



# CHS Revision Colombia Case Study Report



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This report has been produced by CHS Alliance as part of the 18-month global consultation process to update the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality & Accountability (CHS). It was written by Philip Tamminga, CHS Revision Manager and Aydée Marín Pallares, CHS Steering Committee member.

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## Introduction

This report provides a summary of the outcomes of a CHS Revision country case study in Colombia from July 7-10th. The purpose of the case study was to test the relevance, validity and feasibility of the proposed draft of the updated Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) for different stakeholders in the context of Colombia. The case study was carried out with the financial support of the Spanish Government's Agency for International Cooperation (AECID).

Over the course of the week, the CHS Revision team was able to meet and listen to over 75 people from different stakeholder groups, including migrants in a temporary shelter, participants in a community resilience project,

and a youth and adolescent group. Representatives of local, national and international organisations were also consulted, providing a good overview of the views and opinions of stakeholders with regard to the draft updated CHS, and how to improve it. The case study findings show there is a strong level of support for the proposed updated CHS and interest in continuing to engage with the revision process and work towards greater awareness and application of the standard once finalised. The results of the case study will be used as inputs to prepare a final draft of the updated CHS for presentation and adoption by the end of 2023 - early 2024.

## Case Study Objectives

The Colombia case study was part of a series of **six country case studies** organised by the custodians of the CHS (CHS Alliance, Sphere and Groupe URD) as part of the second stakeholder consultation round to revise and update the CHS. In this second consultation round, a draft text of the updated CHS was presented to stakeholders for their review and comments.

The country case studies objectives, along with other consultations, were designed to test and validate the relevance, utility and feasibility of the draft text of the updated CHS to support people-centred quality and accountability in different country and regional contexts. Colombia was selected as a good context to explore how well the updated CHS responds to the particular set of challenges and opportunities:

Challenges	Opportunities
Triple-nexus context (humanitarian, development, peacebuilding)	Middle-income country with strong government and civil society capacities
Multiple and often overlapping disasters (flooding, volcanoes, landslides, earthquakes, conflict and post-conflict situations)	Strong domestic emergency response capacity and active civil society engagement and ongoing peacebuilding initiatives
Cross-border migration (Venezuela)	Part of UN OCHA's Flagship Initiative also strong R4V experience

Specifically, the case study provided an opportunity for stakeholders to:

1. **Share experiences around accountability to affected people (AAP) and the use of the CHS in the country.**
2. **Review the revised draft CHS and provide feedback on its relevance, validity and feasibility for different stakeholders in Colombia.**
3. **Share recommendations on how to improve the draft texts of the updated CHS.**
4. **Provide recommendations on how to support increased use of the CHS in Colombia.**

## Organisation

The case study took place from July 7-11 in Bogotá, and was led by Philip Tamminga, CHS Revision Manager, Aydée Marín Pallares, CHS Steering Committee member, and Vivian Arenas, CHS Alliance staff member.

Logistical support to organise field visits and focus group sessions was provided by IELCO (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia) and the ACT Alliance regional office, IOM and Colombian Red Cross, and Save the Children Colombia.

Three different focus groups were organised to listen to the views and opinions of people and groups in situations of crisis and vulnerability supported by aid organisations, as well as members of a youth and adolescent leadership programmes. In total, over 45 community members engaged in the focus group discussions.

The case study team also met with over 30 representatives from different organisations, including members of the UN Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, large INGOs, national NGOs and Community-based Organisations, and donor government representatives.

Additional meetings were planned but many organisations' staff were deployed outside of Bogotá and unable to attend in-person meetings, therefore, online interviews were used in some cases.

## Approach

The case study team used semi-structured interviews and focus groups with different stakeholder groups to collect their views and opinions on the draft text of the updated CHS, with a focus on presenting and reviewing the relevance of the reformulated CHS Nine Commitments.

Representatives of groups and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability were asked in focus group sessions how well the draft text reflected their priorities and expectations with respect to organisations that work to support them, and if they felt the CHS could be helpful in supporting them to exercise their rights and ensure greater quality and accountability towards them. Participants were asked to discuss each of the CHS Commitments and reflect on their relevance and importance for their situation and experiences.

Organisational stakeholders were asked if the draft updated CHS aligned to their own views about accountability and the feasibility of adopting and using it as a framework to guide and orient their work. Participants were asked to highlight any elements of the draft that they felt was particularly important or where there could be gaps or areas for improvement. For organisations currently using the CHS, participants were also asked to compare the draft with the current CHS. If there was time, participants were asked to rank each of the CHS Commitments in terms of importance and relevance and/or to complete an online survey questionnaire.

## Reviewing and validating the CHS draft text

The case study team used the CHS revision Guiding Criteria as a general framework to orient the discussions with stakeholders:

- Criteria 1. Do the proposed changes reaffirm and reinforce the standard as a people-centred framework for quality and accountability?**
- Criteria 2. Do the proposed changes address the most important issues that affect quality and accountability?**
- Criteria 3. Do the proposed changes clarify concepts, simplify language, and make it more accessible for users and stakeholders?**
- Criteria 4. Do the proposed changes reinforce the measurability of the Standard?**
- Criteria 5. Do proposed changes reinforce coherence and alignment with existing quality and technical standards and good accountability practices?**
- Criteria 6. Do the proposed changes have the potential to increase adoption and use of the Standard by a wider number of stakeholders, particularly local and national actors?**

### Criteria 1:

There was widespread support for the proposed texts for the updated CHS among all the stakeholders interviewed. All groups considered that the draft texts described the most important elements of accountability.

#### ***Communities' perspectives***

When presenting and explaining the CHS Commitments to community focus groups, it was encouraging to see how quickly and easily community members were able to understand the principles behind the CHS's Nine Commitments and how these could be used to help them advocate for better quality, more effective and accountable support and services. Participants in all focus group sessions felt the CHS describes what accountability means from their perspectives. The words of one participant captures the sentiment of many: "***The CHS makes us feel that we are valued, we are important, and we will be taken into consideration.***" It also meant reaffirming the concept of humanitarian aid as a right and not as an act of charity or goodwill.

However, in discussing the texts, many community focus groups highlighted the need to reinforce people's rights and dignity as a key element of people-centred accountability. As several focus group participants noted, the CHS is "***meaningless if people are not aware of it***" and people feel confident to use it to advocate for their needs, priorities and rights. Others highlighted that even if people were aware of their rights, there are often barriers to them to access assistance. All stressed the need for much greater communication and dissemination of the CHS: "***If people know their rights, they have the opportunity to defend those rights,***" in the words of one youth leader.

Many focus group participants initially found it difficult to shift from a perspective of being a recipient of assistance with an unstated "obligation" to express gratitude towards those providing support, to understanding they have rights and can demand quality and accountability from organisations. Some expressed fears that making requests or expressing negative comments might lead to repercussions in terms of access to support or services. This was particularly true in the focus group session with Venezuelan migrants in a temporary shelter. As one participant stated: "***It is difficult for us to ask for assistance.***"

All focus group participants had many examples of situations where they felt the CHS Commitments were not being met, and when they were not treated with respect and dignity, or given poor quality,

inappropriate support and assistance. Examples ranged from poor quality food, inappropriate items in kits, or the focus or the timing of activities, and disrespectful treatment from organisations and institutions. During the process of presenting and discussing the CHS Commitments was itself interesting to note how over the course of session, attitudes began to shift. As an example, in one focus group session, a participant said: "***I have learned today that access to support and assistance is a right — not charity — and should be available without discrimination because of where you come from.***"

On a positive note, when asked how well the organisations hosting the focus group sessions (IELCO, Colombian Red Cross and IOM, and Save the Children) applied the main concepts of the CHS, participants were universally positive about their experiences and interactions with staff and volunteers. "***The warmth and humanity of the staff is so important,***" said one participant. "***We are treated with respect, they listen to us, and they help us solve issues or problems.***"

### ***Organisations' perspectives***

Representatives of aid organisations also welcomed the proposed text as a step forward in advancing people-centred accountability in the Colombia context. For organisations already using the CHS, such as Save the Children and World Vision, the draft text balanced the need to maintain continuity while helping to add clarity and focus to some elements. Other organisational stakeholders less familiar with the CHS saw it as useful and relevant, and valued the text as a coherent framework for supporting and promoting people-centred quality and accountability.

All organisations noted their interest and commitment to apply the CHS but cited the lack of resources as one of the main barriers to doing this. Several highlighted the disparity in resources allocated for the Venezuela crisis compared to resources to support needs in Colombia. Others pointed out the continued lack of coherency from donors, who on the one hand advocate for rights-based, people-centred accountability approaches while demanding unreasonable timeframes and reporting requirements for programme delivery. Commitment 6 around coordination and complementarity of support was frequently mentioned as an area for improvement.

### **Criteria 2:**

The consensus of all stakeholder groups was that in general, the proposed draft CHS text addresses the most important issues affecting quality and accountability to people and communities. There were, however, many similar suggestions from both community focus groups and aid organisations to reinforce many elements, including issues around culture and diversity, resilience, and linking emergency assistance to longer-term capacity strengthening. There were many similar suggestions to reinforce the links between the CHS and people's rights.

### ***Communities' perspectives***

Focus group participants generally found all the CHS Commitments relevant and a good description of issues relating to quality and accountability that concerned them. **Commitment One's** focus on people's active participation and knowing their rights was appreciated by community members, though as noted above, there were many comments that knowing rights was not enough to guarantee that those rights would be respected by different actors. Similarly, participation was seen as a positive element, but community members said that this needs to be voluntary, not an obligation, and options to participate in programmes and decision-making needs to be organised around their availability and preferred ways of working. Several focus group participants, particularly in the youth group, stressed the need to use media people are familiar with and language adapted to different audiences.

There was a similarly high level of support for **Commitment Two's** focus on relevant, appropriate and timely support and assistance, with many comments on the need to consult with communities to better understand their priority needs and provide the right assistance at the right time. Many participants stressed the need for organisations to know and understand the characteristics of each group, particularly around their culture, capacities and specific needs, and to design programmes around this, not assume that each person or group is homogenous.

For many participants, the text for **Commitment Three** was more difficult to initially understand. The concept of resilience was not familiar to many but was generally understood as "being stronger" or "more capable" of coping with situations of vulnerability. Here too, many participants questioned why the text mentions "resilience to future crises" — as if it was a given that they would inevitably be in situations of crisis. Instead, participants proposed that resilience should be for all aspects of their lives and livelihoods: "**We need to be stronger and more resilient to cope with our day-to-day challenges,**" said one participant.

Participants appreciated the inclusion of using local knowledge and capacities and linked this to their sense of pride and dignity. "*It is hard for us to ask for assistance,*" said one woman. "**We have survived on our own until now, and only came to the shelter because we have no other options.**" Others mentioned their desire for aid organisations to gain job skills and training in order to recover their self-reliance and resilience. "**We want to participate and not be seen as passive recipients,**" said another.

Other Commitments were also viewed positively by participants. However, there were some suggestions that "complaints" was not the best choice of words to describe the meaning behind **Commitment Five**, particularly given the widespread perception of many focus group participants — that people need to be grateful for assistance and should not complain, and the fear that complaints will lead to cuts in assistance. Similarly, for many focus group participants "avoid negative effects" was somewhat vague — and for some, challenged the idea that all organisations provide assistance were inherently "good." However, when prompted, discussions quickly identified examples of negative effects, including situations where they felt "**abuses of power by staff, being humiliated when asking for assistance.**"

Some additional gaps mentioned were around strengthening elements of psychosocial support as part of the **Commitment Three, Four and Five**. Participants highlighted situations where well-meaning staff might be "re-opening wounds or situations of pain and trauma, that later don't get any support or attention." This was also extended to organisational staff and the support to them. Participants supported the idea behind **Commitment Eight**, but also mentioned the importance of staff having the right skills, competencies and support to do their jobs well. One participant used the expression "**Cobbler stick to your last**" ("*Zapatero a tus zapatos*") to reinforce the need for competent, well-trained and well-supported aid workers that understand the culture and context. Meanwhile, one young participant, aged 7, nicely summarised the relationship between a healthy workplace environment for staff and how this reflects in their work with people and communities: "**When you work in a place you like, doing thing you like, things go much better for everyone.**"

### **Organisations' perspectives**

For the most part, representatives from organisations consulted also felt the proposed draft texts covered the most important issues affecting quality and accountability. Many welcomed the draft's sharper focus on participation, reinforcement of local capacities, knowledge and resilience, and the shift away from emergency responses to wider efforts to support people and communities in situations of vulnerability.

The views of one donor government representative echoed the sentiment of most actors consulted: "**We really like the emphasis on supporting, coordinating with and working through and with local actors and authorities. This is how we are trying to orient work in Colombia, but it is an aspect that is often missing in debates at the national and international level.**" The emphasis on strengthening capacities and preparedness before a crisis was also appreciated. "**By the time we learn about a crisis and want to do something, it's already too late! We need to take preparedness, risk reduction and longer-term recovery seriously.**"

There were several areas where organisational stakeholders felt the draft could be improved. One aspect to reinforce is to make more references to the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding. This is particularly relevant for a context like Colombia, with multiple and overlapping situations of crisis and vulnerability. In particular, stronger references to integrated programmes



supporting risk reduction, preparedness, response and capacity-strengthening would be welcomed by many organisations consulted. Additionally, explaining the relevance of the CHS when working in conflict and post-conflict situations with armed groups is another area for consideration in the updated CHS.

Gender, diversity inclusion, power and culture were also mentioned as areas for strengthening, particularly in relation to indigenous populations and situations of cross-border migration. "**Working with indigenous peoples requires a different way of working,**" said the representative of a local NGO. "**It is a lot of work to understand the social, cultural and power dynamics in these communities, and you need to build a relationship of trust over time before you gain acceptance.**" This point was echoed by several participants in a session with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group: "**The CHS talks about power, but this needs to be strengthened to highlight there are always unbalanced and differential power dynamics within organisations and within communities,**" said one participant.

Others pointed to the Venezuela crisis as an example of where understanding the specific dynamics of vulnerable groups is critical to designing effective responses. Even when dealing with displaced people from a neighbouring country with a similar base language, there are often significant differences in terms of language, culture, social and power dynamics and communication preferences. Knowing these dynamics is key to avoid making assumptions or biases on what is relevant and appropriate in terms of a response, whether in terms of provision of food and other items, information provision or people's immediate and long-term priorities and aspirations.

Working and coordinating with local actors and municipal authorities was also frequently mentioned as an area for improvement. Some organisational representatives stressed that while this is part of the localisation agenda, in reality, many organisations "parachute" into an area without consulting with or understanding of existing information, knowledge and activities. "**We are often called in as a liaison to facilitate the relationships between external organisations and the local community and authorities, instead of working together from the start,**" said a representative of a local NGO. "**We have to move away from discussions in the capitol of Bogotá and really get out the different regions of the country if we are serious about localisation,**" said another.

Another suggestion was to shift the focus from equating workshops and trainings with strengthening local capacity. "**How many times have we funded and organised workshops without fully consulting and assessing what the actual needs are?**" reflected one informant. "**In one case, we were supporting a skills workshop for women community leaders, who told us 'Why another workshop? We are trained doctors and health professionals, we don't need training, we need resources and support!'"**

### Criteria 3:

Both communities and organisations felt the draft texts were clear, accessible and understandable. As noted above, it was very easy in community focus groups to present and explain the CHS and the concepts behind each of the Commitments. Organisational representatives were also strongly supportive of the updated texts, with several commenting it was clearer than the current CHS texts.

#### **Communities' perspectives**

In the focus group sessions, the team presented the CHS Commitments and then asked participants to explain in their own words what each Commitment meant for them and give examples of what that might look like in practice. In all cases, participants provided examples in their own words that closely matched most of the Key Requirements for each Commitment. In cases where the Commitment was not clear, such as elements of Commitment Three around "resilience to future crises," further discussion showed that with some additional explanation, participants easily understood the rationale behind the Commitment and Key Requirements.

Another point repeated in all groups was the need to disseminate and socialise the CHS more widely amongst all stakeholders. For all participants, it was the first time they had heard about the CHS, and saw the benefit of a standard that protected their rights and interests, and could be used to advocate to

improve the quality of services and assistance and their relationships with aid organisations and institutions.

### **Organisations' perspectives**

All organisations interviewed felt the draft text covered the most relevant issues related to quality and accountability, and was presented in a clear, understandable manner. There were suggestions on how to strengthen and improve some elements of the texts, but these were minor. In line with the comments above, these included ensuring better linkages to risk reduction, the role of local and national authorities, culture, gender and diversity inclusion, and the importance of organisational leadership to drive accountability at all levels (in line with the General Requirements).

For organisations familiar with and using the current CHS (in this case, IELCO, Act Alliance, Save the Children and World Vision), the proposed draft was welcomed as more user-friendly and accessible for them. **"The reformulation of the CHS is very clear and understandable, and not too complex or technical. It could be very useful for our branch volunteers and our work with communities,"** remarked a senior Colombian Red Cross representative. This was echoed by the Programme Director of IELCO. **"As a faith-based organisation working directly with communities, the CHS has been useful for us to orient our work. The new draft is very simple and will be easy to understand for our congregations as it helps provide a clear ethical framework for our work."**

It is important to note that while the global headquarters of these organisations are members of the CHS Alliance and committed to verification against the CHS, their members/affiliates in Colombia indicated the lack of capacity-strengthening support and materials in Spanish. This meant that they often had to take the initiative for translating and adapting the CHS and disseminating its use the local context. Another important consideration is that these organisations are mostly staffed and managed by local staff, with very few ex-patriate staff. This includes fundraising and resource mobilisation. In many regards, these organisations are closer to being national NGOs than off-shoots of an international organisation, giving more weight to their views regarding the relevance of the CHS in the Colombia context.

Similarly for the representatives of Corpocaminar, a community-based NGO that is part of the NEAR Network, the updated draft of the CHS is a good means to translate policy discussions at the international level, such as the Grand Bargain localisation agenda, into a practical tool or roadmap to use with communities. From their perspective, the new draft can help build a culture of accountability and reinforce communities' ability to exercise their rights to provide their inputs, suggestions and complaints to organisations and institutional authorities. **"It is a good tool if people know about it, as it gives them better, clearer criteria to determine if actions are good or bad,"** according to one. **"But it can't just be used as a way to transfer risk to NGOs, all actors need to use it and comply with it."**

### **Criteria 4:**

There was strong agreement amongst all stakeholders on the added-value of the CHS as a practical means to assess and measure progress on people-centred accountability. Most stakeholders strongly supported the idea that the CHS could and should provide a common framework for all actors involved in supporting people and communities to demonstrate they are meeting the Commitments. For the most part, the emphasis was on assessing programmes and assistance against the CHS and not on organisational-level verification, though a few organisations did mention the value of the proposed General Requirements section as a good overview of the systems, processes and ways of working of an effective and accountable organisation.

### **Communities' perspectives**

As noted above, community members strongly identified with the CHS Nine Commitments as relevant and important for them. Focus group participants consistently remarked that if people and communities were aware of the CHS, they would be able to use it to know if organisations are **"living up to their commitments."** When presenting and discussing the Commitments, participants found many examples when they felt that assistance was not relevant, of poor quality, and did not meet their priority needs and

expectations. This also applied to the actions, behaviours and interactions with representatives of aid organisations or institutions. Similarly, many positive examples were provided when participants felt the CHS Commitments were being met. This reinforces an important point: people and communities are the best situated to assess whether or not an organisation and its programmes or services meet their needs and expectations.

In all focus groups, there was strong support for the idea that organisations should adopt and apply the CHS. Discussions around Commitments Seven and Nine often led to comments that organisations need to be more transparent on how they are using resources, designing programmes and learning and improving over time. The focus group with youth was particularly interesting as for many, Commitment 7 strongly reflected what they want from current leaders — and what they aspire to as future leaders and influencers in society: ***"This commitment is not only required, it is fundamental to accountability,"*** said one. Others stressed the need for ***"attitudes that support being open to constantly improve what you are doing, learn from mistakes, and look for solutions."***

### ***Organisations' perspectives***

Organisations also strongly supported the draft text as a common framework for monitoring and assessing progress applying people-centred accountability. Many organisations saw the draft text as strengthening the need for continuous learning and improvement. ***"Everyone should apply this and show how they are complying with the Commitments,"*** said one. This included some members of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, who saw this as a practical means to establish a common measurement framework at the collective level. Others agreed, but stressed that in order to achieve that, stakeholders need access to a set of indicators for programmes, processes, and organisational systems, combined with practical tools and guidelines, adapted and oriented to their type of organisation and programmes.

A suggestion from several members of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group was to emphasise the need for monitoring and follow-up of the CHS Commitments in coordination mechanisms. ***"There is nothing new here, but we need to continue to disseminate the ethical foundation behind the CHS, including with governments and communities, and engage with communities to develop indicators on what the CHS means for them in their context and reality, and how we will measure ourselves against this,"*** said one participant.

### **Criteria 5:**

This criterion was not as relevant for community members interviewed. Organisations interviewed, however, were able to see to link the draft text to Sphere Minimum Standards, and current policy debates and accountability initiatives. Many considered the draft text as a very practical expression of how policy discussions could be interpreted and applied through the lens of the CHS.

### ***Communities' perspectives***

For the most part, community members were unaware of other standards relating to support and assistance they could access. Indeed, most had very limited knowledge of their rights and entitlements with respect to organisations or institutional and public sector actors providing support and assistance to them. Understandably, the priority for most focus group participants was around accessing information and services that could help them cope and recover from a situation of crisis and vulnerability, and detailed knowledge and awareness of different standards is both unrealistic and contrary to the idea of putting "people in the centre."

Still, one important lesson from the case study is that many people see assistance as an act of charity and are reluctant to critique or request changes to the support received. In this sense, reframing and presenting the CHS Commitments as part of people's rights and organisations' responsibilities could be reinforced in the draft text, and used as the entry point to raise awareness and change people's attitudes towards accountability.

### ***Organisations' perspectives***

Most organisations interviewed saw a clear link between the CHS and related standards. Given the high level of outreach, dissemination and training around Sphere Standards in Colombia, many representatives saw the draft CHS text as aligned with and supporting Sphere, though some were unaware that the CHS is a foundational chapter for Sphere. This is an area that could be reinforced in the draft text.

More importantly, all organisational stakeholders interviewed saw the CHS as completely aligned and compatible with many of the key accountability initiatives underway in Colombia. Several members of the Inter-Cluster Working Group saw this as an opportunity to provide focus to the initiative. "***The idea of the Flagship Initiative is great in theory, but in reality, almost anything goes, without any criteria,***" said one organisation representative. "***The CHS could provide some clarity by offering the Nine Commitments as a description of what we should be aiming for. It's even better as it describes what people and communities want and expect from us.***"

Others believed that the CHS provided more clarity and focus to other policy level debates around the Grand Bargain, in particular, the Participation Revolution and Localisation Agenda. "***We have been discussing what localisation means, and now they have come up with the idea of 7 pillars for localisation. It's too much! Why don't we use the CHS as a more practical way of approaching it?***" said one representative. A representative of a small community-based NGO spoke of the experience participating in a Grand Bargain workshop in Geneva. "***It is great that we finally are invited and have an opportunity to participate in these discussions, but what we need is organisations here in Colombia to use and respect the ideas of the CHS when they work with communities.***"

Another positive element was the fact that many local and national organisations felt that the draft text complemented and aligned with many of their current internal systems and processes. Organisations currently using the CHS for self-assessment and verification purposes saw the draft as less rigid and more adaptable to their organisational context. In other cases, the draft text aligned well to work with international partners. "***A lot of our Act Alliance partners use and verify against the CHS, and they have helped us develop policies. But it's great the new draft reduces the burden such as having a number of policies in place, which is unrealistic given our size and capacity, and focuses on processes adapted to the organisation's context.***" Similarly, a Colombian Red Cross representative noted: "***The draft text is very much in line with some of the tools we use internally for quality assurance, as well as other tools developed by the IFRC, such as the organisation capacity self-assessment process. The CHS is more flexible and would be easier for us to use.***"

In terms of suggestions for improvement, most comments were around including more texts around the linkages to Sphere, Code of Conduct and Humanitarian Charter, as well as other relevant policy commitments and initiatives. In most cases, stakeholders noted that this might not be necessary in the draft text itself, but in the form of additional guidance notes or tools.

## Criteria 6:

All stakeholders mentioned that the draft text is accessible and user-friendly, and that the content is useful and relevant to multiple actors and stakeholders. Community members and organisations alike found the CHS as a relevant tool, and all identified the need for more active, concerted communication to promote awareness and use of the standard. There was a strong sense that the revision process and the resulting updated Standard was an enormous opportunity to create and enable widespread adoption of the people-centred approaches to accountability espoused in the CHS.

### ***Communities' perspectives***

Community members viewed the CHS very positively, and all supported the idea that it should be used by all organisations involved in providing support and assistance to them. One participant in the focus group with youth leaders who also collaborates with a small NGOs said "***This is completely relevant to my organisation's work, even if we are not a humanitarian organisation. I want to start using this today!***" Beyond the more "technical" elements of the CHS, many saw the draft text as helping to shift the

relationship with aid organisations. **"It is about showing compassion and respect for us and leading from the heart,"** said one participant. **"Others said it "makes us feel valued, that our voice really matter."**

Nevertheless, community members were also realistic about how much the CHS itself could change and transform aid. **"What good is it if everyone knows it, if we don't address the barriers against applying it?,"** questioned one participant. Still, others felt it was an important first step towards changing the way organisations interact with people and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability, recognising that this is a long-term process.

### **Organisations' perspectives**

Interviews with organisations working in Colombia were similarly positive about the potential of the draft of the updated CHS to foster greater adoption and use by a wider number of stakeholders. **"The reformulation of the CHS is very clear and understandable, and not too complex or technical. It would be very useful for our branch volunteers and our work with communities,"** remarked a Colombian Red Cross representative. This was echoed by the Programme Director of IELCO. **"As a faith-based organisation working directly with communities, the CHS has been useful for us to orient our works."**

Others commented on the opportunity to introduce the CHS into existing country and regional-level initiatives and processes. This includes UN-OCHA's Flagship Initiative, GIFFMM/R4V Venezuela Refugee and Migrant Response, and national initiatives such as the Colombia Peace Process, disaster risk reduction climate resilience plans and others at the provincial and municipal levels. Several organisations highlighted the need for specific, tailored technical assistance and support to integrate and use the CHS as part of these processes. **"We would like to use the updated CHS with our partners, not only here in Colombia, but across the region,"** said a representative from the ACT Alliance, **"But we need support and resources to do this."**

## **Validation and ranking exercise**

Stakeholders were asked to score the proposed texts of each individual commitments in terms of their relevance and importance, and then an overall score for the Nine Commitments together, using a 1-10 scale, where 10 was very relevant and important. In some cases, this was done informally due to timing issues or the dynamics of the meeting. The ranking exercises confirmed the widespread support for the draft text amongst all stakeholders.

The majority of participants in community focus groups scored the commitments as 10, with a few minor exceptions. Interestingly, it was the youth and adolescent focus group where there were more minor differences of opinions around

some Commitments, leading to some variations in the scores. This was mainly due to the wording of the texts relating to Commitments 1, 2 and 3. However, representatives of migrants and other groups in situations of vulnerability overwhelmingly scored each Commitment as 10.

Key informant interviews and meeting with representatives of organisations were more difficult to use the scoring exercise, mainly due to time limitations. However, as with communities, the overall perception of organisational stakeholders was positive and supportive of the draft text. Scores in these cases were all above 8, with the majority ranking the Commitments as a 10.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The Colombia case study was an important exercise to allow for a wide consultations with multiple stakeholders to collect their views and perceptions of the draft text of the updated CHS. The results were overwhelming positive, with all stakeholder groups expressing strong support for the draft text as relevant, important and useful for the context of Colombia.

The perspectives of people and communities members facing situations of crisis and vulnerability were particularly encouraging. All focus group participants were highly supportive of the CHS and appreciated its focus on protecting their rights and putting their needs and interests at the centre of decision-making. For many, the discussions of the draft text were an opportunity to challenge their own beliefs and assumptions about assistance, and their relationships with organisations and institutions that work with them. The CHS was seen as an important framework, with a set of commitments that matched their own views and expectations on what quality and accountability means to them. The opportunity to participate and engage in the consultation was appreciated, and participants felt their views and opinions were valued and respected.

None of the community members consulted had prior knowledge of the CHS. All believed the CHS needs to be widely shared and disseminated amongst groups of people that facing situations of crisis and vulnerability, as well as within organisations and institutions. Most were confident that greater awareness of the CHS would lead to better quality, more effective support and better relationships with aid providers. Nevertheless, others were less optimistic that many of the underlying challenges and barriers that contributed to situations of crisis or vulnerability would be addressed unless there were concerted efforts to consistently use and apply the CHS among all stakeholder groups.

Organisational representatives also strongly supported the draft text, particularly its focus on participation, working with local knowledge, capacities and resources, the wider emphasis beyond emergencies to cover preparedness, risk reduction and longer-term, sustainable

capacities of local and national actors. Many saw the CHS as a unique opportunity to bring together all actors and stakeholders under a common framework to work towards improving quality, effectiveness and accountability at all levels.

Nevertheless, the CHS was not well-known in the country. Though many organisations are familiar with Sphere, awareness of the CHS is limited, even if it is one of the foundation chapters of Sphere. For many organisational representatives, the consultation was their first introduction to the CHS. The overwhelmingly positive response and the high interest to continue to engage in the process and beyond, after the launch of the updated CHS, is a good indication that the standard is considered useful, relevant and feasible to apply in the context of Colombia.

Organisations that were familiar with the CHS, either through their partners or by adopting it for their own processes, were also highly supportive of the proposed changes to the standard. Most felt it reduced complexity and allowed more flexibility to respond to their specific organisational needs and operational context. Most have developed internal quality assurance systems in line with the current CHS, and felt that the draft text provided continuity with the key elements of the CHS. At the same time, the draft helps to reinforce elements that are very relevant to their work in Colombia, such as the emphasis on helping supporting local knowledge, capacities and leadership, or the wider focus beyond emergencies.

Despite the positive responses of stakeholders to the draft text, a repeated concern was the lack of support, resources and funding needed to sustain and scale-up use of the CHS in Colombia. Most of the examples of good accountability practices, whether explicitly linked to the CHS or consistent with the main elements of the Standard, have been developed locally or in the wider Latin America region. There are few resources available in Spanish (and much less in indigenous languages) to help organisations adopt and apply the CHS, or for communities to know and understand how it can be used to support their rights to access

principled, quality, effective and accountable support and assistance. Stakeholders also commented that these resources need to be developed with a good understanding of the culture and context of Colombia and the region to be useful to them.

In summary, the country case study showed that there is very high level of agreement with the proposed draft of the updated CHS amongst all stakeholder groups consulted. Stakeholders validated the texts as relevant and appropriate for their contexts, whether as a community member facing a situation of crisis, or as an organisation working to respond to people's needs. The draft text is considered as a useful framework to reinforce people-centred accountability, provide clarity on how to understand and implement continuous improvements in organisation's ways of working.

More importantly, community themselves consider the draft updated CHS and its Nine Commitments as a valid description of their views around what is important for accountability. All saw it as a valuable initiative to reinforce their rights, support them to access the support they need and improve their relationships with organisations that they interact with.

The case study results are an invaluable contribution to the CHS Revision process, and the many comments and suggestions will be incorporated into the final draft of the updated CHS. Beyond this, the process itself has contributed to raising awareness, engagement and support for the CHS in Colombia. This opens new opportunities to continue engagement with stakeholders to adopt and incorporate the standard by a wider number of stakeholders once the final draft is completed and launch.

## Recommendations

### *Improving the proposed draft text for the updated CHS*

- 1. Include more explicit references to culture, gender, age, diversity and inclusion, and strengthen the links to rights throughout the text.**

There was a clear consensus from the stakeholder consultations that gender, age, diversity and inclusion need to be more explicit in the text. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of understanding the culture, social and power dynamics of vulnerable groups as a key element of ensuring accountability.

**These elements should be considered by the CHS Revision process in the next draft of the updated CHS.**

- 2. Reinforce elements around risk reduction, preparedness, strengthening resilience, supporting and enhancing local knowledge and capacities and peace-building (triple nexus)**

Stakeholders were supportive of the changes in the updated draft text to expand the CHS's focus beyond humanitarian emergencies. However, there were also many suggestions to incorporate more language that reflects the Colombia context, where multiple and overlapping initiatives around response, preparedness, risks reduction, peace-building and local capacity-strengthening are often part of programmes.

**This is another element for the CHS Revision process to consider in the next version of the draft text.**

### *Building greater awareness, support and use of the CHS in the country*

- 3. Develop and implement a long-term communication strategy for CHS.**

Community members and organisations alike were largely unaware of the CHS before these consultations, but were strongly supportive of the standard, and recommended developing and implementing a communication strategy to raise awareness and advocate for its use in Colombia. However, there was also a clear consensus that one-off launch events or workshops are not enough to ensure the CHS reaches its potential to drive how accountability is understood and exercised in the country. All stakeholders were clear that this is a long-term process. Community members saw this as an opportunity to educate people on their rights and how to exercise them, while organisations saw the potential to use the CHS as a common, shared framework for accountability.

**The CHS Alliance, Sphere and Groupe URD should work with local partners to develop communication materials in Spanish, adapted for different audiences and uses, and to implement sustained awareness-raising campaigns to support wider awareness and use of the updated CHS.**

#### **4. Invest in a country-wide capacity-strengthening initiative for the CHS**

Organisational stakeholders provided numerous examples of opportunities to leverage the CHS to provide greater coherency to existing country and cross-border initiatives such as the Flagship Initiative and GRIFFM. Many saw the CHS as a practical means to promote collective, coherent approaches to people-centred accountability in Colombia and neighbouring countries, including using common indicators, monitoring processes and reporting aligned to the CHS. Others expressed the need for more specific technical assistance and capacity-strengthening support for their own organisations and partners. In all cases, stakeholders highlighted the need for more tools, guidance and support tailored to their specific organisational and programming needs.

**The CHS Alliance, Sphere, and Groupe URD should mobilise resources and build partnerships with organisations working in Colombia to develop a coherent and integrated CHS capacity-strengthening and implementation strategy targeting local and national actors, international actors, and coordination mechanisms, building on existing initiatives in the country and region.**



## Annex: Stakeholders consulted

List of Community Focus Groups	List of organisations interviewed
Venezuelan migrants in a Red Cross/IOM managed temporary shelter - Bogotá	AECID
	ACT Alliance
	Colombia Red Cross
Vulnerable Venezuelan migrant families participating in a resilience project managed by IELCO - Bosa Porvenir	Corpocaminar
	IELCO
	IOM
Colombia and Venezuela youth and adolescent in a Save the Children Colombia "young leaders and influencers" programme - Bogotá	Inter-Cluster Working Group
	Save the Children Colombia
	World Vision Colombia

