Accountability, Equity, Inclusion and Conflict Sensitivity Improvement Planning Guide

A guide for 3MDG implementing partners to develop and implement AEI&CS improvement plans

December 2014

The Three Millennium Development Goal Fund (3MDG) is a pooled fund in Myanmar supported by Australia, Denmark, the European Union, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, managed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).
Table of Content

1. Background ............................................................................................................................. 3

2. Overview of the AEI&CS Improvement Planning Process ...................................................... 5
   Step 1: Review AEI&CS assessment findings and identify the areas with the lowest scores and that you want to prioritize for the upcoming year .............................................. 5
   Step 2: Identify activities to improve AEI&CS in these areas ..................................................... 6
   Step 3: Prioritize activities to ensure a realistic and achievable AEI&CS improvement plan ........ 8
   Step 4: Develop a detailed AEI&CS improvement plan ............................................................. 9
   Step 5: Implement and monitor the AEI&CS improvement plan ............................................... 10

3. Next Steps .................................................................................................................................. 10

This guide has been developed with technical assistance from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), an organisation dedicated to ensuring greater accountability to communities and people affected by crises and/or poverty.
1. Background

The Three Millennium Development Goal Fund (3MDG) supports the provision of health services in Myanmar and contributes towards the country’s efforts to achieve the three health-related Millennium Development Goals. These goals include reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. 3MDG also provides support to the Ministry of Health in order to contribute towards the development of a more effective and responsive health system.

Recognizing the need, opportunities and benefits of focusing attention on Accountability, Equity, Inclusion and Conflict Sensitivity (AEI&CS) in the context of the health sector in Myanmar, 3MDG developed an AEI&CS Strategic Framework titled “Fostering Accountability, Equity and Inclusion in 3MDG: From Principle to Practice” in September 2013.

In order to support the operationalisation of this framework, 3MDG contracted the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), an organisation dedicated to ensuring greater accountability to communities and people affected by crises and/or poverty, at the end of March 2014. The HAP in-country team started its activities in July 2014, and has been working with 3MDG, its Implementing Partners (IPs) and other key stakeholders on raising awareness on the importance of AEI&CS, developing organizational AEI&CS standards, building AEI&CS-related systems and capacities, and assisting with the development and implementation of AEI&CS policies and practices in the health sector in Myanmar.

3MDG’s IPs embarked in a significant AEI&CS improvement process in September 2014 that is represented in the figure below.

Figure 1 - 3MDG AEI&CS Improvement Process
The first step of this process is to conduct an AEI&CS assessment, which entails interviews with IP management teams, staff, communities, and partners in order to assess the organisations’ performance in meeting the eight 3DMG AEI&CS Standards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1: Leadership on Accountability, Equity and Inclusion</th>
<th>Organisations demonstrate their commitments to program quality, which includes accountability, equity and inclusion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2: Staff Capacity and Support</td>
<td>Organisations support their staff to improve program quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3: Information sharing and Transparency</td>
<td>Organisations publicly communicate their mandates, projects and what stakeholders can expect from them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 4: Participation</td>
<td>Organisations involve beneficiaries and communities in all phases of their projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 5: Feedback and Response Mechanisms</td>
<td>Organisations put formal feedback and response mechanisms in place to gather and act on feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 6: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</td>
<td>Organisations learn from experience to continually improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 7: Conflict Sensitivity</td>
<td>Organisations ensure that their activities do not make conflicts worse and where possible that they improve possibilities for peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 8: Working with Partners and Other Stakeholders</td>
<td>Organisations collaborate with partners and other stakeholders to ensure coordinated and efficient interventions.</td>
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The aim of conducting an AEI&CS assessment is to identify strengths to build upon and areas for improvement in order to advance AEI&CS.

The purpose of this guide is to help IPs to develop and implement AEI&CS improvement plans. While the guide is aimed at 3MDG IPs, it can also be useful for any organisation which aspires to strengthen its AEI&CS practices in the health sector.
2. Overview of the AEI&CS Improvement Planning Process

An AEI&CS assessment supports an organisation’s ambition for continuous quality improvement. It provides a learning and development process whereby an organisation uses a set of external criteria (in this case the 3MDG AEI&CS standards) to reflect and discuss:

- Where are we now in terms of our AEI&CS policies and practices and how does that compare with 3MDG AEI&CS standards?
- What could we do better or differently in order to improve the quality of our AEI&CS policies, processes, systems and practices?

One of the main purposes of conducting an AEI&CS assessment is to gather information that will inform the development of an AEI&CS improvement plan. This plan will allow organisations to carefully plan, implement and monitor improvements in AEI&CS in all aspects of their work.

The five steps illustrated below are recommended in order to develop an AEI&CS improvement plan that is realistic and achievable. Each step is described in detail in subsequent pages.

**Step 1**
- Review AEI&CS assessment findings and identify the areas with the lowest scores and that you want to prioritize for the upcoming year

**Step 2**
- Identify activities to improve AEI&CS in these areas

**Step 3**
- Prioritize activities to ensure a realistic and achievable AEI&CS improvement plan

**Step 4**
- Develop a detailed AEI&CS improvement plan

**Step 5**
- Implement and monitor the AEI&CS improvement plan

**Step 1: Review AEI&CS assessment findings and identify the areas with the lowest scores and that you want to prioritize for the upcoming year**

The first step of the improvement planning process is to review the findings your AEI&CS assessment in detail. These findings form a valuable evidence base and will give you a clear picture of your organisation’s existing AEI&CS practices, strengths and areas for improvement. In reviewing the findings, consider the following questions/points:

- What is the most important thing you learned about your organisation’s AEI&CS practices while conducting the assessment?
- Which standards/indicators have the lowest score (in %)? Why?
Is there a gap between policy guidance and practice? For example, does your organisation have well-documented policies but inconsistencies in practice? Alternatively, does your organisation have weaknesses in policy guidance but good practices that are being routinely implemented?

Pay particular attention to the findings of standard #3 (Information sharing and transparency), #4 (Participation) and #5 (Feedback and response mechanisms) as these standards relate directly to the communities you serve. Did the assessment revealed particularly good practices? Why are they working well? Do these practices need to be institutionalized for greater sustainability? Similarly, did the assessment revealed major areas for improvement? What could be the reasons for these gaps?

Were there any major differences in responses provided by each of the four groups interviewed? If that is the case, what could these differences indicate?

Step 2: Identify activities to improve AEI&CS in these areas

Once you have reviewed your assessment findings, you can start identifying activities that have the potential to strengthen your organisation's AEI&CS policies, systems and practices. Based on your assessment findings and your organisation's priorities for the upcoming year, you can select precise activities that would advance AEI&CS and classify them under the eight 3MDG AEI&CS standards.

In order to facilitate the improvement planning process of IPs, 3MDG and HAP have identified generally accepted good AEI&CS practices. These are outlined in the table below. As each organisation is unique and evolves in a particular context, 3MDG and HAP strongly encourage IPs to adapt the activities to their own specific situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Generally Accepted Good AEI&amp;CS Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Leadership on Accountability, Equity and Conflict Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Develop/review the organisation's accountability framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hold workshop(s) to introduce the accountability framework to staff at all levels.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Include a session on the accountability framework as part of the induction process for newly recruited staff.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Put the accountability framework on the organisation's website.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Staff Capacity and Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Develop/review the organisation's recruitment policy and ensure it pays specific attention to gender, ethnic and religious equity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Review the balance of men and women, ethnic diversity and religious diversity every X months.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Develop/review the organisation's staff code of conduct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Put in place a system to ensure that staff truly understand the staff code of conduct.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Include responsibilities related to accountability in staff job descriptions.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Assess staff performance on responsibilities related to accountability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Train staff (both headquarters and field staff) on AEI&amp;CS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 3: Information Sharing and Transparency</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Develop/review the organisation's policy on sharing information with communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Review guidelines, documentation and good practices on how to share information with beneficiaries and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Consult with communities to identify the most appropriate ways for sharing information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Train staff on which types of information should be systematically shared with communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Develop and share user-friendly communication materials about the organisation, its contact details and key project information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Produce community-friendly posters and leaflets about the 3MDG project and its key components.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Translate community-friendly posters and leaflets into local languages so that all groups can understand them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. Distribute community-friendly posters and leaflets in every village/township where the organisation works.

20. Set up community noticeboards in every village where the organisation is implementing the 3MDG project.

21. Meet with communities every month to share information.

22. Identify strategies to ensure that information reaches women and girls and put these strategies into practice.

23. Identify which groups are the most vulnerable in the area in which the project is implemented.

24. Identify strategies to ensure that information reaches these vulnerable groups and put these strategies into practice.

**Standard 4: Participation**

25. Develop/review the organisation’s policy on the participation of beneficiaries and communities.

26. Involve community representatives in programme planning activities.

27. Review guidelines, documentation and good practices on how to ensure good participation of beneficiaries and communities in projects.

28. Discuss with communities on how they would like to participate in the project (not only how they would like to contribute to the project but how they would like to influence the activities of the project). Ensure women, girls and vulnerable groups participate in these discussions.

29. Involve communities in M&E activities.

30. When appropriate, select community representatives in a fair and transparent process.

31. Discuss and agree with community representatives on how they will provide information to communities, request their opinions and suggestions, and share them back to the organisation.

32. Hold meetings with community representatives every month to discuss plans and activities.

**Standard 5: Feedback and Response Mechanisms**

33. Develop/review the organisation’s policy on the establishment and operation of formal feedback and response mechanisms.

34. Consult with staff to identify the most appropriate way for them to provide feedback to the organisation.

35. Put in place a formal feedback and response mechanism for staff.

36. Consult with communities to identify the most appropriate way for them to provide feedback. Ensure that women, girls, and vulnerable groups participate in these consultations.

37. Review guidelines, documentation and good practices on how to design and run an effective feedback and response mechanism.

38. Develop/review the organisation’s procedure for receiving, processing and responding to feedback from communities.


40. Raise community awareness about feedback and response mechanisms.

41. Run the formal feedback mechanism(s).

**Standard 6: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

42. Develop/review the organisation’s policy on monitoring and evaluation and the integration of learning within the organisation.

43. Develop indicators related to accountability.

44. Develop indicators related to conflict sensitivity (if relevant).

45. Ensure that all data is disaggregated by sex and age.

46. Share M&E findings with beneficiaries and communities every month.

47. When not based in the field, AEI Focal Points to visit field activities every month.

48. Organise a review workshop of the 3MDG project every 6 months.

49. Systematically use the findings of these review workshops when doing programme planning for the next period.

**Standard 7: Conflict Sensitivity**

50. Conduct a conflict/context analysis.

51. Ensure staff are familiar with the conflict/context analysis and have read it and feedback their
52. Conduct a risk assessment to analyse/reflect on how the programme activities may make a conflict worse or cause harm to communities.

53. Ensure you gain perspectives from all key participants/sides of a conflict affecting your areas before, during and after program activities.

54. Monitor the conflict/context and the impact of the organisation's activities on the conflict/context.

55. Discuss conflict issues as a matter of routine with program staff in both routine and program review meetings.

56. Ensure issues of conflict and program interactions are made routine and become a standard agenda for all meetings with all stakeholders including partners, beneficiaries, EAGs, community leaders.

57. Train staff on conflict sensitivity.

58. Build questions about conflict sensitivity into any surveys or data collection undertaken when relevant.

59. Raise community awareness about conflict sensitivity for inclusion in feedback and response mechanisms.

60. Develop a logbook or mechanism for partners (staff at health centres) to record conflict related issues.

61. Analyse existing and ongoing collected data on access to health facilities to identify any trends related to conflict (eg parts of the broader community are not coming).

**Standard 8: Working with Partners and Other Stakeholders**

62. Develop/review the organisation's policy on partnerships.

63. Develop a template for a partnership agreement that includes all topics mentioned in indicator 8.3 of the AEI&CS assessment tool.

64. Provide AEI&CS orientations or trainings to local partners.

65. Meet with local partners every month to discuss project implementation.

66. Conduct regular joint-monitoring visits.

67. Decide which information should be shared regularly with key stakeholders and how it should be shared.

68. Attend coordination meetings on a regular basis.

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**Step 3: Prioritize activities to ensure a realistic and achievable AEI&CS improvement plan**

Resources in organisations are always limited, making it impossible to accomplish all activities within optimal timeframes. Limited staff, limited time and limited funds make prioritizing critical to successful implementation of the AEI&CS improvement plan. The next step of the improvement planning process is therefore to prioritize and determine which activities are the most important so that they receive consideration first.

When prioritizing, consider the following points:

- Ensure activities are spread across several standards (not just one or two).

- Ensure a balance across activities focused on policies and practices.

- Give special attention to Standard #3 (Information sharing and Transparency), Standard #4 (Participation), and Standard #5 (Feedback and Response Mechanisms) as these relate directly to communities.

- Consider feasibility (timelines, staff level and expertise, financial resources, etc.).
Step 4: Develop a detailed AEI&CS improvement plan

Once activities have been prioritized, a detailed AEI&CS improvement plan should be developed. The improvement plan will guide the organisation’s improvement efforts on AEI&CS for the upcoming year. Responsibilities and deadlines for each activity should be clearly indicated, as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Deadline (date)</th>
<th>Responsibility (position title)</th>
<th>Support (position title)</th>
<th>Resources required</th>
<th>Links to existing activities (when possible)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1: Leadership on Accountability, Equity and Inclusion</td>
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<td>Standard 2: Staff Capacity and Support</td>
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<td>Standard 4: Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 5: Feedback and Response Mechanisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 6: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</td>
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<td>Standard 7: Conflict Sensitivity</td>
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</table>

It is recommended to develop the AEI&CS improvement plan in an inclusive manner with your team. This will contribute to ownership and smooth implementation of the plan. Try to involve the people that will support the implementation of the plan (for example HR, program staff, technical advisors, etc.) as much as possible.

3MDG and HAP also encourage you to link the activities of your AEI&CS improvement plan to ongoing activities/processes in your organisation in order to facilitate their implementation. For example, if your organisation is already planning to update its human resources policies this year, it is a good idea to seize that opportunity and work with the HR team so that staff job descriptions systematically include responsibilities related to accountability.

Once the AEI&CS improvement plan is final, have it approved by your Senior Management Team (SMT).
Step 5: Implement and monitor the AEI&CS improvement plan

The last step of the AEI&CS improvement planning process is to start implementing the AEI&CS improvement plan and then to monitor its implementation during the year by:

1. Assigning the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the improvement plan. 
   *Recommendation: AEI Focal Point.*


3. When monitoring the implementation of the improvement plan, reviewing the progress of activities and in particular the challenges that prevent meeting deadlines.

4. Adjusting activities based on monitoring findings when necessary.

5. Reaching out to your SMT for support when needed.

Following these simple recommendations should contribute to the efficient implementation of the AEI&CS improvement plan.

3. Next Steps

As previously mentioned, the AEI&CS improvement planning process is part of an overall AEI&CS improvement cycle that starts with conducting an AEI&CS assessment:

![Figure 2 - 3MDG AEI&CS Improvement Process](image)

The HAP team remains available to support 3MDG's IPs during the implementation of their AEI&CS improvement plans. Please don't hesitate to contact your HAP focal point when needed.

Another AEI&CS improvement cycle will start at the end of 2015 as a new AEI&CS assessment will take place. This new assessment will be the opportunity to see the improvements in AEI&CS resulting from several months of work to advance AEI&CS in your organisation. Finally, the same AEI&CS improvement cycle will be repeated in 2016, the last year of the 3MDG project.