

Case study: Women Support Association (WSA) Using the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) for development programme interventions

Overview

Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the development sector perceive the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) applies only to humanitarian response interventions for crisis-affected communities - perhaps because of the prominence of the word “humanitarian” in its title. However, the essence of transparency, accountability and people management can also be applied and demonstrated in development interventions by local, national and international NGOs. The Nine Commitments of the CHS reference the need for humanitarian responses to put communities and people affected by crises at the centre.

What about development interventions that likewise target vulnerable people or communities affected by crisis? The recipients of development interventions also need projects to be implemented in a timely manner. They equally deserve to get information about the objectives of the intervention, and to have the possibility to raise complaints if they consider that these objectives have not been achieved. When it comes to development programmes and projects, it is equally important to coordinate interventions, to keep learning and improving, to deploy well-managed and competent staff, and to manage resources effectively, efficiently and ethically. Thus we can see that the commitments of the CHS are as relevant in the development sector as they are in the humanitarian sector. Based on this realisation, Women Support Association (WSA) has been striving to address these issues within the framework of the CHS in its development programmes.

Background

Established in 1995, WSA works to improve the social, economic, and physical wellbeing of vulnerable communities, especially women, in Ethiopia. In over 20 years WSA has demonstrated significant achievements on enhancing women’s social and economic capacity in rural and urban settings. Through working with communities, especially women and girls, WSA recognises the importance of being transparent and accountable to targeted communities. The ultimate goal of WSA is to narrow the gap between men and women, thereby bringing both genders on board for active participation and decision making in the fight against poverty. In the course of its interventions WSA found out that the CHS could play a substantial role in facilitating its development programmes.

Process

WSA previously developed its accountability framework based on the six HAP Standard benchmarks and has since revised it to be consistent with the Nine Commitments of the CHS. The accountability framework contextualised the CHS to the organisation’s development programmes. WSA has been disseminating the

CHS to its staff, target groups and stakeholders at different levels. WSA believes that successfully applying the Nine Commitments has resulted in increased quality when it comes to the delivery of development programmes.

The Nine Commitments of the CHS have been contextualised in WSA's accountability framework as follows:

- 1. WSA's target groups receive appropriate technical, material and financial support based on the findings of a previously conducted needs assessment.**

WSA is committed to implementing development programmes to its target groups based on a thorough assessment of their needs and the context in which they operate. These needs might change overtime, as well as the necessity to recognise the capacity of different target groups. Moreover, WSA makes sure that its development interventions are aligned with national and international development programmes and policies.

- 2. WSA's target groups receive support within the specified time frame of the project.**

WSA is committed to executing development programmes within the timeframes agreed between funding partners and respective government signatories for each project. In order to ensure that project activities start on time, WSA sets up a consultation process with target groups, government signatories and funding partners in a timely manner. This helps them avoid wasting the valuable time that should be used to provide much needed support to target groups.

- 3. WSA's target groups are not negatively affected by the intervention. They are more resilient and less at risk as a result of the intervention.**

WSA is committed to acknowledging and building on local communities' capacities when implementing development programmes. WSA aims to establish stronger links with local communities and government structures, while ensuring that target groups, stakeholders and staff have greater control over decision-making.

Through the needs assessment and context analysis established prior to the launch of the programme intervention phase, WSA has collected vital information on the sociocultural situation of the communities that reside in the intervention area. This allows WSA to consider the sociocultural situation of those communities, and to design appropriate interventions without affecting societal values. Moreover, the organisation tries to align its strategies with local and traditional knowledge, as well as with capacities and values of the communities.

- 4. WSA's target groups know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.**

This commitment emphasises the need for the inclusive participation of target groups in all of WSA's interventions. It requires the willingness to allow and encourage target communities to speak out and influence decisions. Sharing information, listening carefully to target groups and involving them in

decision-making contributes to more effective programmes and improves the quality of the services that are delivered to them.

Hence, WSA is committed to share its organisational profile, reports and project-specific information to target groups and stakeholders, as well as to the entire community residing in the intervention areas. When it comes to project-specific information, WSA shares the following: intended outcomes, implementation strategies, types of target groups and allocated budget). This will give all stakeholders a clear idea of what can be expected from WSA throughout the project period and how they can be actively involved.

5. WSA's target groups, staff and stakeholders have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints, they have the right to get timely responses to their complaints.

WSA's target groups have the right to complain and to receive an appropriate and timely response. Hence, it is essential to establish systems that enable beneficiaries to report any instances of misconduct and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) - as WSA mainly works with women and girls – or more general programme- or project-related concerns. These complaints and response mechanisms should be adapted to and developed together with WSA's various target communities in order to ensure that they are adapted to their needs and capacity, taking into consideration language, literacy and means of communication.

6. WSA's target groups receive coordinated programme support and complementary assistance from interventions.

WSA is committed to delivering well-planned, coordinated, timely and effective programme assistance to target groups that require collective action to enhance their resilience capacity. With this aim in mind WSA establishes coordination mechanisms, with a clear division of labour and responsibility, such as to identify gaps in coverage and quality. It is important to prevent the duplication of efforts and the waste of resources. The sharing of information and knowledge between stakeholders, joint planning and integrated activities can also ensure that WSA manages risk better and improves the outcomes of its programmes. To this end, WSA should work closely with stakeholders (target groups, government and community structures) in defining clear responsibilities with regard to the management and implementation of development programmes. WSA plans to establish partnerships with local government and community structures such as to enhance the capacity of these actors to deliver development support to the target communities in a coordinated, timely and effective way.

7. Target groups can expect a continuous improvement of the services delivered by WSA, as it learns from experience and takes target groups', stakeholders' and staff feedback into account.

WSA is committed to listening to feedback and addressing complaints in order to learn from the achievements and drawbacks observed during a programme's implementation phase. The organisation considers creating learning forums (e.g. review meetings and exposure visits) to facilitate mutual learning processes among target groups, stakeholders, funding partners, like-minded organisations and staff. WSA aims to continuously learn and improve service provision to target communities.

8. WSA's target groups receive quality services from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

Besides organisational policies and operational guidelines, the quality of the services delivered by WSA largely relies on the capacity of its staff. One of WSA's strategic objectives is to further develop its staff competencies.

It is believed that the actions of staff are the foundation of each of the Nine Commitments and the basis for an effective service provision process. Therefore, WSA is committed to recruit, train and manage staff and volunteers on the basis of its human resources (HR) manual and the CHS.

9. WSA's target groups can expect that the organisation is managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

WSA is committed to utilising resources efficiently in order to achieve the intended objectives. With this aim in mind, the organisation has put in place a financial manual. Project budgets are allocated for each activity in a cost-effective manner, and WSA has established an internal control system to manage and approve payments.

CHS mechanisms and teams

Since 2015 the coordination and management of the CHS is executed by WSA's monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) team. Moreover, there is a core group for inclusive human development (CIHD) at the head office and in each field office, which is in charge of coordinating cross-cutting issues including transparency and accountability. It is the CIHD's responsibility to make sure that the Nine Commitments are mainstreamed and effectively implemented across WSA's development programmes.

The core group has been undertaking activities such as:

- Facilitating monthly organisational meetings among staff members on CHS standards and the protection of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Organising training sessions for target groups, stakeholders and staff members on the CHS in a simplified way, notably by translating the standards into Amharic.
- Establishing, monitoring and assessing the functionality of a complaints-handling mechanism.
- Ensuring that information-sharing mechanisms are effectively put in place for each project.
- Sharing CHS experience with like-minded organisations and consortiums (CCRDA, CST).
- Ensuring that the CHS Commitments are incorporated when planning projects.

Lessons learned

Rolling out the CHS has allowed WSA to considerably enhance the quality of its service to economically and socially vulnerable communities. In this process the commitment of funding partners such as DanChurchAid, Christian Aid, CST and Concern Worldwide to strengthening the institutional capacity of WSA and supporting them in the implementation of the CHS has been vital.

Results and anticipated impact

It is too early to assess the overall impact of this initiative, but there are encouraging initial signs, such as:

- The quality of the project implementation has improved.
- Staff members' commitment and shared responsibility towards the quality of programming, from planning to implementation, as well as to effective monitoring, has increased.
- Accountability towards target communities has been incorporated in staff members' performance development review.
- Staff members and senior leadership have acquired the ability to adapt and link on-going development programmes to humanitarian response programmes in the event of a humanitarian crisis in the intervention area.
- Target communities' involvement in the design, implementation and joint reviewing of projects has increased.
- The support from the governing body of the organisation, its general assembly and board members, to the senior management has increased.

Next steps

WSA plans to fully implement the CHS as far as its capacity is concerned, and develop implementation guidelines for each Commitment such as to ensure the quality of its services and enhance target groups' participation in the project cycle. Furthermore, the organisation plans to undertake a self-assessment exercise in order to get an objective overview of the WSA's performance towards the CHS and develop a plan to improve its performance if and where needed.