Background:

The increasing number of displacement-affected populations in host communities has created a precarious situation where internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain invisible in humanitarian responses, lacking necessary resources and protection support.

Figure 1: Community Leaders from IDPs and Host communities interacting with the Regional Authorities during the ABA Desk Review Workshop in Mekelle, Tigray.

The concentration of services in designated sites has inadvertently created pull factors from surrounding areas and resulted in a general expectation among displacement-affected communities that they are only entitled to humanitarian assistance if they reside in the sites.

The protracted displacement situation in most of the displacement settings in Ethiopia, combined with the concentration of resources in specific sites and the emergence of new, unpredictable emergencies, has led donors to prioritize immediate crises over ongoing displacement issues. This shift in focus has significantly exacerbated tensions between the IDPs and host communities.

Host communities often perceive that IDPs receive assistance without sharing resources, while in reality, IDPs in these areas frequently do not receive aid due to their invisibility. The high cost of living in the host communities further compounds the issue, forcing IDPs out of rented accommodations and into deeper financial instability. Reliance on humanitarian assistance has also compromised their ability to pursue livelihoods, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and uncertainty.

To address these challenges, the CCCM cluster, as a key player in guiding displacement-affected people towards solutions, piloted its Area Based Approach (ABA) response in mid-2023, starting in Shire, Ethiopia.

This approach was necessitated to extend support beyond camps and camp-like settings, ensuring that both IDPs and host communities receive equitable access to information, assistance, and multi-sectoral resources based on their needs. Through the communities' (both IDPs and the host populations') participation, it coordinates and advocates a more inclusive and sustainable humanitarian response, allowing them to exercise their rights and dignity during the displacement situation and advocate for their preferred durable solution options.

Upon piloting, the interest of CCCM implementing partners grew to work on the Area Based Approach (ABA), incorporating the preferences of the communities as well. The CCCM cluster expanded its ABA

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response from two catchment areas[1] in 2023 to 17[2] in 2024 in partnership with the national and international NGOs and UN Agencies and relevant local authorities.

Objectives:

Although the ABA response was scaled up, there had been no impact assessment conducted. CCCM partners have been addressing the communities' needs and advocating for their preferred livelihoods, community resilience opportunities, and durable solution options. However, it became evident that minimum standards for the ABA response were necessary, and partners should harmonize their efforts to ensure communities receive equitable assistance and opportunities, avoiding long-term dependency on humanitarian aid. Humanitarian response should also link to community resilience and durable solutions. To address this, the CCCM cluster decided to organize an ABA desk review, involving community leaders from the catchment areas (including the IDPs and host community leaders), government authorities, and service-providing partners. The desk review workshop had three major objectives:

- To evaluate the perception of the Participants (Communities, Partners and the Government Authorities) before and after the establishment of the ABA in their areas,
- To identify and document key challenges and corresponding mitigating measures of the ABA response from the perspectives of communities, partners, government authorities, and other stakeholders.
- To collect and analyze feedback from the participants on the alignment of the ABA response with minimum standards of response.

Participants' Perception on before and after the ABA Response[3]:

Mekelle AoR:	
Before	**After**
Maichew: There are no formal IDP sites in Maichew anymore; all the IDPs now live within the host communities. When the sites existed, aid was focused there, leaving out those in host communities. Items like blankets, jerrycans, soaps, sanitary pads, and food were given at the IDP sites. When those in host communities asked for help, they were told they were not registered or prioritized. Even IDPs in camps didn't share information or resources. When the communities tried to reach out to the government authorities for the assistance, The government authorities were	OSSHD's ABA response has been providing various supports. The communities are now aware of the humanitarian responses happening in their area and understand that the most vulnerable people are prioritized. Collective kitchens and WASH facilities are available for those who cannot cook at home or afford water for cleanliness. The communities can safely discuss their problems with NGOs/INGOs and receive necessary information about the partners' responses, their capacity to support, and available opportunities. Regular meetings help the communities know the new information, updates and the challenges. However, the lack of health services has put the communities in a

[1] In an area-based approach, the catchment area is the geographical location that constitutes the main entry point for the implementation of the programme.

[2] Out of 17 ABA catchment areas, 14 are operational in Tigray. The three in Amhara were closed due to partners phasing out from the CCCM program because of funding shortages.

[3] Participants frequently noted that humanitarian responses often deprioritized displacement-affected populations living outside camp locations. The provided table aims to capture a wide range of diverse community perceptions both before and after the ABA response, elaborating on different scenarios.

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also very busy with different meetings. But there was no information about what the meetings were for. We also did not get prioritized support from the government. Even after the IDPs returned to the Southern zone (contested areas) and they return back to Maichew as they did not get any services and support, the government has not recognized that there are IDPs in the host communities.	difficult situation, as they have to pay to access government-led health facilities. ABA has given the recognition to the IDPs staying in the host communities for accessing services and raising any other issues. However, the services provided are too limited.
Abi Adi: Communities saw vehicles passing through their areas to the IDP sites, with loaded trucks entering the sites. Hoping for resources, they frequently asked for services but never received assistance. Additionally, information that could have been shared at no cost was also not the practice to share with among each. There was a significant communication gap between IDPs in host communities and those in sites, despite being displaced from the same locations during the conflict.	Communities are now informed about humanitarian responses across IDP sites and host community locations, as committees from both areas participate in meetings by OSSHD. Even 400 individuals who returned from Sudan before the war are receiving information and support when resources allow. The ABA supports not only IDPs in sites but also various displaced people in different residence settings.
Yachila: Communities often saw 'crowded humanitarian partners' at the sites and government offices, wondering what they were doing. Each time vehicles passed by, they hoped for updates, consolation, or support from the authorities. After a few days, they used to hear rumors that IDPs in the sites received various sectoral support, including cash, while those in host communities struggled for everything, even to make ends meet.	The communities expressed gratitude to the CCCM implementing agency, Positive Action for Development (PAD), for the ABA response. They appreciated the clarity it provided regarding the roles and services of various humanitarian partners in Yachila. PAD effectively raised awareness about how service gaps and needs are identified and referred to partners, as well as the challenges in resource mobilization. One major challenge identified by the communities was the lack of accurate data, which the government also struggled to manage. Now, both host communities and IDPs collaborate to support each other and mobilize resources accordingly.
AdiHaki Subcity: IOM-Managed-Adihaki Sub City is the most urban area in Mekelle town. The IDPs, apart from those staying at the sites, have been suffering despite some working in the host communities as daily laborers, although at very low wages. The IDP communities did not get support and access to information and spaces to raise their concerns or report safety and security issues apart from the generous support from the host communities despite the resources were so much stretched in the host community locations.	While the ABA response has begun, there is still room for improvement in community information dissemination. Although the protection desks established by partners are operational, other facilities are not yet fully functional. Increasing community awareness and understanding of the services ABA can offer is crucial. Additionally, there is a need for more consistent participatory events, such as meetings and community interactions. Currently, the impact of the ABA response in the Adihaki Sub City catchment area is not significantly felt, indicating opportunities for further enhancement.
Shire AoR:	
Before	**After**
Shiraro: Communities who could not access the services in the host communities did not have any choices. They had to compromise on whatever the	OSSHD-managed-ABA with minimal support capacity has had a significant impact on both IDP and host communities. IDPs who could not afford firewood now use communal kitchens

host communities could tell them to do. Many IDPs were compelled to go through negative coping mechanisms resulting in different protection issues.	to cook injera. Children and youth from both communities gather for recreational activities, and those who could not afford water for showers now access shower points provided by ABA response. The ABA team maintains a strong complaint and feedback mechanism where the communities have the trust for reporting and complaints safely. Additionally, the ABA team actively conducts awareness sessions for both IDPs and host communities.
Axum: IDPs were unorganized where the humanitarian partners were facing challenges even if they wanted to scale up the response in the host community locations where the IDPs were residing. The communication between the affected populations and the humanitarian communities was detached.	The OSSHD-managed ABA offers recreational activities, a mini-library, WASH facilities, and a communal kitchen. The multipurpose hall serves as a meeting space, feeding center, training venue, and distribution hub. Both IDPs and host communities have equal access to information, including WiFi for connecting with family and friends. They share updates, challenges, and resources. Partners find this response effective, developing weekly and monthly activity calendars for community access.
Endabaguna: The situation was chaotic, with IDPs facing enormous challenges in accessing services both in sites and host communities. The high IDP population in Endabaguna exacerbated these issues, leaving thousands without support and causing rent prices to soar due to competition for accommodation. The host communities were even more affected by the continuous influx, making the situation very difficult because the host community population in Endabaguna is less than the IDPs.	The IOM-managed ABA response provides health care, protection, safe spaces for women and girls, skill development training, and WASH facilities, significantly benefiting the communities. Outreach activities and a community feedback mechanism have addressed many issues, though more support is needed. The effectiveness of ABA has enabled IDPs in host communities to advocate for relocation. This participatory relocation has significantly contributed to decongestion and also, benefiting host communities by sharing ABA facilities.
Adwa: IDPs were not recognized for protection and service provisions, and the government had limited knowledge of displacement management. When seeking services in host community areas, people were directed to stay at designated sites to access facilities. When communities went to the sites expecting accommodation and services, they were deprived of both. The IDPs staying in the host communities had no options of getting support and making their voice heard.	The IOM-managed ABA addresses the needs of both IDPs and vulnerable host communities, regardless of their status. Host community members who previously lacked access to health facilities, now receive free services, though drug shortages remain a challenge. Free counseling and disease mitigation measures have greatly benefited the communities. Regular meetings between IDPs and host communities facilitate information sharing and mutual support, which would not be possible without the ABA response.
Shire: There were frequent cases of IDPs involuntarily moved by the landlords from host communities due to resource-sharing conflicts and rent payment issues. Lacking services and information, many IDPs went to the sites to ask for food, as staying at the sites was a requirement to receive food assistance.	The IOM and ANE-managed ABAs offer various services and awareness programs, although many protection and service provision issues persist. The presence of ABA has also helped government authorities and service providers understand that displaced populations do not prefer sites or camps as their primary option as long as they can access the information, safe environment to stay elsewhere other than the sites and clear communication between the IDPs and the host communities.

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Government Authorities' Reflection on ABA in Mekelle:

The Regional DRMC has no plans to establish new camps or sites. The focus is instead on strengthening existing ones and finding solutions for them, including primary priority as return. The government highlighted that many IDPs live in informal arrangements like rented homes, abandoned buildings, and churches, and is advocating for more partner support for IDPs in host communities facing inadequate housing and food insecurity where the importance of ABA is paramount. However, there should also be harmony among the humanitarian partners and the government authorities to make the ABA effective. *'WFP has excluded food support for the IDPs staying in the out-of-camp locations, worsening the vulnerability'* they mentioned. Government representatives acknowledged the effectiveness of the ABA response and stressed that its expansion of multi-sectoral responses including WASH, NFIs, food and other supports is essential to reach out to the affected communities. As the focus is in the out-of-camp/site locations, the response in the returnees' areas are more crucial than bringing new ideas in the areas where the IDPs have already been coping with their livelihoods in different ways. Therefore, it is highly recommended to scale up the response in returnee areas to coordinate immediate support and link community resilience activities and durable solution initiatives through the CCCM response.

They also mentioned that the government has committed to discussing electricity bill payments for IDPs in camps with relevant authorities and they expressed their responsibilities that the IDPs staying in the sites should also not be left out.

Government Authorities' Reflection on ABA in Shire:

The government authorities in Shire recalled that they advocated for scaling up responses in host community areas from the onset of the crisis in early 2021. That was one of the reasons the government authorities kept counting the IDPs in host communities according to their Woredas of displacement but not according to the sites and their current residential locations. Over the past four years, resources have primarily been used in the sites, which could have made a significant difference if allocated wisely to address immediate community needs and strengthen government structures. The concept of working and implementing the humanitarian response beyond the camp is now being implemented. The government would always support such approaches that address immediate needs and gaps while also fostering community resilience and livelihoods.

Service Providing Partners' Reflection on ABA Response:

Partners appreciated the approach as it helps identify the neediest individuals who lack access to resources due to not staying at designated sites. It encourages communities and partners to think beyond immediate day-to-day responses. ABA has strengthened coordination with government authorities, communities, and stakeholders to address needs. Further efforts are needed to cascade the ABA and its modality, ensuring multisectoral and multi-stakeholder understanding, which aids in linking with durable solution actors. Engaging communities require managing their expectations while providing opportunities to build resilience and explore more options with minimal support from humanitarian and development partners.

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Key Findings and Challenges

1. **Awareness Gap**: Despite the ABA response being found effective to the communities who are aware of the response, many IDPs in host communities are unaware of the services available through the ABA response and in community information centres. This lack of information prevents them from accessing essential support and resources.
2. **Inequality in Service Provision**: IDPs in host communities do not receive the same level of support as those in camps even in the locations where the ABA responses are functional. This disparity leads to unequal access to services and exacerbates vulnerabilities among IDPs in host communities.
3. **Infrastructure Challenges**: Community information centres face significant issues, including insufficient water supply, unreliable electricity, and inadequate space. These challenges hinder the effective delivery of services and support to the displacement-affected communities.
4. **Health and Cash Assistance Needs**: IDPs require healthcare services and financial support to cover rent and basic needs. The absence of these critical services leaves IDPs struggling to meet their daily requirements.
5. **Sustainability Concerns**: Many projects have phased out, leading to a loss of essential services for IDPs. This discontinuity jeopardizes their well-being and underscores the need for sustainable, long-term interventions. Reduced partner involvement and funding limitations, including USAID cuts, have further negatively impacted service delivery.
6. **Coordination Gaps Among Stakeholders**: Significant room for improvement in coordination between humanitarian partners, government actors, and local authorities was highlighted and prioritized by the participants to avoid service duplication and inefficiencies.
7. **Limited Advocacy and Government Engagement**: City mayors were not included in the workshop, despite ABA centers operating on government-owned land. Stakeholders' mapping and engaging was one of the major gaps to be improved.
8. **Partners' Focus on Responding in the Sites:** Despite the need to scale up the response in the out of camp locations, partners' focus on the IDP sites only has significant hindrance in the effectiveness of the ABA response.

Recommendations

1. **Increase Awareness and Service Provision**: Conduct targeted awareness campaigns and strengthen ABA response through the information centres and outreach activities to provide equitable services for both IDPs in camps and host communities.
2. **Strengthen Infrastructure and Access:** Improve access to water, electricity, and other basic utilities at community centers. Expand crucial services such as healthcare and cash support

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without duplicating those available in government-owned facilities. The approach should complement, not duplicate, the government's efforts.

3. **Enhance Coordination and Stakeholder Involvement**: Strengthen collaboration between government authorities, partners, and community representatives, and assign dedicated Camp Management partners to ABA-supported areas particularly for leading the coordination under the ABA response framework.
4. **Expand Income-Generating Activities and Livelihood Programs**: Introduce vocational training, engagement of the communities who already have the skills in different opportunities to avoid the communities' dependency on humanitarian assistance.
5. **Ensure Sustainability and Long-Term Support**: Secure long-term funding, establish government-supported facilities, and develop structured partnerships for the sustainability of ABA centers.
6. **Increasing visibility of ABA and Advocacy**: CCCM partners have exceeded their capacity with limited resources, however, their efforts lack visibility among other stakeholders. ABA responses through community centers are often seen as agency-owned CCCM initiatives rather than a multisectoral, multi-stakeholder effort to address community needs. The CCCM cluster should advocate for greater stakeholder buy-in and allocate more resources to CCCM implementing agencies.
7. **Increased Role of Government Authorities:** Given reduced and frozen funding, increased role of government authorities is crucial. The CCCM cluster, alongside implementing agencies, should collaborate closely with government authorities to ensure a smooth exit and handover, maintaining the continuity of essential services through the ABA response.

Conclusion:

The ABA Desk Review Workshops highlighted the effectiveness of the Area-Based Approach in delivering services to IDPs in host communities, despite significant challenges. Addressing these gaps requires increased partner support, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced stakeholder coordination. Ensuring equitable access to services for all IDPs, regardless of location, is crucial for improving their living conditions and resilience. The CCCM and Durable Solution Working Group (DSWG) are the key responsible entities to link the humanitarian response with the durable solution options and work together to transition the emergency to recovery and resilience.

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