

# Humanitarian Accountability Team WV Lanka: A Case Study

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## Welcome



World Vision is doing cutting-edge work in the international humanitarian sector to better establish accountability to beneficiaries in emergency responses, a long-time desire and stated goal. However, like many other major international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), we lacked the knowledge and ability to bring about this accountability on the ground. At last, with the development and implementation of the Humanitarian Accountability Team (HAT) in Sri Lanka – part of World Vision’s Asian Tsunami Response – we have been able to develop and implement a fully functioning system for beneficiary accountability. HAT produced impressive results, from which many other programmes, both within WV and external to the organisation, are learning.

This e-brochure documents the reasons for the development of HAT and its scope of work, implementation, efficacy, lessons, resources developed and future plans. I trust you will find these materials exceptionally useful. For future use, each e-brochure will be stored in the Relief Forum Database under the heading ‘E-brochures’.

Blessings,

Lars Gustavsson

Senior Executive Officer and Vice President:  
HEA, Collaboration and Business Innovation

## From the Asia Pacific VP

HAT in Sri Lanka is one of the first case studies in the global humanitarian sector that shows how accountability to beneficiaries can work on the ground, finally making it more than just 'a good idea'. As such, HAT is an example of innovation in humanitarian work at its best.



For more than a decade, we, along with other humanitarian groups, have been calling for greater accountability to beneficiaries in emergency responses. In fact, beneficiaries have been calling for it as well. The Listening Project notes, 'It is clear that people [beneficiaries] care a great deal about the relationships they have with those who are trying to help them [NGOs], and want to feel respected and listened to.'

With the success of HAT, we are now able to shed light on what works and what doesn't work in terms of NGO accountability to beneficiaries. Part of our enthusiasm comes from the success of HAT itself. It is even more exciting, however, to note that HAT was able to produce tools for others to use in the creation of accountability systems in their own emergency work. WV offices as diverse as those in Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Sierra Leone and Myanmar are all benefitting, as are other NGOs.

I commend this e-brochure to you, confident that you will see its enormous value.

Best regards,

Watt Santatiwat  
Vice President, Asia Pacific Region

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I. *What the Listening Project Has Learned*, <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/what-the-listening-project-has-learned-pdf.pdf>.

## Executive Summary

The damage from the massive 2004 Asian tsunami led to an international humanitarian response of unprecedented proportions. That, coupled with the complexity and scope of the needs, revealed the need to include beneficiary communities to a much greater extent than before if programme design and implementation were to have maximum impact.



To equip itself, WV's Lanka Tsunami Response Team (LTRT) developed the first-of-its-kind<sup>1</sup> HAT. Tasked with both operational imperatives and community engagement, it was essential for the HAT manager to be included on the senior management team, ensuring that beneficiary concerns reached the highest programme level.

HAT was, and in its ongoing capacity is, generally considered to be an incredible success. Advantages of HAT included better WV relationships with the community and more appropriate emergency and recovery responses. HAT encouraged WV staff to remember who they were working to serve (the beneficiaries), provided a safe mechanism for beneficiaries to file complaints, saved the programme about US\$5 million, helped complete projects more quickly by recruiting community help, reduced fraud and corruption, and built community capacity for self-reliance, amongst many other things.

Challenges included community difficulties in implementing new concepts on which they were trained, such as Do No Harm, as well as leadership and organising skills; the inability of some community action groups (CAGs) to perform necessary community services sustainably (without WV assistance); and lack of understanding by some staff of HAT's role in the programme.

*'HAT was, and in its ongoing capacity is, generally considered to be an incredible success.'*

Overall, however, LTRT senior managers concluded that HAT is vital to large-scale emergency responses in the future.

WV's best practice is being shared within World Vision and with the broader international humanitarian community.

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<sup>1</sup> This was the first HAT team for WV anywhere in the world.

## Background



### **Accountability to Beneficiaries**

WV, along with many other stakeholders in the international humanitarian community, has sought to be more accountable to beneficiaries for more than a decade. WV has made its commitment known through both internal documents<sup>1</sup> and agreement with international codes, standards and membership in global accountability projects.<sup>2</sup>

WV has until recently, nonetheless, lacked the knowledge and ability to implement accountability systems on the ground. This particular case study provides the first solid example of what worked in one context.

### **Sri Lanka**

On 26 December 2004, a massive earthquake (9.0 on the Richter scale) struck Indonesia, triggering a deadly tsunami that hit 13 countries with coastlines on the Indian Ocean. The tsunami was estimated to have killed more than 200,000 people and displaced more than 1.5 million across the affected countries.

The tsunami devastated Sri Lanka's coastline, resulting in over 30,000 deaths and displacing thousands of families. The destruction was severe, and, combined with the implications of Sri Lanka's long-term civil war, made the operational response to the tsunami difficult.

To complement WV's long-term development presence in Sri Lanka, a parallel emergency office was quickly set up to manage relief and reconstruction efforts after the tsunami – the Lanka Tsunami Response Team (LTRT).

*'To address the situation properly, WV's LTRT created HAT in May 2005.'*

Management of technical sectors such as shelter, infrastructure, water and sanitation, health and nutrition, economic recovery, and child protection was done through an operations department that focused on implementation and technical management of projects and activities.

Public response to the disaster was on an unprecedented scale, breaking records for voluntary giving for an international disaster in many of the countries affected. At the peak of the funding process, it was estimated that promises for tsunami relief and recovery totalled more than US\$15,000 million (US equivalent, US\$15 billion).<sup>3</sup>

To address the situation properly, WV's LTRT created HAT in May 2005. In addition to being tasked with operational responsibilities, HAT's purpose was to promote programme accountability to beneficiaries and also to integrate Do No Harm principles by providing the human resources and tools for effective community engagement, advocacy and co-ordination amongst INGOs, NGOs and the government. It was also tasked with building community capacity in order to ensure a sustainable response.

The team was operational through both Colombo-based technical advisers and implementing field staff.

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1. See, for example, WV's Core Values.

2. The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disasters; the Humanitarian Charter and Sphere Standards; membership in the Humanitarian Accountability Project.

3. John Cosgrave, *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC): Initial Findings* (December 2005) p 5. <http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org/NR/rdonlyres/576D8E84-27DB-44DC-8663-83AB9D5BF614/0/lowresA520060221.pdf>

## Components



HAT integrated several components, all of which contributed to greater programme accountability – better engagement with communities, inter-agency partners and government; consistently ensuring that these partners participated in the programmes in meaningful ways; ensuring that HAT’s activities did not harm communities (especially in conflict-affected areas); and building community skills and structures to increase the likelihood of programme sustainability.

Community engagement was key to HAT’s role. HAT sought to engage communities in key programme decisions that directly affected them – how and where they lived, worked and engaged with the programme.

Through Do No Harm (also known as Local Capacities for Peace, or LCP) and targeted peacebuilding, LTRT’s conflict-sensitive approach promoted peaceful relationships within and among communities where the team was working.

*‘Community engagement was key to HAT’s role.’*

Recognising that the scale of the tsunami response necessitated co-ordinated effort among humanitarian actors if communities were to be provided with the best services, LTRT’s accountability strategy included inter-agency and government liaison as well as national- and community-level advocacy. Alliances with inter-agency and government stakeholders were created to promote beneficiary perspectives among policymakers and influential stakeholders as well as to reduce duplication, competition and unintended harm in communities by humanitarian actors.

## Implementation



Initially, the LTRT focused on getting the job done as quickly as possible. HAT emerged within the programme as a vehicle for meeting operational responsibilities, especially those related to shelter reconstruction<sup>1</sup> and water/sanitation. However, HAT also was created to ensure that the outputs of these sectors considered the views of communities and were well co-ordinated with other agencies and government. (HAT later broadened its scope to cover all LTRT programming.)

HAT invested significant human resources in verification of project beneficiaries and co-ordination of beneficiary selection with other agencies, recognising that inappropriate allocation of assistance (particularly housing) was a primary catalyst for conflict within and among communities.

Consultation with beneficiary communities and community participation were essential elements of the permanent housing programme, resulting in modified housing designs, especially for people with disabilities; training beneficiaries as construction monitors; and strengthening community cohesion in resettlement sites through community-based organisation (CBO) development or other community activities.

*'HAT saved LTRT over US\$5 million in construction costs by preventing unsuitable or unneeded construction in the south.'*

Over time, LTRT shifted to a greater emphasis on quality, reflected in placement of the HAT manager on the senior management team. This allowed community concerns to have a voice at the highest level of programme decision-making, along with technical-sector considerations. HAT made sure that the people within the programme were not ignored and that busy technical experts could focus their time on such things as construction.

### **Selected HAT Initiatives**

#### **I. Community Assessment and Information Gathering**

HAT acted as a bridge between communities and other sectors, collecting information through both formal and informal processes. Information collected was aimed not only at gathering community feedback on specific programme issues but also on building the programme's understanding of the delicate context in which it operated, especially in the face of resurging conflict. This information contributed to strategic decision-making in the programme, including the 2007 operational plan; the revision of construction designs and plans, including securing additional funds from one donor as a result of Do No Harm assessment findings; inter-agency advocacy; and regular adjustments to activities based on community feedback.

Several mechanisms that HAT used to gather information included Do No Harm assessments, community consultations, focus-group discussions, collaborative advocacy planning, and regular monitoring by community volunteers.

### 2. Community Complaints

In 2007, HAT established a functioning field complaint mechanism. The objective of the community complaints and feedback system was to *ensure that complaints from beneficiaries were heard, recorded and resolved in an effective and professional manner in accordance with the Humanitarian Accountability Project International (HAP-I) standard and World Vision's organisational principles*. To enable its effective operation, HAT developed two database management software packages, complete with template forms and guidelines, to track community complaints.

HAT welcomed complaints and feedback from stakeholders as opportunities to improve WV's services and to help identify areas in which programme quality and accountability could be improved. The complaints-and-feedback mechanism safely highlighted community concerns; allowed WV to address most grievances at their source before they had a chance to escalate; provided a non-judicial, respectful means to address grievances; increased transparency; demonstrated the organisation's humility and commitment to fulfil its promises; improved security; provided valuable management information; and increased the dignity of communities.

### 3. Information Provision

From the beginning, HAT aimed to make certain that communities were informed about what WV was doing in their communities and to provide a consistent WV liaison of whom they could ask questions. As the programme evolved, so did HAT's information-provision strategy. A verbal communication approach gave way to different approaches, including visual ones such as notice boards, videos and print materials. At the same time, messages changed from solely providing information about programme activities to also informing communities about their rights and advising them on strategies for securing those rights.

### 4. Community Consultation

Community consultation was a key feature of HAT. To further that process, LTRT used a systematic process to engage communities in designing the operational plan for the year (2007). Programme-planning criteria required community engagement as a key step in identifying priorities for sector activities in each district. In order to support this process, a large-scale community consultation was built into the design process. In July 2007, 337 people participated in 24 focus-group discussions run in the north, east and south of the country. The information collected was used in the field and in Colombo to plan projects to meet the needs of communities in the next year.

### 5. Participation

Special emphasis was placed on increasing the degree and level of community participation towards the second half of the LTRT programme, as its community engagement approach matured and the programme began to prepare for transition. The programme was particularly concerned with ensuring that communities were provided with as much capacity building and resources as possible to maintain programme inputs (such as houses, wells and other community infrastructure) and to be able to live

together as harmoniously as possible in newly resettled communities where neighbours often had not known one another previously.

LTRT's participation strategy centred around building CAGs in newly resettled shelter sites to manage construction and other issues that would result from the resettlement, including accessing services (such as bus service, roads, and so forth) and promoting peaceful co-existence among new neighbours. CAGs were formed in all shelter resettlement sites to represent the community and to undertake an organisational function within that community. WV facilitated the process of electing CAG representatives; developed draft constitutions and procedures for the groups; and helped them register with the government, which was a requirement for their operation.

HAT provided both the wider community and individual groups with training in transformational leadership, Do No Harm, conflict mediation, advocacy, bookkeeping and other key skills, and also supported them while they implemented what they learned. Training resulted in stronger leadership in these groups, advocacy action plans for each site, and the ability of community members to analyse conflict within their communities and to deal with that conflict before it became violent. CAGs were also provided technical training in areas such as well maintenance and minor construction repairs to improve their capability to maintain their own housing and infrastructure after WV departed.

For more information on these approaches and tools to implement them, please contact [H\\_Account@wvi.org](mailto:H_Account@wvi.org) or one of the HAT contacts listed near the end of this document.

## **Results of HAT to Date**

### Advantages

LTRT senior managers perceived HAT as vital to future large-scale emergency responses. The LTRT programme director commented, 'I would not want to manage another response of this size again without a HAT team. It really is essential to what we do'. Likewise, the LTRT operations director was quoted as saying, 'I would not hit the ground in future without some kind of HAT function'.<sup>2</sup>

*'HAT was the "conscience" of the programme. It worked as a community-based monitoring and warning system.'*

HAT was so effective that it is not possible to mention all its advantages in this document. HAT's most significant advantages, however, are noted below:<sup>3</sup>

- HAT was the 'conscience' of the programme. It worked as a community-based monitoring and warning system. It helped reduce organisational risk significantly both by identifying problems early and alerting other sectors and senior management team members, and by helping provide suitable solutions to them at the same time.
- HAT acted as a bridge between the community and other sectors. By having a consistent point of contact with communities, trust was built between communities and the organisation, improving information exchange and therefore the quality of the services provided.

- Having a department with a mandate to represent community perspectives helped staff stay connected to the beneficiaries, their original reasons for working for WV, and strengthened their commitment to organisational values based on valuing people.
- Providing information to communities throughout the project management cycle improved participation across sectors and contributed to the empowerment of people over the decisions that affected their lives.
- Through good community engagement, HAT saved LTRT over US\$5 million in construction costs by preventing unsuitable or unneeded construction in the south.
- HAT helped ensure that projects met community *and* technical standards; for example, sound information obtained from the community enabled WV to work with other groups to prevent construction of sanitation facilities that would have polluted the local water table.
- By taking the responsibility to engage the community and deal with its members' complaints, HAT enabled technical staff to spend their time on their particular areas of expertise, such as construction.
- Separating technical and HAT roles ensured that beneficiary voices were heard.
- Corruption was minimized, as all beneficiaries were free to report it, knowing they would be heard.
- In environments where building contractors were in short supply and overloaded with the sheer volume of construction needed, community-led construction, as implemented by the Shelter team and HAT staff members, removed bottlenecks. LTRT found that latrines were taking up to six months to complete through contractors, but after providing materials and training, beneficiaries were able to build their own latrines in only four weeks. This also freed up scarce construction capacity to focus on providing shelter.

### Challenges

Despite the many advantages of HAT, as with any programme, a certain number of challenges also became apparent, including the following:<sup>4</sup>

- Different levels of understanding within the community made application of some training more difficult, especially LCP. In one location the application of LCP training to the broader community was difficult because those that did not attend the training did not understand the new knowledge and the skills that were being applied. A man from Kalutara commented: 'When I tried to apply the training, it caused more conflict. If everyone on the site gets the training, it would be more useful'.
- CAGs, formed at all sites, had varying degrees of success. Some took initiative and enjoyed community support; others found their initial steps at leadership drew a mixed reaction; and one CAG was disbanded.

- Where communities were less familiar with one another, community organisations struggled more to define and undertake their role.
- One group of women indicated that it was reluctant to raise complaints. A woman from Batticaloa reported, 'If we complain, then we are uncertain if we will get solutions, and we are afraid to complain because of other community members'.
- All groups expressed the need for continued support in order to build capacity of CAGs and communities at large to manage their own issues over the long term. The needs ranged from training to financial support.
- The lack of understanding of HAT's role at times led to HAT staff members being directed in a way that did not match HAT's area of competence/expertise. This sometimes resulted in struggles between HAT staff and field managers. It became clear that all WV staff should be given further orientation on issues of humanitarian accountability.
- While there was co-ordination between WV and other agencies, this co-ordination was not up to expected levels. Many WV field staff members were reluctant to share information with other agencies.

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1. WV determined that shelter reconstruction represented the greatest need for ongoing consultation with communities and inter-agency co-ordination; shelter programming also presented the highest risks with respect to potential fraud, beneficiary dissatisfaction and inadvertent increase in community conflict.

2. World Vision, *Why Do Accountability? A Business Case from Sri Lanka* (April 2007), pp. 6 and 7. Available at [www.hapinternation.org](http://www.hapinternation.org) and [H\\_Account@wvi.org](mailto:H_Account@wvi.org)

3. Ibid. 6-12.

4. These are drawn from the *WV Lanka Tsunami Response, Humanitarian Accountability Team Lessons Learned* by Alexandra Levaditis, September 2007.

## Evaluations



Both community members and HAT staff evaluated HAT. In addition to affirming the results of the programme noted above, several additional points were brought forth.

### **By Communities**

Discussions with community members in three operating districts revealed the following:

- Communities, including vulnerable groups, felt that they were adequately consulted by WV. One woman in Jaffna was clearly pleased: 'The fireplace of the kitchen was changed for my convenience. I'm sick and can't stand [up] to cook. World Vision changed the plan after consulting me'.
- Community meetings were the preferred mode for sharing and receiving information. Another woman in Jaffna shared: 'Common and individual construction-related issues are discussed at these meetings. This is useful. All of us became aware of each other's concerns and grievances also'.
- Evidence from all districts showed that the skills acquired through HAT training were being used by community members. 'I am now in a women's society. I learned how to discuss things with members of the society, how to make decisions, and how to lead members', reported a woman from Batticaloa.
- HAT training programmes were recognised as well organised and well executed. In a conflict-prone setting, one beneficiary commented, 'The venue was selected after discussing it with us so as to suit our convenience and safety'.
- WV played a vital role in representing community interests to government and other stakeholders, building trust, especially between communities and stakeholder representatives. A beneficiary in Kalutara noted: 'After the training we had more confidence to co-ordinate with the Pradeshiya Saba. The garbage problem was there always, but it was only after we went to the training that we wrote a letter'.
- Relations amongst community members improved in all cases from the time that families first moved into their new homes. Peacebuilding activities, such as tree planting, contributed to this by bringing people together and providing them with opportunities to get to know one another and to establish relationships. One youth in Jaffna reported: 'Before the tree planting had taken place, we did not have any contacts with the Kudattanai people. Now we have a good friendship with them'.

### **By Staff**

Discussions with HAT staff found:

- HAT field staff considered the following to be the most beneficial of all the training they received: community accountability training, LCP Training of Trainer (TOT) and advocacy training.

- HAT training methods were innovative and interactive, which encouraged participation and learning.
- HAT field staff agreed with the communities that community meetings were the most effective way for community consultation and information sharing.
- HAT activities contributed to improving relations amongst community members.

## Lessons

- A HAT team is vital to proper community participation and engagement in future large-scale emergency responses.
- Splitting the functions of HAT from Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) and Operations makes it possible to ensure that staff members have the time to listen to the community. If the beneficiary accountability function resides with DME/Operations, staff members are often forced to choose between people getting what they need and listening to those people.
- HAT should be part of the senior management team to ensure the concerns of beneficiaries are heard at the highest programme level.
- Having community consultations led by one team (HAT) helps to ensure that all sector assessments are done together, resulting in greater coherence and less time taken for communities to contribute to or host assessments.
- It is important that field offices have procedures for handling complaints in place and that there is a demonstrable commitment on the part of all staff to the principles of complaints management. All staff members and associates should be accountable for what WV does, and their conduct should be professional, financially sound, efficient and effective.



### **Disseminating Lessons from HAT**

Two WV videos document LTRT HAT lessons. The videos are, or will be, available within WV and to other humanitarian agencies as a contribution to the wider industry. The first video is a short training film that illustrates HAP performance benchmarks as they relate to World Vision's LTRT operations in Sri Lanka. It focuses on handling complaints from the community. The film is currently being used by members of the Emergency Capacity Building Initiative and HAP in their training and workshops. It serves to strengthen the capacity of the larger humanitarian sector and provides examples for staff as they encounter issues dealing with accountability. The second video, which is in production, looks at the legacy of what has become known in the tsunami-affected countries as the broken-promise syndrome; that is, many agencies failed to deliver on their promises.<sup>1</sup>

HAP has included a number of the tools developed by WV Lanka (WVL) and distributed them to the wider humanitarian community in Annex 3 of *The Guide to the HAP Standard*.<sup>2</sup> They have

also been posted on the HAP website.<sup>3</sup> All the tools developed by WV Lanka have been widely shared in phase one of the inter-agency Emergency Capacity Building project.

Of course, both lessons and tools have been widely disseminated within WV as well, with WV L HAT staff travelling to other programmes to create awareness and to train others.

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1. Information about the videos can be obtained from one of the HAT contacts listed near the end of this document.
  2. Published by Oxfam GB, March 19, 2008. The document is available online at several websites, including Oxfam Publications, <http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/>.
  3. <http://www.hapinternational.org>

## The Future



### **Sri Lanka**

The tools, systems and processes developed by HAT continue to be used and have been rolled out across WV's HEA programme.<sup>1</sup> This includes community consultation and community feedback systems. Plans in the near future include rolling out a complaint-management system across all WV HEA programming. Many of the materials are being used by other WV programmes as well.

### **Other WV National Offices and NGOs**

It may be difficult for other countries and other agencies to replicate the entire HAT system, due to the wide range of skills and resources that were available to LTRT. Still, it has become abundantly clear that other countries can successfully adapt large pieces of the system used in Sri Lanka. The WV Food Programming and Management Group has adopted a complaints-handling system based on HAT work. Additionally, WV offices in such diverse countries as Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Myanmar and Sierra Leone are adapting different parts of HAT to create their own systems. Other offices, such as Somalia, are intrigued with the possibility of creating their own accountability systems as well.

### **Needs**

- It is necessary to expand on what has been learned in this one case study in order to determine what works well in other contexts and how best to advance or complement what has been learned here.
- It is important to continue to share information with others in order to show the benefits of having a fully developed accountability system and to demonstrate that such a system can really work.
- It is vital to see how HAT learnings can complement what WV's Transformational Development ministry is doing in this area and to develop integrated training materials with this ministry.

*'...it has become abundantly clear that other countries can successfully adapt large pieces of the system used in Sri Lanka.'*

### **Resources**

For resources on developing a beneficiary accountability system for an emergency programme in your country, as mentioned above, offices can use [\*The Guide to the HAP Standard: Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management\*](#).

An *Accountability Toolkit* is being developed for dissemination in 2009. WV also developed a business case to share what was learned, how the programme was implemented, and the advantages of continuing to be accountable to beneficiaries. The business case can be accessed at the HAP website.

For more information and resources, write or call one of the HAT contacts listed below.

The potential for enhancing beneficiary accountability in emergency programmes as a result of on-the-ground lessons and tools documented by the LTRT programme is exciting!

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<sup>1</sup> LTRT was folded back into the WV Lanka National Office in 2007.

## Acronyms Used in This e-Brochure

CAG	Community Action Group (often used interchangeably with CBO for LTRT-supported community organisations at housing sites)
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DME	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
HAP-I	Humanitarian Accountability Project International
HAT	Humanitarian Accountability Team
HEA	Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
LCP	Local Capacities for Peace
LTRT	Lanka Tsunami Response Team
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
TOT	Training of Trainer
WV	World Vision
WVL	World Vision Lanka



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