



**Midlands State University**  
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**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**THE APPLICATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS IN  
FOOD SECURITY SECTOR IN ZIMBABWE**

**BY**

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**Research Topic:-**

**The application of accountability standards in the Zimbabwe food security sector.**

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### **Dedication**

*“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far has the Lord helped us”, I Samuel 7: 12*

This work is dedicated to my boys, Gibson and Ryan Madondo. Thank you Gibson for all the support, and tough love, when I needed it! Ryan, thank you for the constant interruptions while I was trying to work! Mummy appreciates it, it brought a smile to my face every time, and reminded me that even when the research got difficult, I always had my little man to bring me back to reality.

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## **Abstract**

The Humanitarian sector is fast growing. As the world continues to experience an increase in natural disasters due to new threats such as global warming, as well as increased terrorist activity, which has seen the expansion of the role of humanitarian sector, humanitarian actors are also coming under close scrutiny due to their evolving role as the now primary care givers of populations, rather than the state, which has failed to cater to these needs. An increase in new contemporary problems has also seen an increase in the funds being dedicated to different causes. Therefore concern has been raised on the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian actors, which has led to increased call for greater accountability by humanitarian actors.

This research identifies the accountability standards that are used in food security programs, globally and in Zimbabwe as well. Similar research has been undertaken previously on overall application of accountability standards at a global scale, but no extensive research or academic study has been done on the application of these standards in the Zimbabwean context. This research therefore draws on the experiences and learnings of different accountability experts on what accountability standards are being applied, and how they have affected the Zimbabwe food security sector. The researcher also outlines the perceptions of the actual beneficiaries to see what communities themselves think about how NGOs are implementing accountability systems. Data analysis showed that the Zimbabwe NGO community is mainly focusing on only a few among the hundreds of different accountability standards that exist internationally. The research also highlights the challenges in application of accountability standards in Zimbabwe, such as inconsistencies in application not only between different agencies, but even within the same agency as well, financial constraints, and also the fact that beneficiary accountability seems to be lower on the donor priority list, which makes it less significant to project implementing NGOs as well. Given these findings, the research offers a number of recommendations, based on a change in organizational strategy, policy and culture, as well as responsibilities that should be taken up by bodies that bring together NGOs working in the Zimbabwean environment, to influence the uptake of accountability standards in Food security program.

**Key terms:** accountability, food security, Zimbabwe, NGOs, beneficiary, humanitarian actors, legitimacy, accountability standards, beneficiary accountability.

**ACRONYMS**

ALNAP	Active Learning
CDA	Collaborative Learning Project
CRM	Complaints and Response mechanisms
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning Network
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ICRC	International Crescent Red Cross society
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
STC	Save The Children
UN	United Nations
UNDHR	Unite Nationals Declaration on Human Rights

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## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will give a synopsis of the whole research, in so far as the broad aims, methodology and ultimate intended outcomes to the researcher in conducting such a research. A background to the concept of accountability shall be given, as well as how it is understood across the development spectrum. The chapter will also provide an argument on why the subject is so topical, especially in the food security sector in Zimbabwe, and provide an outline into the methodology to be applied in the study, as well as definition of some common terms that the reader is likely to meet while going through the research document. The hope is that this chapter will act as a preamble for the study, and create a basis for which the reader can then understand the rest of the discussion in the ensuing chapters.

#### 1.1 Introducing the Concept of Accountability

The realm of humanitarian work is changing. Traditionally, the primary concern was centered only on the provision of basic commodities, and ultimately saving lives, it has now begun to evolve to include considerations on the actual strategies that are being applied to deliver this assistance. The focus has shifted from the “*what*” of providing assistance, to the “*how*”. The Humanitarian Exchange magazine of January 2011 states that due to the rise of emergencies, which increase the calls for more humanitarian assistance in large volumes, and also the fact that the operating environment for NGOs is also becoming more complicated, with the entry of new actors on the scene, such as the army and multinational corporations also becoming involved in humanitarian aid. These new actors are not necessarily driven by the same humanitarian ethics and principles that guide traditional humanitarian actors, such that it has become more difficult to act for the ultimate good of vulnerable communities, for which this assistance is targeted. The politicization of humanitarian aid especially in politically sensitive areas has also made it near impossible for

humanitarian actors to continue being viewed as neutral, as some of their assistance is being used to further political causes.

Due to the fact that the nature of humanitarian actors themselves has changed, as it is not just philanthropists that are involved in the humanitarian industry, but other actors who hope to have various gains in participating in these activities as well. According to McIvor and Myllenen (2005), perceptions about the communities that get aid from different actors are being altered in the minds of those who provide this aid. Previously, they were seen as hopeless objects, but are now viewed as existing subjects who should also be given the chance to contribute to the design of programs and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. In essence, it has become increasingly important for NGOs to be sensitive to the way in which they provide the assistance, as there is great pressure to show that their programming is sensitive to the rights of vulnerable communities, and that they are dedicated to upholding these rights.

As such, the humanitarian aid community has begun to pay more attention to the way in which they deliver this assistance, and create an enabling environment for the people at the receiving end of this assistance to actively participate and contribute to the decisions that will ultimately affect their lives. This is the essence of accountability in humanitarian work, and accountability standards are the tools that are used to implement this concept in humanitarian programs. These accountability standards range from international, organizational or regional principles, codes or values, and have also begun to make an appearance in the Zimbabwean humanitarian sector, through the efforts of International Non-governmental organizations.

### **1.1 .2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

Food security is a term that has become synonymous with any aid or developmentally oriented project in Africa, as the continent continues to face dire straits in terms of access to adequate food for its populations. According to Zimbabwe Food Security and Nutrition Policy (2012) and there must be a combination of four conditions that must exist in order for a country or indeed individual communities to have achieved food security. These conditions are

- Adequacy/ availability of food supply



- Stability of the supply of food, which are consistently available throughout the year, regardless of season. Accessibility to food or affordability
- Quality and safety of food.

Therefore, this implies that failure to meet all these four conditions by a society or any group of individuals translates to that group or community being considered as being food insecure, and therefore requires additional assistance in order to fulfill those four conditions. Judging by this description of food security, it is plausible to say that, given the current situation regarding access to food by the Zimbabwean population, the population is food insecure. The World Food Program (2013) describes food insecurity as the continued occurrence of severe shortage of food across a country, characterized by incidences of acute under nourishment such that the country becomes limited in its capacity to provide adequate food for its populations, and thus becomes highly dependent on international assistance. Unfortunately, this definition accurately describes the current condition of Zimbabwe's food situation, as well as in the last decade or more. Its population has thus become highly dependent on donor funded food security related activities, especially food aid, in order to cater for the dietary needs of a significant amount of the population, which the Government has so far failed to meet.

According to the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Rural Livelihoods Assessment, 25% of the population, which is currently at 13 061 239 million, are not food secure, (Zimbabwe Country Analysis: 2014), which means a little over 3 million people are currently food insecure. The World Food Program (2015) declares that in recent years, food production in Zimbabwe has been destroyed by a collection of factors, these include natural disasters, unemployment, as well as political instability. Recurrent droughts, poor harvest and high HIV&AIDS prevalence rates have all contributed to the increase in vulnerability in food security, which has obliged the humanitarian aid community to be continuously implementing all-encompassing humanitarian relief operations that are currently being run in the country, which also means that there are quite a large number of International NGOs that are running these programs, in Zimbabwe.

The fact that these vulnerable communities are unable to fend for their families, and have to rely on aid for sustenance, makes them heavily reliant on these aid organizations, which also increases their vulnerability as well. HAP International (2008:3) declares that "In every humanitarian transaction there is an imbalance of circumstantial power between those able to give help and those

in urgent need of assistance”, as such, there is no room for aid recipients to influence the decisions that are made in such programs, as all the power in this relationship rests with the assisting agency, and thus they control how the projects are designed, and ultimately how this aid is distributed. McIvor and Mylleen (2005) also assert that unbalanced power relations can emerge between those who give and those who receive assistance in crisis situations. This can create a situation of extreme vulnerability for the latter unless a system is introduced to control it. The system that humanitarian actors have deemed appropriate to manage these unequal power relations is the concept of accountability to the recipients of humanitarian and development aid, otherwise known as humanitarian or beneficiary accountability, and the designing or adoption of accountability standards as tools to operationalize this concept.

The concept of Accountability is the acknowledgement by humanitarian actors that there is indeed an imbalance in power dynamics between aid givers and aid recipients, and as such, systems need to be put in place to manage this inequality to avoid further putting vulnerable communities at risk of abuse as a result of this power. Wardwell (2012) believes that this power that is being wielded by humanitarian aid providers also brings with it great responsibility to the communities they work with, and as such greater accountability to vulnerable communities is warranted. However, with this also brings with it a duty to protect, strengthen and create an environment in which vulnerable communities can begin to recover from shocks and once again enjoy more fulfilling lives.

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (2010) defines accountability simply as the responsible use of power, while MANGO (n.d) views it as a means for providing people with the means by which they can comprehend and influence the key decisions which are made during the operations of humanitarian agencies and actors. Accountability to beneficiaries’ development assistance is characterized by a number of humanitarian principles, some of which are as follows: Transparency, Meaningful Participation, protection, impartiality, and neutrality, ( ICRC Code 1994), as well as values such as Involving people in making decisions, Complaints handling and response mechanisms, and NGO staff behavior and attitudes towards disaster survivors, according to Mango(n.d).

### **1.1.3 The origins of (Beneficiary/ Humanitarian) accountability**

Accountability in humanitarian and development work has become a topical issue in the past 3 decades, with different stakeholders beginning to push for greater transparency and increased participation of vulnerable communities in the decisions and programs that affect their lives. The advent of beneficiary or humanitarian accountability in the humanitarian sector can be traced back to the early 1990s, as humanitarian actors began to react to the failure to respond adequately to humanitarian circumstances by organizations within that humanitarian era. According to Borton (2004), in Morris (2003), the vehicle for the movement towards accountability to vulnerable people was the Rwanda genocide and the failure to respond to this crisis adequately, and in a timely fashion, by the whole international community, especially considering that in a 3 month period, as much as 500 000 to 1 million people lost their lives, according to Haperen (n.d). This loss of life is generally attributed to the reluctance of the international community to respond to the crisis, as well as lack of coordination and failure of implementation strategies of the humanitarian organizations that were present at that time. Volberg (2006) argues that the reaction of the international humanitarian community was disorganized, came a little too late, and was filled with competition between the different responding agencies, whose numbers amounted to well within their hundreds, operating mainly in the camps in eastern Zaire. Adding on to this was the United Nations' failure to protect victims of genocide, by actually pulling out their peacekeeping forces at a time when Rwanda needed external protection the most, (Haperen n.d). This increased considerably to the loss of life experienced during and after the genocide.

According to Volberg (2006) the Rwanda genocide, and other such disasters finally compelled humanitarian agencies to think beyond traditional relief assistance as just the delivery of that aid, in terms of delivery of food, shelter or basic health care, but rather, they began to reflect on how they deliver this assistance. This led to them beginning to consider their own function within the large humanitarian and development agenda, and how they could improve on their accountability to vulnerable and marginalized populations in the humanitarian sphere. These reflections led to the first ever accountability initiatives, collectively known as the Quality and Accountability initiatives, which constituted the SPHERE standards, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership standards and ALNAP. To date, these initiatives are the front runners in terms of providing the humanitarian sector with tools and strategies with which to improve service delivery to the communities they serve, and ultimately, achieve greater accountability, especially for operations

done by International Non-governmental organizations (INGOs). However, from then on, over 300 accountability initiatives have been developed, according to One World Trust (2009).

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The increased activity of humanitarian actors in emergencies in contemporary society has also increased scrutiny on the performance of their operations by various stakeholders. This scrutiny has led to revelations of abuse of power, and resources by aid agencies, resulting in a lot of negative publicity about humanitarian actors, which has proved detrimental to their operations and funding opportunities. For instance, the UN states that while the massive relief effort by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) after the 2004 Asian Tsunami was proof of the limited capacity that many NGOs have, which also showed instances where funds were being misused and abused. Evidently, this points to the fact that while humanitarian actors are preaching the gospel of accountability as an important pillar of their work, in actual fact, there is little evidence that accountability, and indeed accountability standards are being utilized to improve the quality of programming and ensure such incidences of corruption are minimized. According to McIvor and Myllenen (2005), even though accountability to beneficiaries is an acknowledged humanitarian principle, studies have shown that ignorance in different institutions about the nature and function of these standards in emergency situations. This research therefore seeks to conduct an investigation into the application of accountability standards within the food security sector in Zimbabwe, to determine the extent to which they are being utilized, and identify the gaps and challenges that are experienced if they are not utilized in humanitarian aid programming.

## **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research seeks to take a closer scrutiny at the use or lack thereof of accountability standards in food security programs, and ultimately their impact on overall program implementation strategy.

- To find out accountability standards being implemented in the food security sector in Zimbabwe.
- To document the relevance of accountability standards within the Zimbabwean humanitarian aid context.

- To highlight gaps realized in the implementation of the accountability standards and suggest improvements in the implementation of accountability in Zimbabwe.

### **1.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Which accountability standards are being applied in food security programs in Zimbabwe?
2. How are accountability standards being used in the Zimbabwean food security context?
3. What are the challenges experienced in the application of these accountability standards?

### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Although humanitarian accountability is a fairly new area in the development arena, it is quickly becoming central in the development discourse, as it assures that the NGO sector continues on the path of improvement in program quality. Therefore, this research will be of great benefit to different groups of people in the academic and development assistance sectors.

This research will be a culmination of the academic efforts by the researcher for the past year and half. It will also help her to hone her skills in applying development concepts within her work environment, as the research subject is relevant to her chosen career path. The HAP Annual report (2014) suggests that there is an increase in bodies of evidence, which have proved that the application of standards enhance the quality of programs and accountability to humanitarian assistance recipients. Therefore, this research will also add to this body of knowledge such that the development sector as a whole and particularly in Zimbabwe can gain more knowledge on this area, and thus be informed on the merits of and potential challenges that development actors might meet when applying accountability standards, as experienced by other actors, who will be included in this research. The University will also benefit by acquiring information on new innovations and topical themes arising within the development spectrum, which can contribute to future design of its own development academic programs. It can also be used as a secondary reference text by other students in their own research projects.

## 1.5 ASSUMPTIONS

- The researcher assumes that the relevant documents, such as journals, manuscripts and text books, which are critical to the research, will be readily available during the research.
- The researcher also assumes that the data gathered and reports reviewed will be representative of the Zimbabwean food security sector's use of accountability standards as a whole.

## 1.6 LIMITATIONS

- The researcher is funding the research herself, so that limits the amount of travel to research participants, and hence, she would need to concentrate on those that are within her current location.
- The researcher will have to function within the schedules of the participants, which may affect her projected timeframe for conducting the research.
- The project time line is not adequate to conduct an in-depth analysis of the research area.

## 1.7 DELIMITATIONS

- Although the researcher acknowledges that accountability standards are also being implemented in other humanitarian interventions such as health promotion, the study will be solely based on the application of accountability standards in food security, as the sector that has the largest aid activity in the Zimbabwean context, and as such the area where most NGOs have been concentrating, and dedicating the most time and resources is Food security and nutrition.
- The researcher also appreciates the existence of myriad accountability standards, both local and international. However, given the plethora of these standards, it is only appropriate to restrict the research to only the most prominent ones, which will be treated as the representative of the whole.

### 1.9 Research Ethics

- The researcher will ensure that the analysis and presentation of findings for the research will be independent of her personal perceptions. She will maintain objectivity in the research by using different data collection techniques and measure these against each other.
- The researcher will seek informed consent from all participants to the research, both verbally, during the interviews, as well as making this clear on the research instrument. Participants shall participate freely in the research, and if they are uncomfortable in doing this, they can withdraw from it, at any point in time.
- The researcher will acknowledge every secondary source and references used in the course of writing the research document.

### 1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Accountability:** The willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions, and openness to being challenged and responding to queries based on these actions.
- **Humanitarian:** Any action that primarily seeks to save human life and reduce, or eliminate human suffering
- **Humanitarian/beneficiary accountability:** The concept that humanitarian actors are held responsible for the decisions they make in humanitarian action by disaster survivors, and ensure that communities are provided with the opportunity to contribute significantly to the process of aid provision, as well as give feedback on identified gaps and needs for improvement through the project implementation cycle.
- **Donor:** Any individual, or institution that gives financial or material resources to the betterment of people's conditions, without expecting anything in return.
- **Standard:** A quality or measure serving as a basis, example or principle to which others should conform or by which others are judged, which specifies an accepted level of excellence.
- **NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization which is self-governing, private, not-for-profit entity, which has an explicit social mission, and operates outside the dictates of the

government in its operating environment. NGOs form part of the larger body known as civil society.

- **Food Security:** A condition in which all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a productive and healthy life.
- **Aid effectiveness:** Arrangement for the planning, management and deployment of aid that is efficient reduces transaction costs and is targeted towards development outcomes including poverty reduction.
- **Beneficiary:** Any individual who benefits from, and is affected by the actions of actors in the development sector, and whose interests those actors seek to represent.
- **Ethics:** The determination of what is the right thing or wrong thing to do. They usually relate to a certain technical area of expertise, or interest, for instance Business, and Research ethics. They can also be seen as certain standards of acceptable behavior relating to a specific area or realm, which governs what, is deemed to be correct or wrong.
- **Program Quality:** A collection of characteristics of a product or service which displays its value and condition. Can also be viewed as a measure for excellence.

### 1.11 Breakdown of Chapters

This research document has been broken down into 5 Chapters, Chapters 1 through 5. Chapter one is basically a synopsis of the whole research, which is serving as an introduction not only to the concept of accountability, but to the research, as a whole, and gives a summary of what the research will cover, that is its aims and rationale for the research, using which methods of data collection, analysis and presentation, as well as how the research can be used to beef up other future studies within the same area of interest. Chapter two gives the perspective of different scholars on the research topic, how accountability is generally understood, its origins, and also exploration of the food security situation in Zimbabwe, which is the setting of the research. The researcher gives her own thoughts regarding what the various schools of thought are saying concerning the research topic, and other related concepts, relevant to the research. Chapter 3 provides details in terms of how the actual research was then conducted, from the research design, methods, including data collection, analysis and presentation. This chapter shows exactly how the researcher got the data



she collected and how she analyzed it, to come up with the conclusions that she then presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 is all about reporting what the research respondents said in response to the questions that the researcher was asking concerning her research area. In some instances, direct quotes from research respondents are given, as well as their general insights about how accountability is being applied in the Zimbabwean context. Furthermore, the researcher also shows how some agencies have been implementing accountability standards, through presentation of data collected from secondary sources, in the form of research findings on application of accountability by specific organizations, from across Zimbabwe. Finally, Chapter 5 contains the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher, based on what she found out, regarding the application of accountability standards in the food security sector, as presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains the recommendations the researcher is giving to NGOs, Government and any actor that seeks to improve their accountability and the quality of their programming to communities affected by situations in which they require external assistance in order to survive.

### **Chapter Summary**

The Chapter gave a synopsis of the whole research, to give the reader a general idea of how the research will be conducted. The chapter began by introducing the concept of Accountability, and then moving on to the background of the research problem, which included a summary of the origins of accountability. The Chapter went to outline exactly what the research problem is, and why the research is such an interest to the researcher, and also why it is relevant to the development sector. The researcher gave the objectives of the research, and the research questions that would make up the core part of the data collection process. The researcher also presented some assumptions, envisaged limitations and delimitations about the research, as well as an outline of common terms that are likely to be found within the research document.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter's role is to give an analysis of the concept of accountability to beneficiaries, as discussed and presented by other scholars in the realm of development and humanitarian work. The researcher acknowledges that although this is a fairly new area of study, which made its appearance in the past two and half decades, it has enjoyed significant discussion and exposure by many scholars from different parts of the globe. As such, this chapter will give a synopsis of some of these discourses and what various scholars are saying, with reference to the origin of accountability, its theoretical framework, accountability standards and their function within humanitarian work, as well as their place within the Zimbabwean food security sector. A critique of some of these works will be given, and the Chapter will end by summarizing the main themes presented during the course of the discussion.

#### **2.1 Defining Accountability**

Attempting to find one common definition of the concept of accountability is like searching for a needle in a haystack, near impossible. Lindberg (2009) asserts that a search on the meaning of the term on any of the academic search engines online will produce hundreds of meanings, which illustrate the magnitude in explanations on accountability by different schools of thought, as reflected in different scholarly articles and books. Therefore, defining accountability is largely complex because there is a lack of consensus on what the concept really means. The literature reviewed by the researcher largely agreed that the definition of accountability really depends on the individual, and is also influenced by what roles exist between the two parties, in terms of who is being accountable to whom and under which conditions, according to Edwards and Hulme (1996) in Morris (2013). Defining the concept also involves thinking through why the accountability process is being conducted, according to Srinivas (2015). As has been discussed in Chapter 1, discussions on accountability have been evolving within the NGO sector, more so due to the increase in funding that is being to the sector by various philanthropic institutions and

individuals. As such, accountability has been most commonly concentrated on monitoring the use of the financial and material support, rather than to the actual recipients of these same resources.

Warwell (2012) argues that defining accountability within the context of finances is the traditional way of defining the concept, and stems from the very origins of the term itself. According to Wardwell (ibid), the term “accountability” originally comes from the Latin word “computare”, which literally means “to count”, and until the 1980s, it was used largely in finance. Bowen and Tuck (2008) also acknowledge that up until the 1990s, accountability has been seen as being ‘upwardly’ accountable to donors and how they makes use of the resources provided by these donors. These two texts show the general understanding of accountability that has been predominant not only in the economic sector, but development sector as well. This might explain the fact that people put so much emphasis on accountability being only about measuring what is tangible, hence its definition looks more at quantitative approach, and not enough attention is given to the qualitative side of accountability, which should be a focus of developmental effort, as much as quantitative is.

Hence, for some time now, accountability in the humanitarian sector has been focusing on financial and accounting accountability, that is reporting on how the financial resources that have been obtained from donors have been used, according to Tearfund (2014), hence some of the definitions that will be reviewed here will contain some of those perceptions. However, the other definitions that are being discussed in this chapter will also show how defining accountability should not only be shown within the context of accounting for use of resources within the development sector, but also as a way in which different actors’ performance in giving assistance to vulnerable communities can also be viewed in terms of the quality of the assistance that is being given to vulnerable communities.

Gnarig (2014) declares that from the very start, the defining accountability has been largely influenced driven by the need to respond to the question Accountable to whom? And the answer was nearly always: to the donors, which is otherwise referred to as upward accountability. Hence, development actors saw their role as that of satisfying the interests of the owners and providers of the resources which allowed them to do their work, rather than focusing on fulfilling the needs of

the people for whom this assistance was meant to benefit. Therefore, as much many actors would want to pledge that the people that are affected or benefiting from their interventions are at the center of their actions, as declared in the Humanitarian Charter (SPHERE handbook 2011), the reality seems to point to the fact that the providers of this assistance are actually the ones at the center, because more efforts are put by NGOs to gratify them, and not the people they claim to serve.

Ibrahim (2003) puts it, accountability is multi-dimensional, and entails many different actors, who use different methods and levels of measuring performance. Hence, this implies that accountability cuts across the whole organizational structures, and can be seen in all organizational operations. As a result, all organizational departments should have systems and policies in place to show how they show accountability, which qualifies Edward and Hulme's (1996) in Morris (2013)'s contention that defining accountability depends on the situation as well as Srivinas' (2015) belief that defining accountability depends on to whom one is being accountable. According to a Keystone (2006) study, accountability in NGOs is three-pronged. This means that it can be either upward accountability; from the organization to the donor, or downward accountability, which is also known as humanitarian or beneficiary accountability, which is from the implementing organization to the community, and finally peer to peer accountability, which is the responsibility that an organization has to its peers and partners. This responsibility may include honoring partnerships and sharing relevant information about developments in the sector with other actors in the same line of work.

Different Scholars use different terms to refer to the concept, most popular being downward accountability, beneficiary accountability and of course humanitarian accountability. The NGO and Humanitarian Reform project report (n.d:30) states that customarily, humanitarian accountability, which is also accountability to beneficiaries of aid programs, as stated before, has largely concentrated on providing accountability to donors and other more powerful stakeholders. There was minimal accountability to the less influence, especially the poor, but are usually the most vulnerable group, that is the populations that have been affected by crisis themselves. According to Accountability Innovators (2009), accountability is usually seen as being concerned with accounting and compliance issues, in which indicators that measure performance and systems

for the protection against corruption are designed. This is in line with the traditional meaning that was formally given to the concept, prior to the 1990s, which seems to be the period that accountability to beneficiaries really began to take root (Volberg 2006). The discussion on historical background on accountability will talk about this in more detail, in the ensuing section.

As has been mentioned previously, HAP (2010) defines accountability simply as the responsible use of power. In its simplicity, HAP's definition captures what seems to be the underlying theme in all other definitions of the concept, and it echoes what Keystone (2006) and Accountability Innovators (2014) refers to, when they describe accountability as a notion that deals with how there is unequal distribution of power between the beneficiary of humanitarian action and the suppliers of that assistance. It seeks to strike the balance between the conflict that humanitarian and development actors are faced with in terms of their primary responsibilities. According to Wardwell (2012) in 2004, following the Indonesian Tsunami, USA President at the time, Bill Clinton advised international aid actors that with the heightened power that they enjoy, as the controllers of much needed resources for disaster survivors, also comes great responsibility. As such, NGOs should frequently examine not only what they are doing, by how they doing it. The question therefore becomes where this responsibility lies: does it lie with the people from whom they get the resources to enable them to act and touch the lives of so many vulnerable communities, or does it lie with the people for whom they receive this money, and thus, deliver the much needed assistance.

In essence, development actors are faced with a conflict, where they have to satisfy primarily two groups of people that is their donors, and their beneficiaries. Hence, there is also a decision to be made by each actor, where their primary loyalty lies, as such, this is also how each organization would therefore define accountability, based on whom they deem themselves to be primarily accountable to. Figure 1 below from Tearfund's accountability checklist tries to show the conflict that exists in trying to conceptualize the issue of accountability, which humanitarian aid agencies are struggling with. Basically, within the development context, under which this research was conducted, accountability is about NGOs, who possess all power and influence in any humanitarian or development action, should think about how they can release this power to the poor people that they serve, so that they can also participate fully in the humanitarian and

development process. The conflict is also on which form of accountability should be prioritized by NGOs, whether upward accountability to donors (as the generators of their income), or downward/ beneficiary/ humanitarian accountability to the poor communities, who ultimately give them a reason for existing, because their core business lies with responding to the needs of these poor people.

**Illustration 1: The conflict in defining Accountability**



*Source: Tearfund accountability Checklist*

The Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process report (2010) refers to downwards accountability as accountability that focuses on being answerable to disaster affected populations. According to a survey conducted by Keystone in 2006, downwards accountability is acknowledging that vulnerable communities are powerless because they lack political and economic influence, and as such, no voice to represent their own needs and concerns, especially those that affect their day to day living. This means therefore that because opportunities for improving the lives of these vulnerable communities are largely brought by NGOs, and as such, NGOs should be held responsible for the programs they bring and the decisions they make regarding these same activities. This is because they have taken on the responsibilities for providing basic necessities to populations, due to the failure of the state, which was traditionally

the primary duty bearer in providing these basic necessities to its citizenry. As a result, where previously, a government would be required by its citizens, to show evidence that they actually are capable of delivering the basic needs of the people who voted them into power, and be faithful to its campaign promises, the NGOs, having taken on that role, should also do the same, as the new primary providers of these same necessities.

Keystone (ibid) further asserts that downwards accountability is simply how an organization engages with its beneficiaries, fosters relationships and is held accountable for the impacts of their activities on the recipient community. This same Keystone study also found that generally, donors are not concerned about how their constituents relate to and are accountable to the communities they work with, but rather how their money has been spent. Even the reporting templates from agencies show that there is no specific requirement for them to report on specific accountability issues to communities, unless it is part of an overall indicator that satisfies a donor requirement, usually tied to the use and disbursement of financial and other resources.

NGOs clearly lack the drive to practice ‘downward accountability’ to vulnerable communities, but rather concentrate on reporting measures to satisfy donor requirements. This leaves the humanitarian organization with the challenge of deciding which of the two kinds of accountability to put effort on, between upward accountability and downward accountability. However, if the core aim is to satisfy the reporting needs of the funding partners at large, in order to secure more funding for future programs, it means that the NGOs’ focus lies more in ensuring organizations’ personal survival and financial stability, rather than being driven by the need to ultimately change the lives of the people being targeted by this assistance. Furthermore, by its very title, the word downwards might actually be viewed as being condescending and thus be downgrading to this kind of accountability, as it creates the perception that it is less important than the traditional form of accountability to donors, which is what most NGOs and humanitarian actors are more responsive to, and more willing to invest in.

In its Complaints and Response Mechanism resource Guide, World Vision International describes humanitarian accountability as focusing on accountability to beneficiaries and the communities they work with. It borrows from HAP’s definition of accountability as the responsible use of

power, but also adds that participation of community members in the program is a crucial element in fully describing the concept of humanitarian accountability. As such, the toolkit's focus is in providing the means by which vulnerable communities can significantly contribute to the programs that ultimately are meant to change their lives for the better, by giving guidelines on how to design and implement a system for gathering their feedback as well as complaints on how these programs are being managed. In this toolkit, World Vision stresses that accountability is achieved when communities are given opportunity to participate in the decision making process of development programs by giving their feedback, and the organization acting on that feedback, to improve on their implementation of programs.

In the same vein, accountability is sure to be realized when communities are given opportunity to indicate where the programs are failing to achieve stated objectives, as well as identifying where they are not, and suggesting ways in which these can be improved. This, World Vision believes, gives power back to communities, as they are not just passive recipients to assistance, but rather begin to function as critical partners in the achievement of project goals, as their input ultimately makes the efforts more relevant and thus more suited to actually improving the lives of the people being targeted. This concept by World Vision is relevant in so far as it attempts to "re-package" the perception of what accountability should be in development and humanitarian action, in so far as it provides the means by which communities are also viewed as equal partners in the development process.

Dwyer and Umerman (2010) describe accountability to beneficiaries as the process that organizations engage in to interact and mutually learn with beneficiaries, in the course of implementing their programs. By this definition, the understanding seems to be that accountability is premised on building a healthy relationship between aid agencies and their constituent communities. This definition implies that beneficiary communities are viewed as equal partners. Ibrahim (2003) refers to accountability as 'Answerability', where those that hold power, *Vis a VI* development actors, are expected to provide explanations on the decisions that they make by the people who are affected by their actions and the decisions they make. Again, this definition attempts to correct the power imbalance that exists between stakeholders of humanitarian action and communities. This definition of accountability shows that accountability should have an



element of one party taking responsibility for their actions, while at the same time being held responsible for those actions by others. According to Comwall *et al* (1995) in Ibrahim (1995) accountability is a two way process: an internal element, in which one feels self-motivated to be responsible for their own action, and an external element, which is basically the responsibility that one has to meet the commitments they have made to others. The assumption here is that every individual functions as an ethical being that is aware and therefore takes action to make sure that they deliver the promises that they make to others, so accountability is taken as a personal choice and responsibility. Basing this definition on development actors and their relationship and expected accountability with the people they serve would mean that accountability is more of a personal choice, and thus room for external people to hold development actors accountable would prove challenging.

Civicus (2014) asserts that accountability means the CSO's willingness and its ability to answer and take responsibility for its actions to all stakeholders. Civicus (*ibid*) further qualifies this definition by declaring that there are actually four levels under which accountability can be defined, each one based on the different stakeholders to which one is to be accountable, and these are; upward to donors and regulators, downward to beneficiaries, outward to peers, members and partners, and inward accountability to staff, board and volunteers. Accountability also carries an extra responsibility for the agent being accountable in that they need to *demonstrate* that they have actually fulfilled their core responsibility to the party to whom they are being accountable, to fulfill the whole function of accountability. In this instance, accountability becomes a multifaceted concept, which is all encompassing of the different functions that an organization has, that are tied to its different stakeholders.

To bring this whole discussion on defining accountability to a conclusion, Lindberg (2009) offers a summary of the elements that should constitute the concept of accountability. Basically, Lindberg (*ibid*) believes that every situation of accountability, which is valid, should have the following elements:

- One who is to give an account
- The area of responsibility for which the account is being given
- One to whom the account is given

- The right of the agent to whom accountability is directed to justify or inform on decisions with regards to responsibilities on accountability.
- The right of the agent to whom accountability is directed to sanction and justify decisions made which affect the accounting agent.

The definitions of accountability that have been provided so far are by no means exhaustive, but just a snapshot of what different schools of thought agree on and differ in terms of their different understanding of the concept of accountability. However, for purposes of this research, the researcher shall utilize Tearfund's definition of accountability as the working definition of this particular research. According to Tearfund (2015), in their Beneficiary Accountability Checklist, beneficiary accountability is a measure of the quality of the relationship between the NGO and the beneficiary. It involves taking into account the needs, concerns, capacities and dispositions of affected parties, and explaining the meaning and implications of, and the reasons for actions and decisions. This is to be taken as the working definition of accountability for this research.

## **2.2 Accountability Conceptual framework**

It is again unclear what conceptual framework actually guides the concept of accountability for beneficiary communities. Just like its definition, different scholars also have different perceptions of what actually is the conceptual framework of accountability, and this section will attempt to show some arguments that have been presented by scholars on the conceptual background on beneficiary/humanitarian accountability.

Deloffre (2010) believes that the concept of accountability is based on the background of morality. She makes this claim, by stating that accountability rose from the realization of the failure to respond morally by NGOs, during the Rwanda Genocide, and this morality is hinged on the humanitarian imperative to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it occurs, which is what defines the moral duty of humanitarian NGOs, and is contained in the earliest form of an accountability standard, The ICRC Code of Conduct (1994). The threat on morality was realized when NGOs realized that during their assistance to perceived refugees in refugee camps in Rwanda and surrounding countries, e.g. Zaire, those benefiting from their assistance were not just

genocide victims, but also genocide instigators as well, because there was no proper monitoring system in place to verify who was receiving assistance at the time. According to Deloffre (2010), upon realizing that numerous perpetrators of the genocide had infiltrated the Goma camps and hijacked the aid distribution systems, humanitarian NGOs were confronted with an ethical dilemma: should they continue to distribute relief assistance with the knowledge that they were abetting war criminals and possibly fueling the conflict by bolstering the insurgency; or should they leave the camps and deny innocent victims vital food and medical services. Hence, due to these ethical predicaments, Deloffre believes, the first considerations of coming up with accountability standards to guide humanitarian work began to take flight.

Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (2011), also echo the sentiment that the underlying rationale for accountability to vulnerable communities is based on moral arguments, an argument that is informed by humanitarian principles, in addition to the rights-based approach. Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (ibid) believe that the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), one of the most prominent accountability standards, was built on the premise of providing a framework to maintain the legitimate rights of the claimants, and assist them to claim those rights. Fredriksen (2012) also supports this contention, and goes further to explain that human rights were named as the central cross-cutting theme for all UN programs and missions when Kofi Annan was still the UN Secretary General, and as such, UN efforts began to use human rights to form the foundations of humanitarian and development action. Hence, this implies that the UN, as the front-running, coordinating body of all humanitarian programs, also views human rights as being the driving force behind every actions that is targeted at saving and improving the human condition. The perception created here is that maintaining accountability standards is a matter of ethics, with the need to uphold moral values. It works on the conscience of the aid providers to consider aid recipients as equal human beings because, just like any other human being, they possess inalienable rights, as stated in the Unilateral declaration of Human Rights, which include the rights to be treated with dignity and respect, (Article 1, UNDHR). Thus, for any development actor to have achieved accountability, their actions and decisions must be based on the need to satisfy the basic human rights of the people that are targeted for their assistance.

The UNDP (2010) also describes accountability as the core factor that should influence all efforts that contribute to human development since it contributes to ensuring that the interests of the poorest and most marginalized groups in society are considered. UNDP (ibid) further goes on to say that accountability is actually a core human rights principle, and therefore intrinsic to the human rights based approach to development. In essence, the UNDP is supportive of the belief that the framework that encompasses accountability is the human rights based approach to programming, in which development action is premised on the need to satisfy the human rights of people targeted by assistance, from NGOs. Hence, every development and humanitarian initiative is meant to primarily satisfy the rights of the people who are targeted for assistance, in whatever form.

Kirkmann and Martin (2007) believe that from the Second World War period, humanitarian programs' focus has shifted from being charity focused to being human rights oriented, hence the focus should not be just about delivering assistance where and when it is required, but also predominantly concerned with fulfilling basic human rights, as dictated by International humanitarian law. This also puts a sense of responsibility on the shoulders of duty bearers towards aid recipient communities, and hence, opens up opportunity to them being held responsible for their action by these communities. An exploration on the various definitions on accountability; as given earlier on, shows that this thought is very much in line with how accountability is generally understood by scholars on the subject. Hence, the belief is therefore that accountability standards are therefore premised on the need to provide mechanisms that ensure that communities know their rights and are able to claim them as well a challenge aid providers on their failure to fulfill these rights.

Scott-Villiers (2002) in Bendell (2006) also believes that the rights based approach is indeed the basis for accountability, and cites the example of the organizations such as Action Aid, which, in 1999, began to base its operations on the UNDHR, therefore deliberately recognizing the human rights to education, food, water, health and shelter, which are the areas on which the organization's programs are premised on. As such, it is evident that rights are now forming the basis of accountability, and also give weight to the concept, to which humanitarian actors have no formal or even legal obligation to fulfill. Perhaps this is one way that the proponents of accountability

seek to legitimize the concept, and make ethical considerations work as a trigger for humanitarian actors to begin to take this concept seriously. However, given the fact that this concept is entering its third decade of entry into humanitarian aid spectrum, it still is not widely recognized, or consistently practiced by humanitarian actors show that even the concept of morality has not been enough to persuade humanitarian aid givers to be more accountable to their constituents.

The above discussion brings to the fore the question of what then is the actual link between rights based approaches and accountability? To put it simply, Kjarum in Boesen and Martin (2007) offer a solid explanation on how rights based approaches are the basis of accountability, when he proclaims that ethics are what drive right based development, as people can then claim both material and spiritual benefits, from an ethical point of view. This also means that the worth and dignity of people who are vulnerable and have experienced injustice is also acknowledged by putting much emphasis on their inherent rights as human beings, as well as the recognition of the responsibilities of various bearers to satisfy those rights. Kjarum (ibid) further argues that the idea of including the rights of right-holders and the responsibilities of duty-bears which makes accountability so important, and hence justifies why it should be focusing on development by the people (hence inclusion of vulnerable people in all aspects of development programming), and not for the people, where they are just passive recipients to this aid.

A perusal of some of the most prominent accountability standards, such as the SPHERE Handbook (2011) will actually show that this is indeed the framework that accountability standards are operating under. The SPHERE handbook (ibid) discusses that minimum standards and principles that are contained within the SPHERE Handbook (2011) as articulating its rights-based and people-centered approach to humanitarian response. The researcher also found that trainings<sup>1</sup> that are arranged to train NGO staff on the use of humanitarian accountability standards, such as SPHERE, HAP and the Good Enough Guide also include a session on appreciation of the current human rights framework, as the basis on which the accountability standards are grounded. The SPHERE minimum standards actually declare that the standard's philosophy is The right to life with dignity, and is based on two core beliefs, that those affected by disaster or conflict have a right to life with dignity, and hence a right to assistance, and the belief that all possible steps should

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<sup>1</sup> The training toolkits to these 3 standards can be found on their websites-links can be viewed in the reference section of this document.

be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict (SPHERE handbook (2011)). These beliefs form the philosophy of the SPHERE handbook, as described within the handbook itself, in its introduction to the standard.

The Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) (2009), another accountability standard, states that the rights-based approach includes the achievement of rights by development actors, as part of fulfilling its objectives to the communities that are being targeted for assistance. According to LEGS (ibid) these rights are not contained in the UNDHR, but are also captured in other covenants, in particular Civil and Political rights, and Economic and cultural rights, as well as rights that cover discrimination of women and children. In essence, this means that considerations should be taken when implementing accountability systems, to consider and therefore include looking at how development interventions can be tailored to fulfill some of these rights. Hence for an organization to be truly accountable, they also need to be sensitive to the needs of different groups of people, whose vulnerability is unique, even within a society that has collective, or uniform kind of vulnerability, such as women, children and people living with Chronic illnesses. The Emergency Capacity Building project's Good Enough Guide (GEG) (2007) asserts that accountability means development actors making sure that the women, men and children affected by an emergency (or any other life-threatening situation that diminishes their capacity for self-preservation and responding to dangerous situations), are involved in the planning, implementing and judging the response to this emergency situation. This, ECB believes, will ensure also that a project will have the impact that communities want to see.

GEG (2007) goes further to give a summary of the basic elements of accountability, with regards to development organizations and their staff. Table 1 below shows what project staff should do the following to achieve accountability, at the very minimum.

**Table 1: Basic Elements of Accountability**

<b>Basic Elements of Accountability:</b>
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1. Provide public information to the beneficiaries and other stakeholders on their organization, its plans, and relief assistance entitlements.
2. Conduct on-going consultations with those assisted. This should occur as soon as possible at the beginning of a humanitarian relief operation, and continues regularly throughout. Consultation means exchange of information and views between the agency and the beneficiaries of its work. The exchange will be about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries</li> <li>• The project plans of beneficiaries</li> <li>• Feedback and reactions from beneficiaries to the agency on its plans and expected results</li> </ul>
3. Establish systematic feedback mechanisms that enable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies to report to beneficiaries on project progress and evolution</li> <li>• Beneficiaries to explain to agencies whether projects are meeting their needs</li> <li>• Beneficiaries to explain to agencies the difference the project has made to their lives</li> </ul>
4. Respond, adapt and evolve in response to feedback received, and explain to all stakeholders the changes made and/or why change was not possible.

*Source: The Good Enough Guide: Impact Measurement and accountability in emergencies (2007).*

Table 1 above, outlines the suggested minimum levels that development actors, *Vis a Vis* NGOs should strive for, in order to achieve beneficiary or humanitarian accountability. The information above details the rights of communities, or indeed what they can expect from development organizations during a humanitarian crisis. These should be addressed by NGO staff when they are implementing projects, in order to be accountable. To summarize, these are: access to information, opportunities for full and active participation at all project stages, mechanism for complaints and redress, with opportunity to be heard and continual learning and improvement, based on communities' feedback and contributions. These also form the responsibilities that NGOs have to the communities that they are targeting for assistance.

These rights and responsibilities, as discussed under this whole section, should then form the basis under which aid recipient communities, can hold aid agencies accountable for their actions and

decision making processes. This framework for accountability standards also forms the basis for the accountability principles or standards that are inherent in accountability mechanisms.

### **2.3 Why Humanitarian/ Beneficiary Accountability?**

There seems to be a general understanding among scholars that were reviewed by the researcher that humanitarian or beneficiary accountability only started becoming a concern during the 1990s, when an upsurge of natural and man-made disasters began to demand more involvement of NGOs and other different actors to respond. However, there are also wide ranging reasons why accountability to beneficiary communities began to enjoy great emphasis, and indeed continues to be discussed as an important concern, that is now at the fore of development action by the international development community.

The most popularly held view of why accountability to beneficiaries has become so prominent is the poor reaction by NGOs to the Rwanda crisis of 1994, according to Boosma (2013), HAP (2013) refers to this incident as the ‘watershed moment’, which brought accountability to the fore of accountability discourse. According to Alexander (2013) and Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (2011), it was the deficiencies exposed in the Joint Evaluation on Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) of 1996 – including poor coordination, low accountability to genocide survivors and aid being directed to perpetrators of violence, which provided a strong impetus for the humanitarian community to work towards better professionalism in its work. This situation led to the recognition by NGOs of the potential for abuse and adverse effects during emergency situation, and hence, the needs to create mechanisms for the promotion and monitoring of positive project outcomes.

This again seems to echo the more community centered kind of approach to development work, as the focus is now on the actual recipients of assistance, rather than just the use of the resources that constitute this assistance. However, it is concerning to think that it was only in the 1990s that development actors started considering accountability to beneficiaries as relevant, and therefore needed to be addressed. One cannot help thinking as to the nature of development assistance before this realization, and thus deliberate move towards improving accountability by development actors. In this regard, from way back to the genesis of humanitarian work by non-state actors, it took these actors decades to realize accountability to communities was just as important as to donors, and thus, there needs to be systems put in place to ensure that it remains at the forefront of



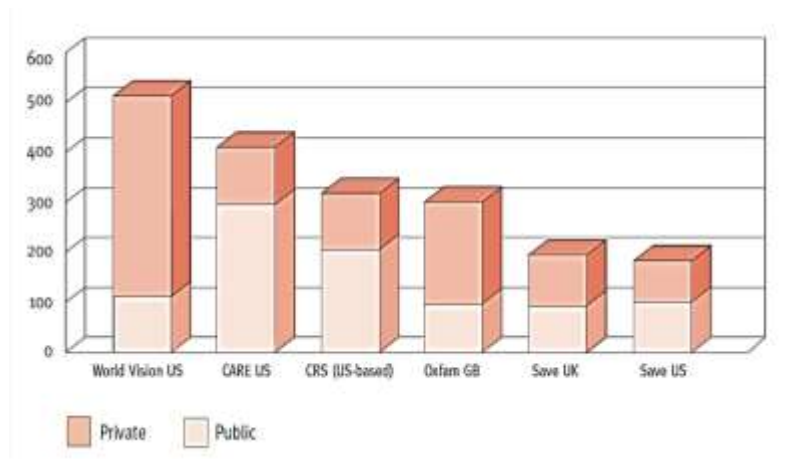
development action. As Deloffre (2010) simply puts it, NGOs founded accountability 'clubs' Vis a VI standards in the humanitarian sector because they believed that they failed to meet their moral duty to the refugees crisis during the Rwanda genocide.

According to Bendell (2006), the Rwanda genocide was a factor in the increased calls for improved accountability to beneficiaries in the 1990 as well. However, he further states that the negative media coverage that was put out in that same period also exposed the shortcomings of the humanitarian response activities by NGOs, and resulted in deeper scrutiny of NGO actions, not only for Rwanda genocide, but also other major humanitarian situations such as the Asian Tsunami of 2004. The Asian Tsunami actually uncovered the fact that humanitarian action can also be used as a platform for abuse of humanitarian funds and misuse of power to vulnerable communities by humanitarian actors. Bendell (ibid) gives some examples of the reaction of media to other emergencies such as demonstrations against corruption aid distribution in Sri Lanka during the Asian Tsunami, as well as the fact that a few years prior to this Tsunami, some of the most prominent media, for instance The New York Times, Washington Post and The Wall street Journal, gave wide coverage of over 30 articles, which exposed the misappropriation of funds and misrepresentation of duties by CSOs in different emergency and humanitarian situations. Examples of these failings by CSOs included "sky-high" salaries for top executives, failure to meet organizational missions, lack of transparency, and questionable fundraising activities, which challenged the accountability of entities that the public had come to trust. As a result, such negative media coverage generated large amounts of mistrust and discontent among the general public, who were also funding partners in some of these programs.

Lee (2004), and Ebrahim (2003) both agree that the increased role of NGOs in the governance of less developed countries through provision of services such as food, water and shelter, which would normally be provided by their respective governments, has increased their visibility in the media. As such, it has also seen NGOs becoming more cautious in the way they conduct their activities, in order to minimize the negative publicity from both print, and most prominently, electronic media. According to Boomsma (2013) and Ebrahim (2003) NGOs are now putting more effort in trying to establish their legitimacy, and this has also played a big role in the rise of accountability in the humanitarian sector as NGOs strive to correct the negative image that has so far been built about them in the media for the past two decades.

As has been discussed in Chapter 1, NGOs are increasingly becoming powerful in development aid and global governance because of the sheer magnitude of funds that they control, which means they are increasingly as the forefront of any humanitarian response situation, which also means that their efforts are increasingly captured in the media, showing how they are using the financial and material resources they receive from different stakeholders. The Table below shows how much financial resource was being controlled by INGOs for the year 2001.

**Table 2: Public versus Private funding for six major NGOs, 2011**



*Source: Humanitarian exchange magazine, issue 25, December 2003*

The table shows six of the biggest, and most prominent international NGOs, and how much private funding they had access to for the year 2001, as opposed to finances that they got from the public. This means that the power that these six agencies wield alone, due to their strategic financial positioning, also puts these same funds at risk of being abused, as there are vast amounts of them. The media is therefore watching such organizations closely to ensure that these same funds are used for the very reasons that they are meant to. As such, NGOs also put in place accountability standards to waylay some of these fears of possible abuse of funds dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable people that the public and governments that contribute to these funds, might have.

Hence, some NGOs are now going so far as to “court” the media, inviting them to their activities to somewhat prove that they are willing to be more accountable, and are therefore working hard to

ensure they are providing quality service to the people they work with. Given all these various reasons to support the origin of accountability, it is apparent that there is some consensus on the fact that the actual performance of humanitarian agencies in past emergencies are what actually triggered the need for greater accountability, and consequently, the genesis of accountability standards.

The concern, however, is the fact that the birth of this concept of accountability, which should really be a non-negotiable part of any humanitarian action, seems to be more of a reactionary measure by humanitarian actors to their previous failings, rather than an original realization of the need to hold themselves in check when working with vulnerable communities, by virtue of the power dynamics that exist in their relationship with vulnerable communities. Perhaps this also explains why, nearly two decades after the establishment of the first ever accountability initiatives, humanitarian accountability is still being treated as a new concept, rather than one that has been in existence for quite some time now, in the development sector.

The continued media reports, highlighting different scandals in the development and humanitarian sector have continued to overshadow the good work that has been achieved in recent years. Reports such as Save the Children UK and UNHCR's Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of disaster affected people by Peacekeepers in several West African countries, (Asmita 2002 in Alexander 2013), or the most recent scandal again involving the UN peace keeping forces' sexual abuse of communities in Central Africa, which has led to the resignation of UN Chief, Barbacar Agaye, after Amnesty International called for an investigation into the matter, (Aljazeera 2015) have shown that accountability to vulnerable communities still remains a cause for concern among humanitarian actors, which implies that it is still not taken seriously. The very fact that the main coordinating body in humanitarian action, the UN, which should be a custodian of accountability in the protection of vulnerable communities from abuse has staff that are still perpetrators of violent abuse is evidence enough that accountability has a long way to go before it can be collectively considered a vital part of humanitarian action. This means that even now, after all the media coverage, as well as failures in humanitarian responses, the development and humanitarian aid community is still only paying lip service to the idea of increasing accountability to communities, but in actual fact, there is still much to be done in terms of translating these claims into appropriate action.

## **2.4 Importance of Accountability in current development structure.**

O'Dwyer and Unerman (2010) agree with the notion that traditionally, accountability to donors has taken center stage in overall accountability implementation in humanitarian action. They however, believe that this upward accountability does not necessarily lead to, and in some cases actually hinders the effective deployment of aid delivery in raising as many people as possible from poor circumstances. They actually make a case for rights based approaches to accountability, which they believe enhance the effectiveness of aid delivery. Even though the application of accountability standards and indeed their success is still more of a phantom than an actual reality, it is vital that a reflection of why it is important to humanitarian and development work be provided in this discourse.

In essence, different scholars in the development sector seem to agree that accountability measures are vital and are beginning to take center stage in current development and humanitarian discourses. According to CIVICUS (2013), the legitimacy and effectiveness of NGOs is driven by strong systems of accountability, and it is therefore very crucial in ensuring there is a good working environment for NGOs. Some parts within the development sector seem to agree that it is worthwhile to seriously consider implementing accountability standards, as it strengthens the work and position of civil society. As development actors are now faced with the ending of MDGs as the framework that was at the core of global development agenda, development actors are now thinking of ways in which accountability can and indeed should also find their place as part of the new proposed development agenda, through the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN (2015) believes that the development framework that comes after the MDGs after 2015 should be emphasized by a more comprehensive framework for accountability. According to the UN (ibid) development agencies should also begin to commit fully to implementing stronger Monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as making the effort to learn from their experiences, and share these learning across the wider development global framework.

It is however, questionable how well humanitarian accountability will fare, when it has been grouped collectively among all other forms of accountability, such as political and financial accountability, which have up until now almost always taken precedence in global discussions on development. Humanitarian accountability runs a risk of being trivialized as it has been in the past,

unless if the donor community and the UN, as the most influential partners in development begin to really push for its uptake by ALL civil society and development actors, and not just a handful of them. Interestingly, accountability is not an actual goal among the 17 proposed sustainable development goals, and as such, application and adherence to accountability standards might also not be realized, as the development sector is still not formally mandated to take it up as part of its operations. Goal number 16 of the SDGs does make some allusion to accountability, as it speaks about the need to Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Although discussion on the actual implementation of the SDGs is still ongoing, this particular goal might be viewed as a call for greater accountability for development actors as well, hence this could be viewed as the drive that NGOs need in order to put systems on place to become more accountable, promote meaningful participation of the communities they claim to assist and ultimately contribute towards lasting change in the conditions of vulnerable people's lives.

According to Scherr et al (n.d.) and Civicus (2014) accountability in the development sector is vital because CSOs often assert that they speak on behalf of minority voices, regularly demand greater accountability from other sectors and manage increasing volumes of public funds, CSOs are being asked to improve their practices internally, among themselves and in their relations with other stakeholders. There is also agreement from humanitarian agencies that have actually invested in humanitarian accountability that it is of paramount importance to achieving program quality and success. HAP (2013) declares that there is proven evidence that suggests transparency through communicating openly, sharing information widely, as well as developing mechanisms for complaints, feedback and response improves accountability to vulnerable communities, especially those people that have been affected by crisis. According to the Report on the Engagement of NGOs and Humanitarian sector (2010), development actors, therefore, need to search for ways to remedy the power imbalance which is brought by humanitarian action and to improve their accountability to disaster affected communities through mechanisms such as: information sharing and transparency; meaningful participation in decision making; responsiveness to feedback; and making people aware of the standard of response they have a right to expect. Basically, this is what humanitarian accountability is premised on, putting standards and mechanisms in place to give communities a stronger voice, better participation and decision making processes, as well as stronger avenues for complaints and redress in humanitarian action.

## 2.5 The Food security Sector in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Food security and Nutrition Policy (2012) describes food security as the condition when all people at all times have social, physical, and economic access to food, which is both safe and is consumed in adequate quantities and the food quality meets the daily dietary needs and food preferences of all people. All this should be premised on an atmosphere which has adequate sanitation, health services and care, which fully allows for a healthy and active life. The Committee on World Food Security (2014) also echoes this definition, and goes on to further develop this description by giving the four mainstays to food security as follows: Availability, Access, Utilization and Stability. The table below shows what exactly these four factors cover, in so far as food security is concerned.

Table 3: The Four Pillars of Food Security

Dimension	Description
Physical <b>AVAILABILITY</b> of food	Addresses the “supply side” of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade.
Economic and physical <b>ACCESS</b> to food	An adequate supply of food at the national or international level does not in itself guarantee household level food security. Concerns about insufficient food access have resulted in greater policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives.
Food <b>UTILIZATION</b>	Utilization is commonly understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. Sufficient energy and nutrient intake by individuals is the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, and diversity of the diet and intra-household distribution of food. Combined with good biological utilization of food consumed, this determines the nutritional status of individuals.
<b>STABILITY</b> of other three dimensions over time	Even if your food intake is adequate today, you are still considered to be food insecure if you have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, risking a deterioration of your nutritional status. Adverse weather conditions, political instability or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security status).

[www.foodsec.org.org/docs/conceptsguide.pdf](http://www.foodsec.org.org/docs/conceptsguide.pdf)

[www.foodsec.org.doc.conceptsguide.pdf](http://www.foodsec.org.doc.conceptsguide.pdf)

Fig 1 above basically gives more details in terms of what these pillars entail, and what is to be expected when communities are said to be food secure. In both of these descriptions however, it is apparent that there is the condition of both physical and economic access to the food. Availability refers to availability of food, in terms of ability to produce the food, as well as to keep this food for the duration until the next production cycle. Access basically looks at ability to get the food, either by purchasing, or ability of the local market to provide adequate food for the local population. Utilization covers how the food is being used at household level, including its preparation and storage, and stability basically looks at the overall conditions surrounding the access to and use of food resources, including length of time the household does have access to adequate amounts of food. The World Food Programme (1996), captures only three Food Security pillars, which are Availability, Access and Utilization. These have been developed further to include people's food preferences and the ability of the food that is available to meet people's dietary requirements.

Some scholars describe food security by its relationship to its antonym food insecurity. As a result, the discussion on food security then becomes how to address this food insecurity. According to Jayne (1995), food security can be achieved by addressing food insecurity, which can be done through either a) food aid also known as food transfers, which basically involves NGOs giving food directly to the those who are in dire need of it or b) by implementing food security programs that build up the capacity of poor communities to raise their incomes, as well as produce their own food for consumption and the surplus for selling. Once food is available locally, this reduces the cost of food purchased through the local market, which also improves access to food for such communities by raising their productivity throughout the food system.

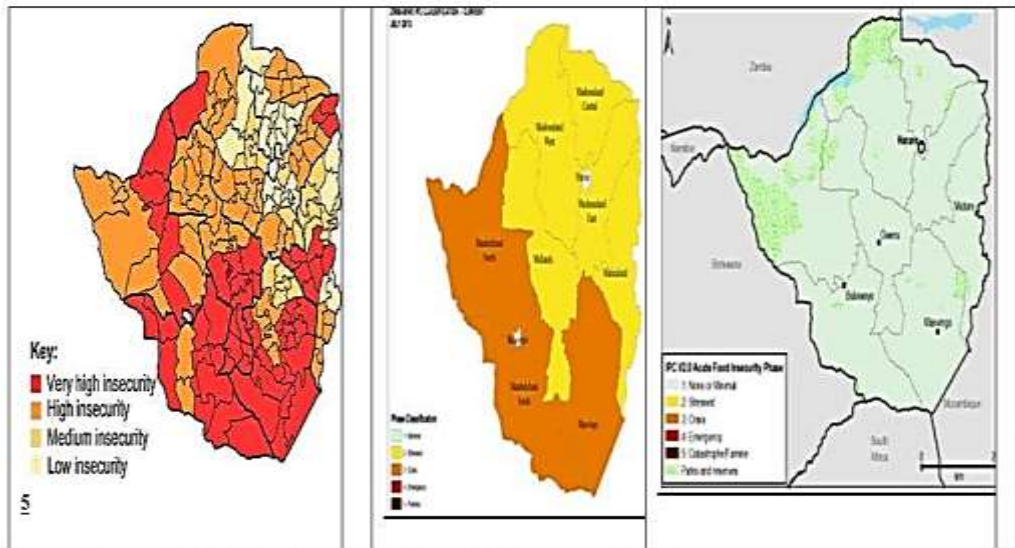
The food security sector in Zimbabwe has been experiencing severe food shortages, with significant parts of the population suffering acute malnutrition and needing vast amounts of support to access adequate food to feed their families. This has lowered the capacity of the Zimbabwean Government to cope, and has left the country needing the assistance of external humanitarian actors in order to respond to the needs of the population. The reasons behind the food insecurity situation in Zimbabwe can be attributed to a number of factors, which include natural

disasters and economic and political stability, according to WFP (2015). FAO (2015<sup>2</sup>) further explains that the main causes of food insecurity in the country are recurrent drought, poor harvests, high unemployment, restructuring of the agricultural sector and a high HIV&AIDS prevalence rate, which have all collectively contributed to the increase in vulnerability and acute food insecurity since 2001. Both FEWSNET (2014) and FAO (2015) agree that agriculture is the mainstay of the Zimbabwean economy, and main instrument for achieving food security, and the fact that the sector is not functioning to its fullest capacity due to diminished physical, financial and political capacity of the country, is also heavily fueling the food insecurity situation in the country. According to FEWSNET (ibid) food security in Zimbabwe is directly connected to domestic agricultural production, and the high levels poverty that are as existing as a result of the poor economic state in the country are also impacting negatively on the access to food and basic services of the people of Zimbabwe.

However, there are some other schools of thought that have been reporting that the food security situation in Zimbabwe has been steadily improving, especially within the last 5 years. According to FEWSNET (2014), current assessments of the food security situation within the country have shown that even in areas that have been traditionally known to be habitually cereal deficit areas in the South and Western parts of the country, have been showing notable signs of improvement in so far as food security is concerned, judging for instance by results for the current 2014-2015 season. However, these same reports do acknowledge that even though acute food security is at the moment quite stable, food and agricultural production is likely to be affected by the late start of the season, flooding and dry spells. According to Relief web (2015), the main reason why they think the food security situation in Zimbabwe is better at the moment is due to the fact that households are still consuming cereals from the last agricultural season, while some are supplementing this food with market purchases or in-kind payment for casual labour activities. Table 2 below shows a trajectory of the food security situation in Zimbabwe from 2008, 2013 and lastly 2015.



Figure 1: Food Security levels: 2008, 2013 and 2015



Source: <http://fewsnets.net/southern-africa/zimbabwe/food-security-outlook/july-2015>

A perusal of the maps above shows significant changes in terms of Zimbabwe’s food security situation for the last decade. The map for 2008 shows that a little above half the population in Zimbabwe was suffering from very high food insecurity, with most of these populations living in regions 4 and 5, which are in the lower half of the of the map. The situation in 2013 had somewhat improved, but there is still evidence to show that the country was still facing serious challenges in terms of lack of adequate food to support the country. It is interesting to note that the two largest cities in the country, Harare and Bulawayo, are the only ones showing minimal food insecurity levels, perhaps implying that the livelihood capacities, and thus access to food in these areas are better than those that are practiced in the rest of the country, as these cities contain the country’s largest economic activity. People in these areas would thus be more capable of accessing food, than those that are living outside. However, the 2015 map shows that the current food security situation in the country seems to be improving, as apparently the whole country is experiencing none to minimal food insecurity. This claim is contrary to report that was published by the Southern Africa Food and Nutrition Security Update (2015), which is saying that poor households

in Zimbabwe have already finished their own production stocks earlier than normal, and will experience an earlier lean/ food insecure season this year.

Zimbabwe also currently has the third highest food insecure population of the whole Southern African region, amounting to a total of 1 490 024, which is almost a third of the total population, following behind Malawi and DRC, according to WFP (2015). This basically implies that food security is still a major issue within the country, and as such, linked to all other sectors to do with health, economic development as well. This also justifies the high levels of aid activity within the country, although not limited to food aid, but now concentrating more on primary agricultural production, and market oriented farming in the long term. Zimbabwe's current Economic Blue print policy, ZIMASSET (2013-2018), declares that under the Food security and nutrition cluster, a summary of the Key result areas that interventions under this cluster should be targeted at Crop and livestock production and marketing, agricultural infrastructural development, nutrition and environmental management. This seems to be the direction that most interventions, including donor funded activities, under food security are also taking. Zimbabwe's food security sector has therefore been a recipient to some of the largest financial grants for humanitarian aid by international Aid agencies. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance (2015) Zimbabwe has been in the top 10 recipients of humanitarian assistance in three of the last 10 years. Hence, CSOs operating within this sector are also implementing projects that are aligned to these national objectives, as stated by the blueprint. However, even before the inception of ZIMASSET,

### **2.5.2 Accountability in the Food Security Sector**

As has been indicated earlier, the spotlight on NGOs has been consistently increasing due to the rise in the assistance that they have providing, as they strive to bridge the gap between what the primary duty bearers, the government, are unable to provide in order to support their populations, and what is actually required for citizens of especially vulnerable countries to lead a life with dignity, encompassing access to basic necessities. Therefore, as their reach increases, the volume of resources that NGOs are handling is also increasing, notably in programs that provide food assistance. As a result, it also makes sense that most accountability standards have been developed

under programs that have to do with the transfer of food and other commodities to vulnerable communities.

According to Anderson *et al* (2012) food assistance has served as the core activity under food security in Zimbabwe for almost two decades now, with other activities to foster self-sustenance and growth acting as secondary, supporting activities. Furthermore, according to Maxwell (2011) in Harmer *et al* (2012) given the significant amount of food aid, and increasing cash being directed at any particular emergency, the risks and possibilities of diversion of these resources also increases greatly. This necessitates the need to put in place risk management policies and practices to counter potential loss or misuse of aid funds and resources. In actual fact, food security activities unfortunately are vulnerable to corruption, fraud and abuse of resources by NGO staff, which calls for strong systems of accountability to be in place to counter these risks. McIvor and Myllenen (2012) affirm that accountability in the food security sector, and most importantly in food assistance related programs is crucial to maintaining the effectiveness of aid in the communities it is provided.

## **2.6 Synopsis of Accountability Standards**

Accountability standards are simply the principles and beliefs that govern the operations of humanitarian actors. Deloffre (2010) defines them as performance standards which let NGOs know whether they are meeting their moral duty, which are socially constructed expectations used by principals as well as NGOs to assess NGOs activities. According to Kirsch (2013), accountability standards include procedures, policies, rules, standards, and guidelines. All these can be specific for one organization as internal systems, or created outside of the organization by a government, or other organizations that specialize in performance measurements such as accreditation bodies or networks, or even individuals who possess the power to do so, which is acceptable to the organization.

Due to the increasing need for legitimacy and establishing a platform to cultivate a trustful relationships between them and their stakeholders, NGOs have begun to implement myriad accountability standards in order to prove their commitment to providing quality service to their

'clients'. This is against the backdrop of mistrust that has been rising from some scandals of corruption, misappropriation of funds and general wastefulness that have plagued the NGO sector, especially humanitarian initiatives during emergencies, which have been dominant in the media in the past decade. Hence, the pressure on NGO is evaluation of their performance against their set objectives and success in delivering these objectives, against the actual needs of the communities. This is accountability personified! Furthermore, NGOs have also been historically vocal concerning the need to hold different stakeholders, such as governments, to account as they claim to be the voice of the voiceless, hence have taken on that role of watchdog, but as Kirsch (2013) puts it, who is watching the watchdog? There are more calls for NGOs themselves to also be held accountable for their actions, and also to demonstrate this accountability.

The most prominent accountability standard that NGOs working in the humanitarian and emergency sector is the Core humanitarian standard on quality and accountability. The standard sets out nine commitments that organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 2: The Core Humanitarian Standards**

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<sup>3</sup> From the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) official website, <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org>



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Source: [www.corehumanitarianstandard.org](http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org)

The Core Humanitarian Standard is built on 4 main principles to accountability, which are Humanity, Independence, Neutrality and Impartiality. Furthermore, the CHS set out 9 Commitments which organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use as a resource to guide their programs, and improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they are providing to vulnerable communities. CHS also acts as a tool which vulnerable communities can hold agencies that are providing assistance to them to be more accountable because they provide information about what commitments humanitarian organizations should be making to vulnerable communities. Apart from CHS, there are also other countless accountability standards that have been developed and are being implemented to increase the utility of NGOs operating in the humanitarian and development sector. According to One world Trust (2010<sup>4</sup>), in reaction to calls for greater accountability CSOs have begun to come together and start defining common standards of practices and also identifying to whom they should be accountable, and why. The

result is a rapid proliferation of self-regulatory initiatives including codes of conduct, codes of ethics, certification schemes, reporting frameworks, working groups, and information services such as directories that outline what different groups in accountability feel they can commit to when providing services to vulnerable communities. Hence, accountability standards come in as a response by civil society to abet in rebuilding some of that trust that the wider audience and recipients of their activities have lost, as a result of past mistakes. Figure 4 below shows a brief description of three most prominent Accountability standards in the Humanitarian sector, under which food security sector lies.

Figure 3 Examples of Accountability Standards



Source: reference from The HAP Standard (2010), The SPHERE Handbook (2011), and the INGO Accountability Charter (2014).

According to Deloffre (2010), due to the various reasons that have been outlined above, the NGO sector decided to begin implementation of accountability in a more formal way. Deloffre (ibid) says due to the increased funding, and the entry of new actors in the humanitarian sector such as

the military into the humanitarian sector and heightened media attention on NGO activities, NGOs decided that good intentions were no longer enough. They began to define standards for doing good and created numerous accountability ‘clubs’ to institutionalize these standards. These were developed in line with the specific needs and operating areas within which the NGS were functioning. Hence, there are standards that are sector specific, such as standards for providing water and sanitation services, shelter, food and nutrition and health, livestock management, education, economic recovery, while others are more general, such the Core humanitarian standards which has been discussed above<sup>5</sup>.

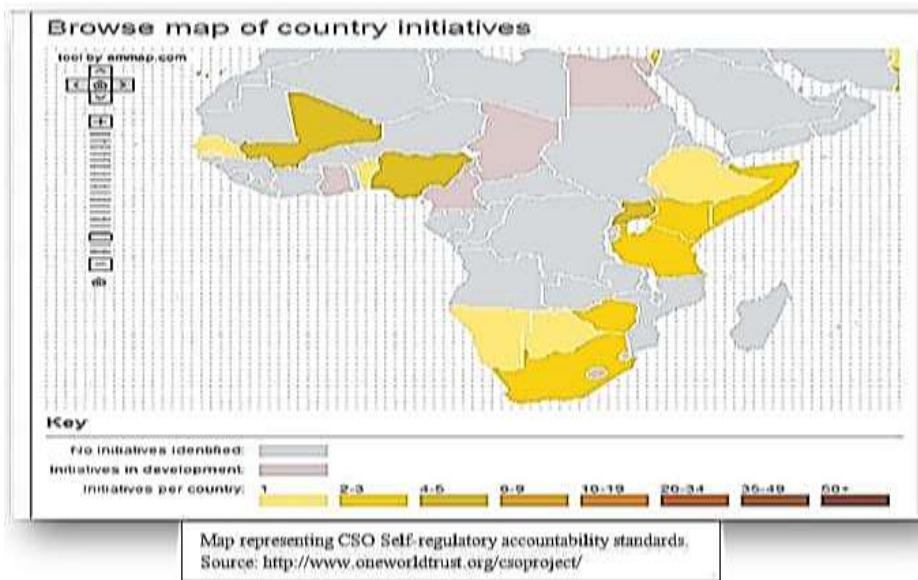
In some forums, accountability standards are also known as self-regulation standards. One World Trust defines self-regulation of CSOs or NGOs as the process through which two or more organizations come together at sector level to either define common norms and standards to which they can be held to account by their stakeholders or encourage transparency and sharing of best practice. This can be on a range of issues from how they are governed to, evaluation systems, to what information they should be making public. Self-regulation can also involve a third party such as a peer CSO or watchdog organization undertaking an external assessment of a CSO. One World Trust (2012) asserts that globally, there are as many as 309 NGO accountability standards (which they call CSO self-regulation initiatives) that are currently functional, according to the study undertaken under their CSO self-regulation Project<sup>6</sup> and this is just counting the ones that were operational during the period of their study. Sadly, of those 309, the standards/initiatives that were recorded during the study, African only average between 1-5 accountability self-regulation initiatives per country. (See Fig 1 below). Considering that Africa has the bulk of CSO activity, the very fact that it has a low number of mechanisms to monitor performance of these organizations through accountability standards and regulation mechanisms is disturbing, and speaks to the quality of humanitarian service being provided to this part of the world.

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<sup>5</sup> A wide range of these standards can be accessed on the One World Trust website, at [oneworldtrust.org](http://oneworldtrust.org)

<sup>6</sup> This project, offers an online database that shows the actual location of CSO accountability/self-regulation initiatives, on a global map. It offers information on global, regional and national accountability initiatives, as well as general information on each and links to their websites. [http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject/cso/general/about\\_this\\_project](http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject/cso/general/about_this_project)

Fig 3: Map of Accountability Standards in Africa



The map shows that there is a serious lack of Accountability standards within the whole of Africa, but more so in the northern and Central parts. Southern Africa is averaging two to three accountability initiatives, and apparently Zimbabwe is said to be hosting the same number. However, these standards do not seem to be very prominent in the Zimbabwean development and humanitarian sector, as there is no real mention of them on the One World website from which the map was generated, except NANGO. Suffice to say, it is the currently known, inter-agency regulation mechanism for NGOs that currently operating in the country. This means therefore that the NGO community in Zimbabwe are having to rely on International accountability initiatives, which might not be suited or even adaptable to the Zimbabwean situation, to ensure NGOs are accountable to the communities they seek to assist, hence, this is a widening gap for these humanitarian actors to consider addressing.



### **2.6.2 The challenge in the adoption and use of accountability standards**

The challenge in the application of accountability standards rests not only in their complexity as additional project activities, which seems to fall outside the normal project scope, but rather, predominantly in their vast multitude. As mentioned earlier, One World Trust (2015) puts the number of existing accountability initiatives at 309, across the globe and this is only the ones they managed to reach out to and registered during their CSO Self-regulation initiatives project. Doubtless, there are plenty more that are not recorded on this project, as this researcher realized, after having gone through part of the database. However, it does put into perspective the fact that there are indeed a lot of standards that CSOs are trying to implement to improve their program implementation practices. Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (2011:4) agree that this multiplicity of accountability initiatives is the major problem to achieving humanitarian accountability. According to Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (ibid) believe that humanitarian accountability as a concept is a victim of its own successes. Due to the existence of multiple mechanisms for, the concept is now shrouded in confusion, and as such, they are adding onto operational staff's normal duties, and this has the potential of harming the organization itself. There is basically confusion among the people working in the field as to which standard to follow because there are just so many of them, and the strategies are all so different, which means more frustration for staff as the forms that need to be filled out for reporting are many as well.

Be that as it may, however, this is not the first time this has been said, and will doubtless not be the last time. However, there does not seem to be movement towards coming up with a plausible solution to counter this problem from civil society. While one side believes accountability is playing a big role in improving the operations of CSOs, evidenced by glowing reports from organizations such as Oxfam, World Vision and Care International on their successes as a result of implementing accountability standards, the other side believes that there is still a long way to go in so far as showing the actual benefits as well as successes in implementing accountability standards in humanitarian assistance programs. Judging by the sheer volumes in accountability standards that are in existence currently, it is also justifiable to say there is no real consensus in the NGO community of what constitutes accountability, as well as to whom, which has been the recurrent theme in this research document, so far. As such, who then can deliberately challenge an

organization when it says it is being accountable by only offering information to communities, without asking them for their input on decisions to be made, seeing as there is no minimum standard to support this anyway.

Featherstone (2013), expressed in his findings that if CSOs invest in information sharing and project beneficiary participation, they can anticipate high levels of beneficiary satisfaction and increased participation in projects, as well verifiable and evident success in projects. Here, he strongly believes there is a direct link between better project performance and accountability. According to a community member who participated in the study conducted by Featherstone (ibid), prior to the coming of the organization, other programs failed because they had no accountability and there was high levels of corruption. Accountability is therefore a core factor in whether a program will succeed or not. However, other schools of thought vehemently argue that the concept has failed to deliver on its promises of improved performance, and are instead, calling for another way in which CSOs can bring sanity to the chaos. The question then becomes, how can this be done? By developing yet another accountability standard?, as suggested by the INGO Charter (2015), or by combining the already existent standards, as has been done by SPHERE, HAP and People In Aid, under the Core Humanitarian Standard alliance. Regardless of how this 'chaos' is to be dealt with, it is apparent that at the moment, accountability for and by the NGO or CSO sector is un-attainable, due to the lack of coordination in setting up accountability systems in the sector. One might also argue that the existence of so many accountability initiatives is valid in so far as it offers a choice for organizations that are operating in different geographical locations, thematic areas for having standards that are relevant to their own programs, and environments.

In his response to MSF Holland's Director's article about Accountability in the Humanitarian exchange (3 July 2003: issues 24), Stockon (2014) argues that while Davis believes that the failure of accountability is the most important failure of humanitarian organizations, it is actually because of this that humanitarian organizations should try harder to be more accountable to crisis victims, rather than just giving up on the concept. Stockon (2014) actually shows that the difficulty that Davis is talking about in the application of the principle of informed consent in humanitarian action actually proves how important accountability standards and principles are in advocating the dignity and rights of affected communities. Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (2011), also argue that stakeholders to development programming should take into account the challenges that humanitarian

practitioners face in trying to practice the principle of informed consent by providing information to communities, and deliberately seeking their opinions on program design and implementation so that they are truly responsive to their needs. Emergencies often occur abruptly, and the focus is almost always on saving lives first, and humanitarian actors would rather concentrate on doing that, than taking the time to ask disaster survivors what their preferences are. This makes achieving accountability even harder, as staff have the capacity to deal with immediate, life-preserving needs, and not so much on seeking collaboration with the communities they are trying to assist.

Knox-Clarke and Mitchell (2011) further postulate that even when aid workers have the capability and time to listen to affected people, the intrinsic power imbalance that exists between aid worker and beneficiary often prevents honest communication. In essence, this means that even when communities are given opportunities for open, honest communication by humanitarian workers and communities, but by virtue of humanitarian workers being the agents that bring, and therefore control the flow of assistance, communities are therefore too afraid to comment negatively on the practice and failures of the projects for fear of losing that assistance. In this vein, the application of accountability becomes very challenging.

As discussed earlier, accountability to vulnerable communities only made a formal appearance in the humanitarian sector in the early 1990s, and as such, is a fairly new concept. In this regard, the challenges that are being faced in the application of accountability, as discussed above become a natural step in the development and growth of any new concept. Monitoring and Evaluation, which came secondary to the advent of humanitarian action, must also have gone through these teething problems, but the more time there was invested in it, now it is a non-negotiable part of any project. According to Wenar (n.d), development actors are also weary of investing in accountability as it holds the possibility of producing either a positive or a negative evaluation result. In essence, if organizations become more transparent, this attracts further inquiry into their strategies for operations, which can make them vulnerable to negative criticism from stakeholders and especially target communities to question details regarding the programs, hence NGOs would rather just maintain the status quo and not this ‘unwanted’ attention on themselves. As a result, accountability standards should also work at waylaying some of these fears so as to convince NGOs that accountability has more benefits than negatives. Otherwise, if the value of accountability is not

shown effectively, the bulk of existent and even new up and coming CSOs will not prioritize these initiatives.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has attempted to outline some of the discussion around the concept of accountability. In essence, not only does the term have a multitude of meanings attached to it, but it also has undergone some transition, which has made its application all the more difficult. The chapter also showed how accountability has evolved to humanitarian accountability, but it also showed why there is need for further research on the concept, as there are some evidences on its effectiveness, as well as the consequences that might arise as a result of lack of its application. It also dwelt on the Zimbabwe food security sector, and how accountability can be challenging to adopt and implement, both in the local and global context. This Chapter basically laid the background to the study, presenting different scholarly perceptions on the concept of Accountability.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will look at the actual methods used by the researcher to collect and analyze the data collected during the research. The research method selected was purely qualitative, to allow the research to present in depth knowledge on the subject matter. The chapter will discuss the qualitative research and will address why the researcher chose it as the most appropriate research design for the project. Further analysis on the selection of respondents, as well as the data collection techniques, tools and finally analysis shall be provided.

#### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The main objective of this research was to find out what humanitarian accountability standards are being utilized in the food security sector in Zimbabwe, and how they have affected the way in which these programs are being implemented in the local context. As a result, the research design chosen by the researcher was selected because it allowed her to get as much comprehensive data as is possible on the subject matter, and present it in a way that effectively shows the accountability practices of NGOs in the food security sector, accurately, and thoroughly. Hence the researcher's selection of the qualitative research methodology.

Simply put, a research design is the description of the rational order of processes that happen when data is being collected and reviewed for any particular study or research, as well as the ultimate presentation of findings and recommendations. The research design provides guidance on the way the researcher will conduct the study, and ultimately influences the type of data collection techniques to be used, and how to analyze and report these findings. According to Maree (2007) in Tshuma and Mafa (2013) research design refers to a map or approach which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specify the variety of participants, the data gathering methods to be used and the data analysis to be done. On the other hand, Taylor (2000) describes it simply as a strategy that has been developed to get answers to research questions. Hence, the research design is simply a plan of action that the researcher will employ to get the answers that are required for the research.

### 3.1.1 Qualitative Research Design

For this particular study, the researcher chose to conduct her study using the qualitative research design. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting. Therefore, qualitative research is more concerned with how reality is created by an individual, and as such, places emphasis more on people's perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon rather than just the number of people participating in the research. According to Hancock (1998), qualitative research is about developing explanations of social phenomenon, and is more concerned about finding answers to the questions that begin with Why, Who, and In what way. This was indeed the researcher's aim in using this kind of research methodology, as the interest of the researcher lay in how each particular individual describes the concept of accountability standards, as well as how these are instrumental in improving or affecting program activities and strategy, hence the research questions either within the research instrument or during interviews. The research will be primarily focused on studying a specific concept to gain further knowledge and people's perceptions on that same concept. According to Hancock (1998), this kind of qualitative research is known as phenomenology, which is the study of a phenomenon which can be an event, situation, experience or concept, and is a form of qualitative research. The study, therefore seeks to further develop a better understanding of the concept of accountability in the food security sector in Zimbabwe.

### 3.1.2 Justification of Research Design

Hancock (1998) postulates that people are surrounded by phenomenon that they may not fully understand and the phenomenon may not have been previously fully described, such that people lack clarity on it. This is why the researcher has chosen this kind of qualitative research design as it is most appropriate for the kind of study to be conducted. According to Mcmillan (2000) in Castellan (2010) a phenomenological study is an attempt to fully understand the essence of some phenomenon. Since the concept of accountability is still an emerging trend on the development agenda, and is not fully understand not only in the international development sector, but in the Zimbabwean context as well, the researcher felt the phenomenological qualitative research design was the most appropriate approach to conducting the research. The researcher felt that further research on the application of accountability standards in Zimbabwe was vital, and hence, decided

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to embark on the research. The researcher felt that the phenomenological qualitative research design was appropriate as it would capture the very concept of accountability exhaustively, while giving perspectives on how it is and should be relevant to the Zimbabwean development aid context, which is what the researcher aims to do. According to Anon (n.d:306), qualitative research is more appropriate when the researcher wants to become more familiar with the phenomenon of interest to achieve a deep understanding of how people think about the topic and to describe in great detail the perspectives of the research participants. This in essence, is what the researcher was aiming for, in selecting this particular research design.

### **3.2 Research Participants selection**

The selection of participants for the research, can simply be termed sampling. This basically outlines how the researcher chose the respondents that took part in the study, and also why the researcher chose this method. In this researcher, the researcher used two kinds of sampling, that is purposive and random sampling.

#### **3.2.1 Purposive sampling**

The researcher used purposive sampling to determine which organizations would have respondents that would be knowledgeable on the subject matter. Tichapondwa (2013) describes purposive sampling as the process of deliberately selecting respondents to the study who have the specific characteristics that are relevant to the area of study. In this case therefore, the researcher deliberately selected NGOs that would have people that have the implementation of accountability standards as part of their portfolio, hence considered to be experts in humanitarian accountability. The researcher chose this type of sampling due to the rarity of accountability experts in Zimbabwe's aid industry, as well as for cost saving purposes. In this instance, respondents were selected from CAFOD, World Vision, Save the Children, Care International, Trocaire, and ACDI/VOCA.

#### **3.2.2 Convenience Sampling**

The researcher also utilized convenience sampling for the selection of participants in the Focus Group Discussions, as she was mainly speaking to community members that had already been randomly selected for an Accountability Evaluation exercise conducted as part of the researcher's

normal work, in Mutare, Murehwa and Harare. This was a cost effective and time saving way of conducting the research, as the participants had already been brought together for the Accountability Evaluation survey, which the researcher took advantage of and ultimately benefitted from.

### 3.3 Data Collection Timeline

The following table outlines the time schedule of the research, and the relevant tasks that were performed by the researcher.

Date	Site	Activities
14/09/2015	Harare	One on one open ended interviews with Organization 1: Accountability and Learning Manager, and Program officer.
15/09/2015	Mutare	Semi-structured Interviews with Organization 2 Program Director, Program Manager and Program officer. Focus Group discussion at Mubiri Irrigation scheme (10 men and women).
16/09/2015	Murehwa	Focus group discussion with 25 men and women Murehwa Center.
17/09/2015	Harare	Focus group discussions with 2 groups of 12 women, 13 men at Mbare. Semi-structured Interview with Executive Director and Program coordinator- Organization 3.
29/09/2015	Harare	Skype calls with Program manager (Organization 3) and phone call with Accountability and Learning Officer (Organization 1).
12/09/2015 to 9/10/2015	Harare	Sending and receiving open ended questionnaires from 2 additional Organizations.

The collection of data took place between 12 September, when the first questionnaires were distributed and 9 October, when the final questionnaire and Interview had been conducted. However, there was low return rate for questionnaires distributed to both known contacts as well as unknown experts, whom the researcher reached out to largely through Linked In, whose work title seemed to cover Accountability in their portfolio. Some respondents indicated a lack of



adequate time to respond to the questionnaires, while others indicated that their organizations were not applying accountability standards in their programs. Most respondents to the standards preferred to have a verbal discussion, ranging between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes, rather than filling out a questionnaire.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods basically outline how the researcher collected the data from her chosen respondents in the research. In this case, the researcher used interviews and questionnaires to collect data from the research participants.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Interviews are basically a conversation that seeks an exchange of information between different parties in a bid to obtain information from one party to the other. According to Fontana and Frey (2005) interviews can be divided into three categories, these are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. In this study, the researcher designed a semi-structured interview schedule with open ended questions to discuss with accountability experts through face to face or Skype conversations, about their perceptions on application of accountability standards in food security projects. Mathers *et al* (1998) state that the semi-structured interview style allows for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss the topic in detail without restrictions or premeditation. This type of data collection method was beneficial to the researcher to get in-depth understanding of the concept, and be able to present this data accurately, as well as get back to respondents for clarity on issues discussed, as well as new ideas that may come up during the course of the interview.

#### **3.4.2 Telephone and Skype Interviews**

Due to the sheer diversity in the location of respondents that participated in the research, the researcher had to rely more on Skype or Phone in order to conduct the interviews, to get the necessary data for the research. According to Mathers *et al* (1998) telephone interviews are an effective and economical way of collecting data where the respondents are accessible by telephone,

as well as being ideal for busy professional respondents, where appointments are easy to make. As such, based on the fact that respondents to this research were busy Development professionals in their own right, whose duties might not permit them a lot of time for participating in non-work related research, and also located in different geographical areas across Zimbabwe, 30-40 minute Skype or telephone interviews were more ideal. The researcher prepared an interview schedule, with specific open-ended questions, which guided discussions with respondents on the issue of accountability in Zimbabwe in general, and their personal experience in the application of accountability standards in particular. The discussions basically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, and the researcher collected vast amounts of data, which were later analyzed and findings presented in the ensuing Chapter 4.

### **3.4.3 Face to Face Interviews**

The researcher also had the opportunity to meet with other respondents face to face to conduct the research interviews. The Face to face interviews offered the interviewer the opportunity to discuss other issues that would arise from the general conversation, as guided by the already set interview questions. This allowed the researcher to probe further into respondents' given answers, to get clearer responses. From these interviews, the researcher ultimately began to formulate follow up questions that the researcher had not originally thought of. This direct contact with respondents also allowed for an easier and more natural flow in the interview process, as well as allowed the researcher to begin to develop a framework for coding of the data basing on emerging themes, and recommendations, as she could discuss issues arising from the conversation freely and directly.

### **3.4.4 Data collection instruments: Questionnaires**

The researcher also developed questionnaires from the interview schedule that was being used for the Skype and Face to Face interviews so that the respondents that did not have time for the interviews could still participate in the research by responding to the same interview questions, in the format of a questionnaire. The questions were open ended to allow respondents to be free to give their true perceptions concerning the issues being asked by the questions, because the researcher sought to access data that might not be obvious to her, but which respondents might

have and as such, would only be able to give in a more unstructured type of questionnaire. Each questionnaire had 4 questions which were reflective of the research objectives. The researcher distributed these questionnaires by email to those respondents who could not be interviewed due to work commitments or proximity. The questionnaires were also a way of getting quick responses as the average time for filling out the questionnaire was between 5-10 minutes, hence for those respondents that did manage to send through their questionnaires, it was a time effective way for the researcher to get the data that she needed. Follow up on unclear responses that were captured on the questionnaires was done through email and Skype Instant messaging to ensure data clarity and depth.

#### **3.4.5 Focus Group Discussions**

The researcher also had opportunity to conduct Focus group discussions with the actual beneficiaries of some food security and nutrition programs in Mutare, Murehwa and Harare, while conducting an independent consultancy for one of the more prominent funding organizations in the Zimbabwe food security sector. The study was on how this funding organization's partners understand their accountability commitments to beneficiary communities, and how they have been exercising these commitments. The FGD participants were randomly selected at the food security project sites that the researcher visited, hence coordination of this was fairly easy. In these focus group discussions, the researcher discussed with direct beneficiaries to Food security projects in those areas on how their funding agency was being accountable to them and how they themselves viewed the accountability efforts being implemented by the implementing partner within their specific locations. The communities were also requested to describe their ideal situation in which they can then say an NGO is indeed being accountable to them. The FGDs allowed the researcher to get different perceptions from women, men and even children on their individual perceptions on the Accountability practices of NGOs in their different places, and how they felt they can improve on some of the gaps identified.

#### **3.5 Review of Secondary Data Sources**

The Researcher also made use of two reports directly related to accountability practices in Zimbabwe that are publicly available on the internet. The idea was to see how different organizations are applying Humanitarian accountability within the Food security sector in Zimbabwe. The reports were a Research report from Save the Children, and The CDA Collaborative Learning Projects), on experiences in applying accountability standards in food security sector in Zimbabwe. These documents were relevant to the research in so far as allowing the researcher to get in-depth, factual knowledge into the accountability practices of some prominent Food security actors within the Zimbabwean context.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

- Before the commencement of every interview and at the preamble of each questionnaire distributed, an explanation on confidentiality was provided as well as informed consent sought from each research respondent.
- To ensure protection of the identity of participants, the researcher withheld the identities of the participants and used coding to make reference to their participation. Only their positions have been outlined, to show variety in the profile of research respondents.
- Photographs taken during the research were only acquired after express permission had been given to do so.
- Most respondents were more comfortable to be quoted anonymously, however, permission to quote was sought and granted, for the quotations that will be captured within the research.
- To minimize biases, the researcher did not include any work that she has done in the research study area from former organizations.
- All interviews done with the community were in Shona, the researcher's primary language, hence this reduced instances of misinterpretation when transcribing this data.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

In this research, the researcher made use of emerging themes in the course of the research as a way of presenting the findings of the research, and ultimately, to analyze the data collected. Qualitative data analysis involves taking the raw data that has been collected during the course of the research and using it to provide explanations, understandings and interpretation of the phenomenon, situations and people that are being studied. Mill (2012) and the Research Proposals (2009) both agree that there are 5 steps to qualitative data analysis, and these are what the researcher followed. These are as follows:

- Collection and/or documentation of data,
- Coding,
- Categorization/ putting data into themes,
- Corroboration/ legitimization
- Reporting/ presentation of findings.

In essence, the researcher read all questionnaires and captured all interview responses on written transcripts. This gave the researcher an idea of the general sense and direction that the responses were taking. The next step in the process was to identify all recurrent and significant statements from the transcribed data, and meanings were then inferred from these statements. These meanings were used to formulate themes, which were later put into different categories, from which the researcher wrote an in depth description of what inferences were coming out from the captured themes, and drew conclusions. This description was used to show the characteristics and experiences in the application of accountability by different organizations within different areas of operation, based on the analyzed information. The researcher shared the draft to research participants such that they could validate what had been captured in the document, so that if there are any errors or misrepresentations, they could quickly be corrected. Due to logistical challenges, the researcher could not go back to FGD participants in Mutare and Murehwa, hence, the validation of information collected was done straight after the FGD, so that participants could see how their responses had been captured, as well as correct instances where errors had been made. Once the validation stage was complete, the researcher then used secondary sources, in the form of accountability reports, and various accountability standards for triangulation with the researched data, and findings were then presented in Chapter 4 of this research report.

### **3.7.1 Data Validity**

To ensure that the data collected was valid and legitimate, the researcher utilized the above mentioned different methods of collecting data, such that they served as different data sources which would enable the data to be compared against each other to also check on its applicability to the research as well. The researcher also used the secondary data sources in the form of accountability reports from different agencies to also check on whether information captured in there compliments the raw data collected by the researcher. As a result, the researcher feels that by employing these different methods of triangulating the data, the findings presented in the ensuing Chapter will have been fully verified, and thus a strong representation of the application of Accountability standards in Zimbabwe's Food security sector, by different humanitarian and development actors.

The researcher was also fortunate enough to speak with both respondents working for a specific organization, as well as the actual beneficiaries to the project being implemented by that same organization. As a result, this was also another form of checking to see whether the claims of the organization were actually true, from the perception of the beneficiaries themselves.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter is a build up to the ensuing Chapters that will be presenting the actual research findings, as well as act as a basis for utilizing the chosen research design. In essence, the discussion was on the methodology chosen by the researcher, hence it gave a brief outline of the qualitative type of research design that was to be used for the collection and analysis of data, as well as the presentation of findings during the course of the research. The Chapter also went into detail on the data collection procedures that were used by the researcher in collecting data, as well as how the data was later analyzed, to come up with the findings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Chapter Introduction**

This part of the research document will offer details on the actual findings from collection of data that was done during the research. The various themes that have been underlined by the researcher will be presented, as well as an analysis of the data collected, which will evolve into a discussion of what these results imply, as well their contribution to the overall research study area. The researcher will also attempt to interpret what these different themes and perceptions may mean to the application of accountability standards in the Food security sector.

#### **4.1 Emerging Themes Data Analysis**

The researcher used emerging themes to analyze the data that was collected during research, as has been outlined in the previous Chapter 3. The research findings are presented below.

##### **4.1.1 Accountability standards in the Zimbabwe food security sector**

There was a general consensus of what accountability standards are being applied by organizations operating in the Food security sector in Zimbabwe. All accountability experts that were interviewed for the research indicated that their organizations were subscribing to the SPHERE Standards, as a primary source for maintain accountability in their food security programs. One respondent actually indicated that her organization had actually coordinated the training of different accountability and other experts from different international organizations in Zimbabwe, who have either a training aspect to their portfolio or in some instances had the kind of position that would help influence the adoption and use of SPHERE standards at strategic planning and implementation level, which would then translate to implementation at field level. These trainings were organized as a Training of trainers' workshop, which would equip participants with the skills and knowledge to conduct trainings in their organizations on the use of the SPHERE standards to all other organizational staff. These trainings were conducted in 2008, then two follow up trainings in 2011, and the respondent had been a Trainer for the last round of trainings in 2011. In essence, these participating organizations would be tracked on their implementation of accountability.

According to this same respondent,

*Due to the introductory trainings on the SPHERE standards, NGOs operating in the food security, health, shelter, water and sanitation in Zimbabwe were formally introduced to the importance of implementing accountability standards to improve their service delivery and quality to their beneficiaries. This also helped in strengthening the capacity of NGOs in emergency response and ensuring community programs are informed by community needs, and not just programs that NGOs deem appropriate, without consulting the actual beneficiaries.*

In retrospect, participants also felt that this initiative of coordinating application of accountability at national level seems to be a strategic one as it allows for the most prominent NGOs operating in different sectors, including food security, to be part of the same discussions on application of accountability standards in their work. One respondent who the researcher interviewed, who had participated in the above mentioned SPHERE trainings declared that,

*Not only does this kind of opportunity create a stage for mutual learning on each other's accountability practices for the participating NGOs, but it sets the stage for development of good relationship among these same organizations, which is vital in pushing the accountability agenda forward.*

It seems that respondents also viewed these trainings as a means on forging relationships which would make collaboration in building NGOs' capacity to enhance accountability practices, which are vital in ensuring that accountability becomes a collective effort, rather than an individual one.

The HAP standards also came up as another popular standard to which most participants said they were involved in implementing in their organizations. This standard was mentioned by all participants, whose portfolio was mainly to do with applying accountability standards within the various projects in their organization. Interestingly, less organizations were actually implementing HAP standards as opposed to SPHERE standards. The researcher probed a few respondents working as NGO staff and found out that the main reason for this was in the way in which these two standards were structured, in terms of their application. While the SPHERE standards were to be implemented by anyone wishing to improve accountability to communities by knowing the recommended minimum levels to be attained in responding to the immediate needs of vulnerable people that have suffered loss in capacity to fend for themselves due to various circumstances, the



HAP standards are more a process of certification that NGOs subscribing to the standards would need to commit to, and be measured against the achievement of these commitments in order to attain certification, and thus international recognition and acclaim on being superior in quality of program delivery.

It is also important to note that none of the participants in the FGDs, who are the actual beneficiaries to the projects that some of the organizations that were studied in the research, knew either what the accountability standards that were being implemented by the organizations they were benefiting. However, they were aware of mechanisms to accountability, and their responses will be discussed further on in this chapter.

**Fig 4: Mrs. Kuvaka watering her vegetables before FGD, Mutare.**



The understanding of the actual understanding on the phrase “accountability standards” also seemed to be different in two organizations, of the five that were studied. One respondent described the accountability standards that her organization was implementation in the following terms:

*“Accountability framework, Information sharing with communities, Complaints and response mechanisms, Meaningful participation, staff competences and continual improvement”.*

However, further prompting by the researcher brought out that these standards were actually part of the HAP standard that some organizations were implementing. This brings out the idea that there is a different understanding of accountability standards within organizations, where some feel these are formal initiatives to which organizations subscribe, either just as a reference, without any further commitment, as in the case of SPHERE, as signatories as in the case of the INGO Charter, or as a formal process of working towards accreditation and certification, as in the case of HAP. As a result, some participants viewed some of their organization based efforts towards improving accountability as accountability standards in their own right.

All respondents also indicated that their respective organizations have internal policies and processes which they also view as accountability standards. Hence, setting up of policies such as Child protection policies, Monitoring and evaluation as well as Food handling policies were cited by one participant as being viewed as accountability standards as well. Two of the 5 researched organizations also shared the same sentiment, where one participant said,

*It is not only International based standards that are recognized as accountability standards, but we also implement our own organizational standards as accountability standards to the communities we work with. Therefore, if we have a good Child protection policy, we measure ourselves against that same policy to ensure we do no harm to the community, and are therefore accountable.*

Hence, organizational policies seem to be a strong factor for accountability across at least a third of the research respondents’ organizations, and are treated as benchmarks to achieving higher levels of program quality, and therefore accountability within these organizations.

Three out of the five agencies that were studied indicated that they had accountability frameworks. These accountability frameworks served as a strategic plan on what accountability commitments organizations were making, how these would be measured, and what principles and values these were built on. This would also be like a guideline, providing the details on what actions would be done by the organization to achieve accountability, and the suggested means of verifying that the organization was actually doing what it said it would be doing in order to achieve accountability.

The researcher also found that NGOs who were deliberately and actively investing in improving their accountability to beneficiaries were also making changes to their human resources structure. Some organizations formulated a completely new department for accountability, and established positions like Accountability Officer, or accountability advisor, while other organizations preferred to simply put the accountability function was simply built into the Monitoring and evaluation department, hence M&E personnel had their portfolios expanded, hence creation of hybrid positions such as Monitoring, evaluation accountability and Learning manager/coordinator. Either way, the organizations that took one step or the other had more success, according to one respondent, in implementing accountability throughout the organization, than an NGO that did not have specific people dedicated to this cause.

Furthermore, some participants also indicated that they were not necessarily following any formal accountability standard, but rather, they were focusing on their individual organizations' principles, and values, to work towards accountability to communities. All of these values are based on organizations' missions, hence the following issues were highlighted as values for upholding accountability to project beneficiaries.

#### **4.1.2 Informed consent at all levels of the project cycle.**

This includes the provision of adequate information about the organization, its programs, reach, and sometimes its funding partners and in rare cases, financial information regarding specific project implementation activities, to the community being targeted for an organization's programs.

#### **4.1.3 Protecting the rights of communities**

This involves respecting and therefore promoting the different rights held by beneficiary communities, including the right to appropriate, timely and adequate assistance, the right to give feedback and complaints on programs, as well as receive feedback on complaints given.

### 4.1.3 Participation of beneficiaries

Creating opportunities for beneficiary communities to actively participate in the decision making processes that affect their lives, at all levels of the project cycle, from project inception until final project evaluation.

### 4.2 Methods for achieving Beneficiary accountability in food security

The recurrent theme during discussions with the accountability experts that were interviewed or responded to the questionnaires was that the organizations they were working for were basically targeting 3 core areas for their efforts towards accountability to communities. These areas are Information provision, Active participation and Feedback, Complaints and Response mechanisms. All the participants that were interviewed, that are working in organizations targeting food security alluded to the fact that their accountability efforts were mainly centered on the above areas.

#### 4.2.1 Active Participation

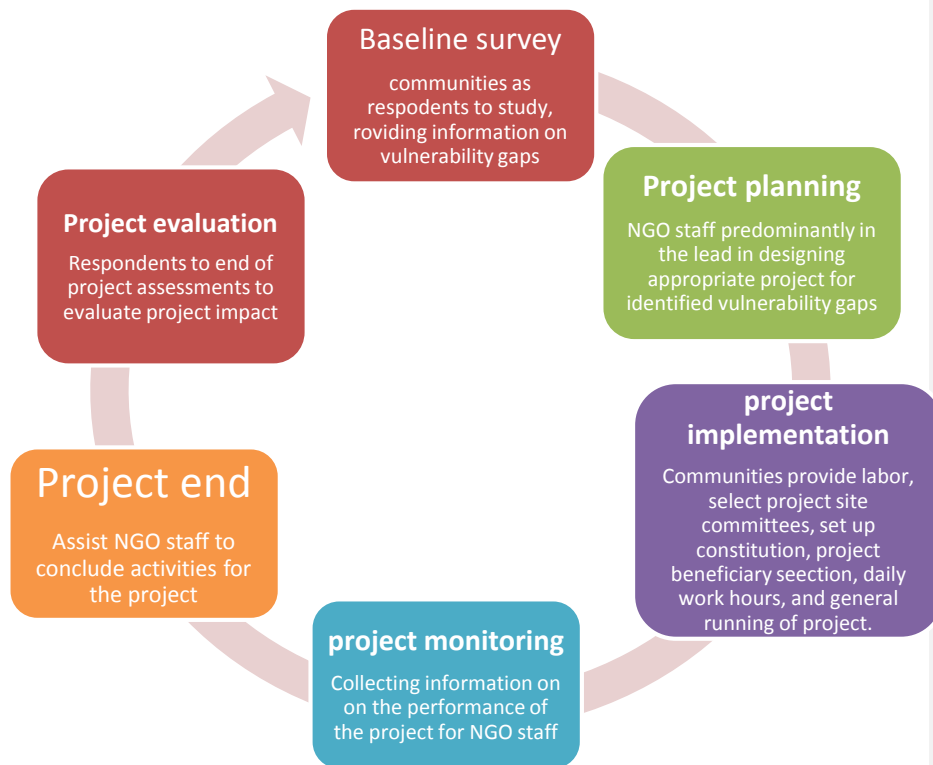
All participants agreed that one of the critical elements to accountability, which they were doing was the inclusion of project beneficiaries at various stages of the project, especially during project implementation. In this case, communities would be part of the discussions on the details of the projects, especially in Asset creation activities<sup>7</sup>. These activities usually involve the building of new or rehabilitation of old assets such as boreholes, irrigation schemes, livestock dip tanks and community gardens, among many other such activities that are meant to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable communities to be food secure by having secure livelihood strategies to their disposal. In terms of ensuring active participation in these projects, therefore, organizations are working on ensuring that beneficiaries are consulted on their preferred working hours, selection of community project committees (through votes), the drafting of a project site Constitution, or Code of conduct, and other details involving the implementation of the project. Three organizations who participated in the research go so far as to share the budget for each particular project such that communities know what their project is worth. As one NGO employee put it, “*This is something that is not ordinarily done by NGOs*”. Other NGO staff also shared that budget information is not generally shared, for fear of further scrutiny by different stakeholders, including local government structures,

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<sup>7</sup> Asset creation projects in Zimbabwe mainly focus on rehabilitation and in some cases building of irrigation facilities, dip tanks, and gardens. Usually, they are interlinked, and always begin with a food distribution component (USAID 2003).

such as Councils, in their different areas of operation, hence usually, it was easier not to share this information.

**Illustration 2: Project Cycle showing levels for beneficiaries' active participation**



Project beneficiaries who were also asked directly concerning this component also confirmed that they were duly involved in the project participation, although most agreed that it was only at the implementation stage that their participation was actively sought, in terms of either providing labor needed to start the projects, and mobilizing beneficiaries to the projects.

Fig 6 above is a depiction of the collection of activities that actual beneficiaries to food security programs, who participated in the research indicated as how they participated different stages of the project, in the form of a project life cycle diagram. It is evident that the core decisions on what kind of projects would be implemented in any particular area lay largely with the implementing NGOs, and beneficiary communities only provided answers to questions that were asked as part of the baseline assessments which were conducted to find out what vulnerabilities lay in the community, which would influence the decision for what kind of project to implement. At the implementation stage, communities seem to be more actively involved in the project, and have practically the run of the project, with some support from NGO staff. Communities also indicated that they filled out various forms, and recorded daily and weekly updates to monitor progress of the project, and identify ways in which to respond to challenges that arise as the project is still running. At the project evaluation stage, beneficiaries were the main source of information for the analysis on how the project had affected the lives of the target community, and to what extent it had reached its objectives. They were also asked to attend project evaluation workshops to give their input on how the project had performed, although this was not a usual practice, and NGO staff confirmed that these workshops were usually conducted in the absence of project beneficiaries.

For one organization, there has been a realization that there was a difference in participation levels for their beneficiaries; hence their system for involving project beneficiaries also takes into account these differences. As one respondent from this organization put it,

*This (participation) is at two levels which are stakeholder participation and right holder participation. Involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the project assist in them participating at any time during project implementation. Right holders also participate at all levels of the project cycle; they participate in coming with ways of how the project successfully attains the goals.*

In this instance, this particular organization has designed their system for community involvement by coming up with two types of stakeholders that are usually directly affected, and so directly involved in the project. Stakeholder participation looks at engaging local leadership of the target project area, such as Council and village heads. These would assist in mobilizing communities, identifying the most vulnerable villages and coordinating communities to participate in the project.

It is at this level that NGO staff said they would work to getting the support of these stakeholders, by offering to contribute to District and village plans at council offices, and so the initial planning would also be heavily reliant on the active participation of these stakeholders. One respondent went so far as to say that *“the active participation of stakeholders was the element that would make or break any project. If stakeholders are not on board, the project fails, but if they are actively involved from the onset, they can rally communities to also take ownership of the project”*.

Furthermore, right holders are the direct beneficiaries to the project, and their participation would be centered mainly on the actual implementation to the project.

#### **4.2.2 Information Provision**

All respondents said that the aspect of information provision was well intertwined within their food security projects, hence different types of information are said to be shared with program beneficiaries at different stages of the project. At the commencement of the project, beneficiaries would be given information on the following: the name of the project, its duration, the donor funding the project, in some instances, as well as its general scope. One participant said that *“The district stakeholders receive project updates on weekly basis and monthly reports are sent detailing the project progress, challenges and how some have been addressed by the implementing agency.”*, while another research participant said,

*Involving stakeholders in all the process of programme implementation, starting the programme inception with the stakeholders explaining the goal of the project, its objectives, the work that the project will involve, the budget that is available for the project’s programming and how we intend to be conducting project activities, how the right holders will be participating during the project life cycle and how they are going to benefit from the project. Stakeholders also contribute to how the project can be implemented well in collaboration with relevant government arms who will be instrumental in the success of the work.*

In this particular organization, Information sharing is a standalone standard which they are working towards, for HAP certification. However, discussions with some project beneficiaries revealed that this information was not widely known due to the fact that it was rarely repeated from the first time it was shared with them when the project first starts, hence communities would

forget important details. Communities thus indicated the need for periodic review on all information, and not just updates on the current status of the project, as is the current norm, but also extra efforts from the NGOs to schedule meetings with them just to ensure they have adequate information about the project.

It was also revealed that due to the fact that Food security in Zimbabwe is usually tied to the Food aid component, beneficiaries normally received information on their food entitlements: quantities per individual and household level, distribution times and general contact details of the organization in case of mistakes in calculation of rations. This was usually the project officer responsible for that particular project, and these would usually be the officer's cell phone number. Some beneficiaries indicated that they also were given information about where the organization offices were physically located, and some actually said they had been there several times to follow up on some issues concerning the project with the implementing agency. Most NGO staff declared that information is given to communities predominantly through project meetings and focus group discussions conducted for collection of monitoring data by NGO staff. According to the respondents whose NGOs are subscribing to the HAP standard, the following information was to be made publicly available to intended beneficiaries, relevant stakeholders, and especially project beneficiaries:

4. Organization background mission vision and values
5. Humanitarian Accountability Framework
6. Humanitarian plan ( in the case of emergency response)
7. Beneficiary selection Criteria
8. Project Progress reports
9. Complaints Handling procedure

For food distribution activities, and even at some project sites, there were also information boards with posters or announcements to give the necessary information to communities; this practice was only common to two organizations.



Picture: Example of an information board at a project site



*Source: Tearfund Complaints Handling guide*

Only one organization actually had information boards such as the one above on which they shared information about the project with their beneficiaries. The rest sad that due to financial constraints, they could not purchase these information boards, but felt they were effective and vital in maintaining information flow between an NGO and project beneficiaries. The rest relied primarily on verbal communication, as described above.

#### **4.2.3 Complaints, feedback and response mechanisms**

All participants interviewed confirmed that Complaints and response mechanisms (CRMs) were a common mechanism for accountability in food security programs. Half of the organizations surveyed had formal, written down Complaints and response procedures for both staff and beneficiaries, and the Help Desk was almost always the major mechanism for getting feedback, both at project sites, as well as during food distribution exercises. Here, there were however, variations in terms of which people actually constituted the Help desk, as for some organizations, it was Community led, with ordinary project beneficiaries being selected by the community to make up the Help desk, with the organization staff giving the necessary support. For other

agencies, the Help desk constituted Village head, the local Chief, or their representative, and two ordinary villagers. Fig 8 below shows a typical Help desk during a food distribution exercise.

**Illustration 3: Example of a Help Desk during a Food distribution exercise**



*Source: ACDIVOCA image archives*

In Asset creation activities however, the Project Site committees also functioned as the mouthpiece to forward concerns to the organization, as well as getting a response from that organization, primarily through the Project site committee. Beneficiaries indicated that this system was more or less in line with their way of doing business and they were more comfortable with maintaining this status quo. During Food distribution exercises, all organizations actually set up physical Help desks on site, where communities could go and lodge formal complaints concerning previously set criteria. In addition, for more sensitive complaints, some organizations use the Suggestion box where communities are encouraged to put in their complaints.

Illustration 4: Example of a suggestion box at a project site



Source: Catholic Relief Services image archives

These suggestion boxes are locked and only the organization staff, designated for this task, has access to them, and after the food distribution exercise, these complaints would be taken out, and analyzed. All respondents whose organizations are using these suggestion boxes agreed that they had a specific timeframe they gave for processing and giving back a response to communities on the complaints. This time was usually four weeks, with some being delivered earlier. There was also a consensus that this response time period was one of the things that organizations monitored during their monthly assessments, and asked communities directly how they viewed their turnaround time for handling and responding to feedback. Some organizations felt that having a formal mechanism for collecting complaints was actually opening a Pandora's box, and actually inviting complaints from project beneficiaries, which most of the time field staff could not solve as some complaints would lead to a change in project design and their respective organizations were not open to doing that. However, the general consensus was that complaints and response mechanism (CRMs) were vital in ensuring that the project was still on course, and monitoring staff

behavior through ensuring that there was no corruption or abuse of beneficiaries that was being conducted, as beneficiaries were encouraged to report these sensitive issues in the suggestion box.

Overall, there seemed to be a clear distinction in the level of engagement in setting up systems for accountability between the organizations. Those that were formally committing to HAP standards for instance, were investing more and as such, were leading the pack in terms of having effective systems for accountability, while those that were utilizing their own internal systems or were subscribing to Internationally recognized standards, such as SPHERE, which are more of reference guides and are not formally reported on, and required no formal commitments against the attainment of their standards, are not as consistent in their application of their accountability standards. Discussions with communities did not necessarily yield exact names of accountability standards or any formal framework, and most cases, what the organizations were saying they are doing as efforts towards accountability was in contrast to what communities were saying themselves. Collectively, however, organizations were working towards HAP certification, while one was already HAP certified, and was now working for second level certification.

Staff training is one other component that two organizations highlighted that they invested in, as a form of accountability initiative to support the three formal ways of achieving accountability, as discussed above, which are active participation, information provision and complaints and response mechanisms. According to one respondent, *“Training staff during induction on Accountability and how to apply the principles in practice”*, while another simply said that staff were being consistently trained on accountability issues, to make them more aware of appropriate behaviors that are expected of them in their engagement with project beneficiaries. In essence, it was agreed by NGO staff that were interviewed that for all the three major components of accountability to be successful and indeed effective, it was crucial that field based staff, and their managers, be well equipped to implement these mechanisms and offer the necessary support to the communities who would be using them as well as benefiting from them. This is why these organizations also had staff directly dedicated to accountability at district level, such that they would see to the implementation and monitoring of accountability standards at all project sites.

It is crucial to point out that for the first three questions during interview and distributed questionnaires, all respondents indicated that their knowledge of accountability standards, the ones that were being observed in the whole organization, and the ones that were specifically tailored or

targeted towards Food Security programs, were literally the same. One respondent said” *because our donor in a food aid program asked us to put a complaints desk during food distribution, that was when we started doing accountability, and that is largely the area where most efforts for accountability are being realized.*” Another respondent declared that their funding partner had asked them to consider accountability due to the nature of the work they do, which has high level interaction with vulnerable communities, and as such, they were mentored by the funding partner to actually train staff on Good Enough Guide and Livestock Emergency Guidelines to be aware on how to achieve accountability in food distribution and agricultural production projects. For International NGOs, whose reach is more global, respondents reported that the drive towards accountability comes from their head office, and they get financial and other support in order to ensure its implementation. Without this kind of high level support, accountability is otherwise not taken seriously at all.

#### **4.3 Relevance of accountability standards in Food security programs**

There was general consensus amongst respondents working in food security programs that as a result of Accountability standards within their food security and other programs, in whatever form, were proving to be very beneficial to organizations that were implementing them. When asked exactly how relevant accountability standards have been to food security programs, respondents gave testimonials on how their food security activities have improved, as a result of deliberate efforts in applying accountability standards in their work. The testimonials are quoted directly, as follows:

- a) *“Budget information has been shared with stakeholders, a practice that shows high level of transparency. This also has enabled beneficiary communities to appreciate the cost of running programmes and enables for communities to be more actively engaged in the programme.”*
- b) *“Our 2010 Strategic plan was influenced by the Accountability scorecard which our funding partner asks us to fill at the completion of each year, hence we can track how we have been doing well, and notice gaps where we should put more effort”.*

- c) *“As a result of our continued engagement with beneficiaries through our Complaints and response mechanism, we managed to start distributing cereal in Gokwe, an area that was meant to receive only cash, but having received feedback from the community that cereal was not available on the local market, hence we managed to begin purchasing grain from areas that had surplus, and distributing to areas with little grain, locally”*

A close perusal of the above testimonials shows that participants were convinced that accountability standards have resulted in improvement in program implementation strategy, influenced organizational strategy, and improved the quality of their development efforts. Furthermore, participants reiterated that it was after they had actually seen these benefits that they began to be convinced that indeed, it was worth it to implement accountability standards. One respondent actually said *“At first, I thought that this is a waste of time, and is not part of my job description. But now, I realize that it has always been part of my job to be accountable, now my work is easier”*. Some participants also described situations in which a lack of application of accountability standards resulted in loss of food commodities, hence failure to fulfill the overall objective of providing the adequate assistance to communities. As a result, now they take accountability standards, especially maintenance of CRMs more seriously as they provide vital information that protect the integrity of the organization and its project through reduction in corruption activities among project staff, and some members of local leadership as well. One respondent said that

*It is because of information that we get from the community and other stakeholders through Help desks and suggestion boxes that we now know how food was being diverted, building material stolen and young women in the villages we work in were being abused by staff. This has helped us to identify the gaps we have in so far as security and staff training is concerned. So now we also run trainings for staff on Sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as human rights, so that they can also value the communities we work with and treat them well, because ultimately we are here because of these communities.*

Beneficiaries who participated in the FGDs also expressed that the increase in information provision from organizations' accountability efforts had also made them more aware of what they should be expecting from organizations. Due to this increased openness from NGOs, beneficiaries

now feel they can trust these agencies in terms of what they are promising by bringing in these different programs, and so they are also willing to support these efforts by participating fully in the food security projects. The existence of CRMs has also ensured that they can submit their concerns to the organization, which to them shows that the organization is putting extra effort to involve them and include them more in project activities. This made them feel that their issues were taken seriously, and they thus felt partly responsible when projects achieved success because they had been providing feedback along the way which led to some adjustments being made to projects implementation strategy, making them more efficient at responding to the actual needs of target beneficiaries.

One respondent also said that accountability standards was also an incentive for staff to do their work better, as their engagement with communities becomes better and easier. According to this responded,

*Staff capacity have also gone very far in giving staff confidence in the day-to-day delivery of their duties. Staff feel confident in enhancing participation within the project and this has improved the ways in which they now deal with complaints”.*

This sentiment was echoed by all interview participants, as some of them reiterated that,

*It was because of this new way of focusing on actual quality standards which began to make staff performance appraisal easier as they would set themselves goals against the accountability principles, which contribute to organizational mission and goals, hence their performance would be measured against these.*

As a result, not only is accountability relevant in improving project delivery and overall program quality, due to improved strategies for delivering development assistance, but it also offers a way for development organizations’ staff to improve on the way they conduct their duties, and also contributing to overall organizational aims. This makes human resource management easier as staff can also be supported to do their best, while working towards the overall organizational culture. One respondent indicated that their organization was implementing human resources standards from the Active Learning Network for Accountability of personnel (ALNAP)’s guide to Human resource management. This accountability standard gives guidelines on how an organization can become more accountable by focusing on the development and professional

growth of its human resources. The rationale for this standard is that if organizations invest more in developing the capacity of their staff, and building up their knowledge and relevant skills set will eventually lead to overall achievement of accountability by the whole organization, as staff are ultimately responsible for implementing these accountability standards in the first place.

One respondent said that accountability standards offer a wide range of benefits, at all levels of the project, in terms of the fact that

*They have helped the organization clarify a lot of issues stakeholders have with the NGO sector, be it targeting and selection of beneficiaries, limited capacity for the organization to implement some works – financial constraints as a result of sharing information on budgets, among other issues. They have also assisted in gaining trust from the stakeholders as a result of our transparency in programming.*

Hence, not only is accountability crucial at the implementation level of any project, but according to this particular respondent, at all organizational levels as well, and in the different programs that are being conducted by the organization. Some organizations have had trickle down effects to programs such as health, where service delivery to patients has improved due to the implementation of CRMs, which are opening the opportunity for dialogue between patients and their health care providers, in two of the surveyed organizations. These CRMs for this particular agency were taken up in the health project due to the successes they enjoyed in the food security projects of the organization, hence it was more of an adoption of a good practice, from one sector to another.

#### **4.4 Challenges in the current application of accountability standards in Zimbabwe**

The researcher also discussed with interviewees and during FDGs as well, what would be some of the challenges that Staff specifically implementing accountability standards would face, as well as what challenges communities themselves have seen in the implementation of these accountability standards. The figure below shows the different forms of accountability that currently exist in the development sector, which were also alluded to during discussions with accountability experts participating in the research.



Illustration 5. Different forms of accountability



There are 3 levels of accountability that were highlighted by respondents from 3 organizations that is upward accountability to donors, accountability to partners, as well as downward accountability to project beneficiaries. Other respondents also argued that they also needed to have internal accountability to their staff as well, so that they can also be accountable to project beneficiaries.

#### 4.4.1 Too many accountability standards for NGOs to follow

One interviewee declared *“There is no clear understanding of accountability in Zimbabwe context, and too many accountability initiatives, which confuses people: and these initiatives echo each*

*other*". This view echoes the underlying theme that was discussed on the same subject in Chapter 2, about how accountability is understood differently by different organizations, hence the existence of the different levels of accountability, as shown in the diagram above. The fact that there are so many different descriptions of accountability has been indicated as another challenge within the Zimbabwean because development actors simply do not know how to be truly accountable to their relevant stakeholders, as there seem to be so many variables in achieving accountability, and implementing accountability standards. The Zimbabwe food security context shows that it is indeed a big challenge, in so far as the application of accountability standards is concerned, because organizations have no set uniform way of doing this, and so cannot be measured against their effectiveness in achieving accountability.

The most worrying thought that all interviewees had was the sheer multitude of accountability standards that exist within the international humanitarian and development sector. Although, as mentioned previously, the most common ones are SPHERE and HAP standards, there are so many others in existence that organizations are not aware of, and thus there is always the risk of "*not doing enough to be truly accountable*", according to one very concerned participant. Another respondent felt there was just no cohesion, and no discussion of accountability at the national level, with different organizations and stakeholders, hence, no real drive for individual organizations to be accountable. One recurrent response was there is no uniform way in which accountability standards are currently being implemented in Food security programs in Zimbabwe. As a matter of fact, this is also evident in other programs as well. Some participants pointed out that these inconsistencies can also be seen as levels in accountability in different operating areas, which are usually districts, normally depended on the individual capacities of the District Field managers, or coordinators. All participants agreed that application of accountability standards does not have to be uniform, but at least there should be a benchmark which organizations implementing food security programs within the Zimbabwean context, should be able to subscribe to, as a minimum standard, and be measured against.

Most respondents felt that if, for instance, an Organization's district team leader is more driven to faithfully apply accountability standards, and supports field officers to do the same, then it is likely that the district will achieve better accountability than another district, in which the team leader is more concerned about achieving project objectives, then also dedicating time to accountability.

One respondent said that “When *organizations get their grant (for a project), they are so driven to deliver those targets, but do not check on the implementation of accountability standards*”. Hence, priority is given more to achieving overall project objectives, as set in the grant agreement, according to most respondents, rather than also including issues to do with accountability, even though not technically alluded to in project documents.

Furthermore, half the respondents admitted that accountability standards have been viewed as extra burden and more duties for staff, hence staff are reluctant to put any effort in activities that are not directly tracked or monitored, and thus not usually reported on, in the periodic assessment reports that are submitted to the donor. This implies that there is either not enough information regarding the application of these standards, such that staff feel an extra burden for it, or the decisions and processes in setting up these standards within the organization were not inclusive of staff, and as a result, are viewed as yet another management system for monitoring their performance, rather than a strategy for organizations to improve on their project delivery.

#### **4.4.2 The cost of implementing Accountability standards**

All interview respondents agreed that even though accountability standards were a necessary component in achieving good program quality, there are also some cost implications attached to their effective implementation. As such, one organization had to purchase lockable, wooden boxes for suggestion boxes, as well as wooden information boards. Another respondent indicated that as a measure to ensure communities understood the new drive towards accountability for his organization, the organization had to do a massive information campaign on what information would be shared with communities, and which methods would be used to share this information, as well as how and how the organization’s chosen CRM would function. Material to legitimize this system in the form of T-shirts, hats, and reflective vests for both the staff dedicated to implementing this system, as well as community Help desk committee members.

Furthermore, most of the respondents said that to make the system more effective, the organization had to employ extra staff, who are based either at the National office, but most commonly, at district level, and these would be called Humanitarian Accountability officers. In half of the

organizations, this function was added to the Monitoring and evaluation officers, as an additional function under that department. One participant said *“They (accountability standards) have prompted our budgeting to include staff capacity and improve the way we launch programmes on being transparent throughout the project’s life cycle”*. As such, respondents felt that this is also why their organizations had been a little reluctant to start the process, as it meant spending money they had not budgeted for. However, all respondent agreed that the long term benefits were worth the cost. Participants in the FGDs also expressed the gap that currently exists in the lack of proper, more robust and safe feedback systems, not only for the reporting of complaints, but also as a formal channel for giving their appreciation as well as offering their own opinions about different aspects of the program they were participating in.

#### **4.4.3 How to improve accountability practices in Zimbabwe Food security sector**

Having discussed the whole status of accountability in food security programs in Zimbabwe with respondents, some discussions around how the situation can be improved were offered by participants. All participants felt accountability standards should become a core issue in any development program, and not just food security, and as such, collective effort should be taken by NGOs to begin to support each other to do this.

One respondent felt that for accountability to be an accepted concept in Zimbabwe, *“Zimbabwe Civil society organizations should put things in order, then talk to communities about accountability standards, because communities have their own dynamics that have to be navigated”*. This same respondent also stressed the need to include various stakeholders in the discussion on how NGOs in the Food security sector in Zimbabwe can become more accountability. She declared that, *“ Most of the time, we impose programs we impose programs on the community, they are disempowered to give their own side of the story, and we continue to give them what we think they want”*, In this regard, the respondent was basically lamenting on the fact that even when discussions on accountability standards in the Zimbabwean context are being done, the NGO community should not leave out communities as well, so that they can contribute to the whole process, and ensure that these standards are tailored to the Zimbabwean situation.

After further prompting, on what “measures to improving accountability”, she was referring to, she reiterated that there was need for Zimbabwe NGO society to come up with standards for 1) beneficiary targeting 2) Food aid distribution 3) Food management 4) Complaints and Feedback mechanisms 5) Staff behavior, especially issues to do with Protection from sexual abuse and exploitation. In the view of this respondent, if Zimbabwe NGO sector come together and collectively agree to design and implement standards based on the 5 areas as highlighted above, this would go a long way in improving accountability to beneficiaries by all NGOs operating not only in the food security sector, but in other sectors as well, such as Health promotion, HIV and AIDS, Shelter, and water and sanitation, among many others.

#### **4.4 SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS**

The researcher also utilized two reports that outline survey results on studied conducted to measure accountability to beneficiaries for food security programs, in Zimbabwe. These two studies were done by Save the Children (UK) and The CDA Collaborative Learning project.

##### **4.4.1 Reports on special surveys on Accountability to beneficiaries**

As another measure to determine the practices on the application of accountability standards in Food security programs in Zimbabwe, the researcher also undertook an analysis of organizational reports on the subject. Hence, this part of the research will present findings, based on organizational reports reviewed by the researcher, which detail how accountability is been implemented in Food Security programs, in Zimbabwe.

##### **4.4.2 Report 1: Children Feedback Committees, Save The Children (UK).**

The first report the researcher reviewed was a report on a survey that was conducted by Save the Children (UK), for a study they conducted in Zimbabwe, in the Mutorashanga area. The research title is “Children’s Feedback Committees in Zimbabwe: An Experiment in Humanitarian accountability”. The project was implemented in 2003, and was centered on establishing child-led Complaints and response mechanisms for their Food aid program, in Mutorashanga. The project was born out of the realization that children were often not involved in the general activities of the Food aid program, their perceptions were not sought, their participation was not encouraged in any aspect of the program, and there were no child friendly mechanisms to give feedback back to the program. The report stresses that all this negatively affected especially child headed or foster

children taken in by relatives when their parents passed away, largely due to HIV and AIDS related illnesses, who were mostly core recipients in food aid projects. According to the report the outcomes of the study and discussions with other agencies led Save the Children (UK) to the conclusion that accountability of humanitarian operations in Zimbabwe to populations in need was inadequate. This led to the establishment of a pilot project in which children were trained and given structural support to set up Feedback committees for children for the Food aid program being implemented in Mutorashanga.

#### **4.4.3 Report 2: The Listening Project, The Collaborative Learning Project (CDA).**

The second report the researcher reviewed is called the Listening Project. In 2006, Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), in collaboration with different developmental actors, combined efforts to evaluate the perceptions of communities and local stakeholders that had been recipient to aid assistance regarding the assistance they received. According to this report, the Listening Project sought the reflections of different people in the communities to assess the impact of aid efforts by international actors, for 20 countries across the world, including Zimbabwe. The study in Zimbabwe was conducted in December 2006, and involved the participation of four INGOs and one local NGO. The project basically deployed specialists in data collection, who were referred to as listeners into the community to hear about their experiences regarding the assistance they were receiving from international actors. These conversations followed no set format, but were just conversations that were held between listeners and communities that had received food aid from different NGOs. The insights collected during these conversations were later gathered, analyzed and presented in the Listening Project report, which was made publicly available to the international aid community and general public, to highlight some of the gaps in accountability practices, in order to improve their effectiveness.

#### **4.5 Analysis of emerging themes in secondary data analysis**

An analysis of these two reports brought out several themes, which had also been highlighted in the one on one interviews and Focus Group discussions. While the STC (UK) report was an experiment into the effect that Feedback mechanisms have as instruments to achieve high standards of accountability to communities, the CDA report was more of a survey into the general perceptions of everyone within the aid community on how they viewed the assistance they were

getting. The CDA report highlighted more gaps than actual successes, while STC (UK) report was a learning document, which had more positives in it.

#### **4.5.1 Importance of Accountability in food security projects**

Both reports reiterated on the overall importance of the need to have strong accountability systems at community level to foster a practice of participation, sharing and learning between the organizations and the communities they serve. STC (UK) discovered that the implementation of systems for accountability at community level is one sure way to ensuring the protection and empowerment of some vulnerable, but normally overlooked groups in the society. According to the STC report, *“promotion of humanitarian accountability is ...also about transforming the perception of people from objects into subjects, of creating a realization in the minds of those who work in emergency environments that the beneficiaries we target are individuals with lives every bit as ...significant as our own”*. The Listening project also reiterated on the importance of accountability, as it declares that the engagement of aid recipients is both a means and an end to effective assistance. It is expected to lead to greater recipient ownership and accountability, as well as sustainability of results.

Both reports again placed great emphasis on how crucial beneficiary participation is to program effectiveness. This participation was described in different forms, were issues to do with collaboration, coordination and consultation with project beneficiaries, at all levels of the project life cycle were indicated to be high on the agenda for development actors, if there were going to realize success within their programs.

Both reports also pointed out how crucial it was to have effective communication protocols and strategies, to ensure that beneficiaries knew and understood everything to do with the project they were involved in, as well as the organization implementing it. These would avoid misconceptions by the community, reduce expectations on areas the organizations could not cover, and generally increase the trust between NGOs and the communities they serve. Both reports viewed this as a critical element to foster more effective programming, hence better accountability.

While the reports made emphasis on the need to develop staff capacity and ensure their attitudes were appropriate to dealing with vulnerable communities, they differed in the reasons why this was important. STC (UK) believes that training staff on accountability promotes their adoption of

appropriate behaviors towards communities, which lessens incidences of Sexual abuse and exploitation, brought on by the unequal power dynamics between NGO staff and communities. According to this report, the most serious consequence of the inadequate promotion of accountability to beneficiaries in humanitarian work is evidenced in the kinds of abuse perpetrated by aid worker. The CDA report, however, stressed the need for training staff in order to develop lasting, and trustful relationships with communities, which ultimately foster ownership and strengthens the impact of assistance. According to the STC (UK) report, McIvor and Myllenen (2005:33) *“In Zimbabwe, individual NGOs have been training their staff on humanitarian accountability and this has helped reduce incidences of abuse.”* As a result, it seems that the more educated staff are in terms of the rights of communities and the responsibility they hold in order to fulfill those rights, the less staff actually are abusive towards the communities they work with.

#### **4.5.2 The consequences for lack of accountability in Food security programs?**

Both reports gave an outline of some of the effects of not having accountability standards in mainly food aid programs, such as the delivery of the wrong kind of assistance, or even inadequate, therefore inefficient to the needs of target communities. In the CDA survey, people actually commented that as a result of a lack of proper consultation mechanism by aid organizations, the community had no opportunity to ask for more appropriate, and sustainable forms of assistance, and always got food aid, which developed dependency syndrome, and did not build up their capacity to be self-sufficient, even after the organizations had left. One community member reiterated that *“NGOS are inflexible in the types of assistance, they don’t ask us what we need, and it is top-driven, and is simply channeled down to us”*. Another respondent in the CDA research felt that NGOs made assumptions about the needs of communities and thus delivered pre-packaged projects that proved inappropriate later on. The STC b (UK) gave an elaborate explanation, when it declared that

*The failure to adequately promote accountability of humanitarian programmes to beneficiary populations has several negative consequences. Assistance delivered in emergency situations can often be inappropriate if time has not been taken to find out what is required and what is acceptable to local communities. We have all read about or personally observed situations where, for example, inappropriate delivery of food aid has sometimes undermined local production through the distortion of markets or where the*



*introduction of a food commodity through aid programmes has subsequently created a demand for something which cannot be locally produced. At the same time, if communities are marginalized in terms of decisions around emergency interventions they begin to manifest a culture of dependency that can be difficult to change when the intervention is over.*

Basically, both reports stress on the need for engaging communities more effectively in the design and implementation of programs. The lack of collaborative effort between actors operating within the same area was sighted in the CDA report as a cause for concern, and a consequent of lack of proper mechanisms for fostering such relationships. Communities basically felt that this lack of coordination was resulting in one person being targeted for multiple programs, for instance food, seed, and agro-based income generation projects, mainly because the selection criteria for all these were similar. As a result, some who really do deserve this assistance were not able to access it. The CDA report emphasizes on the need for collaboration to be a standard that organizations working the food security area strive towards, to ensure more efficient delivery of their assistance. Also, even at community level, communities in the CDA study indicated that they were not consulted about lasting impact to the projects. According to the report “*Most feel they have no way to hold international assistance providers accountable for impact in their locations. Not all want to complain, but they do want to have an opportunity to provide feedback that is heeded*”. Indeed, one begins to understand why standards such as the HAP standard emphasis on accountability being the transference of power from development actors to assistance recipients. Judging by the comment above, communities feel powerless to give any feedback to aid agencies, which could be the result of different challenges, for instance the lack of a formalized system for giving feedback, or fear of recrimination by staff towards communities, if they were to give negative feedback. A common concern among communities, however, is that which has been highlighted previously, and that is the fear that if they complain, or indicate instance where development assistance is not being properly delivered, or adequate, then it will seem they are being ungrateful, and the assistance will be withdrawn. One can understand then, the hesitation communities might feel in using Feedback mechanisms developed by agencies, as they are also always unsure of how things will turn out, after they have given this feedback, especially negative feedback.

### **4.5.3 How do we improve?**

Both reports echo the same sentiments, that when there is a lack of accountability standards and systems, dire consequences are realized within the community, which also translates to program failure. Suggestions for improved within both studies were centered on implementation of safe, appropriate and culturally acceptable systems for giving, receiving and responding to complaints and feedback, staff training on appropriate behaviors and capacity building, and most importantly ensuring the provision of adequate, clear and honest information concerning what organizations do, how they do it, and when the projects will be completed.

### **Chapter Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to present data that was collected by the researcher through various means, and analysis provided on the data that was gathered. In essence, the themes that were formulated from interviews and FGDs, as well as those emanating from perusal of two different reports which outlined studies that were conducted by two different agencies on the application of accountability standards in the Zimbabwe food security sector. All this information is a build up to the conclusions and recommendations the researcher shall present in the ensuing Chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusions

- Although organizations are making some efforts in improving their accountability to program beneficiaries, the impression the researcher got during the research was that commitments to accountability were being made, but no concrete follow up activities to strengthen and fulfill these commitments was ever done. Ideally, the bulk, if not all organizations that were part of the research did have formal, although sometimes different systems and structures for accountability to beneficiaries, this did not translate to the actual beneficiaries, as beneficiaries sometimes gave conflicting evidence, showing that although organizations have these systems, they are not being communicated to beneficiaries, and were therefore not being fully utilized.
- It is important to note that the principles that form the core of the 2 commonly used internationally recognized accountability standards which were being identified by participants that is SPHERE and HAP standards are viewed as standards in their own right, in the Zimbabwean context. Furthermore, the assumptions then becomes that whether the organization is deliberately implementing SPHERE standards, or working towards a HAP certification, or just implementing their own policies, they are still working towards the same principles to achieve accountability to communities.
- Although communities are being involved in the project decision making process, they are more of just informed on decision already made, and asked to comment, but their contributions rarely influence the decisions already made. Hence, this is more of a token participation from communities, probably because that is a component that is attractive to donors when presented in the program proposal, but it is hardly implemented fully.
- When communities observe that the NGOs are making concerted efforts to invest some time and indeed money in setting up mechanisms for accountability, such as Information boards, or even purchasing lockable suggestion boxes, it shows how committed they are to the cause, hence this fosters appreciation and ownership of the program by communities.

- The availability of funds to support accountability activities is one issue that the researcher feels should be critical when an organization decides to begin the journey towards the implementation of accountability practices. As such, budgeting becomes important so that when they are required, funds are available to ensure that the necessary training for staff and community volunteers, and purchase of the relevant materials and services to implement accountability at the time they are needed, to avoid delay in project implementation activities. This will also reduce cutting of corners when staff are trying to implement accountability systems, without the necessary materials in place, due to lack of funds. For instance using make-shift cardboard suggestion boxes, in place of the lockable ones, which are more secure and safer for communities to use. Resorting to such measures may result in doing more harm than good to communities who use these systems, as they are meant to be confidential, but in the case of using cardboard suggestion boxes, confidentiality is compromised.
- NGO sector seems to be driven to implement accountability standards and system usually if the donor explicitly asks for such to be in existence within the projects they fund, or if their Head office requests that they do so, on the premise that this is the global strategy the organization is taking, in all its country programs.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Food and Nutrition council, as the governing body of Food security and nutrition activities in Zimbabwe, should begin to take the NGO sector to task on issues to do with accountability in Food security, to encourage NGOs to make efforts towards implementing these standards.
- The designing of accountability mechanisms, which have an emphasis on setting up Feedback, complaints and response systems should be usable by people of all ages, of both sexes, and of different physical capacities.
- Effective accountability can only be truly achieved when organizations take formal steps to putting systems in place, and open themselves up fully to scrutiny over their preferred accountability standards. Thus, only when organizations commit to either accreditation or certification Accountability standards Such as INGO Charter and HAP standards, they can

they be truly effective in their work. This will also translate to a change in organizational culture, and overall practice.

- Successful application of accountability standards in an organization lies with staff capacity and their buy-in into the concept. As such, staff can be engaged in the design and testing of accountability systems, so that they also take ownership of these systems, and thus be able to use them effectively.
- Organizational culture and practices must reflect the fact that beneficiary is a priority to the organization. As a result, organizations should work at putting in place Accountability policies or similar, to show their commitment to being accountable to their target communities.
- Zimbabwe NGO sector should begin to work towards their own National accountability standards, which are designed for their own environment, and hence, are more relevant, therefore applicable and easy to maintain. This can be achieved by NANGO, the self-proclaimed NGO network in Zimbabwe, engaging their members to start evolving their current Code of Conduct to make it more robust, but also with standards that each member can be measured against, and thus work towards improvement.
- It should be a priority of every organization that seeks to be truly accountable to have a specific budget item that should cater for availing funds for the purchase of relevant accountability materials and services.
- Organizations in Zimbabwe should seek to support each other to improve on accountability, from organizations that are implementing accountability standards, to some that are not yet doing quite so well. The culture of “self-isolation”, in which each organization seems to be currently involved in should reduce, so that they begin to collaborate in collectively improving their accountability to communities they work with. Additionally, the Zimbabwe NGO sector should also learn from other African National Accountability standards such as QUAM (Uganda), or VIWANGO, (Kenya), that have national accountability standards, which have been designed to their own context.

- Due to the fact that communities do not have access to the actual documents which contain the standards for which to hold NGOs accountable, it is difficult for them to realize whether the standards are being fulfilled or not. Furthermore, this leaves leeway for organizations to apply the standards selectively, especially for those ones that are used as only reference (SPHERE, GEG), and no additional follow up is done to ensure their correct, consistent use.
- The donor community should also take responsibility on the fact that if they do not ask for evidence on a NGOs accountability in Food security, and insist that systems for Complaints and Reponses be created, then NGOs will not always make the commitment to do so. Hence, traditional donors that fund the bulk of food security programs in Zimbabwe, such as USAID and World Food Program should begin to put issues to do with accountability as indicators for success and fulfilling project objectives. In this way, this becomes an incentive for organizations to do so, so that they record that they have met objectives, as per donor expectations.

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**APPENDIX A**

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**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Chairperson of the Department of Development Studies

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13 September 2015

To Whom it Concerns

Dear Sir/ Madam

**RE: Yvonne Madondo**

This letter serves to confirm that Yvonne is my student in the Master of Arts in Development Studies (MADS) degree programme. She is in her final year of study and is expected to carry out a research in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the MADS programme. Kindly allow her to collect data for her research.

Thank you in advance for being helpful in this regard. For any further details about the student, please feel free to contact me on [matunhuj@msu.ac.zw](mailto:matunhuj@msu.ac.zw) or 00263733809555

Yours faithfully

Jephias Matunhu (PhD)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jephias Matunhu'.

**APPENDIX B**

**RESEARCH INTO THE APPLICATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS IN THE FOOD SECURITY SECTOR IN ZIMBABWE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Questionnaire ID .....	Date of Interview .....
Interviewer Name: .....	University.....
Organization name .....	Organization Food security operating areas ( province/districts).....
<b>Confidentiality and Consent</b>	
I will be asking you a number of questions relating to accountability standards and how they are being implemented in your organization. The information gathered during the course of this research will be used strictly within the context of this research, and shall not be shared with anyone except mentioned in the composite of the research report. Your participation is greatly appreciated and is completely voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the research at any stage of the interview. Your honest and expert answers will be greatly appreciated, and I would be happy to share with you my final report, if you so wish.	
Do you have any questions that you need clarification on?	
<b>Introduction</b> My name is .....I am a student at Midlands State university, studying towards a Masters in Development Studies. I am carrying out a research on the Application of accountability standards in the Food security sector in Zimbabwe.	

**SECTION A: To find out which accountability standards are being implemented in your organization.**

1. What accountability standards are you familiar with, as an individual?	
2. What accountability standards being used by your organization in its day to day programming?	
3. From these standards, which ones are being applied in your food security programs?	
4. Is your organization a member/ signatory to any accountability standard, whether national, global	

or international? If yes, which ones?	
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**SECTION B: To evaluate the relevance of accountability standards within the Zimbabwean humanitarian aid context.**

5. In what ways has your organization been using accountability standards in food security programs?	
6. What kind of feedback are you receiving from your stakeholders concerning the accountability standards you are using in your organization for food security programs? (Beneficiary communities, staff, local leadership).	
7. Can you indicate instances of good practices that have been recorded by your organization as a result of using these accountability standards?	
8. What effect have these accountability standards had on your food security programs?	

**SECTION C: To highlight gaps realized in the implementation of the accountability standards and suggest improvements in the implementation of accountability in Zimbabwe.**

9. How have the accountability standards affected your food security program implementation strategy?	
10. Are there any lessons learned from your implementation of these standards?	
11. How would you improve on the use of the accountability standards in order to inform better future programming?	

12. What other accountability standards do you think can also be utilized in the food security programs of your organization, which are not currently being applied?	

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview schedule for accountability experts for Skype/ Telephone calls**

#### **A: Opening/ Commencing the interview**

Introducing the researcher: My name is..... and I am a student at Midlands State University, studying towards a Masters in Development Studies. I am doing a research on the Application of Accountability (also referred to as Humanitarian Accountability/ beneficiary accountability) in the Food Security Sector in Zimbabwe.

#### **B: Explaining the purpose of the interview**

I would like to ask you some questions pertaining to this concept, as well as how your own organization has been implementing it in its overall programming as well as in Food security interventions in particular.

#### **C: Motive for the interview**

I am hoping to use the information that I gather from this discussion to help me get a better understanding of accountability practices in Zimbabwe, and also identify any gaps and challenges that may exist in its application. Ultimately, the information gathered will be constituted in a report that will form part of my Masters research document.

#### **D: Length of Interview**

The interview should take between 30-40 minutes.

### **Transition to main interview (main body of the interview).**

#### **1: Establishing expertise of Respondent**

Allow me to begin by asking about your professional background and involvement in accountability

- a. What is your designation and overall responsibility in the organization?
- b. How long have you been involved in the field of accountability?
- c. Are there any other organizations that you have also worked in the same capacity or similar?

#### **SECTION A: To find out which accountability standards are being implemented in your organization.**

1. What accountability standards are you familiar with?
2. What accountability standards being used by your organization in its day to day programming?
3. From these standards, which ones are being applied in your food security programs?

4. Is your organization a member/ signatory to any accountability standard, whether national, global or international? If yes, which ones? ( e.g HAP, ALNAP)

**SECTION B: To evaluate the relevance of accountability standards within the Zimbabwean humanitarian aid context.**

5. In what ways has your organization been using accountability standards in food security programs?
6. What kind of feedback are you receiving from your stakeholders concerning the accountability standards you are using in your organization for food security programs? (Beneficiary communities, staff, local leadership).
7. Can you indicate instances of good practices that have been recorded by your organization as a result of using these accountability standards?
8. What effect have these accountability standards had on your food security programs?

**SECTION C: To highlight gaps realized in the implementation of the accountability standards and suggest improvements in the implementation of accountability in Zimbabwe.**

9. How have the accountability standards affected your food security program implementation strategy?
10. Are there any lessons learned from your implementation of these standards?
11. How would you improve on the use of the accountability standards in order to inform better future programming?
12. What other accountability standards do you think can also be utilized in the food security programs of your organ

**Closing the Interview**

**A: Thanking the respondent**

Thank you very much for taking the time to sit down with me and contribute to my research. I would be happy to share with you my research project document, once it has been completed.

**B: Maintaining Rapport**

Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think would be helpful to me to enrich my research.

**C: Follow up action**

I think I have the necessary information for now. Would it be alright if I contacted you should I require further clarity on your contribution? Thank you again, and I look forward to sharing with you the results of my research.