

Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework case study MzN International Framework used to develop mid-level national agency staff

Background

[MzN International](#) (MzN) is a social enterprise with the mission of making development and aid more effective. This is achieved through developing and implementing high quality consultancy projects and delivering innovative capacity building solutions to United Nations (UN) agencies, governments, businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) worldwide.

The [core humanitarian competencies framework](#) (CHCF) was first developed in 2011, by representatives from a cross-section of humanitarian organisations under the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA, now the [Start Network](#)) led by ActionAid and facilitated by People In Aid (now the [CHS Alliance](#)). The competencies framework recommends a set of core competencies that organisations could adopt to systematically build the skills of their employees and thereby improve their efforts to assist people adversely affected by crisis throughout the world.

Rationale

The [CONTEXT Humanitarian Staff Development Project](#) led by Oxfam GB aims to develop core humanitarian expertise, as well as leadership and management skills for existing personnel at the national level. This project comprises two learning programmes:

- **Core Skills Development Programme:** A six-month, inter-agency programme providing a stream of professional development to national agency staff in their current roles, focusing on an introduction to the key concepts and skills of humanitarian programming.
- **Management and Leadership Skills Development Programme:** A nine-month, inter-agency programme providing continuous professional development training for national agency middle and senior management staff in their current roles, focusing on key aspects of management and leadership in emergency situations.

Learning methods for both programmes include coaching, face-to-face workshops, on-the-job learning, self-directed learning, online learning, group work and practical course work. The programme is piloted in countries including Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the programme is delivered and implemented by MzN International. To date MzN has trained 133 individuals under this programme.

Process

The core humanitarian competencies framework was actively used during the CONTEXT programme. Participants answered an online self-assessment questionnaire based on the framework before attending their first workshop. During the first workshop, the facilitator provided an overview of the framework and its competency domains. Participants then conducted a critical self-assessment against the competencies by completing a 'competency wheel' to rate their current level of capability.

Competencies framework booklets were distributed and posters were made available during the workshop sessions as a reminder to participants. An action plan was developed by the participants and used as another way of gauging the progress made. Participants continued to consciously strengthen the competencies they identified at various stages of the programme.

Outcomes

The effectiveness of competencies framework was acknowledged by the programme training manager, international and national facilitators, and the participants.

Julia Jolley-Socea, Training and Coaching Executive, MzN said: *“I like the way the competencies framework is developed. I also understand it is not about ticking all the boxes in order to become a competent humanitarian aid worker, but these competencies are something for us to strive towards. Finally in terms of capacity building, it is extremely useful to focus on the competencies and work on building that particular set of competencies which can then be used to complement others with a strong suit in a different set of competencies”.*

One of the participants who had recently completed the programme found the safety and security competency very new. It had not previously crossed his mind to focus on safety and security but he soon realised it is one of the most important competencies.

“If I don’t survive how I can assist others with survival. Now I take better care of myself and others,” he said.

He also found the leadership competency very interesting and relevant for application in a work environment. The programme introduced different types of leadership such as autocratic leaders and leaders who facilitate consultation. The participant learned that leadership should not be fixed all the time as it depends on the situation; the leadership style during crisis is different from the leadership style during business as usual.

The participant said: *“I wasn’t so organised and aware before this. Without knowing it, I applied techniques but now I apply these techniques and competencies with more confidence.”*

Challenges:

- The profile of the participants was not strictly humanitarian-based.
- It is challenging to measure whether a change in behaviours or competencies has occurred and determine if the change can be attributed to CONTEXT.
- Participants often return to an environment that is not enabling enough for change to take place.

One of the CONTEXT trainees said: *“Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships is the most difficult competency. It is easy to speak about coordination and its importance, however I am still unable to visualise how to do it practically. Performing a simulation exercise is very different from reality when we return to our own environment.*

“Stakeholders only call each other if there is no other choice. How can we collaborate and trust other people’s coordination when as NGOs we are so self-centred? I was given opportunities to attend meetings, but by the end of the meeting you realise that the result is already pre-decided. Opinions are obtained for the sake of obtaining opinions – not for making changes. It is the same with the communities – decisions are already made by NGOs.”

Recommendations

MzN found that the domain on collaboration and coordination in the competencies framework needs more emphasis and focus. Coordination and collaboration is the key to effective humanitarian response. Therefore, clearer guidance is needed on how one can advocate or encourage coordination and collaboration in practical terms, especially in an uncoordinated and uncollaborative environment.

Additional information

As part of continuing efforts to strengthen the competencies of employees, the **CHS Alliance is undertaking a review of the competencies framework as part of the [Start Network Talent Development project](#)**. The review will engage as wide a cross-section of organisations and individuals as practically possible to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in implementing the framework. The review process has involved an online survey as well as focus group discussions in Asia, Australia, Africa, and the United Kingdom with participation from aid and development organisations as well as affected communities. The conclusions from the review process will be shared later in 2016.