CHS Exchange

Bangkok, 19-20 November 2019

CONFERENCE REPORT

CHSAlliance

MAKING AID WORK BETTER FOR PEOPLE

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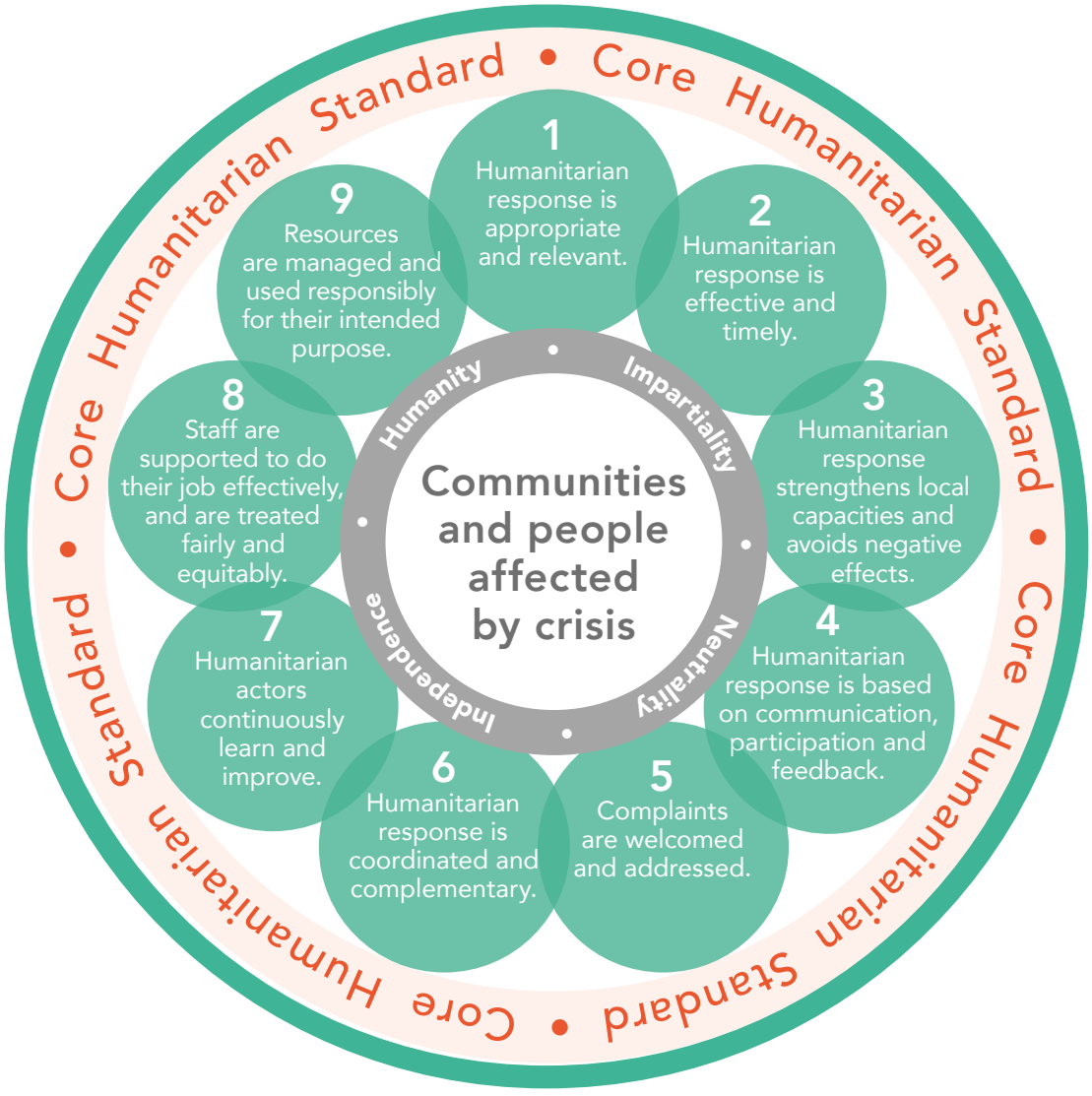


INTRODUCTION

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) was launched in late 2014. It was a collaborative effort by our sector to address the issue of quality and accountability by providing a clear and measurable standard to make aid work better for people.

Five years on, CHS Alliance members and partners came together in Bangkok to discuss the progress that applying the CHS has made and what more needs to be done to drive change for the people we serve.

On 19-20 November, we exchanged knowledge and ideas to identify how we can strive to meet the commitments we have made to affected people – as set out in the CHS.

Over the course of the Exchange, we explored:

- What we have learned through applying the CHS, as organisations and as a sector;
- How we build on this learning to improve our service to people affected by crisis;
- How the CHS Alliance can support the widespread application of the CHS.

This exchange was based on the experience of organisations which have applied the Standard. It built on discussions that took place in London in November 2018 and in Amman in July 2019.

The event was based on group learning, enabling participants to share their experiences and insights with one another.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Tanya Wood, CHS Alliance Executive Director welcomed the participants.

Tanya highlighted the importance of treating the people we work with and for with dignity, noting that Commitment 5 of the CHS (complaints are welcomed and addressed) scores lowest among the Nine Commitments. Shifting the power to the people we serve and truly embracing accountability will take a significant mind shift, Tanya acknowledged, and she invited all aid workers to work with more humility, empathy, compassion and care.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD

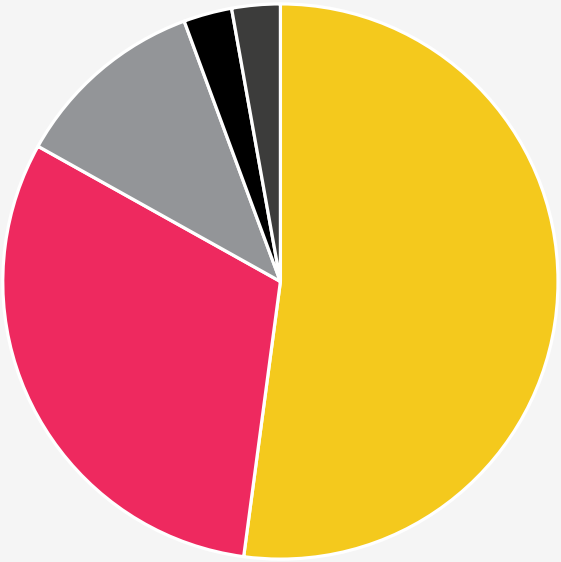
Participants' mapping conducted by Paul Z Jackson, our Bangkok CHS Exchange facilitator, revealed an impressive range of people - representing our members and partners - and geographical diversity.

Ninety-one participants from 65 national and international humanitarian and development organisations as well as government /donors and UN agencies attended the meeting.

Organisations represented included **52 CHS Alliance members**. Among them, **eleven organisations are certified** against the CHS (Act Alliance, Cafod, Christian Aid, Church of Sweden, COAST Trust, Dan Church Aid, Danish Refugee Council, EFICOR, Finn Church Aid, Medair, Norwegian Church Aid, Oxfam, Tearfund), **two are independently verified against the CHS** (Plan International and Save the Children), and **one is an independently verified organisation through group verification** (ActionAid). A **further 16 are self-assessed** (Action Against Hunger UK, ACTED, ActionAid Kenya, CARE International secretariat, Community World Service Asia, Diakonia, Johanniter, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Medair, Oxfam, Plan International, PMU InterLife, SEEDS, Trocaire, Word Reniew, Word Vision).

We welcomed representatives of Germany, Australia, plus OCHA and IASC.

Session 1: Where are you based?



Europe	52%
Asia	31%
Africa	11%
Oceania	3%
America	3%

Participants shared their expectations for the event, which included to:

- Exchange knowledge on the different commitments, especially on complaints response mechanisms and how to address the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation
- Discuss best practices and innovations, and use the details to inform own work
- Learn more about different CHS verification options and how they contribute to donors' due diligence
- Meet new people and hear different points of view
- Learn more about the CHS Alliance, be updated on trends and new initiatives, and exchange experiences with other members.

The event was designed to offer the following opportunities:

- **Increased Knowledge of the CHS:** More detailed understanding on the CHS Nine commitments
- **Learn from, and share with, colleagues** the successes and challenges experienced in applying the CHS
- **Understand more** about the different verification options and what option is best for your organisation
- **Engage on discussion** with others working on issues connected to Accountability to Affected People, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse, and People Management
- **Find out more about CHS Alliance services** and how we can work together to drive positive change

A CHS quiz session, designed to explore and discuss important aspects of the Core Humanitarian Standard and verification and led by team members of the CHS Alliance generated a lively discussion among participants and shown a high level of knowledge and experience in the room regarding the CHS.

Example: Did you know that the last “translation” of the Core Humanitarian Standard was actually a plain language version, produced in English? This takes the total number of translations of the CHS to 27.

POTENTIAL OF THE CHS TO DRIVE CHANGE – PANEL DISCUSSION

A dynamic and inspiring panel discussion allowed speakers and audience members to reflect on how the CHS helps improve aid delivery for organisations individually and collectively.

The panellists were:

- **Rezaul Karim Chowdhury,** Executive Director, COAST Trust - *Certified against the CHS*
- **Carly Sheehan,** Accountability Advisor, Global Humanitarian Team (GHT), *Oxfam* - *Certified against the CHS*
- **Allan A. Calma,** Regional Program Coordinator, LWF World Service - *Conducted self-assessments against the CHS*
- **Tanya Axisa,** IASC Accountability and Inclusion Results Group Coordinator

The panel provided a powerful reminder that the CHS is seen as a valuable tool in driving positive change in organisations and in improving quality and accountability to people affected by crisis. However, a strong message also came through that its verification processes need greater recognition and support (particularly from donors) to achieve sector level change.

Reflections included:

- CHS verified organisations have made some incredible efforts on the ground to improve their work, but at the collective level there is still more work to do.

> ***"The CHS can make a difference to Humanitarian Coordinators because if they know that each organisation operating in his/her country is verified, then they'd know they'd have an accountable response. And this can also help with analyzing accountability at the response level."***
>
> - Tanya Axisa, IASC Accountability and Inclusion Results Group Coordinator

- Lack of resources invested in "how we make aid work better" continues to be one of the main obstacles for organisastions to undertake verification and implement necessary changes.

> *"We've spent years coming up with the CHS, now donors are coming up with their own standards and requirements. So why not take the CHS to the table? If we don't do this, we'll have multiple standards and requirements".*
>
> - Allan A. Calma, Regional Program Coordinator, LWF World Service

> ***"I haven't taken any money from donors for verification, why not? As it's a continuous improving process".***
>
> - Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director, COAST Trust

Organisations choose the CHS verification option which works best for them at the time. Some organisations opt for self-assessment as they prefer the internal learnings without the external pressure of a certification, while others regard external consequences for not making changes identified in the verification process as very helpful.

Panellists suggested including the following elements in aid workers' activities and advocacy efforts to strengthen quality and accountability:

- Promote verification and improvement plan buy-in at every level of an organisation, leadership, management and frontline staff must all be committed

"Management needs to be committed at every level of certification against the CHS. Oxfam's action plan based on weaknesses helped give a narrative to whole organisation that this is everyone's responsibility".

- Carly Sheehan, Accountability Advisor, Global Humanitarian Team (GHT), Oxfam

"Management buy in important, but frontline staff must be part of discussions and if they are not on board then the improvement processes won't work. … Your improvement plan must not be separate from your work plan. The only way to change culture is to incorporate the CHS into your regular work plan."

- Allan A. Calma, Regional Program Coordinator, LWF World Service

- Incorporate the CHS into regular workplans to change organisational culture
- Remind donors collectively that failure is not a bad thing, and they shouldn't punish those who are trying to improve.

"There is collective role for NGOs to remind donors that failure is not a bad thing. We want to see a logical framework with an increase in complaints. This will prove that our frameworks are working. This would prove that communities do trust us and feel they can complain. We need to embrace failure".

- Tanya Axisa, IASC Accountability and Inclusion Results Group Coordinator

This session generated a lot of discussion and sharing of insights which the CHS Alliance will use to guide its future work.

GOOD PRACTICE SHARING

Many CHS Alliance member organisations have made improvements in their practices as a result of applying the CHS Commitments. This event provided an excellent opportunity through marketplace and campfire presentations for members to share their experiences and successes, as well as failures and learnings, with participants.

Summaries of the good practice sharing are shown below. For more information, please **contact the CHS Alliance**.

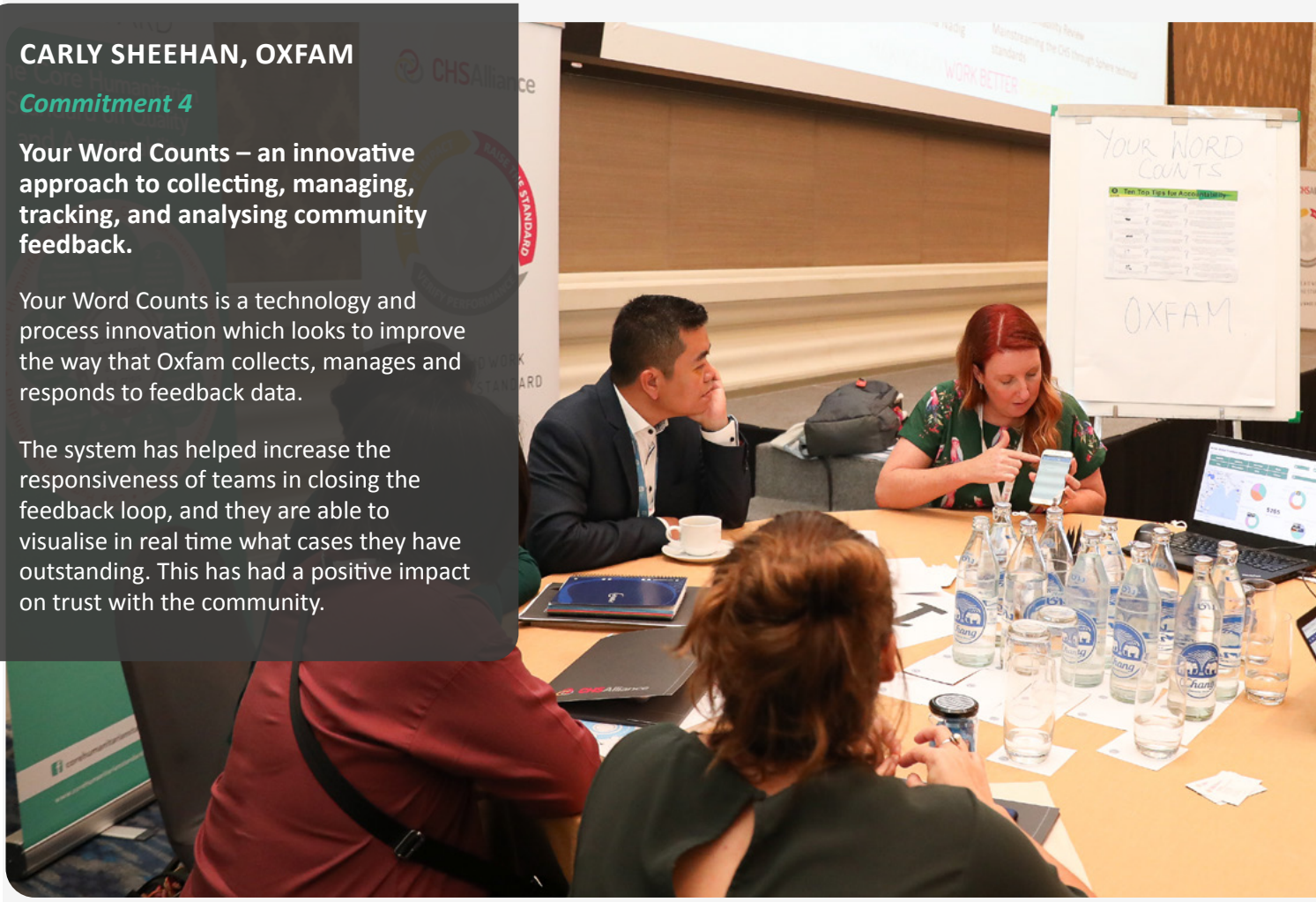
CARLY SHEEHAN, OXFAM

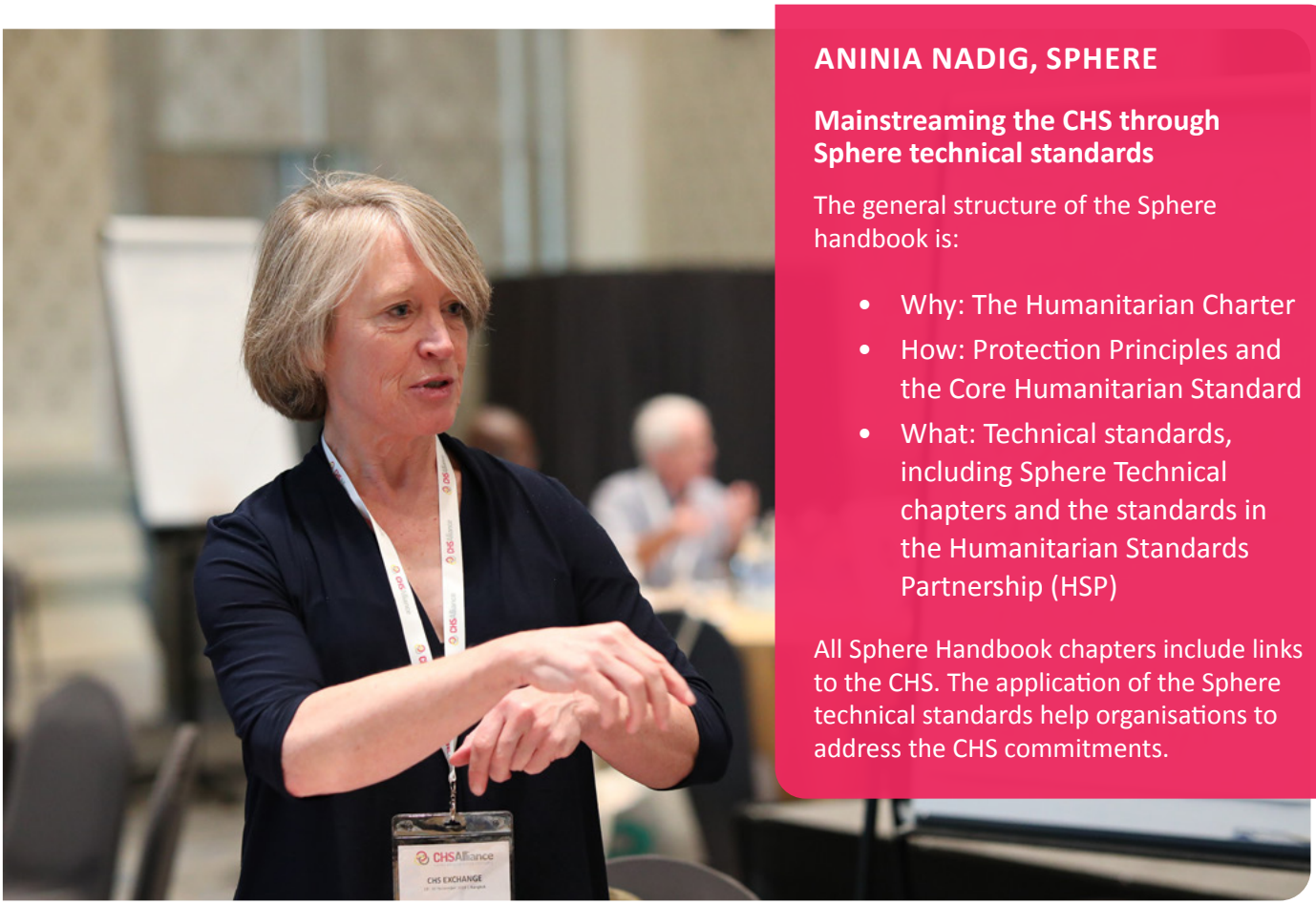
Commitment 4

Your Word Counts – an innovative approach to collecting, managing, tracking, and analysing community feedback.

Your Word Counts is a technology and process innovation which looks to improve the way that Oxfam collects, manages and responds to feedback data.

The system has helped increase the responsiveness of teams in closing the feedback loop, and they are able to visualise in real time what cases they have outstanding. This has had a positive impact on trust with the community.





ANINIA NADIG, SPHERE

Mainstreaming the CHS through Sphere technical standards

The general structure of the Sphere handbook is:

- Why: The Humanitarian Charter
- How: Protection Principles and the Core Humanitarian Standard
- What: Technical standards, including Sphere Technical chapters and the standards in the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP)

All Sphere Handbook chapters include links to the CHS. The application of the Sphere technical standards help organisations to address the CHS commitments.

MATTHEW CARTER, CAFOD

Commitment 1

CAFOD's approach to Safe, Accessible Inclusive and Dignified programming (SADI)

CAFOD shared a tool designed to shift the power toward more vulnerable populations. SADI framework enabled de-siloing Q&A approaches across the organisation. It pulls together what CAFOD had as previously disparate strands (protection, gender, accountability etc.) into one framework that aligns with the CHS.

CAFOD took the decision, following CHS verification, to start this process from foundation rather than to implement quick fixes.

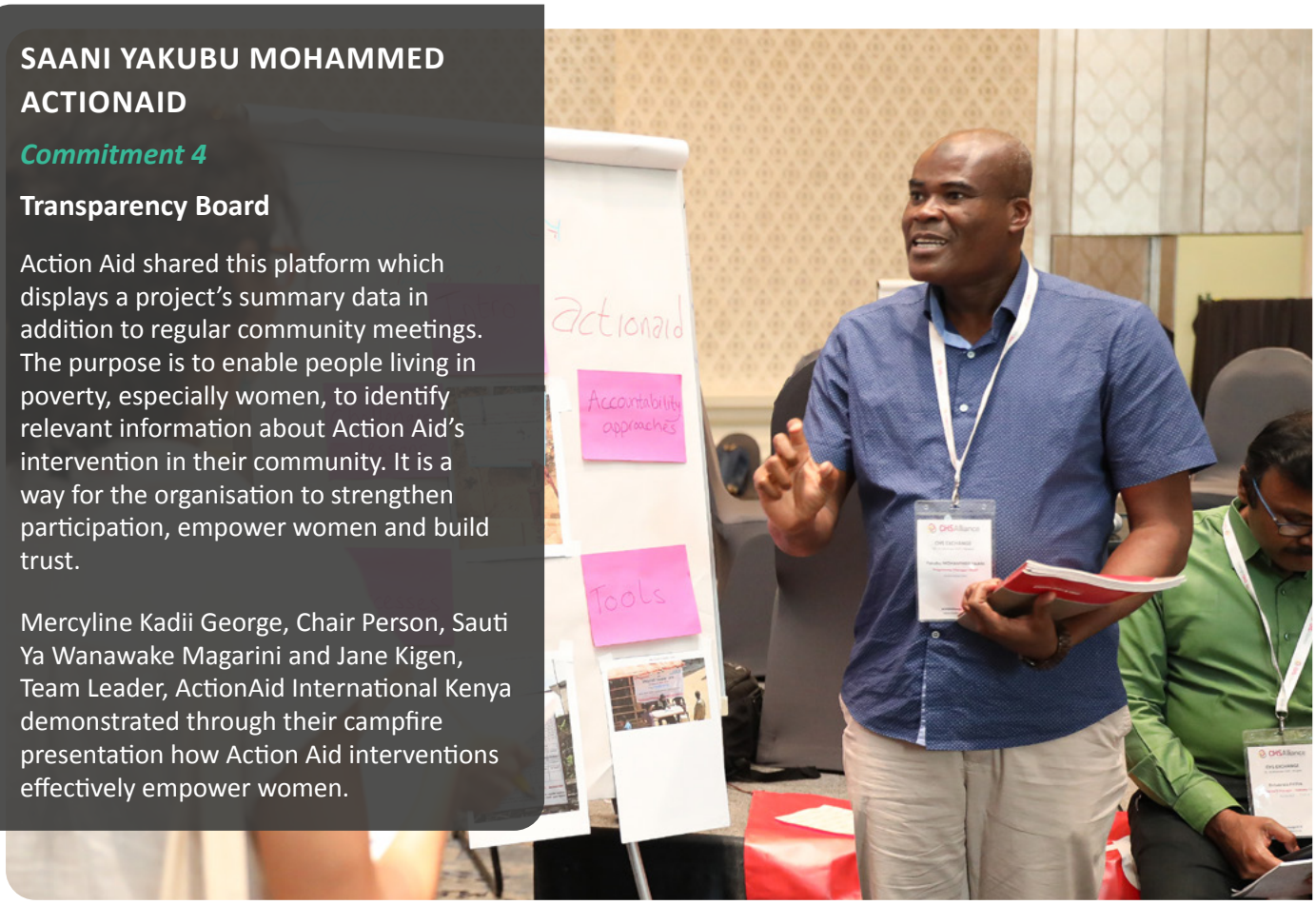
SAANI YAKUBU MOHAMMED
ACTIONAID

Commitment 4

Transparency Board

Action Aid shared this platform which displays a project's summary data in addition to regular community meetings. The purpose is to enable people living in poverty, especially women, to identify relevant information about Action Aid's intervention in their community. It is a way for the organisation to strengthen participation, empower women and build trust.

Mercyline Kadii George, Chair Person, Sauti Ya Wanawake Magarini and Jane Kigen, Team Leader, ActionAid International Kenya demonstrated through their campfire presentation how Action Aid interventions effectively empower women.



MATT BRIMBLE, TEARFUND

Commitment 3

Partner Assessment process & development

The first shift in Tearfund's organisational change following the CHS verification was the recognition of the capacity of partners and adapting to that capacity (not vice versa). Tearfund avoids duplication of quality standards: when a partner works with other organisations in addition to Tearfund, the CHS works as a good common denominator.

JONATHAN ECCLES
SAVE THE CHILDREN

Commitment 3

Safer Programming: Save the Children's approach to ensuring our work is safe for children, in the context of CHS indicator 3.6 on unintended negative effects

Safer Programming is a recently developed approach which combines multiple functions and disciplines within Save the Children to ensure that all our programmes, campaigns, humanitarian responses and global initiatives are safe for children. It is now being adopted and implemented across Save the Children. This means that child safeguarding is not only the responsibility of the safeguarding department, it's a collective responsibility shared by everyone in the office.

YEESHU SHUKLA
CHRISTIAN AID

Commitment 1

Mainstreaming needs of vulnerable groups in large scale disasters: Example from Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami

This example shows how Christian Aid and its partner Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU) complement each other in specific responses, such as the Sulawesi Earthquake. Together, they identified the gaps in the provision of inclusive shelter for people living with disability and designed interventions to address this need in the response to a large scale disasters.

UWE KORUS, CARE

Rapid Accountability Review

The RAR is a reporting tool that allows for scoring of performance during a response against the commitments established by CARE's Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF). The is aligned with the commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). It generates findings and recommendations that are used to make immediate adjustments to the response. It is also a key source for any response review and performance management process.

PIERRE HAUSELMANN, HQAI

Third-Party Quality Assurance

Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) was created to ensure Third Party Quality Assurance using the CHS and other standards. HQAI delivers Independent verification, Certification and Benchmarking against the CHS. A subsidy fund (covering up to 90% of the verification costs) is available to allow small organisations to access CHS verification.

GAETANE WICQUART, ACTED

Commitment 5

Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM)

ACTED shared how they have introduced one CRM system across all countries, which is adapted to different cultural contexts. The importance of identifying relevant and appropriate local communication means to inform communities about the CRM and how to use it were highlighted.

Other success factors for ACTED included having adequate human and technical resources for those managing the CRM, data protection to ensure confidentiality, and analysis of trends to make sure beneficiaries' comments are effectively used to improve a project's quality.

FINDING COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO MAKE AID WORK BETTER FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS

Participants engaged in interactive workshops, which looked at cross-cutting themes of the CHS, on both days of the event. These parallel sessions were designed to facilitate smaller group discussion around the three priority thematic areas of the CHS Alliance.

Accountability to Affected People

Acknowledging that CHS Commitment 5 (complaints are welcomed and addressed) scores the lowest in terms of implementation of the Nine CHS Commitments, participants discussed in small groups the challenges we are clearly still facing with how we receive and handle complaints and feedback.

Practical ways to improve our Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms (CFM), in addition to the development of collective CFMs and joint advocacy for greater investment in these critical systems, were discussed.

Recommendations of the **2019 CHS Alliance-commissioned CFM review** were explored. The main takeaways from the discussions include:

- Inter-agency CFMs are useful to create less confusion for communities but there is no natural place for their management within current system.
- We have become too risk averse/compliance-oriented and need to go back to more open participation of people affected by crisis.
- Adequate staff time must be accounted for and advocated for to run effective CFMs that work with communities' preferences.

People Management

We know that organisations deliver higher quality, more effective aid when they are accountable to the people they serve. This is reflected throughout the CHS, and in particular Commitment 8 , which focuses on excellent people management.

Commitment 8.7 of the CHS asks organisations to have a Code of Conduct is in place that establishes, at a minimum, the obligation of staff not to exploit, abuse or otherwise discriminate against people.

Participants at this workshop explored characteristics of a strong Code of Conduct, and how to assess their effectiveness as a living document. Discussions highlighted the importance for a Code of Conduct to:

- be understandable, written clearly, and available in local languages
- have buy-in from line managers and organisational champions to be effective
- also enable conversations, not just be seen as a standalone document.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) is woven throughout the Nine Commitments of the CHS. After exploring the definitions of key terms relating to PSEAH, small groups shared what was working well for them when it comes to handling complaints of a serious and sensitive nature. The key insights from each table were shared via visual posters and a gallery style walk.

The CHS Alliance is committed to supporting members in responding to SEAH complaints. A proposal for a possible investigator certification scheme and the CHS Alliance's draft Whistleblower Protection Policy were shared via presentations to elicit feedback.

The comments and conversations generated by the presentations will help the CHS Alliance continue these important discussions and our future collective progress on PSEAH.

PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK

Results from table discussions at the end of the event and from an online survey showed that the participants:

- Found the marketplace sessions extremely useful and inspirational
- Valued the opportunity of networking/exchange of knowledge between participants, the good variety of participants (from headquarters, regions and countries) and presenters
- Liked the detailed discussion about different options of the CHS verification scheme
- Appreciated the parallel sessions and small group discussions on challenging topics
- Enjoyed the facilitation style.

Participants suggested the following improvements for future learning events:

- More space for "personal reflection", as there was so much content to digest
- More space for experience sharing (e.g. repeat the formal marketplace, offer informal marketplace to allow organisations to share resources)
- More pre-reading materials prior to the event
- More input from CHS Alliance members in the preparation and facilitation
- More effort to bring government bodies, donors and UN into the room.

Thank you to all the participants for their great engagement in the discussions and for making this exchange a success!