack of human or financial resources** to do so. The limited number or/and lack of capacity of staff available to collect client perspectives during project design is a significant constraint for many agencies. This is compounded by competing priorities that agencies face. As stated by Ombretta Baggio from the IFRC, *"The Red Cross volunteers are expected to respond the essential needs such as food and shelters and this can undermine their ability to collect client feedback"*. Collecting client feedback also incurs certain costs, which are often not eligible for funding under existing grants (as being outside the scope of that project) nor for funding under a future grant (as being outside the time parameters of the project). Costs may be especially high in contexts where targeted communities are hard to reach, either because of the terrain and distances or due to conflict and insecurity. *"We are mainly collecting feedback through key informant interviews with community representatives and other key stakeholders and it has a bias. We would like to collect the views of additional clients in the community but the cost and risks to reach out to them is too high in some areas where we intervene in South Sudan"*, explained Martin Omukuba from the IRC.

Limited access to clients, especially in areas of conflict, hampers the ability of agencies to consult with their clients. In Yemen for instance, Zvidzai Maburutse at the IRC explained that *"access is our main challenge: to collect our clients' perspectives we have to rely on our local staff. But even when they can reach out to them, it is still often impossible to gather people for a focus group discussion or to go house to house to collect their views"*. Access can also be limited by government regulations, such as in Pakistan, where agencies need a special permission to conduct studies or surveys.

Lack of trust and solid relationships between the agencies and their clients represents another challenge and potential bias in collecting client perspectives. *"It is not easy to get information from people. They fear that we'll collect information from them and will never come back. It requires the understanding of the communities that the project may not be funded. We need to manage their expectations, especially at the project design phase. The way other agencies are working will also influence the level of trust they have in the humanitarian aid sector as a whole"*, explained Edward Ishakut the IRC Yola office in Northern Nigeria. This also resonated with Andrea Duechting from the Global Food Security Cluster when she said, *"Trust and confidence are not built overnight and this is especially challenging in times of emergencies, although it might be more feasible during protracted crises."*

Feedback fatigue amongst communities who are being asked several times to give their views to multiple agencies' data collection attempts represents another challenge. This fatigue is aggravated when agencies do not close the loop with clients to communicate what actions they have taken in response to their feedback, let alone when agencies do not return to the communities to provide the aid and services the community indicated they needed. *"The lack of coordination and information sharing among agencies is demanding more time from communities to provide information about their needs and perspectives and often receive no response or see no change in return. This is something that we are aware of and that needs to be addressed as we are asking agencies to be more participatory in the design and implementation of their projects"*, said Isabella Jean from CDA.

Finally, **raising expectations**, especially at a time when the project is not yet approved and funded, represents another risk. *"It is easier to ask people about their feedback about what we are doing than getting their perspectives about project design as we risk raising their expectation and not be able to deliver or even implement any activities if we are not awarded the project"*, explained Nyunt Naing from the IRC in Myanmar and Thailand.

b   Use of Client Feedback in Project Design

Beyond collecting feedback from their clients, agencies also face a number of challenges to making use of the information in project design. *"Using client feedback is much harder than collecting it and there has been less emphasis by humanitarian agencies on this. It is like they think that it will happen automatically but this is not the case,"* explained Kai Hopkins at Ground Truth Solutions.

Lack of capacity to analyse data collected:
The main sources of client feedback during the project design phase, as stated in *Section 1,* are focus group discussions, community meetings and individual interviews. Hence, the Information collected from clients tends to be qualitative rather than quantitative and requires the time, analytical skills, software and staff capacity to analyse it in a way that can be used in project design and proposal writing. Most of the agencies surveyed and interviewed thus reported deficiencies in their capacity to make sense of the data collected. Many of the respondents explained that the data collected is fragmented, often perceived as subjective, and therefore hard to use to influence the design of their projects. Denis Igua from NRC Yemen commented that *"in our sector, there seems to be an analysis paralysis when it comes to clients' views collected in places where we worked before. There is information from past projects that we can use. We need to look back at what we have."*

Another barrier is the perceived **lack of flexibility from donors to adapt their priorities** to accommodate target communities' perspectives. *"When the donor already has a pre-designed focus, it is difficult to integrate views collected from clients if they express a different needs"*, explained Martin Omukuba from the IRC in South Sudan. This was echoed by Edward Ishaku in the IRC in Nigeria when he said: *"sometimes what donors want is different than what people desire"*.

The **lack of cooperation** within agencies (among different units and departments) and between humanitarian agencies also plays an important role in the perceived credibility of data, and whether they are easily accessible. This influences the likelihood of agencies to use the data of other actors in project design. Fahad Abbasi at the IRC in Pakistan noted that *"if the process is collaborative it is easy to make use of the client views, but if some department responsible for project design hadn't been involved in the process, there will be challenges"*.

OPPOSITE: A mortality survey interview in Sierra Leone
Yolanda Barbera/IRC

3 Internal and External Factors Enabling Client Responsive Project Design

A number of factors, within each agency and externally, need to be in place to create the enabling conditions and incentives to collect and use client feedback in project design.

a Internal Factors and Conditions

The organisational culture and senior leadership prioritisation of client responsiveness is one of the most critical internal factors that was mentioned by respondents to this study. **Senior management has a critical role to play in cultivating an institutional culture where feedback is valued and acted upon.** For teams at the front-line to be responsive to the needs and perspectives of their clients, they need to feel that their own views and perspectives are also taken into account in informing the decisions and actions taken by the agency they are working for: *"Why should front-line staff be motivated to be client responsive if they feel that their agency is not responsive to them in the first place?"* asked Isabella Jean from CDA.

This is corroborated by others studies and work conducted by the IRC: in a case study conducted in Kenya,[12] *"both senior and more junior staff members reported that they wanted to encourage greater internal responsiveness… They felt that this would have an instrumental value to client responsiveness: if staff members feel that their own feedback is being listened to and responded to, then they will be more likely to seek out and pass on to their more senior colleagues the feedback from clients."* The organisational structure and management decisions about who is responsible for client responsiveness within the organisation also matters. The position of the function in the organisation chart sends a signal about the relative importance of responsiveness within the agency, and influences the incentive of staff to devote adequate time and effort to collecting and using client perspectives to inform programming. As noted by Fahad Abbasi at the IRC in Pakistan, *"there should be a system in place with clear SOP (Standard Operational Procedures) outlining clear roles and responsibilities and timelines to ensure client responsiveness in project design".* Given the limited time and resources available to design projects and the number of conflicting priorities, client responsiveness needs to be prioritised and institutionalised from HQ and through regional and country offices.

This also resonated with Isabella Jean at CDA who said, *"Technical fixes do not work if the core issue is that accountability to communities is de-prioritised in relation to accountability to donors. Frontline staff and managers who are tasked with reporting to donors routinely face competing demands to demonstrate compliance and progress while also remaining accountable and responsive to communities. Principled commitments that are integral to development practice such as participation and promotion of good governance are often trampled by operational and institutional policies that govern funding arrangements, reporting systems, and institutional rewards and incentives for financial accuracy and timely deliverables and reports. Again, staff behaviours and choices are impacted by the prioritisation they observe every day."* [13]

Dedicating resources to client responsiveness: as mentioned above, the availability of human and financial resources is an important factor to enable teams to collect and use client perspectives in their project design. This includes building the capacities and competencies of staff to understand, value and know how to engage with their clients and to make use of the information collected. *"The availability of our M&E staff to collect feedback is critical. They have a social worker background and it helps because they have the right mind-set,"* noted Ghida Anani from ABAAD. Having access to unrestricted funding was also identified as a comparative advantage since it allows agencies to dedicate more time to engage with clients during project design, be more flexible in their approach and less dependent to donors' interests and priorities.

Piloting and testing client responsive programming actions is also critical to adapting an agency's approach to the specificities of each context and to learn about what works and what impact it has on the quality and effectiveness of programming. *"Client responsiveness is not just about conducting studies and desk reviews and leaving the findings on paper. It needs to be piloted in different contexts for us to see what works,"* said Samer Houshaimi from the IRC in Lebanon.

b   External Factors and Conditions

Relationships and trust that each agency has been able to build with its stakeholders and clients has a significant influence over the ability of the agency to be client responsive. *"We need to explain the humanitarian mandate to the communities we want to serve. We have to explain why we need that information from them, what we will do with it and ensure that we come back to explain them how the information they provided has been utilised,"* explained Edward Ishaku from the IRC in Nigeria.

Donor flexibility is another important factor, both with respect to the timeframe they give to agencies to design their project and submit proposals, and in terms of their ability to accommodate client perspectives in determining project design and direction. Fahad Abbasi from the IRC in Pakistan recommended that *"donors objectives should be flexible and easy to transform based on the data collected from clients on the ground."*

Donor requirements and resource allocation is another important factor. Some donors (inter alia, the Swedish International Development Agency, the UK Department for International Development and the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration) are already rolling out criteria in their funding terms requiring that agencies demonstrate how they are reflecting client perspectives in their programming decisions and how they are making efforts to ensure accountability to affected populations.

Finally, **interagency collaboration and information sharing** is also a factor that strengthens the credibility and use of client feedback in informing project design. Kai Hopkins explained that *"Client feedback could also be used for collective advocacy purpose, to reach out to donors and inform them about what people want. There are a growing number of organisations, including Ground Truth Solutions, who defined themselves as humanitarian to humanitarian organisations and with who agencies could collaborate with to understand affected peoples' views and advocate on behalf of affected communities".* National and local NGOs also have a critical role to play: Andrea Duechting noted that *"the more national and local partners are involved in the cluster discussions around needs and programme intervention design, the closer we get to collecting and taking peoples perspectives into account".*

The main challenge is that more often than not, agencies are competing for space and resources and are thus resistant to collaborate and share information.

Chapter 3:   What's Next?

Despite pledges to place crisis-affected populations at the centre of the design and implementation of humanitarian aid response, the finding of this study clearly demonstrate that the humanitarian sector is still sorely lacking in its ability to reflect client perspectives in project design. As it stands, the power to decide the scope and priorities of humanitarian actions rests with donors and humanitarian agencies. Transferring greater decision making power to clients requires that we address the operational challenges in this report. But beyond that, it requires that we create the incentives for humanitarian leadership and donors to drive policy and structural changes to the way aid is designed, funded and delivered.

Next Steps

Firstly, the IRC will draft a **set of guidance to support humanitarian actors in navigating the barriers to client responsive project design** identified in this study. The content and format of the design guidance will be informed by a series of remote and in-person consultations that we will be holding humanitarian stakeholders across various regions and in headquarters locations. We will present concrete recommendations for actions that staff can undertake within their teams and agencies to be more client responsive, now.

The questions below will guide the stakeholder consultations, structured around the different barriers identified.

Limited Time

> How can agencies collect client perspectives in advance of a call for proposal?

> How can we manage this information to be accessible and retrievable when it is needed?

> How can agencies share information and data collected from clients with each other?

Lack of Human Resources

> How can we clarify staff roles and responsibilities towards client-responsive programming and how can we better integrate these responsibilities into staff job descriptions?

> How can we build the capacity and shift the incentives for staff to collect and use client feedback data for project design?

Lack of Financial Resources

> How can we plan and make the best use of available resources to collect and use client perspectives during project design?

> What information could be collected collectively to reduce costs?

Limited Access

> What alternative ways can we use to collect the perspectives of hard-to-reach clients?

> What can we learn from experiences of agencies using surveys conducted via mobile phones?

> What can be the role of local partners and volunteers?

Trust and Relationship

> What are the key factors influencing the level of trust and good relations that one agency develops with its clients?

> How can we communicate with and mentor our staff, especially at the front-line, to behave and act in a manner that nurtures and increases trust and good relationships with their clients?

Feedback Fatigue

> How can we limit the amount of data we collect from clients to just that which we are able to analyse and to use?

> How can we collect information and client perspectives jointly (inter-agency) to limit risks of multiple agencies consulting with the same communities on related topics?

Raising Expectations

> How can we communicate adequately with our targeted clients when engaging with them during project design and not to raise their expectations especially if the project is finally not funded?

Secondly, the IRC will **engage with humanitarian leaders and donors to raise awareness of the barriers and to strengthen support for policy and system-wide changes necessary to improve client responsiveness in project design**. We will convene, brief and present the findings of this study as well as the recommendations for actions from the design guidance through bilateral and inter-agency engagement.

We will use the consultations to inform our advocacy messaging, discussing such questions as: How can we collectively advocate for and influence donors to provide more time for project design? How can we influence donors and agency leadership to allocate the necessary human resources to collect, analyse and use client perspectives in project design? How can we influence donors and agency leadership to dedicate sufficient budgets to ensure client responsive project design?

The IRC will work collaboratively with Sida, funding this project, as well as other donors and humanitarian aid agencies prioritising client responsiveness and accountability to affected populations to influence dialogue and practice in being client-responsive in the design of their projects.

Together, we hope that the findings from this study, the design guidance supporting agencies to work within current constraints, and the advocacy messaging to address the structural barriers will have a meaningful and sustained impact on the ability of humanitarian agencies to be more client responsive during project design – at the time that it matters most.

ABOVE: A refugee in a camp in Thailand

Thatcher Cook/IRC

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Annex 2: List of Key Informant Interviews Conducted

Name	Position	Agency	Country/Region
Andrea Duechting	Programme Advisor	Global Food Security Cluster	*Global*
Clara Hagens	M&E and Accountability Officer	Catholic Relief Services	*Global*
Denis Igua	WASH Specialist	Norwegian Refugee Council	Yemen
Edward Ishaku	Education Programme Manager	The IRC	Nigeria
Fahad Abbasi	IDP Programme Coordinator	The IRC	Pakistan
Ghida Anani	Founder and Director	ABAAD	Lebanon
Isabella Jean	Director, Evaluation and Learning	CDA	*Global*
Kai Hopkins	Senior Programme Manager	Ground Truth Solutions	*Global*
Martin Omukuba	Deputy Director, Programmes	The IRC	South Sudan
Nyunt Naing	Chief of Party, Local Empowerment	The IRC	Thailand/Myanmar
Ombretta Baggio	Coordinator, Community Engagement	IFRC	*Global*
Richard Rotich	Community Development Officer	Africa Population and Research Centre	Kenya
Roderik Gross	Deputy Director, Programmes	The IRC	Burundi
Samer Houshaimi	Education Programme Manager	The IRC	Lebanon
Zvidzai Maburutse	Deputy Director, Programmes	The IRC	Yemen

Annex 3:   E-survey

Identification

1 In which country or region are you working?

2 Which organisation are you working for?

- › National or local NGO
- › International NGO
- › National Red Cross/Red Crescent Society
- › International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- › UN agency (or fund, programme, office) involved in humanitarian aid (IOM included)
- › Other
  Please specify

3 What is your position?
Please indicate the type of role that most closely corresponds to your position

- › Senior management
  e.g. country director or head of programme for the country
- › Programme staff
- › Monitoring and Evaluation staff
- › Technical advisor
- › Other
  Please specify (or state job title)

4 What are the main sectors you are working on?

- › Camp management
- › Cash transfers
- › Education
- › Food security
- › Health
- › Livelihoods
- › Mine action
- › Nutrition
- › Protection
- › Shelter
- › Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
- › Other
  Please specify

The following questions address your current practice:

5 How often do you collect the perspectives of your intended clients and their communities during the design phase of a project?

- › Never
- › Occasionally
- › Frequently/most of the time
- › Always
- › I don't know

6 When collecting the perspectives of your intended clients and their community during project design, who do you generally consult?
Select from the list below

- › Community representatives and leaders
- › Community members at large
- › Intended clients of the project
- › Women in particular
- › Youth in particular
- › Children in particular
- › People with disabilities in particular
- › Minorities in particular
- › Other vulnerable groups in particular
  Please specify

7 When designing a project and/or writing a project proposal, please indicate the top three sources of information about client and community/perspectives you most often use.

> We conduct surveys with intended clients/ the community with the specific objective of informing the project design.

> We conduct focus group discussions with intended clients/the community with the specific objective of informing the project design.

> We conduct individual interviews with intended clients/the community with the specific objective of informing the project design.

> We conduct community meetings with intended clients/the community with the specific objective of informing the project design

> We use feedback that we had received through running surveys/focus group discussions/individual interviews or community meetings on past projects.

> We used feedback that was received by staff through routine project interactions with clients on past project.

> We use information collected from other indirect sources. e.g. *government surveys and data, data collected by other humanitarian or research organisation, etc.*

> We use other information about client perspectives *Please specify*

8 In your view, how important are client perspectives to informing the design of a project/preparation of a proposal?

> Not important

> Somewhat important

> Very important

> I don't know

9 What would you like to do differently in order to be better able to use the perspectives of your targeted clients during the design of a project? *Open response*

The following questions address the barriers to collect and use clients' perspectives during project design:

10 To what degree do you think that time constraints are a barrier to you collecting and using client perspectives during project design? *Rate from 1 to 5 – not at all to very much*

11 To what degree do you think financial resources are a barrier to you collecting and using client perspectives during project design? *Rate from 1 to 5 – not at all to very much*

12 To what degree do you think that human resources (availability of staff, but also skills and capacities) are a barrier to you collecting and using client perspectives during project design? *Rate from 1 to 5 – not at all to very much*

13 To what degree do you think access to clients/their community is a barrier to you to collecting and using client perspectives during project design? *Rate from 1 to 5 – not at all to very much*

14 Kindly share with us any additional information regarding the barriers you face in collecting and using the perspectives of your targeted clients during project design.

15 If you would be interested in participating in a more in-depth interview (approximately 45 minutes) during the month of August on these issues, please include your email address here.

Annex 4: Key Informant Interview Guide

Identification

1 Date of the interview

2 Agency name

3 Interviewee name and function

4 Country/place of intervention

Current Practices and Barriers to Collect and Use Client Feedback in Project Design

5 Can you explain me how projects are designed in your organisation?
What is the process? Who is doing what?

Feedback Collection

6 Can you explain me how you are collecting client feedback during project design?

7 What are the challenges and barriers that you encounter?

8 What do you think works well?
What are the gaps and missed opportunities?

9 What would you like to do differently?
Building on the analysis of the response to survey question 9

Use of Feedback

10 Who is using the information collected and how?

11 What are the challenges and barriers that you encounter?

12 What do you think works well?
What are the gaps and missed opportunities?

13 How and to what extend does client feedback influence project design?
Can you give an example?

Factors Favouring the Collection and Use of Client Feedback

14 What are the internal factors which (would) make it possible for you to collect client feedback?
e.g. leadership, overcoming gatekeepers (such as frontline staff), incentives

15 What are the internal factors which (would) make it possible for you to use client feedback?
e.g. leadership incentives, relevance and use of data/information collected from clients

16 What are the external factors which (would) make it possible for you to collect client feedback?"
e.g. trust, feeling safe to speak, overcoming inequality/power imbalances at community level

17 What are the external factors which (would) make it possible for you to use client feedback?
e.g. donors timelines for proposal writing, flexibility to adapt project interventions

Recommendations to Ensure Client-Responsive Humanitarian Project Design

18 What would you ask your donors to collect and use client feedback in project design?

19 What would you ask your agency leadership team?

20 Is there anything else you would ask other stakeholders to do?

21 Is there anything that we should do collectively (inter-agency advocacy interventions)?

Next Steps

Provide information to the interviewee on the next steps: The findings of the on-line survey complemented by those KII will be compiled into a short report that will be disseminated in the course of September. This will inform additional consultations with humanitarian agencies to draft and disseminate a Design Guidance support humanitarian aid staff to collect and use client feedback in project design and be more responsive to their intended clients

22 What type of guidance do you think humanitarian aid staff need the most to collect client feedback during project design?

23 What guidance do you think they need to use information collected from clients?

24 Who do you think would be the primary users of such a guidance note? What should we take into account for this guidance to be useful to them?

25 What kind of format would you recommend?

26 Would you be interested to provide inputs and feedback to the drafting of the guidance note?

Additional Remarks

27 Is there anything else that you would want to share with us?

ABOVE: A woman in Dana City, Idlib, Syria, provides her thumb print as identification for an IRC cash distribution to displaced families in the area in March, 2017. Three months after being forcibly evacuated from East Aleppo, thousands of families are trying to start over in nearby Idlib. East Aleppo residents had already endured siege, lack of food and health care, and the loss of most income and assets.

After reaching safety in Idlib, multiple families are crowded into small houses or tents without heat, toilets, or running water. Some are selling aid items to get the cash they need to pay rent, buy food, and get overdue medical care. The IRC has reached almost 3,000 households in the area with cash assistance since November 2016, including families from Aleppo and other parts of Syria. The recent arrivals say that cash is by far the most useful form of assistance they have received.   *IRC*

Notes

1   See *Chapter 1* of this report.

2   See p.9, Grunewald & De Geoffroy, Principle 7
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"Request implementing humanitarian organisations
to ensure to the greatest possible extend, adequate
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4   P. Knox Clarke and J. Darcy,
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5   Figure 3, p.12,
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6   See p.70, CDA Collaborative,
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7   See Chapter 3, p.19,
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8   See p.9; Grunewald & De Geoffroy,
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9   See full list of key informants in *Annex 2.*

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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers life-saving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war, persecution or natural disaster. At work today in over 40 countries and 29 cities in the United States, we restore safety, dignity and hope to millions who are uprooted and struggling to endure. The IRC leads the way from harm to home.

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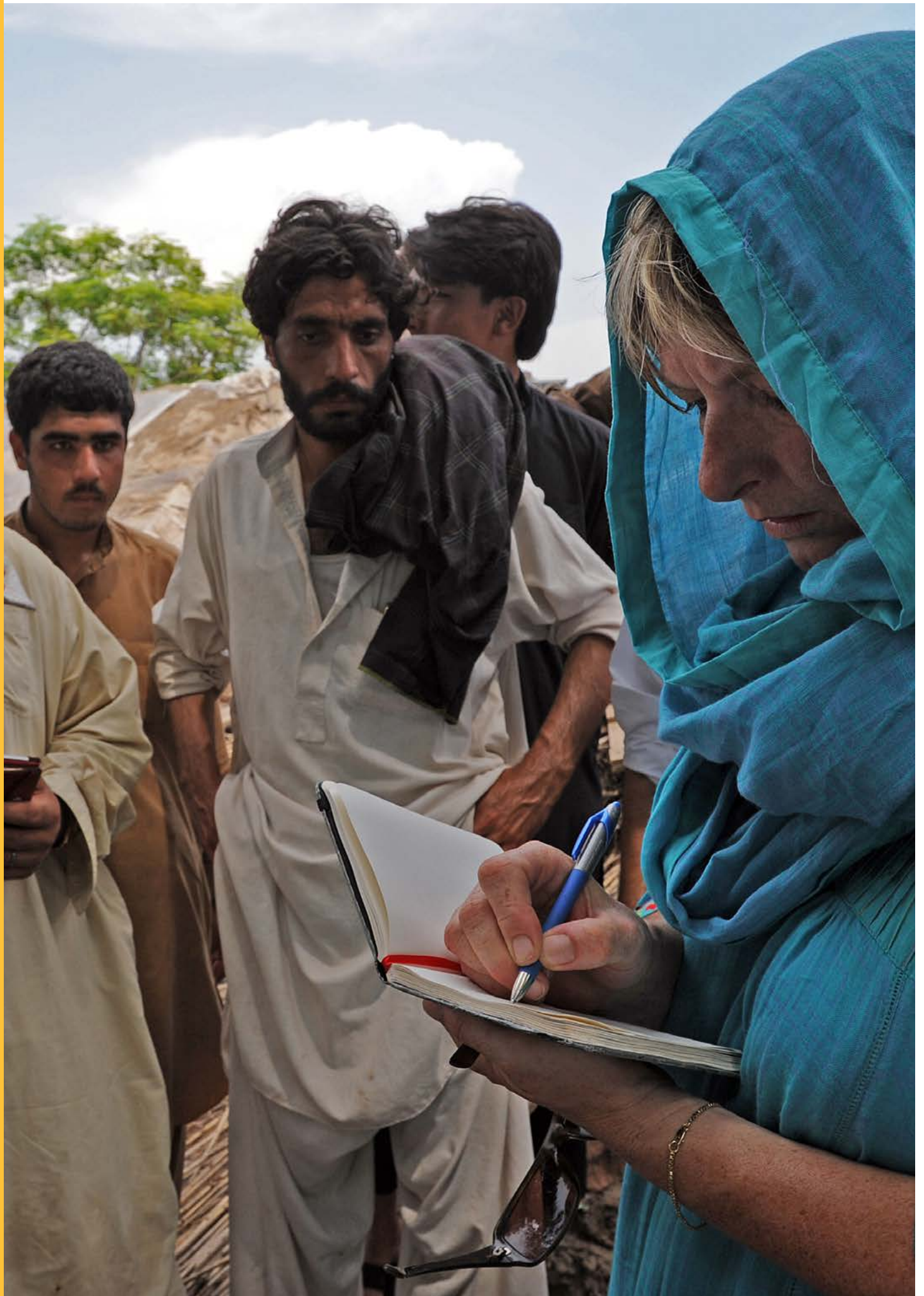   InternationalRescueCommittee

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OPPOSITE: Tineke Ceelen, director of IRC partner, Stichting Vluchteling, collects data in the Azakhel camp near Peshawar in Pakistan.
This camp for Afghan refugees was totally destroyed in the 2010 floods.   *Peter Biro/IRC*