



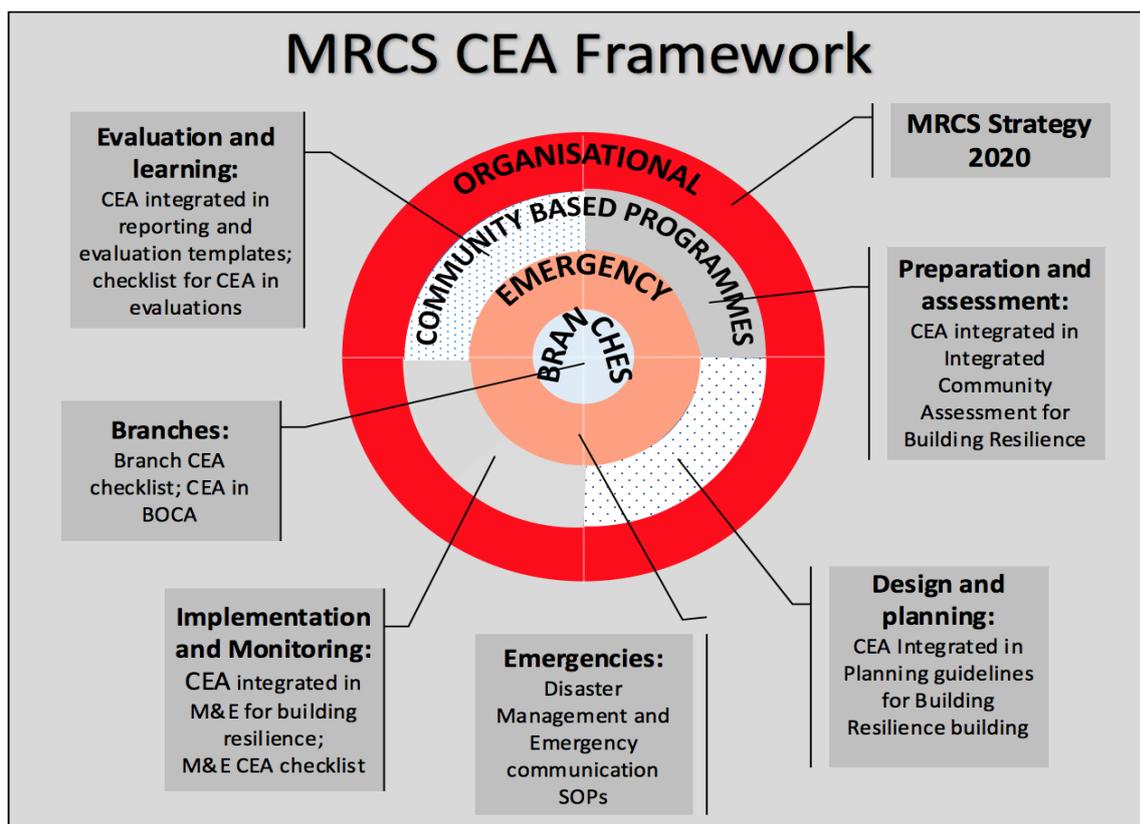
Community Engagement and Accountability Minimum Standards: formulation and integration into the work of the Myanmar Red Cross



Background

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) recognises that there is a duty of accountability to those we aim to assist, and that by engaging with communities and being accountable to them our programming and activities will be of better quality, have a greater impact, help crisis-affected people recover more quickly, build their resilience and lead to more sustainable development. This is reflected in the MRCS Strategy 2016 – 2020 that integrates Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) as both a cross cutting issue and a strategic objective, with an outcome clearly stating that “All programs include a community engagement component based on a set of minimum standards for accountability.”

In order to work towards the aim of the Strategic Plan 2020 to integrate CEA into all work of the National Society, in 2016 a set of CEA Minimum Standards were developed, in cooperation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). These standards and tools focus on how to build on four foundational pillars of CEA – transparent communication, involvement, feedback mechanisms and community-led monitoring and evaluation – into the organisation and into all MRCS operations: at community based programme, branch and emergency response levels.



The process

When developing the standards a number of different internal and external CEA documents and guidelines were consulted including the Core Humanitarian Standard. A particular focus was given to work that has already been conducted in the Red Cross Movement, such as the East African IFRC and National Society Accountability to Beneficiaries (AtB) Minimum Standards, the Movement CEA draft Guide and the British Red Cross Minimum Standards for Accountability in Mass Sanitation ERU.

A workshop was held in March 2016 with a group of core MRCS participants including the PMER working group, with representatives from all departments, and Supporting Officers from a selection of branches. To come up with a draft for the community based programming standards, the group reviewed the East Africa AtB standards to reflect on what would be relevant for MRCS and what additional commitments, actions and tools could be added in. A prioritisation exercise was also conducted. For the branches, the group brainstormed how these commitments and actions could be translated into a structure that was practical for branches. CEA minimum standards for emergencies were not addressed specifically in the workshop, but have been based on work done in 2015 to inte-

grate CEA into the Disaster Management Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) of MRCS.

Following the workshop, various other consultation processes were conducted before the finalisation of the document, including at bi-monthly PMER working group meetings, on field visits to branches, and with staff and senior management from different departments. Advocacy to raise awareness of the process and outputs was also integrated into other relevant meetings and events between March and August 2016.

The standards: structure, key commitments and actions

While other Movement CEA resources often follow a programme cycle model relating to community based programming or emergency response, MRCS decided to extend the focus the minimum standards to all core areas of the work of the National Society, most notably to support strengthening CEA in the 330 branches. As the work of the branches in most areas does not follow a programme cycle model, and to reflect the differences between emergencies and longer-term programmes, these sections are structured differently to make them as practical as possible to implement. For example, the emergen-



Volunteers document community feedback in Sagaing region. Credit: Amanda George/IFRC



Community noticeboard displaying programme information, with suggestion box. Falam, Chin State. Credit: Amanda George/IFRC

cies section follows the structure of the MRCS Disaster Management (DM) SOPs by response timeline and the branch section follows the structure of the BOCA.

The CEA minimum standards consist of key commitments to CEA that must be upheld through a series of actions. These are presented in two sections:

1. Organisational level commitments: covering strategies, staffing and partnerships

2. Commitments for operations: “Operations” includes branches, community based programming and emergency response, and therefore the practical actions required to meet them are divided into three sections:

i. Community based programmes: key actions to meet the commitments are aligned to each stage in the programme cycle, with a corresponding list of tools to help meet these commitments. The activities relating to programmes are prioritized in three categories to make them more achievable (bronze, silver and gold).

ii. Emergency response: A key set of activities was designed by response phase and linked to DM and Emergency Communication SOPs.

iii. Branches: CEA minimum standards follow a checklist of key actions for branches to work towards, and an assessment tool closely linked to BOCA is included as an annex.

Integration across the National Society

Key to MRCS’ approach to CEA is that it is not seen as a separate sector or programme but as a set of interventions to be integrated into existing programmes or operations. To make the CEA commitments and actions as practical as possible care has been taken to integrate the actions and tools into many other

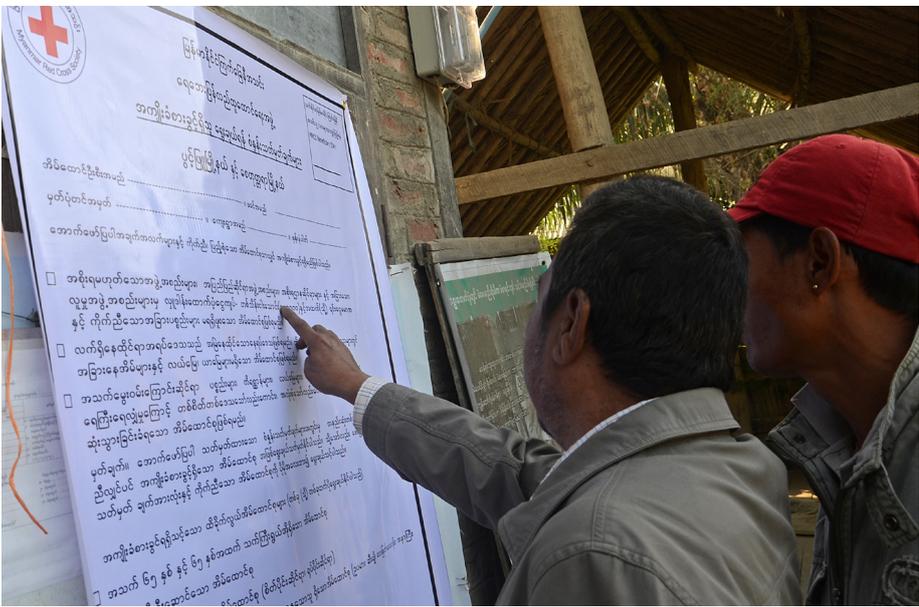
ongoing activities, programmes, processes, policies and guidance documents of MRCS. As such each section has a slightly different structure. This integration is an ongoing process and will continue as existing policies, guidance and processes are revised, or new ones developed. The aim is that these minimum standards are seen as a core part of the work of the National Society and not a standalone initiative. This integration is a core part of this process and is still ongoing. To date CEA, as part of this initiative, has been integrated into the following areas:

1. At organisational level

The CEA standards are reflected in the Organisational Strategy 2016 – 2020 as both a cross cutting issue and a strategic objective. Additionally, the MRCS Communications Policy includes community engagement, the MRCS Partnership Framework also recognises accountability to target populations as a key partnership principle and the PMER Framework recognises CEA as a cross cutting issue in community based programming and follows the same structure as the CEA framework (see above).

2. Community Based Programming

Considerable time has been taken to ensure that this section of the minimum standards is closely linked and integrated to the MRCS PMER framework and resilience programming guidance and tools, with the PMER working group forming a core part of the process. The key CEA actions and tools for the “assessment phase” of the programme cycle have been integrated into the Integrated Community Assessment for Building Resilience (ICABR) guidance module. Work is ongoing to integrate the CEA actions for planning and design into the Planning Guidelines being produced by the PMER unit, with the integration of CEA indicators and tips on how to make the planning and design process accountable. The mini-



Community members read a poster of the selection criteria for cash grants distributed in their village in the 2015 floods in Hakha, Chin State
Credit: MRCS

num standards are also being integrated into PMER mentoring sessions, with the most recent one providing tips on how to make the monitoring process accountable. Work has also been done to strengthen CEA in the community based programme reporting templates.

3. Emergencies

To make the CEA standards as practical as possible for emergencies times, this section follows the same timeline as the DM SOPs that have CEA mainstreamed since 2015. CEA is also being reflected in the ongoing revision of other tools including the Emergency Communication SOP, DANA templates, village emergency assessment template , DM Contingency Plan and ERT/ NDRT training curriculum. The WPNS was also consulted for the preparedness phase.

4. Branches

The minimum actions for branches to meet the four CEA commitments are listed per commitment with a checklist of key activities for branches that includes indicators, tools and examples. These will be piloted with a selection of branches in 2017. Policy and programme documents have also been revised from a CEA perspective including the Branch Development Model and reporting templates. Edits will be considered in the next revision process. As an annex, there is also a tool linked to the BOCA and following the same structure, with a few additional CEA elements incorporated – most notably community feedback - that can be used as an assessment tool either as

part of the overall BOCA or when piloting the CEA minimum standards in branches. This will allow for branches to track how their rating has improved from start to finish of the pilot.

Next steps

Roll out of CEA Minimum Standards has already begun, integrated into other training session with a CEA focus, for example as part of an Urban DRR programme in Ayerwady region. Integration into other tools and processes is already well underway and will continue to be a live process throughout 2016 and 2017. A training of trainers module will be designed based on the final agreed standards and tools adapted. A key part of the roll out will be the continued integration into the PMER framework programme cycle guidance; integration in emergency response simulations to show practical application of the SOPs and in the design the emergency communications SOPs ; the CEA branch pilot in 2017; and the continue application of the MRCS Strategic Plan 2016 - 2020.



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