

WHAT DO COMMUNITIES VALUE IN HUMANITARIAN PROJECT CLOSURE?



*Informed by a study in six
locales in the Philippines*

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ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE NOTE

The content of this guidance note is informed by a qualitative study conducted by an interdisciplinary research team from McGill University, McMaster University, George Mason University, and Laval University who are members of the Humanitarian Health Ethics, and the Center for Disaster Preparedness Foundation, Inc. (CDP) in the Philippines.

The research team collaborated with local non-governmental organizations in the Philippines in the design and development of the project. These organizations conducted the data collection process and they also served as an advisory board.

These are:

- Cooperation for Local Development Solutions (CLODEVs)
- Leyte Center for Development (LCDE)
- Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRRAC)
- Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits (ECOWEB)
- Tri-Peoples' Organization Against Disasters (TRIPOD)
- University of Philippines Visayas Foundation Inc. (UPVFI)



OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED USERS

This guidance note is designed to help facilitate humanitarian project closure in a way that is informed by what communities value and experience during the closure process.



Building on the research findings, the guidance note contains information, recommendations, reflections, and activities directed to humanitarian organizations, as well as community members who already have or might experience humanitarian project closure. It can also serve as a reference to government and duty-bearers in working with non-government organizations and communities.

The guidance note contains recommendations for organizations, (i.e: humanitarian, non-governmental and civil society organizations), community members, or both.



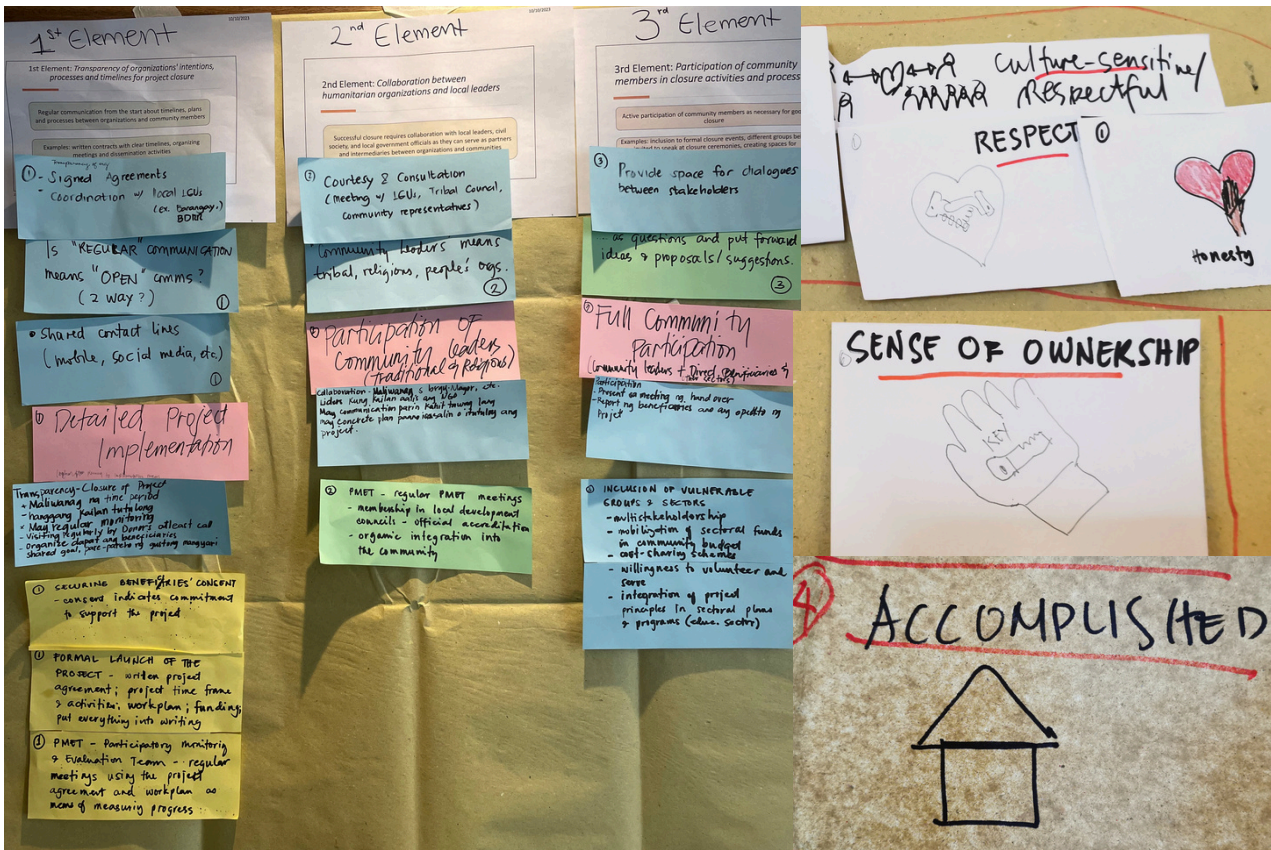
Organizations



Community members



Both organizations and community members



In October 2023, a workshop was held by the research team with the advisory board members to discuss the findings from the community and how this can be integrated by humanitarian organizations in their work.

OVERVIEW

What is Humanitarian Aid?

Humanitarian aid is designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and restore and promote human dignity during emergencies.

Humanitarian action provides services in the context of disasters, conflict, displacement, and other large-scale emergencies.

Services can include:

- Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)
- Shelter
- Health care
- Distribution of relief supplies
- Cash assistance

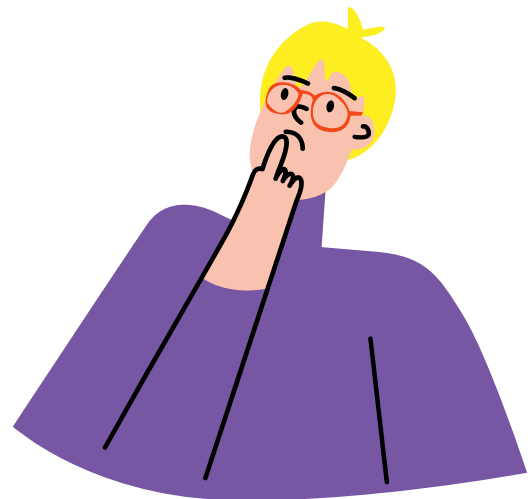
Humanitarian projects are generally intended to be short to medium term initiatives and then closed.



Houses in a relocation site of a community affected by volcanic eruption

Why should we seek to better understand what communities value during humanitarian project closure?

Humanitarian projects will eventually close down, be handed over, or transitioned to a development approach.



There remains uncertainty about how to implement humanitarian project closure well.

Hence, the study was conducted to explore how members of communities that received humanitarian aid perceive closure processes and what they consider to be good practices.

Most research and discussion has looked at it from the perspective of humanitarian organizations.

OVERVIEW

What is the research about?

This research is guided by the question:

“What is the moral experience of humanitarian project closure for members of affected communities, project partners and other local stakeholders?”

Moral experience is considered as a person’s perception that what he or she values is present or disregarded in everyday life.

Research into moral experience helps us better understand the collective, interpersonal, or subjective activities and processes of humanitarian projects experienced by the community that reflect or conflict with what they value.



Hunt MR, Carnevale FA. Moral experience: a framework for bioethics research. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2011;37:658–662.

Kleinman A. Moral experience and ethical reflection: can ethnography reconcile them? A quandary for “the new bioethics”. *Daedalus* 1999;128(4):69–97

Where are the study areas?



Map of the Philippine island and the 6 study areas marked in red

This research was conducted in six (6) communities who received humanitarian aid in response to crises such as typhoons, volcanic eruption, and armed conflict. The aid were provided by a range of organizations and included projects focused on shelter, water and sanitation, livelihood, and provision of relief supplies, amongst others.

WHAT COMMUNITIES VALUE AT CLOSURE

The findings from interviews and group discussions with community members in the study areas revealed the following common elements valued by participants, and which humanitarian organizations are recommended to take into account when closing humanitarian projects.

Each description of the elements include questions to guide their application and recommendations for organizations, communities, and/or both. Quotations are translated from discussions and interviews in local language with community members and local leaders.



1

TRANSPARENCY OF ORGANIZATIONS' INTENTIONS, PROCESSES, AND TIMELINES FOR PROJECT CLOSURE

"Plans should be clearly presented to the community" and humanitarian organization representatives should "talk to Barangay officials together with the community to inform them that the project and support will end."

Clear and regular communication from the beginning of a project and throughout all stages, that include humanitarian organizations, local stakeholders, and community members was described as crucial for transparency and a key channel for engagement and participation.



Guidance questions

- Are there plans and strategies to schedule regular meetings, consultations, and provide project updates to the community?
- What are the modes of communication between the organization and focal persons in the community?



When feasible, prepare a written contract agreed upon by the humanitarian organization and community representatives that outlines project timelines, roles, and processes

2

COLLABORATION BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL LEADERS

Local leaders either from the government or sectoral organizations (e.g. women's, senior citizens, farmers,) are considered as key partners and intermediaries who can coordinate roles and communication between humanitarian organizations and the community.

Guidance questions

- Are local leaders and organizations identified and incorporated as project focal person/s?
- What will be the roles and responsibilities of local leaders in all stages of the project?



Conduct meetings together during the project planning phase and throughout implementation to identify and align with community needs and priorities



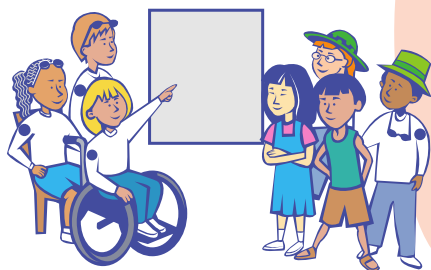
Know the local political context. Ensure neutrality and fairness of project benefits for the whole community

Local leaders can "inform the community about project cessation, monitor the project documents, and follow peace and order."

3 PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN PROCESSES AND CLOSURE ACTIVITIES

Wide community participation from the inception of the project and in all stages up to closure activities fosters respect among stakeholders. Participation in closure processes may include having turn-over or farewell ceremonies, closing meetings, or feedback and evaluation activities.

"Communities should have more participation in planning" and "all stakeholders, particularly vulnerable sectors, should be actively involved" and considered "as partners in any undertaking."



- ### Guidance questions
- What relevant sectors in the community should be involved in the project?
 - How can community members effectively engage in decision-making in the different project stages?



Create spaces and channels of communication for community members to share ideas, suggestions and ask questions about project processes



Actively attend project activities, share local knowledge, and provide feedback to organizations. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, expression and opinion, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

4 SUSTAINING PROJECT ACTIVITIES AFTER CLOSURE

"There were benefits but when they left, they did not last because there was no proper guidance and dialogue. We were not asked how we are going to apply what they taught us."

The potential for sustainability depends on the nature of the project, but a shared responsibility and commitment from the humanitarian organization and community can help establish sustainability mechanisms. This is more likely to happen when organizations prepare the ground and community members are in agreement and feel ready to sustain project activities.

Guidance questions

- How can the community continue to benefit from the project?
- What activities can be done with community representatives to prepare turn-over and sustainability plans?
- What partnerships and mechanisms will be set with local stakeholders to sustain the project?



Enact local policies or form a local community organization that can facilitate the sustainability of project activities

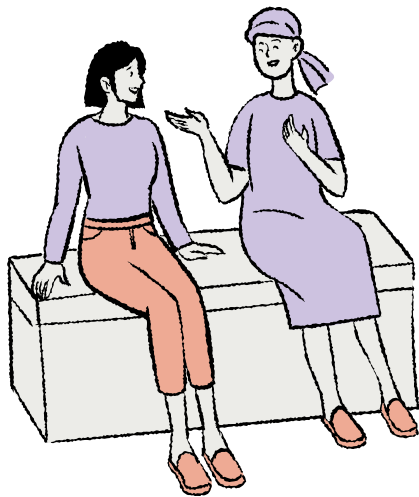


Prepare the ground for sustainability by clearly communicating roles and expectations of how to continue project benefits and activities

5 MONITORING AND CONTINUITY OF THE ORGANIZATIONS' CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Communities value the long-term positive impacts of humanitarian projects and having continued relationship with organizations even after they leave the area. It is important to place mechanisms to monitor project impacts and being aware of the community's evolving needs.

"Until now they continue to help us. So long as someone can reach them out, give information and they will come and we'll respond right away ma'am (..) They are still there ma'am, there's connection ma'am."



Guidance questions

- Are there plans to schedule and conduct follow-up monitoring and evaluation of the project, and assessment of community needs?
- What possibilities for open communication with focal persons and the community can be implemented after closure?



Establish and maintain partnerships with local civil society and people's organizations who can continue to connect the humanitarian organization and community

6 CLOSURE PROCESSES THAT ENSURE FAIRNESS AND PRESERVE RELATIONSHIPS

Humanitarian projects "should be fair to all to avoid division of communities when they are done."

Organizations may generate feelings of division and resentment in the community when access to project benefits and assets (e.g. water and sanitation facilities) are given to certain groups and not all. Fairness and inclusivity are important to foster unity within the community and sustain humanitarian projects.

Guidance questions

- What social and cultural dynamics exist within the community? How will these be taken into account?
- How will it be ensured that all relevant sectors are well-represented in the project phases?
- What is the criteria for identifying who will receive humanitarian assistance? Are these fair and inclusive?



Familiarize with local culture and values prior and during implementation



Identify the most marginalized and vulnerable groups and ensure they benefit from project activities and benefits



Introduce and share with organizations the local traditions, values, and cultural aspects that may be important for the community

7 SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO BE BETTER PREPARED FOR FUTURE CRISES

Humanitarian assistance is often provided in response to a crises or disaster. However, it is also important to incorporate activities during implementation and project closure that can empower and capacitate communities in preventing and being prepared for future crises.

A humanitarian organization conducting seminars focused on disaster risk reduction and preparedness “gave [us] a better understanding on preparing for calamities.”



Guidance questions

- What other activities and mechanisms can be organized for the community to be better equipped to prevent and respond to future crises?
- Will the organization conduct further community needs assessment?



Identify and discuss with local leaders and community representatives other projects that can enhance the resilience of the community



Consider organizing training activities or workshops on disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM)

GUIDANCE QUESTIONS

These guidance questions can be used by humanitarian organizations, communities, and government agencies to support discussion on the closure of humanitarian projects that align with what communities value across the project stages.

The spaces below can be used to take notes. This can also be an activity where participants use meta cards, posters, or other materials to record their answers.

DESIGN PHASE



Are local leaders and organizations identified and incorporated as project focal person/s?

What are the different sectors (women, farmers, elderly, youth, etc.) in the community that can be involved in the project?

What will be the roles and responsibilities of the local leaders in all stages of the project?

What social and cultural dynamics exist within the community? How can these be taken into account for project implementation and closure?

How can community members more effectively participate and engage in decision-making in the different project stages?

TO SUPPORT DISCUSSION

DESIGN PHASE



Are there plans and strategies to schedule regular meetings, consultations, and provide project updates to the community?

What is the criteria for identifying who will receive humanitarian assistance? Are these fair and inclusive?

What are the modes of communication between the organization and focal persons in the community?

Are there considerations to organize training activities or workshops on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management?

ON PROJECT CLOSURE

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

CLOSURE PHASE

What is the schedule for regular meetings and ways of updating the community on the project status and incorporating their input?

What are the spaces and mechanisms for community members and marginalized groups to ask questions, speak out, and share their thoughts?

Who will be invited to project closure activities to ask questions and share ideas about closure? Are some groups being excluded?

What activities will be conducted for project closure (ie: meetings, closure ceremonies, written communication)?

Have all project components and activities been completed prior to closure?

WITH COMMUNITIES

PLANNING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS ALL PROJECT PHASES

Has there been coordination with community representatives and local leaders in preparing turn-over and sustainability plans?

What activities and plans can be conducted to enable sustainability of the project's benefits?

What will be the timeframe for sustainability initiatives?

What resources will be needed for project sustainability? Where will these resources be accessed from?

What partnerships and mechanisms will be set with local stakeholders and other actors to sustain the project?

POST-CLOSURE PHASE

Are community members better equipped to respond to future crises? How could this be measured or evaluated?

What possibilities for open communication with focal persons and the community can be implemented post-closure?

Are there plans to schedule and conduct follow-up monitoring and evaluation of the project, and assessment of community needs? How will these be conducted?

What other activities and mechanisms can be organized for the community to be better equipped to prevent and respond to future crises?

SHARING AND LEARNING SESSION

Engaging in conversation with community members can provide new context and insights on what is valued during project closure. This sharing and learning session guide can support local, national or international organizations in facilitating discussions with community members that foster reflection and conversation on what is valued at humanitarian project closure.

Objectives of community activities:

- Share with the community the findings of the research on what is valued for the closure of humanitarian assistance projects
- Gain further insights from the community on what they value for project closure
- Draw recommendations on how to promote and ensure that what communities value is incorporated in project closure



Sharing and learning sessions were conducted with the partner communities to present and further reflect on the research findings.

Program of activities

The following is an example flow of activities for a sharing and learning session with community members. This can be modified depending on the project, local context, and available time and resources. Organizations can also include here a session on discussing closure using the guidance questions.

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	DURATION
Preliminary activities	Registration, Prayer, National Anthem, Welcome Remarks	15 mins
Why are we here?	Introduction, expectation setting, presentation of session objectives	15 mins
Looking back	Open discussion with participants of their previous experiences on humanitarian project closure	15 mins
What do communities value in humanitarian project closure	Presentation and discussion of the 7 elements of project closure	30 mins
Activity #1: Guess the element	Participants are given scenarios and guess which element it is related to.	25 mins
Activity #2: How should closing be done? (Break/preparation)	Participants prepare a 5-10 minute skit on how they think project closure should be done	15 mins
How should closing be done?	Presentation of participants' skits	30 mins
Ways forward	Open discussion with participants on the materials, support, and ways to promote what they value for project closure, especially when humanitarian organizations arrive in their area.	15 mins

ACTIVITY # 1

GUESS THE ELEMENT

The 'Guess the Element' game can help apply and connect the 7 elements valued at closure with case scenarios that can happen when humanitarian organizations implement projects in the community.

Materials:

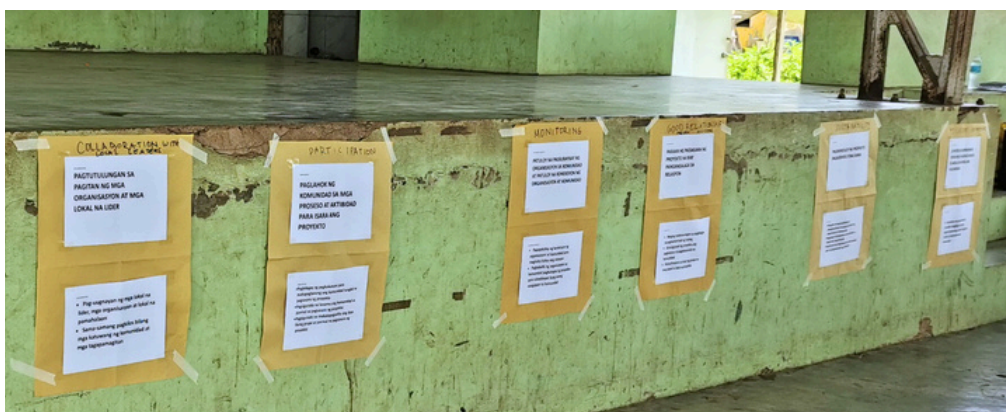
- Print-out of the description of each of the 7 elements
- Tape
- Activity prize (optional)

Steps:

1. Post the print-out of the 7 elements onto a wall
2. Facilitator provides a scenario
3. Participants line up in front of the element they think matches the scenario
4. Participants share why they chose their answer. There is no right or wrong answer, the aim of the activity is to foster discussion about the elements.



Scan QR code for examples of case scenarios on the 7 elements or see Appendix 2



Description of the 7 elements posted on a wall

Activity #2

SKIT: HOW SHOULD CLOSURE BE DONE ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

In preparing a skit, participants can show the activities and values that are important for them when humanitarian organizations exit. They can get inspiration from the 7 elements, but also think beyond these in preparing a skit that represents their needs and aspirations during project closure.

Steps:

1. Divide participants into equal groups.
2. Allot 15 minutes for participants to discuss and prepare their skit. Each skit can be 10–15 minutes.
3. Each group presents their skit.



If the humanitarian organization has a proposed project in the area, additional time can be allotted to discuss the guidance questions with the community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This guidance note presents study findings on the topic of project closure from an important but understudied perspective: that of people living in communities where projects have been closed.

It offers insights into what communities value during project closure, and their concerns and priorities for how humanitarian organizations, leaders and communities should act and collaborate as they approach the end of these projects.

The guidance note includes questions and activities which can help people think about what they value and how these issues apply in their own communities or in their own projects. They can also support discussion and reflection on how to close humanitarian projects from a community perspective.

Considering closure from community perspectives can foster important dialogue about how organizations, communities and local partners can further collaborate, share information transparently, promote participation, avoid divisions, encourage sustainable benefits, and foster resilience to future disasters.



Guess the Elements Game Example Cases

Transparency of organizations' intentions, processes and timelines for project closure

- A humanitarian organization has a meeting with community members, leaders and local government units to share their plan and timeline for the project
 - There is a Memorandum of Understanding that clarifies the duration of the project and the roles of different stakeholders.
-

Collaboration between humanitarian organizations and local leaders

- A humanitarian organization meets with barangay officials to discuss a proposal to implement a project and ask for their help to connect with the community.
 - The camp manager of a temporary shelter informs the organization on what are some of the community needs. The camp manager then reports the discussion back to the community.
-

Participation of community members in processes and closure activities

- Members of the community propose their schedules and possible venues for a project workshop.
 - Community members are invited to speak at the closure ceremony.
-

Sustaining project activities after closure

- The community was connected by the organization to the government agriculture and trade office that can support them in selling produce from their vegetable garden project.
- The organization has turned-over solar panels to the community and connected it with a company to ensure maintenance with an agreement that the local government will shoulder maintenance costs.

Monitoring and continuity of the organizations' connection with the community

- A humanitarian organizations that provided medical service continues to monitor the health condition of project participants through phone or social media.
 - The organization conducts periodic visits to the community and checks whether the water and sanitation facilities provided remain operational.
-

Closure processes that ensure fairness and preserve relationships

- Together with local officials, the organization conducted house-to-house visits to identify community members most in need of materials to reconstruct their shelter.
 - The organization has incorporated community values and cultural context into their intervention and plans for closure.
-

Supporting communities to be better prepared for future disasters

- The organization facilitated the preparation of a contingency plan together with local leaders and community members to identify the appropriate steps and response in the event a disaster strikes.
- Communities received peacekeeping and DRRM training and are able to lead a future response in face of calamities.

CONNECT WITH US



Scan QR code for
more details
about the project

For any comments or feedback, you may contact us through the following:



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