

BACKGROUND TO THE PUBLICATION

Community engagement is a critical component of civil society, international development practice and humanitarian assistance. It is based on the simple premise that communities should be listened to and have a meaningful role in processes and issues that affect them.

Around the world and across contexts, community engagement supports communities in taking their own action to address their most pressing issues.

Community engagement is intrinsic to the human rights-based approach – a UN guiding principle. For this reason, UNICEF Communication for Development (C4D) led the development of the *Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement*, through an extensive consultation process involving two dozen organizations, including humanitarian aid bodies, international aid agencies and educational institutions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim was to establish principles and parameters for communities to plan, take action and be heard in all matters affecting them. The *Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement* are meant to serve as a guide for stakeholders to establish an enabling CE environment, in which community engagement is intentional, structured and at the core of sustainable development progress. The guidance is intended to be a living document, to be updated often based on emerging experience and evidence.

The purpose behind the *Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement* is to

- **Establish** a common language among all stakeholders for defining community engagement principles, key actions, goals and benchmarks.
- **Provide** guidance for gender-sensitive community engagement approaches in high-, middle- and low-income countries, and in development and humanitarian contexts, across all sectors.
- **Address** four specific challenges in current community engagement practice: quality, accountability, harmonization and optimization.

HOW SHOULD THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MINIMUM STANDARDS AND INDICATORS BE USED?

The *Minimum Quality Standards and Indicators for Community Engagement* are intended for use by government leaders, policymakers, funders, researchers, and development and humanitarian practitioners. Specific areas in which they might be applied include proposal writing, budgeting, budgetary review, monitoring and evaluation systems, standard operating procedures, requests for proposals, scopes of work, and job descriptions. They also can be used to evaluate the quality of programmes, projects or initiatives; to structure community engagement actions, and to support training and capacity development efforts.

THE STANDARDS

The quality **standards** fall into four categories (Parts A to D), as shown in the table below. Each category is broken down into several unique **core minimum standards** (numbered 1 to 16 in the table).

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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|---|---|
| PART A: Core Community Engagement Standards | PART B: Standards Supporting Implementation |
| 1. Participation 2. Empowerment and Ownership 3. Inclusion 4. Two-way Communication 5. Adaptability and Localization 6. Building on Local Capacity | 7. Informed Design 8. Planning and Preparation 9. Managing Activities 10. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning |
| | PART C: Standards Supporting Coordination and Integration |
| | 11. Government Leadership 12. Partner Coordination 13. Integration |
| | PART D: Standards Supporting Resource Mobilization |
| | 14. Human Resources and Organizational Structures 15. Data Management 16. Resource Mobilization and Budgeting |

The six core standards in part A are cross-cutting ones that also apply to the standards included in parts B, C and D.

For each of the four broad categories of standards, the document gives a detailed description of the core standard, then lists the quality criteria detailing the minimum targets needed to achieve quality community engagement in that area. These **quality criteria** are universally applicable across all contexts and settings. Below each of the quality criteria is a **list of actions** required to achieve the minimum standard. These actions are meant to be flexible and should be adapted to local contexts as needed.

THE INDICATORS

Measuring the effectiveness, impact and results of community engagement is a critical part of good practice, and to assist in this the guidelines provide two sets of **community engagement indicators** to measure performance for each standard. The first set of indicators is aimed at national and local governments and the second set is aimed at the not-for-profit and community service sectors.

The indicators listed align with the definitions, standards and actions described above. The guidelines can also be used by practitioners in the field to come up with their own indicators that may be useful for specific projects, as they provide suggestions based on current practices. They also suggest new indicators for standards for which no measurement precedent exists.

Underlining the practical nature of the guidelines, they include two checklists:

- **a Community** engagement project cycle checklist (Annex 1) and
- **a Funding** institution checklist (Annex 2)

to be used as tools for practitioners to come up with their own checklists to make sure that CE standards align with their own institutional inputs and outcomes. The two checklists should be used to assess whether the CE standards have been adequately addressed and included at all stages of programme and policy design.

A third practical tool in Annex 3 provides a matrix to design a bespoke framework for community engagement measurement.