



ENFORCING HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST AMONG COMMUNITIES

In extreme emergency contexts, communities often rely on humanitarians to meet their basic needs, both during and in the aftermath of a crisis. With an unequal power dynamic between the served and those serving, humanitarians must ensure that assistance does not create harm or exacerbate existing animosities among affected communities.

Aid workers must be mindful of risks associated with protection, discrimination, sexual exploitation, and gender inequality. Inconsistent aid provision could hamper effective humanitarian response and put lives at risk. While professional experiences and technical qualifications are highly valued among humanitarians, a practical skillset and humanitarian competency-base is also crucial to ensure that assistance is allocated in proportion to need.

The Joint Emergency Operation (JEOP) is led by Catholic Relief Services and implemented through a consortium of partners including CARE, World Vision, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), the Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara, Food for the Hungry, and local church partners, Meki and Hararghe Catholic Secretariats. Over the last decade, the JEOP has provided emergency food assistance in response to acute food needs in Ethiopia. Currently serving over five million people nationwide, JEOP is one of the largest food operators working alongside the World Food Programme and the Government of Ethiopia.

The scope and scale of JEOP has expanded over the years. There are now approximately five thousand programs, operational and support staff contributing to project success, spread across six regions and 125 districts. To ensure that staff understand, embody and act in accordance with humanitarian principles, CRS technical leads designed a series of practical trainings for staff who work directly with communities. Sessions cover do-no-harm principles and protection, sexual exploitation, and abuse policies. Case studies, pictorial demonstrations, video illustrations, group discussions, reflection sessions and pre-and-post evaluations are some of the techniques used to ensure engagement and participation among partners. The modules and content are revised periodically to ensure relevance and contextual depth. With trainings offered multiple times a year,

in different regions and by different partners, JEOP has been able to strengthen its response among communities. In June 2021, as JEOP onboarded numerous new staff in Tigray in response to the conflict, a multi-day training was rolled out for 50 new recruits.

Halefom Gebremichael, commodity manager working for REST in Mekele, the capital of Tigray, is responsible for ensuring commodities are properly transferred between distribution points and verifying that households receive the right amount of aid.

“These trainings remind us to be sensitive to the cause and mindful of individuals’ unique vulnerabilities. A lot of the content might seem obvious, but it’s not until you learn it repeatedly that you realize its importance and practicality,” Halefom says. *“Thanks to trainings like these, we are reminded to give priority to women, the elderly and those with disabilities. We select shaded areas, so people don’t succumb to extreme weather. We locate distribution points close to communities, so they’re not exposed to risk. The more we can put these trainings into practice, the more we will be trusted and accepted by the communities which we serve.”*

Solomon Woldemiret is another trainee. *“It’s only from the JEOP that we receive training on emergency assistance, and this has been very helpful,”* he says. *“The fact that trainings are given in groups is what makes it most effective. As the way that CARE implements JEOP may be different from the way we carry out activities at REST and therefore, with the opportunity to take trainings together, we can share experiences and learn from each other.”*

Solomon is also part of a 12-member early warning committee comprised of experts in emergency, education, agriculture, water sanitation and hygiene, health, and gender. He makes his contribution sharing what he has learned with members of the committee. *“All the members of this group have direct contact with communities,”* he says. *“I know the trainings would be helpful for them too. So, I created short notes from these trainings, translated them into Tigrigna [the local language] and shared it to them.”*

It is important to ensure that aid workers operate within a framework of fairness and respect. JEOP is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders involved meet high quality standards. JEOP will continue investing in trainings tailored to core competencies that serve not only as a protective measure but as a long-term strategy for recovery and reduced vulnerability.

Author: Melikte Tadesse, Communications Manager, CRS Ethiopia

