



# Improving the Accessibility of CHS Verification Scheme for National Actors

Review

FINAL REPORT

February 2023

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## Acknowledgements

This report has been drafted by an independent team formed by HERE-Geneva for the purpose of this review. The team consists of Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, Elise Baudot Queguiner, Raylene Govender, and Valentine Hambye-Verbrugghen. The report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations find their origin in evidence collected by the team and which underwent rigorous analysis and triangulation. The report represents the Review Team's points of view, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the CHS-Alliance.

The Review Team is grateful to the range of individuals who shared their experiences and reflections for this review. Particular thanks go to the members of staff of CHS-Alliance for their logistical support and availability.

## List of abbreviations

A4EP	Alliance for Empowering Partnership
AAP	Accountability to affected people
ADH	Aktion Deutschland Hilft
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CAB	Conformity assessment body
CBPF	Country-based pooled fund
CFM	Complaints and feedback mechanism
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CWS-Asia	Community World Service Asia
Danida	Denmark's development cooperation
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DERF	Danish Emergency Relief Fund
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FPA	Framework partnership agreement
HACT	Harmonised approach to cash transfer
HAR	Humanitarian Accountability Report
HQAI	Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
L/NNGO	Local/national non-governmental organisation
NAHAB	National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PCA	Partner capacity assessments
PSEAH	Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAP	Verification Advisory Panel
WFP	World Food Programme

# Executive Summary

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) contains nine commitments that place people and communities affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action. Since 2016, organisations using the Standard have been encouraged to assess the degree to which they are fulfilling these commitments as per a Verification Scheme adopted by the CHS Alliance. The Verification Scheme includes three modalities: Self-Assessment, Independent Verification, and Certification. This review considers, specifically from the perspective of local and national organisations, how the Verification Scheme can best reach as many organisations as possible to drive systemic change.

At the time of writing, a total of 133 organisations, large and small and from various parts of the world, have decided to undergo one or more of the verification options. While the numbers are increasing, the uptake thus far has been seen as relatively slow and far from scaled, especially among local and national NGOs. The review provides an analysis of potential barriers to increased uptake from the perspective of local and national NGOs, and recommendations on how these could be addressed.

The first barrier is limited knowledge and familiarity with the CHS itself among local and national NGOs. While recent CHS Alliance outreach efforts have led to an increase in engagement, local and national NGOs contacted for this review mostly had a limited awareness and understanding of the Standard. Furthermore, although the CHS represents the core of humanitarian action and should be at the centre of all humanitarian work, its promotion seems to be largely absent from the sector at large, including within UN-led humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

Among those who are familiar with the CHS, the Standard is generally well-understood as an instrument representing the core values and principles underpinning humanitarian action. Its universal nature, however, is not uncontested. The efforts to connect CHS verification to (Western) donors' due diligence are seen by some to risk the CHS being construed as an international donor instrument and constraint on funding rather than a globally developed self-regulatory standard. Further to this, there are questions as to the scope of the CHS. This is primarily an issue for the ongoing CHS revision process, which will have to decide on how it should answer the calls for a more specific focus of the Standard, given that others also view it as a standard applicable to development work.

The second barrier is the perceived heaviness and costs associated with both Independent Verification and Certification. Few believe either modality can be effectively scaled to a large number of local and national NGOs in their current forms and cost structures, especially in a context of growing funding appeals. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the promotion of Independent Verification and Certification has tended to side line Self-Assessment as a potential cost-effective alternative to organisational learning and improvement.

To address these barriers, the review outlines a number of recommendations.

First, the CHS Alliance needs to continue its outreach efforts and ensure active follow-up to encourage active engagement, including promotion of Self-Assessment and eventual membership. To expand reach, peer outreach (including among CHS Alliance members), onboarding NGO networks to encourage CHS uptake among membership, and engaging the UN-led coordination system should be leveraged.

Second, if scaling is the objective, then other more cost-effective means of independent assessment should be considered. These additional or alternative mechanisms could include:

- Re-introducing peer review, which provides both an external perspective on an organisation and peer learning opportunities.
- Expanding the number of organisations able to provide independent assessment, in particular accrediting national providers.
- Scaling measurement and engagement within donors'/funders' due diligence criteria and evaluation processes, including pooled fund mechanisms.

Fundamentally, the approach taken towards the Verification Scheme depends on the theory of change adopted by the CHS Alliance, including the assumed pathway towards realising the level of systemic change ambitioned. For some, this will be achieved through evidence-based rigour and robust levels of compliance, especially among the actors with a large humanitarian footprint; for others via a multiplicity of actors of all sizes and reach committing, measuring themselves (and each other), and benefiting from facilitated learning and improvement. The latter course, though less scientific, has the advantage of being affordable at a large scale, better suited to play on intrinsic organisational motivation, and perhaps more in line with the dynamic nature of organisational culture and performance. Both approaches can be merged to a certain degree, but this needs to be consciously done.

# 1 Introduction and background

1. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), established in 2014, contains nine commitments that place people and communities affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action.<sup>1</sup> The Standard, adopted through an extensive global consultation process, the joint standards initiative, stems from a collective vision to forge a more accountable aid system through the adoption of one universal and measurable standard consolidating best practises.<sup>2</sup> The CHS Alliance was formed in 2015 as a global alliance of organisations committed to making aid work better for people, through the implementation of the CHS. The Alliance is a membership organisation, with both full and associate membership opportunities.<sup>3</sup>
2. The CHS is a “voluntary and measurable standard”, enabling an organisation to “learn the extent to which accountability standards have been incorporated” into their work and identify areas for improvement.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, a Verification Scheme was adopted to enable this measurement and learning.<sup>5</sup> The Scheme “offers different approaches”, recognising there are “many types of aid organisations at different stages of their journey”.<sup>6</sup> Currently, the three Verification Scheme modalities are: Self-Assessment, Independent Verification, and Certification to both facilitate organisational learning and growth and offer a rigorous and independent external audit of an organisation’s compliance with the CHS commitments.<sup>7</sup>
3. The purpose of Self-Assessment is “learning and improvement.”<sup>8</sup> Its tools, including manual and online questionnaires, are open to members and non-members of the CHS Alliance.<sup>9</sup> Members of the Alliance can visualise findings on dashboards, compare data, and develop improvement plans with the support of repositories of good practice, peer support and technical experts. The completion of a member’s Self-Assessment is reviewed and validated through a signed CHS Alliance confirmation letter.<sup>10</sup>
4. Independent Verification “demonstrate[s] commitment and documents level of compliance”, while Certification “confirms compliance” with the CHS.<sup>11</sup> Independent Verification and Certification are open to all organisations regardless of CHS Alliance membership.<sup>12</sup> Both modalities have been delegated to a conformity assessment body (CAB), independent from the CHS Alliance, charged with development of audit tools and implementing audits.<sup>13</sup> The CAB must be accredited under the latest version of ISO/IEC 17065 (or its equivalent).<sup>14</sup> To date there is only one CAB, the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI).
5. Both Independent Verification and Certification are similar in that they use the same HQAI audit tools, have three-year life cycles, and begin with an initial audit (year 0).<sup>15</sup> Summaries of all audits under both processes are made public.<sup>16</sup> A confidential expanded version of audit reports is also given to each organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability 2014

<sup>2</sup> Core Humanitarian Standard Home Page: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org>

<sup>3</sup> The Alliance has two forms of Membership: “Full Membership”, targeting NGOs, the Red Cross /Red Crescent organisations, and the UN, whose “core activities” or that of their members “work towards assisting and protecting vulnerable people and crisis-affected communities”; and Associate Members, who do not meet the eligibility criteria of Full Membership but whose activities and management practices “are consistent with, and supportive of the vision, mission and objective of the CHS Alliance. Full Members, among other commitments must “undertake verification against the CHS within two years of joining”; develop and follow an improvement plan; provide annual feedback on use of and lessons learned from the CHS; have an external complaints mechanism in place and submit annual audited accounts. CHS Alliance, “*Making Aid Work Better for People, CHS Alliance membership pack*”; v. 2; 2021 p. 6

<sup>4</sup> CHS Alliance, *CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme: Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, April 2022 and CHS Webpage; <https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/>

<sup>5</sup> HQAI, *Independent quality assurance of the CHS: What it entails, how it works and the journey ahead*, November 2022.

<sup>6</sup> CHS Webpage: <https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/>

<sup>7</sup> Verification Scheme.

<sup>8</sup> Verification Scheme; CHS Alliance, *Core Humanitarian Standard Self-Assessment Manual*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, March 2022, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this report “Self-Assessment” refers to CHS Alliance verified Self-Assessment available to members.

<sup>10</sup> Verification Scheme; CHS Alliance, *Core Humanitarian Standard Self-Assessment Manual*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Verification Scheme, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Agreement on the Use of the CHS Verification Scheme by Conformity Assessment Bodies, art. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>15</sup> Verification Scheme, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> See HQAI website <https://www.hqai.org/en/network/audited-partners/>

Certified organisations are subject to “maintenance audits” for each of the following two years. Under Independent Verification, if the organisation has areas for improvement, it is obliged to report back within 18 months on corrective actions taken.<sup>17</sup> Any voluntary or forced withdrawals or loss of Certification are announced publicly.

6. At the time of data collection done for this review,<sup>18</sup> a total of 133 organisations have undergone some or multiple forms of verification. Of these 133, 77 organisations are CHS Alliance members, amounting to roughly 46% of the 170 members having completed some form verification thus far.<sup>19</sup> The Alliance further communicated to the review team that 56 members were currently undergoing Self-Assessment. The CHS Alliance has reported a recent increase in uptake among national organisations joining the CHS Alliance and taking on a Self-Assessment exercise.

Verification Modality	INGOs	Local and National Actors	Non-members	Total
Self-Assessment	40	8	50	98
Independent Verification	8	2	19	29
Certification	15	4	3	22

7. Given what was felt to be a relatively slow uptake of verification, in 2019, the CHS Alliance Board commissioned KPMG to conduct an overall review of the Verification Scheme with the objective of making recommendations for the way ahead.<sup>20</sup> In 2020, an independent study was commissioned by the CHS Alliance in consultation with HQAI to look at the opportunity of aligning CHS verification with capacity assessments conducted by donor governments or funding partners.<sup>21</sup> The Verification Scheme has been debated by external practitioners and experts.<sup>22</sup> HQAI has further captured and reflected upon its own lessons learned and run studies on the extent to which its audits map against those of donors.<sup>23</sup>
8. Building off this work, the CHS Alliance has commissioned this review to understand, from the perspective of local and national organisations, what is required to ensure the Verification Scheme is accessible “to the many national and local organisations working in and for their communities”.<sup>24</sup>
9. The review is situated against the CHS Alliance Strategy 2022 to 2025, which sets out the objective of “a greater number and diversity of organisations delivering on the CHS, through making improvements, verifying performance, and driving systemic change”.<sup>25</sup> The focus on local actors reflects the recognition that operationalising a strategy focused on accountability to people in crises must include adoption by the multitude of frontline actors working directly with these communities. It also follows from an overarching humanitarian policy objective of ensuring that local actors drive and lead humanitarian response, as

<sup>17</sup> Idem.

<sup>18</sup> The second semester of 2022.

<sup>19</sup> See CHS Alliance website: <https://www.chsalliance.org/about/our-data/>; these numbers differ from those found on the HQAI website, which list as certified 20 international organisations and 6 national organisations; and as independently verified 13 international organisations and 2 national organisations, <https://www.hqai.org/en/network/audited-partners/>.

<sup>20</sup> KPMG, *CHS Alliance Verification Scheme: The Way Ahead. Final Report*, June 2019; CHS Alliance, *Management Response to the CHS Verification Scheme Review*, October 2019.

<sup>21</sup> LEWINSKY Thomas, *Making CHS into a recognised, verifiable standard, aligned with donor PCA due diligence and compliance requirements. Prospects of raising the standard to the next level. Discussion paper*, April 2020.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., DROSS Ester, PATEL Smruti, “Certification system fit for the future” in *Community World Service Asia*, 2022; PATEL Smruti, VAN BRABANT Koenraad, “Is the Core Humanitarian Standard fit for the future? A contribution to the review of the Core Humanitarian Standard” in *Community World Service Asia*, September 2022.; TAMMINGA Philip, “Bringing aid to account the CHS and third-party verification” in CHS Alliance, *Humanitarian Accountability Report*, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> HQAI Annual Report 2021, [https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/documents/2021\\_HQAI\\_report\\_for-web.pdf](https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/documents/2021_HQAI_report_for-web.pdf); Lewinsky 2020, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Project ToR. See also CHS Alliance, *CHS Alliance Strategy 2022-2025*, February 2022, which sets the following goal: “A greater number and diversity of organisations delivering on the CHS, by making improvements, verifying their performance.”

<sup>25</sup> CHS Alliance Strategy.



articulated by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and featured high on the agenda of the Grand Bargain agreement.

10. While the commitment to make “principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary” has focused minds and set targets, most would agree that progress is slow. The numbers of local actors in humanitarian action are reported to be growing and those receiving support for institutional (overhead) costs is increasing. Despite this trend, barriers to direct international funding to national and local actors remain high.<sup>26</sup> Other Grand Bargain commitments, including quality of funding covering also indirect costs, and harmonised due diligence and reporting procedures, remain largely aspirational.
11. It should be noted that a revision of the CHS is also underway. The two processes have been kept separate, although there is mutual relevance, especially if the decision is made to widen the scope of the CHS following the revision process.
12. The findings of this report are divided thematically in three sections:
  - The first section outlines the findings and opinions gathered on the level of awareness and understanding by local and national actors of the Verification Scheme.
  - The second section looks at the motivators or incentive structures behind engagement in the various modalities of the Verification Scheme, including the perceived barriers to entry.
  - The third section takes stock of the efforts and suggestions gathered in terms of revision/adaptation of the Verification Scheme and how to render it more accessible to local and national NGOs.

The report ends with a set of conclusions and recommendations for the CHS Alliance to further consider in its efforts to scale CHS verification or measurement.

## 1.1 Purpose, scope, and approach

13. The Terms of Reference (Annex 1) set out the purpose and scope of the review. Essentially, the review is tasked to examine what it will take to scale uptake of the Verification Scheme among national and local actors.
14. Three focus areas were identified in the TOR:
  1. To capture the various perspectives of national actors regarding CHS verification;
  2. To report on the changes that other actors need to create to enable greater take up of measuring and improving the ability to meet the commitments; and
  3. To draw lessons from the current Verification Scheme which has been in use for six years.
15. This review has gathered experiences with verification, perceptions as regards the reasons behind the uptake so far, and stakeholder opinions/reflections as to recommendations for the future of the Verification Scheme. It is not an evaluation in the sense that a chain of activities, outputs, and outcomes was systematically considered. Nor does it assess whether verification in general, let alone any of the three verification methods specifically, results in improved delivery, better quality of services or strengthened AAP. While key informants provided their views on the results of the verification assessments they undertook, be it one or more of the three methods, this review did not collect evidence to ascertain that CHS verification improved the delivery of services. Further, it is beyond the scope of this review to question verification as a method to assess

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<sup>26</sup> The humanitarian sector continues to be dominated by a few international agencies. Nearly half of all humanitarian funding goes to three UN agencies: the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). See ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System*, 2022, p. 56.

performance against the CHS in the first place. It should be noted that HQAI is undertaking a study to assess the impact of independent CHS quality assurance.<sup>27</sup>

16. Given the breadth and diversity of local and national actors as well as time and resource constraints, the review focused on a subset of these actors, i.e. local and national NGOs, receiving or interested in receiving international humanitarian funding.
17. As far as possible local and national NGOs' direct experience with verification was captured. However, as few of these NGOs have to date engaged with the Scheme, the review also sought to capture the perspective of local and national NGOs who had not engaged to better understand why and how uptake could be increased.
18. The experiences and feedback of international NGOs' use of the Scheme and their perspective on the applicability of the Scheme to local and national NGOs was also gathered. The review also engaged country-level international interlocutors and funders of local and national NGOs, including country-level coordination bodies, country-based pooled funds and the Start Fund, to better understand potential donor/funder engagement and country-level outreach/use multipliers.

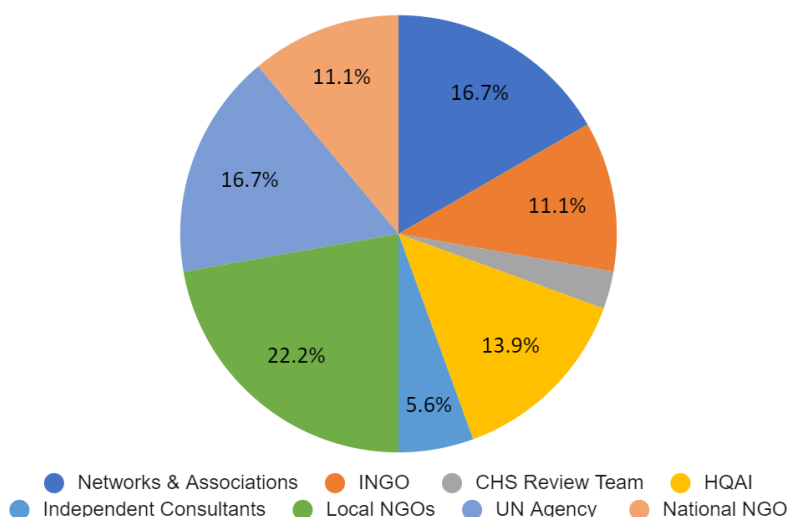
## 1.2 Methodology

19. The review team used a mixed methods approach to collect data, including a document and literature review, interviews with stakeholders, an online survey, and a short series of polls shared in real time with Alliance members during their General Assembly. Key documents reviewed included the following (for a full list see Annex 2):
  - CHS and HQAI documentation;
  - KPMG's 2019 report, CHS Alliance Verification Scheme: The Way Ahead;
  - The 2020 Benchmarking Study on the CHS Verification Framework and Donor's Partner Capacity Assessments;
  - The 2018 and 2020 Humanitarian Accountability Reports, and several discussion papers on CHS verification.
20. The review team remotely conducted 38 key informant interviews with approximately 45 representatives of national and local NGOs, international NGOs, UN agencies, members of HQAI's team, networks and associations, and other humanitarian practitioners and thinkers as relevant. At the outset of the review, participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and advised of the review background, aim and data collection methods to ensure that they had the opportunity to decline participation at an early stage, thus minimising the non-disclosure risk to the review. All participants provided verbal consent.
21. The national and local NGOs contacted were identified via cross-referencing humanitarian funds in the six focus countries, national NGO networks, and CHS Alliance workshop participant lists. Building on the desk review and inception report, interviews were semi-structured and thus conducted along interview templates tailored to each type of stakeholder interviewed. The six focus countries – Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen – were selected on the basis of a number of considerations including new emergency/protracted crisis; disaster/armed conflict; assertive government authorities/open and vibrant civil society; previous CHS engagement and outreach; the presence of international donors, in particular country-based pooled funds.

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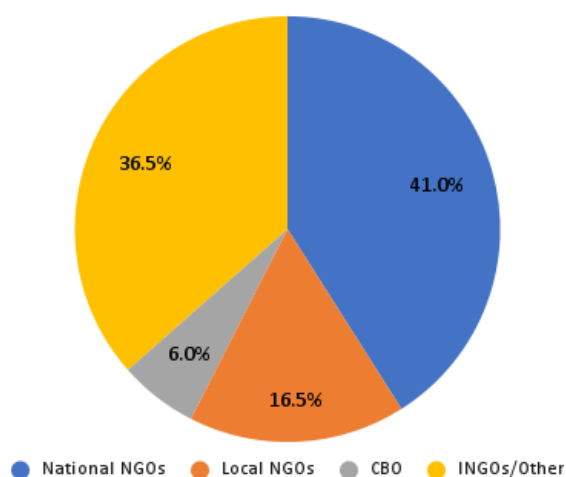
<sup>27</sup> HQAI, "Study confirms: Independent CHS quality assurance has positive impact on accountability", <https://www.hqai.org/en/news/impact/>, January 2023; HQAI, *Independent CHS quality assurance has a demonstrated positive impact on organisations' accountability*, [https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Briefing\\_IMPACT\\_HQAI-2023-01-12.pdf](https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Briefing_IMPACT_HQAI-2023-01-12.pdf), January 2023.

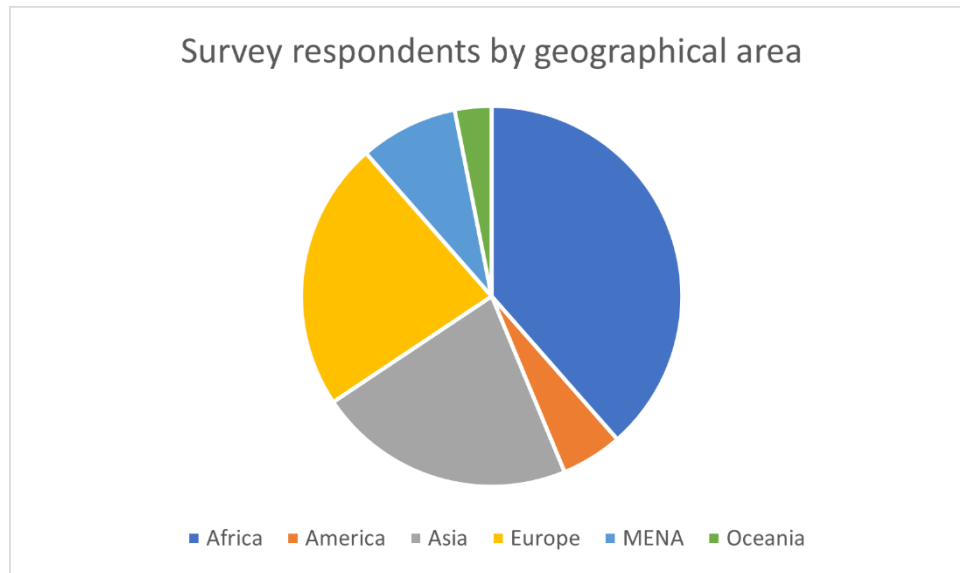
Key Informant Interviews by Type



**22.** An online survey in Arabic, English, French and Spanish was disseminated to collect further data. Available to respondents for three weeks, HERE and the CHS Alliance promoted it through their respective networks and social media channels. Past participants in CHS workshops who had consented to further outreach were also directly contacted by HERE. 157 respondents participated in the survey. 41 percent of survey respondents identified as national NGOs, 16.5 percent as local NGOs, and 6 percent as community-based organisations, bringing the total of non-international NGO participants in this survey to 63.5 percent. About a third are women-led, and about a third are youth-led organisations. Approximately a third are legally registered in Africa; no clear trends emerge regarding the other two-thirds.

Survey Respondents by Type





- 23.** The review team continuously engaged with the CHS Alliance and CHS Alliance team throughout the process. In September, the team participated in the Alliance’s Board meeting, organising workshop-style discussions to test policy recommendations and directions. The CHS Alliance’s General Assembly (consisting of both local and national NGOs and International NGOs) further provided an opportunity to test assumptions based on the literature review with members of the Alliance. This was done via online polling directly during the session; 58 respondents, two-thirds of which represent international NGOs, participated in the polls. In early November, the review team presented preliminary findings during a workshop session with the Verification Advisory Panel. Finally, the team was also asked to present at HQAI’s November roundtable on “CHS Certification as an enabler of localisation”.
- 24.** As part of its analysis, the review team triangulated the data collected by verifying the sources (i.e. key interviews; survey; CHS Alliance General Assembly polls; consultations with Board and VAP; or documents) and cross-checking the sources. In this respect, when the Report refers to a quote, opinion, or statement, this is reflective of a wider held view or trend.

### 1.2.1 Limitations of the review

- 25.** The main limitations of the review are as follows:
- Short duration and limited budget, compared to the complexity and scale of the issues covered, which are, conceptually and policy-wise, hugely critical at this time both internally to the CHS and in the humanitarian sector at large, especially in light of the localisation agenda;
  - The large diversity of local and national NGOs even focusing on those who “seek or have received international financing”;
  - Limited or slow cooperation from NGOs across the board, including at national and local levels. This is likely compounded by the fact that interviews only occurred remotely. Although approximately 200 respondents (among which 150 national and local NGOs) were contacted for an interview, responses were fairly limited. For example, there were no responses from national and local NGOs targeted in the OPT;
  - The limited number of local and national NGOs which had engaged with CHS verification and especially Independent Verification or Certification. As this was a limited set of NGOs, the “user experience” with verification had to still rely in part on the INGO partners of these organisations and how they felt the CHS verification processes could or should apply to local and national NGOs, and on the HQAI auditors who engage with local and national NGOs.

- The review did not capture the opinions of the “people served” and at whom the CHS is aimed. Though not under the scope of this review, they would be an additional source of evidence in considering certain recommendations made herein.

## 2 Findings

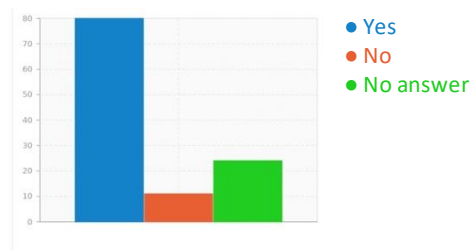
### 2.1 Awareness and understanding of the CHS and its Verification Scheme

- 26.** Before considering user experiences with the verification modalities and the incentive structure for engagement, this first section considers to what extent the CHS is known and understood among local and national NGOs and the international interlocutors that could or should drive such awareness and understanding.
- 27.** In light of past reviews highlighting the need for greater awareness-raising,<sup>28</sup> the CHS Alliance undertook efforts in the last few years engaging hundreds of national NGO representatives. A marked uptake in local and national NGO engagement has consequently been reported.<sup>29</sup> The awareness and engagement in CHS verification modalities nonetheless remains limited, especially given the numbers and diversity of local and national NGOs. Significant scaling would require further similar outreach efforts and especially systematic follow-up, to move beyond awareness to engagement (verification and improvement). The level of awareness and active lobbying for the CHS among international interlocutors was found to be low. The engagement of these potential outreach multipliers would be a critical asset.
- 28.** For those aware of the CHS, its value as a universal standard articulating the standards necessary to ensure accountable assistance to persons in need was well understood and appreciated. There was, however, some confusion as to what “conformity” to the commitments would imply and assumptions made as regards the more resource-challenged local and national NGOs’ ability to meet the CHS indicators.

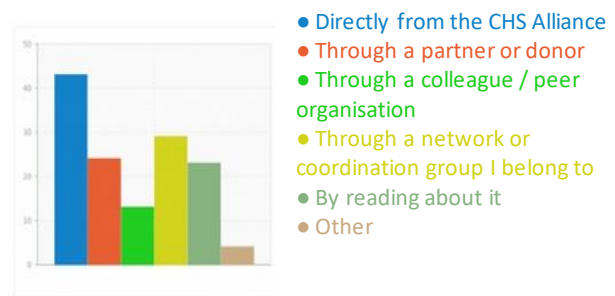
#### 2.1.1 Awareness

- 29.** A large majority of the overall survey respondents confirmed familiarity with the CHS. Among local and national NGOs respondents only 60% felt familiar with the CHS, although the survey was largely circulated among CHS Alliance members and their local and national partners, as well as through country cluster and country-based pooled funds’ (CBPFs) mailing list.
- 30.** In interviews, several local and national NGOs highlighted that the CHS was not widely known among their peers. As one informant highlighted, “I had not realised how little my colleagues are aware of the CHS”.
- 31.** Among the local and national organisations interviewed who had heard of the CHS, several were unfamiliar with the Verification Scheme. When asked if they wished to engage in verification of their organisations against the CHS they expressed interest, asking for more information on how to further engage and sign up to a verification

*Is your organisation familiar with the Core Humanitarian Standard*



*How did your organisation hear about the Core Humanitarian Standard?*



<sup>28</sup> KPMG 2019, p. 4, Recommendation 10; Lewinsky 2020, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> In 2022, more than 300 national NGO representatives participated in seven online workshops to hear how to better support local and national NGOs apply the CHS. See: Wood, Tanya, “2023-the turning point for creating an accountable aid system”; 30 January 2023; <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/article/2023-the-turning-point-for-creating-an-accountable-aid-system/>

process. It appears that most have organisational improvement and growth as the main motivations explaining this interest.

32. Likewise, several informants noted that they were not fully aware of the benefits of CHS Alliance membership. There was some confusion expressed as to the conditions for membership, and to what extent verification was required. They also asked whether undertaking Self-Assessment required CHS Alliance membership. While undergoing at least one form of verification is a requirement of CHS Alliance membership, it appears that this is not widely known.
33. In terms of how local and national NGOs knew about the CHS, a slightly larger percentage of organisations heard about the CHS directly through the CHS Alliance (38% as per the survey findings), while others were informed through network or coordination bodies, donors, or partners. A smaller minority learned about the CHS through a colleague or peer organisation. Feedback through key informant interviews highlighted CHS awareness-raising through (inter-)agency efforts catalysing complaints and feedback mechanisms (CFMs), training programs on accountability, and the SPHERE Standards.
34. In general, key informants, be they UN actors, INGOs or local and national NGOs felt that as a standard reflecting the core commitments of humanitarian action, the CHS was not as prominent as it should be in humanitarian dialogue and coordination fora at the country level, and largely absent in UN-led coordination efforts. As an illustration, some among UN key informants interviewed had not heard of the CHS; others reported having not heard of the CHS until they took up jobs at their organisations' headquarters. Informants highlighted that some coordination mechanisms at the country level such as AAP or PSEAH working groups, where they exist, (may) have the CHS on their radar, but the Standard was clearly less present in its wider applicability.<sup>30</sup>
35. In terms of potential channels for further CHS awareness-raising, several key informants, including local and national NGOs, spoke of the need for "CHS hubs" or local resource centres where knowledge on the CHS could be shared. Some also spoke of increased inter-organisational knowledge-sharing efforts followed up by "accompaniment" or "encouragement" to spark and maintain further engagement and verification. Other international key informants spoke of further efforts to integrate the CHS within the capacity-strengthening efforts of their partners or within their networks as an integrated component of organisational development efforts.
36. Some informants also highlighted that if the CHS Alliance wished to raise awareness among small local and national NGOs, including community-based actors, it would need to focus on a local level (through local actors' peer outreach), not on a national level.

### 2.1.2 Understanding

37. From both survey responses and interviews, there appears to be good understanding of the content of the CHS, and a strong recognition of its value-add. As one key informant noted: "it's the most practical and operational translation of humanitarian principles that I know. It is very easy to explain to my colleagues what these humanitarian principles mean even if very few of them actually knew the CHS". This view resonates with what other key informants noted as their experiences: "It has become a reference in our organisation. People take ownership of it, and it allows you to be part of a process of continuous improvement and learning."
38. While there is strong adoption and understanding of the principles, compliance with the commitments was less commonly understood. Several local and national NGOs (who had not yet engaged in an Independent Verification or Certification process) assumed that they would "fail" given their resource-poor operational environments, competition for human resources with international organisations (including high staff

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<sup>30</sup> See further §43.

turnover), and limited access to technical assistance and funding. The challenge to set up formal complaints and feedback mechanisms was also referenced.<sup>31</sup>

39. Caution was voiced on the universality of the CHS. Local and national NGOs and their networks generally recognised and valued the CHS as a commonly agreed universal standard of accountability. However, several informants highlighted the risk that without careful messaging, the CHS, particularly if closely tied to donor due diligence processes, could be considered driven by international donors and international partners. In other words, construed as “their” standard to be met to secure “their” funding.
40. Discussing the contents of the CHS with key informants, another issue which emerged was the “identity” or understanding of the Standard as applicable only to humanitarian activities or to a wider scope of development and humanitarian activities, and the impact that this scope may have on the uptake and use of the CHS. On this question there were mixed responses. Some felt that given that local and national NGOs do not easily fit into humanitarian or development categorisations, and the increasing number of protracted crises, the identity of the Standard as humanitarian and/or development would not have significant impact on uptake. Others felt that preserving the identity of being a humanitarian actor and ensuring neutral and independent humanitarian action were critical elements of a standard dedicated to humanitarian action and felt that a further broadening of the Standard would potentially dilute its specificity and therefore its uptake.
41. Another development to watch is the understanding of the CHS as a tool that focuses specifically on PSEAH and AAP. One key informant noted for example that their organisation’s original agenda was about age, diversity, gender mainstreaming. It started to look at the CHS when AAP and PSEAH were brought up in an inter-agency context. Asked about this issue, the key informant noted: “we know that the CHS is broader than these two commitments, but we particularly use it to cover our commitments on PSEAH and AAP.” This view reflects a deeper question. Is the CHS the Core Humanitarian Standard or the Core (Humanitarian) Standard on AAP? Some may say that AAP is in itself the core of humanitarian action, while others would say that AAP is one of several aspects that can be viewed as the core of humanitarian action. This latter view is also reflected in the humanitarian coordination architecture, where AAP workings are one structure among many other mechanisms.

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<sup>31</sup> To be noted in this regard that the Review focused only on the potential uptake of the Verification Scheme itself and not the uptake of membership. However, to further encourage large and diverse local and national NGO membership, the conditions for membership may need to be re-considered including the obligations of having an external complaints mechanism in place and/or annual audited accounts.



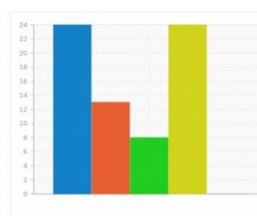
## 2.2 Incentives and barriers to scaled verification

42. Beyond the awareness and understanding of the CHS and the Verification Scheme, this next section looks at the motivation to engage in the various modalities of verification, including the perceived “return on investment”.
43. In general, Self-Assessment, given its relatively low financial cost and emphasis on organisational learning and improvement, was seen as a net positive experience. The potential to drive scaled engagement in Self-Assessment was rarely questioned. It was felt that greater investment should be made by the CHS Alliance in the uptake of Self-Assessment and facilitated organisational learning and improvement.
44. The impact of Independent Verification and/or Certification on learning and improvement and increased recognition was highlighted by several informants. HQAI has also launched a study to examine the impact of audits on the performance of NGOs in terms of their accountability to affected people.<sup>32</sup>
45. However, in line with findings of both the KPMG review and the Lewinsky review,<sup>33</sup> given the high perceived cost of these two modalities, including financial outlay, organisational time and resources, and the public nature of the findings, the overall net gain in terms of return on investment and ability to scale to local and national actors was questioned. In addition, for most NGOs, the audits undertaken to obtain Independent Verification or Certification come on top of (many) other audits, such as those imposed by donors or national legislation.

### 2.2.1 The drive to verify and perceived return on investment

46. As per the survey results and interview findings, the driver for many organisations to undertake Self-Assessment, in addition to doing the right thing, was to measure and improve their performance against the CHS.

*What was your main motivation for undertaking self-assessment?*

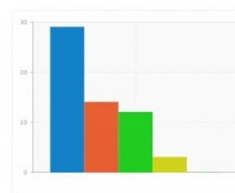


- To know how we are doing in terms of meeting the CHS
- As the first step towards one of the other options
- To increase our visibility
- To improve our performance
- Other

47. The decision of local and national NGOs to invest in Independent Verification and/or Certification, in addition to organisational strengthening in general, more often than not stemmed from a desire to demonstrate publicly that their organisation’s accountability was equivalent to what was being demanded by international actors, strengthening their ability to secure and relate with partners.<sup>34</sup>

to what was being demanded by international actors, strengthening their ability to secure and relate with partners.<sup>34</sup>

*From your organisation’s engagement so far with CHS verification (all options) which results have you seen?*



- Improvements in our organisation’s policies and practices
- Improvement in our recognition by, and relations with, partners
- Increased opportunities for funding
- We have noted no results or changes
- Other

48. In terms of expected return on investment, numerous local and national NGOs highlighted gains in organisational learning from all three modes of verification.

49. Examples of organisational learning and improvement provided included:<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See: <https://www.hqai.org/en/news/impact/>

<sup>33</sup> Lewinsky 2020, p. 6: “unclear business proposition to NGOs as to whether the investment in verification pays off, little incentive for NGOs to undergo audits beyond good practice”; KPMG 2019, p. 14 “Time and resources were ... the main obstacles...” and “Recommendation 7: Clarify the business case for Certification, relative to the other options”.

<sup>34</sup> This finding is similar to that of HQAI, *The journey ahead*, p. 2: “In our experience, L/NGOs that are using CHS verification went to be held to a recognisable international standard”.

<sup>35</sup> The review did not seek to distinguish learning and improvement driven by one form of CHS verification over another, nor did it seek to refine the causalities of these learnings (i.e., whether they would have occurred in any case regardless of the CHS); e.g., Patel and Van Brabant 2022, querying to what extent learning and organisational findings are additional to what an organisation already knew. See also in this regard HQAI and CHS Alliance to “define and find ways to systematically measure the impact of HQAI Independent Verification, HQAI Certification as well as CHS Alliance-validated Self-Assessment processes on accountability”, HQAI, *The journey ahead*, p. 2.

- Improved staff motivation and implementation capacities, and a source of pride for the staff and the institution;
- Creation of interdepartmental dialogue and the growth of a learning culture, with the continual questioning of “what is working? What can be improved? How can we move forward?”;
- An opportunity to see the organisation from the outside in, and benefit from an external perspective;
- Greater ability of the organisation to navigate complex operating environments;
- Establishment of organisational accountability baselines and the development of monitoring and evaluation policies;
- Review and/or drafting of critical policies and a check of organisational practices, ensuring the organisation “walked the talk”;
- Proven impact on the quality of programming in terms of value for money, closer link to target population needs, and improved coordination;
- An instigation to find innovative ways to ensure beneficiary feedback;
- Increased partner and/or donor support and funding for institutional reforms.<sup>36</sup>

50. Specifically for Self-Assessment, over half the survey respondents reported on improvements to organisational policy and practises. Some noted, however, that organisational learning could be significantly scaled if more technical assistance was made available. Several informants felt that the capacity-strengthening support required by national and local NGOs was not at the scale necessary to promote systemic change as ambioned across all three options of verification. In terms of Independent Verification and Certification, this need for capacity-strengthening support was highlighted in the context of HQAI auditors being conflicted when playing more of an advisory/mentorship role, although the confidential audit reports seek to be as detailed as possible in terms of recommended corrective action.

From your organisation’s engagement so far with self-assessment, which results have you seen?



- Improvements in our organisation’s policies and practices
- Improvements in our recognition by, and relations with, partners
- Increased opportunities for funding
- We have noted no results or changes

51. Survey respondents felt that all three verification options had a positive impact on access to funding and improved external recognition.<sup>37</sup> Around 40% of respondents who had undergone Self-Assessment felt gains were made in partner recognition and/or opportunities for funding. Two certified local and national NGOs interviewed described increased levels of respect, reputation, and bargaining power vis à vis other national and international NGOs. An international NGO informant attested to more bargaining power in terms of donor recognition, and an NGO network informant noted increased coordination among its members.<sup>38</sup>

52. By contrast, some informants highlighted what they perceived as a “disappointment” in terms of the “net return on investment”. The gains in expected visibility and access to funding did not equate to the significant investment made in Independent Verification or Certification. Several international NGOs highlighted that they only engaged in Independent Verification and/or Certification because it was being requested by a donor

<sup>36</sup> The list corresponds to the findings of SOKPOH, Bonaventure Gbétoho, *Increasing the confidence and leadership of national organisations by applying the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)*, December 2022: <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/increasing-the-confidence-and-leadership-of-national-organisations-by-applying-the-core-humanitarian-standard-chs/>

<sup>37</sup> In this regard, KPMG 2019 p. 13 notes similar findings.

<sup>38</sup> Sokpoh 2022.

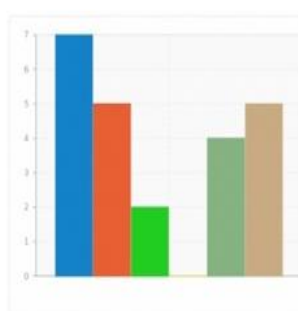
or consortium to which they belonged. Other informants highlighted the potential for negative impact, as any withdrawal of Certification or delisting from Independent Verification would be made public.<sup>39</sup>

53. There were also key informants who highlighted a limited benefit in Certification versus Independent Verification or who were somewhat confused about the difference between the two options. The audit processes for both Independent Verification and Certification were viewed as similar. Currently donors/funders who recognise CHS external verification accept either Independent Verification or Certification.<sup>40</sup> There was also a sense articulated by some that being certified against an accountability standard, which touched upon so many dynamic elements of an organisation, had limited longer-term value, outside of a funding or partnering determination made at that point in time.<sup>41</sup>

## 2.2.2 Barriers to engagement: organisational time and resources

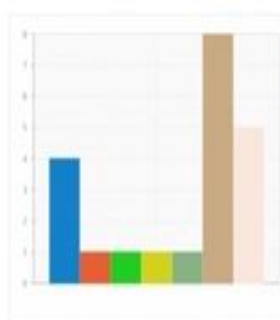
54. Survey respondents and several key informants highlighted that the reluctance to engage in either Independent Verification or Certification was due in large part to the perceived heaviness of the process and its cost implications (including organisational time and resources). As HQAI stated, “CHS Verification requires significant resources, related to verification as such, but also to an organisation’s own investment in delivering against the CHS and related to development local capacities for quality assurance”.<sup>42</sup>

Why are you not considering undertaking independent verification and/or certification?



- The verification options are too costly
- The verification options are too time-consuming
- CHS verification as it stands does not take into account our specific organisational requirements or structure
- We are concerned that we would not meet the standard
- We are subject to so many other due diligence or capacity assessments
- Comments

Why have you not undertaken any of the options for verification?



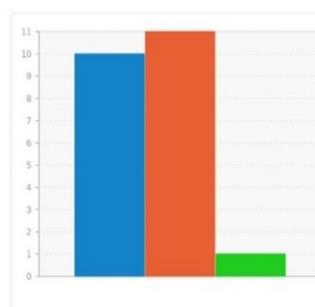
- The verification options are too costly
- The verification options are too time-consuming
- CHS verification as it stands does not take into account our specific organisational requirements or structure
- We are concerned that we would not meet the standard
- We are subject to other due diligence or capacity assessments
- Comments

56. As per the survey results, a greater percentage of respondents that had undertaken Self-Assessment noted that they do not intend to pursue either Independent Verification or Certification.

57. Key informants from INGOs noted that they had decided not to engage in either Independent Verification and/or Certification in order not to burden their partners, either with the cost or time commitment which they felt Independent Verification and/or

55. For the organisations which had decided not to engage in any form of verification at all, as per the survey results and comments, the factors most often cited were cost and overstretched internal resources.

Are you considering undertaking also independent verification and/or certification?



- Yes
- No
- Other

<sup>39</sup> HQAI Website: <https://www.hqai.org/en/network/audited-partners/>

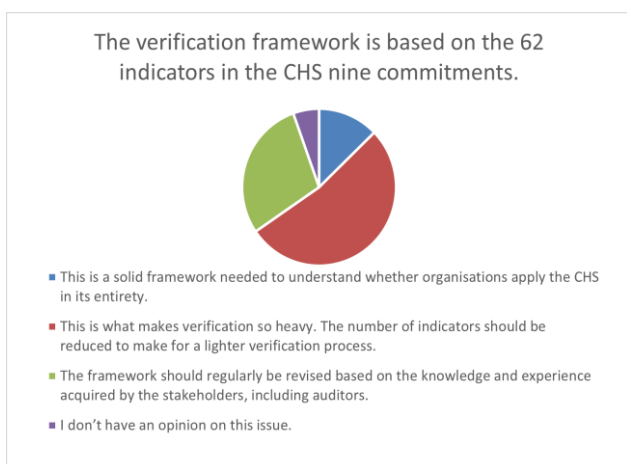
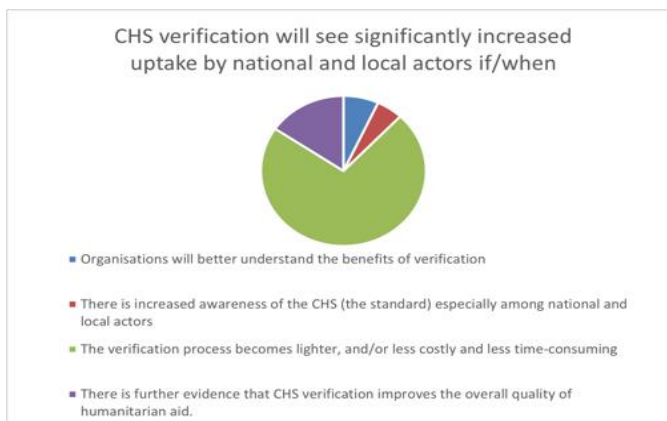
<sup>40</sup> Donors’ reliance on an Independent Verification aligns with a move from “pass/fail” due diligence to the growing use of tiered risk ratings including among the CBPFs.

<sup>41</sup> As one informant from an NGO network put it, “a very expensive piece of paper,” when asked whether Certification should or could be scaled.

<sup>42</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*, does not make a distinction between CHS verification undertaken by HQAI and Self-Assessment which arguably does not have the same cost implications.

Certification implied. They also highlighted their own internal struggles in getting their internal departments to buy in to these processes, let alone encourage their partners to do so.

58. As per a poll carried out among CHS Alliance members during their General Assembly in November 2022, most members felt that CHS verification could only be significantly scaled among local and national NGOs if the process became lighter, and/or less costly and less time consuming.



59. One of the areas of this perceived heaviness pertains to the indicators used to assess compliance. A majority of the members polled felt that the 62 indicators should be reduced, highlighting their heavy and duplicative nature as a barrier to scaling CHS verification.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, several key informants from national and local NGOs highlighted that CHS audits come on top of the many audits they undergo when they are seeking international funding.<sup>44</sup> Many felt it was a time commitment they could not manage, let alone when the results did not lead to direct funding or partnership decisions.<sup>45</sup>

60. Some informants recommended that audits become modular. Reference was made to internal efforts by the CHS Alliance to define a “core of the core” and recommended that verification should potentially focus on critical areas, including matters relating to code of conduct, sexual harassment, and anti-corruption efforts. This, they noted, could be a “level 1 of verification”, hooking organisations into the system with less cost and effort; further verification modules could be built on top of this core and verified over the next few years. It is understood that these issues are being considered by the on-going review process.<sup>46</sup>

61. It was highlighted, however, that HQAI had successfully adapted the indicators to the various operating contexts and size and scale of local and national NGOs.<sup>47</sup> Some informants also felt that local and national NGOs may be less affected by the heaviness of the process as auditing the 62 indicators would be less challenging for smaller organisations with fewer policies and operational practices. As one key informant pointed out, “a very small organisation may only have one policy which re-groups all key points.” Furthermore, it was highlighted that Independent Verification and Certification audits rely heavily on practice and ensuring compliance with the spirit of the Standard, rather than the number and nature of policies in place.<sup>48</sup> By their nature, these organisations have an intimate relationship with local communities and thus may work more easily in the spirit of the CHS. They also tended to operate more directly with target populations and with a smaller operational footprint, lessening the costs and complexity of audits.

<sup>43</sup> In the context of an Independent Verification process, one key informant described spending “six long months uploading long lists of documents” for what was often felt to be a repetitive process.

<sup>44</sup> See section III.

<sup>45</sup> In this regard, an informant highlighted their intent to create an online site where all their documents are uploaded for the various auditors to pick out what they would need, obviating the need to continuously find and upload document for each due diligence process.

<sup>46</sup> <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/chs-revision/>; see also KPMG 2019 recommendations. At the time of the introduction of the Verification Framework, it was decided that it would only be revised following a new edition of the CHS.

<sup>47</sup> Confirming HQAI’s statements that its methods have shown to be “adaptable” to a diversity of actors; HQAI, *The journey ahead*, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> See in this regard Patel and Van Brabant, 2022, Recommendation 2 endorsed by a4ep (alliance for empowering partnerships) calling for more focus on operational capacities rather than on administrative management capacities including a call to differentiate more explicitly between “the capacities to meet international donor requirements, and others that can be more vital to success e.g. commitment and tenacity, political navigation skills, creative problem solving without much money, trust from key stakeholders etc.”.

62. However, it was noted that further specification was required to accommodate the various emergency contexts in which organisations acted, as well as the differences between organisations implementing directly, working through local partners, or working through a network of national counterparts. As an illustration, one international key informant voiced frustration in being identified as having “a serious weakness” due to acts of its national NGO partner, even though it had done everything it thought it could to ensure its national partner effectively applied the CHS. This dependence on the successful operational application of the CHS by contractual partners was felt even more keenly by organisations operating within a network of organisations and therefore unable to choose their national or local counterparts.

### 2.2.3 Barriers to engagement: cost

63. Consistent with previous reviews and recommendations,<sup>49</sup> the relatively high cost of audits was also highlighted as one of the key barriers for engagement in Independent Verification and/or Certification. As per the survey conducted among CHS Alliance members during the General Assembly, a majority felt that donors would have to cover the costs or that there needed to be a larger number of certifying entities, especially based in low and middle-income countries, to increase the number of actors aiming for Certification, presumably at lower cost.

64. The costs of the audits that underlie Independent Verification and Certification were said to range from 25,000 to 75,000 CHF depending on the size and complexity of the audit. While this price tag is heavy for many INGOs, it was reported to be out of reach for most local and national NGOs.



65. Illustrative of this perception of high cost, one key informant highlighted that they were not able to justify the extra costs that come on top of a Self-Assessment exercise, especially as they expected that the Independent Verification or Certification might not produce much more new information or analysis on how the organisation was meeting the CHS commitments.<sup>50</sup> Another key informant noted that the costs for the organisation in question, quoted at close to 70,000 CHF, did not in fact stop at that amount. In addition to the price tag of the audit itself, factors such as the considerable staff time commitment (including opportunity costs) and the potential reputational risks in publicly sharing weaknesses in accountability were highlighted.

66. HQAI is actively exploring avenues to lower the costs of its audits and increase its resources. Among the measures HQAI has highlighted to reduce costs is the increased use of digital tools and hybrid audit methodologies, group audits,<sup>51</sup> localising audits and auditors,<sup>52</sup> and auditing pooled funding mechanisms.<sup>53</sup> In this regard, some highlighted that even under the current cost structure, HQAI is unable to fully recuperate its costs and remains “largely dependent” on donor funding.<sup>54</sup> The feasibility therefore of arriving at a lower cost without significantly scaled demand was questioned.

<sup>49</sup> Lewinsky 2022, p. 2, “Verification scheme considered heavy and expensive for medium and smaller NGOs”; KPMG 2019, p. 2, “Certification is perceived as too expensive, and out of reach for smaller organisations”; TAMMINGA Philip, “Certification Review Project: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendation”, September 2014, p. 7: “The project recommends an average verification cost of not more than 10,000 per organisation ... and perhaps 2500 for a mid-term progress review”.

<sup>50</sup> This view is also expressed by Dross and Patel 2022, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Group audits would look at a group of organisations, and through sampling enable the certification of a number of agencies in a group or cohort. These agencies could then represent that they are part of a “certified group”, rather than being a “certified agency” cutting costs and eventually time. HQAI sees this as another means for “L/NNGOs to financially access [its] services”. Three group audits are currently underway.

<sup>52</sup> HQAI, Building local auditing capacities: <https://www.hqai.org/en/news/localisation/>, September 2020. Several pilots are underway, where access is particularly complex, to test new, local methods of auditing.

<sup>53</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*.

<sup>54</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*.

**67.** Since 2018, HQAI has a Facilitation Fund in place for organisations who want to undertake an HQAI audit but for whom the costs are a significant barrier. It was noted that many local and national NGOs are unaware of this Fund. Others questioned whether the Fund was ready to go to scale and to provide subsidies to a large and diverse group of local and national NGOs. One key informant from a national organisation reported that they applied to the Fund but were told that their application needed to be postponed for a year as the Fund was fully allocated. Currently, the Facilitation Fund is also being used to source and train local auditors.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*.

## 2.3 Developing and/or adapting the Verification Scheme

68. Diverging views were expressed on the current efforts to scale the Verification Scheme, especially the uptake of Independent Verification and Certification. Some felt that the current Verification Scheme could eventually be scaled if greater donor recognition was achieved, costs lowered, and indicators streamlined. Others, on the contrary, felt that efforts to scale the current Scheme to local and national NGOs would not only fail but jeopardise uptake of CHS verification in general. These two different visions and opinions of verification modalities depend in large part on assumptions made on objectives, definitions of success, and theories of change.
69. This next section captures the feedback gathered on the efforts, in particular by HQAI, to increase uptake of Independent Verification and Certification, what has been termed “passporting”, and then explores other possible modalities/avenues to scale both independent audited assessments and self or peer assessments.

### 2.3.1 Scaling Independent Verification/Certification through donor recognition

70. Those who feel that scaled uptake of Independent Verification and Certification depends on donor recognition/engagement in some form are actively seeking to increase the linkages between HQAI audit processes and access to funding.<sup>56</sup> Several options are currently being pursued:

- Simplifying or “bridging between” due diligence processes by making HQAI-audited information or documents available to requesting donors;<sup>57</sup>
- Formal donor recognition of Independent Verification or Certification, either “welcoming” an HQAI audit or automatically exempting independently verified or certified organisations from all or part of a donor’s due diligence processes;<sup>58</sup>
- Expanding or adapting CHS Certification to replace a donor’s due diligence process (CHS+);<sup>59</sup>
- Rendering either Independent Verification or Certification by HQAI compulsory within networks or by donors.<sup>60</sup>

71. Thus far a number of donors who directly fund international actors have accepted that CHS verification audits, in part or in full, can cover their due diligence: <sup>61</sup>

- Germany has recognised CHS verification as equivalent to elements of its due diligence processes;
- ECHO has agreed with HQAI on the creation of HQAI CHS+, fully substituting CHS Certification for an ECHO FPA ex ante assessment under CHS+. This same modality is currently being tested with Luxembourg, Denmark, and the UK;<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See CHS Alliance, *Making Aid Work Better for People. Increasing Recognition of CHS verification. Discussion paper*, June 2020, p. 5: “The potential is there for the CHS to have far more impact to raise the standard of humanitarian work by aligning with donor due diligence processes.” Likewise, see HQAI, *The journey ahead: HQAI is seeking donors and governments to “spearhead” the uptake of Independent Verification and Certification* and states that combining donor diligence processes with CHS Certification “must become the rule, not the exception”. HQAI has found that the return on investment only makes sense for agencies when an audit process for CHS Certification could be joined with a due diligence process such as an ECHO ex-ante FPA due diligence process.

<sup>57</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*.

<sup>58</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*, p. 3: when describing “passporting” in this piece, HQAI describes three different varieties of passporting, Danida and DEC which mandate CHS audits of the members/funders (it is unclear whether this is on top of their own diligence processes), Germany which do not make CHS audits a requirement but will shorten their own procedures if the organisation has undergone CHS verification, and DG ECHO which accepts to substitute its own FPA assessments for that of HQAI CHS audits; see also HQAI Annual Report 2021.

<sup>59</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*. p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*. p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Idem. Discussions are underway to further identify how HQAI verifications could provide more direct funding to local and national NGOs.

<sup>62</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*. p. 3.

- Ireland and Luxembourg encourage their partners to undertake Independent Verification and/or Certification;
- FCDO expects their partners to either undertake Independent Verification or Certification;
- Denmark (Danida) has made Independent Verification or Certification by HQAI mandatory to access its funding.<sup>63</sup>

**72.** Likewise, among the NGO consortia and/or NGO-led pooled fund mechanisms, the UK-based Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), Danish Emergency Relief Fund (DERF), and Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) (by the end of 2023) require their members to undergo Independent Verification and/or Certification.

**73.** In terms of the UN, there has been a slower uptake. No UN agencies to date have formally undergone either Self-Assessment, Independent Verification or Certification, although UNICEF underwent an AAP benchmarking exercise conducted by HQAI.<sup>64</sup> This benchmarking exercise is not part of the Verification Scheme but appears to be another option specifically designed for a large UN agency. At the time of the data collection for this review, UNHCR was considering following this example.<sup>65</sup> UN agencies working with implementing partners have to date not integrated (aspects of) CHS verification in their partner due diligence processes nor recognised some form HQAI verification. The CHS has not been integrated within the UN harmonised approach to cash transfer (HACT) standardised due diligence processes, nor has it been encouraged in any meaningful way in the country coordination mechanisms or integrated in the CBPFs' <sup>66</sup> due diligence processes.

**74.** Though donor/funder recognition has gained traction, many key informants interviewed were sceptical of the extent to which this was a solution for scaled verification for local and national NGOs. Among the concerns voiced is the ability of the system to afford scaled recognition of either Independent Verification or Certification, and the potential costs and resources meeting demand would imply.<sup>67</sup> In a sector where humanitarian funding appeals continue to grow, and where mobilising these resources is an ever-growing challenge, many question how the scaling of costly exercises such as Independent Verification and Certification would be resourced. Another fear is the additional burden placed on local and national NGOs and the risk of raising barriers to direct or even intermediary funding for these actors, in addition to the concern of the CHS being construed as a "Western donor" compliance mechanism, rather than a universally adopted common standard.

**75.** Beyond the potential repercussions on local and national NGOs, doubt was voiced as to the potential of significant donor/funder recognition of either Independent Verification or Certification. The reasons given include, among others:

- A general reticence of donors/funders to align around a uniform or standardised due diligence criteria;
- The nature of CHS verification as an accountability standard, not a due diligence test with therefore different criteria and/or focus of assessment questions, notably including financial

<sup>63</sup> HQAI website <https://www.hqai.org/en/news/round-table-2021/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/article/unicef-benchmark/>

<sup>65</sup> Regarding funds, some hypothesise that there is a concern given that breadth of their operations and partnerships that they themselves would not meet the commitments. Others have conjectured that there is simply reluctance from the UN to engage with a standard which is not UN developed and/or endorsed.

<sup>66</sup> CBPFs are largely seen as the main channels for national and local NGOs in relation to reaching the Grand Bargain target of 25% of global humanitarian funding.

<sup>67</sup> An informant from a large NGO network posited that a better investment would be to invest these sums directly in local and national organisational capacity-strengthening rather than in Certification which by nature was transient.



controls, administrative and accounting capacities, and internal management areas perceived to be outside the scope of the CHS,<sup>68</sup>

- The perceived cost/heaviness of HQAI verification processes;
- A growing number of competing audit entities;
- Donors’/funders’ potential legal and/or internal compliance barriers to delegation or recognition of external due diligence processes.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.3.2 Developing alternative means of independent assessment**

**76.** Given the scepticism and fear of potential negative repercussions of scaling either Independent Verification or Certification, several suggestions and opinions on creating new forms of independent assessments/audits were voiced. One of the key questions in this regard is the necessity of maintaining the condition that the CAB, the entity authorised or mandated to undertake Independent Verification or Certification, be ISO-accredited or its equivalent. For some, the centralisation of independent audit processes in one agency, built for this purpose with the necessary accreditation and supervision to ensure rigour, is a critical element. Others question whether this level of rigour is necessary or even possible in a drive to achieve scale. In expanding beyond ISO certification, assessment institutions could be expanded, especially at the country level, and eventually CHS assessments delegated to others, such as funding partners.

**77.** As highlighted in the CWS-Asia paper,<sup>70</sup> a rigorous centralised process could be effectively replaced by decentralised, cost-effective business models, including training and accrediting national organisations or national and regional certification networks. It is assumed that these national organisations could provide more cost-effective audits, benefit from contextualised knowledge at country level, as well as serve to reinforce national outreach and build local capacities. To a greater or lesser degree, rigour could be preserved through these audit organisations’ accreditation processes. One suggestion for example would be for HQAI to train and accredit local auditor entities for a fee or through franchise/licensing arrangements. Such models would also better fit within current localisation paradigms in terms of ‘turning the system on its head’ with the international actors serving as service providers/facilitators to national institutions taking the lead in driving the accountability agenda.<sup>71</sup>

**78.** The other suggestion is to further mainstream the CHS in donors’ due diligence processes and recognise and aggregate their data. As one informant posited, if the CHS indicators are 80% compatible with a donor’s due diligence criteria, why not simply ask the donor to carry out the CHS verification processes during their own due diligence processes? In other words, “passporting” CHS Certification in the opposite direction with donors committing to provide “aggregated data” against the CHS indicators. As the nature of the discussion with donors is flipped, separating CHS recognition from adoption of HQAI verification processes, this approach may resonate with funding intermediaries, including NGO-led pooled funds or the CBPFs, who have thus far been reticent to adopt HQAI verification processes.<sup>72</sup>

**79.** As highlighted in the Lewinsky report,<sup>73</sup> it was also felt that a side benefit of driving a campaign to integrate the CHS indicators into donor due diligence processes was to strengthen the objective of harmonising due

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<sup>68</sup> As one key informant explained, the CHS is a systemic accountability standard continually guiding organisational behaviours and standards rather than a compliance tool or a due diligence framework as required to determine funding decisions and risk assessments, at a specific point in time.

<sup>69</sup> See Lewinsky, 2020, p. 9 for a comprehensive analysis of the potential for donor uptake.

<sup>57</sup> Dross and Patel, 2022.

<sup>71</sup> As Dross and Patel bluntly put it, “HQAI in Geneva is not the best example of global localisation efforts and empowering national organisations, led by national representatives.” Ibid, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Lewinsky 2020, p. 19.

diligence criteria and processes<sup>74</sup> and further align accountability obligations set by donors with those deemed universally necessary to people affected by crisis,<sup>75</sup> while simultaneously not falling into the trap of the CHS being perceived simply “as a list of donor PCA indicators”.<sup>76</sup>

80. Another variation of the above suggestion would be to further mainstream the CHS indicators in analytical frameworks for project or programme evaluations and reviews, be they in real-time, formative, or summative. Certain steps have been taken in this regard by networks such as the German NGO network *Aktion Deutschland Hilft* (ADH) and the UK-based DEC.<sup>77</sup> At this time, CHS Alliance does not have an overview of where and when evaluations include the CHS in their analytical framework or benchmarks.
81. Similar to peer reviews, these modalities would imply multiple organisations verifying the CHS indicators against their own perceptions and systems, therefore potentially a loss of consistency in terms of the data results.<sup>78</sup> However, the potential advantages include boosting awareness around the CHS and increasing measurement uptake through force multipliers, with less weight on the organisations being assessed.

### 2.3.3 Expanding the use of Self-Assessment and developing new forms of verification

82. Several informants suggested an expanded use and attention placed on Self-Assessment and the development of other lighter forms of verification focusing on learning and improvement rather than a rigorous external audit. Informants stressed that in finding new means of verification, these options should be more cost-effective and less burdensome, though still be effective in assessing whether the organisations meet the CHS commitments.
83. Self-Assessment seems to have been marginalised in the debates on the Verification Scheme. For example, in the Verification Scheme narrative, Self-Assessment is only described as a first step towards learning, while Independent Verification signifies “a sign of engagement” with the CHS.<sup>79</sup> Given the drive to increase the return on investment and ensure donor recognition of Independent Verification and Certification, these two modalities tend to dominate donor engagement efforts. Even in documents and discussions the term “CHS verification” is sometimes used as the short form of Independent Verification and/or Certification, blurring the different constructs, time and cost investment implications of Self-Assessment.<sup>80</sup>
84. Self-Assessment has proven effective in building engagement and triggering organisational learning and improvement. The dashboards and resources provided by CHS Alliance have been recognised as an added value in promoting organisational improvements. It was felt that engagement could be fostered around Self-Assessment including through outreach campaigns and further promotion of learning and success. For Self-Assessment to create systemic or sector-wide change it should be part of a wider strategy or campaign highlighting evaluations or peer reviews as complementary ways to assess whether agencies are meeting the CHS commitments.
85. The call for peer reviews as an additional form of light verification was also heard by this review. Peer review, which emphasises mutual learning, was posited as an effective means to prompt organisational change, foster dialogue and learning among and between international and local and national NGOs, and foster a

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<sup>74</sup> The UN Partner Portal has been designed to facilitate “a harmonised, efficient and easy collaboration between the UN and civil society”. However, the harmonisation of the various UN and other diligence processes is making slow progress at best. Due diligence is a crowded space and while good intentions exist, the reality of harmonising the capacity assessments and audits appears to be a lot more difficult.

<sup>75</sup> Similar to the Thomas Lewinsky discussion paper, it is in essence a political decision in terms of whether donor due diligence should be complemented by an assessment which looks at aspects other than financial controls and managerial capacities. See also the example of ACFID which has integrated the CHS in their code of conduct, Lewinsky 2020, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> Lewinsky 2020, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> E.g., HERE-Geneva, *Independent evaluation of the Aktion Deutschland Hilft e.V. (ADH) joint appeal to Rohingya Myanmar Bangladesh*, April 2019.

<sup>78</sup> To be noted in this regard, the Humanitarian Accountability Report currently aggregates “Self-Assessment” data to measure systemic change. The reliability of measurement data generated by a wider group of actors would therefore not necessarily weaken the means of measuring change. CHS “*Humanitarian Accountability Report*” 2022, p. 15

<sup>79</sup> Verification Scheme, p. 7, table 2.

<sup>80</sup> HQAI, *The journey ahead*, p. 2: “... we acknowledge that organisations’ availability of resources for the audit can be a challenge.... CHS verification requires significant resources, related to the verification as such...”.

movement towards systemic change. Informants felt that the CHS Alliance could work to foster honest and frank conversations among peers where challenges could be shared in “safe spaces” and practical solutions found. It was felt that peer reviews could eventually be integrated or merged with Self-Assessment processes. Reference was made to the possibilities that peer reviews could bring, especially among organisations operating within networks such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NAHAB, NEAR, Act Alliance, and others.

- 86.** In complement to these lighter forms of measurement processes, some suggested placing greater emphasis on “facilitated collective engagement”, taking advantage of online communication tools to engage organisations in an “accountability movement” with facilitated opportunities to meet (digitally) among themselves and share lessons learned, challenges and identifying solutions.<sup>81</sup> While measurement remains a key component, systemic change is catalysed through encouraging engagement with the CHS itself, peer learning and sharing, outside of a measurement process.
- 87.** To conclude, the differing visions and opinions expressed on verification modalities depended in large part on assumptions made on objectives, definitions of success, and theories of change. For those who equate success to systemic change driven by large-scale engagement of organisations learning and improving, then rigorous audit processes were less important, even counterproductive. Beyond the ability to catalyse change, some also question the relative lasting value of the results of a rigorous audit given the dynamic nature of organisations, especially those operating with limited budgets in complex environments. For others, however, organisational change needed to be driven by rigorous external reviews, and success required an evidence-based assessment of certified compliance by a key number of actors including those with large humanitarian footprints. For these informants, focus was placed on further streamlining the current system and ensuring uptake through facilitated access to funding.

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<sup>81</sup> See for example the « The Geneva Learning Foundation » which through digital networks and a learning science expertise catalysed a “movement” of 48,000 plus front-line health care workers supporting each to achieve the goals of the Immunisation Agenda 2030.

### 3 Conclusions

88. As seen throughout the findings, there is slow uptake, including among local and national NGOs, of CHS verification, especially Independent Verification and Certification. This limited momentum is partially due to a lack of outreach and awareness-raising, particularly at country level, but even more so stems from a perception among potential CHS champions – including CHS members, verified and certified organisations, and other stakeholders – that the current Verification Scheme is both resource-heavy and costly, with significant limitations to scaling in its current form.
89. Further re-enforcing this sense of heaviness and lack of scalability is a tendency to equate or focus CHS verification with Independent Verification and Certification, with CHS Alliance Self-Assessment or even simply a stated commitment to the CHS either overlooked or seen as merely a pre-cursor to these more rigorous “scientific” forms of assessment.<sup>82</sup> This focus on audited verification seems a departure from the emphasis on continual learning and improvement found in the CHS, as exemplified in the call for organisations to simply use and adopt the CHS and publicly state “we are working towards application of the CHS”.<sup>83</sup> That notion is similarly out of sync with a growing tendency among donors, especially pooled funds, to fund based on a tiered risk approach.
90. Thus far one of the main approaches to scaling CHS verification is raising demand by seeking formal recognition or adoption of HQAI Independent Verification and Certification by donors/funders. While HQAI is actively seeking to localise verification and reduce costs of audits, it is not sufficiently clear how this path will lead to scaled engagement by local and national NGOs. It renders scaling dependent on a donor’s interest and/or legal ability to delegate its audit practices and the business attractiveness, compatibility and/or perceived added value of HQAI audit processes. Furthermore, it is unclear how increased demand for both verification and eventual technical support would be resourced, or how the potential frustrations of additional barriers to funding and the potential equation of the CHS to Western donor funding conditions would be mitigated. There is a general sense that sparking large scale engagement or systemic change among local and national NGOs will require a new approach.
91. It is beyond the scope of this review to detail what such as an approach should look like. To ensure scaled awareness, engagement and a “net positive return on investment”, critical elements will include developing and catering to “force multipliers”;<sup>84</sup> re-emphasising lighter, more cost-effective means of organisational measurement;<sup>85</sup> expanding means to support continual learning and improvement; mainstreaming CHS commitments in capacity-building frameworks and due diligence criteria; and welcoming expanded means of verification including partners’ due diligence results/data and peer reviews. It is hoped that the recommendations will provide guidance to chart a course for the future and spark uptake driven by an organisation’s intrinsic desire to learn/improve and grow as the best (if not the only viable) means to generate enough energy and engagement to drive systemic change.

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<sup>82</sup> Symbolic in this regard is the Verification Scheme which states that “demonstrated commitment” to the CHS only begins with Independent Verification; *Verification Scheme*, p 7. Likewise, HQAI uses the term “CHS verification” when referring to the “requirement of significant resources” related to its verification processes; HQAI, *The journey ahead*.

<sup>83</sup> Core Humanitarian Standard, p. 7

<sup>84</sup> To increase uptake and engagement, including CHS Alliance members, country level “champions”, country coordination mechanisms, national networks, and local and national NGO funding conduits.

<sup>85</sup> Including re-energising Self-Assessment and introducing peer reviews.

## 4 Summary of Recommendations:

### *Awareness and understanding*

**Recommendation 1:** Carry out outreach and awareness-raising campaigns with country-level outreach, including making use of peer outreach, in-country networks and NGO coordination bodies, OCHA, cluster lead agencies and the clusters.

- **Sub-recommendation 1.1** Reach out to international and national coordination mechanisms including localisation and AAP working groups to encourage membership and use of CHS measurement tools.
- **Sub-recommendation 1.2** Engage “country-level champions” among CHS Alliance members, charged with peer outreach and support at local and country levels.
- **Sub-recommendation 1.3** Create or integrate information “hubs” at country level, providing “country-targeted” outreach materials and eventual rosters of peer organisations/mentors/consultants to support uptake.<sup>86</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** In communication materials, emphasise the universal nature of the standards, the diversity of verification options, the importance of measurement as part of a learning journey, and the adaptability of the indicators and standards to different sizes and types of organisations.

**Recommendation 3:** Consider creating further communication materials (fact sheets, Q&A) on CHS Alliance membership, the forms of membership, the advantages. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that membership is not necessary to show engagement and commitment to the CHS nor a necessary pre-cursor to undertaking a Self-Assessment exercise.

- **Sub-Recommendation 3.1:** The criteria for membership and/or the support offered to non-members should be reviewed considering “scaling” and supporting engagement among local and national NGOs. Among the considerations to be reviewed is to extent to which criteria such as audited annual accounts or external complaints mechanisms should remain as pre-conditions for facilitated Self-Assessment support.

### *Increasing the drive to verify and return on investment*

**Recommendation 4:** Scale the CHS Alliance’s capacity-strengthening support offered to members and/or non-members.

- **Sub-recommendation 4.1** Consider the development of a standby capacity of CHS advisors (a ‘CHS-CAP’) to be deployed, especially within humanitarian coordination mechanisms and NGO coordination bodies/networks.
- **Sub-recommendation 4.2** Develop CHS engagement tool kits and ensure active outreach among capacity-strengthening providers, including within networks of NGOs (national or international), enabling these providers to both advocate for and support local and national NGOs in strengthening systems, policies, and practices as per CHS commitments, and successfully adapt the indicators to their realities and contexts.
- **Sub-recommendation 4.3** Further develop peer learning, mentorship, and support systems among and between CHS Alliance Members.

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<sup>86</sup> See for example the “Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub” which combines “global” digital tools and in country hubs, offering training and mentorship. Resource and Support Hub website. The Hub includes a “consultants directory”: <https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/global/providers>

**Recommendation 5:** The ongoing revision process should consider streamlining the indicators as used in the independent audit processes.

**Recommendation 6:** Lowering the costs of both Independent Verification and Certification should remain a primary consideration.

### ***Developing/adapting the Scheme to scale***

**Recommendation 7:** Review the Verification Scheme based on an articulated Theory of Change and develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure success, capture lessons learned, and take adaptive measures.

- **Sub-recommendation 7.1** Define the Theory of Change as per a clarified specific objective for scaled verification. For example, specify whether the objective is to increase the numbers and diversity of humanitarian actors verifying against the CHS in general, or target fewer institutions with larger reach, or engage smaller organisations who work more closely with fragile communities, such as community-based organisations.
- **Sub-recommendation 7.2** Within the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, further specify and publicise indicators of success (for example: the number of organisations applying at least one of the verification options? The number of CHS Alliance Members? The number of organisations going for Independent Verification and/or Certification? Strengthened accountability to affected people? Organisational change?)

**Recommendation 8:** The potential cost and resource implications of meeting scaled demand of Independent Verification or Certification based on donor recognition for local and national NGOs should be further assessed.

**Recommendation 9:** In further iterations of the Verification Scheme consider whether both Independent Verification and Certification should be maintained.

**Recommendation 10:** Consider piloting verification of the CHS in UN or NGO-led pooled fund mechanisms through integration in these funds' due diligence criteria and procedures.

**Recommendation 10:** Consider advocating with bodies such as ALNAP and IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Groups to ensure that the CHS commitments are systematically reviewed in humanitarian evaluations, especially of collective responses.

**Recommendation 11:** Work to broaden the perception of CHS verification beyond Independent Verification and Certification and launch an "engagement campaign" including the promotion of Self-Assessment

- **Sub-recommendation 11.1** Revise the Verification Scheme to emphasise the value of Self-Assessment, including it being a "sign of engagement".
- **Sub-recommendation 11.2** Create a communications campaign/membership drive to encourage engagement and adoption of the CHS.
- **Sub-recommendation 11.3** Showcase lessons learned and reported benefits from Self-Assessment exercises, including through sharing case studies and profiling members' experiences.
- **Sub-recommendation 11.4** Regularly publicise and highlight aggregated Self-Assessment data on the CHS Alliance website and in communication materials, highlighting engagement and encouraging further uptake.

**Recommendation 12:** Complementary to Self-Assessment, develop other forms of verification, including peer review, which accentuate peer-engagement and support, accentuate organisational learning and growth, and create a shared identity or "movement" of actors.

# Annex I – Terms of Reference



**Delivering on the Commitments to People Affected by Crisis**  
**Improving the accessibility of CHS Verification Scheme for National Actors**

## Call for Expression of Interest

### Background

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The Core Humanitarian Standard is a set of commitments organisations have made to people affected by crises. If we want to ensure organisations are putting their rights and dignity at the centre of our work, organisations, organisations need to not only commit to meeting the standard, but measure and improve how they are meeting their commitments.

The modality established to support organisations to do this is the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme. It currently offers three verification options, Self-Assessment, Independent Verification and Certification. We have evidence from these efforts, that show the verification process is driving improvements in organisations in their policies, processes and practice, bringing changes needed for greater accountability to affected people.

To date, it is highly commendable the efforts that 150 organisations have made to measure how they are meeting the Commitments. However, to meet the commitments to people affected, this effort of measuring and making improvements to meet the standard, has to be taken to scale. This means a greater number of organisations verifying. It also means that the organisations applying, leading and promoting this standard have to be the ones at the frontline of delivery. This requires ensuring the scheme is accessible to the many national and local organisations working in and for their communities.

Of the 150 organisations who are verifying their efforts, 21 are National NGOs. While we are seeing this number increasing, more needs to be done to enable greater take up.

### Aims and Expectation

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This review aims to provide a well-researched analysis of what it will take for the CHS Verification Scheme to meet its ambition; *as many organisations as possible measuring how they are meeting the commitments to people in crisis and making the needed improvements*. Its focus will be on what is required from the perspective of national actors.

It will require a team (2 or 3) consultants to undertake approximately 60 days of work between July and December 2022. Working closely with the CHS Alliance team and its Verification Advisory Panel, the team will research existing work and lesson learnt to date, discuss with a wide variety of stakeholders, and produce a well-reasoned report to inform decision making for the way ahead.

### Three focus areas for the review

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#### **1. Capturing the various perspectives of National actors regarding CHS verification**

The review will capture the various perspectives of national actors on the current barriers and incentives to using the CHS Verification Scheme to improve accountability to people affected by crisis.

CHS Alliance has spent the last 18 months, conducting a series of national workshops, talking to partners and national NGOs to learn about their knowledge, interest, opportunities for the CHS, as well as some of the perceived barriers. This review will build on and complement this research to articulate the factors needed to improve the accessibility.

Questions to explore:

- How to improve awareness of CHS?
- What are the impacts (positive and negative) of undertaking the different CHS verification process?
- What are the perceived and actual barriers for national organisations to verify against the CHS?
- What is needed for greater support for organisations to meet the commitments?
- How will efforts to verify be recognised by others?

Consultation with:

- National organisations who have verified.
- National organisations not members of the Alliance
- Organisations involved in HQAI Facilitation fund, group audit and direct funding pilot
- Key networks including NEAR network, A4EP, Charter for Change and Start network

Informed by

- HAR 2020 and HAR 2022
- Learning from CHS Alliance workshops with national actors

## **2. What changes are needed by others key players to enable greater take up of measuring and improving the ability to meet the commitments**

Accountability to people in crisis requires a whole of system approach to considering the incentives and barriers that are in place. The review will consider what is needed by other actors to enable greater organisational accountability through the CHS verification scheme, particularly the role of INGOs, Government donors, the UN and pooled fund mechanisms.

Questions to explore

- What is the role of the CHS and verification in reducing the burden of donor due diligence processes?
- What are the implications donors support to and recognition of the CHS on the uptake of the CHS for national organisations?
- What actions are needed to increase donors and funding bodies support for CHS verification?

Consultation with:

- Verified organisations
- Grand Bargain Intermediaries work
- Donors working with the CHS
- Donors not working with CHS

Informed by

- The 2020 CHS Alliance review of the CHS and Donor Due Diligence processes
- Reports from HQAI / CHS Alliance / Start's Webinars and workshops on "Due Diligence" webinars



#### **4. Learning from the current Scheme –**

The current scheme has been used for the last six years., with an increasing number of organisations using it. There were adjustments made to the Scheme based on the 2019 review, it requires a constant learning process with the users of the scheme to enable it to meet its ambitions of greater accountability to people in crisis.

Questions to explore

- How the current three options can be taken to scale?
- How the current three options need to adapt, or be added to, to enable greater take up of the CHS?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for CHS verification capacities in countries/regions?

Collaboration with:

- HQAI
- HQAI audited partners
- VAP members

Informed by

- Verification Scheme and the changes made
- 2019 Verification Scheme Review
- Other experience of application of the CHS (shared by CHS copyright holders and others)

#### **Timeline and Deliverables**

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##### **Facilitated consultations on options and findings with**

- CHS Alliance General Assembly (all its members – 29 September)
- CHS Alliance Verification Advisory Panel (Nov – Dec)
- CHS Alliance Governing Board (Sept and Dec)
- HQAI and its Governing Board (TBD)

##### **Deliverables**

- Final Report (no more than 30 pages + annexes) that includes:
  - o Opportunities, barriers, and actions for CHS Alliance to increase accessibility and uptake of the CHS verification by national organisations;
  - o Opportunities, barriers, implications, and actions for increased donors and funding bodies support and recognition of the CHS verification;
  - o Recommendations on necessary modifications of scheme to ensure a robust approach to measuring and improving the delivery of the CHS Commitments.
- Summary overview (5 pages)

#### **Key tasks and responsibilities**

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The review team will be responsible for:

- leading on all aspects of the Review;
- designing the review methodology and data collection tools;
- leading on quality assurance, data analysis, drawing conclusions and learning points, developing recommendations, and report write-up;
- drafting the deliverables and sharing these with the CHS Alliance for feedback and comment;
- ensuring that the Review report responds to the needs of the CHS Alliance and is actionable.

## Review Team

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The review team will report to the Executive Director and work alongside the CHS Alliance's Senior Advisor on outreach.

The team should consist of minimum two consultants, with complimentary geographic and ideally gender perspectives. The team should meet the following qualifications:

- Strategic Thinking and Planning: Experience of organisational strategic planning and programme design.
- Collaborative, able to navigate different views and drive consensus: Able to work collaboratively across different stakeholders
- Extensive experience in research and evaluations
- A sound understanding of the humanitarian and development sector, especially conditions of national and local organisations and promotion of local leadership. We encourage application from the globalSouth
- A good understanding of the CHS, CHS verification, and other standards and their application in the humanitarian and development sector.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Adaptable and sensitive to work in different cultural contexts.
- Meeting and workshop (face to face and online) facilitation skills;
- Excellent writing and presentation skills in English, Other languages are assets

Previous experience of working in with local organisation or network and knowledge of other languages within the team is desirable.

## How to apply

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Please submit your application by email to: [recruitment@chsalliance.org](mailto:recruitment@chsalliance.org)

Applications shall include a **CV and a motivation letter (no longer than 2 pages each for each of the team members)**. Please mention *the name of the team leader and "CHS Verification Scheme Review"* in the subject line.

**Deadline for applications: 18 July 2022**

**Please note:** This position will be a consultant contracted by the CHS Alliance. You will need to commit to the CHS Alliance [vision, mission](#), and [values](#) and commit to be responsible for upholding and promoting the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. This includes respecting the [CHS Alliance's Code of Conduct](#) and the dignity of those whom the Alliance pledges to assist and with whom they have contact.

The CHS Alliance has a zero-tolerance policy towards the abuse of power, exploitation, bullying, harassment and discrimination and towards fraud and corruption. As representatives of the CHS Alliance, staff behaviour must be seen to be of the highest standard. All offers of employment are subject to satisfactory references and appropriate screening checks, including the [Inter-Agency Scheme for the Disclosure of Safeguarding- related Misconduct in Recruitment Process within the Humanitarian and Development Sector](#). As part of this scheme we will seek information about candidates' misconduct (including sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment) with any previous employers for the past five years.

## Annex II – Document list

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HQAI, *Less Duplication, Now. A solution at hand: Using independent audits against the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) to reduce duplication of donor due diligence requirements*, September 2022.

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ICRC and the Netherlands, *Statement on Risk Sharing*, June 2021.

ICVA, *The Grand Bargain 2.0 Explained. An ICVA Briefing Paper*, March 2022.

KAJUNGU Rehema, "[Building our power to take the lead – CHS verification & local leadership](#)", March 2022.

KOBZEVA Marina, "[How to get the horse inside the city gates: supporting teams hesitant about the CHS](#)", June 2022.

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*Launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard and Outcome of the SCHR Certification Review*, 2014.

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## Annex III – Survey questions

### Core Humanitarian Standard Verification Review Survey

Dear colleague/friend,

This survey is being conducted by HERE-Geneva as part of an independent Review commissioned by CHS Alliance. The survey seeks to gather your views and experiences with the verification process linked to the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) or other accountability/due diligence assessments

We are running this survey globally, and are particular interested in receiving the views of **local and national non-governmental organizations. We also invite international NGOs working with local partners to complete this survey.**

The survey is relevant regardless of whether your organization is familiar with the CHS and/or a member of the CHS Alliance.

Thank you for participating in this survey!

The survey should be completed once per organization by the organization's designated representative.

We anticipate that it should take you 10 to 20 minutes, and we ask that you **kindly complete it before 31 October 2022.**

We would encourage you to share all your thoughts and feedback: all the information provided will go directly to the review team, and will be kept confidential and only used in anonymised and aggregated format.

If you would like to contribute directly to our research through an interview or submission of further thoughts and insight, please reach out to us directly at [valentine.hambye@here-geneva.org](mailto:valentine.hambye@here-geneva.org)

## Background questions

What type of organization are you?

Community based organization (the organization works in one local community area)

Local NGO (the organization works in one region or state of the country)

National NGO (the organization works in several regions in your country of legal registration and/or, for certain reasons, across your country's borders)

International NGO (the organization works in more than one country)

Where is your organization legally registered?

Afghanistan  
 Albania  
 Algeria  
 Andorra  
 Angola  
 Antigua and Barbuda  
 Argentina  
 Armenia  
 Australia  
 Austria  
 Azerbaijan  
 Bahamas  
 Bahrain  
 Bangladesh  
 Barbados  
 Belarus  
 Belgium  
 Belize  
 Benin  
 Bhutan  
 Bolivia (Plurinational State of)  
 Bosnia and Herzegovina  
 Botswana  
 Brazil  
 Brunei Darussalam  
 Bulgaria  
 Burkina Faso  
 Burundi  
 Cambodia  
 Cameroon  
 Canada  
 Cabo Verde  
 Central African Republic  
 Chad  
 Chile  
 China  
 Colombia  
 Comoros  
 Congo (Republic of the)  
 Costa Rica  
 Côte d'Ivoire  
 Croatia  
 Cuba  
 Cyprus  
 Czechia (Czech Republic)  
 Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Democratic Republic of the Congo  
Denmark  
Djibouti  
Dominica  
Dominican Republic  
Ecuador  
Egypt  
El Salvador  
Equatorial Guinea  
Eritrea  
Estonia  
Eswatini  
Ethiopia  
Fiji  
Finland  
France  
Gabon  
Gambia (Republic of The)  
Georgia  
Germany  
Ghana  
Greece  
Grenada  
Guatemala  
Guinea  
Guinea-Bissau  
Guyana  
Haiti  
Honduras  
Hungary  
Iceland  
India  
Indonesia  
Iran (Islamic Republic of)  
Iraq  
Ireland  
Israel  
Italy  
Jamaica  
Japan  
Jordan  
Kazakhstan  
Kenya  
Kiribati  
Kiribati  
Kosovo  
Kuwait  
Kyrgyzstan  
Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Latvia  
Lebanon  
Lesotho  
Liberia  
Libya  
Liechtenstein  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Madagascar  
Malawi  
Malaysia



Maldives  
Mali  
Malta  
Marshall Islands  
Mauritania  
Mauritius  
Mexico  
Micronesia (Federated States of)  
Monaco  
Mongolia  
Montenegro  
Morocco  
Mozambique  
Myanmar  
Namibia  
Nauru  
Nepal  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
Nicaragua  
Niger  
Nigeria  
North Macedonia  
Norway  
Oman  
Pakistan  
Palau  
Palestinian Territory, Occupied  
Panama  
Papua New Guinea  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Philippines  
Poland  
Portugal  
Qatar  
Republic of Korea  
Republic of Moldova  
Romania  
Russian Federation  
Rwanda  
Saint Kitts and Nevis  
Saint Lucia  
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines  
Samoa  
San Marino  
Sao Tome and Principe  
Saudi Arabia  
Senegal  
Serbia  
Seychelles  
Sierra Leone  
Singapore  
Slovakia  
Slovenia  
Solomon Islands  
Somalia  
South Africa  
South Sudan  
Spain

Sri Lanka  
Sudan  
Suriname  
Switzerland  
Sweden  
Syria  
Tajikistan  
Thailand  
Timor Leste  
Togo  
Tonga  
Trinidad and Tobago  
Tunisia  
Turkey  
Turkmenistan  
Tuvalu  
Uganda  
Ukraine  
United Arab Emirates  
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
United of Republic of Tanzania  
United States  
Uruguay  
Uzbekistan  
Vanuatu  
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of  
Vietnam  
Yemen  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

In which sector(s) does your organization mainly work?

Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

Early Recovery

Education

Emergency Telecommunications

Food Security

Health

Logistics

Nutrition

Protection

Child Protection

Gender Based Violence

Housing, Land, and Property

Mine Action

Shelter

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

How big is your organization in terms of staff?

Less than 5 paid staff

<p>5 to 10 paid staff</p> <p>10 to 20 paid staff</p> <p>30 to 100 paid staff</p> <p>Over 100 paid staff</p>
<p>How big is your organization in terms of your average annual budget?</p> <p>Less than 1000 USD</p> <p>1000 USD to 5000 USD</p> <p>5000 to 10,000 USD</p> <p>10,000 to 100,000 USD</p> <p>100,000 to 500,000 USD</p> <p>500,000 to 1 million USD</p> <p>Over 1 million USD</p>
<p>What have been your sources of financing for your humanitarian work in the last 3 years:</p> <p>An international NGO</p> <p>A UN agency</p> <p>A pooled funding mechanism</p> <p>An international government donor</p> <p>A national government donor</p> <p>Private sector or individual giving</p> <p>Membership contributions</p>
<p>Would you classify your organization as a “woman led organization”?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>
<p>Would you classify your organization as a "youth led organization"?</p>

## Engagement with the CHS

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) sets out nine commitments by organisations to people affected by crises or in situations of vulnerability they are working with. The Standard commits these organisations to deliver quality, effective, and accountable support and assistance. Essentially, the CHS seeks to strengthen accountability in humanitarian action

Is your organization familiar with the Core Humanitarian Standard?

How did your organization hear about the Core Humanitarian Standard?

Directly from the CHS Alliance

Through a partner or donor

Through a colleague / peer organisation

Through a network or coordination group I belong to

By reading about it

Is your organization a member of the Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance?

Why has your organization not become a Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance member?

We have not yet considered it

We are not sure what the benefits would be for our organization

It is not currently advocated by our partners or donors

It is not currently included in the due diligence processes of our partners/donors

Our organization does not have the time to engage

Our organization does not have the necessary funding

Our organization does not have the necessary staffing

Our organization would not meet the standards

Our organization decided to adopt another system

Our organization is planning to join in the near future

<b>CHS Verification</b>
Linked to the CHS are <a href="#">three options for organisations to assess whether they are meeting the commitments</a> : self-assessment, independent verification, and certification. The CHS Alliance has asked us to look at these options and provide them with suggestions to increase the number of national and local actors using at least one of them. Currently, one organisation, <a href="#">the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI)</a> , <a href="#">provideS the services for CHS Independent Verification and Certification</a> .
Is your organisation familiar with the three options to verify if you are meeting the CHS commitments (self-assessment, independent verification, and certification)? Yes, we have undertaken one or more of the options Yes, but we have not undertaken any of the options
Why have you not undertaken any of the options for verification? Please elaborate on your answer in the comment box.  The verification options are too costly The verification options are too time-consuming CHS verification as it stands does not take into account our specific organisational requirements or structure We are concerned that we would not meet the standard We are subject to other due diligence or capacity assessments
Which of the verification options has your organisation undertaken?  Self-assessment Independent verification Certification
Have you integrated any of the verification processes into other processes in your organization? If yes, please elaborate
In relation to self-assessment, have you consulted the guidance materials from the CHS Alliance?
Have you benefited from or are you aware of the financial support HQAI may provide to help you cover the costs of the certification option?
What was your main motivation for undertaking self-assessment? Please briefly elaborate.  To know how we are doing in terms of meeting the CHS and improve our performance As the first step towards one of the other options To increase our visibility
Are you considering undertaking also independent verification and/or certification?

<p>Why are you not considering undertaking independent verification and/or certification?</p> <p>These verification options are too costly</p> <p>These verification options are too time-consuming</p> <p>CHS verification as it stands does not take into account our specific organisational requirements or structure</p> <p>We are concerned that we would not meet the standard</p> <p>We are subject to so many other due diligence or capacity assessments</p>
<p>What is/was the main motivation for you to undertake independent verification or certification? Please briefly elaborate.</p>
<p>From your organisation’s engagement so far with CHS verification (all options), which results have you seen? Please briefly elaborate.</p> <p>Improvements in our organisation’s policies and practices</p> <p>Improvements in our recognition by, and relations with, partners</p> <p>Increased opportunities for funding</p> <p>We have noted no results or changes</p>
<p>What has your organization appreciated most about the experience with the verification process(es)?</p>
<p>What has been the most challenging part of your organization’s engagement with the verification process(es)?</p>
<p>Would your organization advocate any changes to the verification process(es)? Please briefly elaborate.</p>
<p>Would you recommend other organizations to adopt the CHS and use its verification processes?</p>
<p>Why would you not recommend other organizations to adopt the CHS and use its verification processes?</p>
<p>Why would you recommend other organizations to adopt the CHS and use its verification processes?</p>

<b>Other standard(s) and/or verification</b>
<p>Does your organization use any other standard(s) related to quality and accountability in humanitarian action, instead of the CHS?</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes, we use (please specify)</p>
<p>Does your organization use any other standard(s) related to quality and accountability in humanitarian action, in addition to the CHS?</p>
<p>Does your organisation verify whether you are meeting this/these standard(s)?</p> <p>Yes (briefly elaborate on how)</p> <p>No (briefly elaborate on why)</p>
<p>Has your organisation undertaken an "external" verification of its accountability systems such as a capacity assessment or due diligence process by a third party?</p>
<p>If ever your organization were to adopt an external accountability standard, what would be your main motivations?</p> <p>If you include the "other" option in the ranking, please elaborate in the box below on what that other motivation is.</p> <p>Recognition by other humanitarian organizations</p> <p>Improved quality of our work</p> <p>More accountable organizational systems and practices</p> <p>Increased access to international funding</p>
<p>What drove your organization to undertake an "external" accountability process?</p> <p>If you include the "other" option in the ranking, please elaborate in the box below on what that other motivation is.</p> <p>Recognition by other humanitarian organizations</p> <p>Improved quality of our work</p> <p>More accountable organizational systems and practices</p> <p>Increased access to international funding</p>
<p>Other:</p>

## Final questions

Do you wish to share any other views and experiences regarding "accountability" assessments, such as the verification processes linked to the CHS?

Would you be ok with possibly being contacted for a follow-up interview, or clarifications regarding the answers given in this survey?

Please provide your contact information (name, organisation, and e-mail or telephone number, including country code).

Please note that by doing so the survey will no longer be anonymous, but that all your answers and contact information will be kept confidential and will not be shared outside of the independent research team involved in this review.





