

Are people reached listened to?, by Szasz, Diana and Fisher, Martin

ABSTRACT

Are people reached listened to?

How do development and humanitarian organizations know that their programmes and operations do benefit the people they are targeting? How can they measure whether a general sense of satisfaction is present in regard to the assistance the people receive? Stakeholder involvement has been high on the agenda of development and humanitarian organizations for the past few years, but does practice keep pace with the current debates?

Humanitarian and development organizations are becoming better in engaging stakeholders in the planning stage but are less prepared to adequately engage them in the evaluation of programmes and operations.

This paper will discuss experiences with a survey tool adopted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Europe to find out whether the people assisted were satisfied with the help received and whether they have any recommendations for improving the quality and appropriateness in the future. Although the survey tool is currently used in a systematic way only after disaster response operations, the long-term aim is to boost a culture whereby consulting the people on the goods and services they received becomes an integral part of all programmes and operations, and the conclusions of this kind of evaluation feed back into the programming of the organization. Such feedback mechanisms empower stakeholders, build ownership, and reinforce the mutual trust between an organization and the people it seeks to serve.

The paper will further address some questions around how much people feel comfortable with expressing their real needs or complaining about the services they received, given the uneven power balance between the agencies and the people they seek to help, which is specific to the humanitarian and development sphere. This uneven balance, however, makes it even more an ethical responsibility for the organizations to involve all stakeholders in planning their interventions as well as assessing their success or failure.