

# Guidance on Engaging People in Crisis-Affected Communities to #ReshapeAid

## Background

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) secretariat is committed to engaging people in crisis-affected communities in discussions on how to make humanitarian aid more effective leading up to and at the WHS in May 2016. This guidance is intended to provide recommendations for implementing key components of the WHS Community Engagement Strategy. It was developed in 2015 for the WHS by Dayna Brown, who directed the Listening Project at CDA Collaborative Learning Projects<sup>1</sup>, and Imogen Wall, who led UNOCHA's work on Communication with Communities.

## I. Guidance for Engaging People in Conversations

A key component of the WHS Community Engagement strategy is engaging people in crisis-affected communities in conversations to make recommendations for the participants in the WHS. The conversations should take into consideration the widest possible definition of people in "affected communities", to include not just those directly impacted by disasters and conflicts, but also local first responders (both official and non-official, faith-based organizations, civil society groups, host communities, businesses, etc.) and those affected by the effects of the crisis (diaspora communities, businesses, etc.).

### A. Focus of Conversations

Given the WHS process and timeline, the conversations with people in crisis-affected communities should focus on the following broad areas of inquiry:

1. Understanding how people are responding to crises themselves and what they do when the international aid system is not present. The objective is to understand the ways in which affected communities meet the challenges of preparing for and responding to crisis situations, and the gaps and needs in their lives that need to be met. Conversations should enable them to discuss how they see the roles of local and international responders, the challenges as well as benefits in working with them, and to make recommendations for improving how their needs are met. This would also provide a basis to review the WHS recommendations made to date to see if they fit with the actions, priorities and capacities of people in affected communities as suggested below.

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<sup>1</sup> By listening to nearly 6,000 people in over 20 countries who received, participated in or observed international assistance, the Listening Project gathered evidence on the cumulative effects of aid efforts and ideas on how to make international aid more effective. For more on CDA and the Listening Project see [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org)

2. Feedback on the recommendations that are being suggested through the WHS process and practical recommendations on ways to improve humanitarian action. This could be approached in various ways, such as:

- Sharing a brief summary of what has been heard already and is known about a certain set of or particular problems/critiques/challenges (i.e. lack of protection, not having opportunities to provide input/feedback, problems with targeting, no durable solutions, etc.) and asking affected communities to give their feedback on the problem statements/descriptions based on their experiences. Then the specific recommendations that have been made to address those problems could be shared and the WHS could seek affected communities' feedback and additional ideas on what needs to be done/changed, and by who, based on their experiences.
- Providing the brief summary of the problems as described above, and then asking people in affected communities to suggest how best to solve them, what they think needs to be done, who they think needs to change and how, etc. This would be a much more open-ended approach to engaging affected communities in the options generation and problem-solving process than the first option.
- Asking people to describe the challenges or problems with humanitarian responses and what they suggest be done to address them, who should be responsible for leading or making the changes, and how to prioritize among the many challenges and solutions they suggest.

Neither of these suggested focuses for conversations are mutually exclusive and all could be explored in some conversations.

## B. Listening and Facilitating Conversations<sup>2</sup>

Much of this guidance is from the *Listening Exercise Manual* developed by CDA's Listening Project and CDA's *Guidance to Effective Listening* (forthcoming).

### **Why listening is important**

The simple act of listening signals respect and is an important step towards building relationships. People in crisis-affected communities want a human connection and a relationship with the people who aim to support them. There is a link between the act of listening and more effective strategies and programs. The Listening Project<sup>3</sup> and others have highlighted how well-intentioned assistance is often not relevant, well-utilized or understood simply because aid providers have not adequately listened to those who need assistance to understand their needs, priorities, capacities, and ideas. People in aid-receiving communities and those who have worked with them over many years describe a number of impacts from listening effectively and engaging in meaningful dialogue:

- Better understanding of the culture, beliefs, challenges, dynamics, and politics in communities
- More ideas are generated for dealing with the challenges communities face
- More appropriate assistance is provided

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<sup>3</sup> These lessons and other findings from the Listening Project are summarized in "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid."

- People in communities are more engaged in the process and can help address challenges along the way
- Corruption, waste, and mismanagement of aid resources can be prevented
- Transparency and accountability can be improved
- The possibilities for sustainable outcomes and impacts are increased
- Local ownership--of not just problems, but also of solutions--is greater

## What do we mean by “Listening”?

Intentional and active listening is a way to show respect and to create an open space for dialogue. It requires the listener to be humble, have an open mind, to suspend their judgments and preconceptions, and to be open to hear not just words, but also the feelings and meanings behind the words. It is important to listen to thoughts, to feelings, and to intentions.

### *Listening at Three Levels: Head, Heart and Feet*

**"Listening for the Head" - the Thinking Level** - to thoughts, facts, concepts, arguments, ideas and the principles behind these.

**"Listening for the Heart" - the Feeling Level** - to feelings, emotions, mood, experience and the values behind these.

**"Listening for the Feet" - the Will Level** - to intentions, energy, direction, motivation, the will.

Inasmuch as we are challenged to **listen at** these three different levels, we are also challenged to **express** ourselves more clearly **from** these three levels.

Source: Reeler, p. 4

Listening allows one to better understand another person, their beliefs, values, positions, and what is important to them. **Effective listeners in the WHS process are:**

- ❖ Able to show empathy and be emotionally present.
- ❖ Able to connect to other people and to seek to understand their perspectives and experiences.
- ❖ Able to put their own thoughts, judgments, and emotions aside to understand those of another.
- ❖ Curious, humble, and open to listening to and learning from anyone, including those affected by aid efforts and persons with less education or status.
- ❖ Comfortable listening to people who are expressing emotion
- ❖ Respectful of people who are different and have different views than themselves.
- ❖ Willing to work with and around traditional hierarchies and the formalities expected in adhering to them.
- ❖ Comfortable being in communities and among people who live in conditions of poverty.

- ❖ Open to critical information about their performance, programs, staff, or the larger aid system.
- ❖ Interested in improving their organizational programs and processes.

Listeners need to start with humility and recognize that there is an enormous amount of experience and knowledge among people in societies experiencing crises and receiving international assistance. Improving the effectiveness of humanitarian aid rests on the ability to connect with people who have this experience and knowledge in a non-extractive and respectful manner. Many organizations struggle to listen effectively to community perspectives during program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes, as well as in strategic and policy level discussions such as the WHS. Yet, most people who work in humanitarian programming agree that time spent listening and reflecting on their programs and practices with those affected by them is educational and can improve strategies and outcomes.

The process of engaging people from crisis-affected communities in the WHS process should be guided the following principles:

- **Recognition and respect for local knowledge.** Every person has different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, ideas, and preferences. It is thus important to engage a broad range of people in conversations.
- **Thinking beyond projects and sectors.** Think of each conversation as a way to learn from others. People affected by crises are rarely asked to reflect and comment on both tangible (infrastructure, food security, services, etc.) and intangible (empowerment, trust, accountability, etc.) impacts and the long-term effects of humanitarian action. In order to learn from people's experiences, conversations need to explore this broader context.
- **Broad exploration with focused conversations.** Conversations should follow an open-ended, unscripted process, with only a few guiding questions. Let people bring up the issues and ideas that matter most to them. Explore certain themes and issues in-depth as they emerge through follow-up questions and discussions.
- **Engaging people in analysis.** Conversations differ from structured, rigid interviews or surveys in that they invite people to share their insights and analysis using their experiences and observations as evidence. These insights can eventually be clustered and organized around clearly identifiable themes, which can be identified and analyzed by local people themselves.
- **Actively seek recommendations.** Be humble and open to criticism. Engage people in critical thinking about what can and should be done differently (and by whom) to better address the concerns they have raised.

*“International people don’t understand the communication of the Cambodian people. We speak – explain our thinking – and then come to the point. Westerners put the point first, and then explain their thinking. This way Cambodians are disqualified from the beginning. We explain the idea rather than come to the point.”*

**Cambodian woman working for an international donor**

Source: Listening Exercise Field Visit Report: Cambodia, p. 33.

## Preparing to Listen

### Clarifying the purpose of the conversation

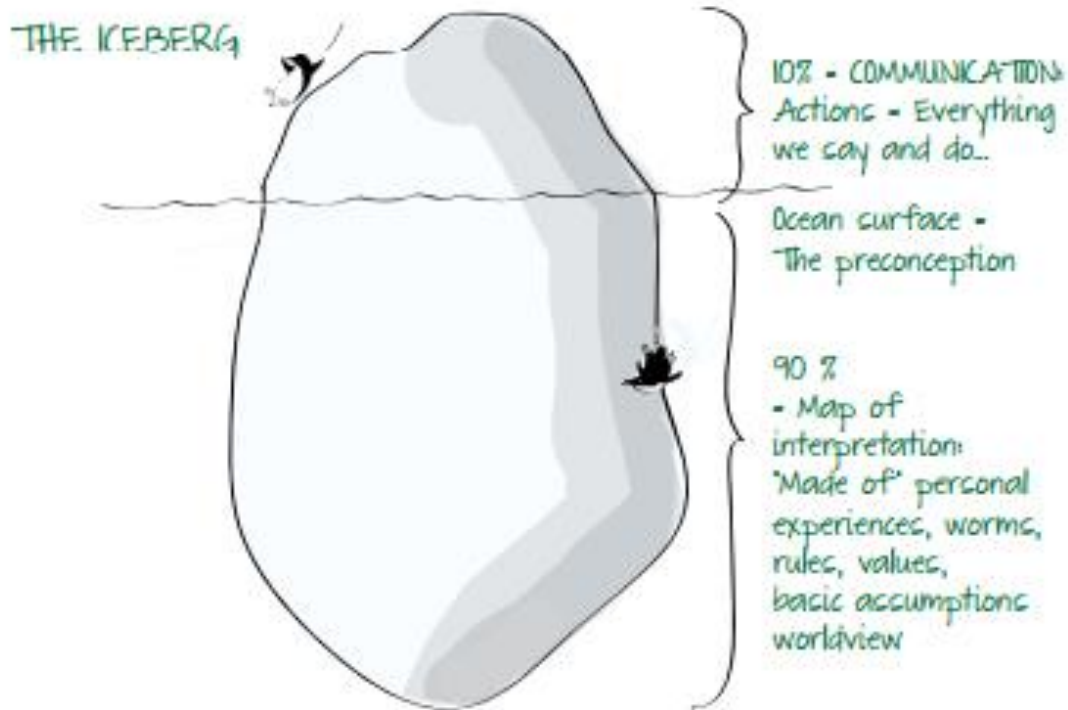
It is important to consider if people in affected communities want to be engaged in the WHS process, how they want to be listened to and to clarify up front what they can expect after sharing their stories, perspectives, and ideas. Most will never have heard of the WHS, so it is important to explain the purpose and the focus of the conversation you would like to have, how it will influence the WHS process and what they can expect after the conversation. It is important to manage expectations and be clear that the conversation is linked to a policy process and will not likely result in additional assistance or immediate changes. If people would rather not be engaged in the WHS process, it is important to respect that and seek others who are willing to share their thoughts.

### Preparing to Listen and Deal with Biases

Prior to engaging in a conversation, think about how you like to be listened to, your communication style, and your personal biases such as your background, education, skills, beliefs, experiences, ethnicity, nationality, culture, languages, etc. Awareness of your own biases (the things that are often “below the surface”, as shown in the picture below) will help you to understand how you may be perceived and what you need to be mindful of during conversations. Acknowledging your biases will enable you to find ways to minimize their influences so that you can truly be open to hearing what the other person is saying and the meaning they are trying to convey. Here are a few approaches to reduce the influence of your own biases:

- **Keep an open mind.** Use open-ended questions to encourage people to speak their minds, do their own analysis, and talk about the issues that are important to them. Be careful not to assume answers will “fit” a predetermined expectation or hypothesis.
- **Ask “why?”** Avoid “yes/no” questions and ask people to explain why they think or believe as they do without expressing doubt or accusing them of being wrong or biased. Try to understand why their opinion may differ from others you have spoken with or from what you might have expected them to say, without judging what they tell you.
- **Be evidence-based.** Ask people to be specific when they speak about their own experiences. Ask for examples or evidence to support their views. Ask how their lives or those of family members have been affected--and listen carefully to the details and their analysis without judgment.
- **Do not try to problem-solve.** The goal is to understand, not to try to find a solution or consensus in each conversation. You can learn as much from differences of opinions and judgments as from common opinions.
- **Be inclusive.** Talk with a broad range of people who represent a diversity of backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints. This may include people who are very different from you, who did not participate in your program or who may oppose the agendas or actions of your organization. (See more in the section below on “Determining Who to Engage in Conversations.”)
- **Triangulate.** Check what people share against what others say and against written records that relate to the issues being explored when possible. This may include summaries or recommendations from the WHS consultative process to date, news reports, social media, monitoring reports or evaluations, NGO or donor reports, etc. When you share these sources, do so in a way that is inquisitive, not judgmental. Triangulation is also a way of checking biases after a conversation is over and may help confirm something you were skeptical about, or undermine a pre-conceived notion.

- **Pay attention to what people actually say.** Record (and ensure translation of) the actual words people use as carefully as possible. This helps you to avoid using jargon or becoming committed to one point of view (which can happen if we translate ideas into our own words).



Source: Helde, p. 42

## Working with Translators

In places where you need to work with a translator, finding a good translator is very important to ensure you can truly hear what people are telling you and that your questions are clear. When possible, try and ensure that the translator speaks the language most easily spoken by the people engaged in conversations. This may not be the “dominant” language taught in schools, but a regional or tribal language or dialect. In some cultures and contexts, you may need to have female translators work with female listeners to listen to women’s and girls’ perspectives independent of the presence of men. Find a translator who is comfortable and has experience with a range of people from different backgrounds. Lastly, consider the profile and attitude of the translator: Are they a threat to the people in any way (are they from an ethnicity, caste, class, political group, or religion that is at odds with the speakers)? Do they act in such a way as to intimidate or look down on the speakers? Are they humble and curious?

Community members will often turn to translators to ask for clarification outside of their translation role, so the more information they have, the better they can facilitate dialogue. Here are some basic guidelines when working with translators:

- Explain the purpose of the conversation beforehand so the translator can speak about this correctly when asked informally.

- Explain the methodology of open-ended questions so the translator does not change the questions to be more easily answerable, such as substituting them with “yes or no” or leading questions.
- Where culturally appropriate, maintain eye contact with the speaker when they are speaking, and then with the translator when he or she is translating, to convey that you are listening even if you do not understand what is being said. The translator should also maintain eye contact with the person speaking and then with you when translating what is being said, if culturally appropriate.
- Ask your translator to translate in the first person in order to repeat as closely as possible what the person is saying.
- Explain that you want to know what the person is saying in their own words and not to summarize, use jargon, or interpret the meaning. Ask the translator to translate often, stopping the person speaking if needed to ensure that he or she is translating everything the speaker is saying. If something is not clear, ask for clarification, rather than guess or fill in.
- If people have questions or seek clarification, ask the translator to translate their questions, rather than attempt to answer the question him or herself.
- Explain that you are comfortable hearing negative feedback, and that you encourage an open and honest discussion.
- Explain that what is heard is not to be attributed to the speaker or discussed with persons inside or outside your organization. Have the translator sign a confidentiality agreement if necessary. This may be important in environments where speakers could face negative consequences for revealing corruption or criticizing the government, an agency, or its staff.
- Explain that if the translator hears of any cases of staff misconduct, protection concerns, sexual exploitation or abuse, or allegations of corruption or fraud, they are required to share that information with you or someone in the agency responsible for managing these issues.

## **Understand the Context**

If you will be listening to people in communities new to you (even within a familiar region) or if you have not had any previous exposure to the local context, culture, or people, it is important to do some research on the local context and dynamics in advance. Those intending to listen for the first time to people in communities new to them should dedicate some time during the planning and preparation phase to discuss the following factors, ideally with people who are from the local community:

- Cultural and political sensitivities in the local context (country, region, community, neighborhood);
- Social factors such as ethnicity, castes or class systems, cultural beliefs, religion, and gender, including identification of most vulnerable or marginalized populations to ensure that their voices are heard;
- The best ways to approach and greet individuals and different groups in communities;
- Required protocols and courtesy calls (to local officials, community leaders, elders, etc.);
- People whose presence will prevent open expression of opinions (i.e. a politician, village chief, warlord, religious leader, etc.);
- General perceptions of outsiders in the community;
- People or groups who may be uncomfortable with/opposed to your presence;
- What times of the day or week are busy for different people (i.e. if you call a meeting on a market day and women typically go to the market, you may have no women. Or if you have a meeting during hours farmers are in their fields, you may only get members of a wealthier merchant class)

- What places are accessible to different groups (often there are some places certain groups cannot access due to cultural, gender or safety considerations)
- How to best introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the conversation;
- What behaviors, language, and gestures to avoid using;
- Potential safety concerns or risks to yourself or the people you will listen to in the communities.
- Other listening, assessment, or evaluation processes people have been asked to participate in recently (including for the WHS).

## Determining Who to Engage in Conversations

It is important to listen to a range of people who may differ by ethnicity, religion, caste, political affiliation, gender, and economic status. When possible or appropriate, include people who did not participate in your program or receive any international assistance, or who may not understand or who may even oppose the agendas or actions of aid agencies. In this way, you can accumulate a multi-faceted picture that captures a large part of the reality of the situation and a diversity of views. Within a given location or region, this would mean understanding social and diversity factors to ensure that conversations are held with a variety of persons representing those with more and less power, and those with more and less vulnerability.

In the Philippines, aid agencies took a special interest in how indigenous persons were affected by Typhoon Haiyan. Indigenous leaders reported that every time foreigners came to visit them--- including to listen-- they had to first walk through the local Filipino village. A village chief explained that the increased attention to his people was eroding fragile good will with the neighboring village. He suggested that future meetings be held in town, where it was not so visible that foreigners were giving them more attention than their non-indigenous neighbors.



There is a tendency among aid agencies to favor certain geographic areas or to take an interest in a type of population (IDPs, indigenous persons, women, disabled, etc.) or people affected by a particular problem (malnutrition, gender-based violence, etc.). As a result, these persons or populations can become over-burdened by researchers, volunteers, and donor visits. Many of these people feel obligated to participate in conversations but may be upset by the exposure or unmet expectations. When choosing communities for conversations, consider areas which have not been over-targeted. If it is necessary to go to such an area, be sensitive to the perceptions of one group of persons receiving special attention over another and if this will cause resentment or have negative consequences for the participants.



## Facilitating Conversations

### Listening Skills

Listening is a critical skill and ability that may come more easily to some than others. When people feel that they have been listened to, they feel worthy, respected, and appreciated. Following are some good and bad listening skills when facilitating conversations:

 <b>Good Listening Skills</b>	 <b>Bad Listening Skills</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Sitting straight and facing the speaker.</li><li>▪ Showing concentration through maintaining eye contact (where culturally appropriate).</li><li>▪ Being comfortable with pauses and allowing time for people to think and respond.</li><li>▪ Having one person take notes while another person is listening, speaking and focusing on the person speaking.</li><li>▪ Responding with appropriate verbal and non-verbal reactions (i.e. nodding, saying “yes”, moving closer when appropriate, etc.).</li><li>▪ Allow people to finish what they are saying without interrupting them.</li><li>▪ Listening to the whole message—the meaning, consistency, ideas, emotions, intentions, facts.</li><li>▪ Listening for things that are challenging or unpleasant.</li><li>▪ Clarifying with follow-up questions.</li><li>▪ Paraphrasing what was heard.</li><li>▪ Summarizing key points.</li><li>▪ Not drawing premature conclusions.</li><li>▪ Hearing before evaluating.</li><li>▪ Demonstrating empathy.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Interrupting the speaker.</li><li>▪ Eyes searching, looking or moving away, and being distracted by something else.</li><li>▪ Being distracted by your own thoughts and unable to focus on what the other is saying.</li><li>▪ Rehearsing your answer or next question while the person is speaking</li><li>▪ Checking the time.</li><li>▪ Looking at your phone or other device. Feeling and/or becoming defensive.</li><li>▪ Hearing what is expected—listening only for specific things or key words.</li><li>▪ “Pseudo” or “fake” listening—listening but not really hearing.</li><li>▪ Acting defensive.</li><li>▪ Drawing premature conclusions.</li><li>▪ Listening for a point of disagreement.</li></ul>

## Non-verbal Communication

There are a variety of non-verbal gestures that can communicate your level of attention, presence, interest, disagreement, or other reactions. These vary across cultures and it is important to be aware of your facial expressions and body language and what they may be communicating. *Remember: all of these are dependent upon what is considered appropriate for the culture and context.*

Listener's facial expression and what it communicates to the speaker	
Concentration / Eye contact	"I am listening"
Puzzlement	"I need clarification"
Ponder	"I am reflecting on what you said"
Excitement / Happiness	"I like what you are saying" / Encouragement
Dislike / scowl	"I don't like what you are saying" / Disagreement
Disappointment	" I am surprised"
Eyes searching around (when in a larger group):	"I am distracted" measuring reactions of others / identifying next speaker
Moving closer / approaching	"I am interested in what you are saying" Engagement/Attempt to insert a comment or ask another question/could be threatening
Moving away / distancing	Giving the speaker space to express him/herself Could also communicate disinterest/loss of focus
Silence	Reflection, emphasis, can also increase tension

### ***Ideas for observing and practicing active listening skills:***

- When you have a conversation or discussion with a co-worker, a family member or a friend, observe and pay attention to the way you and others communicate, both verbally and non-verbally. Reflect on how you know and feel when you have been heard and understood.
- Observe the way other people listen and engage in group discussions such as small team meetings, focus group discussions or large staff meetings. Ask people how they would like to be listened to and how they want to be engaged, particularly those who have not participated much.
- Practice active listening skills in pairs or small groups by demonstrating what good listening and bad listening would look like using verbal and non-verbal responses.

## Establishing Rapport

Establishing good rapport is important to getting conversations off on the right foot. Some actions can help to build rapport even with complete strangers—for instance beginning a conversation with

appropriate small talk and inquiries, being culturally appropriate, and minimizing power or status differences. For example, in many Asian countries, people do not wear shoes in their homes. When listeners are invited into the home, it is likely they will be told to not take their shoes off. Taking them off anyway communicates respect. Acting and dressing to minimize differences between yourself and those you will be listening to can also help to create more of a sense of trust or sense of “commonness.” For instance, fancier clothes or briefcases used in offices and cities could communicate to villagers that you have a higher position in the social hierarchy, which may make people feel intimidated about speaking openly and voicing opinions next to the official and important-looking “experts.” Having a cup of tea/coffee when offered shows you appreciate hospitality and value the time of the people you want to engage in conversation. Build time into your schedule to ensure that you have time to do what is culturally appropriate to build rapport when engaging new people or communities.

## Introductions

How you introduce yourself is critical to what you communicate about who you are and the type of relationship you are trying to establish. You never get a second chance to make a first impression. During the introductions, listeners need to establish personal rapport, communicate their purpose transparently, and ask for time and consent to engage in a conversation. You should clarify that what you hear will not be attributed to the person sharing the information and establish a safe environment in which people can openly share their views. Use words that are easy to understand and help to clearly communicate your intent. Remember that how you ask your questions sends implicit messages, and you want people to feel comfortable engaging in a conversation and sharing their experiences. Some simple guidelines for introductions include:

- Introduce yourself and your colleagues, identifying names and organizational affiliation or membership in a WHS listening team;
- Explain the purpose of your conversation in a sentence or two;
- Ask for consent to have a conversation and make sure the time and location suits the person/people;
- Mention some of the general and larger questions you are hoping to discuss with them;
- Explain that you are listening to and gathering perspectives from a number of people with the intention to learn from them in order to improve humanitarian action in the future.
- Try not to raise expectations. Explain that this is not a needs assessment and that people will not receive any direct benefit or immediate assistance after talking with you, but that their input is valuable to making humanitarian aid more effective in the future.
- Do not use jargon, acronyms, or terms that are too technical;
- Ask for permission to take notes and explain that what they say will not be attributed to them in a way that would identify them. Clarify that you are not recording their name and will not use any other identifying information when reporting on the findings.
- Do not record the conversation or take photos unless necessary and with agreement by the person/people you are listening to.

**Sample script for an introduction:** This will need to be adapted depending on the local culture, who you are listening to and what your particular focus is.

Warm hello/greeting—

*Introduction:* “Our names are [...]. We represent [organization’s name], an organization based in [region/city]. We would like to hear your views on humanitarian aid and what can be done to make it more effective [or whatever the particular focus is for the conversation.]”

Some people may also want some explanation on what this conversation is connected to, so be prepared to explain a little bit more about the WHS process so they can decide if they want to engage.]

*Lead-in:* Do you have time to share your experiences and ideas?

*Assuming they say yes...*

Is this a good place to talk? (If not, move to where advised)

If they do not want to talk with you, respect that request and if appropriate, you could ask them to recommend others in the community that you should listen to. If people say, “I really don’t know anything about this and can’t help you,” you could offer to explain the reasons behind the conversation once more and pose more concrete questions to give confidence to the person about their ability to contribute to the discussion from their experience. However, do not pressure anyone to engage in a conversation.

## Asking Good Questions

To understand people’s perspectives, it is best to use open-ended questions, that is, questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” but rather encourage the participants to speak their minds and direct the conversation in ways that address the issues that are important to them. Listeners should allow the conversations to flow freely from the answers and interests of the people with whom they are talking. Often, it helps to share what you have heard from other people in other areas as a way of making it more of a conversation than an interview. Conversations can then turn into a dialogue about a particular challenge or an issue that both the communities and the listeners have been struggling to understand and solve.



### USE:

- **Icebreaking questions.** These can be helpful in starting the conversation with small talk to build rapport.  
*Example: How long have you been here? How is your family doing?*
- **Open questions.** These start with *who, what, when, where, how* and invite the speaker to describe things. *Example: What did your community do when the disaster happened or the conflict started? (descriptive) How do you feel about humanitarian aid efforts in your community? (exploring attitudes / feelings) How could assistance be provided better? (application / suggestion)*

- **Probing / follow-up questions.** These often start with “why” and seek to draw out additional details and analysis. *Example: That’s really interesting, can you tell me more? Why do you think that happened? Could you describe when you felt your voice has been heard?*
- **Theoretical / Hypothetical questions.** These can help the person to offer additional opinions, conclusions and recommendations by offering a new scenario in which to apply their experience. Usually these questions start with the words: Imagine... Suppose... Predict... If..., then... How might... What are some possible consequences...*Example: If you were to advise the local authorities or an aid agency elsewhere after a similar disaster, what would you tell them? What are some possible consequences if the assistance to your community stops tomorrow?*



**AVOID:**

- **Closed questions.** These are limited by default because they invite “yes/no” answers and do not facilitate a conversation. *Example: Do you think the maternal health services were useful? Avoid pre-defining answers. Example: Do you think that was unfair or fair?*
- **Leading questions.** These attempt to guide the respondent's answer. *Example: Would you agree that the assistance provided has met your needs?*
- **Multiple choice questions.** These are often used in written surveys and are not usually appropriate in a conversation. As a last resort, in cultures where people feel shy to voice opinions, a skilled listener might use a multiple choice or ranking question, but ensure that a full spectrum of options (positive and negative) are made available. Sometimes this can help kick start a conversation when people are afraid to be critical or of saying the wrong thing.

**Types of Questions**

The question types listed below provide some ideas on how to move a conversation beyond project specifics to a higher and cumulative level of analysis.

<b>Descriptive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe the challenges you face?</li> <li>- What has been your experience with local or international humanitarian aid projects?</li> <li>- How have you been involved?</li> <li>- What kinds of impacts have you seen?</li> <li>- What has worked well? What has not worked so well?</li> </ul>
<b>Evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you give me an example or more details?</li> <li>- Why do you feel this way?</li> <li>- What is your experience? What have you seen or heard?</li> <li>- Why do you think that is positive? Negative?</li> <li>- How? For whom? For how long?</li> <li>- What factors do you think led to that?</li> <li>- How did that make you feel?</li> </ul>
<b>Clarification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you explain what you mean?</li> <li>- Am I right that what you are saying is...?</li> <li>- Let me be sure I understand you right – do you mean....?</li> </ul>

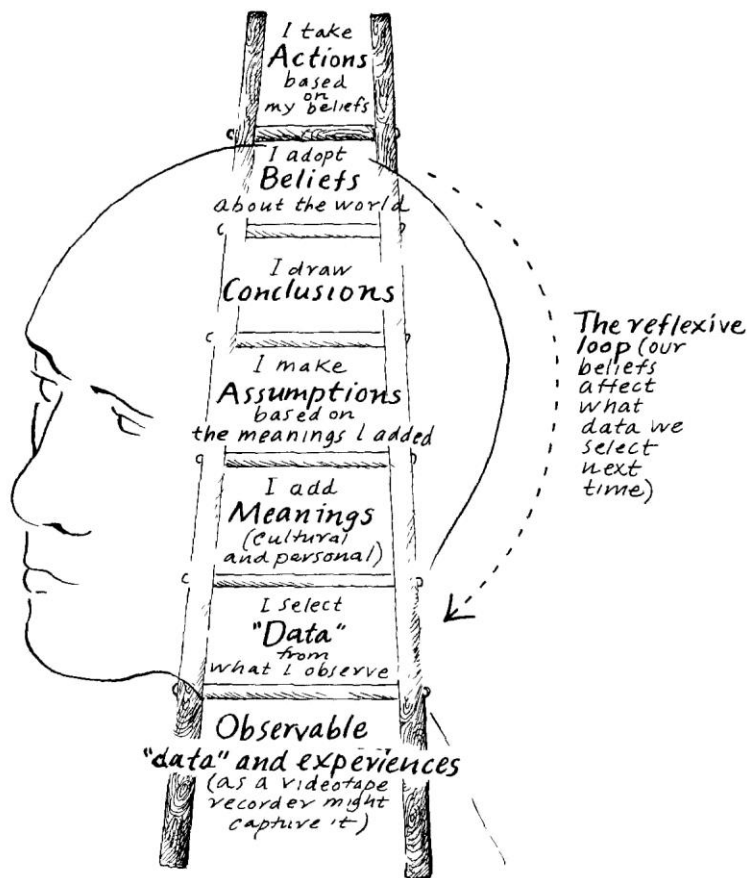
<b>Analytical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why did "x" result occurred when "y" happened?</li> <li>- Why do you think that "x" was good when another person thought it was bad?</li> <li>- Why do you think "y" happened? Why did it happen then, or to that person or group?</li> <li>- Why do you think those factors led to that outcome?</li> </ul>
<b>Application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When "y" happens, what impact does it have on you, your family, and your community?</li> <li>- What can be done to improve the situation?</li> <li>- What can be done to make the positive impacts from these actions have lasting effects?</li> </ul>
<b>Abstract / Hypothetical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What advice would you give to someone like you in another community (or country) who is dealing with similar issues?</li> <li>- If you were to start over again, how might you act differently to get better outcomes?</li> <li>- In general, if "x" happened, would "y" also happen?</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluative/ Judgmental</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you judge the impacts/outcomes of the response to [the crisis affecting them, for instance a typhoon, displacement, conflict, etc.]?</li> <li>- What do you see as the positive and negative impacts?</li> <li>- How do you feel about international humanitarian aid efforts and the people who are providing it?</li> <li>- In your opinion, what is appropriate and useful for outsiders to do in your community? What is the right role for outside organizations?</li> <li>- What is your experience with (or what are your thoughts about) the community consultation processes used by aid agencies?</li> <li>- What would you recommend to make aid efforts more effective?</li> </ul>

## Importance of follow-up questions

Follow-up questions help dig deeper and gather additional details, fill in information gaps, and help further analysis by distinguishing between nuances in the issues raised by people. For example, community members often make comments about "participation" (or lack thereof). Follow-up questions can help to dig deeper into what they mean by *participation* and what their personal experience has been; it is difficult to differentiate between all the various uses and interpretations of many terms such as this without follow-up and clarification. Listeners need to be purposeful about learning and seeking the details in order to better understand the issues. Many of the questions types in the chart above can be used as follow-up questions.

The ladder of inference shown below<sup>4</sup> can help you to think about the ways people process information and experiences and about how to use follow-up questions to elicit understanding about the beliefs, assumptions, and meanings being conveyed and that ultimately affect actions.

<sup>4</sup> From Pruitt, Bettye and Thomas, Philip. Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners, p. 127.



"The Ladder of Inference." Source: Senge, Peter M. et al. p.246

## Ending the Conversation

When a conversation is coming to an end, give the person a chance to ask you questions, seek clarification, or raise any other issues or concerns. Simply ask:

- Do you have any questions for me?
- Is there anything else you want to say?

In closing, thank them for their time and go over how the content of your conversation will be used and if there will be opportunities to participate in further analysis or future processes. For example, explain that the conversation notes will be written up and shared with those who will be attending the World Humanitarian Summit. When possible, let people know that they will get a copy of the report [or whatever the expected output will be] and how and when that will happen. If people posed questions and concerns that require a concrete response or action from your organization or other actors in the area, provide information about follow-up steps that will be taken, when, and by whom.

## Recording Conversations

You should generally avoid recording conversations as people may not be willing to speak openly if they know they are being recorded. It is also not advisable to take pictures as your focus should be on

listening and not on taking pictures of project sites or participants. Taking photos can also make people feel nervous about information or opinions being traced or attributed to them. It is important to ask people if they mind you taking notes so that you can record what they say and not forget anything. If they seem uncomfortable with you taking notes or it seems inappropriate (for instance if you are standing in a market or outside of someone's home, or in a crowd), try to write down what you have heard as soon after the conversation as possible so that you do not forget important details and examples.

When taking notes, try to capture as much of what people say, including the exact words, key phrases and specific examples people share during the conversations. "Raw data" and the words people chose to use matter and will help make the subsequent analysis comprehensive and rich in content. It is preferable not to ask for people's names or other identifying information so that you can keep their views non-attributable and to protect their privacy. In higher risk environments, keep notes with you at all times or keep them protected in a locked bag. Keep computer notes password-protected and, if data is highly sensitive, consider encryption or other methods to keep it secure.

When taking notes for each conversation, you can observe and note the gender and approximate age of the speakers, as well as any other factors that are specific to their social identity (ethnicity, religion, position or status in the village) and that may affect their level of vulnerability (widow, disabled, single mother, etc.). If there are several people in the group you are talking to, you could draw a diagram of the group in the conversation, giving descriptions of who was where and some sense of who spoke most and least. You can put numbers on the people in the diagram and record who says what by putting numbers next to quotations or examples. This will help to contextualize what different people have said during the data analysis.

When working in teams, it is important to determine roles and responsibilities for note-taking prior to starting conversations. It is best to write answers while questions are being asked and pay attention to the person when he/she is speaking. When working in teams of 2 or 3 people (depending on translation needs), ideally one person will take notes while the other(s) actively listens and facilitates (and/or translates) the conversation.

You should be able and/or willing to type up your notes when possible to facilitate analysis and sharing with others. If this is not possible, a leader or facilitator can organize a debrief session in which listeners report out what they heard from their hand written notes at the end of each day. Leave enough time each day to capture as much detail, main points, and examples from your conversations.

## **Ethical Considerations of Listening**

### **Safety and security of the local person/s and their information**

In contexts where the national, sub-national, or local authorities are concerned about negative information being shared, consider how to maintain a safe listening environment and mitigate negative consequences for those you speak to. Be aware that the government or others may send someone to listen in on conversations and report back on who said what. Usually persons will self-censor when they notice such a person is present. You can also handle such informants by having a colleague or another team member take them aside and engage them in a separate conversation, thereby gathering their views. In contexts where those in power employ people to report on their people and where human rights abuses are a common risk for those speaking out, you should be extremely cautious and take advice from local people to determine if you should engage people in conversations, how to best ensure



confidentiality and where to meet if they agree to it. It may even be necessary to have code language or signals when the meeting no longer feels safe and needs to be strategically or carefully ended. When possible, go back to an area to see if there were negative consequences for those who participated in the conversation. Do this with care and sensitivity so no further harm is done. Consider that even your presence could pose a risk to the welfare of those who speak out about corruption or misconduct of aid personnel or government officials.

### **Responsibilities around protection issues**

Sometimes you may learn about abuse or protection problems faced by a person, his or her family member, or someone in the community. Just by being physically present in a community, you may learn about cases that have been overlooked by the government or other aid agencies. Even though the primary objective of the conversation is not related to protection issues, you have a responsibility to report this type of information with urgency. This information should be given to the responsible parties for follow-up and, when possible, tracked to ensure that action has been taken to assist the person suffering and/ or mitigate the issue.

## **C. Analyzing the Conversations (including with communities)**

An intentional and effective listening process has to be followed by analysis of what people said, identification of differing views, patterns and trends, and synthesizing the recommendations and implications. Making sense of the various views with some of those who have been engaged in conversations and/or with representatives from affected communities can also prevent the listening processes from being extractive and will engage them in the reflection and problem-solving process.

### **Debrief and Analysis Processes**

When planning listening processes, allow time for listeners to debrief with one another at the end of each day. Debriefs make it easier to remember the details of who said what-- while conversations are still fresh in one's memory. Debriefs also help to fill in gaps in note-taking. When feasible, debriefs can focus on recording the raw information and analysis that listeners heard and to discuss challenges and solutions to engaging people in meaningful discussions. Regular debriefs are also a helpful platform for coaching listeners and refining the questions.

Analysis sessions with at least some of the community members who have been engaged in the conversations - whether at the end of each day, the end of the listening process or at regular intervals-should generate reactions, reflections, and prioritized recommendations and suggestions. When using examples from conversations, listeners should not disclose the names of people with whom they have spoken as this might cause problems for the people and/or generate frictions within the community. Listeners should use these analysis discussions to hone in on the themes, patterns and diverging views that have emerged in the conversations to ensure the range of views are captured and not lost through the analysis and filtering process. As the list of issues and themes emerges, listeners should engage community members in prioritizing which ones stand out as most critical to address, while not losing insights and comments which may have only come up a few times.

### **Identifying Patterns and Themes**

It should be remembered that this is an iterative and progressive process – after a number of conversations, patterns will often start becoming evident. As listeners focus between the lines of what was said—the underlying assumptions, expectations, changes, impacts, feelings, attitudes, etc.—these larger issues should be captured as themes as well. It is important to capture the breadth as well as depth of observations/insights. Listeners should discuss how to determine the frequency of issues raised and how to indicate the frequency of key themes in the notes and in reports. Disaggregation of major themes is also important to understand how humanitarian aid or specific issues are affecting men, women, youth, the disabled, and other identity groups and vulnerable groups differently.

Here are some questions for facilitating analysis:

- Let the listeners share some memorable stories and quotes from the conversations. First, let them talk about what they have actually heard (data). Afterwards, follow-up questions can encourage them to examine what they heard (analysis).
- When listeners tell of a particular conversation and its content, ask: What did you find interesting in that? (Data). Why? (Analysis). What did you find surprising? Why? (reflection)
- Where did you hear the most agreement among the people you listened to? (Data). Why do you think this came up so often this way? (Analysis)
- Where did you hear differences? Why do you think that person differed from the other(s)? In what way did it differ? (This is a combination of getting content/data, understanding the context, and getting behind it to analysis and disaggregation.)
- What do you think that person meant when s/he said....? Why do you think this is what they meant? (To the rest of the group and/or to community members) Do you think that sounds right? What else might s/he have really been saying? How would we know which interpretation is closer to the reality? (No one idea should “stand” without the chance for others to question and challenge it.)
- What are the implications of that idea? Why? (Reflection)
- What changes are needed to address the issues, concerns and suggestions raised during the listening process?

As people explain what surprised or interested them, they will begin talking to each other analytically, and by the end of the discussion the facilitator should be able to sum up with, “most of us thought that ‘x’ was very surprising, but three people did not think so because...” Or, “about half of the group thought ‘y’ was the most interesting area of conversation but the other half was divided, thinking that ‘a’ and ‘b’ were more significant.” The idea is that such discussions get people thinking about what is really being said behind the words and examples, and these factors constitute the basis of the analysis. The richness of the discussion and the reasons behind the differing views are as important to capture as the perspectives themselves. Understanding, not consensus, is the goal.

### ***Additional Tips for Facilitating and Recording Analysis:***

- Assign a note-taker: It is crucial to record the discussions in as much detail as possible.
- In cases where a mixture of national, local and expatriate staff and/or community members is involved, facilitators may need to allow people to discuss in their languages at first and then to summarize for the rest of the group, though this could mean losing some details.
- Emphasize the importance of separating personal views from what was heard: Listeners will inevitably bring up some of their personal analysis and reflection into the process of restating what was heard – it is important to ask for clarification before recording statements as quotes/stories: “Is this something you heard, or is this something you think/your own reflection?” It is useful however, to note listeners’ views separately to inform the analysis and report writing.
- Create a “Wall of Themes”, with listeners and/or community members grouping quotes, examples or details by major themes.
- Catch thoughtful quotes and include ones that may not match the “wall of themes.”
- Don’t try to find consensus. It is important to just listen to what people have to say, and if there are not patterns or agreement, it is just as important to hear and acknowledge that.

At the end of the analysis and reflection process, explain the next steps and set a timeline for drafting the report, getting comments, finalizing the report and translating it. When appropriate, go over the expectations of listeners and representative community members to read and comment on the draft, as well as confidentiality issues about what they have heard.

## **D. Facilitating Collaborative Listening Exercises**

Collaborative listening, learning and reflection can be a useful method for increasing understanding and promoting the changes the WHS hopes to foster within and across organizations. By involving people from multiple agencies, the listening and learning process can also capture a much broader scope of evidence and analysis. By taking the time to listen together to what people have to say about their cumulative efforts, they can communicate a genuine commitment to learning and improving together and to engaging local people in the process. A collaborative listening effort, if perceived as disassociated from any particular project or agency, can also mitigate the inherent biases that exist when engaging people in communities where participating organizations currently work or have worked in the past.

While most agencies do occasionally work together, organizing joint listening and analysis sessions involving staff from different teams and agencies can be challenging, largely due to additional organizational and logistical requirements. Below is guidance on ways to manage multi-agency collaborative listening efforts, based on experience gained through organizing twenty such exercises as part of the Listening Project and in facilitating feedback workshops in various humanitarian contexts:

**Identify a host/lead organization.** In a multi-agency listening exercise, designating a “facilitating” or a “host” organization helps to ensure leadership and coordination. This lead agency could be an

individual organization or an established network or umbrella group of agencies. A lead coordinator, preferably with seniority and decision-making authority, should be the point person working with the coordinators from other participating agencies. Areas of support that lead agencies may provide include, but are not limited to: coordinating logistic arrangements (transportation, accommodations, schedules, selection of communities, etc); ensuring security briefings for listening teams when needed; arranging for a conference room or other facilities for the orientation/training and final analysis and reflection sessions; coordinating the provision of materials for the group sessions (paper, pens, flipcharts, meals, etc); coordinating submission of individuals' and teams' notes and/or feedback on reports; and supporting the dissemination of findings to participants from agencies and communities.

**Invite others to collaborate/participate.** Engage international and local organizations and, if appropriate, donors, government representatives or others in the listening process. Emphasize that this joint listening and learning effort will not look at any one agency's work or compare agencies, and is not an assessment or an evaluation. Participating agencies will need to coordinate logistical support and may need to provide and arrange for transportation, accommodation and/or meeting rooms for the listening teams, especially in regions where they have field offices. They should designate a point person (preferably someone with decision-making authority) to participate in coordination and planning meetings in advance of and during the listening exercise. Participating agencies may also need to make appointments with key stakeholders in areas where they have relevant contacts.

**Set aside funds and secure additional resources if necessary.** Participating agencies should contribute to the joint listening effort by covering the costs of their participation—including staff time and expenses. This may include field expenses for local partners or volunteers. When listening team members are expected to travel to regions where they do not normally work, they may require funding for accommodation and meals. Participating agencies could agree on common per diems or set up a common fund from which expenses for all participants are covered. It may be necessary to seek out additional funding, particularly to facilitate participation by affected people themselves, local volunteers, or community-based organizations.

**Identify regions and areas to visit.** Participating organizations should work together to determine the regions and communities to be visited and key people in these communities to engage in conversations. It is important not just to go to easy to reach areas and to communities that are frequently visited. Given different experiences and relationships, participating agencies should be able to provide varied access to relevant stakeholders. The learning process will be enriched by the inclusion of the broadest possible range of locations and people in communities who have different perspectives. Participating organizations should share as much information as possible about the context and programs in the areas in which they work, as well as suggestions of places and people they deem important to include in the process. There may be situations where certain questions could best be answered by listening to people in areas of the country that have not received any assistance or where participating organizations have not worked, so you may need to work with others working in those areas who know the context and have access to the relevant communities. Joint planning sessions should include participation of at least one person from each agency who is knowledgeable about the local context and who can inform the decisions about where to go and who to include.

**Identify and Train Listening Team members.** Participating organizations should work with the host/lead agency and facilitators/trainers (when relevant) to identify criteria for selecting the staff to be engaged in the listening process. It is helpful to provide some training for all of the listening team members, and if time and context permit, listening team members can spend some time holding a few

conversations near the training area to practice their skills. Facilitators/trainers and team members could then regroup to discuss how the conversations flowed, where there may have been difficulties, and which approaches worked best in order to improve their listening and conversational skills.

**Organize listening teams.** Arrange for small teams of staff or volunteers from different participating agencies to visit a broad range of locations. Follow similar guidelines as described in the previous section, striving for diverse team composition and gender balance. To reduce the potential of bias and to encourage learning across agencies, each team should include members from different organizations. To avoid bias, most staff should be assigned to areas where they do not normally work. If field-based staff are joining the listening effort but were not in the joint training session, plan to provide a brief orientation at the field sites and include any translators as well.

**Consider language.** Although many countries have an official language(s), many people may only feel comfortable truly expressing themselves in their local or regional languages or dialects. Elderly persons may have had less education and less opportunity to learn the official language, as may be the case for other more marginalized groups. When possible, have at least one person who speaks the local language on each team. If this is not possible, consider hiring translators so that educated and younger persons are not given more of a voice than less educated and more marginalized persons.

**Consider Gender.** When possible, try to ensure that there are some all-female teams (and when possible at least one all male team) to engage specifically with women. In some contexts, this may be more culturally appropriate and important to ensure that women are able to participate.

**Consider local Context and Dynamics.** When assembling listening teams and hiring translators in environments with tensions or conflict, it is important to understand who has tensions with whom and why. These could be rooted in ethnic, religious or political issues or in government or corporate interests that are in conflict with communities being visited. It may be necessary to match the listening team, as much as possible, to the social profile of the community being visited. If this is not possible, it may be advantageous to use staff from a totally different context to listen in these areas as they may be seen as more neutral and impartial. This can be one area where expatriates may have the advantage of being seen as less influenced by local politics or tensions. Discuss with local staff or partners how to ensure that listening teams do not endanger or otherwise negatively impact the people to whom they are speaking and if special measures need to be taken to mitigate potential negative consequences.

**Assign facilitators for each team.** When working with multiple teams, a facilitator should be assigned to provide coordination and facilitate debriefs and analysis of conversations. When geography and budgets allow, it is ideal for teams to meet at the end of each day to discuss and compare what they heard. This way, participants from each team can share, analyze, reflect and learn as they go. They can also identify special issues to follow up on in subsequent conversations based on what was learned from other team's conversations. Facilitators help guide this process and should ensure that there is a record of what each team heard, as well as of the analysis done by listeners and with communities.

**Develop a Schedule for the time available.** A joint listening exercise can take anywhere from one day to one week or longer, depending on the objectives, resources and available staff time. More time allows for more conversations and opportunities to hone the participants' listening and analytical skills. Depending on the time and resources available, conversations could occur in several regions/locations concurrently or teams could visit different locations in the country consecutively. For the listening

process to be most effective, a commitment of dedicated and uninterrupted time for listeners is encouraged.

**Organize joint analysis and reflection session.** Wherever possible, all listening team members should participate in a final group analysis and reflection session involving all listening teams. This is an opportunity to discuss and analyze what they heard, to compare notes, to identify key issues and trends, and to reflect on what is important to share with the WHS and with those they engaged in conversations.

**Reflect and share lessons learned.** When possible, participating agencies should reflect on the lessons learned from the process of listening collaboratively and share with the WHS secretariat and others who will be engaging in collaborative listening exercises. If possible, try to include not only the staff who organized and listened, but also a sample of people who were engaged in the conversations from communities

## E. Sharing the Conversations and Analysis

### Written and verbal summaries

Once conversations are completed, a written report should summarize the stories, perspectives, analysis and recommendations of people from crisis-affected communities for the participants of the World Humanitarian Summit. They should not include personal information or names of people but should include information on how many people were engaged, their locations, gender, and any other background information useful for the readers to be able to place the stories and analysis in context (i.e. if from a particular ethnic group, IDPs, host communities, etc.). The reports can also include reflections from those who listened to the community members, though these should be presented separately.

The reports can also be used to raise questions and stimulate further discussion and thinking among affected communities and aid agencies in country and abroad. Translating the reports into national languages will facilitate further engagement of national and local stakeholders and community members in the WHS process. Those engaged in the listening process from communities and from the participating agencies could also share and disseminate the findings in presentations within their agencies and to those who will be attending the WHS, including government officials, civil society representatives, business people, media, and others.

Reports from community conversations should be submitted to [submissions@whssummit.org](mailto:submissions@whssummit.org)

### Videos and other products

As outlined in the WHS Community Engagement strategy, capturing community perspectives through other media than written notes and reports from conversations is essential if the WHS is to create ways in which affected communities can really tell their stories. This material needs to capture how people interact and go about their work and daily lives, not just focus on capturing their spoken views. It needs to provide opportunities for affected communities to present their lives, challenges and experiences to the international community, not just to be asked to speak to specific pre-determined issues which may not resonate with the community concerned. There are multiple ways in which this can be done, which

should be explored by the technical specialists brought on board to implement the strategy. While talking heads material is useful, it also means views can be easily decontextualized and the capacity to tell stories is undermined.

***Key points when filming content:***

- Ensure all footage, especially any shot on mobile phones, is in landscape not portrait mode
- Always use a tripod
- Remember to shoot B-roll
- Think carefully about what – or who – is in the background of a shot. Be careful also of any background audio: background noise is a distraction, and background music can make footage extremely difficult to edit.
- Refer to technical guidance concerning quality of footage and sound and any formatting specifics (guidance to be provided by the organization delivering this element)
- Use an external microphone and preferably lapel mike for all audio
- Do not use a zoom as it affects the quality of the footage
- Ensure that all footage shot is accompanied by appropriate consent and release forms (these should also be developed by the organization delivering this element)
- Filming in sensitive areas should be done indoors and as discreetly as possible.
- When filming in sensitive areas, always remove the footage/memory card from the camera immediately after filming and store it separately, in case equipment is confiscated or searched.
- When shooting indoors think carefully about lighting. In particular, ensure subject is not backlit
- Those being filmed should speak freely, not read from a script or prompt

Individuals and organizations who have videos, recordings, and other means of conveying community perspectives should submit them to the WHS secretariat at [submissions@whssummit.org](mailto:submissions@whssummit.org) or share them through the WHS website, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

## II. [Guidance on Bringing Crisis-Affected People to the WHS Processes and Summit](#)

The WHS is committed to including representatives from affected communities (such as community leaders, local organizations, local business people, local government officials/authorities, local journalists, etc.) to the October Global Consultation and the WHS in May 2015. It is important to establish a fair and transparent process for selecting representatives, and to do it at least 2 months in advance of when their attendance is desired. The WHS or sponsoring agencies will need to provide support in getting passports and visas, travel arrangements, accommodation, etc. It will also be important to provide translation into the language they are most comfortable speaking, and including materials such as the synthesis report and the regional reports from their countries or regions to read prior to the meeting so that they can be prepared to really engage.

The WHS or sponsoring organizations may also need to mentor/guide them on the subjects, process and how to participate effectively in all aspects of the meeting (i.e. try to sit with people who are “in” the system, not just with others from your country, region or constituency (local NGOs, affected communities, etc.). It would be helpful for affected community members to have local hosts as well as someone to mentor and support them as they engage in what may be an overwhelming process.

Those helping to organize sessions and side events at the WHS need to plan ways for those from affected communities to be part of every discussion. The way to shift the conversation and embolden the agenda is to have more people from affected countries engaged in every conversation and discussion. As the agenda and facilitation process are prepared, it is recommended that people from affected communities are in each session, in small group, on each panel, etc. This means also making sure that there are enough people from affected countries to be engaged in all discussions, not just grouped together or sitting on panels as “token” representatives. It would be good to start off plenaries and major sessions with videos and/or with people from affected communities sharing their stories and suggestions for how to improve humanitarian action to remind people why we are here. If this cannot be done in person, videos and other methods can be used to ensure that their voices are heard. Having more people from affected countries in the consultations and the Global Forum can help generate more creative ideas and push for more progress.

### III. Sustaining community engagement through local media

#### A. Who are local media?

Aid agencies conventionally regard media as a sector with whom they work for PR, fundraising and advocacy purposes. Working with local media is very different, however. Domestic media in disaster affected countries serve an audience that consists of affected populations, an audience they have a responsibility to serve.

Journalists in the context of community engagement should be viewed as professional information gatherers and disseminators, experts whose job it is to understand and represent the communities who make up their audiences. As communications professionals, they are also skilled at packaging and presenting information to their audiences in culturally appropriate and engaging ways, organizing discussions (both on air and in the context of work like outside broadcasts) and representing the views of their audiences. They are also professional, and often very talented storytellers.

It is important to remember, however, that many local journalists have had limited professional training and are often subject to the editorial perspectives of their owners (who may be businessmen, politicians or – in the case of state run media – the national authorities).

#### B. Working with local media: practical recommendations

**Treat local journalists as the experts in communications that they are.** Ask for their advice and input on the best way to use media to generate discussion and inputs for the WHS. Don't simply present a pre-designed model, and avoid the impression of wishing to promote a particular organization. In particular, discuss their experiences with interactive programming and ways to capture the views of their audience, particularly those affected by crises.

**Take time to research and understand the communications ecology of the given country or area** in which you wish to work, paying particular attention to the impact of communications technology (because this is usually under researched and thus not exploited to its full potential). Communications



patterns and opportunities can vary enormously even within a country. In some countries (i.e. Indonesia and India), social media is now central to how information moves and discussion happens. In much of Africa, radio outstrips all other media in importance. Working with the right platforms and understanding how platforms interconnect (real time feedback on radio broadcasts coming through a station's Facebook page, for example) is vital for meaningful community engagement.

It is often necessary to **make specific and extra efforts to reach out to women** – both as an audience and in terms of female media professionals. Few local media organizations have the capacity to desegregate their audiences or to understand the specific communications/information needs of women. It is also unusual for women to head media organizations.

Remember **local media are often under resourced**: few local media outlets can afford to cover expenses and many journalists work effectively for free. While paying for stories is never acceptable, providing support such as transport, meals, internet access and accommodation for overnight site visits is often essential if reporters are to be able to do their job.

**For broadcast outlets, airtime is a commodity** and often the only source of revenue aside from advertising and private support open to a radio or TV station. Aid agencies should not expect airtime to be donated for free, even for humanitarian work. If you do not wish to pay for airtime, consider an in-kind donation such as training, equipment or other support. Products such as public service announcements should always be paid for as these involve time, effort and skill to produce. Consider:

- Sponsoring call in shows/public discussions
- Organizing reporting trips to difficult to reach areas
- Working with local media when organizing community discussions (if agreed to by the community in advance)

**Do not expect journalists to be familiar with the cluster system or humanitarian jargon.** Many local media representatives, even those operating in ongoing crises, are unfamiliar with the architecture and language of an international humanitarian response. This is usually because they have not been presented with an opportunity to learn how it works. Ensure that all materials provided to them are jargon free and in appropriate languages to as great an extent as possible. Consider running special workshops to present and explain the humanitarian system when needed.

**Don't seek to dictate the editorial content of local media products.** No journalist responds well to being told what to print or broadcast, and for many local journalists their voice has been hard won. Others may be under political pressure.

## C. Engaging local media in the WHS Process and Summit

Local journalists almost never have the resources to travel overseas or to engage in major events, but they usually relish the chance to do so. To engage local media in the WHS process and summit:

- Create a transparent system for selecting which reporters are invited to attend events. Competitions (e.g. essay or documentary making) are recommended to ensure that talented and engaged reporters are selected. An open invitation to a given outlet runs the risk of the opportunity to travel being given to either the most senior person (possibly even the media owner) or to someone politically expedient, not necessarily the best qualified reporter.

- Provide a full package of support, including help with visas, travel, per diems, and a go-to point person during the event with appropriate language skills.
- Begin planning attendance at least three months ahead of an event, as obtaining visas can be complex and time consuming especially for those travelling to Switzerland or the US.
- Provide appropriate translation services (written and spoken)
- Ensure media from developing countries are not marginalized.
- Ensure media from developing countries are presented as participants and contributors, and not treated just as journalists. Invite them to join panels and attend group discussions.
- Ensure a gender balance by making particular efforts to identify women media professionals to attend. This could include: country level application processes open only to women, places at events made available only to women or recruitment processes (e.g. essay competition) focused specifically on gender related issues.

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