Core Humanitarian

Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability

Updated Guidance Notes and Indicators 2018

Forward

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) was launched in December 2014. It was a direct result of the 2012 Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) in which the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project joined forces to seek greater coherence for users of humanitarian standards. The JSI consulted more than 2,000 humanitarian workers in head offices, regions and disaster-prone countries. The feedback highlighted the need for the harmonisation of standards, with communities and people affected by crisis at the centre and humanitarian principles as the foundation.

The CHS was the result of a rigorous 12-month, three-stage consultation and test phase. It replaced the 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel and the Sphere Core Standards and elements of the Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles (2011 edition). In their efforts to harmonise standards, HAP International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project were joined by Groupe URD who integrated the Quality COMPAS reference framework into the CHS.

In 2015, the CHS was enhanced by performance indicators, guiding questions and guidance notes. It was this additional content that was updated during the 2017-18 Sphere Handbook revision. The full CHS with updated indicators, guiding questions and guidance notes was then integrated into the Sphere 2018 Handbook (4th edition).

A full history of the CHS development in 2013 and 2014, as well as lists of contributors, piloting organisations and donors can be found at www.corehumanitarianstandard.org. An explanation of the key changes for the 2018 Sphere Handbook can be found at spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/.

What changed in this edition?

The content of the original edition of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (Commitments, Criteria, Key actions and Organisational responsibilities) remains unchanged. The 2015 Guidance notes and indicators have been updated where relevant and the overall structure has been maintained.

The main changes are the following:

*   The Performance indicators have been lightly edited and four new performance indicators added in Commitments 4, 6, 8 and 9.

*   The Guidance notes have been updated. Some elements have been reformulated as actions to support the Key actions and Organisational responsibilities more directly and to make the information easier and quicker to reference for operational staff.

*   The Guiding Questions for monitoring Key actions and Organisational responsibilities have been updated. assessments.

Relationship between the CHS and the Sphere Standards

The CHS is a strong promoter of a people-centred approach. With its inclusion in the Sphere 2018 Handbook, the CHS is firmly anchored in a broader rights-based approach based on people's rights under existing international law and declarations. These rights are spelled out in the Humanitarian Charter and Annex 1 of the Sphere Handbook. They are also put into practice in the CHS, the Protection principles and Sphere's technical standards.

All Sphere Handbook chapters include links to the CHS. The Sphere Handbook therefore offers an integrated approach to humanitarian work, combining the purpose, process and concrete activities of humanitarian response.

Acknowledgements

The 2018 CHS Guidance notes and indicators update in the context of the Sphere Handbook revision was led by Takeshi Komino (CWSA Japan) and Sawako Matsuo (JANIC), with the support of a small writing group.

Feedback and review

Comments on the CHS are welcome at any time, and can be sent, along with enquiries, to info@corehumanitarianstandard.org. All comments received will be addressed in the next revision of the CHS, which will be incorporated again in the revised Sphere Handbook (5th edition).

The decision regarding the next revision of the CHS will be taken by the CHS Steering Committee in the next few years. An update on the revision process will be made available on the CHS website and on the copyright holders' websites.

A note on translations

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability is already available in 27 languages on www.corehumanitarianstandard.org.

If you would like to translate the CHS or the CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators into an additional language, please contact info@corehumanitarianstandard.org for guidance on translations. All translations will be free to access at www.corehumanitarianstandard.org.

Please note that any Sphere 2018 Handbook translations – which of course include the CHS – can be found on www.spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/.

Related materials

Tools supporting the application of the CHS are free to access at www.corehumanitarianstandard.org.

Additional resources

CHS Alliance: www.chsalliance.org

Groupe URD Quality and Accountability Compass: www.urd.org

Sphere: www.spherestandards.org

Contents

Introduction

Every day all over the world, countless people from all walks of life are moved to act in response to the humanitarian imperative – the desire to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it happens.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) sets out Nine Commitments that organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. It also facilitates greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis: knowing what humanitarian organisations have committed to will enable them to hold those organisations to account.

The CHS places communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action and promotes respect for their fundamental human rights. It is underpinned by the right to life with dignity, and the right to protection and security as set forth in international law, including within the International Bill of Human Rights.[1] These rights are also spelled out in Sphere's Humanitarian Charter.

As a core standard, the CHS describes the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action. Humanitarian organisations may use it as a voluntary code with which to align their own internal procedures. It can also be used as a basis for verification of performance, for which a specific framework and associated indicators have been developed to ensure its relevance to different contexts and types of organisation. Furthermore, as a foundation chapter to the Sphere 2018 Handbook, the CHS supports technical response activities. It is also the foundation standard for the Standards Handbooks under the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP).[2]

The CHS can be promoted and implemented by individuals, organisations, coordinating bodies, consortia and other groups undertaking or contributing to humanitarian action. Although primarily intended for the humanitarian sector, the CHS can be used by any organisation to bring better quality and greater accountability to all aspects of its work with communities and people affected by crisis.

The CHS is the result of a global consultation process. It draws together key elements of existing humanitarian standards and commitments. These include but are not limited to:

- The Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief;
- The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management;
- The People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel;
- The Sphere Handbook Core Standards, the Protection Principles and the Humanitarian Charter;
- The Groupe URD Quality COMPAS;
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Commitments on Accountability to Affected People/Populations (CAAPs); and
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria for Evaluating Development and Humanitarian Assistance.

---

[1] The International Bill of Rights includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocols.

[2] http://www.humanitarianstandardspartnership.org/

Structure of the Core Humanitarian Standard

The Core Humanitarian Standard consists of Nine Commitments. Each commitment is structured as follows in this document:

- The **Commitment** states what communities and people affected by crisis can expect from organisations and individuals delivering humanitarian assistance.

- **The Quality criterion** describes a situation where the Commitment is met and how humanitarian organisation and staff should be working to meet the Commitment.

- **Performance indicators** measure progress in meeting the Commitment, drive learning and improvement and allow for comparison across time and location.

- **Key actions** and **Organisational responsibilities** describe what staff should deliver and the policies, processes and systems that organisations need to have in place to ensure their staff provide high-quality, accountable humanitarian assistance. All Key actions and Organisational responsibilities are supported by indicative guiding actions.

- **Guidance notes** support the Key actions and Organisational responsibilities with examples and additional information.

A **glossary** of terms used and **Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions and Organisational responsibilities** are included at the end of this document.

The circular diagram shows "Communities and people affected by crisis" at the centre, surrounded by the principles Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence, and the Nine Commitments:

1. Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.
2. Humanitarian response is effective and timely.
3. Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.
4. Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.
5. Complaints are welcomed and addressed.
6. Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.
7. Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.
8. Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably.
9. Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.

Applying the CHS

The CHS is a voluntary and verifiable standard. It is included in the Sphere Handbook and used by other Standards initiatives grouped in the HSP. CHS Verification is a structured, systematic process to assess the degree to which an organisation is working to meet the CHS Commitments. The CHS verification options[3] are set out in the CHS Alliance Verification Scheme and range from self-assessment (supported by the CHS Alliance) to certification (carried out by accredited Conformity Assessment bodies[4]).

The CHS applies to aid organisations and individuals that:

- deliver direct assistance to communities and people affected by crisis;
- provide financial, material or technical support to other organisations, but do not directly take part in providing assistance; or
- combine both these approaches.

Organisations working in partnerships should explain their commitment to the CHS, seek understanding of how their partners[5] approach the Nine Commitments and do whatever they can to work with them to implement the CHS commitments.

Humanitarian responses take place in many different contexts. Culture, language, the capacity of responders, security, access, environmental conditions and resources will influence the response.

The Key Actions required by the CHS, therefore, need to be adapted to the context.

As illustrated in the chart below, the CHS is designed to be used in a range of ways by those involved in humanitarian action:

- Field level: Put quality and accountability into practice at field level through technical and sectorial guidance such as the Sphere and other technical standards, and methodological guidance for project management and evaluation such as the Groupe URD Quality and Accountability COMPASS;
- Organisational level: Continuously improve systems, structures and practices through verification such as the CHS verification scheme and organisational support;
- Global and policy levels: Learn and improve at global and policy levels through collective accountability, peer learning, exchanges, dissemination and advocacy.

Claims

Any individual or organisation involved in humanitarian action is encouraged to use and adopt the CHS and may state: "we are working towards application of the CHS". Organisations may only claim that they comply with the CHS if they have undergone objective verification against it.[6]

---
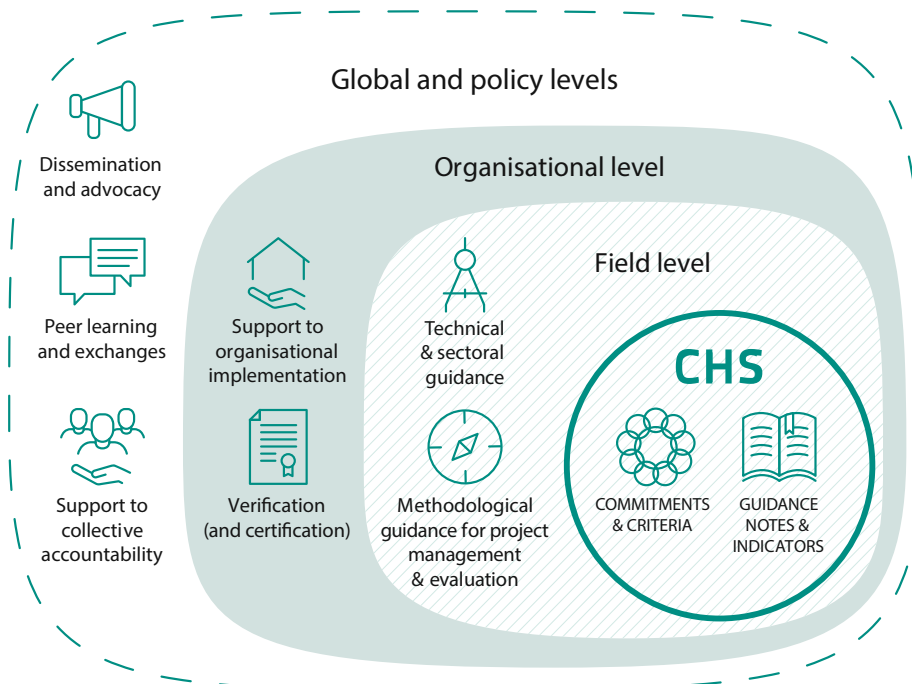
[3] For further information on verification against the CHS please see https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/ or contact verification@chsalliance.org

[4] Currently, the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) is the only accredited Conformity Assessment Body conducting CHS verification.

[5] See definition in glossary.

[6] Please see the specific claims linked to the different verification options within the CHS Alliance Verification Scheme on https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/ or contact verification@chsalliance.org.

Principled Humanitarian Action

People are at the heart of humanitarian action. The primary motivation of any response to crisis is to save lives, alleviate human suffering and to support the right to life with dignity.

Humanitarian organisations recognise that the humanitarian imperative comes first and seek, therefore, to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed.

Humanitarian action is guided by four widely accepted principles[7]:

- **Humanity**: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

- **Impartiality**: Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no adverse distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.

- **Independence**: Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

- **Neutrality**: Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.[8]

Humanitarian principles are at the core of all humanitarian work. They guide humanitarian action and their application is essential to distinguish humanitarian action from other forms of activities and action. In the CHS, the four principles are integrated into the Commitments, Quality Criteria, Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities.

International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law and International Refugee Law set out fundamental legal standards relating to the protection of individuals and groups, and to the nature of the assistance which may be provided to them. The Sphere Humanitarian Charter summarises the core legal principles that have most bearing on the welfare of those affected by disaster or conflict.

Those who apply the Core Humanitarian Standard recognise the primary responsibility of states and other relevant authorities to protect and assist those affected by disasters or armed conflicts within their territories. Humanitarian action should not undermine these responsibilities; indeed, whenever possible, it should complement them (see also the Sphere Humanitarian Charter).

---

[7] The principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality are derived from: the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement proclaimed in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent; United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 46/182, 19 December 1991; and UN General Assembly Resolution 58/114, 5 February 2004.

[8] Some organisations, while committed to giving impartial assistance and not taking sides in hostilities, do not consider that the principle of neutrality precludes undertaking advocacy on issues related to accountability and justice.

The Nine Commitments and Quality Criteria

1. Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.

2. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is effective and timely.

3. Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.

4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.

5. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.
Quality Criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.

6. Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.

7. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.

8. Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.
**Quality Criterion:** Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably.

9. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.
Quality Criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.

Commitment 1
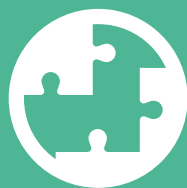
Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the response takes account of their specific needs, culture, and preferences.
- The assistance and protection provided correspond with assessed risks, vulnerabilities and needs.
- The response takes account of the capacities, skills and knowledge of people requiring assistance and protection.

Key Actions	
1.1 Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders.	• Assess the role and capacity of local government and other political and non-political actors, as well as the impact of the crisis on them. • Assess existing local capacities (material, human, markets) to meet priority assistance and protection needs, understanding that these will change over time. • Cross-check and verify information, acknowledging that assessment data will initially be imperfect, but should not impede life-saving actions. • Assess the safety and security of affected, displaced and host populations to identify threats of violence and any forms of coercion, denial of subsistence or denial of basic human rights. • Assess gender-related and power dynamics, as well as social marginalisation, to define a more effective and sustainable response. • Coordinate with others to avoid burdening communities with multiple assessments. Joint assessments and findings should be shared with interested agencies, government and affected populations.
1.2 Design and implement appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs and risks, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups.	• Assess the protection and assistance needs of women, men, children and adolescents, of those in hard-to-reach locations and at-risk groups such as persons with disabilities, older people, socially isolated individuals, female-headed households, ethnic or linguistic minorities and stigmatised groups (for example, people living with HIV).
1.3 Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context.	• Monitor the political situation and adapt stakeholder analysis and security. • Monitor epidemiological and other data regularly to inform ongoing decision-making and prioritise life-saving interventions. • Remain flexible enough to redesign any intervention in response to changing needs. Confirm that donors agree with programme changes as needed.

Organisational Responsibilities	
1.4 Policies commit to providing impartial assistance based on the needs and capacities of communities and people affected by crisis.	• Organisations maintain policies, processes and systems that support a commitment to humanitarian principles and inclusiveness. • All staff understand their responsibilities and how they may be held to account. • Organisations share these policies transparently with other stakeholders.
1.5 Policies set out commitments which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and to collect disaggregated data.	• Required levels of data disaggregation for assessment and reporting are clearly outlined.
1.6 Processes are in place to ensure an appropriate ongoing analysis of the context.	• Humanitarian workers have management support to acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary to manage and carry out assessments.

Guidance notes

Assessment and analysis is a process, not a single event. As time allows, in-depth analysis should be carried out. The capacities and needs of affected people and communities should not be assumed but identified through assessments that engage them in an ongoing discussion to find appropriate responses.

Consider providing basic training in psychological first aid for staff involved in assessments. This can help the staff manage people who become distressed during an assessment.

Ensure specialised assessments for groups potentially facing protection risks. Specific assessments with women, men, boys and girls to understand their exposure to violence, discrimination and other harms are an example.

Impartial assessment: Acting impartially does not mean treating all people the same. Providing rights-based assistance requires an understanding of differing capacities, needs and vulnerabilities. People may be vulnerable because of discrimination based on individual factors such as age, sex, disability, health status, sexual orientation or gender identity, or because they are caring for others who are vulnerable.

Vulnerability: Social and contextual factors also contribute to people's vulnerability. These include discrimination and marginalisation, social isolation, environmental degradation, climate variability, poverty, lack of land tenure, poor governance, ethnicity, class, caste and religious or political affiliations.

Existing capacity: People, communities, organisations and authorities affected by crisis already possess relevant skills, knowledge and capacity to cope with, respond to and recover from crises. To uphold the right to life with dignity, actively engage affected people in decisions that affect them. Targeted efforts may need to be undertaken to strengthen participation of typically under-represented groups, such as women, children, older people, people with disabilities, and linguistic or ethnic minorities.

Data disaggregation: This is important to understand the impact of actions or events on different groups. At a minimum, good practice encourages disaggregation by sex, age and disability. Additional factors should be based on context.

Analysis of disaggregated data is necessary to using standards in context and to monitoring. Good use of disaggregated data can show who has been most affected, who is able to access assistance and where more needs to be done to reach an at-risk population.

Ongoing analysis and effective use of the data: Human resources systems should be flexible enough to recruit and deploy assessment teams rapidly. Allocate programme budgets and resources according to need. Funding should support ongoing analysis of assistance and protection needs and the adaptation and correction of programmes, including measures to facilitate access (such as outreach mechanisms, accessibility of facilities and communication).

Commitment 2

Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is effective and timely.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis, including the most vulnerable groups, consider that the timing of the assistance and protection they receive is adequate.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the response meets their needs.
- Monitoring and evaluation reports show that the humanitarian response meets its objectives in terms of timing, quality and quantity.

Key Actions	
2.1 Design programmes that address constraints so that the proposed action is realistic and safe for communities.	• Clearly identify and state any limitations if it is not possible to assess and meet the needs of a specific area or population group, including hard-to-reach locations. • Prioritise support to local response capacity in advance where contingency planning shows areas or populations are vulnerable and may prove hard to access in the future.
2.2 Deliver humanitarian response in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without unnecessary delay.	• Be aware of living conditions, cultural practices, seasons, agricultural calendars and other factors that influence providing the right services at the right time. • Include time frames for delivery and monitoring systems in programme plans; anticipate and flag delays. • Acknowledge that decisions will be made based on imperfect knowledge in the early stages of an acute crisis and refine decisions as information becomes available. • Coordinate with others to develop shared strategies to address collective issues that block timely assistance.
2.3 Refer any unmet needs to those organisations with the relevant technical expertise and mandate, or advocate for those needs to be addressed.	• This includes unmet information needs as well as protection and assistance needs.
2.4 Use relevant technical standards and good practice employed across the humanitarian sector to plan and assess programmes.	• Apply national technical standards, where these exist, adapted to the humanitarian context. • Coordinate with relevant stakeholders to advocate for the use of globally agreed standards to complement national ones (including Sphere and partner standards in related sectors).
2.5 Monitor the activities, outputs and outcomes of humanitarian responses in order to adapt programmes and address poor performance.	• Define time-bound and context-specific performance indicators. Review them on a regular basis to measure progress towards meeting assistance and protection needs. • Include progress against objectives and performance indicators, in addition to activities and outputs (such as number of facilities built). Monitor project outcomes and desired results such as use of facilities or changes in practice. • Review systems regularly so that only useful information is collected, with updated contextual information (such as local market function, change in security).

Organisational Responsibilities	
2.6 Programme commitments are in line with organisational capacities.	• Policies reflect the importance of using agreed humanitarian technical quality standards and developing expertise in chosen areas of intervention. • Acknowledge the conditions under which the organisation may need to provide services outside this area of expertise until others can do so.

2.7 Policy commitments ensure:

- systematic, objective and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities and their effects;
- evidence from monitoring and evaluations is used to adapt and improve programmes; and
- timely decision-making with resources allocated accordingly.

Guidance notes

Addressing constraints and realistic programming:
Where an organisation cannot access a population or meet identified needs, it has a responsibility to refer these needs to appropriate actors (including government, non-government actors).

Use forecasts and early warning systems for contingency planning before a crisis to help communities, authorities and agencies respond quickly when needed. This will also allow affected people to protect their assets before their lives and livelihoods are at risk.

Develop decision-making processes that are flexible enough to respond to new information from ongoing assessments. Within an organisation, delegate decisions and resources as close to the implementation site as possible.

Document decisions and decision-making processes to demonstrate transparency. Base the processes on consultation, meaningful participation and coordination with others, see Commitment 6.

Monitoring activities, outputs and outcomes: Monitoring informs project revisions, verifies application of selection criteria and confirms whether aid is reaching the people most in need. Document any programme changes that result from monitoring and establish monitoring systems that involve and rely on affected people and key stakeholders, see Commitment 7.

Use common response-wide monitoring indicators where available.

Organisational decision-making: Both the responsibilities and processes for decision-making within organisations must be clearly defined and understood, including who is responsible, who will be consulted and what information is needed to inform decision-making.

Organisational policies, processes and systems:
Organisations should document how humanitarian action improves outcomes, using systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Show how data from monitoring and evaluation is used to adapt programmes, policies and strategies, strengthen preparedness and improve performance in a timely manner, see Commitment 7. This may include an emergency response fund or being able to recruit or deploy qualified staff quickly when needed.

Commitment 3

Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis consider themselves better able to withstand future shocks and stresses, as a result of humanitarian action.
- Local authorities, leaders and organisations with responsibilities for responding to crises consider that their capacities have been increased.
- Communities and people affected by crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised individuals, do not identify negative effects resulting from humanitarian action.

Key Actions

3.1 Ensure programmes build on local capacities and work towards improving the resilience of communities and people affected by crisis.	• Design services (for example, drought management and flood-, hurricane- or earthquake-resistant structures) that reduce the impact of hazards. • Support self-help initiatives and community preparedness actions.
3.2 Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities.	• Understand and address needs and capacities of different groups who are exposed to different levels of risk.
3.3 Enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first-responders in the event of future crises, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented	• Work with municipal authorities and local government as much as possible. • Advocate that local actors are treated as equal partners with autonomy to design and/or lead a response. • Support the initiatives of local groups and organisations, as the platform for learning and capacity-building to strengthen first response in future crises. • Hire local and national staff, considering diversity within the population, instead of expatriates wherever possible.
3.4 Plan a transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme that ensures longer-term positive effects and reduces the risk of dependency.	• Provide support to strengthen existing state and community systems, rather than establish parallel efforts that will not last beyond the duration of the response.

Key Actions	
3.5 Design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy.	• Take steps to restore social services, education, markets, transfer mechanisms and livelihood opportunities that cater to the needs of vulnerable groups. • Fully consider market conditions when analysing which form of assistance (cash, voucher, or in-kind) will have the greatest positive outcome. • Buy goods and services locally when possible. • Mitigate negative repercussions on the market to the extent possible.

3.6 Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner, including in the areas of:

- people's safety, security, dignity and rights;
- sexual exploitation and abuse by staff;
- culture, gender, and social and political relationships;
- livelihoods;
- the local economy; and
- the environment.

Organisational Responsibilities	

3.7 Policies, strategies and guidance are designed to:

- prevent programmes having any negative effects, such as, for example, exploitation, abuse or discrimination by staff against communities and people affected by crisis; and
- strengthen local capacities.

3.8 Systems are in place to safeguard any personal information collected from communities and people affected by crisis that could put them at risk.	• Establish clear and comprehensive policies on data protection, including electronic registration and distribution systems. • Inform those receiving aid about their rights in relation to data protection, how they can access the personal information that an organisation holds about them and how to raise concerns they have about misuse of information.

Guidance notes

Community resilience and local leadership: Communities, local organisations and authorities are the first to act in a crisis and have in-depth knowledge of the situation and specific needs. These local actors should be equal partners and given autonomy in designing or leading a response. This requires a commitment by international and local agencies to adapt their way of working and engage in open dialogue and constructive criticism. Local financial infrastructure/services should be used wherever possible, instead of creating new parallel systems.

Transition and exit strategy: In collaboration with the authorities and affected population, design services as soon as possible that will continue after the emergency programme has finished (for example, introduce cost-recovery measures, use locally available materials or strengthen local management capacity).

Negative effects and "do no harm": The high value of aid resources and the powerful position of humanitarian workers can lead to exploitation and abuse, competition, conflict, and misuse or misappropriation of aid. Aid can undermine livelihoods and market systems, drive resource conflict and amplify unequal power relations between different groups. Anticipate these potential negative effects, monitor and take actions to prevent them if possible.

Be aware of cultural practices that may have negative effects on some groups. Examples include: biased targeting of girls, boys or specific castes; unequal education opportunities for girls; refusing immunisations; and other forms of discrimination or preferential treatment.

Safe and responsive feedback and complaints mechanisms can reduce abuse and misuse. Staff should welcome and seek out

suggestions and complaints. Staff should be trained in how to exercise confidentiality and refer sensitive information, such as disclosures of exploitation and abuse.

Sexual exploitation and abuse by staff: All staff share a responsibility to prevent exploitation and abuse. Staff members have a responsibility to report any abuse they suspect or witness, whether within their own organisation or outside. Note that children (girls in particular) are often highly vulnerable, and policies should explicitly protect children from exploitation and abuse, see Commitment 5.

Environmental concerns: Humanitarian response can cause environmental degradation (for example, soil erosion, depletion or pollution of groundwater, overfishing, waste production and deforestation). Environmental degradation can amplify a crisis or levels of vulnerability and reduces people's resilience to shocks.

Measures to reduce environmental degradation include reforestation, rainwater harvesting, efficient use of resources and ethical procurement policies and practices. Major construction activities should only be performed following an environmental assessment, see Commitment 9.

Organisational policies to prevent negative effects and strengthen local capacities: Organisations are encouraged to have a clearly documented risk management policy and system in place. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that fail to systematically tackle unethical behaviour or corruption via their own anti-bribery policies and procedures and through collective action with other NGOs increase corruption risks for other actors.

Policies and procedures should reflect a commitment to the protection of vulnerable people and outline ways to prevent and investigate the abuse of power. Careful recruitment,

screening and hiring practices can help to reduce the risk of staff misconduct, and codes of conduct should make it clear what practices are forbidden. Staff should formally agree to adhering to these codes and be made aware of the sanctions they will face if they fail to do so, see Commitment 8.

Safeguarding personal information: All personal information collected from individuals and communities must be treated as confidential. This is particularly the case in handling protection-related data, reported violations, complaints of abuse or exploitation, and gender-based violence. Systems that ensure confidentiality are essential to prevent further harm, see Protection Principles in the 2018 Sphere Handbook and Commitments 5 and 7.

The increasing use of electronic registration and distribution systems in humanitarian response highlights the need for clear and comprehensive policies on data protection. Agreements obliging third parties such as banks and commercial organisations to safeguard information are essential. Clear guidance about the collection, storage, use and disposal of data, aligned with international standards and local data protection laws, is important. Systems to mitigate the risk of data being lost should be put in place. Data should be destroyed once no longer required.

Commitment 4

Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of their rights and entitlements.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that they have timely access to clear and relevant information, including about issues that may put them at further risk.
- Communities and people affected by crisis are satisfied with the opportunities they have to influence the response.
- All staff are trained and provided with guidance on the rights of the affected population.

Key Actions

4.1 Provide information to communities and people affected by crisis about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, how it expects its staff to behave, the programmes it is implementing and what they intend to deliver.	• Consider information itself as a key element of protection. Without accurate information about the assistance and their entitlements, people may become vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. • Communicate clearly what behaviour people can expect from humanitarian workers and how they can complain if they are not satisfied.
4.2 Communicate in languages, formats and media that are easily understood, respectful and culturally appropriate for different members of the community, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups.	• Use existing communication systems and consult with people on their communications preferences. Consider the degree of privacy required for different formats and media. • Ensure that communications technology, new and old, is used effectively and safely.
4.3 Ensure representation is inclusive, involving the participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work.	• Give attention to groups or individuals historically excluded from power and decision-making processes. Systematically consider ethical ways of engaging with these individuals and groups to respect dignity and avoid any increased stigma. • Consider the balance between direct community participation and indirect representation by elected representatives through the various stages of response.
4.4 Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received, paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback.	• Train staff to gain and maintain people's trust, know how to respond to both positive and negative feedback and observe the reactions of different community members to the way services are provided. • Integrate feedback collection into a broader approach across organisations or sectors to review, analyse and act on the feedback. • Share response to the feedback with the community.

Organisational Responsibilities	
4.5 Policies for information-sharing are in place, and promote a culture of open communication.	• Define and document processes for sharing information. • Strive to share organisational information about successes and failures openly with a range of stakeholders to promote a system-wide culture of openness and accountability.
4.6 Policies are in place for engaging communities and people affected by crisis, reflecting the priorities and risks they identify in all stages of the work.	• Outline how staff members are trained and encouraged to facilitate community engagement and decision-making, listen to diverse communities of affected people and manage negative feedback. • Design policies and strategies to help create space and time for community dialogues, decision-making and self-help.
4.7 External communications, including those used for fundraising purposes, are accurate, ethical and respectful, presenting communities and people affected by crisis as dignified human beings.	• Share information based on risk assessment. Consider potential harm to the population, such as when sharing information about cash distributions or demographics of specific settlements, which can put people at risk of being attacked. • Exercise care when making use of stories and images that discuss and depict affected people, as this can be an invasion of their privacy and a breach of confidentiality if their permission is not sought.

Guidance notes

Sharing information with communities: Sharing accurate, timely, understandable and accessible information strengthens trust, deepens levels of participation and improves the impact of a project. It is key to being transparent. Sharing financial information with communities can improve cost-effectiveness and help communities to identify and highlight waste or fraud.

If an organisation does not share information appropriately with the people it aims to assist, misunderstandings and delays, inappropriate projects that waste resources, and negative perceptions about the organisation can develop. This can generate anger, frustration and insecurity.

Effective, safe, accessible and inclusive communication: Different groups have different communication and information needs and sources. They may need time talking among themselves in a safe, private setting to process the information and its implications.

Informed consent: Be aware that some people may express consent without fully understanding the implications. This is not ideal, but a degree of consent and participation may initially have to be assumed based on expressed willingness to take part in project activities, observation, knowledge, or legal or other documents (such as contractual agreements with the community).

Participation and engagement: Consult affected people and local institutions early in the response to build on existing knowledge and develop positive, respectful relations. Early consultation can be a better use of time than fixing inappropriate decisions later. In the early stages of an acute response, consultation might only be possible with limited numbers of affected people. Over time, there will be more opportunities for more people and groups to become involved in decision-making.

Be aware that in some conflict settings, encouraging group discussions and decision-making could be seen as a form of political organising and could harm local people. Consider various methods to enhance community engagement with the feedback system, including the use of community scorecards.

Feedback: Formal feedback can be sought through specific assessments (using group discussions or interviews), post-distribution monitoring, or questionnaires. Informal feedback received during daily interaction should also be used to develop trust and improve programmes on an ongoing basis. Obtain feedback on whether women, men, girls and boys feel respected and satisfied with their influence over decision-making. People may be satisfied with the aid delivered, but dissatisfied with their influence on decision-making.

People may fear that critical feedback will have negative repercussions. There may also be cultural reasons why criticism of an intervention is unacceptable. Explore different methods of providing informal and formal feedback, including methods for confidentially sharing the feedback.

Design feedback mechanisms with other agencies and ensure they are accessible to all people. They should be seen as separate from complaints mechanisms that address serious infringements of practice or behaviour, see Commitment 5, although in practice there is usually an overlap in the types of feedback and complaints received. Acknowledge and follow up on the feedback received and adapt the programme when appropriate. Integrate feedback mechanisms into organisations' monitoring and evaluation systems.

Promoting a culture of open communication: Organisations should publicly state (on their website or in promotional material that is accessible by affected people) any specific interests such as political or religious identity. This allows stakeholders to better understand the nature of the organisation and its likely affiliations and policies.

Organisational commitment to participation and listening to communities: Gender and diversity policies can help to promote the values and commitments of the organisation and provide concrete examples of expected behaviour. Feedback from affected people should also inform strategy and programme development.

Restricting information, confidentiality and non-disclosure: Not all information can or should be shared with all stakeholders. Consider how the collection of information that can identify groups (demographics) or individuals may cause or increase people's vulnerability or create new threats to their protection.

An ethical approach to external communications: Fundraising material and photographs taken out of context can often be misleading and can also increase protection risks. Policies and guidelines relating to external communications should be available to all staff and can help to ensure that mistakes are not made.

Details attached to images and included in stories must not allow people (particularly children) to be traced to his or her home or community. Geotagging of images should be disabled when taking photographs.

Commitment 5

Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Quality criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised groups, are aware of complaints mechanisms established for their use.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider the complaints response mechanisms accessible, effective, confidential and safe.
- Complaints are investigated, resolved and results fed back to the complainant within the stated time frame.

Key Actions

5.1 Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.	• Disaggregate by sex, age and disability, as these criteria may influence people's views on access and obstacles to complaints mechanisms. • Agree on how complaints can be submitted, what may prevent people and staff from complaining, and how they wish to receive the response to complaints. Consider how complaints will be recorded and tracked and how what is learned from them will be incorporated into future planning. • Explore joint complaints mechanisms with other agencies, partners and third-party contractors. • Train staff on the complaints mechanism.
5.2 Welcome and accept complaints, and communicate how the mechanism can be accessed and the scope of issues it can address.	• Consider an information campaign to help raise awareness of the system and procedures, during which people can ask further questions about how it will work.
5.3 Manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner that prioritises the safety of the complainant and those affected at all stages.	• Deal with each complaint individually, even if many cover similar issues. • Provide a response within a specified time frame. The complainant should know when to expect a response. • Consider community management or engagement in the complaints-handling system.

Organisational Responsibilities	
5.4 The complaints-handling process for communities and people affected by crisis is documented and in place. The process should cover programming, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other abuses of power.	• Keep records of how the complaints mechanism is set up, decision criteria, all complaints made, how they were responded to and within what time frame. • Take care to ensure that information on complaints is kept confidential, in strict accordance with data protection policies. • Work with other organisations on complaints mechanisms, as this may be less confusing for communities and staff.
5.5 An organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously and acted upon according to defined policies and processes has been established.	• Publicly share policies which relate to an organisation's duty of care to the people it aims to assist, its codes of conduct and how it will protect potentially vulnerable groups such as women, children and people with disabilities. • Establish formal investigation procedures that adhere to the principles of confidentiality, independence and respect. Conduct investigations in a thorough, timely and professional manner, meeting legal standards and local labour law requirements. Provide training to designated managers on investigations and on handling staff misconduct, or provide access to specialist advice. • Include a grievance procedure and whistleblowing policy to deal with staff complaints, and make staff aware of them.
5.6 Communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.	• Explain the complaints process to communities and staff. Include mechanisms for both sensitive issues (such as those relating to corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, gross misconduct or malpractice) and non-sensitive information (such as challenges to the use of selection criteria).
5.7 Complaints that do not fall within the scope of the organisation are referred to a relevant party in a manner consistent with good practice.	• Clarify guidance on which complaints fall within the organisation's remit, and when and how to refer to other service providers.

Guidance notes

Designing a complaints mechanism: Social and power dynamics must be assessed before deciding on the best way to interact with communities. Pay attention to the needs of older people, women and girls, boys and men, persons with disabilities and others who might be marginalised. Ensure they have a say in the design and implementation of complaints systems.

Raising awareness about how to make a complaint: Time and resources will be needed to ensure that affected people know what services, staff attitudes and behaviour they can expect from humanitarian organisations. They should also know what to do and where to make a complaint if a humanitarian organisation has failed to meet these commitments.

The mechanism should be designed so that people may be assured that they can always make a complaint confidentially and without fear of retaliation.

Manage expectations, as communities may believe that the complaints process can solve all their problems. This can generate frustration and disappointment if the expected changes are outside the control of the agency.

Managing complaints: Explain clearly to the complainant when the complaint falls outside the control and responsibility of the organisation. Where possible and in agreement with the complainant, refer the complaint to the appropriate organisation. Coordinate with other agencies and sectors to ensure this functions effectively.

Only trained staff should investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers.

Confidential referral for additional care and support (such as mental health and psychosocial support, or other healthcare) should be provided for complainants according to their wishes.

Anonymous and malicious complaints present specific challenges because their source is unknown. They may be a warning signal to the organisation of underlying discontent, and any follow-up will need to investigate whether there is any previously unacknowledged cause for complaint.

Protecting complainants: Take care when deciding who needs to know what information within the organisation. People reporting sexual abuse may face social stigma and real danger from perpetrators and their own families. Design a mechanism which ensures that complaints will be treated confidentially. A whistleblowing policy should be in place to protect staff who highlight concerns about programmes or the behaviour of colleagues.

Data protection policies should cover how long specific types of information should be kept, in accordance with relevant data protection laws.

Complaints-handling process: Ensure that both the organisation's staff and the communities it serves have the opportunity to report complaints. Such complaints can be seen as an opportunity to improve the organisation and its work. Complaints can indicate the impact and appropriateness of an intervention, potential risks and vulnerabilities, and the degree to which people are satisfied with the services provided.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of people affected by crisis: An organisation and its senior management are responsible for ensuring that complaints mechanisms and procedures are in place, and are safe, transparent, accessible and confidential. Where appropriate, organisations should consider including specific statements about cooperating with investigations into SEA cases in their partnership agreements.

Organisational culture: Managers and senior staff should model and promote a culture of mutual respect between all staff, partners, volunteers and people affected by crisis. Their support for the implementation of community complaints mechanisms is vital. Staff should be aware of how to handle complaints or allegations of abuse. In the case of criminal activity or where international law has been broken, staff should know how to contact the appropriate authorities. Organisations working with partners should agree on how they will raise and handle complaints (including against each other).

Staff behaviour and codes of conduct: Organisations should have a staff code of conduct that is endorsed by senior management and made public. A child safeguarding policy should apply to all staff and partners, and inductions and training should be provided on expected standards of behaviour. Staff should know and understand the consequences of breaching the code of conduct, see Commitments 3 and 8.

Commitment 6

Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.

Performance indicators

- Organisations minimise gaps and overlaps identified by affected communities and partners through coordinated action.
- Responding organisations – including local organisations – share relevant information through formal and informal coordination mechanisms.
- Organisations coordinate needs assessments, delivery of humanitarian aid and monitoring of aid implementation.
- Local organisations report adequate participation and representation in coordination mechanisms.

Key Actions	
6.1 Identify the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of different stakeholders.	• Consider collaboration to optimise the capacity of communities, host governments, donors, private sector and humanitarian organisations (local, national, international) with different mandates and expertise. • Suggest and lead joint assessments, trainings and evaluations across organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a more coherent approach.
6.2 Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other humanitarian organisations.	• Recognise that the overall planning and coordination of relief efforts is ultimately the responsibility of the host government. Humanitarian organisations have an essential role to play in supporting the state's response and coordination function.
6.3 Participate in relevant coordination bodies and collaborate with others in order to minimise demands on communities and maximise the coverage and service provision of the wider humanitarian effort.	• Advocate for the application of and adherence to recognised quality standards and guidelines through coordination. Use coordination bodies to contextualise humanitarian standards, especially the indicators, to collectively monitor and evaluate activities and the overall response. • Determine the scope of activities and commitments, as well as any overlap with other coordination bodies and how this will be managed, for example in relation to accountability, gender and protection coordination.
6.4 Share necessary information with partners, coordination groups and other relevant actors through appropriate communication channels.	• Respect the use of local language(s) in meetings and other communications. Examine barriers to communication so that local stakeholders are enabled to participate. • Communicate clearly and avoid jargon and colloquialisms, especially when other participants do not speak the same language. • Provide interpreters and translators if needed. • Consider the location of meetings to allow local actors to participate. • Work with networks of local civil society organisations to ensure their members' contributions are included.

Organisational Responsibilities	
6.5 Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles.	• Include coordination in organisational policies and resourcing strategies. The organisation should provide a statement on how it will engage with partners, host authorities and other humanitarian or non-humanitarian actors. • Staff representing agencies in coordination meetings should have the appropriate information, skills and authority to contribute to planning and decision-making. Clearly articulate coordination responsibilities in staff job descriptions.
6.6 Work with partners is governed by clear and consistent agreements that respect each partner's mandate, obligations and independence, and recognises their respective constraints and commitments.	• Local and national organisations engage or collaborate with partners with a shared understanding of each other's organisational mandate and mutual roles and responsibilities, for effective and accountable action.

Guidance notes

Working with the private sector: The private sector can bring commercial efficiencies, complementary expertise and resources to humanitarian organisations. At the very least, information sharing is required to avoid duplication and to promote humanitarian good practice. Ensure that the partnering businesses have committed to core human rights and do not have a history of perpetuating inequalities or discriminatory practices. Partnerships with the private sector should ensure explicit benefits for people affected by crisis, while recognising that private sector actors may have additional objectives of their own.

Civil–military coordination: Humanitarian organisations must remain clearly distinct from the military to avoid any real or perceived association with a political or military agenda that could compromise the agencies' impartiality, independence, credibility, security and access to affected populations.

The military has particular expertise and resources, including those associated with security, logistics, transport and communication. However, any association with the military must be in the service of and led by humanitarian agencies and according to endorsed guidelines. Some organisations will maintain minimum dialogue to ensure operational efficiency, while others may establish stronger links.

The three key elements of civil–military coordination are information sharing, planning and division of tasks. Dialogue should take place throughout, in every context and at all levels.

Complementary assistance: Local organisations, local authorities and civil society networks have a significant amount of context-specific experience. They may need support in re-establishing themselves following the effects of a crisis and need to be engaged and represented in coordination of the response effort.

Where authorities are a party to the conflict, humanitarian actors should use their judgement regarding the authorities' independence, keeping the interests of the affected populations at the centre of their decision-making.

Coordination: Cross-sectoral coordination can address people's needs holistically rather than in isolation. For example,

coordination on mental health and psychosocial supports must be done across the health, protection and education sectors, such as through a technical working group made up of these specialists.

Coordination leaders have a responsibility to ensure that meetings and information sharing are well managed, efficient and results-orientated. Local actors may not participate in coordination mechanisms if they seem to be relevant only to international agencies, due to language or location. National and sub-national coordination mechanisms may be required and should have clear reporting lines.

Participation in coordination mechanisms before a disaster establishes relationships and enhances coordination during a response. Link emergency coordination structures with longer-term development plans and coordination bodies where they exist.

International interagency mechanisms for the coordination of emergencies should support national coordination mechanisms. In refugee assistance, the refugee coordination mechanism should be that used by UNHCR.

Sharing information (including financial): between different stakeholders and different coordination mechanisms makes it more likely that programme gaps or duplication will be identified.

Working with partners: Different types of arrangements may exist with partners, ranging from the purely contractual to shared decision-making and shared resources. Respect the mandate and vision of the partner organisation and its independence. Identify opportunities for mutual learning and development. Identify what both parties stand to gain from the partnership as they increase their knowledge and capacities and ensure better response preparedness and more varied response options.

Longer-term collaborations between local and national civil society organisations and international organisations can allow all partners to increase their knowledge and capacities, and ensure better response preparedness and more varied response options.

Commitment 7

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.

Quality criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis identify improvements to the assistance and protection they receive over time.
- Improvements are made to assistance and protection interventions as a result of the learning generated in the current response.
- The assistance and protection provided reflects learning from other responses.

Key Actions	
7.1 Draw on lessons learnt and prior experience when designing programmes**.**	• Design monitoring systems that are simple and accessible, recognising that information should be representative of different groups, clearly articulating who benefited from previous programmes and who did not. • Consider failures as well as successes.
7.2 Learn, innovate and implement changes on the basis of monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints.	• Use open-ended listening and other qualitative participatory approaches. People affected by crisis are the best sources of information about needs and changes in the situation. • Share and discuss learning with communities, asking them what they would like to do differently and how to strengthen their role in decision-making or management.
7.3 Share learning and innovation internally, with communities and people affected by crisis, and with other stakeholders.	• Present the information collected through monitoring and evaluation in an accessible format that allows sharing and decision-making – see Commitment 4. • Identify ways to support system-wide learning activities.

Organisational Responsibilities	
7.4 Evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices.	• Organisations include a performance review and improvement plan that is based on measurable, objective indicators in their learning cycle. • All staff understand their responsibilities in relation to monitoring the progress of their work and how learning can contribute to their professional development.
7.5 Mechanisms exist to record knowledge and experience, and make it accessible throughout the organisation.	• Organisational learning leads to practical changes (such as improved strategies for carrying out assessments, reorganisation of teams for more cohesive response, and clearer articulation of decision-making responsibilities).
7.6 The organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response amongst peers and within the sector.	• Compile and publish reports on humanitarian responses, including key lessons learned and recommendations for revised practices during future responses.

Guidance notes

Learning from experience: Different approaches and methods suit different performance, learning and accountability purposes:

Monitoring – collection of regular data sets of project activities and performance can be used for course correction. Use qualitative and quantitative data to monitor and evaluate; triangulate data and maintain consistent records. Consider the ethics of how data is collected, managed and reported. Determine what data is collected and how it is presented based on the intended use and users of the data. Do not collect data that will not be analysed or used.

Real-time reviews – one-off assessment exercises, involving people working on the project, can be used for course correction.

Feedback – information received from affected people, not necessarily structures, can be used for course correction. People affected by crisis are the best judges of changes in their lives.

After-action reviews – one-off exercises, involving people working on project, occurring after project completion. Identifies elements to retain and change in future projects.

Evaluations – formal activities to objectively determine the value of an activity, project or programme, normally conducted by people external to the project, can be real time (to allow for course correction) or occur after project completion, to provide learning for similar situations and to inform policy.

Research – this involves systematic investigation into specific defined questions related to humanitarian action, generally used to inform policy.

Innovation: Crisis response often leads to innovation as people and organisations adapt to changing environments. People affected by crisis are innovating as they adapt to their own changing circumstances; they may benefit from support that involves them more systematically in innovation and development processes.

Collaboration and sharing of lessons: Collaborative learning with other agencies, governmental and non-governmental bodies and academic bodies is a professional obligation and can introduce fresh perspectives and ideas, as well as maximise the use of limited resources. Collaboration also helps to reduce the burden of repeated evaluations in the same community.

Peer-learning exercises have been used by a variety of organisations and can be undertaken to monitor progress in real time or as a reflective exercise post-crisis.

Networks and communities of practice (including academia) can create opportunities to learn from peer groups, both in the field and in after-action reviews or learning forums. This can make an important contribution to organisational practice and system-wide learning. Sharing challenges as well as successes among peers can enable humanitarians to identify risks and avoid future mistakes.

Evidence that is available across sectors is particularly useful. Learning and reviewing evidence among organisations is more likely to contribute to organisational change than lessons learned within a single organisation.

Monitoring performed by the people affected by crisis themselves can enhance transparency and quality and encourage ownership of the information.

Evaluation and learning policies: Key lessons and areas identified for improvement are not always addressed systematically, and lessons cannot be considered learned unless they have brought about demonstrable changes in current or subsequent responses.

Knowledge management involves collecting, developing, sharing, storing and effectively using organisational knowledge and learning. Longer-term national staff are often key to preserving local knowledge and relationships. Learning should also extend to national, regional and local actors and help them develop or update their own crisis-preparedness plans.

Commitment 8

Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

Quality criterion:
Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably.

Performance indicators

- All staff feel supported by their organisation to do their work.
- Staff satisfactorily meet their performance objectives.
- Communities and people affected by crisis assess staff to be effective in terms of their knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes.
- Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of humanitarian codes of conduct and how to raise concerns about violations.

Key Actions	
8.1 Staff work according to the mandate and values of the organisation and to agreed objectives and performance standards.	• Different terms and conditions may apply to staff of different types or levels. National employment law often dictates the status of an individual and must be respected. All staff members must be made aware of their legal and organisational status, whether national or international.
8.2 Staff adhere to the policies that are relevant to them and understand the consequences of not adhering to them.	• The need for induction and training on organisational mandate, policies and codes of conduct applies in all situations, including a rapid deployment or scale-up.
8.3 Staff develop and use the necessary personal, technical and management competencies to fulfil their role and understand how the organisation can support them to do this.	• Opportunities for formal staff development may be limited in the first phase of response, but managers should provide an induction and on-the-job training as a minimum.

Organisational Responsibilities

8.4 The organisation has the management and staff capacity and capability to deliver its programmes.	• Hire people who will increase the accessibility of services and avoid any perception of discrimination, considering language, ethnicity, gender, disability and age. • Consider how the organisation will address peaks in demand for qualified staff in advance. Clarify country-level roles and responsibilities as well as internal decision-making responsibilities and communication. • Avoid deploying staff for short periods of time which leads to high staff turnover, undermines continuity and programme quality and may lead to staff avoiding personal responsibility for assignments. • Adopt ethical recruitment practices to avoid the risk of undermining local NGO capacity. • Develop locally recruited staff who are likely to stay for longer periods of time. In multi-mandated agencies, development staff should be trained and available for humanitarian response.
8.5 Staff policies and procedures are fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and compliant with local employment law.	• Organisational policy and practice promotes the role of national staff at management and leadership level to ensure continuity, institutional memory and more contextually appropriate responses.
8.6 Job descriptions, work objectives and feedback processes are in place so that staff have a clear understanding of what is required of them.	• Job descriptions are accurate and kept up to date. • Staff develop individual objectives for work aspirations and competencies which are documented in a development plan.
8.7 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.	• The organisation's code of conduct is understood, signed and upheld, making it clear to all representatives of the organisation (including staff, volunteers, partners and contractors) what standards of behaviour are expected and what the consequences will be if they breach the code.
8.8 Policies are in place to support staff to improve their skills and competencies.	• Organisations should have mechanisms to review staff performance, assess capacity gaps and develop talent.
8.9 Policies are in place for the security and the wellbeing of staff.	• Agencies exercise a duty of care to their workers. Managers make humanitarian workers aware of risks and protect them from exposure to unnecessary threats to their physical and emotional health. • Measures that can be adopted include effective security management, preventative health advice, active support for working reasonable hours and access to psychological support. • Establish a policy that expresses zero tolerance for harassment and abuse, including sexual harassment and abuse, in the workplace. • Establish holistic prevention and response strategies to address incidents of sexual harassment and violence as experienced or perpetrated by their staff.

Guidance notes

Staff and volunteers: Any designated representative of the organisation, including national, international, permanent or short-term employees, as well as volunteers and consultants, is considered to be a member of staff.

Organisations should sensitise staff and volunteers to raise awareness of marginalised groups and avoid stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Adhering to organisational mandates, values and policies: Staff are expected to work within the legal scope, mission, values and vision of the organisation, which should be defined and communicated to them. Beyond this wider understanding of the role and ways of working of the organisation, an individual should work to a set of personal objectives and the performance expectations agreed with their manager.

Policies should make explicit commitments to gender balance with staff and volunteers.

Policies should promote a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. This might include: identifying and eliminating barriers to accessibility in the workplace; prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability; promoting equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value; and providing reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities in the workplace.

External partners, contractors and services providers should also know the policies and codes of conduct that apply to them, as well as the consequences of non-compliance (such as termination of contracts).

Performance standards and development of competencies: Staff and their employers are mutually accountable for their skills development – including management skills. With the help of clear objectives and performance standards, they should understand what skills, competencies and knowledge are required to perform their current role. They should also be made aware of the opportunities for growth and development that might be available or required. Competencies can be improved through experience, training, mentoring or coaching.

There are various methods that can be used to assess a staff member's skills and behaviours, including observation, reviewing work output, direct discussions with them and interviewing their colleagues. Regular documented performance appraisals should allow managers to identify areas for support and training.

Staff capacity and capability: Personnel management systems differ by agency and context but should be informed by good practice. They need to be considered and planned at a strategic level with the support of senior management. Organisation and project plans must consider staff capacity and gender balance. There must be the right number of staff with the right skills in the right place at the right time to deliver short- and long-term organisational objectives.

Organisations should ensure that staff have the competencies needed to support community listening, decision-making and action. Staff should also be trained in how to apply standard operating procedures, as this allows for higher levels of delegation and faster responses.

Performance review schedules must be flexible enough to cover staff who work short-term, as well as those on open-ended contracts. Adequate attention should be given to competencies of listening, enabling inclusion, facilitating community dialogue and enabling community decision-making and initiatives. Partner organisations should agree on the competencies required for staff to meet the agreed commitments.

Staff policies and procedures: The style and complexity of staff policies and procedures will depend on the size and context of each agency. However simple or complex the agency may be, staff should participate in the development and review of policies where possible to ensure that their views are represented. A staff manual facilitates knowledge of and consultation on policies and the consequences of non-adherence.

Staff guidance: Each staff member should identify individual objectives that cover their work aspirations and the competencies they hope to develop, and document these in a development plan.

An effective response is not simply about ensuring that skilled staff are present, but also depends on the way that individuals are managed. Research from emergency contexts shows that effective management, frameworks and procedures are as important, if not more important than, the skills of personnel in ensuring an effective response.

Security and well-being: Staff often work long hours in risky and stressful conditions. An agency's duty of care to its national and international staff includes actions to promote mental and physical well-being and avoid long-term exhaustion, burnout, injury or illness.

Managers can promote a duty of care through modelling good practice and personally complying with policy. Humanitarian workers also need to take personal responsibility for managing their well-being. Psychological first aid should be immediately available to workers who have experienced or witnessed extremely distressing events.

Train staff to receive information on incidents of sexual violence experienced by their colleagues. Provide access to robust investigative and deterrence measures that promote trust and accountability. When incidents do occur, adopt a survivor-centred approach to medical and psychosocial support, which includes recognition of vicarious trauma. Support should be responsive to and inclusive of the needs of expatriate and national staff.

A culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health professional should contact all national and international staff and volunteers one to three months after they have survived a potentially traumatic event. The professional should assess the survivor and refer them for clinical treatment if appropriate.

Commitment 9

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

Quality criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.

Performance indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of community-level budgets, expenditures and results achieved.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the available resources are being used:
    a. for what they were intended; and
    b. without diversion or wastage.
- The resources obtained for the response are used and monitored according to agreed plans, targets, budgets and time frames.
- Humanitarian response is delivered in a way that is cost-effective.

Key Actions

9.1 Design programmes and implement processes to ensure the efficient use of resources, balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response.	• Adapt procedures in rapid-onset crises to enable faster financial decision-making and cope with challenges (for example, a lack of available suppliers to carry out competitive tenders).
9.2 Manage and use resources to achieve their intended purpose, so minimising waste.	• Ensure staff with specific skills and systems are in place to manage risks related to procurement, cash-based assistance and stock management.
9.3 Monitor and report expenditure against budget	• Establish financial planning and monitoring systems to ensure that programme objectives are met, including procedures to mitigate key financial management risks. • Track all financial transactions.
9.4 When using local and natural resources, consider their impact on the environment.	• Conduct a rapid environmental impact assessment to determine risk and put mitigating measures in place as early as possible in the response or programme.
9.5 Manage the risk of corruption and take appropriate action if it is identified.	• Document funding criteria and sources of funding. Be open and transparent with project information. • Encourage stakeholders to report abuses of power.

Organisational Responsibilities

9.6 Policies and processes governing the use and management of resources are in place, including how the organisation:

- accepts and allocates funds and gifts-in-kind ethically and legally;
- uses its resources in an environmentally responsible way;
- prevents and addresses corruption, fraud, conflicts of interest and misuse of resources;
- conducts audits, verifies compliance and reports transparently;
- assesses, manages and mitigates risk on an ongoing basis; and
- ensures that the acceptance of resources does not compromise its independence.

Guidance notes

Efficient use of resources: The term "resources" refers to the inputs an organisation needs to deliver its mission. This includes but is not limited to funds, staff, goods, equipment, time, land and the environment in general.

In high-profile acute crises, there is often pressure to respond quickly and to demonstrate that agencies are doing something to address the situation. This can lead to poor project planning and insufficient emphasis on exploring different potential programme and financial options (for example, the use of cash-based assistance) that may offer better value for money. However, the elevated risk of corruption in these contexts means it is important to provide training and support to staff and establish complaints mechanisms to prevent corruption within the systems ⬚ see Commitments 3 and 5.

Deploying experienced senior staff during this time can help to mitigate the risks and strike a balance between providing a timely response, maintaining standards and limiting waste.

Collaboration and coordination between organisations (and communities) can also contribute to a more efficient response (for example, by conducting joint assessments or evaluations and supporting interagency registration and logistics systems).

At the end of the project, the assets and resources that remain will need to be donated, sold or returned responsibly.

Using resources for their intended purpose: All humanitarian actors are accountable to both donors and affected people and should be able to demonstrate that resources have been used wisely, efficiently and to good effect.

Accounting records should satisfy accepted national and/or international standards and should be applied systematically within the organisation.

Fraud, corruption and waste divert resources away from those who need them most. However, an intervention that is not effective because it is understaffed or under-resourced cannot be said to be accountable. Economical does not always equal value for money. A balance will often need to be struck between economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

Monitoring and reporting on expenditure: All staff members share responsibility for ensuring that finances are well managed. Staff are encouraged to report any suspected fraud, corruption or misuse of resources.

Environmental impact and use of natural resources: Humanitarian responses can have negative impacts on the environment. For example, they can produce large amounts of waste, degrade natural resources, contribute to the depletion or contamination of the water table and cause deforestation and other environmental hazards. Ecosystems are essential to human well-being and buffer against natural hazards. Any impact on the environment must be addressed as a cross-sectoral issue, as this may cause further and lasting damage to lives, health and livelihoods. Involving affected people and their concerns in this process is key. Support for the local management of natural resources should be integrated into programming.

Managing corruption risks: The definition and understanding of corrupt practices is not the same in all cultures. A clear definition of the behaviour that is expected of staff (including volunteers) and partners is fundamental in addressing this risk, see Commitment 8. Engaging respectfully with community members, and establishing on-site monitoring mechanisms and transparency with stakeholders can help to reduce corruption risks.

Gifts-in-kind may create ethical dilemmas. Giving gifts in many cultures is an important social norm, and refusing a gift would appear rude. If receiving the gift causes a sense of indebtedness, the receiver should politely refuse it. If it is accepted, it is important to declare this and discuss it with a manager if concerns remain. Mitigate risks for operational independence and organisational impartiality by producing guidance for staff and encouraging transparency. Staff should be made aware of such policies and possible dilemmas.

Natural resources and environmental impact: Organisations should commit to environmentally sound policies and practices (including a plan of action and rapid environmental impact assessment) and make use of existing guidelines to help address environmental issues in an emergency. Green procurement policies help reduce the impact on the environment but need to be managed in a way that minimises delay in the provision of assistance.

Corruption and fraud: Fraud includes theft, diversion of goods or property and the falsification of records such as expense claims. Every organisation must keep an accurate record of financial transactions to show how funds have been used. Establish systems and procedures to ensure internal control of financial resources and to prevent fraud and corruption.

Organisations should support recognised good practice in financial management and reporting. Organisational policies should also ensure that procurement systems are transparent and robust and incorporate counter-terrorism measures.

Conflicts of interest: Staff must ensure that there is no conflict between the aims of the organisation and their own personal or financial interests. For example, they must not award contracts to suppliers, organisations or individuals if they or their family stand to gain financially.

There are various forms of conflict of interest, and people do not always recognise that they are contravening organisational codes and policies. For example, using the organisation's resources without permission or taking gifts from a supplier might be construed as a conflict of interest.

Creating a culture where people feel that they can openly discuss and declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest is key to managing them.

Auditing and transparency: Audits can take several forms. Internal audits check that procedures are being followed. External audits verify whether the organisation's financial statements are true and fair. An investigative audit is executed when an organisation suspects a specific problem, usually fraud.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions and Organisational responsibilities

Below are some guiding questions related to the Core Humanitarian Standard's Key actions and Organisational responsibilities. These questions can be used to support programme design, or as a tool for reviewing a project, response or policy.

Commitment 1: Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Has a comprehensive and consultative assessment of capacities and needs been conducted and used to inform response planning?
- Are affected people and communities, local institutions and other stakeholders (including representative groups for women, men, girls and boys), been consulted when assessing needs, risks, capacities, vulnerabilities and context? Are assessment and monitoring data disaggregated by sex, age and disability?
- How have at-risk groups been identified?
- Are relevant cross-cutting issues considered in the needs and context analysis?
- Does the response provide assistance in a way that is adapted to the needs and preferences of the affected population (for example, in-kind, cash)? Are there different types of assistance and protection for different demographic groups?
- What actions are taken to adapt the response strategy to different demographic groups, based on changing needs, capacities, risks and the context?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Does the organisation have a clear policy commitment to rights-based, impartial and independent humanitarian action, and are staff members aware of it?
- Do relevant stakeholders perceive the organisation as impartial, independent and non-discriminatory?
- Do working processes include mechanisms for consistently collecting data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other relevant characteristics?
- Are these data regularly used to guide programme design and implementation?
- Does the organisation have the funding, staffing policies and programmatic flexibility to allow it to adapt the response to changing needs?
- Does the organisation systematically carry out market analysis to determine the appropriate forms of assistance?

Commitment 2: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Are constraints such as physical barriers or discrimination and risks regularly identified and analysed, and plans adapted accordingly together with the affected population?
- Does planning consider optimal times for activities, accounting for factors such as weather, season, social factors, ease of access or conflict?
- Are delays in implementing plans and activities monitored and addressed?
- Are early warning systems and contingency plans used?
- Are recognised technical standards used and achieved?
- Are unmet needs identified and addressed?
- Are the results of monitoring used to adapt programmes?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Are there clear processes to assess if the organisation has sufficient ability, financing and appropriate deployable staff available before making programming commitments?
- Are there clear policies, processes and resources in place to support monitoring and evaluation and to use the results for management and decision-making? Are they known to staff?
- Are there clear processes to define responsibilities and timelines for decision-making on resource allocations?

Commitment 3: Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Have local capacities for resilience (structures, organisations, informal groups, leadership figures and support networks) been identified and do plans exist to strengthen these capacities?
- Is existing information on risks, hazards, vulnerabilities and related plans used in programming activities?
- Has the programme considered whether and how services could be provided by local civil society, government or private sector bodies? Are plans in place to support these bodies as they take over the provision of relevant services?
- Are strategies and actions to reduce risk and build resilience designed in consultation with, or guided by, affected people and communities?
- In what ways (both formal and informal) are local leaders and/or authorities consulted to ensure response strategies are in line with local and/or national priorities?
- Are staff sufficiently supportive of local initiatives, including community-based self-help initiatives particularly for marginalised and minority groups, and first response capacities?
- Is the response designed to facilitate early recovery?
- Is there progressive ownership and decision-making by local people?
- Has a market assessment been completed, to identify possible impacts of the programme on the local economy?
- Has a clear transition and/or exit strategy been developed in consultation with affected people and other relevant stakeholders?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Is there a policy that requires the execution of risk assessments and risk reduction exercises for vulnerable people in the organisation's programme areas? Is it known to staff?
- Do policies and procedures exist for assessing and mitigating the negative effects of the response? Are they known to staff?
- Are policies and procedures in place to deal with situations of sexual exploitation, abuse or discrimination, including based on sexual orientation or other characteristics? Are they known to staff?
- Are contingency plans in place for responding to new or evolving crises? Are they known to staff?
- Do staff understand what is expected of them on issues of protection, security and risks?
- Does the organisation enable and promote community-led action and self-help?

Commitment 4: Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Is information about the organisation and response provided in accessible and appropriate ways to different affected groups?
- Can women, men, girls and boys (especially those who are marginalised and vulnerable) access the information provided, and do they understand it?
- Are affected people's views, including those of the most vulnerable and marginalised, sought and used to guide programme design and implementation?
- Are all groups within the affected community aware of how to give feedback on the response, and do they feel safe using those channels?
- Is feedback used? Can the programme point to elements that have been changed based on feedback? See Key actions 1.3 and 2.5.
- Are barriers to giving feedback identified and addressed?
- Is data provided through feedback mechanisms disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other relevant categories?
- Where assistance is provided through electronic transfers, are feedback channels available to people, even where there is no direct contact with staff?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Do policies and programme plans include provisions for information sharing, including criteria on what information should and should not be shared? Are they known to staff?
- Do policies and programme plans include provisions for data protection? Are there criteria for safe data storage (in lockable cabinets for hard copies and password protected files for soft copies), restricted access, destruction of data in case of evacuation and information sharing protocols? Do such protocols detail what information should be shared, with whom and in which situations? (Keep in mind that information should only be shared on a strictly need to know basis and should not contain identifying details or case histories unless necessary.)
- Do policies include provisions on how to deal with confidential or sensitive information, or information that could potentially place staff or affected people at risk? Are they known to staff?
- Is there a policy commitment and guidelines about the way in which affected people are represented in external communications or fundraising materials? Are they known to staff?

Commitment 5: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Are communities and people affected by crisis consulted about the design of complaints mechanisms?
- Are the preferences of all demographic groups considered, particularly those related to safety and confidentiality, in the design of complaint handling processes?
- Is information about how complaints mechanisms work and what kinds of complaints can be made through them, provided to and understood by all demographic groups?
- Are there agreed and respected time frames for investigating and resolving complaints? Is the time between when a complaint is filed and its resolution recorded?
- Are complaints about sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination investigated immediately by staff with relevant competencies and an appropriate level of authority?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Are specific policies, budgets and procedures in place for handling complaints?
- Are all staff provided with induction and refresher training on the organisation's policy and procedures for handling complaints?
- Does the organisation's complaints-handling policy include provisions for sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination?
- Is the organisation's policy commitment and procedures for preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination shared with affected people?
- Are complaints that cannot be addressed by the organisation referred in a timely manner to other relevant organisations?

Commitment 6: Communities and people affected by crisis receive co-ordinated, complementary assistance.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Is information about the organisation's competencies, resources, geographical areas and sectors of work shared in a timely way with others responding to the crisis?
- Is information about the competencies, resources, areas and sectors of work of other organisations, including local and national authorities, accessed and used?
- Have existing coordination structures been identified and supported?
- Are the programmes of other organisations and authorities considered when designing, planning and implementing programmes?
- Are gaps and duplication in coverage identified and addressed?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Is there a clear commitment in organisational policies and/or strategies to work in collaboration with other actors?
- Have criteria or conditions for partner selection, collaboration and coordination been established?
- Are formal partnership arrangements in place?
- Do partnership agreements include clear definitions of the roles, responsibilities and commitments of each partner, including how each partner will contribute to jointly meeting humanitarian principles?

Commitment 7: Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Are evaluations and reviews of responses of similar crises consulted and incorporated as relevant in programme design?
- Are monitoring, evaluation, feedback and complaints-handling processes leading to changes and/or innovations in programme design and implementation?
- Is learning systematically documented?
- Are specific systems used to share learning with relevant stakeholders, including affected people and partners?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Do policies and resources exist for evaluation and learning? Are they known to staff?
- Does clear guidance exist for the recording and dissemination of learning, including specific guidance applicable to humanitarian crises?
- Is learning identified at programme level, documented and shared within the organisation?
- Is the organisation an active member of learning and innovation forums? How does the organisation contribute to these forums?

Commitment 8: Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Are the organisation's mandate and values communicated to new staff?

- Is staff performance managed, under-performance addressed and good performance recognised?

- Do staff sign a code of conduct or similarly binding document? If so, is their understanding of the policy supported by training on it and on other relevant policies?

- Are complaints received about staff or partners' staff? How are they handled?

- Are staff aware of support available for developing the competencies required by their role and are they making use of it?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Are procedures in place for assessing human resource needs in relation to programme size and scope?

- Does organisational planning make provision for future leadership needs and for developing new talent?

- Do staff policies and procedures comply with local employment law and follow recognised good practice in managing staff?

- Do staff security and well-being policies cover the practical and psychosocial needs of local staff who may have been personally affected by the crisis?

- Are soft skills that support the ability of staff to listen to and account for feedback from people affected by crisis taken into consideration when recruiting, training and appraising staff?

- Do all staff have updated job descriptions and objectives, including specific responsibilities?

- Is the compensation and benefits structure fair, transparent and consistently applied?

- Are all staff inducted and updated on performance management and staff development policies and procedures?

- Are all staff (and contractors) required to sign a code of conduct (that covers the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse) and provided with an appropriate induction on the code of conduct?

- Is there a clear statement/clause/code of conduct included in the contract with financial service providers and commercial actors to prevent sexual and other exploitation?

- Does the organisation have location-specific guidelines for an internal complaint handling mechanism? Are these known to staff?

- Do staff members understand, recognise and respond to discrimination in their own programmes and activities?

Commitment 9: Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

Guiding questions for monitoring Key actions

- Are staff following organisational protocols for decisions regarding expenditure?

- Is expenditure monitored regularly and the reports shared across programme management?

- Are services and goods procured using a competitive bidding process?

- Are potential impacts on the environment (water, soil, air, biodiversity) monitored and actions taken to mitigate them?

- Is a safe whistleblowing procedure in place and known to staff, affected people and other stakeholders?

- Are cost-effectiveness and social impact monitored?

Guiding questions for monitoring Organisational responsibilities

- Do policies and procedures exist for ethical procurement, use and management of resources?

- Do these include provisions for:
  - acceptance and allocation of funds?
  - acceptance and allocation of gifts-in-kind?
  - mitigation and prevention of environmental impacts?
  - fraud prevention, handling of suspected and proven corruption and misuse of resources?
  - conflicts of interest?
  - auditing, verification and reporting?
  - asset risk assessment and management?

Glossary

For the purposes of the CHS, the following definitions apply:

Accountability: the process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power (see also mutual accountability).

Audit: a systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining audit evidence [records, statements of fact or other information which are relevant and verifiable] and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to which the audit criteria [set of policies, procedures or requirements] are fulfilled.

Civil society: citizens who are linked by common interests and collective activity but excluding for-profit, private sector organisations. Civil society can be informal, or organised into NGOs or other associations.

Climate change adaptation: climate change pushes at-risk people beyond their capacity to cope and makes more people vulnerable to the effects of disasters. Climate change adaptation relates to interventions that seek to identify, reduce and manage risks associated with more frequent, severe and unpredictable weather events.

Code of conduct: a statement of principles and values that establishes a set of expectations and standards for how an organisation, government body or partner will behave, including minimum levels of behaviour expected and any disciplinary action that could follow in cases of non-compliance.

Communities and people affected by crisis: the totality of women, men, girls and boys with different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities who are affected by disasters, conflict, poverty or other crises at a specific location.

Competencies: the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that staff need in order to be effective in their roles, and that ultimately determine an organisation's success.

Complaint: a specific grievance of anyone who has been negatively affected by an organisation's action or who believes that an organisation has failed to meet a stated commitment.

Coping mechanisms: some coping mechanisms are sustainable and helpful, while others may be negative, with potentially long-term harmful consequences, such as the sale of assets, reducing expenditure on medical care or education, consuming less food, or heavy alcohol consumption.

Corruption: "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain"[9]. This includes financial corruption such as fraud (see below), bribery, extortion and receiving kickbacks (illicit payments in return for facilitating transactions or contacts with influential people). Exchanging relief goods in return for sexual favours, preferential treatment of friends or relatives when recruiting or providing assistance, and the manipulation of distribution lists and diversion of resources are also forms of corruption.

Disaster risk reduction: is a type of response that aims to identify and address risks caused by both climate (e.g. drought, floods and landslides) and non-climate related disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis).

Document: any form of record of discussions, agreements, decisions and/or actions that is reproducible.

Duty of care: a moral or legal obligation to ensure the safety of others. It entails meeting recognised minimum standards for the well-being of crisis-affected people, and paying proper attention to their safety and the safety of staff.

Effectiveness: the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives. The effectiveness of humanitarian response is a responsibility that is shared between responders and outcomes should be assessed in conjunction with crisis-affected communities.

Efficiency: the extent to which the outputs of humanitarian programmes, both qualitative and quantitative, are achieved as a result of inputs.

Engagement: the processes by which organisations communicate, consult and/or provide for the participation of interested and/ or affected stakeholders, ensuring that their concerns, desires, expectations, needs, rights and opportunities are considered in the establishment, implementation and review of the programmes assisting them.

Entitlement: refers to a right to benefits (goods or services) specified especially by law or contract. People affected by crisis have a right to protection and security and these and other rights are enshrined in international humanitarian law and human rights declarations, which most countries have signed up to.

Evaluation: usually an episodic assessment of performance, focused on results (outcomes and impacts) that can be internal or external. Evaluations can provide assessments of what works and why, and highlight intended and unintended results for accountability and learning purposes.

---

[9] Transparency International

Evidence: information on which a judgment or conclusion can be based. In humanitarian work, many different sorts of evidence are used including subjective and qualitative information. Qualitative information is not necessarily information of a lower quality than quantitative information. ALNAP[10] uses six criteria to judge the quality of evidence used in humanitarian action: "accuracy; representativeness; relevance; generalisability; attribution; and clarity around context and methods".

Feedback mechanism: a formal system established and used to allow recipients of humanitarian action (and in some cases, other crisis-affected populations) to provide information on their experience with a humanitarian agency or the wider humanitarian system. Such information is then used for different purposes, in expectation of a variety of benefits, including taking corrective action to improve some element of the response.[11] Feedback can also be provided informally.

Fraud: the act of intentionally deceiving someone in order to gain an unfair or illegal advantage (financial, political or otherwise). This is usually considered as a violation of civil law.

Gifts-in-kind: any goods and services (rather than money) received by an organisation as a donation. The purpose of gifts-in-kind is to assist an organisation in carrying out the purpose for which it was organised.

Hazard (and risk): something that has the potential to cause adverse effects such as an earthquake or an epidemic. A risk is the likelihood of harm occurring from that hazard and the potential losses to lives, livelihoods, assets and services.

Humanitarian Country Team (HCT): a strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum established and led by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Composition includes representatives from the UN, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), international NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. Agencies that are also designated cluster leads should represent the clusters as well as their respective organisations. The HCT is responsible for agreeing on common strategic issues related to humanitarian action.

Humanitarian action: action taken with the objective of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity during and after human-induced crises and natural disasters, as well as action taken to prevent and prepare for them.

Impartiality: relates to giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress, being objective and not discriminating because of someone's nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, tribal allegiances or political opinion.

Informed consent: agreeing to an action based on a clear understanding of the facts, implications and consequences of the action.

Integrity: involves behaviours and actions consistent with a set of moral or ethical principles and standards.

Monitoring: an ongoing and usually internal process of data collection, focused on inputs and outputs.

Mutual accountability: a process by which two or more partners agree to be held responsible for the commitments that they have voluntarily made to each other (see also accountability).

Organisation: an entity that has the management structure and power to apply the CHS.

Partners: organisations working jointly within a formal arrangement to achieve a specific goal, with clear and agreed roles and responsibilities.

Participation: involves enabling crisis-affected people to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them. It is achieved through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and worst affected are represented and have influence.

Policy: a documented statement of intent and rules for decision-making.

Practice: refers to established actions or ways of proceeding and is often guided by policies and procedures.

Private sector: primarily comprised of for-profit institutions (i.e. businesses), but includes social enterprises where the primary aim is not profit and where profits might be reinvested in social causes. Private sector engagement refers to all types of involvement, ranging from acting as a supplier, donor, advisor or innovator, to businesses carrying out humanitarian response.

Protection: all activities aimed at ensuring the full and equal respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnic, social, religious or other background. It goes beyond the immediate life-saving activities that are often the focus during an emergency.

Psychological debriefing: a formal process that encourages participants to relive distressing or traumatic events. This has been found, at best, to not work and, at worst, to cause more harm. This should not be confused with psychological first aid or counselling that aim to listen to people's concerns and allow them to talk through issues if they want to.

---

[10] Knox Clarke, P. & Darcy, J. (2014) 'Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action'. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI: http://www.alnap.org/ resource/10441.aspx.

[11] Bonino, F. et al. (2014) 'Closing the Loop – effective feedback in humanitarian contexts'. ALNAP-CDA Practitioner Guidance. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Quality: the totality of features and characteristics of humanitarian assistance that support its ability to, in time, satisfy stated or implied needs and expectations, and respect the dignity of the people it aims to assist.

Resilience: the ability of a community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner. The focus on resilience aims to protect or re-establish people's livelihoods, ensure that systems (including governance and infrastructure) are better able to withstand future shocks and also ensure that communities are organised and prepared to respond better to subsequent disasters. Access to social, financial, cultural and emotional support through extended family, religious networks and rituals, friends, schools, and community organisations and activities helps to re-establish individual and community self-respect and identity, and enhance a person's capacity to recover from a disaster.

Sexual abuse: "actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions." (UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13))

Sexual exploitation: "any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another." (UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13))

Sexual harassment: unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature in the workplace that can include indecent remarks or sexual demands.

Staff: any designated representative of an organisation, including national, international, and permanent or short-term employees, as well as volunteers and consultants.

Staff competencies: the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that individuals develop in the course of their working life. Staff capacity considers how these individual competencies work together to achieve organisational objectives.

Stakeholder: anybody who can affect or is affected by an organisation, strategy or project.

Surge capacity: relates to the ability of an agency to scale-up quickly and to respond to large-scale crises.

Transparency: refers to openness, honesty and communication. An activity, project or organisation is transparent if information about it is open and freely available to the public.

Vulnerability: the extent to which some people may be disproportionately affected by the disruption of their physical environment and social support mechanisms following disaster or conflict, resulting in an increased risk of exploitation, illness or death. Vulnerability is specific to each person and each situation.

Whistle-blowing: when a member of staff reports suspected wrongdoing at work. This includes the suspicion of fraud or misuse of resources, neglect of duties or when someone's health and safety is in danger.

The **CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators** supplement the Core

Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). Aimed at all

humanitarian actors and organisations involved in planning, managing

or implementing a humanitarian response, this document provides

clarification on the Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities laid

out in the CHS and examines some of the practical challenges that may

arise when applying the CHS. It provides indicators and guiding questions

to promote measurement of progress towards meeting the standard and

drive continuous learning and improvement.