One World Trust

DEC Accountability Framework

Assessment Validation: 2012-13

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Executive Summary

As a collective of the UK's largest International NGOs who raise and distribute funds in times of extreme humanitarian disaster, the Disasters Emergency Committee has a unique position within the British aid system. An essential component of the DEC's model is providing a signal of legitimacy to their donors, by ensuring that the work they fund is conducted under the highest standards of accountability and transparency. This provides the British public with confidence that their donations are being used in the way in which they would wish. One way in which this is ensured is through the Disasters Emergency Committee Accountability Framework (DECAF). The Accountability Framework has two principle objectives:

- To drive and support the improvement of process and practice within each DEC Member Agency
- To provide external assurance that the DEC Member Agencies are working to the highest standards of accountability.

In order to facilitate both objectives, the DEC Secretariat commissions an annual validation of the Member Agencies' self-assessed performance against the DECAF Framework. For the third year, this validation has been conducted by the One World Trust. The following report presents the methodology and findings of the DECAF Validation for 2012/13.

Following an extensive evidence review and analysis of submitted evidence from across the fourteen Member Agencies, the One World Trust was able to validate all of the ratings for the selected Ways of Working. The One World Trust can therefore extrapolate that in all likelihood **the DEC Member Agencies' ratings against the Accountability Framework are correct.**

Member Agencies' self-assessed performance against the Framework for 2012/13 demonstrates a gradual improvement in their accountability policies and practices, compared to 2011/12. This rate of improvement is most likely due to the complexities of securing improvement across large, international organisations, however the new DEC Accountability Framework, introduced in 2011/12, also places increased demands on Member Agencies to meet best practice standards of accountability.

A key way in which Member Agencies are encouraged to plan for improvement against the DEC Accountability Framework is through the formation of yearly Improvement Commitments. Agencies take different approaches to working with Improvement Commitments, and the majority report that it is a useful aspect of the DECAF process. For Commitments made in 2011/12, 87% were either Met or Partially Met, suggesting that they play a role in either shaping, or at least reflecting, Member Agencies' efforts to improve their accountability performance. Where Improvement Commitments were not met, this was due to a variety of reasons, from understandable organisational or staff changes, to unrealistic or unclear Improvement Commitments being submitted. The One World Trust suggests that there is room to strengthen the quality and oversight of Improvement Commitments so that they better serve the DEC Member Agencies and the Secretariat.

The evidence submitted by the Member Agencies, and the accompanying discussion during the Validation Visits provided many interesting examples of innovative and leading approaches, and also

current challenges that Agencies are experiencing. In general, Member Agency staff reported that they found the Validation process this year to be useful and constructive.

That said, there are a number of areas where the One World Trust has identified that the Frameworks' objectives to support internal improvement and provide external assurance are currently limited by challenges with both the content of the Accountability Framework, and the design of the Validation process. A forthcoming, planned review of the current DEC Accountability Framework will offer an opportunity for further development and improvement and to ensure it remains relevant and useful.

The One World Trust believes that the DEC Accountability Framework is a leader in Humanitarian standards, and by striving to refine and improve both its content and methodology of assessment it will continue to offer a valuable tool for the improvement of the DEC Member Agencies.

1 Introduction

The Disasters Emergency Committee Accountability Framework (DECAF) has two principle objectives in its role within the DEC's efforts to ensure quality. Firstly, the Framework drives and supports the improvement of process and practice within each DEC Member Agency. Secondly, the Framework provides assurance to the British public that the DEC Member Agencies are using their donations to implement work to the highest standards of accountability.

In order to facilitate both objectives, the DEC Secretariat commissions an annual validation of the Member Agencies' self-assessed performance against the DECAF Framework. For the third year, this validation has been conducted by the One World Trust.

The following report presents the methodology and findings of the DECAF Validation for 2012/13. The report is structured as follows:

I.   **Methodology** outlines the process by which the Validation was conducted, highlighting new approaches for 2012/13 compared to previous years. It also summarises some challenges with the current DEC Accountability Framework which the One World Trust has identified, which may be instructive in the upcoming review of the DECAF process

II.   **Validation: Findings from the Peer Review Workshops** summarises the evidence provided by the Member Agencies against each of the selected Ways of Working, highlighting innovative approaches and good practice, and identifying areas of improvement.

III. **Direction of Travel** presents an analysis of the Member Agencies progress across the two first years of the new DEC Accountability Framework.

IV.   **Improvement Commitments** reviews how Member Agencies plan and reflect on their continual achievement against the DEC Accountability Framework across the year.

V.   An **Appendix** provides a brief summary of the performance of each Member Agency, individually, including their validated ratings for the selected Ways of Working.

The report concludes by assessing the validation results, the implications for the DEC Accountability Framework, and suggesting some key areas where development of the Framework might be beneficial.

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview of the DEC Accountability Framework

The DEC Accountability Framework consists of four "Priorities" relating to the principles by which Member Agencies aspire:

1) We use our resources efficiently and effectively.
2) We achieve intended programme objectives in accordance with agreed humanitarian standards, principles and behaviours.
3) We are accountable to disaster affected populations.
4) We learn from our experience—taking learning from one emergency to the next.

These are enumerated in 21 specific best practice standards, or, Ways of Working. Agencies assess themselves on their performance against each Way of Working, using a traffic light system of Red, Amber, and Green rating levels:

Red: The agency has no policy or procedure which commits them to working this way.

Amber: The agency has a policy or procedure and some evidence of application, but cannot be confident about systematic delivery.

Green: The agency can show that they have assurance systems in place to ensure that the policies and procedures are being systematically applied.

To accompany their self-assessed ratings for the current year, Member Agencies also submit planned ratings for the following year, accompanied by a number of Improvement Commitments, which detail how they will strengthen their current policies or practices.

The current DEC Accountability Framework was first used in 2011/12, and represented a significant step-change in comparison to its preceding Accountability Framework, in that it raised the standards that Member Agencies were expected to achieve, to be in line with the forefront of thinking around Humanitarian standards of effectiveness and accountability. At the same time the new Framework used since 2011/12 maintained the overall 'less is more' approach of seeking to capture a wider reality of agency practice with a limited but carefully chosen and agreed number of 'Ways of Working' grouped in several 'Accountability Priorities'. Each 'Way of Working' tests the Member Agencies' capabilities to be accountable to a range of stakeholders focused on the immediate subject of the 'Way of Working' on its own. However, the Ways of Working are also proxy indicators that encourage agency reflection and exploration of other connected issues in agencies' practice.

A forthcoming, planned review of the current DEC Accountability Framework will offer an opportunity for further development and improvement of both the Framework content, the assessment methodology and its role and utility for achieving DEC objectives including building public trust in quality of DEC members' work in future years.

2.2 Validation Process

Member Agencies' self-assessed scores against the DEC Accountability Framework are validated through the review of sampled evidence to establish both the likelihood of accuracy of the self-assessment, and to explore individual aspects of practice.   To validate the Member Agencies' self-assessed ratings against the DEC Accountability Framework, the One World Trust selected five of the

21 Ways of Working to consider in depth. The sampled Ways of Working were selected by the One World Trust to afford a perspective from across the four Priorities, and to avoid repetitions from 2012/13. The Ways of Working were also selected to reflect the breadth of stakeholders with which the Member Agencies work, to include staff, partners, local structures and peer coordination mechanisms. In this way the intention was to design an engaging and informative learning process for the Member Agencies, which truly tested the extent of their accountability to different stakeholders.

The five selected Ways of Working were:

- 1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice
- 1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened
- 2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same
- 3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations
- 4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders

The Member Agencies were asked to provide evidence against the five Ways of Working for **two countries** in which they operated. One country was from a recent DEC appeal funded response to a humanitarian disaster (either the Horn of Africa or Haiti). Because there had not been a DEC appeal in 2012/13, the second country was selected by the One World Trust from a list submitted by each Member Agency. Member Agencies could request that their second country be a location in which the agency continued to operate on the basis of funds raised through a previous DEC appeal. However some Member Agencies specifically requested the opportunity to test the organisational spread of their practices by offering country programmes which were not currently or in some cases had never been funded through a DEC appeal. Both such countries are deemed for this report to be 'non-DEC' countries, and are marked in the table below with a *. The countries for each member Agency were as follows:

Table 1: Countries for which Member Agencies submitted evidence

Member Agency	Country 1	Country 2
ActionAid UK	Kenya	Bangladesh*
Age International	Kenya	Haiti
British Red Cross	Haiti	Bangladesh*
CAFOD	Somalia	Haiti
CARE UK	Somalia	South Sudan*
Christian Aid	Kenya	Philippines*
Concern UK	Somalia	Haiti
Islamic Relief	Somalia	Bangladesh*
Merlin	Somalia	Philippines*
Oxfam GB	Somalia	Mali*

Plan UK	Kenya	Ethiopia
Save the Children UK	Somalia	Bangladesh*
Tearfund	Kenya	Niger*
World Vision UK	Somalia	Kenya

The One World Trust reviewed evidence submitted by each agency for the five Ways of Working and the two sample countries. The review of evidence was accompanied by a half day visit to each agency to discuss their evidence in depth. This allowed further evidence to be requested and submitted, for any questions about the evidence answered, and to further probe the organisational processes that each agency had in place. In addition the One World Trust reviewed the Member Agencies' Improvement Commitments, to understand:

- how they are developed and used by the Agency
- whether Commitments submitted last year had been met, and if not, the reasons why
- whether Commitments proposed for 2013/14 were realistic, and would achieve the planned improvement in ratings.

It should be noted that it was out with the scope of this consultancy to verify Agencies' reported achievements against their Improvement Commitments: the discussion aimed to help each Agency reflect on how their Improvement Commitments can best shape their organisational development.

The validation process for 2012/13 differed from the previous two years, where representatives from two or three Member Agencies had reviewed their peers' evidence, facilitated by the One World Trust, with the Peers having responsibility for deciding the final ratings. Feedback from the Member Agencies demonstrated that the new approach had several advantages:

- There was space to describe and discuss the evidence in depth
- The One World Trust was able to probe the agencies' organisational processes which in particular could offer assurance against the Ways of Working
- Shorter meetings, in the agencies' offices meant senior staff could attend, and staff could attend for portions of the visit, meaning a broader contribution from across the agency could be achieved
- Ratings could be firmly challenged or validated by the One World Trust. Previous experience has shown that peers were unable to successfully do this, both because they had not had the opportunity to assess the evidence ahead of the meetings (due to the demands on their time this would have caused), and because they were often personally reluctant to robustly confront their colleagues on the evidence provided.

It should be noted that in order to ensure that learning is captured and shared between Member Agencies (a key objective of the previous Peer Validation workshops), a "Learning Conference" will be held with the Member Agencies on the 3rd of June 2013, allowing discussion of key issues that they have experienced in the previous year.

Following the Validation visits, the Member Agencies were able to submit further evidence if required. After reviewing this, the One World Trust presented and discussed its findings with the DEC Secretariat, to reach conclusions about the final validated ratings.

2.3 Challenges with the current DECAF process

The DEC has been using the DECAF approach as part of its wider quality assurance process for a number of years. Both the Framework itself and the validation method have undergone some changes in response to experience, and to maximise the benefit for the DEC Member Agencies, collectively and individually. In order to ensure that the DEC Accountability Framework continues to effectively support Member Agencies' accountability improvement, and offer assurance to external stakeholders, the DEC Secretariat is planning to conduct a consultation and review of DECAF's purposes and processes. In anticipation of this exercise the One World Trust would like to offer some suggested areas for development which we have identified over the course of three DECAF cycles.

- **Limitations of the RAG ratings**: The RAG rating system has the advantage of providing a quick and simple visual impression of where agencies stand individually, and from the pattern, where the group stands overall. Yet it has become evident that the Red Amber Green classifications do not necessarily capture the breadth of standards between Member Agencies. In particular, the Amber rating is very broad, and achieving Green can be either relatively straightforward, or highly complex depending on the Way of Working and the individual humanitarian setting. A possible approach, in order to improve the value of the assessment and validation process as a generator of focused and telling year-on-year management information while keeping the 'dashboard' quality of the overall system, would be to subdivide the ratings with clearly formulated thresholds.

- **Understanding of "assurance":** Agency staff, particularly those new to the DECAF process can find it hard to understand what systematic assurance would look like for each Way of Working, partly because the contexts of work can vary so much. Systematic assurance mechanisms are an important part of raising organisational performance, and the DEC Accountability Framework is notable for looking for them. However, as in previous years it is evident that there are varying degrees of understanding of what assurance means, particularly as to how it differs from simply being evidence of application, and where Member Agency staff should look for evidence of assurance (i.e. internal auditing systems). This could be addressed through a combination of focused induction and training for new accountability leads and improved narrative guidance.

- **Definitions of Ways of Working**: The DECAF Guidance notes provide some explanation of what each Way of Working means, and the types of evidence that is required for policy, application and assurance. However the One World Trust has found that in some cases the Guidance is insufficient, or because of lack of clarity hampers progress towards the standard raising objective of the Way of Working. Once clarified often significantly different, new and important evidence was submitted. There is therefore a need to create clearer definitions of what each Way of Working requires, including improved explanations of what suitable evidence may look like. One possibility may be to develop set indicators for each Way of Working, which are scored separately, but cumulatively give a more differentiated picture of a Member Agency's performance against the Way of Working and overall. The development of such indicators however would necessarily have to face challenges stemming from the different ways in which some Member Agencies work.

- **Focus of the Ways of Working**: in a good number of discussions Member Agencies highlighted that certain Ways of Working in fact contained several different requirements which demanded different evidence, and that this could be complex to meet. Examples include multiple stakeholders being named, or qualifying adjectives such as 'effectively' being applied to activities, with such 'effectiveness' being beyond the agency's ability to measure or record. In some cases these challenges can be resolved through agreement on common guidance. In other cases a clearer wording of the Ways of Working may be desirable.

- **Improvement Commitments**: Discussions with agencies and review of the Improvement Commitments showed that the DEC Accountability Framework asks agencies important questions, but is not proving to be a universally useful tool. This is because there is limited guidance on the way Improvement Commitments should be formulated, tracked and reported on, and the connection between them and the existing organisational accountability performance as displayed through DECAF. As is expanded on later (see p 37) there is room to increase the effectiveness of the Improvement Commitment section of the DECAF process in driving organisational improvement by ensuring that they are SMART, and possibly by verifying each Member Agencies progress against their commitments in the same way that the main DECAF framework self-assessments are validated. Due to the additional workload this would entail, there would need to be consensus from the Member Agencies that this is something they fully support.

3 Validation: findings from Member Agencies' evidence and visits

The five Ways of Working selected for the Validation process for 2012/13 are detailed on p5.

The One World Trust was able to validate the ratings of all the Member Agencies, against all five of these selected Ways of Working. The One World Trust can therefore confirm that **the DEC Member Agencies' ratings against the Accountability Framework are likely to be correct.** This is a notable improvement from the 2011/12 process, which had an accuracy rating of only 87% meaning the self-assessed ratings could not be unequivocally confirmed. It is likely that the improvement is mainly due to the use of the new DECAF Framework in 2011/12, which Member Agencies are now more familiar with. That said, also this year, a very significant number of submitted self-assessment ratings tested in the sample (16 out 42, = 38%) were not initially sufficiently supported by evidence (i.e. potential candidates for downgrades), and in a further 7 cases (16.7%) we initially considered upgrades[1]. All ratings could eventually be confirmed following:

- discussion of gaps and clarifications on the nature of evidence required,
- discussion and agreeing with reasons given that the case for an upgrade was not conclusive, and
- submission of further evidence,

However, the high proportion of instances where questions needed to be asked shows that the quality of initial submissions is not as high as could be expected. This demonstrates that the review process does not only fulfil the validation objective, but also provides a scrutiny role and capacity support on the quality of data collated by agencies for the DECAF process. In the future, Member Agencies are invited to review their initial draft evidence compilations more robustly before submitting them to the validators.

The following subsections consider the Member Agencies' achievement against each Way of Working in depth. An initial overview provides contextual understanding for the Way of Working's position in the DEC Accountability Framework, and offers some insight into any particular challenges or debates that were raised by the Member Agencies. The following analysis discusses how Member Agencies performed against the Way of Working. An overview of ratings for that Way of Working in terms of the DECAF Red Amber Green scale is followed by consideration of different approaches taken by Member Agencies in meeting the Way of Working. '**Common practice'** describes how the majority of agencies have shown themselves to meet the Way of Working. **'Practices that lead the way'** provide insights into agency approaches where evidence of new or particularly successful systems and methods has been submitted. '**Need for improvement'** details how some agencies are still exploring ways to improve their practice against the Way of Working. It is important to recognise that Member Agencies often work in very difficult contexts, and are striving to provide the best

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[1] In some cases Member Agencies had clear evidence of assurance mechanisms but chose to remain "strategically Amber" for a variety of internal reasons. However as the One World Trust can only assess the evidence that is provided to us, we cannot guarantee that there are not more instances were an in depth audit would reveal examples of assurance mechanisms. The decision was taken to allow "strategic Ambers" in order to facilitate internal improvement, or due to an organisations' particular interpretation of a Way of Working (see Christian Aid on Way of Working 1.2 p10)

possible service to disaster affected people, therefore Member Agencies' willingness to share and reflect on their challenges should be commended.

Because several of the Ways of Working are composite, involving different aspects of agency practice, some agencies may feature in more than one approach. By focusing the discussion of Agencies' evidence on common practice, practice that leads the way and practice where there is a need for improvement, this report follows from the analysis conducted in the 2011/12 Validation Report. As then, it is believed that discussing different *practices* rather than effective Red Amber and Green ratings allows greater differentiation between agencies who are performing particularly well, and those whose practice is still developing in different settings. As mentioned previously, the RAG ratings have some considerable limitations, not least that they can mask good and bad practice, and that achieving a Green rating for one Way of Working can be significantly harder than for another, or harder for one agency than another. Throughout the following section, text boxes pick out particularly interesting approaches to meeting the Ways of Working.

3.1   Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice (Way of Working 1.2)
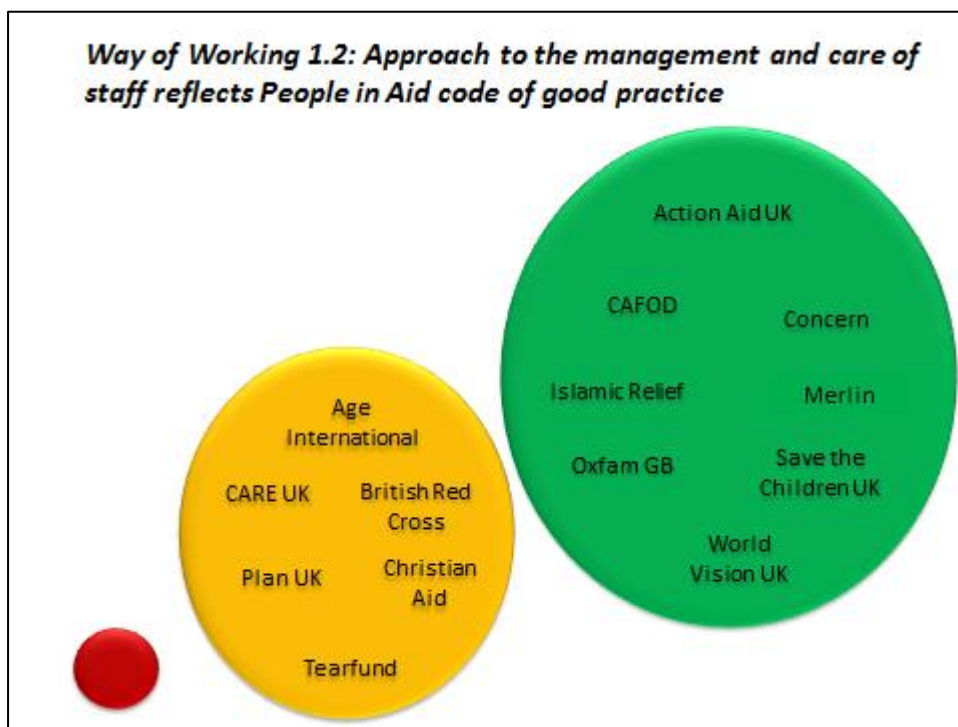
Figure 1: Distribution of RAG Ratings for Way of Working 1.2

Way of Working 1.2: Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice

"**Evidence should demonstrate that** risks to staff security and well being are assessed for all programmes and reviewed at regular intervals; that staff receive induction/ training, have clear objectives and are subject to regular performance management; that the effectiveness/ fairness of recruitment is monitored and that HR procedures themselves are regularly reviewed." *DEC Accountability Framework Assessment Guidelines*

Practices that lead the way

- Agencies are certified as "Verified Compliant" by People in Aid, meaning that an external audit has confirmed that their HR policies and procedures are in line with the PiA Code of Good Conduct
- Internal Audit teams review the application of HR policies and procedures
- Self-assessments completed by country offices review their HR procedures

Common approaches

- Agencies have clear HR policies and procedures
- Do not necessarily have processes in place to ensure HR policies are systematically applied
- Some agencies working through partners do not feel it is appropriate for them to enforce HR procedures upon their partners

Continuous Improvement

3.1.1 Overview

This Way of Working concerns Member Agencies' accountability to their staff. Drawing on the standards set by the People in Aid Code of good practice (See **Error! Reference source not found.**),

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this Way of Working concerns issues around staff recruitment, performance management, training and development, and staff security and well-being. For agencies that work with partners, they should demonstrate how they support their partners to meet these standards. As this Way of Working in effect summarises the entire standards of People in Aid Code of Good Practice, the necessary evidence to be submitted is extensive, often requiring individual policies, and application evidence for each of the four areas listed above. It should be noted that no attempt was made to evaluate the *quality* of the policies and procedures provided: their existence was deemed satisfactory.

> **Text Box 1: The People in Aid Code of Good Practice**
>
> The People in Aid Code of Good Practice is an internationally recognised standard on Human Resource Management for Humanitarian and Development agencies. The Code of Good Practice consists of seven Principles, including strategy, staff policies, management of staff, communication with staff, recruitment, staff training and development, and staff health safety and security. Agencies can engage with People in Aid on three levels: as members, as "Committed to People in Aid" meaning they have made a public commitment to uphold the Code's principles, and as "Verified Compliant" meaning that they have undertaken an extensive external audit to confirm that their practices are in-line with the People in Aid standards.

The DECAF Way of Working concerning management and care of staff specifically references the People in Aid Code of Good Practice, because it is widely regarded as an industry standard in this field. In addition the DEC recognise and encourage their members to engage in a range of other industry wide standards, such as Sphere, HAP and the Red Cross Code of Conduct (this is part of *Way of Working 2.1: the agency has defined and documented processes for programme management which are underpinned by a clear statement of standards*). This linkage ensures that the DECAF remains at the forefront of industry thinking around humanitarian standards, and that the Member Agencies meet standards that are widely expected in their sector. It also prevents unnecessary duplication by agencies who participate in one or more of the other agreed standards.

As with the other agreed standards, Way of Working 1.2 does not require that Member Agencies are members of People in Aid: simply that their internal HR policies and procedures reflect People in Aid's standards. Certification that a Member Agency is "Verified Compliant" with People in Aid (i.e. who have undertaken an extensive external audit of their HR policies and practices) is considered sufficient assurance to achieve a Green rating, although such agencies are encouraged to demonstrate other internal assurance processes as well.

3.1.2   Common practice

Management and care of staff is now regarded as a fairly fundamental aspect of good practice for Humanitarian agencies, and so no evidence was presented which suggested that individual agencies were being challenged with basic implementation. All were able to provide examples of the application of their policies at both the UK office and field level. Many agencies however chose to remain Amber because of a lack of confidence in systematic application. For example Help Age field offices report that they are unsure about the systematic application of People in Aid standards, despite the existence of an Internal HR Audit process. Similarly Plan UK feel that they do not receive sufficient assurance from Plan International about their country offices' compliance with HR policies,

although they are hoping next to year to have sufficient internal assurance mechanisms to achieve Green. Because of their position within the CARE International Family, CARE UK recognise that there may well be sufficient assurance mechanisms present at an International level for this Way of Working, but they encounter challenges accessing this evidence, leading to their Amber rating. Tearfund has extensively worked with partners on the translation of People in Aid Code principles and aligned Tearfund policy into local HR practices and procedures. However, the current internal audit on HR practices has not yet been completed, lacking the final assurance element for Tearfund itself.

3.1.3 Practices that lead the way

Divergence between agencies on this Way of Working centred around their ability to *ensure* that the policies were being systematically applied in the field, which largely was determined by the structure of the organisation, and whether they worked with partners. Some agencies were able to provide direct assurance evidenced as to their HR standards both in the UK office, and overseas. World Vision International's People and Culture Scorecards facilitate a regular assessment of HR procedures resulting in a dashboard display of strengths and weaknesses. Concern and CAFOD presented certification by People in Aid, alongside internal HR Audit processes, as evidence of systematic assurance. ActionAid were able to demonstrate strong policies and application evidence across their field offices, supported by a Human Resources and Organisational Effectiveness unit at ActionAid International. Like other agencies Merlin and Oxfam also make active use of the internal audit function as assurance mechanisms, including Oxfam asking internal auditors on country visits to specifically test some DECAF related questions, hence beginning to mainstreaming the systems focus of DECAF into general working procedures beyond its Humanitarian Indicator Tool reporting.

3.1.4 Working through Partners

For organisations that work through partners, there was a split of opinions as to how this Way of Working should be applied. The DECAF Guidelines state that "for partnership working, evidence should demonstrate what processes we have in place to support our partners to meet our standards". As an organisation that implements through Partners, CAFOD provides support to them on HR issues, and their Partner profiles ask broadly about the HR systems they have in place. In combination with their own certification by People in Aid, this is sufficient for a Green rating. However, despite also being Verified Compliant by People in Aid, Christian Aid consider that they should be looking at the HR standards of those who implement the work on the ground; their partner organisations. Therefore because they do not *assure* their partners' HR standards, and do not feel it would be appropriate to do so, they have rated themselves as Amber, which the Validators respect. Tearfund adopts a similar position in that it provides a significant level of support through organisational capacity assessments and continued training, which manifests itself in developed HR procedures at the partner level. However Tearfund remains sceptical about how widespread this level of achievement is across all of its partners' operations.

Oxfam reports the interesting experience of one of its Somalia based partner Hijra moving ahead with its own PiA Code certification (see Figure
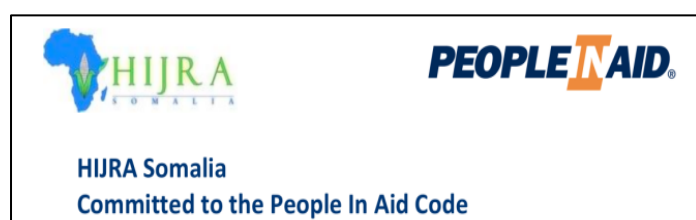

Figure 3: Oxfam partner Hijra PiA certification

3), demonstrating the effect of long term partner support in this field.

3.2 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened (Way of Working 1.6)
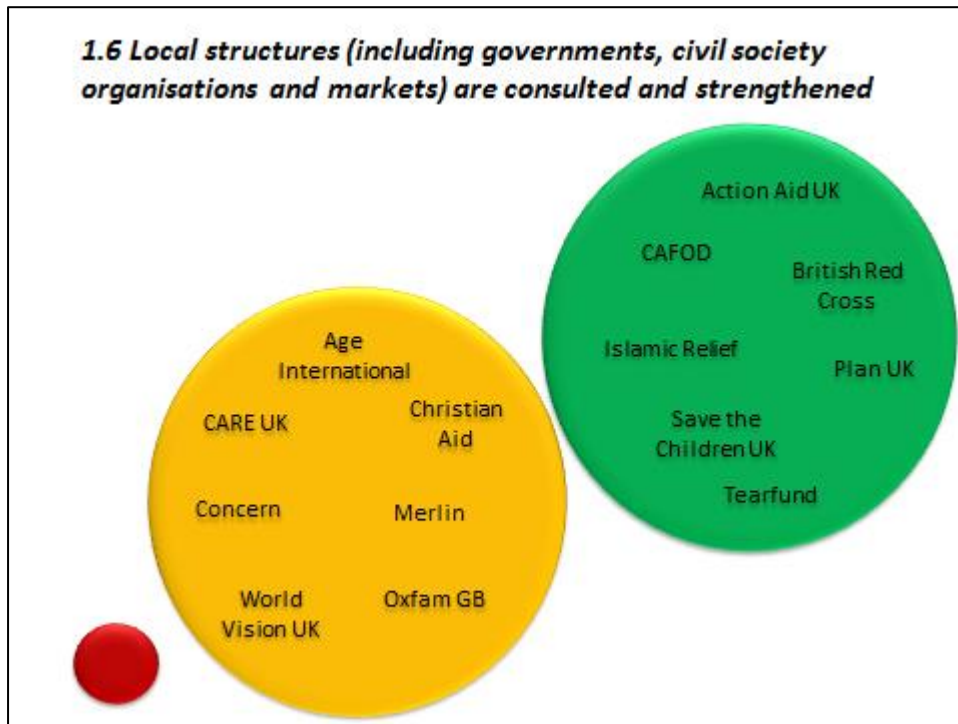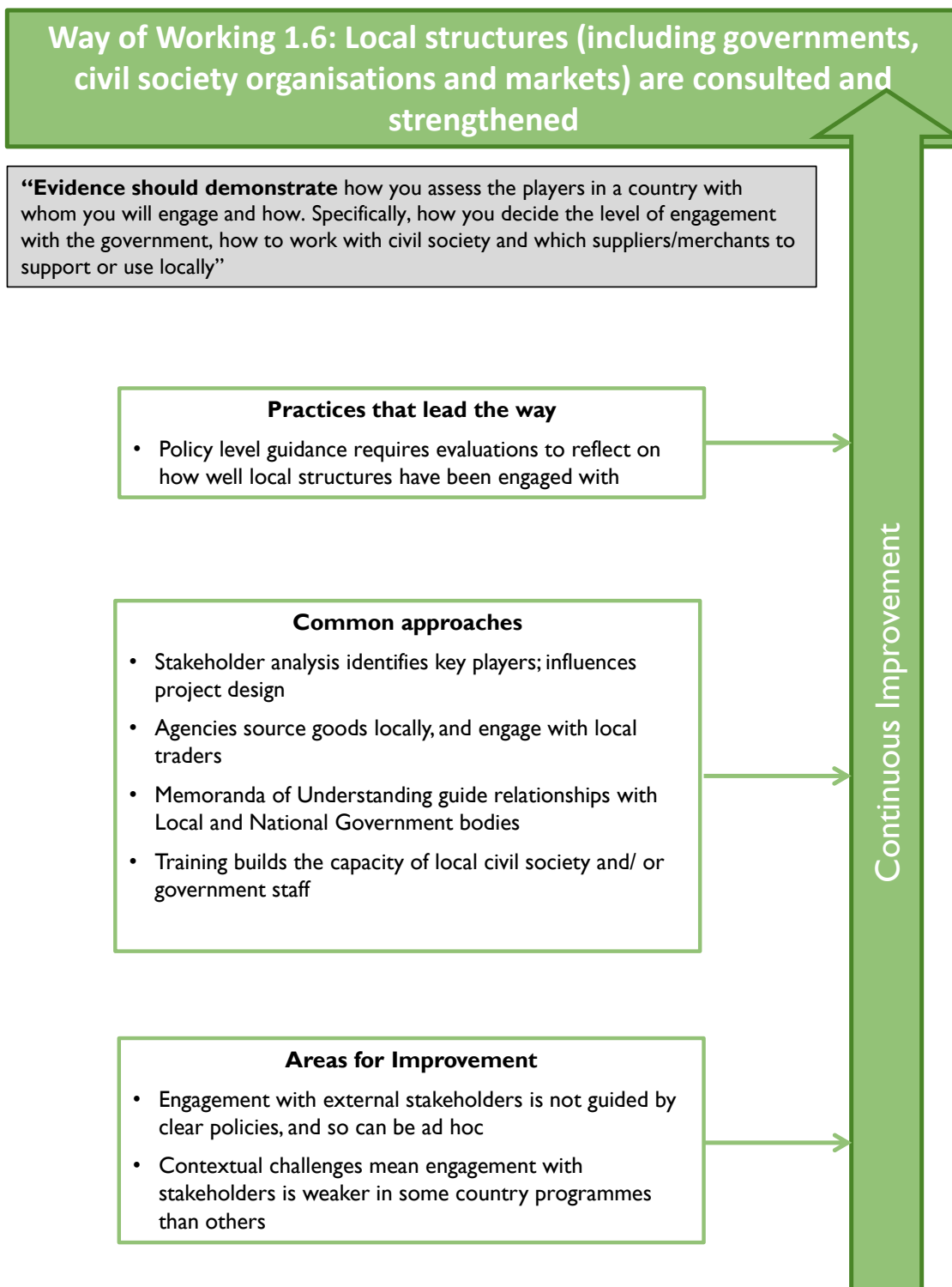

Figure 4: Distribution of RAG ratings for Way of Working 1.6

3.2.1 Overview

This Way of Working encourages Member Agencies to think about the context in which they are working, and the impact they have on existing local institutions and organisations, looking beyond their own beneficiaries and communities. This may involve consulting, working with and offering training local or national government departments, local councils and local civil society organisations. It also includes analysing local markets and traders, and ensuring procurement supports the local economy where possible. A concern raised by several agencies focused on the scope of this Way of Working: not only was it ambitious to seek to implement it with regards to all three named stakeholder groups, but also in some cases government was non-existent or not a viable stakeholder. To address this, in assessing compliance with this Way of Working the validators looked for engagement with at least two of the three stakeholder groups mentioned. Importantly, this Way of Working does not concern Member Agencies' work with Partners (which is the concern of Way of Working 1.5).

This was a challenging Way of Working for many agencies to evidence. Several agencies initially focused their evidence on work with Partners: after subsequent requests all were able to provide some examples of work with other local structures as well. In particular few agencies had policies

Way of Working 1.6: Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened

"Evidence should demonstrate how you assess the players in a country with whom you will engage and how. Specifically, how you decide the level of engagement with the government, how to work with civil society and which suppliers/merchants to support or use locally"

Practices that lead the way

• Policy level guidance requires evaluations to reflect on how well local structures have been engaged with

Common approaches

• Stakeholder analysis identifies key players; influences project design

• Agencies source goods locally, and engage with local traders

• Memoranda of Understanding guide relationships with Local and National Government bodies

• Training builds the capacity of local civil society and/ or government staff

Areas for Improvement

• Engagement with external stakeholders is not guided by clear policies, and so can be ad hoc

• Contextual challenges mean engagement with stakeholders is weaker in some country programmes than others

Continuous Improvement

which articulated the need to strengthen local structures: this was problematic when looking for satisfactory assurance mechanisms, as systematic monitoring and evaluation is often guided by specific policies.

A further challenge was created by the divergence between the wording of the Way of Working itself, and the accompanying Guidance notes. Whereas the latter requires that local structures are consulted *and* strengthened, the former merely recommends that evidence shows how local players are assessed, and the level of engagement with them decided upon. For this reason, the Validators accepted evidence of stakeholder analysis as sufficient, without evidence of local structures also being strengthened. However it should be noted that this concession weakens the standard raising power of DECAF. *Strengthening* local structures should be an aspiration of all Humanitarian agencies, and indeed many do achieve this already: the DEC Accountability Framework should encourage all Agencies to ensure this is an integral aspect of their programming.

> **Text Box 2: BRC Strengthening Local Markets**
>
> Working with a local NGO, Prodipan, in Bangladesh, the British Red Cross helped local people to better engage with markets. By conducting a market analysis, establishing Producer Groups at a local level, and then linking these groups with market traders, the project helped local communities to collectively negotiate a better price for their goods.

3.2.2 Common practice

All agencies were able to demonstrate some examples of engaging with local structures. Many agencies provided evidence of procurement guidelines and procedures to show how they source goods locally wherever possible in order to sustain local economies. Some agencies' projects went beyond this to actively engage with local markets: Christian Aid conduct Emergency Market Mapping at the beginning of a project to assess what the impact of cash distribution will be on prices. In Bangladesh the British Red Cross worked with their Partner to link local producer groups with Market Traders, in order to secure better prices for their products (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

It was common for agencies to provide Memoranda of Understanding with Local or National Governments as evidence of their engagement, although it may be debatable to what extent such documents demonstrate a consultative or supportive relationship. Working with government bodies can certainly be a delicate task: it may not be appropriate for an agency to presume to strengthen their capacity, or even to consult with them, beyond achieving an understanding of what work is required. There were several examples however of agencies working in collaboration with government bodies, for example, World Vision drew on the expertise of the Ministry of Livestock in Kenya, to source breeding goats for a project (see Text Box 3: World Vision: Scouting for Goats), and Plan provided training for the Government on Disaster Risk Management issues. In South Sudan CARE Netherlands provided training to traditional leaders to help their understanding of the Local Government Act.

Merlin in particular emphasised the use of MoU with Governments as assurance mechanisms as they constitute the outcome of a negotiated process, rather than just being a forward looking tool. At the same time it was recognised that such agreements had limits because despite an organisational desire to contribute to the strengthening of the institution, governments in fact often resented the idea of any such tools being used to review their performance in the sense of leading to reporting or assessment from their end.

Whilst building the capacity of Partners was not a concern of this Way of Working, some agencies did show that they strengthened other civil society organisations. For example CAFOD provided training for groups of block makers in Haiti. In Somalia CARE is a founding member of the Somalia NGO Consortium, which brings together national and international NGOs in order to facilitate co-ordination and share information (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Text Box 3: World Vision: Scouting for Goats

In Kenya, World Vision worked with the Ministry of Livestock to source Galla goat breeding bucks, which could be introduced to herds in Hulugho District, to strengthen the gene pool, and thus increase milk production.

3.2.3 Practices that leads the way

As mentioned above, some Agencies struggled to demonstrate systematic assurance, despite good evidence of application, which may be a result of a lack of policy level guidance on this issue. A notable exception was ActionAid, whose Human Rights Based Approach places responsibility for service provision upon governments, and sees ActionAid's role as helping local communities to ensure they receive this service from the state. ActionAid's Evaluation ToR requires evaluators to reflect on whether this policy has been met. An alternative approach to assurance used for this Way of Working was to demonstrate that stakeholder analysis is a necessary component of the project management cycle: this was the approach of both Plan and the BRC. Interestingly both Christian Aid and CARE are currently rolling out political economy analysis tools to move beyond basic stakeholder mapping to achieve a greater understanding of the political context and vulnerabilities. Both Christian Aid's Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment, and CARE's Governance Context Analysis offer the potential to provide assurance against this Way of Working, once they are systematically adopted across the organisations.

Islamic Relief pointed towards the impact of the application of its own rigorous procurement policy in host countries such as Bangladesh on the transparency of government service provision and procurement in projects that Islamic Relief is involved in.

3.2.4 Need for improvement

Although all agencies could demonstrate some evidence of strengthening local structures, some were notably weaker and less regular than others. This was often due to a lack of clear policies or programme management systems which required a stakeholder analysis, and so engagement with external actors was ad hoc, depending on individual project design. Agencies also varied in achievement on this Way of Working between countries. Merlin noted that its approach to work through MoU with government or government departments was overall crucial for its ability to operate, but also offered opportunities to plant the seeds for quality assurance as part of government work. While it could not evidence this as being successful in the chosen country

contexts, Merlin pointed out that in other countries MoU for instance included 'patient charters', which showed the positive impact of the organisation's approach on its collaborators. Oxfam's demonstration of its consultation and strengthening practice was strong, but rated itself as Amber as the evaluation itself did not yet reveal assurance of the effectiveness of the engagement of shopkeepers and communities.

3.3   Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same (Way of Working 2.4)
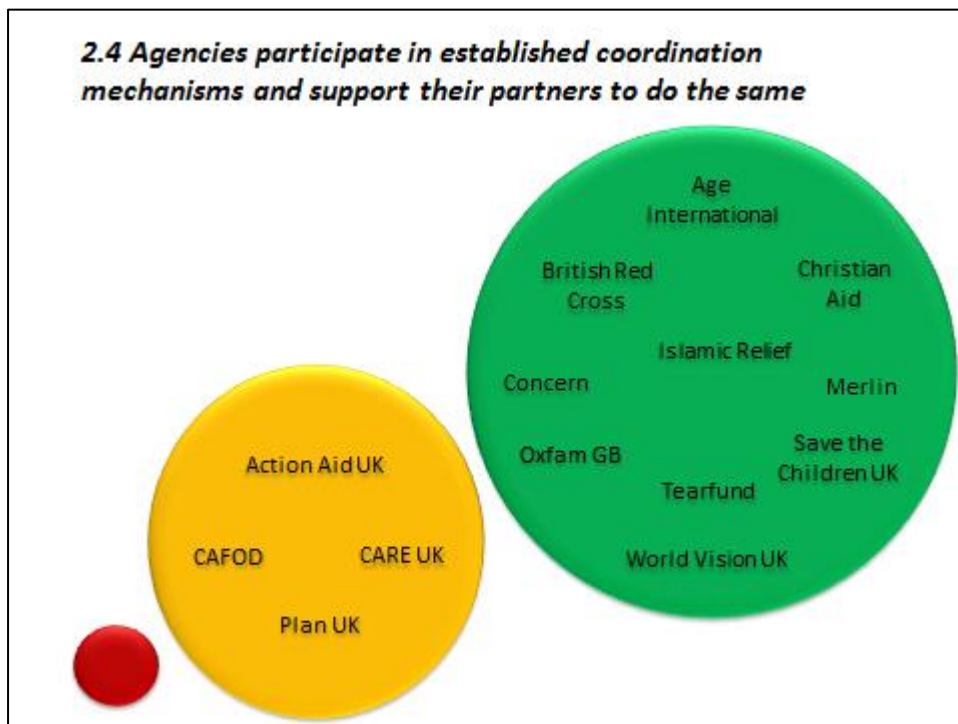
Figure 6: Distribution of RAG ratings for Way of Working 2.4

3.3.1   Overview

Following on from Way of Working 1.6, this Way of Working encourages Member Agencies to engage with other organisations working in their country or region, in order to coordinate activities and avoid unnecessary duplication. This particularly refers to existing integrated coordination mechanisms, such as national government meetings, or UN Cluster meetings, on specific thematic issues such as water/sanitation, emergency shelter and nutrition.

Way of Working 2.4: Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same

"Evidence should demonstrate that with clusters- and other means of integrated coordination- as a matter of course, take on leadership roles (national or international) when we can and that we seek out opportunities to coordinate and cooperate with other agencies"

Practices that lead the way

- Agencies support their partners to engage in coordination mechanisms and/ or make sure that partners' perspectives are fed up to the Cluster meeting level
- Agencies advocate to donor bodies and the UN to be more accesible to local organisations.

Common approaches

- Agencies regularly attend meetings of UN Cluster groups or other coordination mechanisms, evidenced through meeting minutes
- Reporting mechanisms such as Situation Reports and Programme Evaluations ask about engagement with coordination mechanisms

Areas for Improvement

- Agencies lack reporting mechanisms to ensure that engagement with co-ordination mechanisms occurs systematically
- Reporting mechanisms highlight that country programmes are not always engaging with coordination mechanisms

Continuous Improvement

This Way of Working specifically asks Member Agencies to support their partners to also participate in coordination mechanisms. In many cases, partner organisations are implementing activities on the ground, and so are in the best position to contribute to coordination mechanisms. Some agencies

such as CAFOD find that their partners are able to participate easily in Cluster meetings, however other Member Agencies have reported challenges with this. In some contexts they have found that staff from local organisations may find it difficult to access Cluster meetings or may even be refused entry, in other cases, Member Agencies recognise that it would not be appropriate for their staff from grassroots CSOs to attend international level UN meetings. As the support of partners is explicitly mentioned in this Way of Working, the validators pushed all Member Agencies to provide evidence of how they worked within these challenges to allow their partners to meaningfully contribute to coordination meetings.

> **Text Box 4: CARE: Somalia NGO Consortium**
>
> CARE is a founding member of the Somalia NGO consortium, which brings together 86 local and international NGOs to provide a coordinated voice within a very complex operating environment. The NGO Consortium shares information and analysis, facilitates coordination and joint advocacy, and improves representation of its members with stakeholders including local authorities, donors and the UN. Recently NGO Consortium members contributed to a strategic review of UN Integration.

For some agencies, contextual challenges were experienced in the particular countries discussed. Tearfund's partner in Niger JAMED works on food security issues in a very remote region, so it would not be feasible for them to regularly attend national level coordination meetings on water, sanitation, and hygiene. In Somalia, World Vision took the unusual step of deciding to work with partners in order to secure better access to vulnerable people. Part of their partner selection process involved checking that the organisation was actively involved in local coordination mechanisms and UN Clusters.

3.3.2   Common practice

The majority of agencies were able to show that they and/ or their partners regularly attended UN cluster meetings, or other similar coordination mechanisms. This was evidenced through the provision of minutes from the meetings, which showed attendance by the Member Agency or its partner. Most agencies then had assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that engagement with coordination mechanisms was taking place. This generally consisted of a reporting system such as a Situation Report or Evaluation template which includes a specific question about the agencies engagement in coordination mechanisms. For example World Vision's HEA Scorecards ask country offices to conduct a quarterly self-assessment of their operations, including engagement with coordination mechanisms: they then have to provide supporting evidence (for example cluster meeting minutes) to their regional offices.

3.3.3   Practices that lead the way

Innovative approaches to this Way of Working concerned ways in which the perspectives of local partners could be represented at Cluster level meetings. ActionAid is again notable here for having policy level guidance in their Emergency Response Guidelines which specifically mentions the need to promote local perspectives at national coordination meetings, although they recognise that in practice this is not yet happening systematically. As Text Box 4 describes, CARE provided evidence of the Somalia NGO Consortium which brings together national and international NGOs working in Somalia, whose role includes coordinating with donors on behalf of their members.

CAFOD requires a different approach: to feedback from the field to CAFOD's UK office, staff participate in regular telephone briefing meetings with their partners to ensure they are kept up to date with their *partners* engagement in coordination mechanisms. Christian Aid go one step further, by advocating to donors such as ECHO, DfID and the UN to be more accessible and welcoming to local organisations: they feel this is particularly important, as it is the partners who are operating, and therefore should be engaged.

3.3.4 Need for improvement

All agencies were able to demonstrate their participation in some form of coordination mechanisms. However, several do not have reporting systems in place to ensure that this is regularly happening, or, where they do,

> **Text Box 5: Age International- Involving partners in grassroots coordination activities**
>
> Age International reported their experience of involving a locally well established partner (RACIDA, Mandera / Kenya) in coordination work as being particularly effective in establishing engagement in coordination by other district level stakeholders and avoiding duplication. Assurance was sought by specifically probing this aspect with RACIDA partners during the qualitative data collection phase.

recognise that their reports are in fact highlighting that engagement with coordination mechanisms (particularly by partners) is poor or sporadic, and therefore work needs to be done to improve engagement. For instance while overall performing well on policy, application and assurance on this Way of Working Islamic Relief also reported that the difficulties in following field staff work in a remote management situation (such as Somalia) at times led to duplication of efforts at local level, compounded by difficulties of effectively coordination and communication with some Diaspora community support initiatives.

3.4 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations (Way of Working 3.5)
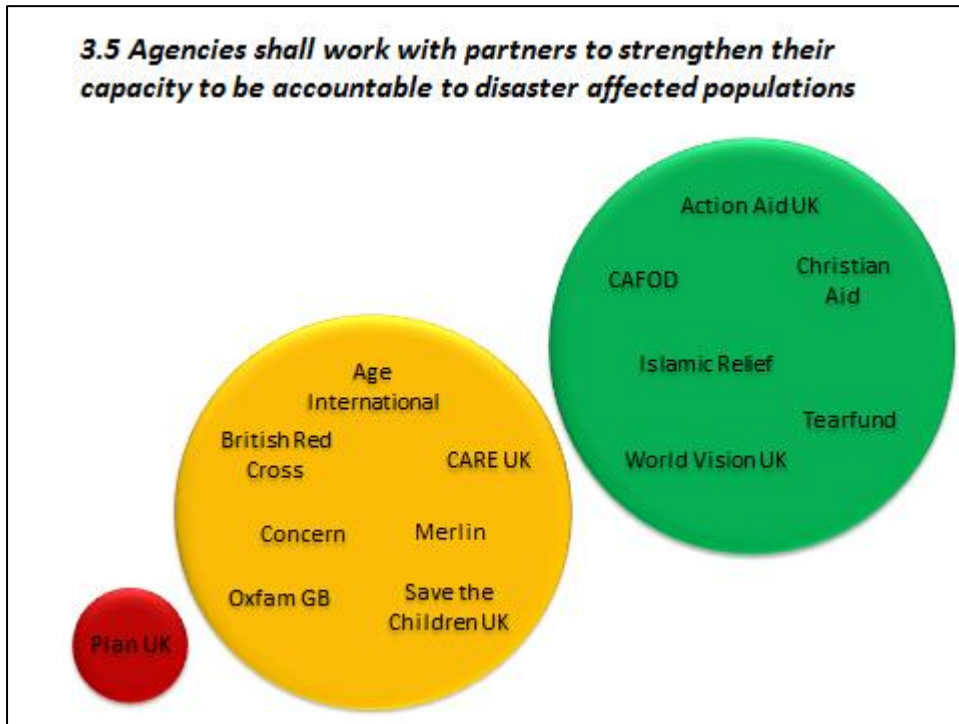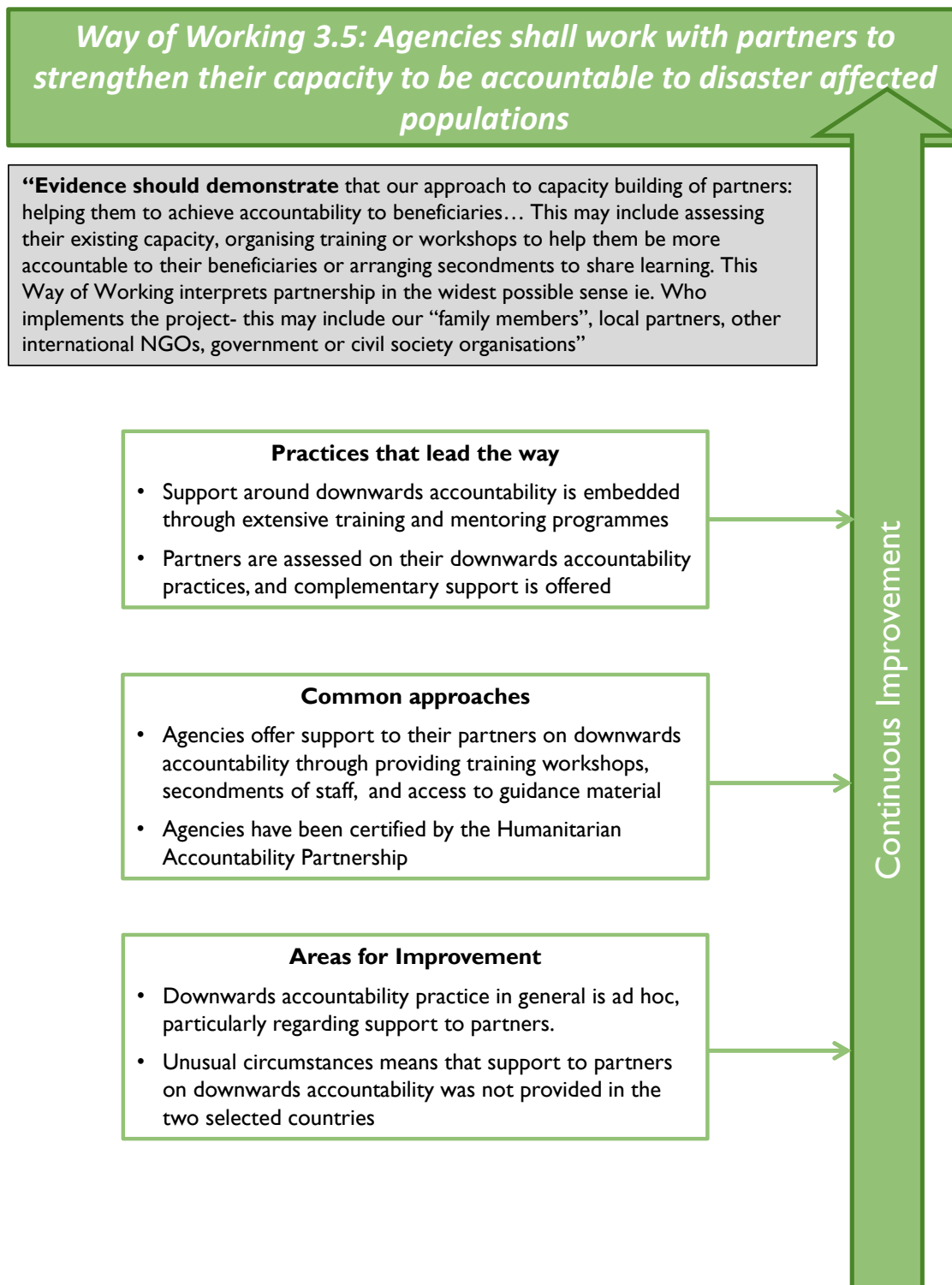

Figure 8: Distribution of RAG ratings for Way of Working 3.5

3.4.1 Overview

Priority Three of the DEC Accountability Framework concerns accountability to disaster affected populations. For each of the Ways of Working the Guidelines suggest that for partnerships, Agencies should have clearly stated expectations of how their partners will meet the standard. Way of Working 3.5 specifically focuses on the *support* that the Member Agency will provide their partners to help them meet the previous four Ways of Working concerning downwards accountability. This directly reflects the revised HAP Standard, which expects that agencies working with Partners support those partners to also meet the set standards of accountability and quality management.

As not all DEC Member Agencies work with partner organisations, the Guidelines indicate that a broad definition of Partners can be accepted, as far as those who are implementing the project, including "family members". For example, the British Red Cross partners are other National Societies; for World Vision the implementers of their projects are staff from World Vision National Offices.

Way of Working 3.5: Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations

"**Evidence should demonstrate** that our approach to capacity building of partners: helping them to achieve accountability to beneficiaries… This may include assessing their existing capacity, organising training or workshops to help them be more accountable to their beneficiaries or arranging secondments to share learning. This Way of Working interprets partnership in the widest possible sense ie. Who implements the project- this may include our "family members", local partners, other international NGOs, government or civil society organisations"

Practices that lead the way

- Support around downwards accountability is embedded through extensive training and mentoring programmes
- Partners are assessed on their downwards accountability practices, and complementary support is offered

Common approaches

- Agencies offer support to their partners on downwards accountability through providing training workshops, secondments of staff, and access to guidance material
- Agencies have been certified by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

Areas for Improvement

- Downwards accountability practice in general is ad hoc, particularly regarding support to partners.
- Unusual circumstances means that support to partners on downwards accountability was not provided in the two selected countries

Continuous Improvement

3.4.2   Common practice

DEC Member Agencies who regularly work through Partners have often experienced challenges providing satisfactory evidence against other Ways of Working under Priority Three. It was notable

that these were the agencies who performed particularly strongly under this Way of Working: able to show clear policies and processes for providing partner organisations with support on different aspects of accountability to beneficiaries. The validators were not however concerned with the accountability standards of *partners*, recognising this is not always something which Member Agencies are in a position to assure. For example, CAFOD provides ample support to their partners on accountability, but will not force the matter, if the organisation has other current priorities: they reasonably consider issues such as Child Protection and Financial Standards more important "non-negotiable".

Member Agencies use a combination of different approaches to support accountability: established practices include providing training workshops, or online tools, such as CARE's Accountability Wiki. In some cases staff from Member Agencies are seconded to the Partner in order to provide direct support with accountability: the British Red Cross took this approach in Haiti. Several agencies also have international teams of accountability specialists who provide oversight and coordinate accountability training, for example ActionAid International's Evaluation and

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Text Box 6: ActionAid: Promoting accountability to local communities

ActionAid Kenya has encouraged its partners to be more accountable to their local communities by erecting Transparency Boards. These boards detail the activities undertaken by the Partner organisation, the amount of money provided for the work (raised by ActionAid and others through Child Sponsorship), and whether the work has been completed or not. ActionAid Kenya report that confidence in using the Transparency Boards has led to the Partners demanding that local level Government offices use similar methods to be transparent about their use of funds.

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Accountability Unit, CARE International's Accountability Standing Team. Text Box 6 describes how ActionAid's support to partners on accountability has led to these partners demanding greater accountability from their local government.

Several of the Member Agencies, such as CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund are HAP certified, which provides assurance that partners are being supported on accountability to disaster affected populations.

3.4.3 Practices that lead the way

As the majority of Agencies provide some form of support to their partners, innovative approaches to this Way of Working concern how to embed this support into partners' work. World Vision

provided evidence of their comprehensive training programme for staff on downwards accountability. The Accountability Learning Lab is a 10 month process: preparatory study of reading materials lays the ground for a 12 day residential course in which participants not only receive training on accountability issues but also conduct field exercises and develop a plan to improve the accountability of their National office. After the training course, participants are paired with mentors who provide support as they implement their accountability plans.

Text Box 7: CAFOD: Assessing Partners' Accountability

CAFOD's Accountability Minimum Standards Tracking Tool identified that CRS Haiti needed to focus on accountability to disaster affected populations. CRS International recognised the value of the thorough assessment, and responded effectively to its findings, bringing in staff to support the Haiti office, and subsequently sharing the learning from this exercise with their other country programmes.

Although not a requirement of this Way of Working, assessing partners' accountability standards can be an important first step in determining where support is most needed, what form it should take, and tracking whether it has actually improved accountability standards of Partners. CAFOD's Accountability Minimum Standards Tracking Tool provides an in-depth assessment of their partners' accountability procedures against set standards which reflect the HAP benchmarks. This results in a dashboard style rating, dependant on a minimum level of achievement across six categories. The tool includes improvements that are expected in the next 12 and 24 months. Text Box 7 describes how CAFOD used this tool to identify areas for improvement by their partner CRS Haiti, and ascertain that downwards accountability had improved as a result. Save the Children provided interesting evidence of a workshop concept in Bangladesh which combined more abstract conceptual aspects, such as introductions to HAP principles, with showcasing of local accountability practices (see Figure 10) to encourage and motivate participants to innovate.

Concern engages on a contractual basis with a local mobile telephone company in Mogadishu (Hormuud) to provide small scale cash transfer services to beneficiaries in Somalia, binding the service provider, its contractors and agents also to Concern's Programme Participants Protection

Figure 10: Save the Children suggestion boxes in Bangladesh - complaints and feedback procedures for beneficiaries

Policy and its Code of Conduct.

3.4.4 Need for improvement

As described above, the majority of agencies are confident with the need for downwards accountability, and have found ways to help their partners achieve this. However, as the newest member of the DEC, Plan UK is still working on the development of a Plan International Accountability Framework for Disasters. As was noted last year, Plan UK recognises that individual country programmes can have good downwards accountability practices, however this is not guided by Plan International policies or procedures. Plan UK admit that supporting partners with accountability remains a distant goal, however there are plans for it to be specifically mentioned in their Accountability Framework. For this reason they have rated themselves as red, and due to the length of time it takes to embed new process, expect to remain so next year.

As discussed above, World Vision have interpreted this Way of Working as concerning the support they provide to their staff on accountability, which is admittedly impressive. However, it should be noted that in the case of Somalia, where World Vision did decide to work through partners in South Central province, they did not provide any support to these partners on accountability issues. This was an unusual way of working for World Vision, however if they work with partners again in the future, as is planned with the Syria response, they recognise that they will need to develop new approaches to support them with accountability.

3.5 Key Learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders (Way of Working 4.2)
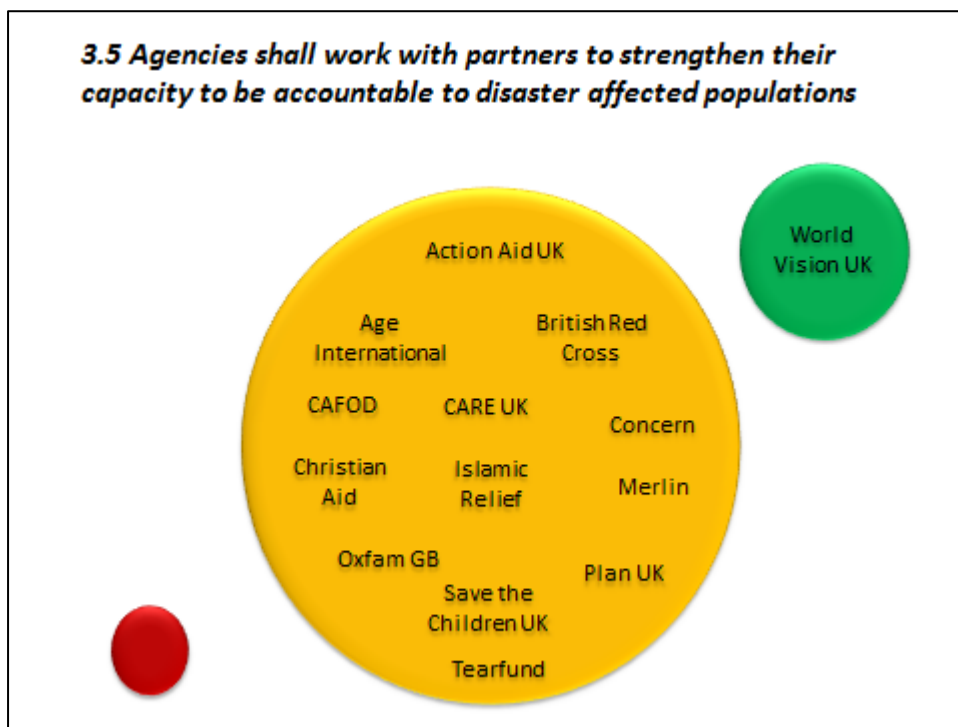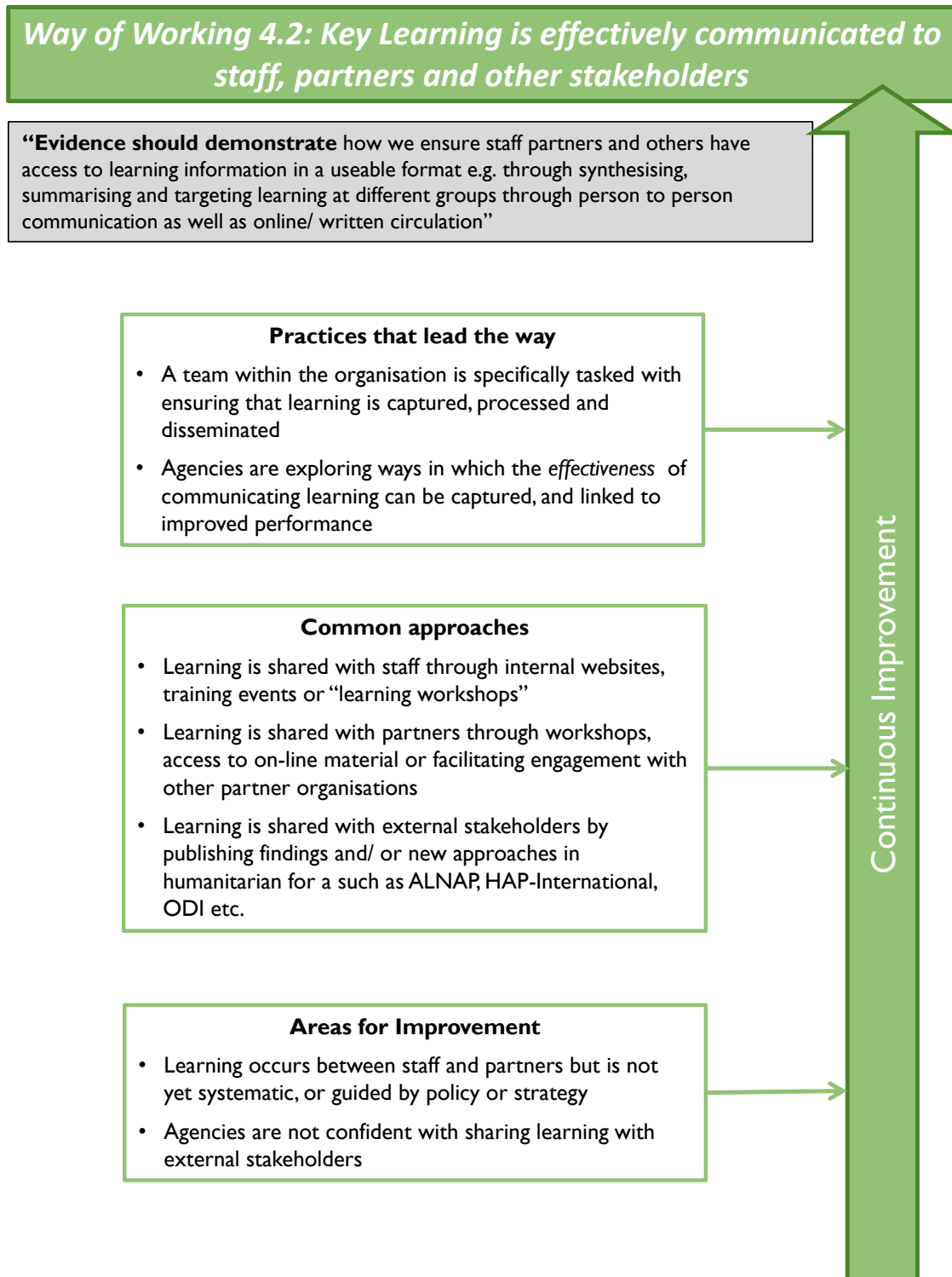

Figure 11: Distribution of RAG ratings for Way of Working 4.2

Way of Working 4.2: Key Learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders

"**Evidence should demonstrate** how we ensure staff partners and others have access to learning information in a useable format e.g. through synthesising, summarising and targeting learning at different groups through person to person communication as well as online/ written circulation"

Practices that lead the way

- A team within the organisation is specifically tasked with ensuring that learning is captured, processed and disseminated
- Agencies are exploring ways in which the *effectiveness* of communicating learning can be captured, and linked to improved performance

Common approaches

- Learning is shared with staff through internal websites, training events or "learning workshops"
- Learning is shared with partners through workshops, access to on-line material or facilitating engagement with other partner organisations
- Learning is shared with external stakeholders by publishing findings and/ or new approaches in humanitarian for a such as ALNAP, HAP-International, ODI etc.

Areas for Improvement

- Learning occurs between staff and partners but is not yet systematic, or guided by policy or strategy
- Agencies are not confident with sharing learning with external stakeholders

Continuous Improvement

3.5.1   Overview

This Way of Working was chosen because the subject of effective communication of learning was considered as part of the DECAF Validation process in 2010/11. Under the previous DECAF Framework, Way of Working 5.4 asked if "Key learning is effectively communicated to staff and

partners". At the time, there was considerable discussion around the issue of Humanitarian learning, and particularly regarding how agencies can ensure that learning is effective. In revisiting this topic, it was hoped that some progress on thinking around learning would be seen. It is interesting to note that for this Way of Working since 2011/12 there has actually been a move back to Amber from Green by six agencies[2], and all agencies which in 2010/11 had planned to move to Green have in fact remained at Amber.

The decline in ratings may in some part be due to the new wording in the DECAF Framework, in which "other stakeholders" are now included. Although all agencies were able to show that they share learning externally, they may lack confidence that this occurs systematically, causing a reversion to Amber. The change in ratings may be due to the realisation that commitments to move to Green were unrealistic: as discussed in the following section, Improvement Commitments around learning are common, and yet are often not met, or only partially met. Finally, as discussed below, several agencies chose to remain "strategically Amber", due to concerns that a Green rating may send a false signal internally and externally, that the agency is fully successful with effectively sharing learning.

Learning is undoubtedly a complex and much discussed issue for all Humanitarian organisations. As the "strategic Ambers" indicate, there is a general lack of confidence that any agency can guarantee it always learns from its mistakes. Furthermore, improvements in organisational learning require considerable change to achieve: how to measure and thus quantify such improvements in learning is an additional issue which agencies are only just beginning to consider (see *3.5.3 Practices that lead the way* below). Despite these complexities, it is to be hoped that agencies do not shy away from meeting the challenge of learning effectively, and that in subsequent years there is a drive for more agencies to achieve Green ratings.

3.5.2 Common practice

In general, learning is seen as an area for continued improvement by the majority of agencies, but where there is already some good practice to build upon. Established practices to sharing learning

Figure 13: Tearfund's 'Footsteps' series

with staff included agency Intranet sites, such as ActionAid's HIVE, Plan's PlaNET and the BRC's RedRoom. Several agencies also hold learning events for staff, at the national, regional or international level: the BRC has a yearly "Learning Week" with events for staff across the

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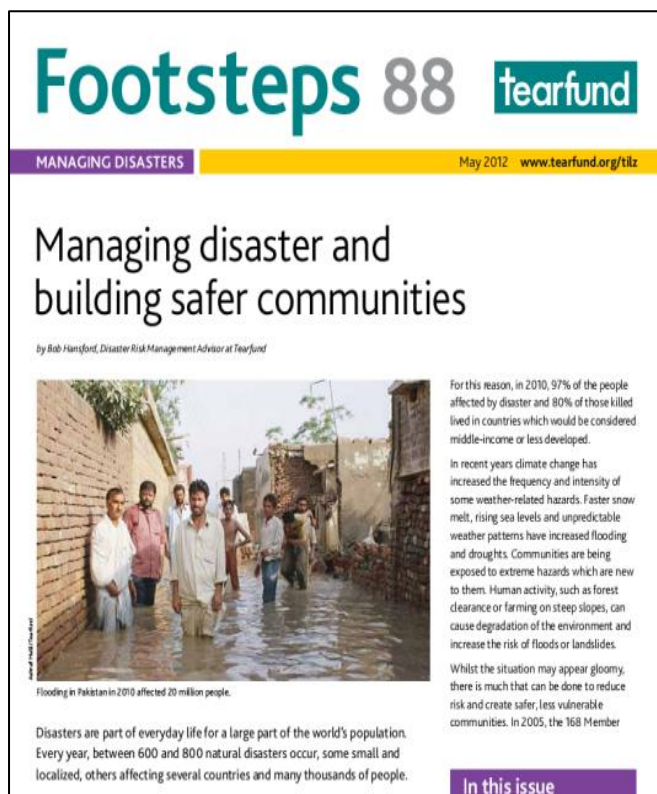
[2] ActionAid UK; Age International; Christian Aid; Islamic Relief; Merlin; Save the Children UK

organisation on a range of topics. Tearfund works across all its chapters with 'Footsteps' a field office and partners oriented practical publications series to address particular issues and disseminate lessons learnt.

As the Tearfund example shows efforts to share learning with field offices tend to use similar mechanisms as those intended for partners, although it may be debated to what extent internet based resources are easily accessible to grassroots organisations. Several organisations bring their partners together so that they can share learning: CAFOD holds regional conferences for partners. ActionAid have trialled "Exposure Visits" in South Asia: taking a community member from one response to visit another, in order to promote the sharing of learning and exchange of ideas between local community members around resilience issues. ActionAid are now looking at ways to achieve the same exchange of ideas without the need for costly air travel.

All agencies were able to demonstrate that they have shared learning with external stakeholders by publishing accounts of their projects and research through sectoral fora such as HAP, ALNAP and the ODI. For example, CAFOD have published many of their accountability tools and case studies on the HAP website; Plan has published a briefing paper on Climate extremes through the ODI; World Vision is currently undertaking research on Child Friendly Spaces in collaboration with Columbia University. Concern is actively pointing staff to external fora such as ALNAP as a recommended 'go to' places for sharing its own and other good practice.

Figure 14: ALNAP publications as recommended reading

However, this tends not to be as systematic as internal learning, and often depends on whether the agency has produced a particularly interesting case study, an approach to a specific challenge, or have recently been involved in sector wide learning events. Some agencies, such as the BRC, recognise that sharing learning externally, and incorporating external learning, is not yet an area where they are systematically confident.

3.5.3   Practices that lead the way

Innovative thinking around this Way of Working occurred where agencies addressed the issue of whether learning is "effectively" communicated. The majority of agencies did not consider the effectiveness of their approaches to sharing learning. However, Christian Aid is hoping to be able to demonstrate that learning is being effectively taken on board by staff. The development of a Humanitarian Performance Report will track the impact of Christian Aid's work around the world. Christian Aid hope that this will enable them to identify where staff are building upon previous lessons to improve their performance, and therefore whether the learning has been effectively shared. World Vision's H-Learn unit is a team specifically tasked with gathering, processing and disseminating learning about Humanitarian responses throughout World Vision, and with external stakeholders. H-Learn's existence therefore provides World Vision with assurance that learning is being shared. In order to ascertain the effectiveness of their work, the H-Learn team are currently

reviewing their business plan, and have a working group which is specifically looking at how learning is being used by World Vision staff.

3.5.4   Need for improvement

Some agencies recognise that learning is an area where they are not yet confident. Although CARE can provide some evidence of learning occurring between staff, and learning from previous responses being shared more broadly through their Emergency Toolkit, it varies between country programmes (they highlighted that South Sudan was particularly weak at this). CARE UK hope that with Learning being positioned as a strategic priority by Care International in the future, it will increasingly become more systematic. Islamic Relief is building up an East Africa regional lessons learnt database for sharing experiences, but acknowledges that it is still in its infancy, and that it is very rudimentary format of a table may not yet encourage intensive use even by Islamic Relief field staff. As mentioned above, some agencies recognise that they still have room for improvement as regards sharing learning with partners and external stakeholders.

4 Direction of Travel

As previously discussed, a principal objective of the DEC Accountability Framework is to drive humanitarian accountability practice improvement by its Member Agencies towards a set of common Ways of Working, which, when met, give grounding to a message of deserved public trust into the quality of work of the agencies. To this end, the DEC would expect to see progressive improvement in the ratings provided against the Framework. As the following overview chart (Figure 15) shows, agencies participating in the DECAF process have collectively responded well to the drive for improved accountability. The DECAF I period shows clearly an annual growth of Green ratings, which signifies the introduction and use by agencies of systematic assurance methods to harmonise the application of their policies across all their operations. At the same time instances of absence of policy on some key tested Ways of Working were over time eliminated, providing a stronger basis for both application and assurance but also public accountability as policy clarifies to external stakeholders what the organisation commits to doing.

While with a two year run of the DECAF II framework it may be too early to speak of consolidated trends, it is worth noting that also since 2011 the proportion of Green ratings from the assessment is rising, and only very few gaps in policy are being recorded. The latter can be partly explained with the requirements of the new DECAF II framework being tougher and touching on some emergent areas of policy and practice that its predecessor was not testing to the same degree, and also that the DEC was able to welcome a new member agency which is now beginning to work and respond to the framework. The continued significance of Amber ratings achieved by Member Agencies is a result of the extraordinary range of circumstances in which DEC members have to perform, different in each humanitarian crisis.

Figure 15: Overall trend of DEC member Agency performance against DECAF criteria since 2007

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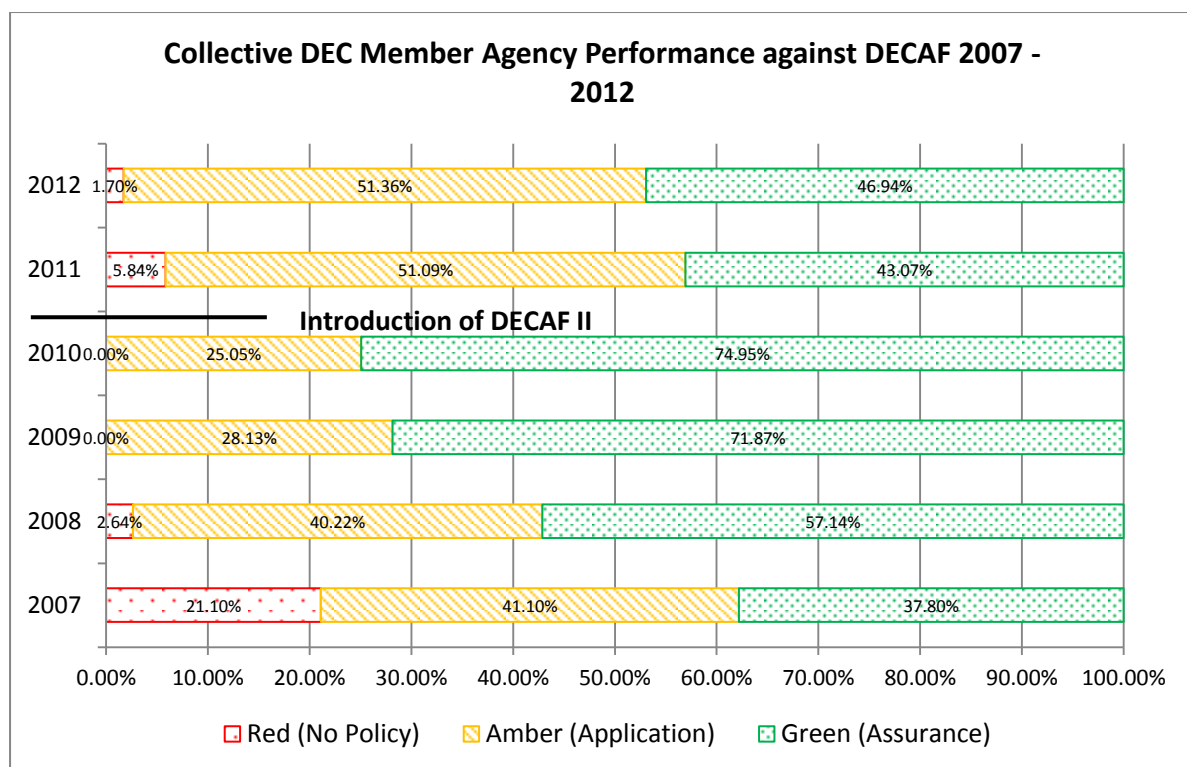
5   Improvement Commitments

The following subsection considers the Member Agencies Improvement Commitments, which sheds some further light on individual Agencies' organisational changes.

5.1   Overview

A principle aim of the DEC Accountability Framework is to drive improvement within Member Agencies. To this end, Agencies are required to submit yearly Improvement Commitments against a number of Ways of Working. These Improvement Commitments should detail the planned organisational developments that are intended to take place across the next year within the agency, which will lead to improvement against the Way of Working in question. Agencies are not required to submit Improvement Commitments against all Ways of Working, only against those areas where they plan to improve. To be as useful to the agency as possible, Improvement Commitments should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound (SMART).

The following year, Member Agencies are asked to report on their progress against each Improvement from the previous year. Achievement against the Improvement Commitments is not confirmed by the DECAF validators, however they do discuss progress, challenges and future plans the Member Agency visits.

5.2   Working with Improvement Commitments

Different Member Agencies work with the Improvement Commitments in different ways, as best fits their own organisational needs and requirements. In particular the structure and governance of a Member Agency can profoundly affect both how the Improvement Commitments are made, and the ease with which they can be achieved. For example, Member Agencies who are the Head Office of their organisation (such as Islamic Relief and Merlin) are able to make specific commitments which will enable clear progress against the DEC Accountability Framework. In such cases the Improvement Commitments may directly influence organisational strategy and planning, and so truly be a driver for change within the Member Agency. Yet not all agencies formulate their DECAF Improvement Commitments the same way. For most, DECAF Improvement Commitments are an expression of otherwise developed and agreed priorities for change. However, in some cases, ambitions to cross a RAG rating boundary can trigger the inclusion of a DECAF Improvement Commitment into the general change programme. Agency staff confirmed in most cases that the DECAF Improvement Commitments were relevant for structuring their organisational development work, and in the case of one accountability lead the DECAF Improvement Commitments were described as determining their annual work plan.

This is considerably more challenging however for Member Agencies who work as part of a Federation (such as ActionAid UK or the British Red Cross) or who are support offices for International organisations based elsewhere (such as CARE UK, Plan UK, SCUK and World Vision UK). In these cases the Member Agencies are able to decide on specific Improvement Commitments for internal processes, however with wider organisational changes, or changes to programming they may need to simply reflect developments being enacted by their Head office, Secretariat or Sister organisations. Such agencies often will advocate for wider organisational change in the case of particularly important DECAF Priorities: both the BRC and Plan UK are instrumental in driving the downwards accountability agenda with their respective lead organisations; many such agencies have

had to find ways of bringing the DFID driven Value For Money agenda to the attention of their international families. Such agencies will also find that their Improvement Commitments concerning wider organisational developments also take more time to be achieved, reflecting the complexities of large international organisations.

Working with Partners can also present a challenge to the achievement of Improvement Commitments. Agencies who work primarily through Partners (such as CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund) have found that whilst they can make commitments to provide guidance and support to their Partners, and develop assurance mechanisms to monitor their work, it is not appropriate for them to enforce organisational policies or procedures, or to require particular standards to be met in areas, unless they are "non-negotiable" such as finance or child protection. In other cases, such as when working with partners in security induced remote management situations (a frequent case in Somalia and also Mali), partnership or even direct affiliate relationships cannot be subject to the usual protocols of interaction and accountability.

Despite the challenges of forming and meeting Improvement Commitments, many agencies have reported that they are useful drivers of change within their organisation. The requirement to develop Improvement Commitments allows Accountability Focal Points in each agency to identify specific areas where their organisation can and should improve. The Improvement Commitments then flag to Senior Management where resources should be directed to achieve improvement. Finally the expectation that Member Agencies will make, and improve against Improvement Commitments, lends credibility to the DECAF Framework, placing it as a driver for change rather than a mere statement of standards.

5.3 2012/13 Improvement Commitments

As part of this year's DECAF Validation visits, the One World Trust discussed achievement against Improvement Commitments made the previous year, for 2012/13. Figure 16: Number of 2012/13 Improvement Commitments Met, Partially Met or Not MetFigure 16 represents the number of 2012/13 Improvement Commitments which were Met, Partially Met or Not Met. It was decided not to present this data aggregated by Member agency for two reasons. Firstly, achievement against the Improvement Commitments has not been verified and therefore is subjective to each agency's view of their success. Secondly, because agencies face different challenges with their Improvement Commitments, as described above, comparing levels of achievement without full contextual explanation would be misleading.

It should also be noted that although Member Agencies are asked to report on their progress against the Improvement Commitments, not all clearly indicate whether the Commitment has been met or not. In some cases therefore the One World Trust had to make a judgement as to whether the described activities of the past year satisfied the Commitment made. The classification "Partially Met" is used for two scenarios: activities listed under the Improvement Commitment did not all take place, or activities listed under the Improvement Commitment did not take place at all, but other activities meant that the overall objective of the Improvement Commitment was met. Reasons for these two scenarios are discussed below.

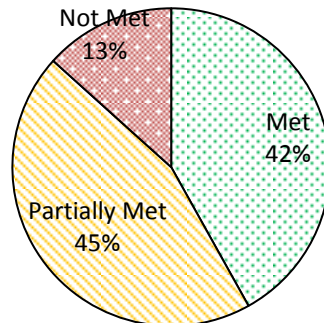**Total 2012/13 Improvement Commitments Met, Partially Met or Not Met**

Not Met 13%

Met 42%

Partially Met 45%

Figure 16: Number of 2012/13 Improvement Commitments Met, Partially Met or Not Met

As can be seen from Figure 16, across all the Member Agencies, 42% of Improvement Commitments made for 2012/13 were judged to have been met by their Member Agency. This is a good achievement given the challenges that many agencies face in forming and meeting Improvement Commitments. A further 45% of Improvement Commitments were "Partially Met". Therefore for 87% of Improvement Commitments made last year, Member Agencies have seen some form of improvement. This clearly demonstrates that the Improvement Commitments are at least reflecting improved standards: anecdotal evidence suggests that in many cases, they are actively guiding it.

However despite the valid reasons why Improvement Commitments might not have been met, the high % in this category supports the argument that greater efforts should be made to ensure they are SMART, as clearer, more realistic commitments should be easier to define as being Met or Not Met.

Discussion with the Member Agencies revealed that reasons for not met or partially met Improvement Commitments include:

- Improvement Commitment involves a process over a number of years, which is still underway
- The Improvement Commitment was unrealistic for the time frame specified, or the process has taken longer than expected.
- Changes to staff or to the organisation mean that the activities of the Improvement Commitment has been delayed
- Changes to the organisation mean that the activities of the Improvement Commitment are no longer relevant, or need to be rethought

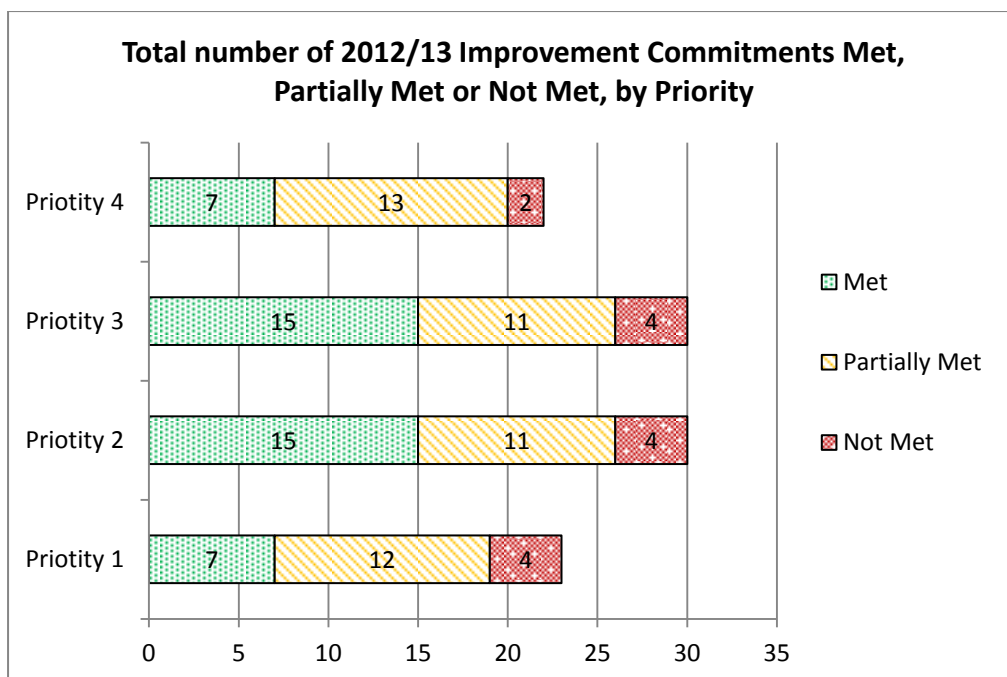**Total number of 2012/13 Improvement Commitments Met, Partially Met or Not Met, by Priority**

Figure 17: Improvement Commitments Met, Partially Met or Not met by Priority

Figure 17 presents achievement against the Improvement Commitments aggregated by DECAF Priority. This shows that Priority 2: "We achieve intended programme objectives in accordance with agreed humanitarian standards, principles and behaviours", and Priority 3: "We are accountable to disaster affected populations" had the highest percentage of Met Improvement Commitments (50%). Interestingly, Priority 4: "We learn from our experience – taking learning from one emergency to the next", had the highest % of Improvement Commitments that were Partially Met or Not Met (68%). This may reflect the fact that Learning is a challenging area for many Humanitarian agencies, and that there is an ongoing debate about how to quantify improvements in the quality of learning.

5.4 2013/14 Improvement Commitments

In line with the DECAF Guidance all agencies submitted Improvement Commitments for 2013/14, as part of their initial DECAF Submission in January 2012.

For Priority 1, most agencies and especially CARE have made Commitments to improve their use of resources: Value for Money is a particular area of attention under this Priority.

Priority 2 is of less concern to most agencies, with the exception of Age International, Oxfam GB and Save UK, who all have at least a third of their Commitments concerning programming standards.

For Priority 3, Concern, the BRC, Merlin and Plan are placing particular emphasis on accountability to Disaster affected populations this year. Only World Vision is not making any commitments in this Priority, as they already perform very strongly in the area of downwards accountability. However, as discussed earlier, if they work with Partners in the future, for example in the Syria response, they will need to develop policies and processes to ensure that their Partners are also supported in their accountability to local communities.

Many agencies have made a substantial number of commitments around learning, under Priority Four, with ActionAid, Islamic Relief and Merlin paying particular attention to this topic. Only CARE Oxfam GB and Plan UK have not made commitments here. CARE UK recognises this is an area where

they are not yet systematic but hope that a strategic focus from CARE International on learning will bring improvement in the future. Plan UK perhaps are understandably placing their organisational focus instead on downwards accountability.

5.5   Areas for Development

In anticipation of the planned review of DECAF's purposes and processes, the One World Trust has considered areas where the use of Improvement Commitments could be strengthened. There are two main ways in which we believe that the process of making Improvement Commitments could better serve the Member Agencies and the DEC Secretariat. Firstly, the quality of the Improvement Commitments could be improved. Currently Improvement Commitments can vary enormously, and many do not satisfy SMART criteria. Unclear and unrealistic Improvement Commitments can hinder real opportunities for organisational change. Encouraging and even ensuring that all commitments are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound would hopefully support improvement, and would make verification of Commitments easier to measure and track over time.

Secondly, there is an opportunity for greater oversight of achievement against the Improvement Commitments. Although there is anecdotal evidence from Member Agencies that the Improvement Commitments drive change, this is not confirmed through the DECAF verification process. If the DECAF Validation process included asking for evidence that SMART Improvement Commitments had been met or not, it is likely that greater weight would be given to the Improvement Commitment Process by the Member Agencies, and there would be greater leverage within each organisation to ensure Commitments are met. Validating achievement against Improvement Commitments would also allow more reliable tracking of whether they are indeed useful agents of change. This should of course be balanced against the additional workload that such an extended verification process would cause Member Agencies.

Conclusion

The DEC Accountability Framework Validation Process for 2012/13 demonstrated that the evidence submitted by all Member Agencies' against the sample of self-assessed Ways of Workings were accurate. Therefore the One World Trust can conclude that the Member Agency self-assessed ratings submitted for the entire DEC Accountability Framework are an accurate reflection of how they work. In addition, the Validation process highlighted some interesting examples of innovative practice, and areas where Member Agencies recognise they need to improve. The subsequent "Learning Conference" will enable further exploration of some of these case studies.

A broader consideration of achievement against the DEC Accountability Framework as a whole, shows that Agencies have made gradual yet important improvements in their accountability policies and practices not only over the past two years, but across the whole period that the DECAF has been in use, including its 1st form, since 2007. The submission of "Improvement Commitments" is a key way in which Agencies are encouraged to plan and reflect on how they are planning to continue their accountability achievements.

Although it was generally agreed by staff from the Member Agencies, and the One World Trust, that the slightly different methodology for the 2012/13 DECAF process was more efficient, and allowed for better validation of the ratings, there remain some challenges with the DECAF process. The One World Trust believes that DEC Accountability Framework is a leader in Humanitarian standards, and that by striving to refine and improve both its content and methodology of assessment it will continue to offer a valuable tool for the improvement of the DEC Member Agencies.

6 Appendix 1: Member Agency Summaries

6.1 ActionAid UK

ActionAid's federated structure, with an International Secretariat sitting in Johannesburg, has always created challenges in both assessing and evidencing performance against the DEC Accountability Framework. Previous years have seen strong attempts by AAUK to overcome these challenges, for example, asking Affiliates and Associates to conduct the initial assessment themselves, and by inviting staff from across the organisation to participate in the Validation Workshop. However this year, due to staff absences, and new appointments, ActionAid UK's submission this year was far more basic, making it challenging to explore their evidence, and especially assurance mechanisms, in depth. However subsequent submissions of additional evidence did provide additional support to ActionAid UK's ratings. The challenges with this year's submission

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	A	A
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

emphasise the importance of ensuring support and engagement from across the organisation: both horizontally from relevant departments, but also vertically, from country offices to senior management. This is particularly the case for a complex organisation such as Action Aid. Plans for a specific DEC Accountability Team within AAUK will hopefully address these problems.

It was particularly notable that AA UK experienced challenges evidencing assurance: systematic assurance can be held by Action Aid International- as with HR standards, through the Human Resources and Organisational Effectiveness Team, however in other cases assurance is contained within individual country affiliates and associates. As this is a recurring challenge, and often masks good practice on the ground, ActionAid may wish to consider whether this is the most effective way of assuring and communicating its minimum standards to its supporters (both institutional donors such as the DEC and individual members of the public).

Despite these challenges ActionAid UK provided strong evidence of application for many Ways of Working. In particular ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach means that emphasis is placed on the effective participation of local people. This was especially the case for Way of Working 2.4, where Emergency Response Guidelines commit Action Aid to promoting the perspectives of local people in coordination meetings, and Way of Working 1.6, where the HRBA identifies institutes of Government as the duty bearers, with responsibility for meeting their people's needs: ActionAid therefore helps local people to secure these rights.

Improvement Commitments: AAUK recognise that their Improvement Commitments for 2012/13 were too ambitious, resulting in many not being met: again they are challenged by the need to work within ActionAid International's ongoing processes. Improvement Commitments for 2013/14 are again ambitious, and commitments to achieve Green should also be accompanied by clear strategies to provide satisfactory *evidence* of assurance mechanisms.

6.2 Age International

Age collected data and determined self-assessment ratings for the DECAF assessment with strong participation by country teams, which accounts for some of the reluctance to 'go Green' on 1.2, 1.6, and 3.5, whereas validators the One World Trust would certainly have been open to consider this on the strength of assurance evidence presented. Yet Age maintained that the reality on the ground as voiced by country teams about the not fully systematic nature of assurance made them more comfortable with Amber ratings. In particular it was highlighted that the impact of longer term programmes such as HOPE would require longer to mature. With its approach Age presents

2012/13 Ratings	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

itself as an organisation which is consciously using the DECAF process for self-critical improvement.

Age was initially weak on providing suitable evidence on assurance (independent of the rating issue) as part of Submission 2. From the perspective of the validator, the assessment visit proved to be critical to understanding Age's and HelpAge International's particular situation and uncovering some of its previously less visible strengths in accountability approaches. Additional evidence submitted following the meeting included in particular improved data on assurance systems and their link into policy / strategy driven processes such as the HOPE training programme and the Older People's Associations Research project.

Improvement Commitments: Despite Age's caution with self-assessment, rating aspirations for the next year in the Improvement Commitments demonstrate that Age is hoping to conclude on a number of longer running change processes. These involve a level of policy review, internationalisation of standards, and establishment of mutual communication protocols and practices between partners. Improvement Commitments were described by Age as directly integrated into annual departmental work plans, and subject to half yearly progress tracking.

6.3 British Red Cross

The British Red Cross' position within the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent –

similarly to other DEC members working in partnership - provides some interesting challenges as to how to promote and ensure accountability standards with its National Society partners. However, it also means that the British Red Cross demonstrates particular strengths concerning partnership working. For example, with Way of Working 2.4, the Federation is tasked with representing the perspectives of National Societies, including the BRC, at co-ordination meetings. Similarly, the BRC has demonstrated in its evidence this year for Way of Working 3.5 that it works extensively with other National Societies to support them on accountability to disaster affected populations, by providing workshops, and seconding specialist

2012/13 Ratings	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

accountability delegates. However, it should be noted that the BRC has consciously reverted from Green to Amber ratings for a number of Ways of Working this year, particularly around accountability to disaster affected populations: this reflects organisational changes, and especially the on-going development of an overarching Accountability Framework which will provide greater assurance against DECAF. The expiry of the BRC's current People in Aid membership has also prompted reflection on their assurance that HR policies and procedures are being systematically applied, leading to an Amber rating for Way of Working 1.2.

Improvement Commitments: The BRC's Improvement Commitments for 2013/14 reflect these organisational changes, concerning HR procedures and the development of the Accountability Framework. The BRC have an organisational strategy for 2015 to become a "Learning Organisation" with a view to building upon already strong approaches to sharing learning with staff, to improve how they share learning externally and with partners. However, as with several other agencies, they believe that achieving a Green rating for 4.2 would send the wrong signal to the organisation, and so plan to remain Amber.

6.4 CAFOD

As an agency that works exclusively through Partners, CAFOD has had to develop ways of promoting expected standards of working, whilst respecting their partners' independence. CAFOD will provide guidance and support on particular issues, and encourage their partner's to see the intrinsic benefits of the approach they are promoting, however, with the exception of "non-negotiables" such as standards of financial reporting and child protection, they do not feel it is appropriate to make contractual demands on their partners in areas such as beneficiary accountability, or engagement with other stakeholders. Nonetheless, CAFOD's level of oversight of their partners' activities and programmes provides them with adequate assurance in several areas. Of particular note is their Accountability Minimum Standards Tracking Tool, which provides an in-depth assessment of their partners' accountability procedures. In

2012/13 Ratings	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	A	A
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

the case of CRS Haiti, this identified the need to focus on accountability to disaster affected populations. CRS International responded effectively to this finding, bringing in staff to support the Haiti office on this, and subsequently sharing the learning from this exercise with their other country programmes. CAFOD is certified by both HAP and People in Aid, providing external verification of their internal assurance mechanisms for HR and accountability standards.

Improvement Commitments: One World Trust noted that due to recent staff turn-over, the reasoning behind Improvement Commitments is not always clear, and commitments for 2012/13 do not always reflect the organisational processes underway. It was suggested that this could be remedied by allocating "owners" for Improvement Commitments, and ensuring that representatives from across the organisation feed into the development of Improvement Commitments.

6.5 CARE UK

As a Support Office within the CARE International family, CARE UK does not have direct reporting lines from the field, limiting the assurance that they are able to provide against the DECAF standards. However, CARE UK can place confidence in the policies and procedures of CARE International and the three lead offices who directly manage operations (CARE US for Horn of Africa). For example, CARE country offices develop their own HR standards, shaped by their lead office. With Way of Working 1.2, CARE UK feel that there may already exist sufficient assurance mechanisms, however their Amber rating reflects the challenges that they experience accessing such evidence. They hope that certification by People in Aid or a similar initiative will provide suitable assurance to be Green in the future. CARE UK's evidence featured some interesting approaches: for example a Governance Context Analysis to shape

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	A	A
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

stakeholder engagement strategies against Way of Working 1.6, evidence of the CARE initiated Somalia NGO forum for Way of Working 2.4, and an in-depth position paper on Partnerships in Emergencies, which placed particular emphasis on ensuring Partners are accountable (Way of Working 3.5). This demonstrates that despite the lack of systematic application, CARE can demonstrate good practice in many of the areas considered by this year's assessment. For Way of Working 4.2, CARE recognise that they remain unsystematic about learning, however they hope that the new CARE International strategy, which will feature learning, will help improvement in this area.

CARE UK submitted evidence from Somalia and South Sudan- which was not a DEC funded country. CARE UK decided to include South Sudan in their countries for assessment as they welcomed the opportunity to test themselves, and for the DECAF process to highlight some of the challenges with that country office. They noted that CARE South Sudan faces considerable challenges with staff capacity, and many practices remain informal and undocumented. However, CARE UK staff were pleased by the level of evidence they were able to provide nonetheless, and the exercise demonstrates the benefits that including non-DEC countries in the DECAF assessment can bring.

Improvement Commitments: As with other similar organisations CARE UK have to be realistic about the level of influence and impact they can achieve within CARE International. Improvement Commitments for 2012/13 were all met, however in several cases despite proposed activities being completed it was recognised that they were still not sufficiently confident to move to Green. For 2013/14 CARE UK continues to find ways in which they can improve internally, and work with Care International to improve standards of working on the ground, particularly in relation to HR, Value for Money, Accountability and Learning.

6.6 Christian Aid

Christian Aid's submission this year was notable for its clarity and realism: the ratings for each way of working were well evidenced, and logically explained, and there was no need for further evidence to be submitted.

Working through partners means that Christian Aid considers the standards of work being conducted by its partner organisations, when rating themselves against the DECAF framework. In several cases its comparatively strong performance this year is a result of this broad approach. For example, with Way of Working 2.4 Christian Aid recognises its responsibility to promote its partners' engagement with co-ordination mechanisms and to advocate to the UN, DfID and other international platforms to be more local organisation friendly. Last year Christian Aid placed

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

particular organisational emphasis on supporting partners with accountability to local communities, as part of their certification by HAP, which enabled the Green rating against way of working 3.5. However, this focus on partners' standards has also resulted in a deliberate limitation in ratings: although Christian Aid is "verified compliant" by People in Aid, and so should be technically rated as Green against 1.2, it has chosen to remain Amber in reflection of the fact that it cannot ensure that its partners also meet these HR standards. Christian Aid is taking an interesting approach to ensuring effective learning in the next year by developing a Humanitarian Performance Report, which will track improvements across the organisation. It believes that this will enable itto identify if learning is in fact being taken forward.

Improvement Commitments: Christian Aid's Improvement Commitments reflect organisational priorities for the year in question: for 2012/13 there was a focus on accountability to disaster affected populations; for 2013/14 there is a focus on organisational learning. Christian Aid has found that its improvement commitments are a useful progress tracking tool , and flag to Senior Management areas for attention.

6.7 Concern UK

The confidence that spoke out of Concern UK's evidence submission for the DECAF II validation process was based on a claim, reiterated at the review meeting, of a virtually 'seamless integration' of Concern UK (the DEC member agency) with Concern Worldwide as the implementing humanitarian agency. This led to particularly interesting discussions with Concern about the quality of assurance in place in relation to Ways of Working where relationships with partners were tested, such as 2.4. and 3.5. Drilling down in how Concern meets the composite nature of Way of Working 2.4 (involving own participation in coordination AND partner support) revealed that whereas

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

initially assurance evidence was weak in that it again largely demonstrated application (i.e. de facto involvement, for instance in coordinated food distribution programmes) for one country (Somalia). However, the organisational response to donor and field demand for effective coordination was subsequently demonstrated in form of integration of that demand into roles profiles (checked through appraisals and evaluations). The evidence submitted also affirmed Concern's acknowledged improvement needs on effective partner involvement, but in terms of generating information flow on this area, fulfils the criteria for a Green rating.

For Way of Working 3.5 evidence submitted assurance evidence demonstrated both the use of forward looking tools (such as in Haiti the organisational capacity assessment system CLOSAT) and subsequent verification reviews through internal audit, and for Somalia the use of a systematically drawn up and policy grounded accountability commitments plan, which also contains elements of evaluation of past periods. Yet overall Concern remains less convinced of the systematic nature of assurance across all its operations.

While Concern is rating itself as Amber on Way of Working 4.2 on effective dissemination of learning, and it is agreed that evidence of assurance remains too anecdotal to be safely considered as systematic, Concern's pointer towards the use of external dissemination channels such as ALNAP publications is noteworthy in that it opens the way towards both broader sharing of good practice across organisations, but also may suggest ways of reducing duplication that inevitably occurs when virtually every organisation creates learning and dissemination systems that effectively share content that at least to a majority arguably are of relevance to a much wider community.

Improvement Commitments: Concern's reporting on its Improvement Commitments was at times frank and hence very helpful, also in view of a relatively high degree of specificity in the activities the organisation intended to pursue. Concern shared on some Improvement Commitment the challenge that while clear targets for the subsequent year were formulated, actual implementation timeframes were longer and hence these commitments could only be considered as partly met.

6.8 Islamic Relief

As a directly implementing agency Islamic relief drew for its evidence largely on IR Worldwide documents, and could, as the validation of the majority of self-assessed Green ratings shows, convincingly argue the strength of its policies, application record, and assurance systems in place. This was accompanied by a tangible high level of confidence in the organisation's abilities to deliver. However, while probing Islamic Relief especially on the initially not always conclusive evidence of assurance, the agency reflected also freely on the challenges that arise for its assurance approach in particular in the context of remote management due to high security problems in Somalia affecting local staff,

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

their tracking and communications often severely. This openness was very valuable to explore.

Interesting evidence and explanations in the review meeting were provided on Way of Working 1.6 demonstrating effective influence exercised on government procurement practices in relation to an IR Bangladesh initiative. Evidence for Somalia focused at the community level, showing how the organisation engages and strengthens local institutions as well.

While evidence on assurance systems in place on coordination issues is strong warranting a Green rating, Islamic Relief disclosed that the assurance itself also revealed challenges such as of duplication of work with work conducted by not sufficiently involved diaspora support organisations on water and sanitation services. This led to creative discussions about how in particular isntances of absence of UN lead often humanitarian agencies stepped in to generate the coordination nodes, but evidently with some weaknesses.

Improvement Commitments: While generally Improvement Commitment reported on or past periods and put forward for the time ahead were well formulated including helpful milestones for progress reporting and completion, it was noted that there were IR's plans in course for PiA compliant certification (relevant for Way of Working 1.2) but that these were not in the Improvement Commitments. It may be worth for IR to establish a more coherent cross checking of work undertaking on improvement and its formal documentation which would also feed into the DECAF process.

6.9 Merlin

Merlin's capacity to address accountability issues has received a significant boost with the introduction of its accountability action plan system since 2011/12. These plans, rooted in the organisation's accountability framework, identify both specific benchmarks, gaps, and specific action to be taken. Situation Reports form an important source for the assessment of areas where more work is needed, and in the review meeting Merlin and One World Trust discussed also the wider overarching evaluation and review frameworks in use at Merlin (including its Evidence and Impact Policy) that allow problem identification, the aggregation of learning

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

and its eventual sharing. In support of the latter Merlin has more recently introduced an intranet field library system complemented by an online learning centre which offers remote access courses and resources. While prepared for monitoring of uptake sufficient assurance evidence could not be provided for all sample countries.

Merlin's situation is very specific in that in all of its operating localities a close cooperation with health services and the Ministry of Health is at the heart of its work. This brings with it a number of limitations in terms of assurance systems Merlin itself can show in that in many cases health authorities for instance do not see their cooperation with Merlin as a platform for generating data on their own performance or allowing a thus focused review. This is compounded in the case of some areas of Somalia by the hardly existent nature of governmentally coordinated or provided health services. In particular with regards to Way of Working 1.6 Merlin described hence assurance on strengthening of some of its key external local stakeholders as being hard to guarantee on a systematic basis. Similarly, assurance for instance on partner support on beneficiary accountability (Way of Working 3.5) reaches its limits when working with governmental institutions whose policy approach and structure is geared not towards accountability but on service provision, and this often much longer term than for disaster relief periods. Merlin's key approach to promote accountability and capacity building therefore runs through a strategy of progressive negotiation and improvement of the MoU tool, but it is accepted that only in some country contexts (and not those for which evidence was submitted), introductions of 'patient charters' had been possible and were deemed appropriate.

Improvement Commitments: Merlin's Improvement Commitments are quite broad and while frequently time bound, are not as strong as desirable on the use of effective milestones against which to measure progress. Reporting on progress is however detailed. Discussions at the review meeting revealed a mixture of motivations to list individual commitments as part of the DECAF process, some rooted in desires to move to a new RAG rating stage within DECAF, others being an expression of much wider organisational development and change plans.

6.10 Oxfam GB

Oxfam, as a very large and well developed agency, puts on display an impressive array of evidence including for assurance. Supported by internal structured processes such as the Humanitarian Indicator Tool (HIT) the agency draws DECAF evidence largely on the basis of existing information flow, mainstreaming the function rather than treating the process as an annual exception. At the same time the review discussions revealed that Oxfam sees particular value in the DECAF process as it asks questions on systems that its own HIT system does not directly address. This provides an incentive for Oxfam to think about other resources that from a systems point of view can be actively used to gather data on DECAF Ways of Working. In the review meetings in particular the involvement of the Internal Audit function was discussed, with (outside the sampled countries) outgoing internal auditors being occasionally asked to gather data on some DECAF relevant questions.

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

Giving detail on local joint agency/partner assurance mechanisms such as Project Implementation, Monitoring and Accountability Committees Oxfam provides for instance interesting examples of local assurance systems that contribute to meeting requirements on a range of Way of Workings (such as 1.6. , 2.4, and 3.5.). Yet overall the organisation remains self-critical in its ratings, preferring Amber over Green when the prevailing sense is that broader systematic assurance may not yet be reached. Similarly Oxfam conceptually disputes the possibility of ever reaching a deserving Green on effective dissemination of learning (4.2), from a conceptual point of view. Oxfam also points to the challenges involved in gathering annual new evidence for instance on accountability capacity building with partners, when such relationships and work programmes are long term and may not yield new evaluation processes and results within the reporting period

In other areas such as coordination, Oxfam however puts its achievements forward with confidence, such as its engagement in both UN led cluster work, and involvement in national NGO coordination activities.

Improvement Commitments: Oxfam's Improvement Commitments are refreshingly succinct, although not particularly precisely time bounded and arguably could be improved in terms of the formulation of progress milestones as well. The latter may also have affected to some degree the extent of reporting on progress made available. In most cases the Improvement Commitments shown for the DECAF process are targeting a change in the RAG rating already for the following, although some also have a longer timeline.

6.11 Plan UK

As the most recent member of the DEC, Plan UK is understandably someway behind other Member Agencies in its ratings against the DEC Accountability Framework. This is most notable with regards to Priority 3, concerning accountability to disaster affected populations: Plan UK is currently developing an Accountability Framework for Disasters, and whilst they have identified good practice in the field with relation to accountability, it remains undocumented and ad hoc. They recognise that they are still someway off being able to support partners on this issue, hence their red rating for Way of Working 3.5. Plan UK has also taken a cautious approach towards their other ratings: for example, Plan International's Global Assurance Unit conducts audits of country offices on a risk driven basis, and includes HR issues. However Plan UK have decided that they need their own internal assurance mechanisms before they can rate themselves as Green for Way of Working 1.2, which they are close to achieving.

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	A	A
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	R	R
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

The One World Trust challenged Plan UK's ratings for both Ways of Working 1.6 and 2.4. For 1.6, Plan was able to show that they assure that consultations take place with local stakeholders, as it is a required component of their Situation Reports. For 2.4, Plan UK provided ample evidence of Plan's engagement and leadership in coordination mechanisms, such as UN Clusters. However, since Plan did not work with Partners in the two selected countries of Ethiopia and Kenya, they provided evidence from Latin American programmes of enabling Partners to participate in Disaster Risk Management co-ordination mechanisms. Given the strength of their evidence of Plan's participation in coordination mechanisms, this was deemed satisfactory for Amber to be awarded.

Improvement Commitments: Plan UK's Improvement Commitments for 2012/13 largely concerned moving from Red, meaning that they had no policies or practice, to Amber, meaning that they had some evidence of application. In particular, Improvement Commitments focused on Accountability and Learning. Accountability continues to be an area of improvement for 2013/14, with the development of the Plan UK Accountability Framework.

6.12 Save the Children UK

Save the Children's approach to gathering evidence for the DECAF process was based on special DECAF based requests for data out to field offices, but combined with support visits by staff to both generate a deeper understanding about the DECAF process and strengthen local capacity evidencing accountability practice.

Challenges, which were not unique to Save the Children, were encountered primarily in relation to evidencing assurance, with data presented initially often focusing on other examples of application. The review meeting helped to address many of these issues and additional evidence submitted following the meeting enabled

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	A	A
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

confirmation of the originally submitted ratings. In the case of evidencing assurance on the PiA code of practice, the internal audit review of HR systems proved essential. That said, internal auditors might be usefully invited to comment more extensively on the HR systems in place if they are to play a greater role in evidencing assurance systems of the organisation.

Discussions at the review meeting also focused on the use of MoUs as both forward looking planning documents and as assurance tools. The agreement of such MoUs was accepted as demonstrating an outcome as much as a plan, but it was helpful to receive additional evidence through SitReps on how the cooperation goals set out in the MoUs for instance on strengthening of local external stakeholder capacity (Way of Working 1.6) panned out and was tracked in practice.

In relation to Way of Working 2.4 Save the Children presented a particularly well interlocking chain of evidence from policy commitments to assurance. Worth underlining is that the assurance developed in the case of Bangladesh, which while a previous DEC appeal country is now in a long term operations mode, is showing to take a much more structured form than is possible in particular in current crisis and difficult to access countries such as Somalia. In particular the impact of Save the Children's investment into its (Accountability) Breakthrough programme evidenced again in the context of Way of Working 3.5 can be felt here. Nevertheless Save the Children maintained an Amber rating for itself on this Way of Working as work in progress.

Improvement Commitments: Save the Children's Improvement Commitments made under the DECAF process were described as being essentially the annual workplan for the accountability lead and team, being the expression of overall organisational and not necessarily DECAF specific improvement and change priorities. Reporting on progress was meaningful and included longer term perspectives. The current set of Improvement Commitments are different to that in that they all aim for a DECAF RAG rating change within the next year.

6.13 Tearfund UK

Tearfund is currently at the tail end of a major change process within the organisation, merging humanitarian and regional development teams into geographical units, which are then advised by a humanitarian support team. The implications of the new structure for maintenance of organisational knowledge on humanitarian accountability, but also the spread of such expertise to other staff was a recurring thread of discussion during the well and diversely attended review meeting. With Tearfund presenting a mixture of Green and Amber self-assessment ratings for the sampled Ways of Working One World Trust and Tearfund

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1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	A	A
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	G	G
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	A	A

jointly explored in the meeting in particular also the question of good quality evidence of assurance, and the interest in being able to demonstrate the link from assurance systems back to their policy or strategy root.

Interesting differences in the quality of evidence submitted on both sampled countries (Kenya and Niger) emerged from the exploration of the difference of settings encountered and engagement of field staff and partners with assurance systems such as the MICAH reporting template system. In the context of coordination (Way of Working 2.4), it became for instance evident that the new templates, where they were used, played an important role in prompting for and generating information about coordination activities and local partner involvement. In the case of Niger, the new templates were not yet always used, limiting the assurance value that some of these reports provide. The challenges that arose from working largely with a single and very remotely based partner in Niger (JEMED) were also discussed, including the repercussions this had for local partner involvement in Cluster meetings for instance, which was not always felt to be meaningful or best use of funds and time.

The original evidence submitted in support of the targeted Amber rating on effective dissemination of learning (Way of Working 4.2) received substantive attention at the review meeting with meeting participants 'discovering' the value of its long standing field oriented 'Footsteps' humanitarian practice publications series in this area.

Improvement Commitments: Tearfund's progress reporting on last year's Improvement Commitment detailed both successes and difficulties, yet lacked a time milestone element. This is similar for the current year's Improvement Commitments, which were notably revised after the review meeting and the reflection on the impact of the structural change at Tearfund over the past year. Tearfund both expanded the list of Ways of Working it committed to prioritise, but also communicated progress targets within some Ways of Working for which it rated itself as Green to reflect wider organisational development goals beyond the DECAF RAG focus.

6.14 World Vision UK

World Vision International benefits from comprehensive monitoring systems which provide assurance for WVUK against many of the DECAF ways of working. For example, People and Culture Scorecards assess National Office performance on HR standards, which results in a "dashboard" summary of strengths and weaknesses (Way of Working 1.2). Similar Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs Scorecards assess National Offices' Disaster Management capacity against set goals and indicators, in this case providing assurance that there is engagement with coordination mechanisms (Way of Working 2.4). In other cases, assurance is provided through World Vision teams tasked with responsibility for specific areas such as Learning (Way of Working 4.2). and Accountability (Way of Working 3.5).

2012/13	Submitted	Validated
1.2 Approach to the management and care of staff reflects People in Aid code of good practice	G	G
1.6 Local structures (including governments, civil society organisations and markets) are consulted and strengthened	A	A
2.4 Agencies participate in established coordination mechanisms and support their partners to do the same	G	G
3.5 Agencies shall work with partners to strengthen their capacity to be accountable to disaster affected populations	G	G
4.2 Key learning is effectively communicated to staff, partners and other stakeholders	G	G

World Vision is a direct implementer, and so does not generally work with Partners: policies and assurance mechanisms do not consider partners therefore. However, in the case of Somalia, they decided that the challenges of the situation required a partnership approach in South Central. WVUK were able to provide evidence for Way of Working 2.4 that engagement with co-ordination mechanisms was a criteria of partner selection. In line with the DECAF guidance they took a broad definition of Partners for Way of Working 3.5 to be those who are implementing the project on the ground: in this case, staff, and provided evidence of their extensive Accountability Learning Labs for staff training. This is satisfactory for their current approach, however, if World Vision increasingly works through partners, for example in the Syria response, it will need to consider how to adapt policies and assurance mechanisms accordingly

Improvement Commitments: World Vision UK's Improvement Commitments must necessarily reflect the focuses of World Vision International: it can be challenging to exert influence in such a large organisation, particularly on UK centred issues such as Value for Money. Their commitments this year reflect the strategic priorities of Resilience (World Vision International and World Vision UK) and Learning (World Vision UK).