



Garib Unnayan Sangstha (GUS)

Accountability starter pack



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Purpose of this pack

This guide is for those staff who would like to learn more about how to implement activities that are accountable to people and communities. It is Primarily aimed at program-staff responsible for implementing development or humanitarian projects and programmes.

The pack begins with an introduction to GUS approach to accountability. This is followed by GUS Accountability Matrix. The Matrix shows the commitments to accountability found within GUS Programe Standards, and the different levels programmes can achieve in each area. Following this is an explanation of c Minimum Standards on Accountability.

The rest of the pack is divided into four sections - one for each of the four Standards that GUS is focusing on. For each Standard, there is a brief

explanation as to why this Standard is important, then some 'How-To' Guidelines and a Good Practice example from one of GUS programmes. We have also added an extra section on how to improve greater financial transparency as we have had so many requests for guidance specifically on this.

This guide is just the beginning. There are lots more resources available to help you implement accountability. If you can access the intranet then please have a look at our page on Accountability accountability If you can't access the internet then please get in touch with either latifgus@gmail.com and we can discuss what might be appropriate and send it to you.

We welcome your feedback – please help us improve our support to you.

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INTRODUCTION

In our work to overcome poverty, it is essential that GUS is accountable to the people whose lives we seek to improve and to the organizations and individuals whose

Support makes this possible. We cannot expect either group take us at our word that GUS 'does the right thing' – we need to demonstrate this in every aspect of our work.

Accountability lies at the core of GUS values: accountability, empowerment and inclusiveness. In our humanitarian, development and campaigning work, we strive to help people in poverty to know and demand their rights and to hold to account those in power (including ourselves and other actors & NGOs, as well as employers, landowners, local and national governments, etc). For GUS to call for greater accountability from others, we must be accountable ourselves.

GUS is primarily accountable to women and men living in poverty but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously and continuously strive to balance the needs

of different stakeholders. Besides women and men living in poverty our stakeholders include: donors; supporters;

partners and allies; staff volunteers and the wider public; the individuals and institutions that we seek to influence throughour advocacy and campaigning work; other GUS affiliates and the regulatory bodies in the we operate.

We believe that by being more accountable to communities, we can have higher quality programmes and more sustainable impact. We strive to promote the participation of people and communities in programme identification, planning and delivery – ensuring that decisions about how

we use our resources are shaped by the priorities of women and men living in poverty.

GUS definition of accountability is: Accountability is the process through which an organization balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making and activities, and delivers against this commitment.

Accountability is based on four dimensions - transparency, feedback mechanisms, participation and learning and evaluation - that allow the organization to give account to, take account of and be held to account by stakeholders.

The principles that underpin our ability to be accountable are:

We hold ourselves accountable to people living in poverty but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously and continuously strive to balance their different needs.

Increased accountability will be achieved and demonstrated through respectful and responsible attitudes, appropriate systems and strong leadership.

Our objectives for the three year period 2019 - 2021 are:

Transparency: We will ensure the people affected by our programmes have access to all relevant information, in time and in accessible form, in order that they can hold us to account.

Feedback: We will ensure that appropriate and accessible channels exist so that people affected by our programmes are increasingly able to give us feedback.

Participation: We will enable people to be involved in decision-making and implementation of all aspects of our work.

Monitoring and Effectiveness: We will ensure that our programmes are judged by those directly affected by them, as having a positive impact on their lives.

MATRIX - ACCOUNTABILITY TO PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

What is it?

This matrix comes from the GUS Programme Standards and the self assessment exercise to measure adherence to those standards. You may have seen it before. It is based on field practice and is a useful reminder / gauge of the different dimensions that contribute to increased accountability and the levels that can be achieved by GUS programme or project teams.

Dimensions	Level 1	Level 2				
Transparency Programme Standard 11	Limited project ¹ information is shared in an ad hoc manner with stakeholders ² . Most information is provided verbally and/ or informally. It is generally provided at the beginning of the project and may not be updated.	³ Detailed project information is made publicly available: basic information about who GUS is, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, who funds us and basic information about project budget and activities. Methods for sharing information are chosen by project staff and/or donors.				
Feedbac k Programm eStandard	No formal feedback of complaints mechanisms are in place.	Stakeholders are informed of their right to give feedbackabout projects, to make complaints and are offered at least one way to do both. Project staff asks for information feedback from stakeholders.				
Participati on Programme Standard	Stakeholders are informed about the project. Plans are discussed with key informants in the community, who are taken as representative of the full community. There is limited analysis of who holds authority in the local community and how.	Stakeholders are consulted about project plans. They provide information which project staff uses to make key decisions about their work, at all stages of the project cycle. Women and men are consulted separately, and main social groupings in the community are identified, including the most marginalized.				
M E L Program me	Feedback on what is done with this information is ad hoc.	Monitoring data is collected from program staff and communities. Program staff and communities are consulted in evaluations. Programme/project has formal mechanisms in place to communicate findings back to program staff and communities.				
Dear GUS colleagues - building mutually respectful relationships - a great addition to how we define our accountability!						
Relationships Programme Standard 11	Project staff understand that respect for stakeholders is important but are unsure how to strengthen these relationships.	Project staff are always polite and patient with stakeholders and try to understand local social expectations, and mostly speak local language(s). However staff don't have much time to devote to thischallenge.				
Another addition - Please note that some of the codes outlined in the footnote are only applicable to humanitarian responses						
Standards Programme Standard 11	Project team is not aware of the standards or codes that GUS is signed up to	Relevant standards or codes that GUS is signed up to, are clearly referenced in the project approach, and communicated to stakeholders.				

^{1.} The matrix focuses on project level activities but can, equally, be applied at a programe level.

^{2.} For the purpose of this document 'stakeholders' refer to people, communities and partners with whom GUS is working.

^{3.}Bold text indicates that this is the GUS Minimum Standard for this particular dimension.

The majority of this Starter Pack will concentrate on the first four dimensions of accountability in the matrix. The fifth dimension has recently been added as a result of additional thinking as we go through SMS (Single Management Structure) and come together as one GUS. Guidance and good practice on this dimension will be added as we work together on improving our practice and accountability in being a good program staff.

Level 3	Level 4				
Detailed information about GUS , the program staff and the project, including budgetary information and M&E reports are made available in appropriate local languages using methods that are easy for stakeholders to access: this information is regularly updated. A public annual report of GUS work in is available in hard copies in all GUS offices.	Full project and financial information is made available in ways that are easily accessible for all stakeholders. Projectstaff negotiate how best to share project information about objectives, budget, progress and complaints-handling procedures with stakeholders: in ways that are relevant, Accessible and appropriate to them. MEL findings are fed back and reviewed with stakeholders.				
Project has formal feedback and complaints mechanisms in place; actively encourages stakeholders to give feedback and make complaints; and records all feedback and complaints. Feedback and complaints always receive a response. Project demonstrably seeks continuous improvement in the quality and use of the complaints mechanisms.	Feedback and complaints systems are designed with stakeholders, building on respected local ways of giving feedback. Systems encourage the most marginalized to respond and are comprehensive. Feedback and complaints always receive a response. Trends are monitored and learning is fed to the wider organization. Project demonstrably seeks continuous improvement in the quality and use of complaints mechanism.				
Decisions are made jointly by project staff, with stakeholders consulted about plans. Stakeholders regularly provide information that project staff use to make key decisions about their work, at all stages of the project cycle. Women and men are consulted separately, and teams ensure main social groupings in the community are identified and their voices heard.	Decisions are made jointly by project staff and stakeholders. Stakeholders contribute equally in making key decisions about the project, throughout the entire cycle, including planning the budget. Project staff make sure they work with individuals and organizations who truly represent the interests of different social groups. It is clear that GUS projects are influenced by program staff and communities where GUS works.				
Communities and actors, partners are consulted on the development of appropriate outcome indicators. Capacity of partners and communities is built to undertake basic monitoring activities themselves. Findings are reviewed regularly with community.	Communities and program staff participate in decisions about what to monitor and evaluate in a programme/project, helping to define the indicators of success. Findings are reviewed regularly with community. Changes to the project are jointly discussed and agreed.				
	Community and program staff are important judges of both what we do and how we do it; the MEL system empowers stakeholders.				
Dear GUS colleagues - building mutually respectful relationships - a addition to how we define our accountability!					
Programmes help stakeholders build up their self- confidence and self-respect. Project staff aim to help local people to analyze and tackle their own issues in their own ways. Formal	Programe actively promotes dialogue and reflection between project staff and stakeholders on each others' experience. By working together new options for action are developed without ideas being				

mechanisms exist to support this aspiration.

unilaterally imposed. Formal mechanisms support this aspiration and are regularly reviewed and adapted jointly by project staff and stakeholders.

Another GUS addition - Please note that some of the codes outlined in the footnote are only applicable tohumanitarian responses.

Relevant standards or codes that GUS is signed up to are clearly referenced in the project activities, and a clear process to measure performance

Against these standards is set out. Review and reflection on performance is done ad hoc

Relevant standards or codes that GUS is signed up to demonstrably inform project design and delivery.

Clear processes for measuring and reflecting on performance against these standards exist, and are used to develop plans to improve future practice.

GUS PROGRAMME/

PROJECT ACCOUNTABILITY MINIMUM STANDARDS

What is it?

Whilst GUS as a whole uses the matrix on the previous pages to demonstrate various possible levels of accountability, GUS requires that certain minimum standards are met by the programmes and projects it is responsible for. This simple, one-page description of the Minimum Standards for Accountability required by GUS aims to make clear whatthese standards are.

Transparency

Programmes and projects must make available the following information to program staff/communities:

- who we are, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, relevant project and programme information such as expenditure specific to that community and progress reports, how to give feedback and make a complaint.



Participation

Programmes and projects must have mechanisms that ensure program staff and communities are involved in decision-making about (a) what the project will achieve and (b) how this is to be done.



Feedback

Programmes and projects must have feedback mechanisms that have been discussed and agreed with people affected by the project or programme; and are capable of dealing with positive and negative feedback in addition to complaints.



Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning

Programmes and project design and implementation must ensure that processes are in place which actively involve stakeholders in measuring, learning from and sharing the extent to which we have met program staff and community expectations



1.Transparency:

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must make available the following information to program staff /communities: who we are, what we do, how we do it, who we work with, relevant project and programme information such as expenditure specific to that community and progress reports, and how to give feedback and make a complaint.

Why?

Providing information to beneficiaries and communities is essential for meaningful participation. It also allows communities to hold us to account – if we share our commitments with them, this enables people to check whether we are meeting them.

Our commitments to communities are two-fold: we commit to doing what we said we'd do and we committo behaving in a way that is polite, respectful and upholds people's dignity. Both are equally important. Sharing information in ways agreed with the community potentially enables them to influence how the project is implemented. If people know whatto expect then they will know when they are not getting it, and can tell us. This not only upholds our commitment to transparency, but improves project Efficiency - we have had several cases of communitiesstopping fraudulent practice (in our program staff, or others) because they felt empowered enough to let us know that they were not receiving the services they knew they were meant to receive. Because we know that everybody finds it particularly difficult, in the annexe you will find information focusing on sharing financial information with program staff and communities which is part of GUS Minimum Standard on transparency

GUIDELINES

- 1. Information for program staff and communities must be:
- Accessible in the right language and the right format. This could be written, verbal, or in pictures – or anything else you and the community decide. It must be free of acronyms! The more ways you are able to provide information the more people you will reach.
- Engaging wherever possible it should engage the attention of the recipients.
- Timely it should be current and updated regularly.
- Safe it must not mislead or cause harm to communities, program staff, GUS or others, and it must uphold the dignity of all
- Verified accurate, consistent, and validated.
- Accountable give users an opportunity to feedback what kind
 of information they want and how they want it as well as evaluate
 whether the information provided met both their needs and the
 above criteria.
- 2. Designing the best information in the best way(s): Firstly:

Stakeholder mapping and analysis - who are you wishing to communicate with, what information do they need - what dothey know, what do they need to know?

Secondly:

Together with the community, identify the most appropriate formats for communicating the right information to the people who need to receive it. Not everybody will want

the same things in the same way. Your choices for communication methods could include, but are not limited to the following: community meetings; community notice boards; loud speaker; drama; leaflets and brochures; posters; personal meetings; phone calls; local radio/tv etc.

Don't forget that vulnerable and marginalized groups are notlikely to come forward easily to give their opinions - you will have to go to them to make sure they are heard.

Thirdly:

Make a communications plan, ensure that it is included within your project work plan and budget.

Fourthly: Develop appropriate materials as required; make special efforts to ensure that all translations are well done and work with community representatives to ensure that the intended message is what is understood and the formats are appropriate.

Lastly:

Deliver your plan and continually check that it is working – is the right information getting to the people who need it?

3. The following is the minimum information that you need to share with communities (and program staff)

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

As part of the ECB (Emergency Capacity Building) project,GUS designed a series of communication materials to be used in communities. The ECB is a network of NGOs who work together to improve the speed, quality, and effectiveness of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve welfare, and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.



Winter clothing distribution 2021 Islamic Relief Bangladesh's Multi Sectoral Development Program (M, S, D, P)

The aim of the project was to produce templates of posters that would advise the community of what they should expect from the NGOs, and encourage them to hold us to account.

The posters bore a set of messages such as 'We want to make improvements – tell us what you think about the project' and 'people have a right to be involved in [the NGO] response'.

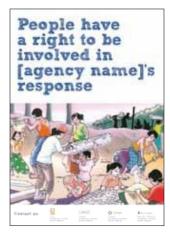
Research was undertaken to decide how best to communicate these concepts to the community. It was decided that the posters should be designed together with the community, to produce materials that would resonate with them. As a pilot, GUS and the ECB developed posters in—Bangladesh.

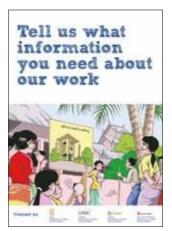
Project staff conducted Focus Group discussions with disaster-affected communities, together with a local artist. The Focus Groups and the artist developed images that they felt best communicated the poster's message. Posters were subsequently produced and then field tested where possible to check the images were effective.

The posters were then translated into two languages – English, Bangla. They are available to download on the ECB website. The idea is that agencies can adapt the posters to their own context, and add agency logos, office addresses and contact numbers so communities can ask questions and provide feedback. Ideally, agencies in a response would dothis jointly. Guidelines are provided to help agencies with adapting the images and translating the text.

There were many learning points from the project. The team had hoped to keep written words to a minimum, so that posters were accessible to communities without a writing culture – however they found that at least a basic written message was necessary. They also discovered that images are very context specific – how communities view themselves varies from location to location, but also in urban and rural contexts. The posters on their own do not amount to an accountable response, but used as part of a participatory approach, they can prove useful in letting communities know that we want to work together with themin a humanitarian response.

For more information, visit :www.gus.org.bd

















2. Feedback:

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must have feedback mechanisms that have been discussed and agreed with people affected by the project or programme; and are capable of dealing with positive and negative feedback in addition to complaints.

Whv?

GUS is a learning organization, and we want to learn from our beneficiary communities. Beneficiary feedback is essential to inform us how well our projects are running, and how appropriate they are. Feedback can also pick up more serious issues such as fraud or misconduct. Feedback should be used to make project decisions and adjust plans as necessary –

if we don't know anything is wrong then we can't put it right. We should always let communities know whatactions have been taken as a result of their feedback. If no action was taken – for example if something is outside our control, or not appropriate for the project– we need to let them know that too. Feedback canalso alert us to more serious issues, such as fraud, misconduct or sexual exploitation.

It can be hard to ask for feedback, in case it is negative. Don't worry – we are all in the same position, and the purpose of feedback is to help us learn and improve the programme, not to criticize. In any case, feedback can often be positive – which canbe encouraging for staff!

GUIDELINES

to go through when setting up a feedback and complaints mechanism. **GUS** definesfeedback as issues raised that can be resolved in a day or two at project level, and complaints to be more serious issues (usually misconduct such as fraud or sexual exploitation) that need to be taken up at a senior management level. The same mechanism can pick up both.

- 1. Secure organizational commitment to seek and act onfeedback and complaints.
- If you do not get management commitment, you will not be able to follow up on the feedback and complaints you receive. Not doing so will let the community down, and probably affectyour relationship with them, and the running of the project.
- 2. Consult with the community to decide the most appropriate method to channel feedback and complaints. Many programmes use more than one mechanism, to ensure that different groups in the community are being reached. Don't be afraid to try different approaches not allof them will be successful, and that's OK.
- 3. Design a process for handling feedback and complaints and identify who will carry out the role

If you are implementing through program staff, you will need to decide how they will be involved. Will they set up their own mechanism? Will you set one up together? If it is an **GUS** mechanism, how will you process feedback about the community & other actors?

- 4. Set up the infrastructure for handling feedback and complaints in the community and train staff.
- There are many different types of mechanisms that programmes have used. These include telephone hotlines, community meetings, appointing community focal points, providing help desks at distributions, having an office 'opendoor' day and many more!
- 5. Raise awareness in the community about how they canfeed back and complain, and what about.
- 6. Receive and record feedback and complaints in alogbook or complaints database.
- 7. Acknowledge the feedback/complaint either verbally orin writing.
- 8. Resolve: either informally, using programme knowledgeand common sense, or formally, by investigation.

Serious complaints (for example those involving issues such as fraud or sexual exploitation) will need to be dealt with by senior management, following the appropriate GUS policy.

- 9. Respond to the person who complained.
- With serious complaints, confidentiality may mean that you are not able to share certain information with the complainant. In this case, you will need to explain this andlet them know that their complaint was followed up withoutproviding any confidential details.
- 10. Record the response in your complaints database and share what you learnt.
- It is important to analyze and share trends so we can learnas an organization.

Adapted from 'GUS video 'Setting up a Complaints and Response Mechanism'. Please use in conjunction with GUS Public Complaints Policy and

Guidelines for Implementing GUS Public ComplaintsPolicy in the International Division.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

A feedback and complaints mechanism was implemented in GUS Drought Response Programme in Kurigram. The team first needed to decide how to solicit feedback from the

Community. They decided that 'high-tech' mechanisms, such as a phone hotline, were not appropriate in this context, and instead instigated specific community discussion meetings. These took place bi-weekly, and were an opportunity for the community to discuss any issues that they had regarding the project. The community meetings were facilitated by field staff working on that particular project. The community were oriented on the process, including both the rights of the community and the parameters of what GUS could respond to.

The discussions were minute and recorded on a simple Word template, then shared with the relevant project staff. Complaints and feedback that required follow up was logged on an Excel database by the MEAL (Monitoring Evaluating Accountability and Learning) Officer. If the feedback or complaint could be resolved at project level, action was taken by the relevant Technical Team Leader. It was mandatory for them to inform senior management of complaints they received and redressed. Serious complaints were referred to the Programme Manager for resolution.

3. Participation

Minimum Standard

Programmes and projects must have mechanisms that ensure partners and communities are involved in decision-making about (a) what the project will achieve and (b) how this is to be done. Finally, the complaint was closed and beneficiaries informed as to the action taken. This was done by the MEAL Officer or project staff as appropriate. Analysis of the complaints and feedback received was undertaken on a bi-weekly basis and used in a progress report.

Most feedback so far has been on day-to-day issues. Common feedback included queries on the registration process, and comments on the quality of services provided. Issues have been addressed together with program staff such as the Woreda (District) Administration where appropriate. On the whole, the system has been a success, with changes made to project implementation following feedback.

However the team recognise there are some limitations - the open discussion forum means that sensitive issues might not be raised, which could be why serious complaints are not emerging.

The discussion groups might not also include more marginalized members of the community – for example those who work in the home might have difficulty attending, and the elderly or disabled might be physicallyunable to. However this will be addressed by exploring other, parallel methods to seek feedback and complaintsfrom different groups.

Why?

GUS remit is to work *with others* to overcome poverty and suffering. People have a right to participate in their own development⁴, and GUS should model this approach. As GUS we should try to reinforce people's dignity by involving them in decisions and activities that affect their lines. Given an enabling environment, resources and information to make informed choices, together we can make projects more equitable and effective. We should create opportunities for people to participate at every stage of the project cycle, should they want to.

GUIDELINES

There are many opportunities to involve people and communities in the project management cycle, from design to evaluation. Are you working with community & other actors? In many programmes, it is our community & other actors who have the most opportunity to involve people. You could look at the project

management cycle together and identify points at which the community can be involved. Here are some ideas:

- Invite representatives of local people to participate in project design
- Enable the village committee to take part in project budgeting
- Check the project design with different groups of people from the community
- Invite local community, village committee, and local authorities to take part in developing criteria for selection of those to participate in or benefit from the project
- Announce the criteria and display them in a public place
- Invite the local community and village committee to participate in selecting beneficiaries
- Invite the village committee to take part in monitoring results.

Firstly, practical steps need to be taken to make sure men, women and vulnerable/marginalized people can attend meetings and get involved in project related activities and committees, for example:

- Think about the time of the meeting, and how this fits with men and women's work and domestic responsibilities. Talk to men and women to find a time which is most suitable forthem, e.g. avoiding mealtimes.
- Many women have child care responsibilities. Think about providing a crèche or making other childcare arrangements.
- Think about men and women's mobility and security, and the accessibility of the venue. Consider providing transport and/or covering transport costs.
- Choose a venue that women will be comfortable with: somewhere they would normally congregate, or where women and men are used to coming together, not a venue that is traditionally male-dominated.
- Make sure women know about the meeting and are specifically invited to attend by an appropriate person, e.g. avillage elder.
- Bear in mind any cultural considerations, such as restrictions on women and men mixing, and think about how to alleviate these, e.g. through seating arrangements. If men and womenreally can't sit in the same room, hold separate meetings and ensure that women's views are clearly communicated.

 Consider whether the focus of the meeting is likely to influence who attends. For example, men may be more likely to attend meetings about construction and less likely to attend those about health issues, if they consider this to be women'sresponsibility.

However, participation is about more than being present. You must also take steps to ensure that both men, women and vulnerable/ marginalized people's involvement is meaningful, that their voices are heard and their viewpoints taken into consideration:

- Meet with men and women to explain that their participation is important, and that their views do matter; build their confidence so they feel that they have the right to get involved in matters that affect their lives.
- Make efforts to ensure that program staff understand and fully agree with GUS gendered approach – they will be the prime facilitators and ensures of this at a community level.
- Meet with men to break down their resistance to women's participation and gain their support. Understand that they may feel threatened, and explain how women's involvement can be beneficial to the whole community.
- Ensure that you have a full understanding of the dynamics, e.g. the presence of female staff may make it easier to involve women.
- Make sure that the meeting is conducted in a languageeverybody will understand.
- Find ways to give women and men the confidence to voice their opinions; for example, invite women to sit together for mutual support; actively invite people to speak, or work in small groups, which may be less threatening.
- Encourage full debate of different viewpoints before decisions are taken, reinforce that there is not 'right' option.

Adapted from GUS Rough Guide to Promoting Women's Participation

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

programme as health and hygiene volunteers.

Their duties include mobilization of communities, extent to which we have met community expectations. receiving and safekeeping of food and non-food items and assisting in the actual food distribution

In the protracted relief programme (long term assistance to vulnerable communities), different project activities are managed by community members. In the garden assistance activities, garden committees comprised of community members oversee the running of project activities. There are also village relief and rehabilitation

Committees. They are involved in community mobilization, information dissemination and assist in the management of programmes. All these committees receive training from GUS. Other committees and groups that are involved in programme implementation

intheprotracted relief programme are water user point committees, communityhealthclubs



Md.Abdul Latif **Executive Director** Garib Unnayan Sangstha (GUS)

4. Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning Programme and project design and implementationmust ensure that processes are in place which That manages the food and non-food distributions. actively involve stakeholders in measuring, learningfrom and sharing the

Why?

process. Communities are also involved in the public health People affected by a project should be given the opportunity to judge whether or not that project is improving their lives. Together with GUS own findings, this can determine whether a project is having impact. Community members affected by projects implemented by GUS or our program staff can participate in monitoring and evaluation throughout the project cycle. For example, they can help design indicators, gather data and discuss findings. With appropriate support, they can also participate in reviews and evaluations issues.



Md. SajedulIslam Chair person- Board of Trustee Garib Unnayan Sangstha (GUS)