

Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework case study

RedR UK, Sub-Saharan Africa

Increased self-awareness on core humanitarian competencies and behaviour change amongst CONTEXT trainers, coaches and trainees

Background

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

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

Both programmes are based on the core humanitarian competencies framework, first developed in 2011 by representatives from a cross-section of humanitarian organisations under the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (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.

The CONTEXT programmes are being piloted in selected countries including Kenya. In Kenya, the programme is delivered and implemented by the [RedR UK Sub-Saharan Africa](#) regional office team. The team has been operating from Nairobi since 2011 and provides capacity-building and technical expertise for humanitarian actors in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Madagascar, Somalia, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic (CAR), Rwanda, Senegal, and South Sudan. RedR programmes in the region are in response to the need for local and relevant capacity-building expertise in a context of both acute and prolonged humanitarian crises.

Process

Numerous international and national trainers and coaches were engaged to support the implementation of the CONTEXT programme. Learning methods for both programmes include coaching, face-to-face workshops, on-the-job learning, self-directed learning, group work and practical course work. The core humanitarian competencies framework has been integrated as part of the programme modules. A few of the trainers and coaches also use it as a tool to increase self-awareness amongst trainees.

The competencies framework is regarded by trainers using it as a guiding document to support appropriate aid worker behaviours.

A RedR national trainer for CONTEXT programme: “I myself never imagined being an aid worker. I wish someone taught me the principles and values as well as assisted me in understanding the

contexts when I first started. CONTEXT allows systematic ways of inculcating knowledge and attitudes desired of an aid worker.”

Another trainer said: “Every agency behaves and operates differently in different parts of the world. Therefore a tool like the competencies framework that is a generic framework is essential to guide their work.”

The competencies framework allows people to view aid workers in a way that is appropriate.

A few CONTEXT trainers and coaches noted the value of having non-programme staff in the CONTEXT programme as it creates opportunities to work together, understand each other better, and promotes greater integration and support between programme and non-programme staff.

Trainers and coaches also noted that there truly is buy-in and change on issues in cases where entry level and middle managers as well as senior managers from the same organisations are sensitised to concepts issues raised in the programme. The Core Skills programme has more impact if the line manager and/or senior staff in the same organisation also attend the Management and Leadership programme.

Results

The strengths of the competencies framework were noted as:

- It can be used to fill-in policy framework gaps within organisations.
- It focuses on disaster relief and can thus be used as a guide for development organisations who otherwise would not have such targeted policies.
- It gives partners who having already brought on board frameworks such as the HAP Standard (since replaced by [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\)](#)) and Sphere Standards, an additional opportunity to speak the same language as international agencies. This makes coordination and collaboration much easier.
- The behavioural aspects of the framework cut across the different thematic areas in organisational departments as well as the different stages of disasters. This makes it easier for those not familiar with the requirements in a certain department to be able to complete required tasks by referring to the framework. The framework gives a snapshot of the needed competencies of staff.
- It highlights the level of preparedness organisations have in place to respond to disasters.
- It addresses the security of targeted beneficiaries and not only staff.

Areas for improvement

While the competencies framework has many strengths, trainers and coaches also experienced challenges in its application.

Some of the challenges observed were:

- No coordinating board or oversight body to ensure that private sector bodies and aid agencies involved in emergency response adapt and adhere to the competencies framework.

- Navigating bureaucracy in attempts to implement the competencies framework is challenging in organisations.
- Competition amongst organisations overshadows the required coordination that is needed for implementation.

The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of affected populations is also a rising concern. It is recommended that any revision to the competencies framework gives prominence to competencies to prevent the risk of SEA.

Additional information

Overall, the competencies framework is found to have many key strengths as shown above. However, those involved in the CONTEXT programme in Kenya found the application and dissemination of the framework can be conducted in a more rigorous manner.

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.