

## Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework case study

### Save the Children Bangladesh

### Building national talents to respond to emergencies

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#### Background

[Save the Children](#)'s mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. The organisation has been working in Bangladesh since 1970 and today reaches over 15 million people each year. With a staff of over 800 and a network of more than 100 partners, Save the Children is one of the largest child-rights organisations in Bangladesh. Save the Children under the [Start Network Talent Development project](#) has actively taken steps to build appropriate skills, knowledge and competence of a total of 175 trainee staff at entry-level to rapidly and efficiently support affected people in the humanitarian field in a fast growing and evolving context through the [humanitarian trainee scheme](#).

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 (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

In Bangladesh the implementation of the Talent Development project started in October 2015. Forty young citizens were chosen through a rigorous process of recruitment and selection, for a 60-credit master's degree programme offered by the Oxford Brookes University, UK. The intensive one-year programme combines academic learning with a hands-on, practical training programme. As part of the programme, the trainees are hosted with various agencies involved in the humanitarian sector, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international NGOs, and the government. The scheme is currently in its first phase with the participation of 18 trainees.

#### Process

The core humanitarian competencies framework is integrated at all levels of this trainee staff recruitment and development scheme. In the recruitment and selection process for example, the shortlisting and interview processes are designed and conducted based on the six competency domains in the competencies framework. The shortlisted cohorts were subsequently sensitised and orientated on the skills and behavioral areas for capacity building, with a focus on the core competencies in the framework as well as specific job-related technical competencies.

The emergency core facilitators group is also using the competencies framework as a reference point when designing and delivering the Oxford Brookes master's study modules. Furthermore, observations and feedback to the trainees are noted in the performance objectives that constitute the six core competency domains. This is in line with the aim of the framework supporting a feedback and development culture using measurable evidence.

## Results

Although the humanitarian trainee scheme is only mid-complete, initial results and anecdotal evidence amply support the usefulness and relevance of the framework in recruitment and capacity building of entry-level recruits into the humanitarian organisations that are participating in the scheme.

Some of the immediate results of integrating the competencies framework into the scheme are cited in the below anecdotal examples:

- Using the framework has created a shared language and clarified expectations in a consistent and objective way so trainees are very clear about what behaviour is expected of them. The trainee staff who were new to the humanitarian and development sector are showing heightened understanding of the sector as well as the importance of understanding the local context in Bangladesh particularly. The majority of the trainee staff acknowledged that the needs of the affected population should always come first. This observation represents a marked shift in their attitude towards affected populations prior to joining the training scheme. Many trainee staff have acknowledged that previously they had regarded affected populations as “needy and passive recipients of aid”.

A quote from a trainee captures this: *“The key strength of the competencies framework is that it describes the desired behaviours of aid workers and we are systematically oriented towards behaving in that manner”.*

- In one of the host agencies, the trainee staff observed a lack of gender sensitivity in a male colleague who demonstrated rude behaviour to women and suggested they were not fit to work in the humanitarian sector. This directly conflicted with the framework’s expected core behaviour: “Demonstrate understanding of the gender and diversity dimensions of humanitarian situations”. There was no existing gender sensitisation programme or gender policy in the host organisation. The trainee who was highly sensitised to gender and diversity issues raised the concern with the director. The director was unaware of the situation as no one had ever raised this concern before. The director took the complaint seriously and addressed the issue directly with male staff. The organisation is presently looking into developing a gender policy for its staff.
- The competencies framework was used to develop trainee’s performance objectives. This was helpful as it gave trainees and host agencies the opportunity during assignments to broaden their perspectives on behavioural issues affecting staff in the humanitarian sector, discuss learning and share innovative ideas and examples. For example, trainees hosted at organisations implementing response strategies in Cyclone Roanu affected areas, were given the opportunity to practice the behavioural aspects of the competency framework as part of on-the-job training.
- There was no safety and security focus in one of the host agencies a trainee was placed in. The trainee who was trained on safety and security, which is one of the core competencies in the framework, suggested a session on safety and security to the director in the host agency. The safety and security session will be conducted soon.

## Challenges

Some of the challenges faced in the implementation of the competencies framework through the trainee staff scheme are as follows:

- There is an absence of systematic orientation on the competencies framework for staff, thereby posing a challenge in consistent understanding of the content and the use of the framework.
- The majority of the supervisors at the host agencies are not well versed in the use of performance objectives that are competency-based.
- There is not an adequate platform to discuss behaviours that are contradictory to the desired behaviours stated in the competencies framework, which is frustrating for the trainee staff as the ground reality is often different from what they are taught.

A quote from a trainee illustrates this issue: *“Aid workers and leaders are not sincere and don’t really care about the real needs. I ask myself what am I doing here? Some colleagues just don’t seem to care and regard the job just as any job. How can they empower others if they are not empowered and just don’t care?”*

## Lessons learned

- The competencies framework is making a difference when it is systematically integrated at different human resources (HR) stages such as recruitment, selection, performance management and training.
- Technical support should be made available to orientate people on the framework and to guide users in effective and different ways of implementing it.
- The competencies framework serves as a guide; it is up to the users to contextualise and tailor its use to serve their needs.

## 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.