

AMMAN CHS EXCHANGE CONFERENCE REPORT

2-3 July 2019



TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	1
Exploring the key Humanitarian Issues in the Region	2
The role of the CHS in the MENA region	4
Organisational perspectives on using the CHS to drive change	5
Finding solutions to meet the most challenging CHS Commitments	7
<i>Commitment 3 - Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects</i>	7
<i>Commitment 4 - Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback</i>	10
<i>Commitment 5 - Complaints are welcomed and addressed</i>	12
<i>Commitment 8 - Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably</i>	14
Closing remarks	16



INTRODUCTION

One hundred participants from more than 15 countries gathered in Jordan on 2-3 July 2019 for a conference dedicated to exploring how the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) can make aid work better for people in crisis.

The Amman CHS Exchange, hosted by the CHS Alliance and Islamic Relief Worldwide, brought together representatives from 50 national and international humanitarian or development organisations working in the region and globally to discuss how the Core Humanitarian Standard is “A Driver of Change”.

Organisations represented included 22 CHS Alliance members. Among them, eight organisations are certified against the CHS (Islamic Relief, Tearfund, Danish Refugee Council, Dan Church Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, Finn Church Aid, Oxfam, Medair), one is independently verified organisation (ActionAid), and 11 are self-assessed (ACTED, ActionAid Kenya, CARE International, IRC, IRW, Medair, Diakomia, Malteser, Johanniter, Oxfam, Plan International).



The Amman CHS Exchange was designed for learning and to share good practice on applying the CHS. When we use the nine commitments, we better assist people who have been affected by crisis.

We acknowledge the excellent support of the steering committee, with representatives from CHS Alliance, Islamic Relief Worldwide/Jordan and Disaster Emergency Committee. This report summarises the main takeaways of the event.

EXPLORING THE KEY HUMANITARIAN ISSUES IN THE REGION

“It has never been more important than now to apply the CHS Standard” – Panos Moutmsiz

Participants were welcomed by Islamic Relief Jordan Country Director, **Elsadig Elnour Kabbashi**, who highlighted the opportunity provided by this learning event. “Together, we will share thoughts on how these standards can drive change at different levels in terms of quality of humanitarian aid delivery, and what we collectively can do to meet the CHS Commitments” he said.



Elsadig Elnour Kabbashi, Opening Session | © Islamic Relief Worldwide/CHS Alliance

Panos Moutmsiz, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis, delivered an inspiring keynote speech that made the link between the humanitarian principles the CHS embodies and the importance of bringing the standard down to field level.



He reminded the participants that humanitarian work is a question of dignity and respect, and that the CHS is the “benchmark” for this. He highlighted the need to take protection extremely seriously and take action by ensuring Code of Conduct and complaints mechanisms are in place. Staff must be aware of and trained on these.

“Today’s gathering is music to my ears and I am proud to be part of the movement that tries to shape aid,” said Moutmsiz. “We are here to bring forward in the best possible ways the aid to affected population. The CHS Standards should be applied by everyone in the sector.

“‘How do we bring the CHS to the field?’ There are technical standards, like in water and sanitation, or economic security. But we should also remember about the moral standards, which are often about our values.

“CHS has to be like a guidebook, on everyone’s desk and used by all. That’s the minimum we want to adhere to. It’s the practical part that helps to guide the assistance we are planning and each cluster should take ownership for it”.

Tanya Wood, Executive Director of the CHS Alliance, closed the session by challenging everyone in the room to work together to keep raising the standard. “None of this happens by accident. It comes from putting in place accountability processes at an organizational level. The CHS is the tool to do this.”



THE ROLE OF THE CHS IN THE MENA REGION

How well do we know the Core Humanitarian Standard? An initial poll of the participants revealed that 77% of respondents said their organisation has worked with the Core Humanitarian Standard, for example doing a verification or something else related to implementing the standard. More than half (59%) have been involved individually with the CHS Alliance, for example, participating in training, webinars or events.

The responses to a CHS quiz demonstrated an impressive level of awareness about the standard among participants.



ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON USING THE CHS TO DRIVE CHANGE

How can the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) drive change in the region?

A panel, facilitated by **Bonaventure Sokpoh**, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Learning, CHS Alliance, discussed the role standards can play in improving aid delivery for organisations.

The panellists were:

- **Mindy Abraham**, Deputy Country Director, Medair Lebanon, who lead the Médair certification process at country level
- **Shabel Firuz**, Programme Impact & Learning Manager, Islamic Relief Worldwide, who lead their certification process at the headquarters
- **Amani Salah**, Head of Humanitarian Financing Unit OCHA Jordan, who is responsible for the Country-Based Pool Fund in Jordan.

The speakers highlighted the alignment of the CHS with their organisational values, such as dignity and accountability. They discussed the importance of engaging senior staff to demonstrate how aid organisations can lead the drive to support the CHS.

Shabel Firuz said: “Common understanding of expected standards is important ... The drive toward quality and accountability is underpinned by the organisational values and backed up by full buy-in from the senior management.”

“The CHS has triggered a wake-up call to be more intentional on communicating policies with staff,” said Mindy Abraham.

On the issue of CHS verification, a number of advantages were highlighted to organisations who have gone through one of the processes. These included better connection between the headquarters, country programmes and partners; the collection of good practices; and the systematic application of policies on the ground.

Mandated by humanitarian principles, OCHA is committed to ensure that its partners apply the CHS said Amani Salah.



Mindy Abraham, Bonaventure Sokpoh, Amani Salah and Shabel Firuz, Panel Discussion
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Participants raised and discussed the importance of:

- the adherence of the donors to the CHS to encourage its application while making sure that the standard truly serves people in crisis (in other words keeping the CHS from becoming just another compliance check)
- the learning and improvement aspect
- the challenges of certification against the CHS in partnerships
- the challenges of getting national and local actors to apply the CHS.

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO MEET THE MOST CHALLENGING CHS COMMITMENTS



Commitment 3 - Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects

This session examined commitment 3 - humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects. It was facilitated by Katy Bobbin, Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) and Tanya Wood, CHS Alliance.

To aid better understanding of the commitment, the session started with a brief presentation on the organisational responsibilities and key actions related to it, and how we as a sector are reaching them.

Three table discussions took place around the following good practice examples:

Organisation name	Presenters	Title
Medair	Margie Davis	<u>Cash for Health in refugees in Jordan</u>
IRC	Kathryn Hoeflich	Partnership Excellence for Equality and Results System
Tearfund	Matt Brimble	Working with a national partner who is CHS certified

The group crowdsourced which indicators of the commitment 3 they would like to discuss in more depth to collectively explore some of the main challenges in the region. A summary of these discussions follows.



3.8 Systems in place to safeguard personal data collected from communities and people affected by crisis that can put them at risk.

There are a number of practical implementation challenges for how personal data is collected and handled. For example, it is common practice (when working in areas like Cox's Bazaar) that lists of beneficiaries are passed around different aid workers. One organisation shared how their CHS audit picked this up and issued a corrective action relating to indicator 3.8. Data protection and data sharing were identified as critical issues for aid agencies this year.

Proposed solutions included raising general awareness about data protection, although this was acknowledged to be “a double-edged sword” with the potential to scare people if not handled sensitively. Other solutions included implementing a data protection policy, and using customer relations management software. It was also noted that employees must be trained on using complaints and feedback mechanisms.

3.5 Design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy.

Five main challenges were identified: 1) working with governments, 2) working with local partners or communities & families, 3) sense of competition between INGOs, 4) ability to develop a comprehensive early recovery plan, and 5) unintended, negative effects on the local community of humanitarian action.

The importance of building long term relationships was stressed as a solution, along with increasing local people's participation and capacity building. Local procurement and working to restore farms or factories or schools were also proposed for resilience-building.



3.4 Plan a transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme that ensures longer-term positive effects and reduces the risk of dependency.

Aid delivery being “too donor driven” was seen as a challenge, along with lack of collaboration between different actors, and no clear timelines. There was an observation that the “CHS verification process can be too idealistic”.

Solutions to tackle these issues included:

- more coordination between relief and development actors
- a better understanding of people's needs
- contingency planning and constant evaluations
- taking the long-term view in strategy (diversifying donors)
- building an exit strategy into response planning from the beginning.



Commitment 4 - Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback

This session looked at the CHS commitment 4 – Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback. The session was facilitated by Bonaventure Sokpoh, CHS Alliance and Geneviève Cyvoct, CHS Alliance.

Commitment 4 is the second most challenging commitment based on the average scores from the CHS verification data. The CHS indicator 4.1 related to providing information to communities and people affected by crisis has the lowest score among the indicators of this commitment. The participation and engagement of communities (indicator 4.3) and welcoming feedback (indicator 4.4) are fairly low too. We are doing better on policies than practices.

Our perceptions of how we are doing can be very different from those of the people we are serving. This was shown by a field survey conducted in Chad by Ground Truth Solutions in 2018 where 60% of community members felt informed about services available to them and 90% of staff felt that community were well informed. We all committed ourselves to the Grand Bargain Participation Revolution, but we are all—organisations and donors—struggling to make it a reality.

Three good practices were presented and discussed with the participants.

Organisation name	Presenters	Title
ActionAid	Clare Bleasdale William Gray	<u>Accountability in Emergencies Resource book</u>
Islamic Relief	Hadeel Hassoun	<u>Mobile Education Bus Project</u>
International Rescue Committee	Walaa Alshalan	<u>IRC Jordan office's client responsiveness practices</u>



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The good practices shared revealed on the ground of activities that improve the level of commitment 4, including:

- Radio shows and theatre productions to provide information to communities and people in crisis and collect feedback (indicator 4.1)
- Working with communities to design the project and sharing information about the activities, including budgets (indicator 4.3)
- Doing regular visits with women and youth to undertake reflection cycles and conducting impact/satisfaction/exit surveys to capture beneficiaries' feedback (indicator 4.4)

The most important remaining challenges and possible solutions discussed were:

- Dynamic displacement of people. Participants identified the use of focal points, community leaders and/or community-based organisations to update information. They also suggested the use of diverse channels for example radio or theatre (for two-way communication)
- Resistance from staff and staff turnover. To tackle this challenge, participants suggested more use of online training. Organisations can do more work with frontline staff on how to reflect feedback in their organisation's practices.
- Child friendly feedback mechanism. Participants shared examples regarding using recorded observations on children from the start to the end of the project.



Commitment 5 - Complaints are welcomed and addressed

A well-attended session on commitment 5 – complaints are welcomed and addressed—was facilitated by Karen Glisson and Rosa Argent both of the CHS Alliance.

Five diverse presentations of good practice relating to this most challenging commitment of the CHS were shared with the group. This was followed by table discussions on different topics.

Organisation name	Presenters	Title
CARE	Moiez Ahmed	<u>New guidance on feedback and complaints mechanisms</u>
ACTED	Claudia Tromboni	<u>Complaints mechanism</u>
NRC	Christian de Luca Hadeel Al Omari	<u>Jordan child-friendly complaints mechanism</u>
World Vision	Reem Mahmoud Almasri	<u>Complaints mechanism</u>
International Medical Corps	Michael Gall	<u>Community-based feedback & response mechanism global guidelines</u>

The good practices shared revealed how organisations in the region are approaching key issues such as consultation with communities, complaints management and referrals, through developing strong processes and mechanisms for following up with the complaints.

Important remaining challenges and possible solutions discussed (by indicator) are:

5.1 Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.

Challenges to meaningful consultation with communities included cultural barriers, fear of retaliation from affected individuals and also survey fatigue. Solutions to address these included moving from a project to a programme based approach, as this will reduce the number of consultations. Another action was briefing the community from the outset about the complaints mechanism and how to use it.



Challenges to meaningful consultation with communities included cultural barriers, fear of retaliation from affected individuals and also survey fatigue. Solutions to address these included moving from a project to a programme based approach, as this will reduce the number of consultations. Another action was briefing the community from the outset about the complaints mechanism and how to use it.

5.3 Managing complaints in a timely and fair manner that prioritises the safety of the complainant at all stages

Identifying the most appropriate channel(s) for receiving complaints and feedback was discussed. This is not always obvious. Community consultation assists the design of the mechanism. The ability to process, take decisions, respond and close complaints was also considered a major challenge. Using appropriate technology can assist with this, along with dedicated resources.

5.4 The complaints-handling process is documented and in place (including PSEA) & 5.5 Establishing an organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously and acted upon according to defined policies and processes

Challenges for handling PSEA complaints were discussed, including in places where a lack of policies lead to ad hoc processes, or processes that were very complicated. It was also noted that there is sometimes a breakdown in communication between policymakers and operational staff, which causes implementation challenges. Specific solutions proposed included translating policies into local languages and sharing with partners on the ground. Involving local staff in policy development was recommended. Standardising and simplifying processes were also suggested.

It was acknowledged that the handling of sensitive complaints is not always easy to get right. Ways to address these challenges include building a positive staff culture (including running Code of Conduct training sessions), improving the staff ratio for major complaints handling, and putting confidential systems and processes in place.



Commitment 8 - Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably

The session looked at commitment 8—staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably. It was facilitated by Gozel Baltaeva, CHS Alliance and Mayumi Fuchi, Islamic Relief Worldwide.

Good practice examples were shared and discussed further:

Organisation name	Presenters	Title
Islamic Relief Worldwide	Mayumi Fuchi	<u>IRW's revision of the Code of Conduct in preparation for CHS Audit</u>
Tearfund	Matt Brimble	Review of Partner Assessment process & development of a 'Disaster Management Capacity Assessment' tool in reply to Corrective Action Request 8.4: "Tearfund does not ensure a systematic assessment and follow up of its staff and partners".
Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)	Swati Abida	Meeting commitment 8 obligations: introduction of 4 pillars (security risk assessment, mitigation efforts, information, training) around staff security and risk management.

Some of the main challenges facing organisations were recruitment and retention (staff turnover), working with partners, taking a systematic approach to training, having the resources to implement training schemes and focusing on staff wellbeing in emergency situations.



Potential solutions or actions to take forward (by CHS indicator) include:

8.3 Staff develop and use the necessary personal, technical and management competencies to fulfil their role and understand how the organisation can support them.

Solutions include strengthening onboarding, increasing the quality of job descriptions, and understanding staff motivations for staying.

8.4 The organisation has the management and staff capacity and capability to deliver its programs).

Sharing practices to get and keep the right people is one solution. Others include investing in a partner's capacity building, and being flexible to adapt to continuous changes.

8.9 Policies are in place for the security and the wellbeing of staff.

Actions to address this included running employee assistance programmes online and in house for counselling and other services. Ongoing trainings and involving partners when developing and reviewing security plans were also proposed.

Overall, the CHS Alliance can help with a number of these challenges through encouraging its members to share their good practices (tools and resources) on staff management and development.

Having a code of conduct in place that establishes, at a minimum, the obligation of staff not to exploit, abuse or otherwise discriminate against people (8.7) also faces challenges. These include how to integrate the values in the document into daily life, how partners and contractors align with an organisation's code of conduct, and different cultural norms. The risk of abusers slipping through gaps was raised.

Some ideas to address these included having staff undertake E-learning/testing prior to taking a contract, having random internal staff audits, and more thorough and consistent background and referral checks. The CHS Alliance can support members through gathering and sharing best practice tools, resources and lessons learnt.

CLOSING REMARKS

The conference closed with Elsadig Elnour Kabbashi, Islamic Relief Jordan's Country Director, thanking participants for bringing their "tremendous knowledge" to the CHS Exchange. While acknowledging that challenges remain, he said: "It is high time for all organisations to come together to standardise our tools for people affected and for donors."

A critical standard to achieve this is the Core Humanitarian Standard.

Tanya Wood, Executive Director of the CHS Alliance, ended with a rallying call to action. "As we approach five years of the Core Humanitarian Standard, we have come a long way. The CHS Alliance has 155 members and widespread endorsement from members and donors. We are now at a critical juncture—moving from baby steps to adulthood—as we enter this phase of maturity. We hope you will maintain and strengthen your collaboration with us on this journey to make aid work better for people in crisis."

Participants' feedback

Results of an online survey showed that the participants:

- Found the opening session inspiring
- valued the opportunity of networking/exchange of knowledge between participants, the good variety of participants (from headquarters, regions and countries) and presenters
- Enjoyed the parallel sessions and table discussions where good practices were shared and discussed
- Liked the focus on the more challenging CHS commitments

Participants suggested the following improvement for future learning events:

- More and smaller breakout sessions with optimal number of selected presenters
- More practical examples/practical tools and resources to share with participants
- More interactive panel discussion
- Bring in more local partners, government bodies and donors and more focus on the local context.