COVID-19 AND THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD (CHS): HOW TO MEET OUR CHS COMMITMENTS IN OUR RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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As the world races to respond to the global outbreak of COVID-19, it is vital that the views and rights of people affected are not forgotten.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) is an important tool that sets out our sector’s core commitments to affected people. It can guide us in taking a principled and people-centred approach to the way we manage the response and adaptation to COVID-19.

This is a public health, social and economic crisis that is truly global in scale. With restrictions in travel and movement, national and localised health care, civil society and humanitarian organisations will play a critical role. All people should have equal access to health services and treatment, without discrimination, and be treated with dignity and respect.

Key CHS commitments of relevance for the response to this pandemic are:

COMMITMENT 1: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS APPROPRIATE AND RELEVANT

COVID-19 is exacerbating the risks of the most vulnerable people. Considering the diverse needs of people and adapting the response to make sure it is inclusive to different groups is more important than ever.

- Increase attention to the diverse needs of people at all stages. Please see this useful guidance from IFRC, OCHA and WHO COVID-19 specific Guidance

COMMITMENT 2: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY

To respond to COVID-19, programmes will need to quickly adapt. Quick and effective decisions are required as the situation rapidly evolves. This reinforces the need for flexibility and adaptability.

- Adapt activities and revise plans as needs rapidly change.
- Consider lessons learnt and prior experiences, especially from previous pandemics and the Ebola outbreaks and relevant guidance e.g. WHO’s COVID-19 specific guidance.

COMMITMENT 3: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE STRENGTHENS LOCAL CAPACITIES AND AVOIDS NEGATIVE EFFECTS

COVID-19 is resulting in travel restrictions for aid workers and repatriation of international staff. The already great contributions of national and local partners will significantly increase.

- Utilize all opportunities to support the lead response of national and local partners.
- Reinforce remote management mechanisms and learn from previous experiences, paying attention to managing risk.

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The impact of COVID-19 on behaviour is unknown but it will likely bring changes and social disruption that may lead to increased risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, challenges to public safety, fraud and other criminal activity. Therefore, pay increased attention to potential negative behaviour.

- Circulate PSEA Codes of Conduct and other safeguarding measures and remind staff of the need to comply. Provide initial or refresher training on PSEA.

**COMMITMENT 4: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS BASED ON COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK**

To succeed in the fight against COVID-19, people must understand, accept and respect the rules put in place to manage the spread. While communication is critical, some classic methods of engaging with communities (such as group discussion, face-to-face meetings) are compromised. Social norms will need to be modified to prevent disease transmission.

- Update communication and feedback channels by increasing the use of technology and remote communication channels, such as radio.
- Promotion and distribution of clear, consistent and accurate messages pertaining to COVID-19 are essential. Effective community engagement can assist with identifying and addressing rumours or misinformation.
- Ensure communication is contextualized. Community perceptions and beliefs can support or hinder the response, so it is extremely important to understand and address these.

**COMMITMENT 6: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS COORDINATED AND COMPLEMENTARY**

Our response to COVID-19 demands coherent collaboration at a time when our resources will be stretched.

- Collaborate with relevant groups: communities, national governments, national and local health services, donors, private sector, scientists, humanitarian organisations, partners and relevant networks.

**COMMITMENT 8: STAFF ARE SUPPORTED TO DO THEIR JOB EFFECTIVELY, AND ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND EQUITABLY**

Everyone is exposed to the risks of this pandemic and will experience additional stress in response to COVID-19.

- Frontline staff should be provided with the necessary protective equipment and material required to do their job safely.
- Ensure your staff is aware of risks and how to protect themselves and others. Pay attention to additional stress for staff and consider psychosocial support. Support staff in taking care of their relatives as needed.

For more information, contact the CHS Alliance Head of Policy, Advocacy & Learning, Bonaventure Sokpoh.

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