CHS Alliance

HUMANITARIAN
ACCOUNTABILITY
REPORT 2020

ARE WE MAKING AID WORK BETTER FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition of the Humanitarian Accountability Report intentionally draws on the expertise and views of a wide range of people from different backgrounds and with differing perspectives. More than 50 individuals from over 40 organisations participated – including research institutes and think-tanks, the United Nations, governments and donors, NGOs and NGO Networks – by reflecting on the CHS verification data, and our collective progress and challenges. They have all helped us answer the critical question: "Are we making aid work better for people affected by crisis?" The conclusions drawn are thanks to the engagement of all contributors throughout the process, especially during the challenging circumstances presented by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

We are grateful to our contributing authors Paul Knox-Clarke and Eilidh Kennedy for their hard work in interrogating the CHS verification reports and data and for combining this with their detailed knowledge of the sector.

We are extremely grateful to the authors of the foreword, Aysha Touma and Kitty van der Heijden for sharing their respective views as a person affected by crisis and a person working for a donor government.

This report benefited from valuable comments and input from 15 reviewers (see inside cover page) who kindly volunteered their time to this review in a challenging period of Covid-19. We sincerely thank them.

The report based its analysis on the CHS verification data complemented by data from people affected by crisis. We are grateful to the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) and the Ground Truth Solutions for their collaboration in compiling the data.

Analysis on each of the CHS Commitments is complemented by two opinion pieces from key members of the humanitarian sector who share their thoughts on the data and draw on their experience and knowledge to provide us with valuable ways forward. Each of these contributors has our deep gratitude.

We greatly appreciate the CHS Alliance members' and partners' engagement in this edition of the Humanitarian Accountability Report. We are particularly grateful to the CHS-certified organisations

who shared their stories of change: CAFOD, Christian Aid, Finn Church Aid, International Blue Crescent, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Medair, Naba'a, Norwegian Church Aid and Tearfund. You can read the stories in full at https://www.chsalliance.org/har2020/#impactstories.

We would like to thank and congratulate all CHS Alliance members who reaffirmed their Commitment to the CHS via our CEO pledge (see page 84).

The production of this edition was coordinated and managed by the CHS Alliance staff, especially Bonaventure Gbetoho Sokpoh, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Learning and Rosa Argent, Head of Membership and Communications whose efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

We would also like to thank everyone who directly or indirectly contributed to the production of this edition of the Humanitarian Accountability Report.

Finally, the CHS Alliance is grateful to its donors – the Federal Republic of Germany, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg – for their generous contributions to funding the activities of the CHS Alliance.

Tanya Wood
Executive Director, CHS Alliance

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAP Accountability to Affected People

ACTED Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development

ADRRN Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network

ALNAP Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action

CAFOD Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

CAR Corrective Action Requests

CARICOM Caribbean Community

CBO Community-based Organisation

CBP Community-based Protection

CBPF Country-based Pooled Funds

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CERF Central Emergency Response Fund

CHS Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability

CRM Complaint and Response Mechanism

CSO Civil Society Organisation

EIA Environmental Impact Assessment

EU European Union

GBV Gender-based Violence

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation

HAP Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

HAR Humanitarian Accountability Report

HC Humanitarian Coordinator

HCT Humanitarian Country Teams

HIS Humanitarian Inclusion Standards

HNO Humanitarian Needs Overview

HQAI Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative

HR Human Resources

HRP Humanitarian Response Plan

HSP Humanitarian Standards Partnership

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IDP Internally Displaced Persons

IFRC International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INGO International Non-governmental Organisation

IT Informational Technology

JEEAR Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda

LGBTQI+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex +

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

MEAL Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

NCA Norwegian Church Aid

NGO Non-governmental Organisation

OCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODI Overseas Development Institute

OECD/DAC Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee

PCA Partner Capacity Assessment

PSEA Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

PSEAH Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment

Q&A Quality and Accountability

REAP Risk-informed Early Action Partnership

SADDD Sex, Age and Disability-disaggregated Data

SCHR Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

SEA Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

SOGIESC Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WASH Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

CONTENTS

The Humanitarian Accountability Report 2020 seeks to address the question of whether we are making aid work better for people affected by crisis. It opens with two different perspectives: one from a woman affected by the Syrian conflict, Ayhsa Touma, and another from a donor government, the Netherlands, Kitty van der Heijden.

FOREWORD

The conflict in Syria, now in its tenth year, is the most severe humanitarian crisis since the twentieth century's world wars. More than 70 per cent of the nation's infrastructure has been destroyed, millions of people have been displaced, and hundreds of thousands have been killed.

As one of the millions of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), I received assistance from convoys upon arrival at the displacement areas. However, some of the aid was a burden for me to carry during the time I was displaced. It was also not administered at the right time since I did not know where I would finally stay, and there was also further aid I needed that was not provided at that time.

I am member of a group of Syrian women who fled from a total of seven Syrian governorates, and our displacement fate has led us to meet in Ma'arrat An-Nu'man city in Idlib. Here a woman from the host community brought us together, in an initiative that we call Yasaminat Syria (Jasmines of Syria). We work together to communicate with local initiatives, organisations and expatriates to provide a better response to other IDPs.

What particularly helps me is that I fully understand the context and, as someone who became an IDP several times over, I know the type of aid that is needed and the proper timing for its delivery.

"Some of the aid was a burden on me to carry during the displacement trip, it was not received at the right time since I did not know where I would finally stay"

Additionally, as a woman, I am close to the most vulnerable groups of women and children. Together with my group members, we affect positively the humanitarian response in several areas, through an exchange of experiences and knowledge that improves the response for IDPs, especially in establishing the numbers of IDPs and assessing their needs.

I am particularly keen to advocate for and support initiatives that improve the relationship between humanitarian actors and ourselves – the IDPs and host communities – to raise our voices and build trust. For example, we aim to build women's capacity in general, especially in households headed by women who have had neither educational opportunities nor have a profession. We also focus on the elimination of child labour and support compulsory education, and help female minors to acquire their basic rights – such as education and being protected from underage marriage.

"What particularly helps me is that I fully understand the context and, as one of the affected people who became IDPs several times, I know the type of aid needed and the proper timing for its delivery."

My paramount desire is that humanitarian aid always positively affects me and all IDPs and does not have a negative impact on our lives already disturbed by crisis.

Aysha Touma
Representative of Yasaminat Syria, a group of Syrian women in Idlib

'Trust, but verify'. Like most good proverbs, this Russian saying has the benefit of being applicable in many different situations. It certainly applies to the humanitarian sector. Trust is essential to its functioning, and enduring trust cannot exist without accountability.

This report asks if we are making aid work better for people affected by crisis. The best way to answer that question is through verification and accountability.

For the most part, our trust in the humanitarian sector is well deserved. But there are occasional exceptions. To improve aid efforts, it is essential that those exceptions are found, addressed and resolved. That is the only way to restore trust where it has been violated. It is our obligation, both to the people we assist and to those who enable us to help others, especially now that Covid-19 is compounding the challenges the sector already faces.

The sector needs to step up its efforts to build effective and transparent mechanisms for SEAH accountability: easy-access complaints systems, confidential and independent investigations, and tailored support for survivors.

Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) must be subjected to particular scrutiny. This affront to human dignity has no place anywhere, least of all in the humanitarian community.

The sector needs to step up its efforts to build effective and transparent mechanisms for SEAH accountability: easy-access complaints systems, confidential and independent investigations, and tailored support for survivors. An important part of this approach is to establish independent ombuds mechanisms when appropriate, at national level, that can investigate cases and mediate on behalf of survivors.

There are many milestones on the road to greater accountability, and this report by the CHS Alliance marks a number of them. It offers valuable insight into the effectiveness of humanitarian responses, which in turn helps to make the sector more accountable. Its data-driven analysis enables a better understanding of humanitarian dilemmas and demonstrates the sector's readiness for accountability. In doing so, it fosters a more informed debate on the future of humanitarianism and provides the verification that reinforces trust.

Kitty van der Heijden
Director-General
for International Cooperation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
the Netherlands

There are many milestones on the road to greater accountability, and this report by the CHS Alliance marks a number of them. It offers valuable insight into the effectiveness of humanitarian responses, which in turn helps to make the sector more accountable.

"MY PARAMOUNT DESIRE IS THAT HUMANITARIAN AID ALWAYS POSITIVELY AFFECTS ME AND ALL IDPS AND DOES NOT HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR LIVES ALREADY DISTURBED BY THE CRISIS."

Aysha Touma,
Representative of Yasaminat Syria

The experience of organisations using the CHS suggests that significant gains could come from focusing on three areas of improvement:

1

ENGAGING BETTER WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS

2

IMPROVING HOW WE MANAGE INFORMATION TO ENSURE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ACCESS THE RIGHT SERVICES

3

IMPROVING ORGANISATIONAL FLEXIBILITY TO RESPOND TO RAPIDLY CHANGING NEEDS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Just over five years ago, at the end of 2014, the humanitarian sector marked a significant collective achievement when it launched the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) that set out the essential elements for principled humanitarian action. The Standard was intended to clearly state the agreed, essential elements for working with communities and people affected by crisis – not to focus on additional, nice-to-haves for aid. It combines both what organisations need to put in place and how organisations are supposed to work.

The Standard was designed so its application could be measured. The results of these measurements reveal, overall, the areas where organisations are doing well, and the areas where they need to improve.

The start of this decade sees the humanitarian endeavour at an important juncture. This year the world has faced the Covid-19 pandemic and this report was written as the sector confronts the challenges of racism. These challenges come at a time when the sector is already stretched in providing life-saving services and protection to the people caught in numerous protracted and complex humanitarian situations. Now is therefore an important time to reflect on what has been achieved after five years of application of the CHS and to consider what still needs to be done.

This year also sees the sector on the eve of the five-year anniversary of the Grand Bargain – another significant set of Commitments and promises to improve humanitarian action – many of which are echoed in the CHS.

Of the Nine Commitments, the one that comes closest to being fulfilled is Commitment 6, on coordination and complementarity... At the other end of the scale, the lowest scoring Commitment is Commitment 5, which states that complaints should be welcomed and addressed.

This 2020 edition of the HAR uses data from the CHS verification scheme and a variety of other sources to illustrate the degree to which aid organisations are meeting the CHS Nine Commitments. It compares the results from CHS-verified organisations with broader trends in the humanitarian sector as a whole and considers how change and improvement in issues of quality and accountability can be accelerated.

The report demonstrates the achievements of the 90+ individual organisations in applying the CHS. The data from all organisations undergoing CHS verification in 2018 and 2019 shows that two-thirds of these organisations fully meet at least one of the Nine Commitments, and more than one-third meet three or more[1]. The CHS has driven progress. Since 2016, the data shows that almost half of the certified organisations that have been assessed annually over at least a three-year period have made major improvements in one-quarter or more of the 62 CHS indicators[2].

It is also useful to consider the aggregated data to paint a picture of how CHS-verified organisations, as a whole, are meeting the Commitments. The message from this is that while there is a general effort towards meeting the requirements, there is still a substantial way to go to fully meet the core, essential elements of principled and effective humanitarian action.

The aggregated data also illustrates that performance is generally better in those indicators related to establishing policies than those related to what staff do in practice.

Overall, CHS-verified organisations are closer to meeting some commitments than others. Of the Nine Commitments, the one that comes closest to being fulfilled (as illustrated by the average verification score) is Commitment 6, on coordination and complementarity. This may reflect significant investment over the past decade in humanitarian coordination.

---

1. Data set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.
2. Data set two – data from 13 organisations who have been in the certification process for at least three years.

At the other end of the scale, the lowest scoring Commitment is Commitment 5, which states that complaints should be welcomed and addressed.

This is of deep concern, as it shows that we still face a challenge about how we listen to the feedback, concerns and complaints of people we are supporting. Critically, it shows that despite acknowledging the huge challenges the sector faces in protecting people from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and the substantial efforts made to strengthen these protections, there are still systemic weaknesses. If people don't know how to complain about their treatment, organisations are less likely to put a stop to abuse.

This uneven picture of progress in the CHS verification data can be better understood when set against the background of weak improvement in the humanitarian sector as a whole. Numerous reviews and research reports have commented on the extremely slow pace of change in the sector. The CHS appears to have catalysed improvement in areas that humanitarian organisations have been trying to address for over two decades. But this also demonstrates how slowly change occurs in the sector and may help us to further understand why this is the case.

Three challenges emerge repeatedly as constraints to fulfilling all Nine Commitments. Focusing on them could have a 'multiplier effect', helping organisations to improve across the board.

At the same time, the scale of the humanitarian challenge, both now and in the immediate future, requires humanitarian organisations to greatly increase the pace of improvement around quality and accountability.

The experience of organisations using the CHS suggests that significant gains could come from focusing on three areas of improvement: engaging better with people affected by crisis; improving how we manage information to ensure the right people access the right services; and improving organisational flexibility to respond to rapidly changing needs.

These three challenges emerge repeatedly as constraints to fulfilling all Nine Commitments. Focusing on them could have a 'multiplier effect', helping organisations to improve across the board.

Collectively we need to do far more to accelerate this change. Humanitarian organisations need to think about how they conduct change and what is required to drive improvements. This is an area that has received only limited attention in the humanitarian sector, as there has generally been an assumption that change can be planned and implemented like any other project. The experience of organisations engaging with the CHS, and of the humanitarian sector as a whole, suggests that this is not the case. New approaches to change are required if organisations are to adapt to the constant challenges that the sector is confronted by.

The essential elements of principled humanitarian action, which are the core of the CHS, must continue to guide this work if we are to honour our Commitments to the people whose lives have been affected by crisis.

New approaches to change are required if organisations are to adapt to the constant challenges that the sector is confronted by. The essential elements of principled humanitarian action, which are the core of the CHS, must continue to guide this work if we are to honour our Commitments to the people whose lives have been affected by crisis.

SECTION 1:
....

INTRODUCTION

The CHS Alliance is a movement of humanitarian and development organisations committed to making aid work better for people. Organisations who make up this network are committed to putting people affected by crisis at the heart of what they do by implementing the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS).

THE HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

The Humanitarian Accountability Report[1] (HAR) 2020 is an evidence-based overview of the current state of adherence to the CHS, using data gathered from organisations that have undertaken CHS verification.

The 2020 edition of the HAR is written more than five years after the launch of the CHS[2]. It provides a critical opportunity to consider performance in the areas of humanitarian quality and accountability over a period of several years.

The report aims to:

- Examine the degree to which organisations are meeting the CHS Commitments, using verification data;
- Use CHS data and broader sector trends to understand where progress has been made and where it needs to significantly improve;
- Highlight the need for further strengthening of policy and practice to increase the sector's accountability to people affected by crisis.

THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD

The CHS places **communities and people affected by crisis** at the centre of humanitarian action. Produced by the sector, for the sector, it is a **core standard**, describing the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian aid. It is written as a set of Nine Commitments that organisations have made to people affected by crisis.

As a core standard, its application is designed so that organisations can measure progress and identify areas where they need to improve. The CHS Alliance Quality Assurance Verification Scheme (the "verification scheme") offers organisations a structured, systematic process to assess the degree to which they are applying the CHS.

Managed by the Alliance, the scheme offers three[3] different verification options. This recognises the wide variety of organisations engaged in supporting people affected by crisis.

- **Self-Assessment** is designed to be a learning exercise; it helps an organisation gain an understanding of their capacity and performance against the CHS. The process is validated by the Alliance.
- **Independent Verification** provides organisations with an external, independent assessment of capacity and improvement against the CHS.
- **Certification** also provides organisations with an external, independent assessment, and, depending on the result, provides a certification of compliance against the CHS.

Independent verification and certification are undertaken by Conformity Assessment Bodies. To date all of the third-party options have been conducted by the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI)[4].

---

1. The Humanitarian Accountability Report was produced from 2005 until 2013 by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). HAP's successor, the CHS Alliance, has continued producing the HAR since 2015.
2. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) was launched in Copenhagen in December 2014.
3. A fourth option, peer review, was removed from the scheme in 2020.
4. See https://hqai.org/

MEASURING PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE CHS

....

All three verification options use the same 62 indicators outlined in the CHS Verification Framework to measure their performance. For organisations to be able to track their progress, as well as to ascertain the broader trends in the sector, all the verification scheme options use the same scoring grid. (see page 13)

For certification, it is important to note that no certificate will be issued if an organisation scores 0 on any of the CHS indicators. Organisations receive a certificate when they demonstrate:

• That their organisational systems support the application of the CHS;

• An active and sustained process to correct any identified minor non-conformity;

• That there are no major risks of non-conformity.

This means, in common with other industry certification schemes, organisations can be certified even if they do not score three on every indicator of the CHS.

Importantly, all CHS verification processes support organisations with identifying areas where action is needed to improve. With certification, there is a rigorous and transparent process; unless an organisation improves its performance and rectifies major weaknesses, it risks public suspension of its certificate.

HOW CHS DATA IS USED IN THIS REPORT

The report – which uses two different data sets – is based on information gathered from CHS-verified organisations. At the time of writing, more than five years after the CHS was launched, more than 90 organisations have engaged in CHS verification.[5]

Data set one provides the most recent, aggregated snapshot of how well verified organisations are collectively meeting the CHS Nine Commitments.

The data comes from verifications undertaken in 2018 and 2019 from 56 organisations (20 certifications, eight independent verifications and 28 self-assessments).

Data set two provides an analysis of progress over time, using a subset of data from set one. This is the certification data from 13 organisations, as the certification process provides transparent information through annual assessments.[6]

To complement the data sets, the report also considers the written, narrative reports from CHS verification (see figure 1).

In considering overall trends in the humanitarian sector, the report also draws on a number of sources known to the authors, as well as sources suggested by 15 external reviewers.[7]

....

FIGURE 1: CHS VERIFICATION DATA USED IN REPORT

Narrative reports from 90+ verified organisations

Data set one:
56 Data sets from 2018 and 2019 including
28 self-assessments,
8 independent verifications and **20** certifications

Data set two:
13 Data sets from certified organisations involved in the process for at least three years

---
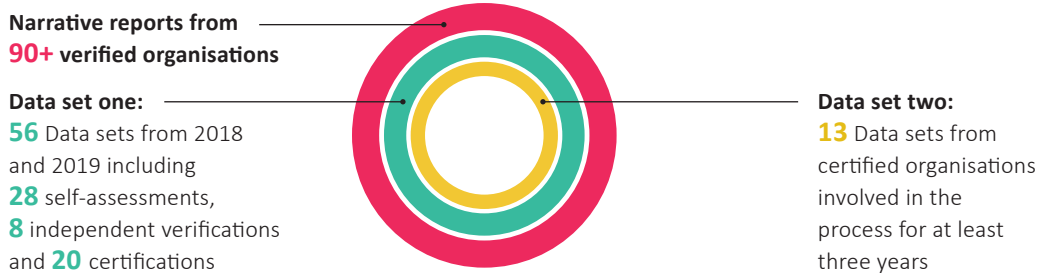
5. See https://www.chsalliance.org/ for more details and updated data.

6. Some of these organisations were externally verified over the three-year period 2016, 2017 and 2018, and some over the period 2017, 2018 and 2019.

7. A first draft of the report was reviewed by people in the humanitarian and development sector covering a diversity of organisation types (NGOs, Donors, UN, research institutes and independents) and geographical areas both headquarters and field (see the detailed list on inside cover page).

TABLE 1: CHS SCORING GRID

Scores	Meaning: for all verification scheme options	Technical meaning for independent verification and certification audits
0	Your organisation does not work towards applying the CHS Commitment.	**Score 0:** indicates a weakness that is so significant that the organisation is unable to meet the Commitment. This leads to: • **Independent verification**: major weakness; • **Certification**: major non-conformity, leading to a major corrective action request (CAR) – No certificate can be issued or immediate suspension of certificate.
1	Your organisation is making efforts towards applying this requirement, but these are not systematic.	**Score 1:** indicates a weakness that does not immediately compromise the integrity of the Commitment but requires to be corrected to ensure the organisation can continuously deliver against it. This leads to: • **Independent verification**: minor weakness; • **Certification**: minor non-conformity, leading to a minor corrective action request (CAR).
2	Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying this requirement, but certain key points are still not addressed.	**Score 2:** indicates an issue that deserves attention but does not currently compromise the conformity with the requirement. This leads to: • **Independent verification and certification:** observation.
3	Your organisation conforms to this requirement, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time – the requirement is fulfilled.	**Score 3:** indicates full conformity with the requirement. This leads to: • **Independent verification and certification:** conformity.
4	Your organisation's work goes beyond the intent of this requirement and demonstrates innovation. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.	**Score 4:** indicates an exemplary performance in the application of the requirement.

© CHS Alliance,
Sphere, Groupe URD.

PUTTING THE CHS DATA INTO CONTEXT

The CHS verification data provides an important evidence base, from more than 90 organisations, assessing themselves against a sector-wide standard. However, this provides only one lens to examine the many and varied broader efforts that are being made towards quality and accountability in the sector. Ninety organisations is a small proportion of the many actors engaged in humanitarian work.

The CHS verifcation data is complemented by data from other publications with which the authors are familiar, as well as that suggested by the reviewers. The report also draws on a range of opinion pieces from a variety of organisational perspectives within the sector. Most importantly, as the CHS aims to put communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action, the authors felt that it was very important to include data that reflected the views and opinions of crisis-affected people themselves. The report draws, in particular, on the work of Ground Truth Solutions, and on data from affected people collected as part of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

Data from both sources is presented here in aggregated, 'global' form, to allow comparison with the aggregated CHS verification data. However, this does obscure significant differences from one country to another in terms of the way people perceive humanitarian assistance.

We must also be clear that the overall assessment of performance and progress is based on data aggregated from a number of organisations. It does not, therefore, reflect the performance of any specific organisation, many of whom have performed better than the aggregated data suggests. In compiling this report it has not been possible to disaggregate the data by organisational type, or by country or operational context. It is hoped that this form of disaggregation will be possible in future.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report is in five sections.

Section 1: Introduction.

Section 2: Provides an overview of performance against the CHS and compares this performance with the trends in the sector.

Section 3: Looks at the CHS Nine Commitments in detail considering overall performance against each Commitment, progress made against the Commitment and suggested actions for further improvements. Opinion pieces – personal reflections by experts on the topic, considering progress to date and how performance might be improved – complement the analysis of each Commitment.

Section 4: Examines change, the CHS and how improvements can be made at a sector-wide level.

Section 5: Conclusion.

SECTION 2:
....

HOW ARE WE MEETING OUR COMMITMENTS TO PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS?

Successful change takes time. A 2017 ALNAP report on change in the humanitarian system suggested that change processes can take anywhere between three and fifteen years.[1] It is clear that the humanitarian system needs to change: recent scandals relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as financial fraud, are unacceptable.

The CHS is one driver for a more accountable system that puts people at the centre of aid. The CHS verification data starkly demonstrates that there is still much more to be done to achieve this. This section considers the overall performance of CHS-verified organisations against the Standard. It is followed, in Section 3, with an analysis of the performance of each of the Nine Commitments.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE CHS COMMITMENTS – AN OVERVIEW
....

Performance against the CHS Commitments by individual organisations

Five years after the CHS was introduced, two-thirds of organisations undergoing verification in 2018 and 2019, meet at least one of the Nine Commitments, and more than a third meet three or more. This reflects intentional progress since applying the CHS: almost half of the organisations have made major improvements[2] in a quarter or more of the 62 CHS indicators. The experiences of some of these organisations are included in Section 3, where we consider individual Commitments.

These figures may understate the degree of investment and success that organisations have demonstrated in working towards the Commitments. New emergencies, or changes in the funding or political environment, bring new challenges, and so organisations need not only to meet the Commitments once, but continually adjust so that they can meet the Commitments over time. As such, the verification against the CHS has been designed to ensure organisations continually assess themselves or are assessed independently assessed, over time.

The certification process is very rigorous in this regard. Certified organisations have to address weaknesses, called Corrective Action Requests (CAR) in the auditing process, over a defined period of time, to obtain or maintain the certificate.

Reviewing the performance of CARs illustrates the extent to which CHS can drive improvement: some organisations have addressed up to twelve CARs – and so improved on twelve indicators – in six months.

As well as serving as an incentive to make changes, organisations report that CHS verification helps them identify the areas in which they need to focus, provides common goals for improvement across the organisation, and allows for shared learning about how to achieve them. As this data shows, it is certainly possible to improve quality and accountability in meeting CHS Commitments to communities and people affected by crisis.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE AGAINST CHS COMMITMENTS BY CHS-VERIFIED ORGANISATIONS
....

The CHS verification serves a dual purpose. Not only is it designed for individual organisations to measure their own performance and therefore to improve over time, but it also provides comparable data to be able to assess how well the group of CHS-verified organisations, are collectively honouring our Commitments to people in crisis.

If we take a close look at the most recent data (see figure 2) the most significant observation is that five years after the CHS was introduced, on average, this group is not systematically conforming to any of the Nine Commitments (that is, they are not achieving, on average, scores of three. See scoring grid page 13).

---

1. Knox Clarke, P. (2017). *Transforming Change*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.
2. Major improvements are classified as an increase in at least one point on a four point scale.

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENT

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:

1 Is appropriate and relevant — 2.56

2 Is effective and timely — 2.46

3 Strengthens local capacity and avoids negative effects — 2.37

4 Is based on communication, participation and feedback — 2.39

5 Welcomes and addresses complaints — 1.91

6 Is coordinated and complementary — 2.89

7 Improves as organisations learn — 2.32

8 Is facilitated by competent, well-managed staff — 2.52

9 Comes from organisations that responsibly manage resources — 2.57

Source: Data set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

This should also make the sector pause for reflection when a comparison is undertaken of which Commitments are being met the most, and which the least. Commitment 6 on coordination is closest to being met on average.[3] Disappointingly, Commitment 5 on complaints being welcomed and addressed, still receives a very poor average score of below two.

Another key observation from this data, echoing many other reports and evaluations in the sector, is that there is a **difference between what we see in policy and what takes place in practice**. Figure 4 shows that performance is slightly better for indicators related to organisational policies and processes – organisational responsibilities – than to 'Key Actions', those indicators that describe what staff should actually do.

As the CHS verification is designed to create improvements over time, the data from certified organisations – which are annually assessed – illustrates exactly this (see figure 4).

There are appreciable improvements in three Commitments:

- **Commitment 3** – Strengthening local capacities and avoiding negative effects of aid;
- **Commitment 4** – Basing humanitarian response on communication, participation and feedback;
- **Commitment 5** – Complaints are welcomed and addressed.

However, in the other six Commitments, there is very little difference between the aggregated scores of the first and third year of verification.

Commitment 6 on coordination is closest to being met on average. Disappointingly, Commitment 5 on complaints being welcomed and addressed, still receives a very poor average score of below two.

---

3. The average score across 56 organisations is 2.89, just short of the score of three which would suggest that, on average, CHS-verified organisations conform to this requirement, with systems ensuring that it is met throughout the organisation and over time (see CHS scoring grid on page 13).

FIGURE 3: CHS COMMITMENTS: KEY ACTIONS VERSUS ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:

#		Key actions	Organisational responsibilities
1	Is appropriate and relevant	2.52	2.59
2	Is effective and timely	2.47	2.44
3	Strengthens local capacity and avoids negative effects	2.39	2.32
4	Is based on communication, participation and feedback	2.28	2.54
5	Welcomes and addresses complaints	1.82	1.98
6	Is coordinated and complementary	2.94	2.79
7	Improves as organisations learn	2.14	2.51
8	Is facilitated by competent, well-managed staff	2.44	2.61
9	Comes from organisations that responsibly manage resources	2.58	2.51

■ Key actions   ■ Organisational responsibilities

Source: Data set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 4: CHS COMMITMENTS: PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:

#		Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
1	Is appropriate and relevant	2.85	2.85	2.94
2	Is effective and timely	2.68	2.68	2.71
3	Strengthens local capacity and avoids negative effects	2.54	2.58	2.73
4	Is based on communication, participation and feedback	2.37	2.39	2.59
5	Welcomes and addresses complaints	1.96	2.12	2.26
6	Is coordinated and complementary	3.17	3.19	3.18
7	Improves as organisations learn	2.78	2.73	2.81
8	Is facilitated by competent, well-managed staff	2.79	2.78	2.75
9	Comes from organisations that responsibly manage resources	2.65	2.66	2.72

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data set two – data from 13 organisations who have been in the certification process for at least three years.

PUTTING THE CHS
DATA IN CONTEXT

Given its very purpose – a standard that sets out the core elements of principled and effective humanitarian action – it is unsurprising that the CHS aligns closely with many of the issues that have been the focus of attention in humanitarian organisations for years.

The push for greater accountability featured prominently in the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR), as long ago as 1996[4]. This led to a number of initiatives within organisations to improve accountability, as well as the establishment of inter-agency initiatives such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), a predecessor organisation of the CHS Alliance. In 2004, the second assessment of the JEEAR[5] concluded that there had been positive changes – particularly in the establishment of accountability mechanisms, but agencies, and the system as a whole, still fell short of fully meeting their own expectations in this area. This led to accountability being included as one of the three main pillars of the 2011 Transformative Agenda[6]. By 2016, 20 years after JEEAR, the issue was still one of concern, leading to the bold promise in the Grand Bargain of a 'Participation Revolution'[7]. At the time of writing, many signatory organisations to the Grand Bargain have introduced new approaches, and there have been a number of joint, interagency activities. However, there is "no evidence of a system-wide move towards a transformative approach that affords affected populations strategic influence over the aid they receive and how they receive it."[8]

The challenges of significant change in the humanitarian system – as well as some approaches to addressing these challenges – are discussed in more depth in Section 3. Crucially, the pattern revealed by the CHS verification data (see page 16) can be observed elsewhere. Individual organisations often make very significant – and successful – efforts to change specific areas of their work. But it is harder to reach a point where enough organisations are making similar changes at the same time, creating a 'critical mass' that supports systemic change. And even if this critical mass of organisations is achieved, the system is obviously more than the sum of its parts. For example, one hundred organisation-specific feedback mechanisms may demonstrate a widespread desire to encourage feedback, but this does not necessarily make it easier for an individual to give feedback on their personal experience, or for this feedback to influence the overall progress of the response in its entirety. There needs to be changes – in feedback mechanisms, but also in related areas of planning and funding, and even in the underlying culture – at the response level as a whole.

Many CHS-verified organisations credit the CHS with helping them to achieve changes in their organisations. The work by organisations to meet the Standard is therefore contributing to change across the sector. However, if the sector is to honour the commitments we have made to the communities and people affected by crisis, and if progress is to be accelerated, the sector needs to recognise that no humanitarian organisation works in a vacuum. We must redouble our efforts as a sector, and increase the recognition of the CHS by all aid actors, including donors. We must also ensure its inclusion in interagency frameworks so that its adherence can be tracked at the level of collective response.

The work by organisations to meet the Standard is contributing to change across the sector. However, if the sector is to honour the Commitments we have made to the people affected by crisis, and if progress is to be accelerated, the sector needs to recognise that no humanitarian organisation works in a vacuum

4.   As were issues related to: Preparedness (Commitments 2 and 3); Coordination (Commitment 6); Organisational learning (Commitment 7); Competence and training of staff (Commitment 8).

5.   Borton, J., Eriksson, J. (2004) *Lessons from Rwanda, Lessons for Today*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

6.   https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/Transformative%20Agenda.pdf

7.   https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives

8.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

SECTION 3:
....

PERFORMANCE AGAINST EACH INDIVIDUAL CHS COMMITMENT

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) sets out the essential elements for principled humanitarian action as a series of Commitments made to communities and people affected by crisis.

This section considers each of the Nine Commitments of the CHS, using quantitative and qualitative data from the CHS verification reports to consider the following:

→ Aggregated performance of CHS-verified organisations against each Commitment and the key indicators within each Commitment;

→ Progress against each Commitment over time (averaged across organisations);

→ Some of the challenges reported by organisations as they attempt to make changes.

CHS-verified organisations are not necessarily representative of the humanitarian sector as a whole. To provide a wider view and put the performance of CHS-verified organisations into context, each chapter also considers the current status of the broader humanitarian system with respect to the salient CHS Commitment.

The data tells only a partial story, and we have introduced narratives to provide a fuller picture:

→ Stories of change about organisations that have undertaken certification against the CHS;

→ Opinion pieces from a range of people within the sector who share their personal reflections on the data and propose thought-provoking ideas for the way forward.

Finally, each of these chapters provides recommendations for improving performance. These are based on a variety of sources, including:

→ Recommendations in response to key constraints noted during the CHS verification processes, or on approaches that CHS-verified organisations have found successful in fostering improvement;

→ Recommendations in response to constraints and successes identified in the wider literature.

In many cases, the recommendations repeat those made in recent research and assessments, in the hope of amplifying these ideas and building support around common approaches to improving how we can make aid work better for people.

RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.

This is one of the higher-scoring Commitments. However, more work is required to make humanitarian assistance and protection relevant to marginalised population groups. Organisations also struggle to ensure that their responses remain relevant over time, as the context changes.

FIGURE 5: COMMITMENT 1 – HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS APPROPRIATE AND RELEVANT
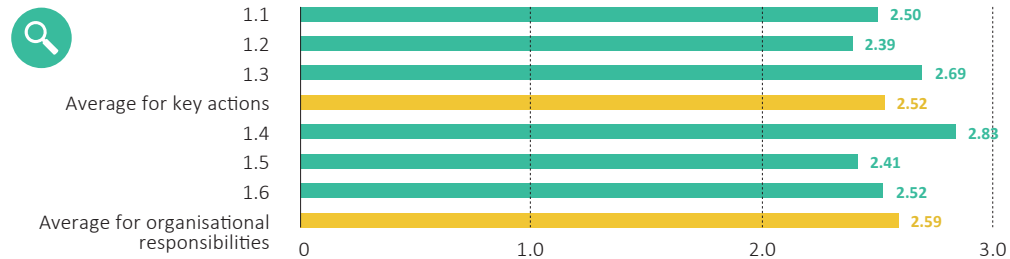
1.1	2.50
1.2	2.39
1.3	2.69
Average for key actions	2.52
1.4	2.83
1.5	2.41
1.6	2.52
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.59

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 6: COMMITMENT 1 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
1.1	2.92	2.85	2.85
1.2	2.62	2.69	2.85
1.3	3.00	2.92	3.08
Average for key actions	2.85	2.82	2.92
1.4	3.00	3.15	3.15
1.5	2.58	2.58	2.69
1.6	3.00	2.92	3.00
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.86	2.89	2.95

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment	Score
Commitment 1	**2.56**
Commitment 2	**2.46**
Commitment 3	**2.37**
Commitment 4	**2.39**
Commitment 5	**1.91**
Commitment 6	**2.89**
Commitment 7	**2.32**
Commitment 8	**2.52**
Commitment 9	**2.57**

0   1.0   2.0   3.0

COMMITMENT 1 INDICATORS

Key Actions

1.1 Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders.

1.2 Design and implement appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs[1] and risks, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups[2].

1.3 Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context.

Organisational Responsibilities

1.4 Policies commit to providing impartial assistance based on the needs and capacities of communities and people affected by crisis.

1.5 Policies set out commitments which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and to collect disaggregated data.

1.6 Processes are in place to ensure an appropriate ongoing analysis of the context.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

This is one of the higher-scoring of the Nine Commitments. CHS-verified organisations are making systematic efforts towards making aid appropriate and relevant.

While not all points of the requirement are fulfilled (see figure 5), providing impartial assistance (indicator 1.4) stands out as the area where organisations were assessed with the highest score. Although the score for this Commitment is fairly encouraging, it has not improved significantly since 2016. The initial audits of CHS-certified organisations showed that the baseline was higher than it was for most other Commitments, and yet, since then there has not been any real change in the overall score (see figure 6).

Looking beyond CHS-verified organisations to the sector as a whole, it is highly instructive to examine the views of crisis-affected people on the relevance of the aid they receive. In a 2017 survey of 5,000 aid recipients in five countries, 39 per cent said that the aid they received was relevant to their needs[3]. Data from the Ground Truth Solutions Humanitarian Voice Index for the period 2016-2018[4] showed that 29 per cent of respondents agreed (either mostly or completely) that aid met their needs.[5] In both surveys, the perception of people affected by crisis of the relevance of aid was highly context dependent: it differed from one country to another, and over time.

---

1. "Needs" includes assistance and protection.

2. This may refer, for example to: women, men, girls, boys, young people, and older persons, as well as persons with disabilities, and specific minority or ethnic groups without any such distinction.

3. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London. A further 48 per cent said that aid partially addressed their most important needs.

4. The Humanitarian Voice Index from Ground Truth Solutions is an aggregate database of findings from surveys conducted between 2016 and 2019. Analysis provided for this report draws on data from Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Bangladesh, Chad, Dominica, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Turkey and Uganda. Ground Truth Solutions (2020), *Humanitarian Voice Index 2020*. Ground Truth Solutions, Vienna.

5. Although the question here is not just about relevance – as it asks not only if the aid addresses needs, but also if it covers, or completely fulfils, those needs. It is possible that some respondents felt the aid was relevant, but that there was not enough of it: half of those who provide a negative response ask for more of the same aid, rather than a different type of aid.

Nevertheless, the responses suggest that while organisations are making changes, there is still some way to go before these changes are visible to many people on the ground.

Assessments of the relevance of humanitarian aid tend to suggest that – in general – it is more relevant in short-term, acute situations, but becomes less relevant as the crisis becomes protracted[6]. Assessments also suggest that certain groups – often women, the elderly, disabled, LBTQI+ people, as well as those marginalised within the specific cultural and social context – receive aid that is less relevant to their specific needs.[7]

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The indicators for this Commitment can be broken down into three main areas: the existence of policies; information collection and analysis; and the use of information in the design and implementation of activities.

Overall, the review of Commitment 1 data reveals that:

• Policies are established, but overlook some vulnerable population groups (indicators 1.4, 1.5);

• There are challenges obtaining information based on the needs of marginalised people, and on how needs change over time (indicators 1.1, 1.2 and 1.6);

• A lack of flexibility is hampering the design and change of programmes to ensure relevance (indicators 1.2[8], 1.3).

Policies are established, but overlook some vulnerable population groups

The scores are highest in the indicators that address policy – specifically, policy Commitments to impartial assistance. The data shows that organisations have been less effective in making policy Commitments that recognise the diverse needs of marginalised population groups. However, there have been a number of important policy initiatives in the sector, aimed at groups such as women and girls, the elderly and the disabled over the past two years.[9]

Knowing what is really needed

When it comes to ensuring that aid is relevant, the CHS-aggregated scores demonstrate that organisations are making systematic efforts to understand context, stakeholders and needs. However, the score for indicator 1.2, which asks that programmes are designed and implemented based on an impartial assessment of needs and risk, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups, was lowest of all the indicators.

Beyond the CHS, the issue of impartial needs assessment is a key Commitment of the Grand Bargain, although one that has seen fairly limited progress. However, the most recent report on the Grand Bargain suggests that there have been improvements over 2018, and "substantive progress in key technical areas, including on joint analysis."[10]

Scores for context and stakeholder analysis (indicator 1.1 and 1.6) were, on average, better than those for needs' assessment. But the CHS verification reports demonstrated that these analyses are often only conducted at the start of the operation, and that few organisations continue this analysis as it changes over time.

6. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London. ALNAP (2020) *More Relevant? 10 Ways to Approach What People Really Need*. ALNAP, London.

7. IFRC (2018) *World Disasters Report: Leaving No-one Behind*. IFRC, Geneva. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

8. Indicator 1.2 covers both the collection and the use of information: Programmes are appropriately designed and implemented based on an impartial assessment.

9. OCHA (2019) *Sustaining the Ambition: Agenda for Humanity Annual Synthesis Report*. OCHA, New York.

10. Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

This may partially explain why, as noted above, aid becomes less relevant the longer that operations go on. Ongoing and repeated analysis was the area most frequently cited as a challenge to fulfilling the Commitment, and has been noted, elsewhere, as a major constraint to more relevant aid[11]. CHS verification reports suggested that ongoing assessment was limited by both organisational capacity and by insecurity, preventing repeated access to affected people.

Despite these constraints, there are examples of CHS-verified organisations creating and deploying systems to understand the operational context, and the way that it changes over time.

INTERNATIONAL BLUE CRESCENT STORY OF CHANGE

Prompted by a CHS certification audit, International Blue Crescent developed an approach integrated with their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system: staff job descriptions were changed to include the collection of data, over time, from specific sub-groups of people affected by crisis. This information was included in the ERP, and fed into programme design and management. Staff at the organisation report that this has led to improvements in a number of areas.

CHS verification reports suggest that many organisations were still struggling with the specific needs of marginalised groups.[12]

The reports suggest that organisational culture, a lack of skilled staff, and a lack of systems for disaggregating data on marginalised groups all acted as constraints. The challenge for the future may be as much around harmonising data from different sources, and then using it in programming, as it is about collection and analysis.

Designing and changing programmes to ensure relevance: challenges of inflexibility

The final set of indicators (1.2 and 1.3) relate to ensuring that programme design and implementation ensures the provision of relevant aid. The CHS-aggregated scores suggested that this was an area where more work is required, particularly on indicator 1.2: Design and implement appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs[13] and risks, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups.[14] CHS Verification reports suggest that this is because information – particularly on marginalised groups – is not collected, or that when it is, decision-making processes are not designed to systematically include it. In addition, research on the humanitarian sector suggests that organisations are often not set up or funded to provide the sorts of assistance that communities and people affected by crisis feel is most relevant.[15]

---

11. Knox Clarke, P., Campbell, L. (2015) *Improving Humanitarian Coordination*. ALNAP/ODI, London; Obrecht, A. (2019) *Shifting Mindsets: Creating a More Flexible Humanitarian Response*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

12. see also OCHA (2019) *Sustaining the Ambition: Agenda for Humanity Annual Synthesis Report*. OCHA, New York; IFRC (2018) *World Disasters Report: Leaving No-one Behind*. IFRC, Geneva.

13. "Needs" includes assistance and protection.

14. This may refer, for example to: women, men, girls, boys, youth, and older persons, as well as persons with disabilities and specific minority or ethnic groups without any such distinction.

15. Campbell, L., Knox Clarke, P. (2019) *Beyond Assumptions : How Humanitarians Make Operations Decisions*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

COMMITMENT 01

The CHS verification reports also suggested that a number of organisations – and particularly smaller organisations – found it difficult to change their programmes over time as the context changed, and reported that this was due to a lack of independent funds or donor inflexibility. Challenges in changing programmes over time have been noted more broadly across the system,[16] although the situation – at least with respect to donor funding – may be slowly improving.[17]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The results of CHS verification suggest that organisations should:

- Enhance activities around participation to give people in affected communities more say over the assistance and protection they receive;

- Increase the diversity of their staff and of representation in governance bodies to ensure that organisational conversations reflect the views of groups such as disabled, elderly and socially marginalised groups, and make these population groups more 'visible' in operational design;

- Ensure the collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD), and the use of guidance and standards such as Humanitarian Inclusion Standards[18] (HIS) for older people and people with disabilities;

- Assume in planning interventions that a proportion of any population in crisis will be female, elderly and disabled, and plan the 'standard package' of activities and materials accordingly;

- Clarify and, if necessary, redesign, decision processes so that analysis (assessment, feedback and context monitoring) is clearly and reliably fed into programme design, implementation and redesign;

- Continue efforts to make funding more flexible. This will require longer-term funding with reduced conditionality and an enhanced focus on outcomes on the part of the donors, and training in adaptive approaches on the part of organisations;

- Consider how, and in what ways, logistics and human resource processes can be made more flexible, to adapt to changing needs on the part of the communities and people affected by crisis. Research on this issue has shown that these areas often constrain flexible programming;[19]

- Continue to support the use of unconditional cash transfers wherever possible, which, by allowing communities and people affected by crisis to make their purchasing decisions, can improve the relevance of the goods (and to an extent services) they receive.

16. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London; Obrecht, A. (2019) *Shifting Mindsets: Creating a More Flexible Humanitarian Response*. ALNAP Study. ODI/ALNAP, London.

17. Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London; Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London. The 2020 report notes differences of opinion between operational organisations and donors on this topic, but also notes some examples of positive change towards more flexible funding.

18. Age and Disability Consortium (2018) *Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities*. CBM International, Bensheim/ HelpAge International, London/ Handicap International, Lyon. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Humanitarian_inclusion_standards_for_older_people_and_people_with_disabi....pdf

19. Obrecht, A. (2019) *Shifting Mindsets: Creating a More Flexible Humanitarian Response*. ALNAP Study. ODI/ALNAP, London.

"THE CHS NEEDS TO STAY SHARPLY RELEVANT TO MAINTAIN ITS FOCUS ON WHAT THE SECTOR DEFINES AS THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN ACTION. GLOBAL EVENTS OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTATING FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES THAT ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY, POVERTY, CLIMATE CHANGE, RACISM AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION."

"The collective ambition to leave no–one behind still needs greater effort; breaking down siloes at all levels still remains one of the biggest barriers to positive change."

Diana Hiscock
Global Disability Advisor, HelpAge International, United Kingdom

WHAT BARRIERS MUST WE OVERCOME TO ENSURE WE LEAVE NO-ONE BEHIND?

Making space to learn from and understand the capacities and vulnerabilities of different groups in different contexts is often seen as unimportant, tending to be viewed as an 'add on' with only limited investment or organisational 'listening time'.

Humanitarian action promotes participation through localisation and community engagement but demands a clear understanding of how to engage with older people and people with disabilities.

Complaint mechanisms are rarely inclusive and accessible for everyone; by no means all of the diverse voices within communities are heard or addressed. Restricting feedback prohibits open and honest discussion across the spectrum. Meaningful participation cannot be achieved unless we have better representation across age, gender, disability and other elements of diversity, combined with active engagement at *all* stages of the project cycle. The Covid-19 life-saving responses, for instance, have rarely involved active community engagement in developing solutions to protect each individual within communities.

The importance of sex, age and disability disaggregated data is well recognised in key guidance,[20] bringing us closer to the 'hard to reach'. Yet the sector creates barriers to the hard-to-reach and unintentionally discriminates against those trapped in a system of short-term restricted funding, instead of creating one that provides safe and equitable access.

From a gender, age and disability inclusive perspective, a three-step approach is now being deployed: SADDD identifies those in need; barriers and enablers to accessing humanitarian assistance must be understood; and communities must be engaged to ensure their participation. However, inconsistencies remain in how these steps are embedded into organisational responsibilities and programme activities. Is data used to inform integrated or inclusive programme design? Are we asking older people and people with disabilities what main challenges they face, as well as exploring opportunities for contributing to preparedness, response and recovery? What capacities do they have and how would they like to use them? We need to move from monitoring as a 'policing activity,' to real engagement with data as a means of designing programmes together effectively.

CHS Commitments aspire to drive quality into our humanitarian agenda, together with other guidelines such as Sphere and the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP).[21] Yet the collective ambition to leave no-one behind still needs greater effort; breaking down siloes at all levels still remains one of the biggest barriers to positive change.

The evidence is clear that older persons and persons with disability are among those most at risk of complications from Covid-19 and their inclusion is challenging all our humanitarian responses. While most of us accept that as we grow older our lives do not become more disposable, there is a risk that this Covid-19 response may leave many behind.

Diana Hiscock
Global Disability Advisor, HelpAge International,
United Kingdom

---

20.   See Inclusive Data Charter http://www.data4sdgs.org/inclusivedatacharter, the IASC Inclusion of persons with disability in Humanitarian action https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-inclusion-persons-disabilities-humanitarian-action/documents/iasc-guidelines, the UN Disability Strategy https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/ and Humanitarian Inclusion Standards https://spherestandards.org/resources/humanitarian-inclusion-standards-for-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities/

21.   See Sphere and HSP. https://www.spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/standards-partnership/

"Working with LGBTQI+ people involves asking some hard questions... If these are not being asked – and answered – it's likely that organisational ways of working are excluding LGBTQI+ people."

Emily Dwyer
Co-Director, Edge Effect, Australia

ARE YOU CHOOSING TO INCLUDE OR EXCLUDE LGBTQI+ PEOPLE?

Many LGBTQI+ people have specific needs in emergencies. Pre-emergency marginalisation – such as criminalisation or violence within families, or bullying at school and discrimination in workplaces – undermines resilient livelihoods and makes some LGBTQI+ people wary of accessing official relief and recovery assistance. Violence and discrimination continues during disasters or conflict; and in some cases worsens: LGBTQI+ people are sometimes targeted by armed groups or security officials, or blamed within communities for causing disasters as a form of divine punishment.

Ways of working in the humanitarian sector can exacerbate this marginalisation and leave LGBTQI+ people vulnerable to further discrimination. For example, transgender and non-binary people may not be able to obtain identification documents, leaving them without ID needed to access aid. Very few assessments include specific data collection with LGBTQI+ people, resulting in LGBTQI+ invisibility in funding documents, designs and evaluations. Assumptions or bias about families may exclude diverse families, including those with a same-sex couple at their core.

These are just some reasons why humanitarian action is often inappropriate for or irrelevant to LGBTQI+ people, and why LGBTQI+ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and community members turn to informal community-based responses instead.

Sometimes agencies choose not to work with people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC), because of concerns about lack of expertise, concerns about doing harm, or fear that national governments and partner organisations may react negatively.

However, the CHS contains an expectation that agencies will acknowledge such challenges and develop "ways to overcome the constraints they come up against."[22]

What does the CHS verification data tell us? The highest score (2.69) amongst the components of Commitment 1 is for organisational responsibility 1.4, focusing on policy Commitments. The lowest average score (2.39) was achieved for key action 1.2, focusing on design and implementation, and understanding of vulnerabilities and capacities.

This rings true for diverse SOGIESC inclusion: increasingly, organisations have policy Commitments that include diversity in general, or that add the acronym LGBTQI+ to the list of marginalised people who should be consulted. Inclusive practice is often a different matter. While a list mention in a policy document is a good start, staff in humanitarian settings may be left asking practical questions. These questions are often along the lines of 'what should we ask?' and 'who should we ask and how can it be done safely?' and 'what should we do with the answers we receive?'

Working with LGBTQI+ people requires transformation within organisations, and involves asking some hard questions. Does my organisation provide specific training on LGBTQI+ issues in emergencies to staff or partners? Are strengths of LGBTQI+ people recognised in our work? Are tools systematically checked for exclusionary assumptions? Do we encourage partnerships (where safe) with LGBTQI+ organisations? If questions such as these are not being asked – and answered – it's likely that organisational ways of working are excluding LGBTQI+ people.

Emily Dwyer
Co-Director, Edge Effect[23], Australia

---

22. CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere (2014) *Core Humanitarian Standard,* CHS Alliance/Groupe URD/Sphere, Geneva

23. https://www.edgeeffect.org/

EFFECTIVENESS AND TIMELINESS OF AID

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

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is effective[1] and timely.

This Commitment shows relatively high scores and improvements in some areas, though a number of diverse challenges remain around programme design, funding, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

FIGURE 7: COMMITMENT 2 – HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 8: COMMITMENT 2 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS
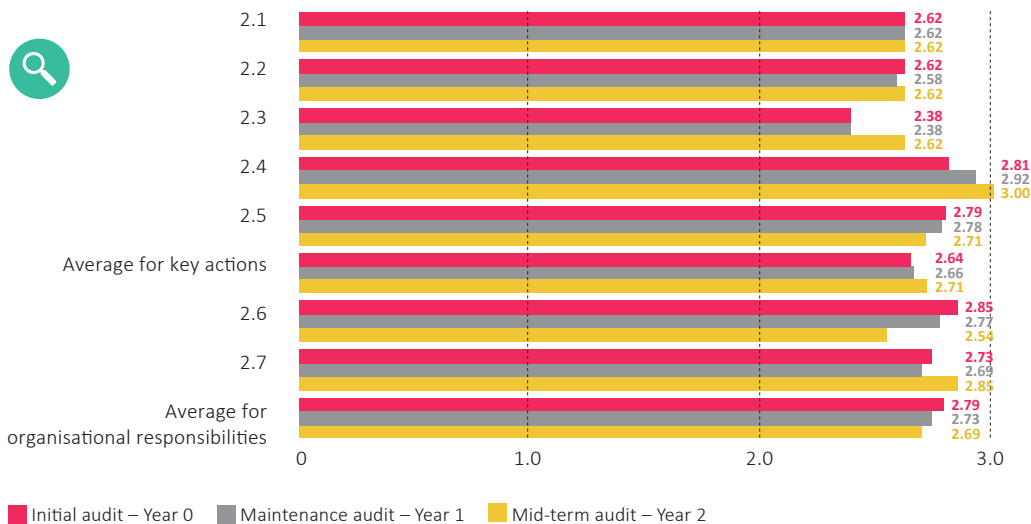
■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

1. The term effectiveness is used quite broadly in the CHS, to address a number of elements that relate to the quality of the project or programme, such as the use of technical standards and referral to other organisations. However, the term effectiveness also has a more narrow definition as an evaluation criterion: the degree to which an intervention achieves its objectives. This narrower definition of 'effectiveness' would exclude a number of the areas considered under this Commitment. In this report, the authors have retained the wording used in the CHS. Some readers may prefer to think of these as 'quality' rather than 'effectiveness' issues.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment	Score
Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

0   1.0   2.0   3.0
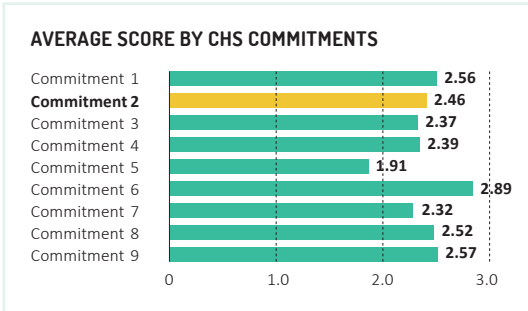
COMMITMENT 2 INDICATORS

Key Actions

2.1 Design programmes that address constraints[2] so that the proposed action is realistic and safe for communities.

2.2 Deliver humanitarian response in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without unnecessary delay.

2.3 Refer any unmet needs to those organisations with the relevant technical expertise and mandate, or advocate for those needs to be addressed.

2.4 Use relevant technical standards and good practice employed across the humanitarian sector to plan and assess programmes

2.5 Monitor the activities, outputs and outcomes of humanitarian responses in order to adapt programmes and address poor performance.

Organisational Responsibilities

2.6 Programme commitments are in line with organisational capacities.

2.7 Policy Commitments ensure:

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

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

The CHS aggregated scores for Commitment 2 – effectiveness and timeliness – show that, overall, organisations are making systematic efforts to meet this Commitment, but still fall short of fully meeting all the requirements.

Compared to the other eight Commitments, scores here are mid-range – neither particularly high nor particularly low (see figure 7). While the data showing progress over time indicates limited progress on this Commitment overall since 2016 (see figure 8), there are some notable exceptions, particularly those related to use of standards (indicator 2.4) and to referring needs to other organisations (indicator 2.3).

These results – that performance on effectiveness and timeliness is acceptable, but that there is room for improvement – are echoed in the reports based on perceptions of people affected by crisis. In a 2017 survey for ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System report, 69 per cent of respondents said that they were satisfied with how quickly aid arrived, and 89 per cent said they were either fully or partially satisfied with the quality of the aid that they received. These results suggest room for improvement, but were better than those for most of the other questions.[2]

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The Commitment has one requirement relating to timeliness (indicator 2.2). The others relate to effectiveness, including realistic design; the use of standards; M&E; and referring activities to partners where the agency does not have the necessary skills.

---

2. Of these, 54 per cent of respondents were 'fully satisfied'

COMMITMENT

02

Timeliness: the importance of streamlined decision-making, partnerships and rapid funding

While the overall figures for timeliness (indicator 2.2) did not show any significant change from 2016, some of the CHS verification reports demonstrated that timeliness improved for those organisations that had made efforts to streamline decision-making in a bid to improve the timeliness of their responses. The reports also showed that particular challenges remained in securing timely funding for sectors which were not always seen as 'immediate', such as education. Going beyond CHS-verified organisations, research has suggested that humanitarian actors also tend to struggle with timely response in atypical emergencies (such as Ebola or Coronavirus) and in situations where there is a 'flare up' in a long-running emergency[3].

Interestingly, a number of CHS-verified organisations suggested that working in partnership or as part of a network enabled them to respond more quickly to needs: collaborative working is often seen as taking time, so it is heartening to see that it can also speed responses up.

It will come as no surprise that the main constraint to a timely response is both the delay in accessing funding and a lack of independent funding to initiate operations quickly. The sector as a whole has been working on this issue with the creation of a number of initiatives to address these challenges, with attempts to speed up the release of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs), while the START fund continues to release funds for immediate response. However, the volume of funds dispersed through these facilities are relatively small, and should not be seen as replacements for rapid funding through more conventional channels.[4]

Other systemic areas of improvement that should have an effect on timeliness are the increased use of cash (which, particularly in cases where the infrastructure for cash programming already exists, can be quicker to distribute) and increased focus on preparedness activities, to allow earlier and more rapid responses.

Effectiveness: improvements in the knowledge and use of technical standards

The highest score related to the 'effectiveness' indicators was (indicator 2.4) for 'using relevant technical standards'. This may reflect the broad use of the Sphere and HSP[5] in the sector. This was also one of the areas in which the certified organisations had shown significant improvement since 2016 (see figure 8). Despite this, however, the indicator has still not been fully achieved. CHS verification reports indicated a number of challenges: in particular, organisations struggled to keep technically skilled staff at the country level where their expertise was most required.

The indicator with the lowest score concerned designing realistic, safe programmes to address context and constraints (indicator 2.1). This may reflect the broader tendency of the humanitarian organisations to use the same 'cookie cutter' programmes regardless of the situation,[6] a response, in part, to challenges around understanding context outlined under Commitment 1. CHS verification reports indicated that staff with the relevant technical skills (including M&E) often worked in 'silos', and were not always able to input their knowledge into programme design.

FINN CHURCH AID STORY OF CHANGE

The experience of Finn Church Aid shows that it is possible to design programmes that consider the risks and potential negative effects of aid on the individuals and communities that the organisation serves. The initial CHS certification audit revealed that Finn Church Aid's risk assessments were mainly focusing on risks to their operations and staff, and overlooked the risks to communities. In response, the organisation integrated a participatory do-no-harm analysis into project planning guidelines, and has built on this guidance with concrete examples of good practice from operations.

3.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

4.   Stoddard, A., Poole, L., Taylor, G., Willitts-King, B., Jillani, S., Potter, A. (2017) *Efficiency and Inefficiency in Humanitarian Financing.* USAID, Washington DC.

5.   https://www.spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/standards-partnership/

6.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London; Ramalingam, B., Mitchell, J. (2014) *Responding to changing needs.* ALNAP/ODI, London.

No systematised monitoring across all programmes but increasing investment

The indicators linked to M&E programmes (indicators 2.5, 2.7), had better numerical scores than indicators relating to the the design of interventions. It was, however, challenges with M&E capacity that dominated the CHS verification reports. A common theme was the lack of sufficient organisational Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) capacity, which meant that many programmes were not being monitored and teams struggled to follow up on poor performance where it was reported.

For many organisations MEAL processes were not systematised across all programmes and the outputs of learning were not communicated to each level of the organisation – from programmes to country offices to headquarters – or communities. In part, this is a design problem: a lack of verifiable indicators in organisational strategies and programme designs make measurement challenging. It was also a challenge of funding. Budget lines for MEAL were some of the first through which organisations attempted to save money when donors required them to cut project costs.

Yet despite these challenges, evidence from a number of organisations applying the CHS suggests that investments in MEAL are increasing. This mirrors changes across the humanitarian system as a whole, where there appears to be a renewed focus on monitoring. The enhanced Humanitarian Programme Cycle places an emphasis on 'meaningful and systematic monitoring',[7] and a number of organisations are using new and effective monitoring techniques to good effect[8].

✓ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Research and evaluation across the sector, as well as the experience of organisations in working towards meeting the CHS, suggests that there are a number of practical steps that can be taken to improve both the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

To improve timeliness, organisations should continue to:

- Build strong and reliable partnerships with local organisations – who may be able to respond more quickly to events – and with organisations with different mandates and skills (see Commitment 3).

- Ensure that they have clear, well understood decision-making processes, to ensure timely decision-making;[9]

- Integrate cash into programming;

- Focus on preparedness activities, which allow more timely assistance including the establishment of mechanisms to rapidly recruit and deploy skilled staff;

- Work to ensure the inclusion of crisis modifiers – which allow development funding to be allocated to crisis response activities, and are often an early and relatively fast way of responding to changing conditions – and other flexible mechanisms into development funding.

With respect to effectiveness, organisations should:

- Ensure that programme design is conducted by skilled teams, containing individuals from different technical backgrounds;[10]

- Ensure that staff deployed to emergencies receive training/refresher courses in humanitarian standards, such as Sphere and the HSP standards;

- Invest in the development and use of effective monitoring systems (see Commitment 7).

---

7.   OCHA (2019) *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019*. OCHA, New York.

8.   Dillon, N. (2019) *Breaking the Mould: Alternative Approaches to Monitoring and Evaluation.* ALNAP Paper. ODI/ALNAP, New York.

9.   For more on effective humanitarian decision processes see Campbell, L, Knox Clarke, P. (2019) *Beyond Assumptions: How Humanitarians Make Operations Decisions*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

10. For more on team leadership see Knox Clarke, P. (2014) *From Chaos to Control: Leadership in Humanitarian Operations*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

"The application of technical standards is the area where more progress has been made over the last few years. This is encouraging and builds on efforts to improve technical standards."

Dr Balwant Singh
Executive Director, Sphere, Switzerland

PREPAREDNESS IS KEY FOR EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

Covid-19 demands our undivided attention and requires effective and timely action by all of us: governments, donors, the UN, business, humanitarian organisations, communities, families and individuals. Anything short of this means unnecessary infections, deaths and suffering for millions more.

CHS Commitment 2 is about effective and timely humanitarian assistance. It requires preparedness that encompasses leadership, good governance, planning, knowledge, skills, monitoring and evaluation, application of learning and adequate funding. The overall performance data for the 56 organisations that completed CHS verifications gives a score of 2.46, below the score of three that signals fulfilment of the Commitment.

The failure to meet this requirement has major consequences for those delivering and receiving assistance. First, a delayed humanitarian response often results in many more people needing assistance. Second, a delay usually worsens the severity and complexity of the problems people face. Thirdly, ineffective responses to a humanitarian crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic multiply the impact of other existing crises such as famine, hunger and economic recession, by deepening the level of need and contributing to a sense of intractability of existing problems.

The data shows that organisations are not a long way off from meeting the requirements in some areas: coordinating with others and referring unmet needs to those with relevant technical expertise; and using relevant technical standards – such as Sphere[11] and other standards of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership[12] – and good practice to plan, assess and evaluate programmes. In addition to having the highest score for this Commitment, the application of technical standards is also the area where more

progress has been made over the last few years. This is encouraging and builds on efforts to improve technical standards, including the revision of the Sphere handbook in 2018 through an inclusive global consultation process, and to disseminate them widely. On the other hand, organisations perform poorly in addressing constraints such as access, security, logistics and funding when designing programmes.

There is hope for this Commitment to be fully met, and being prepared is key.

Do the governance and leadership of organisations understand community structures and needs, and the importance of working with communities to develop plans? Are they equipped to plan, make timely decisions and allocate resources appropriately? Is there adequate investment in the skills and competencies required for humanitarian assistance? Does the latter build on and involve skills within communities and community groups? Has the organisation made provision for expanding capacity rapidly during crises and identified ways to do so? Is there adequate monitoring and learning to adapt and improve programmes? Are logistics, security and other organisational systems able to cope with the demands associated with crises? Have donors committed to mobilise flexible, unearmarked and long-term funding rapidly during crises and funding for preparedness, without onerous requirements for recipients?

If the answer is 'yes' to these questions, it suggests organisations are well prepared and better able to achieve the requirements of Commitment 2. If the answer is 'no', there is no time like now for investment in preparedness. Learning from past crises and the application of lessons to current crises such as Covid-19 contribute to effective and timely humanitarian assistance and cannot be emphasised enough, for both humanitarian organisations and donors alike.

Dr. Balwant Singh
Executive Director, Sphere, Switzerland

---

11.   https://www.spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/

12.   https://www.spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/standards-partnership/

> *"Agility is a state of mind. It must be encouraged and developed among stakeholders if the sector is ever to truly adapt programmes and address poor performance."*

Véronique de Geoffroy
Executive Director, Groupe URD, France

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND AGILITY: QUESTIONING THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH IN COMPLEX SETTINGS

The CHS verification data for Commitment 2 suggests that organisations are making systematic efforts to address the effectiveness and timeliness of aid. However, indicators also demonstrate that there has been no actual improvement during the last two years. Aid workers are used to collecting data for monitoring purposes, but it does not necessarily follow that monitoring contributes to an effective and timely humanitarian response. Increases in humanitarian funding have been accompanied by an increasing number of accountability measures based on a conception of 'good performance' as merely compliance with what is designed, measured and monitored as planned in the logical framework. These accountability measures, which do not take into account the complexity and unpredictability of operational contexts, are the main constraints to programme adaptability.

The constant uncertainty of crisis contexts mean that it is a challenge to ensure that aid both continues to meet needs and remains relevant. The quality of aid and the accountability of actors towards affected populations and donors depends on:

- Understanding the situation and how it might evolve;
- Deciding to act or to allocate funds in the face of uncertainty and risk;
- Acknowledging the possibility of making mistakes;
- Adapting administrative and financial procedures to accompany change;
- Building trust between the different stakeholders of the response to a complex, multi-form and changing crisis.

These issues, which are the basis of 'agility' (or 'adaptive management'), concern both humanitarian and development actors – implementers and donors – as they increasingly collaborate in protracted crisis contexts in multi-year programmes aimed at reconstruction and resilience building.

Agility can be defined as a 'structured and iterative decision-making and adaptation process' which can be adopted in response to uncertainty. Agility does not lead to chaos; based on a number of specific rules, and short iterative cycles, it helps to anticipate risks, and to learn and adapt rapidly. Agility involves:

- Accepting uncertainty about what will – and will not – work to address the challenge(s) identified. Interventions can change over their lifetime, but agile management explicitly recognises that solutions are not known in advance.
- Focusing primarily on the purpose of programmes and less on the "how" (activities and resources) as well as allowing more flexibility in the use of those resources and the choice of activities. The priority question is not, "Did we do what we said we would do?" but rather, "Did we do what we needed to do to achieve the goal of the intervention?"
- Working on short and repetitive cycles, analysing results and adjusting actions on the basis of what has been learned in order to adapt quickly. Since it is not possible to know everything in a complex situation, agile or adaptive management learns by trial and error, testing approaches and adapting them quickly.
- Focusing on relationships, dialogue and engagement, and putting people at the heart of processes because their motivation and interpersonal skills are crucial in complex contexts.

More than a set of procedures and tools, agility is a state of mind. It must be encouraged and developed among stakeholders if the sector is ever to truly 'adapt programmes and address poor performance' – as required by Key Action 2.5 of the CHS.

Véronique de Geoffroy
Executive Director, Groupe URD[13], France

---

13. This short article is based on a number of research papers produced by Groupe URD in the past few years, in particular: Carrier, M. (2020) *Agilité ou Gestion Adaptative, Mettre en Oeuvre des Actions de Solidarité en Situation Complexe*. Groupe URD, Plaisians; Grunewald, F. (2019) Black Swans and Grey Rhinos: Aid and the Challenges of Agility, In: *Humanitarian Aid on the Move*, March 2019. Groupe URD, Plaisians.
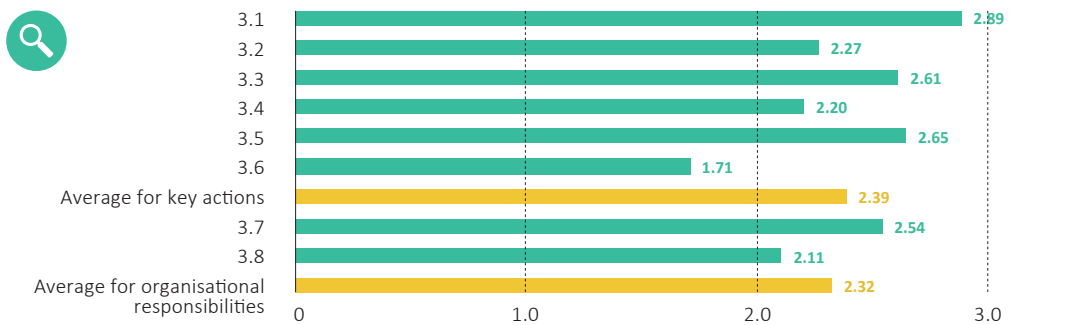
03

STRENGTHENING LOCAL CAPACITIES AND REDUCING RISK

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

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

There has been significant improvement in some areas over the last three years – especially with Key Action 3.1, 'Building on local capacities' – with positive signs that further improvement is more than possible. However, performance is hindered by the difficulty of creating sustainability in fragile and resource-poor contexts; there is also a suggestion of some inflexibility on the part of humanitarian organisations.

FIGURE 9: COMMITMENT 3 – HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE STRENGTHENS LOCAL CAPACITIES AND AVOIDS NEGATIVE EFFECTS

3.1	2.89
3.2	2.27
3.3	2.61
3.4	2.20
3.5	2.65
3.6	1.71
Average for key actions	2.39
3.7	2.54
3.8	2.11
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.32

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 10: COMMITMENT 3 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
3.1	3.00	2.92	3.31
3.2	2.54	2.54	2.92
3.3	2.62	2.77	2.92
3.4	2.62	2.77	2.69
3.5	2.96	3.00	3.00
3.6	1.92	1.88	1.69
Average for key actions	2.61	2.65	2.76
3.7	2.77	2.69	2.92
3.8	1.92	2.08	2.38
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.35	2.38	2.65

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment	Score
Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

0   1.0   2.0   3.0

COMMITMENT 3 INDICATORS

Key Actions

3.1 Ensure programmes build on local capacities and work towards improving the resilience of communities and people affected by crisis.

3.2 Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities.

3.3 Enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first responders in the event of future crises, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented.

3.4 Plan a transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme that ensures longer-term positive effects and reduces the risk of dependency.

3.5 Design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy.

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

a. People's safety, security, dignity and rights;
b. Sexual exploitation and abuse by staff;
c. Culture, gender, and social and political relationships;
d. Livelihoods;
e. The local economy; and
f. The environment.

Organisational Responsibilities

3.7 Policies, strategies and guidance are designed to:

g. Prevent programmes having any negative effects, such as, for example, exploitation, abuse or discrimination by staff against communities and people affected by crisis; and
h. Strengthen local capacities.

3.8 Systems are in place to safeguard any personal information collected from communities and people affected by crisis that could put them at risk.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

This was one of the lower scoring Commitments overall: while scores suggested that systematic efforts to change were certainly being attempted, organisations were further from fully conforming to requirements than they were for most of the other Commitments.

In one area, relating to unintended negative impacts (indicator 3.6), the score suggested that there had not yet been any systematic effort to address the issue.

It is important to note, however, that there are also some significant positives. The score for indicator 3.1 on building local capacities and resilience was one of the highest for all CHS indicators. Scores in several areas also show progress over time since 2016, suggesting that this is an area where organisations are conscious of their weaknesses and are working to address them.

**COMMITMENT
03**

The relatively low overall score for the Commitment was reflected in the views of people affected by crisis about humanitarian responses in general. Ground Truth Solutions found that only 29 per cent of people completely or mostly agreed that aid helped them to become more self-reliant:[1] "Most people find aid 'not at all' or 'not very' empowering. This question repeatedly produces some of the most negative responses in our surveys."[2] Ground Truth Solutions also found that this was an area of concern for humanitarian field staff.

The ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System report[3] concluded that the humanitarian sector as a whole is increasingly engaging with the underlying challenges of poverty and vulnerability, and that there had been an increase in resilience programming – but that this work on resilience had only really been effective when undertaken as part of larger, government-led programming.

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

Progress on supporting local capacity

The Commitment puts strong emphasis on recognising and supporting local capacity to improve sustainability (indicators 3.1, 3.3). With all these indicators, scores have improved significantly since 2016. As noted above, building local capacity scored relatively well.

However, scores remain fairly low when it comes to deploying the results of existing community hazard and risk assessments in planning (indicator 3.2). This reflects a general issue from across all the Commitments as a whole, about how best to use information gathered from the local community for the purpose of programme design. In CHS verification reports, some organisations also recognised that they had not done enough to plan and implement capacity strengthening for local leaders.

Others, though, had suggested that this was an area where they had made progress. Tearfund, for example, used a self-help group approach to assist in the development of a community's capacity for resilience and to consider how investments in aid might reduce dependency.[4]

The challenge of creating exit strategies in fragile, resource-poor environments

The Commitment also includes indicators related to programme design, building-in exit strategies and early-recovery activities (indicators 3.4, 3.5). Echoing the low score for exit strategies, the most commonly listed organisational weakness for this Commitment was a failure to systematically create an exit or transition plan in the design of their projects. CHS Verification reports suggested a number of reasons for this. Uncertainty about the duration of a crisis and about the duration of funding made exit planning difficult in many circumstances. In some cases, organisations also reported that, given high levels of need, severely damaged economies and
a paucity of government or development agencies, it was unrealistic to assume that programmes could be 'handed over', either to the community or to other actors.

There are positive signs from across the sector as a whole. In 2019, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) members adopted a recommendation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus aimed at "effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need."[5] Much progress still needs to be made, however, and reviewers for this report engaged in these discussions, note a lack of clarity and agreement around basic concepts. It remains to be seen what the Nexus will look like in practice.

1.   Ground Truth Solutions (2020), *Humanitarian Voice Index, 2020*. Ground Truth Solutions, Vienna.
2.   Ground Truth Solutions (2019) *Briefing Note Grand Bargain: Field Perspectives 2018*. Ground Truth Solutions/OECD, Vienna.
3.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.
4.   Tearfund's CHS certification Mid-term Audit Summary Report in 2018.
5.   OECD/DAC (2020) *Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development Peace Nexus*. OECD/LEGAL/5019. OECD, Paris.

At the same time, a number of international financial institutions are becoming more active in fragile states, where much humanitarian action is conducted. At the time of writing, the World Bank is consulting on a strategy for fragility, conflict and violence.[6] In advance of this strategy, it is also engaging in longer-term activities with a number of humanitarian actors in Yemen and elsewhere.[7]

Meanwhile, many organisations, particularly those who are part of the United Nations (UN) family, are attempting to develop programmes in ways that bridge development and humanitarian activities, and builds longer-term capacity. Several donors are also making progress on multi-year funding.[8]

Organisations are not deploying information to prevent and avoid negative effects

Indicator 3.6 relates to the use of information to change programmes: in this case, to 'Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended negative effects'. As seen with other Commitments that touch on this issue, meeting this indicator has proved challenging and is among the lowest scoring of all indicators across the CHS. The poor score in this area is probably linked to issues described in Commitments 1 and 2 related to the structural misapprehension of given situations and the need to adapt programmes to and for changing contexts.

Gaps in protecting personal information

Finally, the Commitment includes an indicator related to the safeguarding of personal information (indicator 3.8). While this is another area that has seen improvement, performance against this indicator is still poor. Given the growing use of technology in humanitarian action, and the ever-increasing quantity of data that is collected through programming, this is a critical and worrying gap that urgently needs addressing.

NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID STORY OF CHANGE

In response to a CHS certification audit Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) addressed this gap by deploying the European Union's (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) across all of its work. GDPR processes, information materials and e-learnings are developed and distributed to all NCA global staff. Using the GDPR to address issues of data protection is one of a number of changes that the organisation has made, building on existing policies and procedures to support improvement, rather than creating new and additional approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to make progress in this area, organisations should:

- Critically consider their assumptions around the relationship between humanitarian and development activities and test their theories of change to create realistic assumptions about what can be achieved;

- Actively consider the range of partners available in fragile contexts, building relationships with development actors, but also with civil society groups and the private sector;

- Continue and amplify work to connect humanitarian response to safety-net programmes;

- Clarify the conditions that are required – at the outset – for programme handover and closure, as well as for organisational 'exit' from an area, and continually assess against these conditions;

- Identify key potential risks or negative effects of common programme types, and build in systems to monitor and address these effects where they occur;

- Focus on improving data security and the privacy of personal data collected as part of humanitarian work.

6.   World Bank Group (2020) *World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence* 2020-2025. World Bank Group, Washington DC.

7.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

8.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London; Development Initiative (2019) *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2019*. Development Initiatives, Bristol.

"I have heard from local NGOs that they are still treated like subcontractors rather than leaders... that capacity strengthening is top–down and often an afterthought."

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood
Former Under-Secretary General for Partnerships,
IFRC and Co-Convener of Grand Bargain Workstream 2, Switzerland
Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of Malaysia on Public Health, Malaysia

SOME WELCOME PROGRESS ON OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS LOCALISATION

It seems almost unfashionable to speak positively about the progress of the humanitarian community in a report such as this. However, the CHS verification data for Commitment 3 shows that there are now many positive aspects to the sector's general approach to local actors.

Our good intentions with regard to local actors and local capacity largely pre-date the use of the term "localisation". For instance, provisions somewhat similar to Key Action 3.1 (on supporting community resilience) and 3.3 (on strengthening local capacity) appeared in the code of conduct of the 'Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and NGOs in Disaster Response', when it was first adopted 25 years ago. As is to be hoped, we have been able to make some progress in that time, particularly in gradually embracing a much wider view of humanitarianism to include risk reduction and climate change adaptation, peace promotion and resilience approaches. However, with the achievement of the Grand Bargain in 2016, the pace has quickened.

Over the last three years, average evaluation scores on Key Actions 3.1 and 3.3 have all increased, as has Key Action 3.7, which covers policy arrangements to strengthen local capacity. All are now comfortably between a score of two ('Systematic efforts towards applying the requirement, but certain key points not addressed') and three ('Requirement fulfilled').

It is now rare to find international humanitarians who are unfamiliar with the logic as to why there should be greater investment in the leadership, capacity and delivery of local actors. We have seen important milestones reached by some NGOs, UN and government donors. For instance, last year, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) changed its policy to allow local partners to begin receiving overheads as part of their contracts.

A number of donors have increased their funding to Country-based Pooled Funds with the express purpose of supporting more local actors. Local NGOs are now represented in 21 of 28 Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT).

Still, there is much room for improvement. As a former sherpa of the Grand Bargain's localisation workstream, I have heard from many local NGOs (particularly women's rights organisations), that they are still treated like subcontractors rather than leaders, that their funding is strictly earmarked, that capacity strengthening support, when available, is top-down and often an afterthought.

The humanitarian response to the current Covid-19 pandemic is almost inescapably local, given the impact of control measures. We have also learned the hard way that community trust is especially important when it comes to controlling an epidemic. To build trust, it is vital to understand how communities perceive both the disease and the response to it, so that the sector can act on the community's questions, suggestions and capacities. If the sector's response remains static and does not adapt to changing concerns, it will fail to remain relevant and trusted by the very people who need our help the most.

Now could be the turning point when international organisations embrace the transformation that is needed. Now is the time to enable and support local humanitarian leaders, so that all responses can be more effective and trusted by the community.

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood

Former Under-Secretary General for Partnerships, IFRC and Co-Convener of Grand Bargain Workstream 2, Switzerland

Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of Malaysia on Public Health, Malaysia
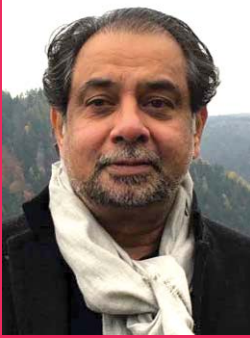
> *"The Covid-19 crisis is an opportunity to reverse the fragmentation within our sector and move towards collaboration, complementarity and respect."*

Marvin Parvez
International Convener, Alliance for Empowering Partnership, Pakistan

COVID-19 AND THE MOVES TOWARDS LOCALISATION

In my 30 years of working as a humanitarian aid worker, there has been no disaster as damaging as Covid-19.

I have sometimes tried to compare Covid-19 to the 2004 Tsunami in Asia. But Covid-19 is a Tsunami that cannot be seen or heard. It comes in waves and every wave takes away thousands of lives and pushes many communities from every corner of the world into extreme hardship, poverty and hunger.

Both local and national NGOs have always been the first responders in previous disasters, but as the Covid-19 pandemic is on a global scale it is unlike any that has come before. It has had a huge impact on both the economic and social welfare of the world's population. Ordinarily, NGOs tackle these issues over the longer term, drawing on their skills and expertise about how best to assist people who are affected.

Normally it takes months for the large INGOs to mobilise funding and international surge-team deployments. With the humanitarian sector under lockdown in national capitals across the globe, it has been the next door neighbours, local faith communities, CBOs, Community-based Protections (CBPs) and NGOs that have provided leadership and a timely response from day one.

This is going to be a locally-led disaster response, with national and local civil society groups playing a critical life-saving role. This unprecedented pandemic calls for global unity, a collective response and the fulfillment of all Commitments to localisation.

As the Alliance for Empowering Partnership has made so clear in its position paper on the localised response to Covid-19, "Local and national civil society organisations have a critical role to play in the response to this pandemic. This is all the more so because drastically reduced international travel and supply lines make large scale international mobilisation impossible.

"Many international actors are also having to deal with their own operational disruptions and domestic Covid-19 crisis.

"We know that this will not only be a public health, but also an economic and social crisis. It may also lead to a rise in ethnic, gender-based and domestic violence, and may cause social unrest among daily wage earners and people working in informal sectors faced with a loss of jobs, income and food security. All local and national capacities need to be mobilised to mitigate these impacts as much as possible."[9]

The Covid-19 crisis is therefore an opportunity to reverse the fragmentation within our sector and move towards collaboration, complementarity and respect.

Many large INGOs are asking their governments for support for core and programme funding during this pandemic. Covid-19 is not just taking lives but also having a devastating effect on national civil societies in the global south. The sector will be reassured about government commitment to localisation if they place equal importance on the core costs of southern NGOs as they do to those elsewhere. Unless this issue is addressed, the response to future disasters could be even more difficult and even more costly.

We would especially like to highlight Commitment 3 of the CHS. This Commitment, if implemented and adhered to in full, will result in newly empowered partnerships. This is the only responsible and accountable answer to the current global pandemic. In the light of the huge scale of needs, resources must be managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose (as per Commitment 9). The sector needs to learn from its past experience of the response to the Tsunami and ensure that it reinforces local capacities and provides sufficient resources. Only then can the humanitarian sector provide a timely, appropriate response, whilst also safeguarding the dignity and respect of the affected populations.

Marvin Parvez
International Convener, Alliance for Empowering Partnership, Pakistan

9.   http://a4ep.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A4EP-COVID_19-position-paper_Final.pdf
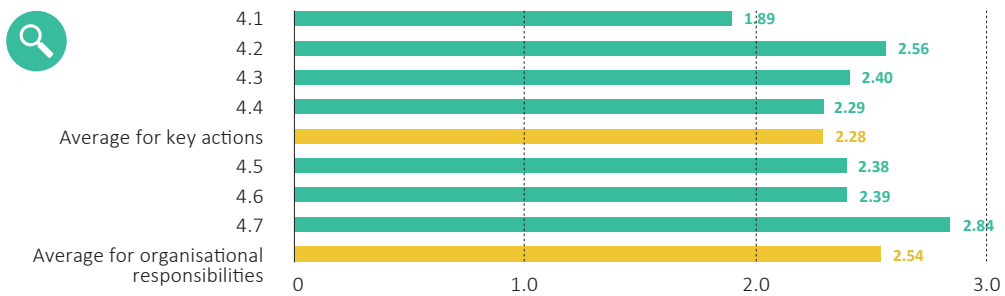
COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

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

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

Despite decades of attempts to improve communication and participation in humanitarian action, this Commitment has not yet been achieved. However, there appears to have been positive movement over the past three years, and some factors in the external environment may help organisations to communicate better and become more open and participatory.

FIGURE 11: COMMITMENT 4 – HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS BASED ON COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK

4.1	1.89
4.2	2.56
4.3	2.40
4.4	2.29
Average for key actions	2.28
4.5	2.38
4.6	2.39
4.7	2.84
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.54

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 12: COMMITMENT 4 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
4.1	1.38	1.38	1.69
4.2	2.46	2.46	2.46
4.3	2.46	2.46	2.85
4.4	2.31	2.31	2.54
Average for key actions	2.15	2.15	2.38
4.5	2.62	2.63	2.85
4.6	2.73	2.92	2.92
4.7	2.62	2.54	2.85
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.65	2.69	2.87

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

0   1.0   2.0   3.0
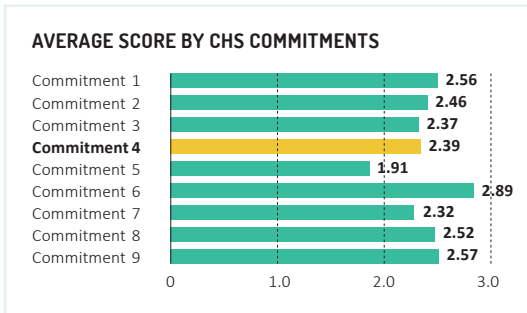
COMMITMENT 4 INDICATORS

Key Actions

4.1 Provide information to communities and people affected by crisis about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, how it expects its staff to behave, the programmes it is implementing and what they intend to deliver.

4.2 Communicate in languages, formats and media that are easily understood, respectful and culturally appropriate for different members of the community, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups.

4.3 Ensure representation is inclusive, involving the participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work.

4.4 Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received, paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback.

Organisational Responsibilities

4.5 Policies for information-sharing are in place, and promote a culture of open communication.

4.6 Policies are in place for engaging communities and people affected by crisis, reflecting the priorities and risks they identify in all stages of the work.

4.7 External communications, including those used for fundraising purposes, are accurate, ethical and respectful, presenting communities and people affected by crisis as dignified human beings.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

Despite the significant attention that has been given to the issues of communication and participation in humanitarian action over the past 25 years, this Commitment remains further from achievement than many.

The numerical scores place it sixth out of nine Commitments, with key points still to be addressed (see figure 11). On a more positive note, however, the scores do suggest that progress has been made towards fulfilment of this Commitment since 2016 (see figure 12).

When examining the humanitarian sector as a whole, data from crisis-affected people suggests that there is still much work to be done. In ALNAP's 2018 survey of

5,000 crisis-affected people, 39 per cent of respondents said that aid actors had communicated well about their plans and activities, and 36 per cent said that they had been able to give their opinion, make complaints and suggest changes to aid programmes.

These responses were less positive than those questions that centred around the quality and amount of aid received.[1]

Importantly, those people who had been able to give their opinion were three times more likely to say that they had been treated with dignity than those who had not. Information from Ground Truth Solutions[2] paints a similar picture: in surveys from 2016-18, an average of 36 per cent of respondents felt that their opinions were 'mostly' or 'completely' considered. In both the Ground Truth Solutions and the ALNAP figures, there were significant differences in responses from one country to another, and in both there had been progress on previous years.

1.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System.* ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London. 24 per cent responded 'partially' to the question around communication, and 22 per cent responded partially to the question around feedback.

2.   Ground Truth Solutions (*2020), Humanitarian Voic*e Index, 2020. Ground Truth Solutions, Vienna.

COMMITMENT

04

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The indicators for this Commitment cover three main areas, which can be seen as three different levels of engagement by communities and people affected by crisis in the design and management of humanitarian activities. The first area is communication – the degree to which organisations make information about themselves, their activities, and the rights and entitlements of people accessible to the communities with whom they work (indicators 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.7). The second area concerns the degree to which the intended users of humanitarian goods and services can give feedback on their experiences (indicator 4.4), and the third concerns the degree to which they can engage in all elements of programming, including design (indicators 4.3, 4.6).

Challenges for effective communication remain

Of the three areas, it is the indicators related to communication, particularly indicators 4.1 that score lowest: activities related to providing information to communities are still not systematic or complete. This was also the area where the largest number of organisations reported having difficulties. Not only were the scores for providing information low, but so were the scores for ensuring that policies for sharing information were in place.

These results are both surprising and worrying: surprising, because sharing information should be easier than establishing working feedback or participation processes; worrying, because it is the provision of this basic information that provides the basis for communities and people affected by crisis to receive their entitlements, and hold organisations to account. While there has been improvement in this area over the past three years, these scores suggest that this is an area that should receive urgent attention.

NABA'A STORY OF CHANGE

Naba´a programmes are developed in a highly participatory way, based on communication, information sharing and feedback of users. Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of their rights and entitlements and have access to the information they need. However, the CHS certification process identified that some new communities were less informed and knowledgeable about Naba´a. This was addressed by putting in place several new systems to ensure information on the organisations, its principles and expected behaviour of staff are systematically provided to any communities they start working with. Neighbourhood self-support groups were established and now share information within the community about the organisation and its values.

Feedback is collected, but with little impact on design of programmes

With respect to the indicator 4.4 relating to feedback, the scores were slightly better, but still lower than those for most other indicators across the Nine Commitments. Given the attention that the humanitarian sector has given to establishing feedback mechanisms over the past five years,[3] as a sector we might expect the CHS indicators to be more positive. However, the overwhelming bulk of evidence related to the sector as a whole suggests that, while there may be more mechanisms, there has to date been a singular "lack of progress on ensuring that feedback from affected populations is integrated into the design, delivery and review of programmes."[4] For example, in Chad only eight per cent of people affected by crisis surveyed believe that aid providers take their opinions into account[5]. Attention may be shifting from creating mechanisms per se, to ensuring feedback is actually used –

3. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London; Ground Truth Solutions (2019) *Briefing Note Grand Bargain: Field Perspectives 2018. Ground Truth Solutions/OECD, Vienna.* Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

4. Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

5. Since 2018, through the Ground Truth Solutions and CHS Alliance project on 'Strengthening Humanitarian Accountability in Chad', people's views and perceptions are collected and used to update the humanitarian Response Plan and the humanitarian programmes in Chad. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/article/strengthening-humanitarian-accountability-in-chad/

the 2020 *Grand Bargain Independent Report* suggests a slight increase in the number of organisations reporting that they take corrective action on the basis of results[6] – but progress is still very limited.

The seeming inability of the CHS-verified organisations to change programmes on the basis of new information is a recurrent theme across several Commitments (see particularly Commitment 1). Research in a number of humanitarian contexts (not specifically related to CHS-verified organisations) suggests that this results from a combination of mechanisms that people affected by crisis find hard to use; poorly designed or unclear decision processes in humanitarian organisations; inflexible funding that prevents programmes being changed; and inflexible structures and processes on the part of organisations, which prevent the hiring of skilled staff, or the procurement of new supplies to meet changing needs.[7]

Further developments will require changes in attitude and new skill sets

A high performing area was that related to facilitating participation for all members of the community in each element of the programme cycle (indicator 4.3, 4.6). Humanitarian organisations have struggled for years with the topic of participation, with some even questioning the degree to which 'development'-style participation is possible and desirable within the context of humanitarian action.[8] Improvements among CHS-verified organisations in this area may relate to changes made as part of the Grand Bargain 'Participation Revolution' and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) result Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion, whereby many organisations have redoubled efforts to develop and implement policies, and some donors have made funding dependent on the engagement of people affected by crisis in decision-making.[9]

They may also have been supported by a greater emphasis on the links between humanitarian and development activity, and the provision of longer-term funding.[10]

Difficulties remain, however. Several CHS verification reports showed challenges in engaging marginalised people in decision-making, for example. CHS verification reports, as well as research undertaken on the broader humanitarian system, suggest that many humanitarian organisations also lack staff skilled in community organisation and participatory approaches, are unclear on what they are attempting to achieve with respect to participation,[11] and – fundamentally – still see participation as an 'add on' to existing activities, rather than a fundamental rethinking of their role and relationship to the communities among whom they work.

✔ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to speed up progress in this area, organisations should:

- Ensure that they have clear policies on what should be communicated to people affected by crisis, and how it should be communicated. These policies should particularly emphasise the rights and entitlements of people affected by crisis. They should also ensure that these policies are known and understood by all staff, and that their implementation is a standard element of response design and implementation;

- Ensure that the design of communication and feedback mechanisms is undertaken by staff closest to the communities, and that efforts are made to ensure that the media used are both accessible to the communities and culturally appropriate;

- Take steps to increase the ability to use feedback. Key actions include reviews of decision-making processes, and building flexibility into structures, partnerships and Human Resources (HR) and logistical processes (see Commitment 1 for more detail);

- Consider what 'participation' means for the organisation in practice; how participation relates to their organisational mandate and what would have to change – in staffing, funding, processes and other areas, in order to implement participation as a default.

6.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

7.   Obrecht, A. (2019) *Shifting Mindsets: Creating a More Flexible Humanitarian Response*. ALNAP Study. ODI/ALNAP, London; Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report* 2019. HPG/ODI; London; CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

8.   Brown, D., Donini, A. (2014) *Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

9.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

10. CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

11. See also Brown, D., Donini, A. (2014) *Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

"The data suggests that despite our revolutionary intent, we still have some work to do on the basics."

Gareth Price-Jones
SCHR Executive Secretary and Co-Convener
of Grand Bargain Workstream 6, Switzerland

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE SHOULD BE BASED ON COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK

As Executive Secretary of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the participation of people affected by crisis in crisis-response is a critical part of my work.

This focus is reinforced by my role as co-convenor of Workstream 6 of the Grand Bargain, the 'Participation Revolution'. I was therefore very interested to discover how, as a sector, the CHS data is tracking our progress.

The data suggests that despite our revolutionary intent, we still have some work to do on the basics. Policies need to be put in place – the average here is 2.54 – but we should really be scoring at least a three ('requirement fulfilled') by now. Ideally, we should be pushing the boundaries further after four years of the Grand Bargain and strong NGO and UN engagement in IASC Results Group 2. Even outside these frameworks, with the generally widespread Commitment to the principle of participation across the system, I would expect most agencies to have effective policies in place. Many donors have required humanitarians for some years now to demonstrate how people affected by crisis have been involved in response design, so it is disappointing that not everyone has achieved this.

However, I am actually more discouraged by the lower score – see Average for key actions (figure 11) – on delivering our responsibilities, as this is the area that in my view counts for more. There are also better reasons as to why this area is more of a challenge. Progress on 4.2 ('Using appropriate languages and formats') is encouraging, and Translators without Borders deserve a great deal of credit for this. They have raised both the level of competence and achievement across the sector and beyond over the past few years, particularly with coverage in publications such as the Economist and the Guardian.

A recent webinar conducted by the Grand Bargain suggested that confident leadership which addresses the 'fear of changing organisational programme models' is critical. Leaders have to be sufficiently convinced of the efficacy of participation to allow for 'systematic change throughout the organisation', while also needing to have 'a comprehensive understanding of all stakeholders to whom humanitarians are accountable'. The highlighting of key elements of participation in the non-humanitarian media is critical to ensuring that these are understood and supported beyond the realm of technical expertise. It also helps demystify what can seem an arcane discussion, which we know many grant writers and managers, never mind CEOs, struggle to visualise.

With indicator 4.3, we're doing a little less well on ensuring the participation of communities and affected people at all stages of a response. This reflects what we're hearing in the Grand Bargain workstream, and what we're seeing in the current response to Covid-19. It will take a concerted effort to ensure that this does not further worsen over the next year as the combination of scale, urgency and the unique characteristics of a pandemic response, risks pushing the sector into a much more top-down approach than we have seen for years. We have a huge task to hand in reconnecting with communities and people affected by crisis, as the initial response is revised and adapted.

With the advent of Covid-19 making face-to-face contact more difficult, the sector will need to remain constantly vigilant to ensure that progress continues.

Gareth Price-Jones
Executive Secretary, SCHR and Co-Convener
of Grand Bargain Workstream 6, Switzerland

"A woman told me "They are treating us like we are ignorant… I know what is best for me, why don't you all just listen." There, in my opinion, is the solution for this sector."

Salama Mohammed Bakhalah
Board member, Loop, United Kingdom

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

As a sector we have made progress in creating systems that ensure accountability and recognise the need to communicate with communities and people affected by crisis. However, despite the growing awareness of the need, there has been no significant shift in practice.

Data corroborates my own experience that as a sector we still have a long way to go. I believe that to operationalise these systems and make them work better for local communities, the sector needs to decentralise the discussion. What holds the sector back from meeting its Commitments is that discussion takes the form of a centralised, global approach that simply states what form best practice should take. It is often forgotten that all people are different, even if the nature of crises are often similar.

In some instances the sector still treats people receiving aid as though they are children who do not know what is good for them, and have little to contribute. People do know what is best for them, and they are often working hard to deliver solutions with no resources. They deserve to be given space to express this knowledge. We need to take the answers from the community and shape the feedback mechanism and the response based on those answers. The sector needs to learn from them, and not the reverse.

In a country such as Yemen, where 80 per cent of the population needs some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, one individual could be receiving food, shelter, water, education and other forms of support from more than one humanitarian agency. How can we expect one person to be able to provide feedback to all of these different organisations, when each one will have its own approach? The act of providing feedback in this case becomes a burden in and of itself.

As a sector, I believe that we are still treating these Commitments as a box-ticking exercise. Donors need to know that their money is being put to good use; humanitarian actors want to prove that they are meeting all of the Commitments. In reality, to what extent are we genuinely meeting the true purpose of these Commitments? When we say that people have shaped the response, at what stage are we asking people for their views? Is it after the project has been written, approved and confirmed? If that is the case, what are we really asking of them? In instances where humanitarian partners have been able to collect information on the views of the population in the response to a crisis, the system has proven to be very slow to include or take into account those views.

On a visit to an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Lahj, Yemen, a woman told me that, "They are treating us like we are ignorant, like we do not know anything. I know what I want, and I know what is best for me, why don't you all just listen." There, in my opinion, is the solution for this sector. We simply need just to listen to the people, to listen to what they really want. That includes listening to them about the ways they share their views and opinions and then adapting to what is already being deployed, rather than asking them to adapt to us and giving them preconceived options to comply with.

Salama Mohammed Bakhalah
Board member, Loop[12], United Kingdom
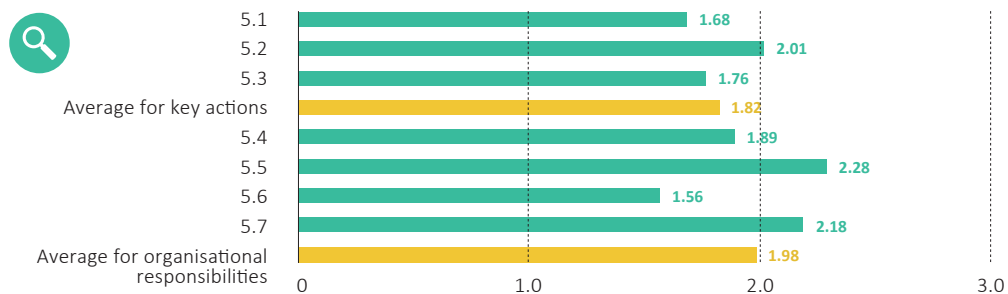
---

12.   www.ourloop.io

COMPLAINTS ARE WELCOMED AND ADDRESSED

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

Quality Criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.

This is significantly the weakest scoring Commitment of the CHS: despite frequent and repeated moments of attention given to the issue over the past two decades, mechanisms for complaints are not well understood by the people they are designed for and do not regularly lead to responses, sanctions or improvements.

FIGURE 13: COMMITMENT 5 – COMPLAINTS ARE WELCOMED AND ADDRESSED

5.1	1.68
5.2	2.01
5.3	1.76
Average for key actions	1.82
5.4	1.89
5.5	2.28
5.6	1.56
5.7	2.18
Average for organisational responsibilities	1.98

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 14: COMMITMENT 5 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
5.1	1.23	1.38	2.00
5.2	1.92	2.12	2.19
5.3	2.00	2.19	2.35
Average for key actions	1.72	1.90	2.18
5.4	2.23	2.38	2.23
5.5	2.62	2.77	2.85
5.6	1.46	1.54	1.46
5.7	2.23	2.46	2.77
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.13	2.29	2.33

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

0   1.0   2.0   3.0

COMMITMENT 5 INDICATORS

Key Actions

5.1 Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.

5.2 Welcome and accept complaints, and communicate how the mechanism can be accessed and the scope of issues it can address.

5.3 Manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner that prioritises the safety of the complainant and those affected at all stages.

Organisational Responsibilities

5.4 The complaints-handling process for communities and people affected by crisis is documented and in place. The process should cover programming, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other abuses of power.

5.5 An organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously and acted upon according to defined policies and processes has been established.

5.6 Communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff, including organisational Commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

5.7 Complaints that do not fall within the scope of the organisation are referred to a relevant party in a manner consistent with good practice.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

Performance on ensuring complaints are welcomed and addressed was significantly worse than any other Commitment, suggesting that, because of unsystematic efforts in this area, CHS-verified organisations are still only making limited progress (see figure 13).

On a more positive note, although the scores were low, they do show greater improvement than any other Commitment since 2016 (see figure 14).

Comparing CHS verification and more general humanitarian data from the sector as whole, including that provided by people affected by crisis themselves, it is clear that there is still limited awareness of, and access to, complaint mechanisms. Ground Truth Solutions have found that "amongst affected people, typically just over half know how to make suggestions or complaints to agencies."[1] As outlined under Commitment 4, ALNAP reported that 36 per cent of survey respondents were "able to give an opinion on the program, make complaints, and suggest changes to the aid agencies": a further 22 per cent of respondents said that they were 'partially' able to do so.[2]

However, it is possible that mechanisms are much less likely to be used by people with the most serious complaints, who may fear negative consequences if the complaints are not dealt with professionally and confidentially.[3]

1.   Ground Truth Solutions (2019) *Briefing Note Grand Bargain: Field Perspectives 2018.* Ground Truth Solution/OECD, Vienna.

2.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System.* ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

3.   Human Rights Watch (2014) *The Power These Men Have Over Us: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia.* Human Rights Watch. New York.

COMMITMENT
05

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The indicators for this Commitment cover a number of related elements required to establish and run a complaint mechanism: organisational will and commitment; a design process that involves the people who might use the mechanism; activities to make people aware of what they can expect and of how they can complain if these legitimate expectations are not met; and ongoing management of the mechanism.

Relatively high levels of organisational Commitment?

The indicator on which CHS-verified organisations score highest, is 'Organisational will and commitment to welcome and act on complaints' (indicator 5.5). There are only two other indicators that received aggregate scores of over two, implying that 'systematic efforts' are being made.

One area which has rightly received significant scrutiny in the humanitarian system in the past two years is that of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and the way in which organisations have dealt with complaints of these violations. A CHS Alliance report into the alleviation of sexual exploitation and abuse suggested that there is an "organisational culture within some humanitarian agencies whose instinct is also to marginalise, ignore, downplay or actively undermine reports of SEA when they occur, and often those who seek to report them."[4]

People affected by crisis not included in the design of complaints mechanisms

With respect to indicator 5.1, which refers to the consultation of people affected by crisis on the design and ongoing management of the process, the score was extremely low. This again shows up the failure of humanitarian organisations in using the information and opinions of people they work with in the design or adaptation of their services: a recurrent theme across all Commitments. Many of the CHS verification reports mentioned, in particular, difficulties with ensuring that marginalised population groups were involved in activities. This is of particular concern, as these people are more likely to be excluded from – or worse, badly treated by – humanitarian programmes.

The CHS scores for awareness of behaviour expected by staff were the lowest of all (indicator 5.6). This is supported by similar scores for Commitment 4, where organisations' performance on communicating with communities and people affected by crisis was lower than any other area.

Mechanisms are unconnected and do not lead to action

Finally, organisations scored badly on putting mechanisms into place (indicator 5.4) and managing them in a timely, fair and appropriate manner (indicator 5.3). Many CHS verification reports mentioned piecemeal initiatives that differed from one programme to another, and which had limited organisational impact. Another common failing was related to the use of mechanisms by partner organisations – which often had more frequent and sustained contact with communities and people affected by crisis than the CHS-verified organisation.

---

4. Wall, I. (2018) *Alleviation of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Sexual Harassment and Abuse.* In: CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report.* How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

Several organisations reported that their partners were not well informed about the mechanisms in place, or did not use them consistently. And, as was also the case with feedback mechanisms (Commitment 4) and monitoring (Commitment 2), organisations were generally much better at collecting information than acting upon it. This failure has been noted elsewhere: the most recent State of the Humanitarian System report[5] notes specifically that there has been very little progress in establishing mechanisms for redress and or sanction in response to complaints.[6]

CAFOD STORY OF CHANGE

The experience of CAFOD shows that it is possible to work with partner organisations to establish complaints mechanisms. A partnership approach is central to CAFOD's work, but the trust and respect that this requires meant CAFOD felt unable to force a mechanism onto partner organisations. Recognising that safe and inclusive programming requires complaint mechanisms, but also goes beyond them, the organisation developed a fully holistic programming framework. They worked in a collaborative way with partners to review current practice, identify gaps, and prioritise improvements, including that communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe, dignified, inclusive, and responsive mechanisms to handle feedback and complaints.

Despite success stories such as CAFOD's experience, however, the significant weakness of this Commitment is a matter of concern, both in itself and because it suggests that humanitarian organisations are, in this area, stubbornly resistant to change and improvement. Over the past two decades, there has been no shortage of attention given to the topic of complaint mechanisms: it has seen a number of 'waves' of attention, generally initiated by scandals involving the sexual abuse of people affected by crisis[7]. There is no shortage of guidance on how to establish an effective mechanism,[8] and no shortage of statements on the need for these mechanisms to be working effectively.

Is change coming?

It is possible that this situation has already begun to change for the better. The most recent revelations of sexual abuse – both of people affected by crisis and of humanitarian staff – occurred in 2018 and have led to renewed interest and to a number of promising initiatives. Several major donors have acted to make funding conditional on improved performance around complaints, particularly those related to sexual exploitation and abuse. These actions take place against a background of increased public scrutiny of large, established organisations, and a focus in civil society and the media on sexual abuse and the broader abuse of power.

More broadly still, access to social media is now making it possible for people affected by crisis to publicise complaints globally, with the potential to cause organisations significant reputational damage. These changes may, in part, explain the improvements seen in the performance of CHS-verified organisations on Commitment 5 since 2016.

5. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System.* ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

6. Ibid.

7. For a timeline, including major attempts to improve the performance of the sector, see Wall, I. (2018) *Alleviation of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Sexual Harassment and Abuse*. In: CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

8. See, among many examples: Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of the Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security (2009) *Guidelines on Setting Up a Community Based Complaints Mechanism Regarding Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and non-UN Personnel.* ECHA/ECEPS, Geneva; InterAction (2013) *PSEA Basics Training Guide – Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation & Abuse (PSEA)*. InterAction, Washington DC; IASC (2016) *Best Practice Guide Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms*. International Organization for Migration, Geneva; BOND (2019) *Safeguarding report-handling toolkit.* BOND, London.

COMMITMENT 05

Previous experience suggests that there may be a number of barriers to sustained improvement. A number of organisations spoke of the importance of resourcing complaint mechanisms, particularly over the longer term.

This is confirmed by the CHS Alliance study in 2019[9] on Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms of its members.

Systemic challenges over information management – related particularly to the confidentiality of information and to the use of information in decision-making – will also need to be addressed. And even some of the seemingly positive moves to improve systems may have unintended negative results. The actions of donors in cutting funding to organisations where abuse has occurred may create perverse incentives: some donors have indicated that they see an increased number of complaints as a negative indicator,[10] rather than an indicator that complaint systems may be working better.

Finally, it should be recognised that improved complaint mechanisms will not, in themselves, prevent poor performance, exploitation or abuse. These mechanisms are only one of a range of actions that need to be taken to improve performance and accountability in this area; better investigative tools and systems, and protection for whistleblowers are also important. The ultimate goal must not be to improve the complaint mechanisms, but to lessen the number of legitimate complaints.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to sustain and build on improvements, organisations should:

- Improve communications with people they work with and for;
- Improve information-management systems and decision processes, particularly with respect to confidentiality of information and the use of information in decision making;
- Clarify options for redress and sanction in response to complaints and use sanctions consistently;
- Work more closely with civil society partners and existing human rights and ombuds functions, to ensure the humanitarian system's complaint response has the right referral mechanisms to connect into local civil society;
- Ensure that partner organisations are aware of their obligations with respect to the design and implementation of these mechanisms, and that these organisations consistently meet obligations;
- Work to build programme- or system-wide complaint mechanisms;
- Ensure that the trustees of the organisation, or equivalent, understand their role in holding the organisation's management to account for acting on complaints;
- In addition, donors should consider the consequences of their funding decisions in this area, in an attempt to ensure that they incentivise the development of effective, functioning complaint mechanisms.

9. Thomas, M. (2019) *CHS Alliance Support to Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms*. CHS Alliance, Geneva.
10. Ibid.

"THE CHS PROVIDES AN ESTABLISHED TOOL FOR DRIVING CHANGE. IT DESCRIBES THE CONSISTENT STANDARDS OF QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY THAT ARE NEEDED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS. WHILE PROGRESS OVER ITS FIRST FIVE YEARS HAS BEEN MIXED, IT DOES PROVIDE AN ESTABLISHED AND AGREED FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURABLE CHANGE."

HAR 2020, section 5, page 83

"Only if we unite as a sector and listen to communities systematically, we will be able to fulfil our collective commitment to welcome and address complaints."

Alexandra Hileman & Mariska De Keersmaecker
Inter-Agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Team
IOM, Switzerland

PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION & ABUSE: WELCOMING AND ADDRESSING COMPLAINTS

Organisations today are receiving more complaints from communities than ever before, including complaints of SEA committed by staff. It is heartening to see an overall understanding from the aid community that this increase in reporting is not necessarily an indicator that SEA is more widespread, but that our complaint mechanisms are slowly getting better at welcoming complaints, and that individuals increasingly dare to come forward. Yet while global attitudes appear to be changing for the better, CHS Commitment 5 received a sobering overall score of 1.91 – the lowest score of all CHS Commitments and well below 'requirement is fulfilled.'

As a sector, we need to determine where we are falling short not only in our claim of willingness to receive and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct by our people, but also in instilling the perception within communities that our accountability systems truly are there to serve them. Recent years have seen improvement in our inward-facing commitments (policies and procedures) and the benefit of these improved accountability measures should not be dismissed. But the CHS Commitment 5 data leaves little mystery about our shortcomings in our outward-facing commitments: to consult meaningfully with communities, especially with an awareness of their rights and the expected behaviour of aid workers.[11]

One key factor holding us back from achieving Commitment 5 as it relates to SEA is a lack of coordination between organisations and between sectors. To properly handle complaints we need to advocate for, and create, broad accountability mechanisms so that a community member can bring an allegation to *any* complaint and feedback mechanism, and that the complaint will reach the concerned agency while the complainant receives the services they need.

Creating such systems to handle sensitive complaints requires ongoing collaboration between PSEA and GBV actors to promote accountability and provide support ('address' complaints), and AAP colleagues to ensure communities are empowered to report as they choose and receive messages about their rights in one voice ('welcome' complaints). To make complaints welcome and addressed, we need to prioritise linkages between AAP, PSEA, and GBV in the field.

Such integrated systems, coupled with ongoing efforts to improve policies and procedures, will allow complaint handling to be streamlined within the humanitarian architecture, and perhaps one day allow us to begin measuring the success of our collective efforts from a community perspective. There have been significant achievements in recent years in normalising and building systems we believe should be in place to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. We need now a means to learn if the end user – our 'clients' – believe they are welcome to come forward. To be truly meaningful that welcome must come from the whole humanitarian community. If efforts between sectors and organisations are unified we can build jointly from existing efforts – for instance from perception surveys by Ground Truth Solutions – to measure impact from the community's perspective, and ensure that the views of people affected by crisis are regularly acted upon in our efforts to handle complaints.

In sum, only if we unite as a sector and listen to communities systematically, we will be able to fulfil our collective Commitment to welcome and address complaints.

**Alexandra Hileman & Mariska De Keersmaecker
Inter-Agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation
and Abuse Team, IOM, Switzerland**

---

11.   Action 5.1 scores 1.68 and organizational responsibility 5.6 scores 1.56.

"Welcoming and addressing complaints is a vital part of maintaining the safety of the people we serve."

Asma Khader
Consultant & CEO, Solidarity Is Global Institute, Jordan

THE SECTOR MUST RESPOND TO COMPLAINTS TO KEEP WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE

Despite the heavy focus and hard work on this topic in recent years, CHS Commitment 5 – 'complaints are welcomed and addressed' – still scores well below what we, as a sector, need to achieve. The experience of the Solidarity Is Global Institute/ Jordan (SIGI/JO) paints a very similar picture to the CHS verification data. We know that much more needs to be done to get this right, especially when it comes to protecting women and girls.

SIGI/JO promotes women's rights and the full participation – politically, economically and socially – of women and girls in public life in Jordan. Over the last few years, we have put in a great deal of effort to address the issue of women's and girls' complaints. However, we still have a number of constraints to overcome to ensure that women and girls are protected from GBV, and more generally that their rights are respected, especially now in the unique context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During this particularly difficult and sensitive time, the government has been obliged to impose restrictions on movement as a precaution against the spread of Covid-19. As a consequence, we have sadly seen an increase in the number of complaints related to GBV. Indeed, according to the official national statistics, the incidents of GBV during the pandemic increased by at least 30 per cent. This is starkly illustrated by our own experience at the Effat Centre[12]. We usually come across an average of 650 cases per year; during the Covid-19 lockdown, however, we were asked for support for 800 cases of Violence Against Women (VAW) and GBV in just two months.

Our work is ordinarily constrained both by the absence of a proper judicial process and because victims are simply afraid to report incidents of abuse.

During the Covid-19 pandemic this effect was magnified. SIGI/JO also had to cope with the immediate closure of services and centres, the courts, local health clinics, human rights institutions, all of which were prevented from undertaking their invaluable work for both Jordanians and foreigners alike. This applied to those living in every part of Jordan, no matter who they were or where they lived. It was also even more challenging to communicate with the police than before.

Another crucial factor that cannot be overlooked was the reduced space – never great in the first place – in which local women's rights' CSOs and CBOs were obliged to implement their activities on the ground. Very complex procedures were also in place for social, legal and psychological counsellors to obtain permits to physically meet victims.

We can address complaints more effectively and better protect women's and girls' rights in Jordan through:

- Establishing a coordination body recognised by decision and policy makers, and responsible entities, to develop and implement adequate and sustainable strategies;
- Maintaining an adequate number of courts during emergency situations to ensure access to justice for everyone;
- Monitoring and evaluating actions over the development processes of public policies, procedures and regulations, to ensure their sensitivity towards, and focus on, gender issues and vulnerable groups.

Civil society organisations must be supported in their continuing endeavours to guarantee the safety and provision of basic needs for all. Welcoming and addressing complaints is therefore a vital part of maintaining the safety of the people we serve.

Asma Khader
Consultant & CEO, Solidarity Is Global Institute, Jordan

---

12. Specialised centre where we provide legal and psychosocial support and assistance for victims of GBV.

COMMITMENT 06

COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

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

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.

The Commitment to coordination and complementarity is, in 2020, the closest of all Nine CHS Commitments to being fulfilled. This reflects the substantial work that humanitarian organisations have undertaken to improve coordination over the past decade.
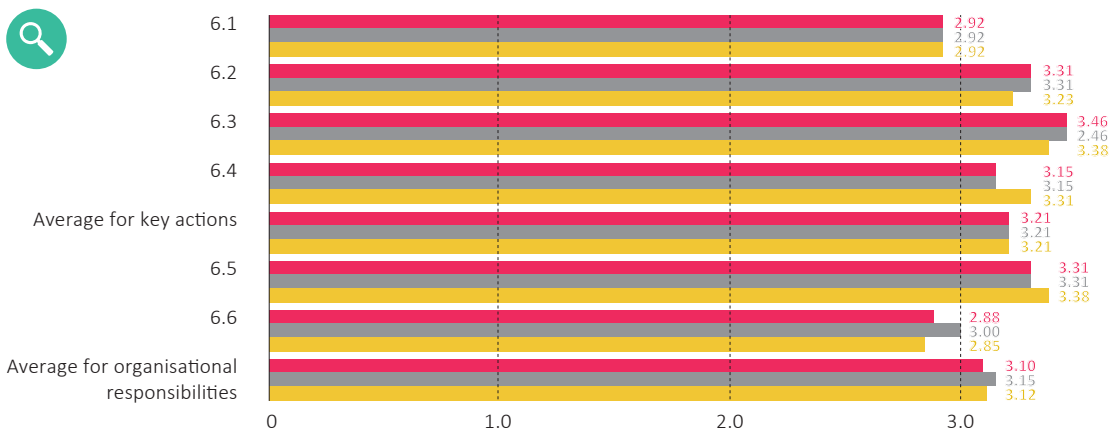
However, the CHS verification data records little progress over the past few years. This is a concern, because humanitarian responses are still far from being models of complementarity. Increased focus on areas such as cash and the humanitarian-development nexus, create new coordination challenges. The localisation agenda has shown how much work is required to recognise the contribution of local and national actors in humanitarian response, and to include them in the formal system.

FIGURE 15: COMMITMENT 6 – HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IS COORDINATED AND COMPLEMENTARY

- 6.1 — 2.80
- 6.2 — 3.04
- 6.3 — 3.05
- 6.4 — 2.89
- Average for key actions — 2.94
- 6.5 — 2.97
- 6.6 — 2.61
- Average for organisational responsibilities — 2.79

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 16: COMMITMENT 6 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

- 6.1 — 2.92 / 2.92 / 2.92
- 6.2 — 3.31 / 3.31 / 3.23
- 6.3 — 3.46 / 2.46 / 3.38
- 6.4 — 3.15 / 3.15 / 3.31
- Average for key actions — 3.21 / 3.21 / 3.21
- 6.5 — 3.31 / 3.31 / 3.38
- 6.6 — 2.88 / 3.00 / 2.85
- Average for organisational responsibilities — 3.10 / 3.15 / 3.12

■ Initial audit – Year 0 ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1 ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

0   1.0   2.0   3.0
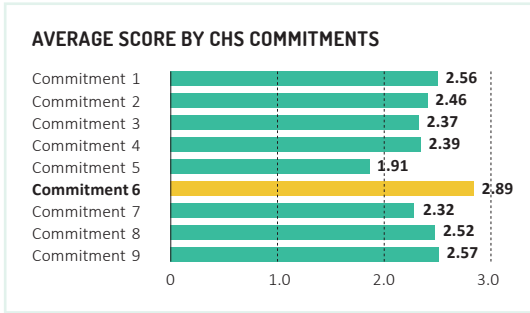
COMMITMENT 6 INDICATORS

Key Actions

6.1 Identify the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of different stakeholders[1].

6.2 Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities[2] and other humanitarian organisations.

6.3 Participate in relevant coordination bodies and collaborate with others in order to minimise demands on communities and maximise the coverage and service provision of the wider humanitarian effort.

6.4 Share necessary information with partners, coordination groups and other relevant actors through appropriate communication channels.

Organisational Responsibilities

6.5 Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles.

6.6 Work with partners is governed by clear and consistent agreements that respect each partner's mandate, obligations and independence, and recognises their respective constraints and commitments.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

The Commitment to coordinated and complementary aid was the highest scoring of all the CHS Commitments, although it fell short of being fulfilled across all the indicators (see figure 15).

However, it was also the Commitment that showed the least progress over time, with no meaningful change on the score for any indicator since the baseline assessment of the CHS-verified organisations started in 2016 (see figure 16).

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The indicators for this Commitment address: policy; information collection (assessing the presence and capacities of various stakeholders); establishing clear bilateral relationships; participation in multilateral coordination mechanisms; and sharing information. These indicators relate both to coordination between international actors and to coordination between international and national entities. Some may in practice apply more to coordination between internationals whilst others, particularly the indicator related to partnerships (indicator 6.6), to coordination between national and international actors (indicator 6.5). There is also one indicator that relates specifically to relations with national actors (indicator 6.2).

Policies are in place

In many ways, the scores on these indicators echo those of the other Commitments, with indicators for policy scoring highest. For Commitment 6, this reflects the fact that most organisations in the sector have committed to coordination – through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNHCR-led coordination systems – and through various agreements to support governments and civil societies affected by crisis[3].

---

1. Including local actors, humanitarian organisations, local authorities, private companies and other relevant groups.

2. Where authorities are a party to the conflict humanitarian actors should use their judgment vis-à-vis the independence of the action, keeping the interests of communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of their decision-making.

3. Including United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 46/182, and, more recently, initiatives such as the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change.

COMMITMENT
06

Information not always shared, despite coordination mechanisms

Participation in coordination mechanisms receives a high score (indicator 6.3): in fact, it is one of the very few areas across all of the Nine CHS Commitments where CHS-verified organisations fully meet expectations.

Reviews of formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms – particularly those at field level – have suggested that they work fairly well,[4] and the most recent State of the Humanitarian System report concluded that improvements in coordination had made a contribution to the increased effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.[5] But further improvement is still necessary. Many field staff find coordination overly time consuming,[6] and the existing systems are not well adapted to the coordination of cross-sectoral activities, such as cash programming,[7] or to combining humanitarian and development coordination. In the State of the System report, only 33 per cent of respondents were positive about attempts at humanitarian-development coordination.[8]

In the CHS verification data, sharing information (indicator 6.4) does slightly less well than participation in coordination mechanisms (indicator 6.3). This is significant, as information exchange is the foundation of the formal coordination system and is also a key element of the ever-growing number of humanitarian platforms and networks. However, in a system where organisations compete for donor funding, there can be strong disincentives to sharing information with other organisations.[9] Analysing and formatting information for circulation can also be time consuming, and further draws down on scarce information-management resources. There may also be security reasons for not sharing information.[10]

TEARFUND STORY OF CHANGE

The experience of Tearfund, which works through more than 250 partner organisations and coordinates with local government, church and Civil Society Organisations demonstrates how CHS certification can lead to fresh thinking and direct improvements. Undertaking the CHS certification audit gave the organisation's leaders a new perspective on coordination – which can take place outside formal mechanisms – and helped them take it to a new level. For example, Tearfund recently ran an accountability pilot in which partner organisations and their field offices were encouraged to collect and share non-sensitive feedback from the communities where they worked. Sharing this information among partners working on similar projects allowed them to identify common trends, anticipate challenges and learn from each other. The pilot project had a dual purpose: it strengthened coordination while also boosting accountability to communities and people affected by crisis across a number of organisations.

Limited understanding of partner capacities

The indicator for information on partners and other stakeholders (indicator 6.1) relatively poorly. CHS verification reports suggested that, in particular, organisations do not routinely identify the capacities of their partners, which limits their understanding of how they can best complement each other's skills.

4.   Knox Clarke, P., Campbell, L. (2015) *Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London; Knox Clarke, P., Campbell, L. (2016) *Improving Humanitarian Coordination*. ALNAP Working Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

5.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System, 2018*. ALNAP/ODI, London.

6.   In a survey for the ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System report, 46 per cent of respondents said that the time cost of participation in coordination mechanisms outweighed the benefits: ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

7.   Steets, J., Ruppert, L. (2016) *Cash Coordination in Humanitarian Contexts*. GPPI/CaLP, Berlin.

8.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

9.   Sanderson, D. (2019) Coordination in Urban Humanitarian Response. *Progress in Disaster Science*. Vol 1, pp. 1-4.

10. Knox Clarke, Campbell, L. (2016) *Improving Humanitarian Coordination*. ALNAP Working Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

In research on humanitarian organisations outside the CHS verification reports, international actors have been criticised for having too narrow a view of the capacities required in a response, and for not looking beyond traditional boundaries to identify potential partners.[11]

Mixed results for coordination between national and local authorities and civil society

The most surprising result relates to indicator 6.2, 'Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other humanitarian organisations.' The score on the indicator is high: CHS-verified organisations appear to be fully meeting expectations, even though this result does not tally with discussions in the humanitarian sector on localisation. It may reflect the fact that the indicator specifies complementary work with national and local authorities, rather than national and local civil society and NGO groups. The most recent State of the System report[12] concluded that, "While relationships between international actors and the governments of crisis-affected countries vary significantly from one situation to another", there had been a "general trend of improving relationships", and that many government interviewees suggested that they had good relationships with international actors. The report was less positive about the relationships between international actors and national civil society, however. The positive score on this indicator may also reflect the fact that the CHS-verified organisations are not necessarily a representative cross section of the humanitarian system, and are doing better in this area than the system as a whole.

The other area that touches on localisation is the indicator related to partnerships (6.6). While there are many international partnerships in the sector, the majority of humanitarian partnerships are probably between international agencies and local or national 'implementing partners', with the national actors delivering humanitarian goods and providing services on the ground. This indicator was the lowest scoring of all of those related to coordination, and this may reflect broader challenges around current attempts to 'localise' humanitarian action.

Of course, partnerships between international and national actors are not the only possible form of localisation. Many would argue that 'real' localisation requires national and local bodies to be funded directly, without there being any form of international organisation as intermediary or decision partner.[13] At the same time, much of the discussion around localisation has focused on improving the quality of partnership relationships, and there appears to be general agreement that more work is required. Only 11 per cent of national organisations polled by Ground Truth Solutions said that they receive enough support from their international counterparts;[14] in contrast, 32 per cent of international organisation representatives felt that they gave enough support. This support comes in a number of ways. With respect to financial support, only a minority of Grand Bargain signatories have met the 25 per cent benchmark for funding to local and national responders[15] although over 90 per cent of the smaller Charter for Change group have met the lower 20 per cent target.[16] There are also important unaddressed questions around the quality of the funding. Local organisations are much less likely to receive unrestricted funding, and so bear a greater risk around unexpected delays, and find it harder to meet reporting and other requirements.[17] Progress on building capacity has, if anything, been slower: fewer than 65 per cent of Charter for Change signatories have met targets. CHS verification reports pointed, in particular, to the difficulty of making long-term investments in capacity building when international actors were themselves reliant on short-term funding.

11. Barbelet, V. (2019) *Rethinking Capacity and Complementarity for a More Local Humanitarian Action*. London, HPG/ODI.

12. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System.* ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

13. NEAR's *Grand Bargain Statement #1.* Available at: http://near.ngo/home/workdetail?id=6. Accessed on 16/04/20.

14. Ground Truth Solutions (2019) *Briefing Note Grand Bargain: Field Perspectives 2018.* Ground Truth Solutions/OECD, Vienna.

15. Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London. In 2020, nine signatories reported that they had done so. See Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

16. Charter for Change (2019) *From Commitments to Action Progress Report 2018-2019*. Charter for Change, London.

17. Charter for Change (2019) *From Commitments to Action Progress Report 2018-2019*. Charter for Change, London; Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

COMMITMENT 06

✓ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

While organisations scored well on this Commitment, there is still much work to be done. Coordination mechanisms must be adapted to a changing humanitarian environment and the current system must be shifted away from international dominance, with full recognition of the contributions of both national and local actors.

Organisations can make progress by:

- Experimenting with ways to adapt existing coordination mechanisms to address new coordination challenges, such as the Nexus and the use of cash; documenting and sharing lessons on what works;

- Clarifying mutual expectations around coordination, in bilateral partnerships and multilateral relationships. There is often an expectation that coordination means working on a single, joint project (rather than working on related but separate projects in parallel), but this is not always realistic. Agreeing on the expected 'level' of coordination can make a difference to the success of the activity;[18]

- Wherever possible, using common, system-wide approaches, standards and information formats to make working together easier and more efficient. Coordination is not just about structures, but also about the way different organisations work;

- Undertaking capacity assessments, involving local people to get a better sense of the capacities available to improve the humanitarian response: recognising that many of the capacities required for effective response do not fall into the 'traditional' humanitarian model;[19]

- Ensuring that local partners receive media attention, and that the importance of national actors is underlined in external communications;[20]

- Ensuring that the recruitment efforts of international organisations do not undermine the capacity of local and national organisations;[21]

- Allowing local and national organisations more space to set the agenda and define priorities around localisation: discussions should not necessarily focus on the relation between international and national actors, but be led by the priorities of national actors themselves;[22]

- Co-design long-term, mutual capacity-strengthening processes, that aim to enhance the ability of both international and local actors to respond and work together over time.

In addition, donors should:

- Ensure that longer-term funding is available for capacity strengthening, and that – at the very least – organisations with demonstrable capacity receive funding for necessary overheads irrespective of whether they are international, national or local. Research has shown that there is no difference in the quality of the response (as perceived by people affected by crisis) between international and national organisations.[23]

18. Knox Clarke, P., Campbell, L. (2015) *Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

19. OXFAM (2018) *Localization in Aid – Why Isn't It Happening? What to Do About It?*. Blog article; Bryant, J. (2019) *Mapping Local Capacities and Support for More Effective Humanitarian Responses*. Humanitarian Policy Group/ODI, London.

20. As recommended by the Charter for Change.

21. As recommended by the Charter for Change.

22. See Austin, L., Sokpoh, B. G. (2018) Inclusive Humanitarian Action, In: CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

23. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

"**PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS; EFFECTIVE, SAFE AND RESPONSIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT; INCREASED FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTIVENESS. ADDRESSING THESE THREE THEMES… WOULD HAVE A MULTIPLIER EFFECT AND PROVIDE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN A WIDE RANGE OF AREAS.**"

HAR 2020, section 4, page 80

"The involvement of those affected is paramount and must be transparent. When we bring everyone together, we see the gaps much more clearly."

Najat Rochdi

Former Director of Peer to Peer, OCHA, Switzerland

Deputy Special Coordinator for UNSCOL, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Lebanon

HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION: RECOGNISING OUR ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE NEED TO KEEP IMPROVING

As a former Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), I have often thought about how to best deliver results to those we as a sector serve. Coordination and complementarity is one such way. Commitment 6, which is close to my heart, is a way for us to deliver results more effectively, despite continuing gaps.

As a system, we have achieved a lot on the ground. At national level, things are generally well thought through and clusters work well together. We see open communication between HCs and clusters. This starts, of course, with the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) itself and the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) both of which require working together cohesively with partners, including with people affected by crisis.

Working well together leads to joint needs' analyses that require processing information and crafting a response plan together. This creates a great team dynamic. However, working well together at a national level does not always translate into a well-functioning system locally, as gaps in communication between the capital and the local level are often prevalent.

Effective coordination depends on cluster leads at national and local levels, both in terms of human resources and the information available to them. This is an area for further exploration and requires national capacity-strenghening.

In my experience, effective coordination architecture must include nationals with the right understanding, guided by humanitarian principles. Localisation must go beyond the transfer of risk to genuine co-creation, enabling a much more robust AAP. The involvement of those affected is paramount and must be transparent. When we bring everyone together, we see the gaps much more clearly.

Another challenge is the standardisation of data. How partners collect data can vary widely, with duplication of effort often creating inconsistencies that impact the quality of HNOs and HRPs. Better quality and consistency of data means a better understanding of needs.

We must improve how we measure the quality of data to make responsible and informed decisions. We need better data through standardised approaches, which is where CHS verification data is a game changer. Examining how we are performing as a collective, all using the same framework, makes a real difference.

All of this sits very much on the shoulders of the HCs, with the support of OCHA. The personal qualities of the HC are vital – they have to be open and willing to bring everyone to the table with a strategy and vision.

These lessons, including the empowerment of humanitarian leaders, coming together as a humanitarian community, and innovating to better serve and support the most vulnerable, now informs how we respond to Covid-19.

While coordination is key to good management, we must continue to challenge ourselves as humanitarian leaders on ways to further improve the lives of those we serve.

Najat Rochdi

Former Director of Peer to Peer, OCHA, Switzerland

Deputy Special Coordinator for UNSCOL, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Lebanon

"I am convinced that increased localisation of humanitarian action is vital to achieve Commitment 6."

Janemary Ruhundwa
Executive Director, DIGNITY Kwanza, Tanzania

TRUE PARTNERSHIP NEEDS TO FULLY INTEGRATE NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INTO HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS

DIGNITY Kwanza is a national NGO in Tanzania that promotes and safeguards the human dignity of the marginalised and vulnerable for the attainment of social and economic development. Through its legal aid, community empowerment and support, and advocacy programmes, DIGNITY Kwanza works with refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced populations.

While demonstrating that the Commitment is not yet fulfilled, the CHS verification data on Commitment 6 does indicate some systematic efforts towards meeting its requirements. There has been a reduction in the score for Commitment 6 since 2018, when it was the only one fully met. Despite this, the Commitment has continued to fare better than some others. Experience on the ground suggests that this high score could be attributed to coordination at the organisational level having become more streamlined, as it is generally governed by contracts and policies that are regularly monitored. This makes it relatively easier, and sometimes mandatory, for the organisations and their staff to adhere to existing coordination mechanisms.

However, despite being the Commitment most adhered to, fulfilment of Commitment 6 has not yet been achieved. The factors that affect the sector's overall general performance are also the ones likely to prevent the achievement of this and other Commitments. One such factor is the context of the sector's operations. The emergency context limits better coordination and the mapping of local capacities in time to ensure complementarity early enough. Irregular, insufficient, and short-term funding, especially to local organisations, creates coordination challenges even where coordination mechanisms already exist. With inadequate funding comes inadequate staffing.

Consequently, one employee may hold several roles in the organisation, affecting not only their performance but their availability to participate in coordination bodies. Additionally – and paradoxically – a perceived challenge of non-local organisations needing to find better ways of working with local actors is another barrier to enhancing the capacity of these local actors. Instead, organisations with greater financial muscle compete with, and eventually replace, the local actors.

I am convinced that increased localisation of humanitarian action is vital to achieve this Commitment. True partnership allows for better coordination, recognition and the complementing of the roles and efforts of local actors, including the very people affected by crisis. More stable funding to local actors would underpin the consistency of their response, which would in turn produce better planning and coordination. If the capacity of local actors is to be enhanced, it is essential not only to implement projects, but also to adhere to this and the other eight CHS Commitments.

Janemary Ruhundwa
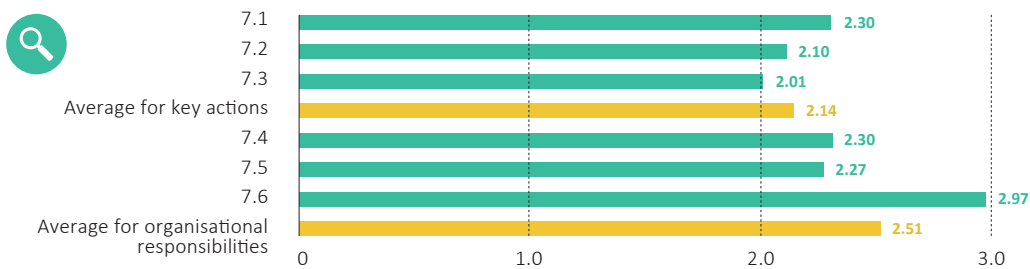**Executive Director, DIGNITY Kwanza, Tanzania**

07

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE AND IMPROVING

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

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.
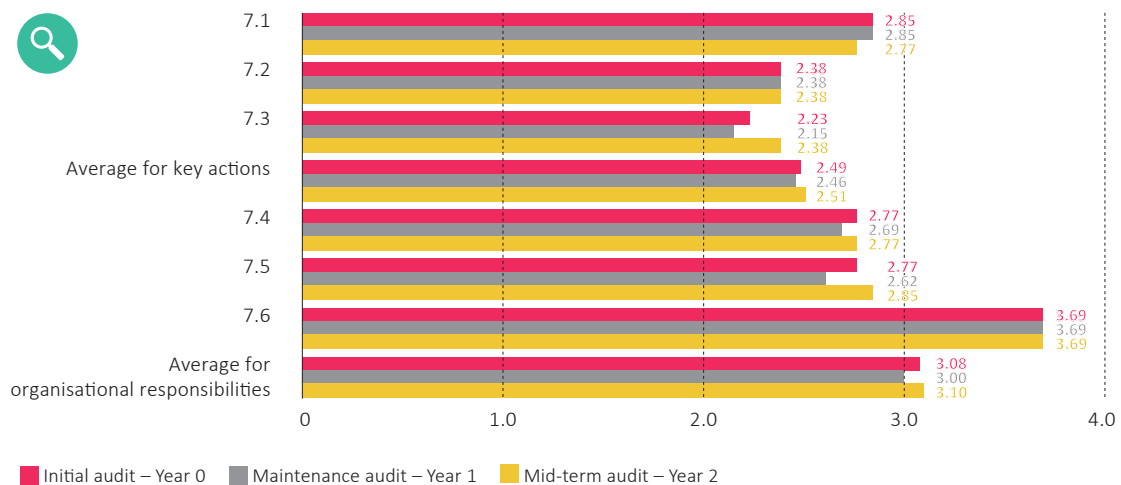
While there are many examples of good practice across the humanitarian system, as a whole the system remains poor at learning from experience. The problem relates partly to skills, partly to funding and partly to the absence of a learning culture throughout the sector.

FIGURE 17: COMMITMENT 7 – HUMANITARIAN ACTORS CONTINUOUSLY LEARN AND IMPROVE

	Value
7.1	2.30
7.2	2.10
7.3	2.01
Average for key actions	2.14
7.4	2.30
7.5	2.27
7.6	2.97
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.51

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 18: COMMITMENT 7 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
7.1	2.85	2.85	2.77
7.2	2.38	2.38	2.38
7.3	2.23	2.15	2.38
Average for key actions	2.49	2.46	2.51
7.4	2.77	2.69	2.77
7.5	2.77	2.62	2.85
7.6	3.69	3.69	3.69
Average for organisational responsibilities	3.08	3.00	3.10

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57
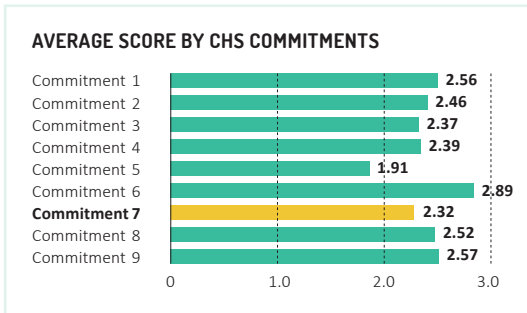
COMMITMENT 7 INDICATORS

Key Actions

7.1 Draw on lessons learnt and prior experience when designing programmes.

7.2 Learn, innovate and implement changes on the basis of monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints.

7.3 Share learning and innovation internally, with communities and people affected by crisis, and with other stakeholders.

Organisational Responsibilities

7.4 Evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices.

7.5 Mechanisms exist to record knowledge and experience, and make it accessible throughout the organisation.

7.6 The organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response amongst peers and within the sector.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

This Commitment scored poorly, coming eighth out of Nine Commitments (see figure 17). There was also very little progress shown in the scores between 2016 and 2019 (see figure 18).

The poor performance of CHS-verified organisations in monitoring and learning appears to be part of a larger problem in the humanitarian system. The 2018 State of the Humanitarian System report suggested that monitoring in the sector was "very weak"[1]: only 39 per cent of the practitioners surveyed for the report were positive about the use of M&E to improve programmes in their organisations.

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

The indicators for this Commitment require that: actions should be based in organisational policy; mechanisms should be established to record knowledge and made available for learning;

this knowledge and information is then used in the design of new projects, and in the iterative redesign of new ones; knowledge should be shared with stakeholders, particularly communities and people affected by crisis, and with other humanitarian agencies.

Many organisations are without a policy foundation to support learning

Unusually, compared to other Commitments, the score for the policy indicators 7.4 and 7.5 was relatively low. With most Commitments, challenges relate more to the implementation of policy – or to the gap between actions and the related policies — than to an outright absence of policy.

Systems to capture learning are often weak

Several CHS verification reports established that organisations did not have the requisite systems to ensure that information or learning is captured, analysed and consolidated. A key issue was a lack of resources to be able to build effective systems.

---

1. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

COMMITMENT 07

Monitoring and learning systems rely on skills and funding, and, if they are to work, need to continue over time. In CHS verification reports and in other work on humanitarian M&E, staff have reported that these activities are often the first to be cut when cost savings have to be found.[2]

However, research on the humanitarian system, as well as CHS verification reports[3], suggest that funding is not the only challenge. Even where mechanisms to capture learning exist, the methods they use are not always rigorous, and so the information they produce can be unreliable.[4] Recognising this, some organisations have made significant investments in improving the quality of monitoring, learning and evaluation functions over the past decade.[5] Systems are also often piecemeal. They tend to be project or country specific, making it hard for an organisation to gather and collate information from across numerous programmes.[6]

Moreover, the information that is collected can also be irrelevant to the needs of key users. There are a wide variety of measurable elements in any humanitarian activity: expenditure; timing; delivery; the short-term results of the activity on people affected by crisis; the longer-term impact on society and the economy.

It is impractical to expect all of this information to be captured by a single mechanism, and so agencies make choices on what they will collect.[7] In practice, what is collected is very often the information required by the donors: on expenditure, and on the delivery of agreed outputs.[8] Information on the true impact of a programme,[9] which would be of good use for the

design of future programmes or for revising an existing intervention, is much less commonly considered.[10]

Again, this is an area where some humanitarian organisations have done a good deal of work, and it has been a focus of the revised Humanitarian Programme Cycle[11]. But overall, many humanitarian organisations, including CHS-verified organisations, still fail to collect information about, or understand, the results of many of their activities.

Various factors lead to poor use of experience in programme design

Given these challenges, it is not surprising that the scores for the two indicators (indicators 7.1 and 7.2) on using lessons in programme design and on implementing changes on the basis of monitoring were both fairly poor. It is not possible to ascertain if the information needed either remains uncollected, or is of poor quality. But, as we have seen elsewhere, the constraints to using information go beyond a simple lack of information (Commitments 1, 3, and 4). Even where information is successfully collected, it is often not disseminated effectively within the organisation.

The score for the indicator for sharing internal learning (indicator 7.3) was the lowest of all the indicators for this Commitment, and this was an area that many CHS verification reports made clear was difficult to implement.

---

2. Warner, A., T. (2017) *What Is Monitoring in Humanitarian Action? Describing Practice and Identifying Challenges*. ALNAP Scoping Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

3. Many of these challenges will be familiar to the reader from Commitment 2.

4. Knox Clarke, P., Darcy, J. (2014) *Insufficient Evidence? The Quality and Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Action*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

5. Ibid; Warner, A, T. (2017) *What is Monitoring in Humanitarian Action? Describing Practice and Identifying Challenges.* ALNAP Scoping Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

6. Dillon, N., Sundberg, A. (2019) *Back to the Drawing Board: How to Improve Monitoring of Outcomes.* ALNAP Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

7. Ibid.

8. Warner, A, T. (2017) *What Is Monitoring in Humanitarian Action? Describing Practice and Identifying Challenges.* ALNAP Scoping Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI. This orientation is likely to continue: despite commitments in the Grand Bargain, donor reporting requirements are becoming more stringent. See: Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

9. Including, as we have seen, feedback information.

10. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System.* ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London; ALNAP (2015) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London. Knox Clarke, P., Campbell, L. (2016) *Improving Humanitarian Coordination*. ALNAP Working Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

11. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space

ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLD-WIDE STORY OF CHANGE

Islamic Relief Worldwide has taken a proactive approach to these challenges as result of the CHS certification process. The organisation has instituted systematic learning registers for all their country offices, which ensures that information is captured in a broadly similar way. This information is then shared through communities of practice and online platforms. During the Covid-19 crisis, the organisation used Zoom meetings to share best practice between country teams and to provide technical briefings. These were supported by guidance and training materials made available on an online platform.

Ultimately, though, the challenge of learning and improving may come down to the culture of the organisation. It can be technically difficult and expensive to build effective monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems, but, as the scattered efforts of many individual organisations have shown, both within and outside the CHS verification reports, it is not impossible.[12] That many agencies have not even established policies to support organisational learning suggests that, in much of the sector, this area is not a priority. A culture of learning requires an openness to admit failure,[13] a challenging exercise to undertake in an environment in which organisations are competing over funding.

One route forward may lie in common action. The indicator for contributing to learning across the sector (indicator 7.6) received a high score and was the only part of this Commitment for which organisations almost fulfilled the requirement .

An inference could be that CHS-verified organisations seem to be better at sharing learning with each other than they are at sharing learning among their own staff. It may also suggest a worrying disconnection between operational staff – who are collecting the information and designing the programmes, but doing so in isolation – and headquarters and policy staff, who are networking and sharing information with one another across the many platforms that have come into existence during the last five years.

But there is also a more positive interpretation. A number of the more significant changes in the humanitarian system have come about through interagency platforms.[14] These magnified the efforts of those scattered across a number of organisations attempting to change attitudes across the sector as a whole. It may be that sectoral learning leads, rather than follows, learning in individual organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

A number of organisations have made significant progress in this area. Others should follow them by:

- Ensuring that the design of M&E activities is an integral part of project design, rather than being 'bolted on' when the design is completed;

- Ensuring that decision-makers clarify the information that they need from MEAL systems, so that the systems can be designed to provide this information and do more than just donor reporting;

- Similarly, ensuring that decision-makers are involved to a degree in the analysis of information. This is often the exclusive preserve of M&E staff, and means that knowledge and information become 'siloed' in the MEAL department of the organisation;

- Considering whether programme and country-level MEAL systems can be aligned to allow a degree of organisation-wide analysis and learning;

- Making decision processes explicit, and ensuring that there are steps that require information to become an integral part of those processes.

12. Warner, A, T. (2017) *What Is Monitoring in Humanitarian Action? Describing Practice and Identifying Challenges*. ALNAP Scoping Paper. ALNAP/ODI, London.

13. Ramalingam, B. Wild, L., Buffardi, A. (2019) *Making Adaptive Rigour Work: Principles and Practices for Strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management*. ODI, London.

14. Knox Clarke, P. (2017) *Transforming Change*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

"The onus is on humanitarian actors and the sector at large to innovate. This is a shared responsibility, and an enabling culture and functioning ecosystem needs to be collaboratively built."

Anna Skeels

Head of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), Elrha, United Kingdom

LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

Humanitarian actors must continuously learn and improve. This is imperative. Faced with numerous, complex and protracted emergencies, the sector can no longer simply rely on the status quo.

People affected by humanitarian crises, the 'users' of humanitarian 'services', deserve better. As users of services in our own lives, we can – and often do – have high expectations, and we trust that these will be met. Such expectation and trust must be our aspiration for the users in the humanitarian system.

Commitment 7 includes a strong focus on innovation as a means to learn and improve. For Elrha, humanitarian innovation is essential for effective humanitarian response. We believe that through supporting the generation of new, tested solutions that are proven to work, we can make progress in tackling the greatest humanitarian challenges. For us, humanitarian innovation is not about novelty or the introduction of 'shiny, new things' but a structured and iterative process that identifies, adapts and shares ideas for improving humanitarian action.

The Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities for Commitment 7 align well with Elrha's approach to humanitarian innovation:

- The onus is on humanitarian actors and the sector at large to innovate. This is a shared responsibility, and an enabling culture and functioning ecosystem needs to be collaboratively built, one that is inclusive and diverse. It must allow for innovation by – not just for – service users.
- The importance given to innovation that is evidence based. This needs to respond to top-priority challenges, to be targeted where it is needed most and to generate rigorous evidence on the improvements it brings for its users.

- Highlighting dissemination as being vital for innovation. We need to support an end-to-end approach to humanitarian innovation and ensure that promising innovations and the learning they generate (even if they 'fail') are shared.

The humanitarian innovation agenda has to date been dominated by powerful 'northern' actors within the formal humanitarian system, including Elrha and our Humanitarian Innovation Fund. This presents barriers to many locally driven innovations. We know the critical contribution that local organisations and communities can play in generating effective humanitarian innovation and wholeheartedly support efforts where this is locally led. The work of the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), a network of more than 50 members including national NGOs from 20 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, is a strong case in point. ADRRN has a strategic focus on grassroots innovation, the Regional Innovation Forum and the Innovation Hub. We are proud to be working in partnership with them to bring together local actors and to give them the time and space for innovation.

We are not yet as a sector where we need to be with CHS Commitment 7 and, by extension, with humanitarian innovation. But progress is being made.

Often, we need a new way to think before we can work out a new way to be and the humanitarian innovation agenda is evolving and developing all the time. We need to challenge ourselves as to who is, and should be, part of this movement and conversation: this would show great promise for performance against Commitment 7.

Anna Skeels
Head of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), Elrha, United Kingdom

"In Chad, [we've] incorporated community perception indicators into monitoring the HRP. The responses can make uncomfortable reading, yet have prompted change, better communication and more listening."

Belinda Holdsworth
Head of Office, OCHA, Chad

FAIL FAST, WATCH AND LEARN: HOW HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS CAN CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE?

My first reaction to the score for Commitment 7 as one of the lowest was, honestly, surprise. I feel those of us working in the humanitarian sector should expect to score better on learning from experience and reflection. After all, we all take part in numerous lessons learnt exercises, attend numerous after-action reviews, and input into highly-detailed M&E reports.

A closer examination of the scores for the individual indicators that make up Commitment 7, however, perhaps shows why we are unable to see the results of our efforts.

Take, for example, Key Action 7.1. 'draw on lessons learnt and prior experience when designing programmes'. Aid organisations certainly carry out this action, but when? All too often, I think, far too late.

Most of the time we do this many months after start of the programme. Exercises are hampered by staff turnover. We're unwilling to change or innovate if that raises costs and increases staffing needs, particularly in a resource-poor environment. It's quicker, and easier, to stick with what we already know.

How do we overcome these challenges? I think we need a lighter touch involving shorter M&E cycles, more agile processes, and a renewed focus on how to apply learning. There needs to be light monitoring and light feedback, with critical evaluation of the services soon after the intervention. We need to 'course correct' when it's still useful for the programme.

We must be able to advertise our failures, and not just admit to them in 'safe spaces'. The disincentives, and penalties, for discussing mistakes are very high in our sector. Competition for resources and increased partner scrutiny make low-key course correction approaches very appealing. Yet if we don't highlight what goes wrong as well as what works well we miss the chance to prevent others making the same mistakes.

We should also reframe the way we think about learning and reflection. Who produces the learning and who 'receives' it? The wording itself of Key Action 7.3 emphasizes our 'sharing learning and innovation internally', rather than learning from others. People and communities also innovate and adapt, and usually much better and faster than we do.

We need to watch and learn more and then support such community innovations. I too rarely see M&E reports that focus on how crisis-affected communities adapt without humanitarian assistance, and how we adapted our programmes in response.

Are we prompting the right reflections, and are we asking the right people to create learning? What about the people who don't tell us to our face what we're doing wrong? In Chad, the HCT has worked with Ground Truth Solutions and the CHS Alliance to incorporate community perception indicators into the monitoring framework for the Humanitarian Response Plan. Data collected from periodic surveys in three regions prompts discussion in the HCT and clusters on how to evolve and adapt. The responses sometimes make uncomfortable reading, yet have prompted change, better communication and more listening.

Covid-19 has laid bare what we as a sector need to do to fully meet Commitment 7. The crisis has challenged us, but it has also been a spur to action and allowed us to fail fast, to share innovation and to learn from communities. We have had no option but to adapt quickly. I sincerely hope I hear more about all your failures in the future!

Belinda Holdsworth
Head of Office, OCHA, Chad

COMPETENT, WELL-MANAGED AND SUPPORTED STAFF

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

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

The growth and increasing complexity of humanitarian environments makes it challenging to ensure that enough staff, with the right skills, are available in all cases.
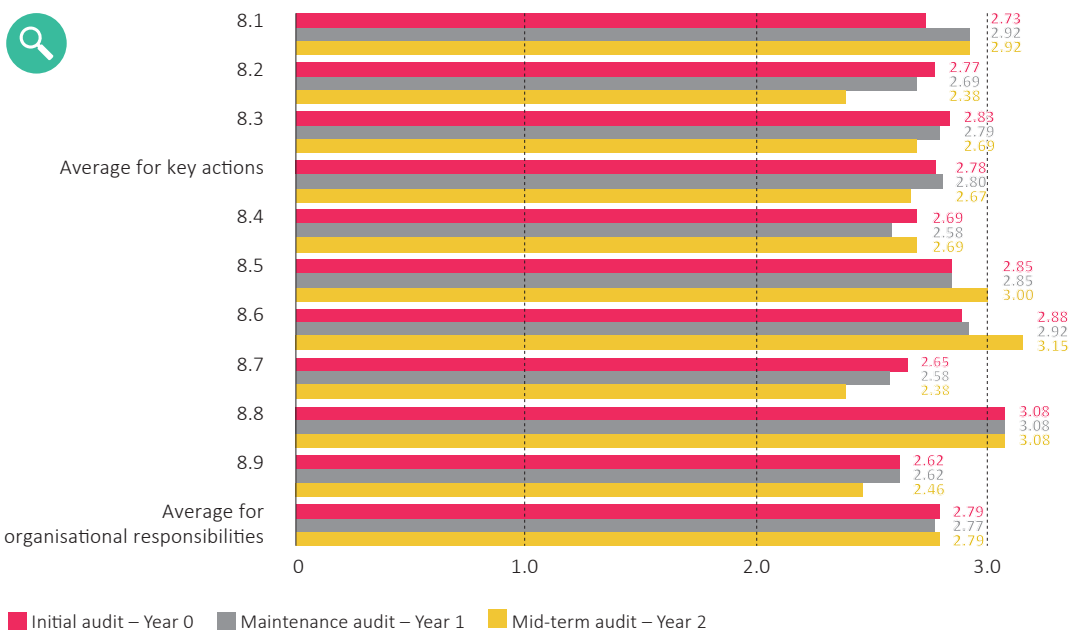
Efforts to secure the safety and well-being of staff are underway, but in all areas – skills' building, security and prevention of abuse – consistent attention has not yet been paid to the needs of nationally recruited staff and, particularly, to the staff of partner agencies.

FIGURE 19: COMMITMENT 8 – STAFF ARE SUPPORTED TO DO THEIR JOB EFFECTIVELY, AND ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND EQUITABLY

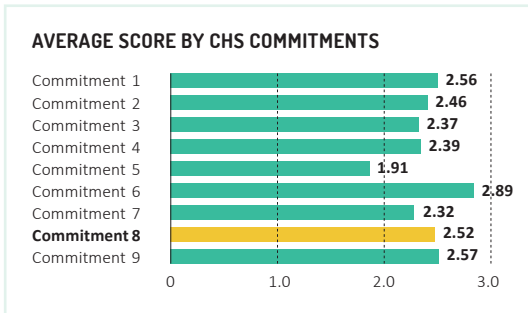|	Value
8.1	2.66
8.2	2.22
8.3	2.43
Average for key actions	2.44
8.4	2.35
8.5	2.78
8.6	2.71
8.7	2.58
8.8	2.58
8.9	2.41
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.61

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 20: COMMITMENT 8 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
8.1	2.73	2.92	2.92
8.2	2.77	2.69	2.38
8.3	2.83	2.79	2.69
Average for key actions	2.78	2.80	2.67
8.4	2.69	2.58	2.69
8.5	2.85	2.85	3.00
8.6	2.88	2.92	3.15
8.7	2.65	2.58	2.38
8.8	3.08	3.08	3.08
8.9	2.62	2.62	2.46
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.79	2.77	2.79

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment	Score
Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

COMMITMENT 8 INDICATORS

Key Actions

8.1 Staff work according to the mandate and values of the organisation and to agreed objectives and performance standards.

8.2 Staff adhere to the policies that are relevant to them and understand the consequences of not adhering to them.

8.3 Staff develop and use the necessary personal, technical and management competencies to fulfil their role and understand how the organisation can support them to do this.

Organisational Responsibilities

8.4 The organisation has the management and staff capacity and capability to deliver its programmes.

8.5 Staff policies and procedures are fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and compliant with local employment law.

8.6 Job descriptions, work objectives and feedback processes are in place so that staff have a clear understanding of what is required of them.

8.7 A code of conduct is in place that establishes, at a minimum, the obligation of staff not to exploit, abuse or otherwise discriminate against people.

8.8 Policies are in place to support staff to improve their skills and competencies.

8.9 Policies are in place for the security and the wellbeing of staff.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

People are central to achieving the Standard. To fulfil all Nine Commitments, organisations must support staff and volunteers to do their jobs effectively and treat them fairly and equitably.

The scores for Commitment 8 place it in the middle of the Commitment table, with organisations making fair attempts to meet it (see figures 19 and 20). It is positive that humanitarian organisations generally have the values, policies, and codes of conduct in place to manage, develop and protect people working or volunteering for them. However, implementation of these policies is inconsistent and this risks the entire humanitarian endeavour. If people are not supported or treated fairly, they cannot deliver meaningful, high quality aid. Staff must be well to serve well.

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

As with all the Commitments, there are a number of indicators that refer to the responsibilities of the organisation: to ensure that there are enough staff in place with relevant skills; that these staff are provided with a clear understanding of their roles and objectives; and are given opportunities to improve their skills.

Organisations should ensure that staff policies are fair and non-discriminatory, and that specific policies exist for security and well-being. Beyond this, in order to fulfil the Commitment, the onus is on staff to work to the agreed objectives, follow organisational policy and take advantage of professional development opportunities.

In general, the indicators for organisational responsibilities scored slightly better than those related to staff behavior, although there were opportunities for improvement in both areas.

COMMITMENT
08

Challenges remain to ensure skilled staff are in place

The indicator for ensuring that staff capacity was in place to deliver programmes effectively (indicator 8.4) scored relatively poorly. This may reflect a number of factors. Since 2015, expenditure in the sector has been growing more quickly than staffing, which may suggest that there are fewer staff to do the same amount of work.[1] Increased engagement in middle income and urban environments also calls for new skill sets, which existing staff may not have. CHS verification reports suggest that organisations are making systematic efforts to ensure that staff have the relevant skills – and the relevant indicator 8.8 for this scored better – but the CHS-verified organisations also reported a number of constraints.

As ever, one of these was resourcing and not having sufficient funds to fully support skills development. This was particularly constraining when it came to making learning opportunities available in numerous languages. This is a necessary consideration, given that around 93 per cent of humanitarian staff are locally recruited, and may learn more effectively in their own language. A second constraint was the lack of an up-to-date understanding of what capacities are required on the ground, and so there was a failure both to recruit the right people and to provide the right training opportunities. Finally, high staff turnover made it difficult to ensure that staff with the right skills were in post, a challenge that has been reported elsewhere.[2]

Policy frameworks still omit core issues

The highest scoring indicator related to the quality of policies: the fact that they were fair, transparent and non-discriminatory (indicator 8.5). However, there appeared to be a gap when it came to policies concerning security and well-being (indicator 8.9), which scored lower. Adherence to policies by staff (indicator 8.2) scored lower still. This pattern – of organisations putting policies in place, but these policies being only partially or patchily implemented – recurs throughout the Commitments.

With respect, specifically, to HR policies, and safety and well-being in particular, some CHS-verified organisations reported that they had struggled to make the investments in security and well-being mechanisms that the policies required. Provision of support to nationally recruited staff, the overwhelming bulk of the workforce, was noted as being particularly irregular.

This point is echoed in reports from outside the CHS verification reports. These suggest that, while there has been an increase in the attention given to staff security, this has largely occurred within international organisations.[3] Nationally recruited staff of these organisations have seen improvements in the availability of support, but the staff of partner organisations, who are often working in the most insecure environments, have not. It is certainly the case that the number of fatalities among aid workers has continued to rise more or less in proportion with the increase in the total numbers of aid workers, despite the investments that have been made to date.[4]

People working in the aid sector often experience poor mental health, and are at risk of burnout and high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[5]. Indicator 8.9 shows efforts are being made to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of staff by enacting duties of care, but more needs to be done.

PSEA issues still not fully addressed

The ability for humanitarian actors to work with dignity in an environment safe from sexual abuse has received overdue attention during the past two years. Having a code of conduct that establishes the obligation of protection against SEA is one of the fundamental membership requirements of the CHS Alliance, but more work is needed to enshrine this in all organisations that govern behavior. A number of organisations reported that their policies required improvement in this area. The CHS verification reports also revealed that staff in some organisations do not consistently sign a document binding them to a specific set of standards.

1. ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.
2. Korff, V.P., Balbo, N., Mills, M., Heyse, L., Wittek, R. (2015). The Impact of Humanitarian Context Conditions and Individual Characteristics on Aid Worker Retention. *Disasters*, Vol 39, Issue 3, pp. 522-545.
3. Jackson, A., Zyck, S. (2017) *Presence and Proximity to Stay and Deliver, Five Years on*. UNOCHA/NRC, Geneva.
4. Humanitarian Outcomes (2019) *Aid Worker Security Report Figures at a Glance 2019*. Humanitarian Outcomes, London.
5. CHS Alliance (2020) *Working Well? Aid Worker Well-Being and How to Improve It*. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

Where they do, some organisations struggle to transpose the standards and organisational ethos encapsulated in the documents into the behaviour and actions of their staff. This was particularly challenging in contexts where documents were not culturally sensitive or appropriate.[6] Across the humanitarian sector as a whole, agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the scale of the challenge,[7] and are making investments to address sexual abuse in the workplace.[8] In doing so, however, they need to ensure that these investments do not overlook nationally-recruited staff as well as other (potentially overlapping) groups, such as LGBTQI+ staff, who may have particular vulnerabilities.

CHRISTIAN AID STORY OF CHANGE

Christian Aid's initial CHS certification audit identified that codes of conduct were not systematically in place for Christian Aid staff and volunteers, nor for partner organisations. In response, the organisation took a series of decisions to ensure that this critical tool was understood throughout the organisation. This included annual training for all staff, and stipulated that all partnership agreements should include codes of conduct. Importantly, these codes were not imposed by Christian Aid – rather, the organisation provided support to partners to develop their own, thereby enhancing the ownership of partners over how they addressed core issues such as PSEA and financial probity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Building on the work of CHS-verified organisations that have shown progress on this Commitment, humanitarian organisations should:

- Ensure that they have clear performance management systems in place that prioritise regular, two-way discussions between supervisors and supervisees;

- Identify skills' gaps, focusing on the skills that are actually required for programmes, and not just 'traditional' humanitarian skill sets. Ensure partner organisations are considered in these analyses;

- Extend security activities fully to nationally-recruited staff and to staff of partner organisations, ensuring that the activities and approaches are appropriate for the context and nature of the organisation;

- Ensure that skills'-development activities are accessible to staff and partners – aim to put resources online, and ensure that they are translated into the languages that staff speak as a default;

- Ensure that staff sign a code of conduct and commit to key policies during the induction process. Periodically recommit to the code and evaluate against these policies during their employment;

- Ensure that sanctions for breaches of this code of conduct are spelt out and enforced.

---

6. CHS Alliance, Islamic Relief Worldwide (2019) *Amman CHS Exchange Report*. CHS Alliance, Geneva.
7. A survey conducted for the UN suggested that one in three staff had experience of sexual harassment: Deloitte. (2019) *United Nations Safe Space Survey Report 2019*. Deloite., New York.
8. Humanitarian Outcomes (2019) *Aid Worker Security Report Figures at a Glance 2019*. Humanitarian Outcomes. London.

"Staff who are empowered to perform their roles to the best of their ability can have a transformative effect on the lives of vulnerable people."

Sally Mansfield
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia
to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland

WELL-BEING AND SAFETY OF STAFF IS ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE AID

Many organisations rightly claim that their greatest asset is their people. Well-managed and competent staff are central to achieving effectiveness and promoting accountability.

Having served recently as Chief People Officer at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and now heading a busy overseas post, I have long considered that attracting, developing and retaining the right staff must be a priority. For humanitarian agencies, whose operations are often a lifeline for those they assist, staff who are empowered to perform their roles to the best of their ability can have a transformative effect on the lives of vulnerable people.

Commitment 8 of the Standard requires that communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers. Is this happening in practice? The data indicates that, while the sector falls just short of this Commitment, it isn't tracking too badly. The numbers tell an encouraging story; that humanitarian agencies generally have the values, policies and codes of conduct in place to foster positive management and development of their people. Even better, staff policies are tracking well in terms of being fair, transparent and non-discriminatory.

However, the data also shows that, while policies and frameworks might exist on paper, their implementation is much patchier. Worryingly, staff do not seem to have a clear idea about which policies apply to them, nor of the consequences for non-compliance. Given that 'policies' in this context can cover everything from equality, diversity and inclusion to PSEAH, it is imperative that staff understand both the policies applicable to them and responsibilities flowing from them. Even with a sustained international focus on PSEAH, most recently in the wake of the 2018 Oxfam scandal, much more needs to be done to ensure Commitments and intentions are given practical purpose.

Agencies can use a range of measures to improve staff awareness, including through individual performance assessments, mandatory training and regular communications. Leadership practices which model good behaviour are important in setting a clear example for staff and influencing organisational culture.

The data also reveals that agencies do not always have policies in place aimed at ensuring the security and wellbeing of staff. For organisations working in high risk and high-pressure humanitarian settings, these aspects should be a central concern. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased humanitarian needs while hampering some agencies' ability to rotate international staff in and out of countries and to directly support local staff. This highlights the need to pay close attention to well-being and safety. Staff who do not feel supported and safe will not be as effective. The impact of heightened risks and pressures on families of staff should also be considered. Agencies without proper security frameworks may suffer higher staff turnover, higher insurance claims, and open themselves up to legal action.

The recent focus on duty of care issues should now lead to concrete actions across the humanitarian sector. This includes the adoption of robust security protocols that apply equally to local and international staff, as well as ensuring the availability of mental health and psychosocial services for all humanitarian staff and volunteers. Donors should do their part by supporting these costs, which are often outside programme funds, through flexible and sustained funding.

Sally Mansfield
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland

"Could increasing transparency and the opening up of aid organisations help staff and volunteers better understand and follow their organisation's policies?"

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
Executive Director, COAST Trust, Bangladesh

AN OPEN AND CARING ORGANISATION, CREATIVELY MEETING COMMITMENT 8 IN THE COVID-19 ERA

I am delighted that as a sector we have nearly succeeded when it comes to people affected by crisis receiving the assistance they need from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

CHS verification data shows that organisations are not far from meeting the Commitment in most areas, despite the pressures on staff and especially those working in national aid organisations.

It is encouraging to see that the sector is performing best when it comes to staff policies and procedures being fair, transparent, caring and non-discriminatory, as well as compliant with local employment law. However, it is also striking that the action requiring the most work under Commitment 8 is ensuring that staff adhere to relevant policies and fully understand the consequences of non-adherence.

Could, therefore, increasing transparency and the opening up of aid organisations help staff and volunteers better understand and follow their organisation's policies?

COAST believes that making an organisation 'open' is a big step toward fulfilling all Nine of the CHS Commitments, but especially Commitment 8. For COAST, an open organisation is one that:

- Has an open communication policy, ensuring all staff and external stakeholders can access the official phone and email contacts of COAST workers, including an easily accessible chief executive.
- A 'your right to know' policy and information disclosure policy with minimum exceptions, especially for all external stakeholders.
- An easily accessible and easy to understand complaints-response mechanism.

These open policies are highly effective for the chief executive, as well as reducing monitoring costs. Above all, this openness promotes a sense of ownership both among staff and the crisis-affected people we serve.

I believe that this makes a real difference to staff adhering to essential policies and procedures.

However, Covid-19 has created a huge challenge to our openness as an organisation. Our staff now need to maintain social distancing for health reasons. Face-to-face communication has been drastically reduced. As COAST had already introduced communication- and information-management software before the outbreak, we have fortunately been able to maintain staff communication and now undertake training in new health protection issues.

Every day the pandemic is evolving, but one thing we have to cultivate is hope. We need to keep our staff optimistic and motivated. To inspire our staff who are working remotely at this difficult time, we have made sure that we still have open communication through online software. COAST supports its staff with a stable internet connection and flexible working hours to help them maintain their work-life balance. Having policies in place for both the security and well-being of staff is clearly set out in the CHS. We see it as our duty of care to keep people safe and healthy in body and mind. Actually, we now feel that our internal communication and Commitment to remain concerned for one other has been strengthened, even during the lockdown.

COAST has developed its own six quarantine and isolation facilities. We are also placing all possible emphasis on promoting such prevention for refugees and all other programme participants. This is funded by the surplus income we have from microfinance projects.

Until a vaccine is found, we in aid organisations know that we will have to adapt to social distancing, and with limited opportunities for travel. That's why now more than ever the sector has to be as creative as it can be: we cannot afford to compromise our open communication and direct accountability with our staff, the people we serve and our partners.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
Executive Director, COAST Trust, Bangladesh

09

RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

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

Quality Criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.
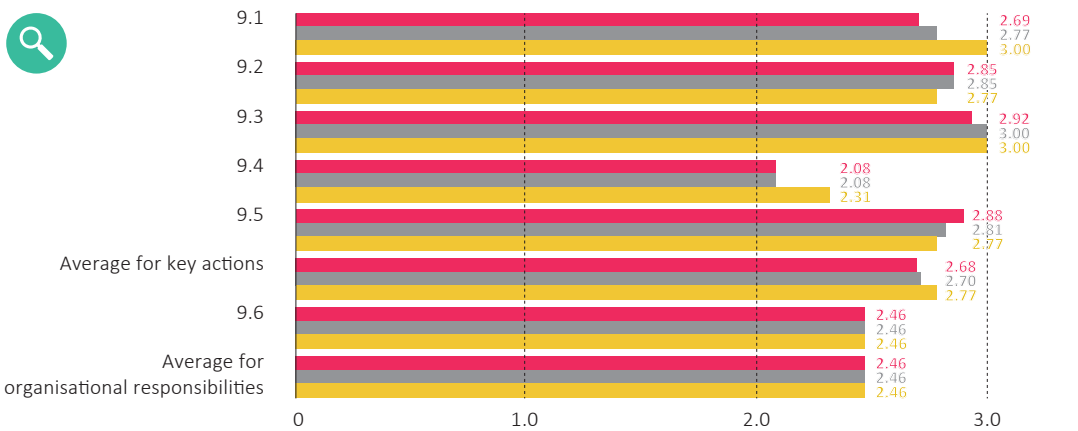
Some progress has been made, and continues to be made, in ensuring the efficient use of resources in humanitarian programming. However, more could be achieved by harmonising internal processes and investing more in anticipatory and early responses. Attention to environmental considerations lags behind other areas and should be a cause for concern for the sector when environmental challenges, in particular climate change, exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the people the sector works with.

FIGURE 21: COMMITMENT 9 – RESOURCES ARE MANAGED AND USED RESPONSIBLY FOR THEIR INTENDED PURPOSE

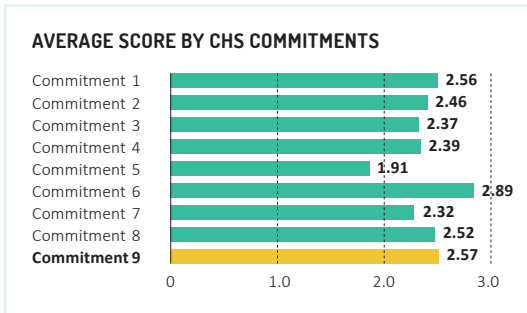|	
9.1	2.67
9.2	2.55
9.3	2.88
9.4	2.04
9.5	2.75
Average for key actions	2.58
9.6	2.51
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.51

Source: Data-set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

FIGURE 22: COMMITMENT 9 – PROGRESS OVER THREE YEARS

	Initial audit – Year 0	Maintenance audit – Year 1	Mid-term audit – Year 2
9.1	2.69	2.77	3.00
9.2	2.85	2.85	2.77
9.3	2.92	3.00	3.00
9.4	2.08	2.08	2.31
9.5	2.88	2.81	2.77
Average for key actions	2.68	2.70	2.77
9.6	2.46	2.46	2.46
Average for organisational responsibilities	2.46	2.46	2.46

■ Initial audit – Year 0   ■ Maintenance audit – Year 1   ■ Mid-term audit – Year 2

Source: Data-set two – data from 13 organisations that have taken part in the certification process for at least three years.

AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS

Commitment	Score
Commitment 1	2.56
Commitment 2	2.46
Commitment 3	2.37
Commitment 4	2.39
Commitment 5	1.91
Commitment 6	2.89
Commitment 7	2.32
Commitment 8	2.52
Commitment 9	2.57

COMMITMENT 9 INDICATORS

Key Actions

9.1 Design programmes and implement processes to ensure the efficient use of resources[1], balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response.

9.2 Manage and use resources to achieve their intended purpose, so minimising waste.

9.3 Monitor and report expenditure against budget.

9.4 When using local and natural resources, consider their impact on the environment.

9.5 Manage the risk of corruption and take appropriate action if it is identified.

Organisational Responsibilities

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

a. Accepts and allocates funds and gifts-in-kind ethically and legally;

b. Uses its resources in an environmentally responsible way;

c. Prevents and addresses corruption, fraud, conflicts of interest and misuse of resources;

d. Conducts audits, verifies compliance and reports transparently;

e. Assesses, manages and mitigates risk on an ongoing basis; and

f. Ensures that the acceptance of resources does not compromise its independence.

PERFORMANCE AT COMMITMENT LEVEL

This was one of the higher scoring Commitments (see figure 21); coming second, overall, out of nine. This is welcome news at a time when aid budgets are being stretched, environmental limits are being reached or exceeded and the pressure on aid actors for their vital services is increasing.

While there was little improvement on the Commitment as a whole over the past few years, there was some notable improvement on the indicators related to efficient programme design and environmental impact (see figure 22).

PERFORMANCE IN KEY AREAS

Fulfillment of Commitment 9 requires that organisations have policies related to efficient and responsible use of resources in place; that they design, manage and monitor programmes to ensure efficiency; and that they take specific steps to manage the risk of corruption and minimise environmental impact.

Poor performance on policies reflects a number of issues to be addressed

Atypically, the indicator related to establishing policies and processes scored less well than other indicators focusing on key actions. Indicator 9.6 outlines six different areas, from maintenance of independence to environmental responsibility, all of which would require significant work to establish effective policies and mechanisms.

---

1. The term "resources" should be understood in its broader sense, encompassing what the organisation needs to deliver its mission, including but not limited to: funds, staff, goods, equipment, time, land area, soil, water, air, natural products and the environment in general.

COMMITMENT

09

Several factors required for practical improvement

On the design, management and monitoring of programming (indicators 9.1, 9.2, 9.3), scores were generally fairly high. Monitoring (indicator 9.3) scored particularly well, perhaps reflecting the tendency of humanitarian monitoring systems to concentrate on issues of expenditure and deliverables, rather than broader results. Indicator 9.1 regarding design of programmes scored lower, but showed greater progress since 2016. The major constraint to progress in design and management raised in CHS verification reports, was a lack of harmonised systems across the organisation. Often, each country would have a different approach to recording and reporting financial data. This is a particular challenge for large organisations working in many different countries, which often use different systems for recording data, and report in numerous formats to different donors.

Addressing this challenge requires organisations to harmonise and standardise their own systems (see also Commitment 7). Donors should also simplify and harmonise reporting requirements and partners' capacity assessments. As part of the Grand Bargain, the issue of reporting requirements should have been addressed by 2018, but, while there have been successful pilot experiments such as the 8+3 template (an attempt to harmonise donor reporting by NGOs coming out of the Less Paper More Aid initiative and welcomed by donors[2]) "there is as yet no system-wide shift from donors" to simplified reporting[3] and "uptake [of the template] remains low."[4]

The CHS Alliance is currently exploring the potential of, and necessary measures for, the CHS to become a formally recognised, verifiable standard, aligned with the donor Partner Capacity Assessments (PCA) due diligence and compliance requirements. This would also help organisations meet the Grand Bargain Commitment 4.2. If successful, this could result in a substantial reduction in duplication and cost saving measures for donors and NGOs alike, and ultimately too for communities and people affected by crisis.

When examining the humanitarian sector as a whole, the State of the Humanitarian System report mentions a number of other constraints to efficiency. These include duplication and overlap between organisations and a tendency to intervene at the height of crises (when needs and costs are higher), rather than developing models for early response.[5] Again, there has been work as part of the Grand Bargain on preventing duplication, but this has, to date, seen "limited progress,"[6] with the main focus on UN agencies, rather than the system as a whole.[7] There is also renewed sectoral interest in anticipatory and early response, largely catalysed by the threats posed by climate change: the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) initiative is an important step in this regard. More broadly, the increasing deployment of cash programmes and technology may yield broader programme efficiencies.[8]

---

2.   For more information see https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/harmonize-and-simplify-reporting-requirements/harmonized-reporting-template-83-template-final

3.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London.

4.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

5.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

6.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

7.   Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Poole, L. (2019) *Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2019*. HPG/ODI, London; Metcalfe-Hough, V., Fenton, W., Willitts-King, B., Spencer, A. (2020) *Grand Bargain Independent Annual Report 2020*. HPG/ODI, London.

8.   ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

Environmental considerations lag well behind other areas

The indicator that scored least well under this Commitment was 9.4, 'When using local and natural resources, consider their impact on the environment'. Although good progress has been made on this indicator over the last three years, organisations still only just managed to demonstrate that they are making systematic efforts to consider their impact on the environment; this was the area that most CHS verification reports raised as being difficult. At the same time, however, there are a growing number of initiatives that are focusing on reducing harm to the environment.[9] For example, from the donor side, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade implemented an Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy for all funded aid projects in 2018.[10] The IFRC will include harm to the environment in its forthcoming World Disasters Report 2020 and OCHA's Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week 2020 showcased the efforts to address the issue of a number of members of the Environment and Humanitarian Action Network.

MEDAIR STORY OF CHANGE

Medair was prompted by the CHS certification audit process to clarify issues of environmental protection in its work. Their procurement policy has been updated to support a more environmentally sustainable approach, and the organisation is now routinely including environmental assessments as part of its new project proposal. Medair recently completed an environmental impact assessment (EIA) for its emergency shelter project that supports the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazaar, developing an action plan on the basis of the results.

Systems are in place to manage corruption, but implementation can be difficult

While many CHS-verified many organisations reported systems to manage corruption (the indicator 9.5 was the second highest scoring indicator) the CHS verification reports highlighted that for some the issue of corruption is still a challenge. In particular, some organisations struggle to implement their zero-tolerance policies. The challenge of eliminating corruption is a necessary focus for the aid sector as corruption can undermine progress towards a plethora of sector-wide objectives – not just CHS Commitment 9 — and delegitimise humanitarian and development action.[11]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to improve in this area, organisations should:

- Harmonise their internal systems to allow better understanding and comparison of expenditure data. Those organisations that performed better on this Commitment had made significant investments in their internal systems;

- Incorporate early warning data into decision-making, and make decision-making more anticipatory and less reactive;

- Develop 'no regrets'[12] and other programmatic solutions to allow more early response;

- Routinely include considerations of the environment in project design and monitoring.

---

9.   Tull, K. (2019) *Guidance, Standards, and Protocols in the Humanitarian Sector on Reducing Harm to the Environment*. K4D Helpdesk Report 653. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

10. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2018) *Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy*. Government of Australia, Canberra.

11. Transparency International (2019) *SDG 16 Is the Key to the 2030 Agenda,* Transparency International, New York.

12. No regrets are actions which have a positive effect whether or not the anticipated event (flood, drought) occurs. For example, when training locally recruited staff in approaches to respond, the training will be valuable for the organisation regardless of if the event occurs or not.

"Aid organisations that are serious about stopping fraud and corruption can be guided by the CHS specifically, Commitment 9 and indicators 9.5 and 9.6."

Malika Aït-Mohamed Parent
Anti-Corruption Expert, France

WHY WE NEED TO PAY GREATER ATTENTION TO THE RISKS OF CORRUPTION IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

As part of the necessary accountability and transparency dialogue, the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon reported in 2012 that "Corruption prevented 30 per cent of all development assistance from reaching its final destination".

Since then, this ratio has not been denied. 30 per cent of 28.9 billion USD dedicated to humanitarian assistance in 2018! I leave it to you to calculate how much that makes.

The CHS verification data shows that organisations are making systematic efforts towards applying the requirement to "manage the risk of corruption and take appropriate action if it is identified" (score of 2.75 for the indicator 9.5).

However, my experience and the results of research I have led show that the aid sector is not immune from corruption risks. A recent illustration is the aid corruption and abuse in the Congo revealed by the New Humanitarian. As with other industries, fraudsters and corrupt staff target business areas such as procurement, Information Technology (IT), finances, insurance, intermediary services, and customs clearance. On top of all these, some specific schemes occur more often in the area of humanitarian assistance, such as 'ghost lists', double-dipping, sextortion, governance structures which allow nepotism, urgency to spend, as well as the lack of due diligence by implementing partners.

More recently, the important influx of financial flows during the humanitarian response to Covid-19, with some exceptional measures such as lockdown and quarantines, constituted an unfortunate 'opportunity' for fraudsters and organised crime to target humanitarian organisations.

Indeed, in terms of supply chain management, the lockdown imposed by the authorities reduces tremendously the human presence in warehouses, offices, garages and similar locations.

Also, 'expedite and ad-hoc' procedures, to 'speed up' the humanitarian response add a new layer of risks because of reduced internal control.

When it comes to IT, the absence of anticipation and preparation of the shift from working from the office to working from home, may lead to an increase in cyber risks, due to minimal data protection, as well as hacking, phishing and so forth. Laptops may often have the necessary level of protection, but mobiles phones are frequently not equipped with anti-virus technologies and stand as an open door to both organisational and people data.

With the issue of finances, as in non-emergency contexts, cash and ForEx transactions remain an obvious target for both internal and external attempts at misconduct. Reliable reviews of past emergencies such as the Ebola outbreak reported corrupt practices including widespread misuse of funds and medical supplies, misreporting of salaries and payments for goods, petty bribery to bypass containment measures, such as roadblocks and quarantined zones, flawed and opaque procurement processes. These documented schemes need to be carefully reviewed and control indicators must also be reviewed against emerging schemes to prevent this from happening again.

Aid organisations that are serious about stopping fraud and corruption – which should be all of them – can be guided by the CHS, specifically, Commitment 9 and indicators 9.5 and 9.6, which help ensure that funds are used for their intended purpose and for the ultimate good of people affected by crisis. This has the potential to make all the difference.

Malika Aït-Mohamed Parent
Anti-Corruption Expert, France

> *"Looking to the future, we have an opportunity to better integrate environmental concerns into humanitarian action. For this we need better matching of the supplies with actual needs."*

Elizabeth Riley

Executive Director (ag), Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, Barbados

SUSTAINABLE AID

I'm an environmentalist at heart and by training, so it's encouraging to see that Commitment 9 ranks second only to Commitment 6. I think this speaks to how many aid organisations have been working with partners to better meet the needs of crisis-affected people.

Analysis of Commitment 9 subcategory scoring is revealing. Unsurprisingly, areas often emphasised in humanitarian responses – monitoring and reporting expenditure against budgets (Key Action 9.3) – scored the highest. However, Key Action 9.4 on considering the impact of using local and natural resources on the environment scored the lowest, which demonstrates that this area requires greater attention.

Environmental sustainability is one of the five resilience pillars which informs the work of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). These pillars have high-level policy support as they have been adopted by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community within the "Caribbean Pathway for Disaster Resilience in CARICOM". Yet the low score on indicator 9.4 suggests that even with the issue clearly identified, there's still room for better integration of environmental concerns into humanitarian action.

A good place to start is managing response-generated waste. The Covid-19 pandemic is generating significant waste globally. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) protocols require not just health practitioners, but all essential workers to frequently change their PPE. This creates a significant number of used gowns, gloves and more, over a sustained period of time. This needs to be addressed.

There are some specialised waste management humanitarian organisations, but the issue is not mainstreamed within aid organisations across the board.

This is of special importance in the Small Island Developing States context, where we have limited land space and fewer disposal options.

To tackle the impact of aid on local environments we also must consider aid that is unsuitable and unsolicited.

Aid organisations may make contributions with the best intentions, but that does not mean they're consistent with the country's needs. We saw a deluge of items including clothing and shoes after hurricanes Maria in Dominica and Dorian in the Bahamas.

Unnecessary or unusable aid poses a serious relief management and environmental challenge for local responders and authorities. They also divert attention into addressing secondary effects of a disaster, when energy is better spent elsewhere.

Looking to the future, we have an opportunity to better integrate environmental concerns into humanitarian action. For this we need better matching of the supplies with actual needs. We also need humanitarian organisations to use innovative technology and materials. Could we use more recyclable materials?

Finally, cash programming allows crisis-affected people the power of choice. It gives people the option to buy what they need. Cash can benefit smaller, local producers, while vouchers tend to be linked to use in formal businesses. With cash you can buy what you need from a farmer down the road. It just makes sense.

Here in the Caribbean, we're continuing the conversation on these vital environmental concerns. Going forward, I want to see them strongly promoted at policy and action levels.

Elizabeth Riley
Executive Director (ag), Caribbean Disaster
Emergency Management Agency, Barbados

...............··

WHERE NEXT? CHANGE, IMPROVEMENT AND THE CHS

While section three of the report made recommendations for how progress on each of the separate Commitments might be achieved, this section highlights three overarching elements that appear to be preventing progress across all Commitments.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
....··

Each organisation working toward the CHS is at a different stage, and will have different strengths, weaknesses and priorities for action. However, there are some recurring underlying challenges which, if addressed, would allow improvement across a number of areas.

Participation of people affected by crisis

The first theme is fundamental to the CHS: improving the participation and engagement of people affected by crisis in the decisions and actions about their lives. At the very least, the people we serve should have information that includes the nature, amount and timing of support; the organisation providing it; expectations of how organisational staff should behave; and what to do if any element of the programme does not meet expectations. We should still strive for the Participation Revolution. While this is an area of weakness that underlies the challenges encountered in fulfilling Commitments 4 and 5 (respectively, communication, participation and feedback; complaint mechanisms), it has also been shown to impact a number of other areas, such as the relevance of assistance and the responsible use of resources.

Effective, safe and responsive information management

Poor information-management practices underscore failures and constraints within almost every Commitment. Specific weaknesses include the failure to identify and collect the information that has the most impact on successful programming (such as information on context, local capacities and possible negative effects); failure to collect information over time to understand evolving situations; failure to create harmonised organisation, programme or

sector-wide systems that allows information to get to potential users; failure to adequately protect the privacy of data and, time and again, failure to use information in decision-making processes.

Successful information management in highly complex crisis environments is challenging and can be resource intensive. However, it is also central to the effectiveness of any organisation focused on numerous programmes with numerous partners, in diverse, changing contexts. It should be of great concern that, in the information age, the humanitarian system performs so weakly in this area.

Increased flexibility and adaptiveness

Humanitarian organisations struggle to adapt their responses to the needs and priorities of the people they serve, to the realities of different contexts and to changing situations. This is another recurring challenge and relates to the issue of information management: often the relevant information is not available, and where it is, it is not used in decision-making. But it goes beyond this. Projects are planned according to specific outcomes, with fixed, short-term funding. Staff lack the requisite skills, and inflexible supply chains and the culture and expectations of humanitarian workers also play a part. Improvements in flexibility and adaptiveness would make it easier to respond to the needs of crisis-affected people and ensure that the relevance and quality of aid is maintained over time.

Addressing these three themes would not solve all the current challenges of the CHS Commitments. But, as they have impact on many other challenges, addressing them would have a multiplier effect and provide the foundations for improvement in a wide range of areas.

MOVING FORWARD

As this report has shown, progress on specific areas of the CHS has been significant and sustained for many individual organisations. Yet, if we take all the organisations and all the Commitments together, progress has been fairly slow. In this section we consider some of the constraints to change that will need to be overcome if the sector is to realise the progress it owes to the hundreds of millions of people it serves.

It is not surprising that progress towards achieving the CHS Commitments is frustrated by the same efforts at change seen in the broader humanitarian system. As noted in section two, the humanitarian system is not effective at change. A review[1] of change efforts across the system concluded that although there had been changes to structures and procedures, they generally failed to live up to original hopes. They had little impact on the lives of people affected by crisis and "there are severe limits to the ability of the humanitarian system to change and improve."

The CHS needs to stay sharply relevant to maintain its focus on what the sector defines as the essential elements of principled humanitarian action. Global events over the last five years have highlighted the importance of restating fundamental issues that address gender inequality, poverty, climate change, racism and other forms of discrimination.

The most recent edition of the Humanitarian Accountability Report in 2018 recognised that current approaches to change in areas relevant to the CHS were not working, and looked instead at how change had actually been achieved. Given the challenges that many organisations now have in fully implementing the Standard, these approaches are worth revisiting.[2]

Essentially, the lessons highlighted in the HAR 2018 describe a virtuous circle, whereby small-scale, innovative actions on the ground are amplified throughout a given organisation and the system as a whole. This contributes to an environment that sees the benefits of these changes, welcomes that change, and is encouraged to work for further change. This in turn leads to more small-scale actions, and so the cycle grows.

Underlying this approach is a move away from a linear, 'project style' change process – first policy, then roll out, then change – to a more holistic process where action, amplification and change in the humanitarian environment are seen as mutually reinforcing and take place simultaneously. Organisations implementing the CHS have given us positive examples in all three areas.

Small scale actions on the ground

The HAR 2018 concluded that "change occurs through small-scale, concrete actions that are continuously revised and adapted, rather than top-down, large-scale action plans."[3] Reports from organisations working to fulfil CHS Commitments show no shortage of this type of new and innovative activity on the ground, from Tearfund's use of solar technology in WASH interventions[4] to Christian Aid's shelter support to people living with disability[5]. A common denominator is the inclusion of users – the people who have been affected by crisis – in the process of design, and the readiness to change approach on the basis of user requirements. As the HAR 2018 notes "change occurs when humanitarians value the contributions of crisis-affected people and communities."[6]

1. Knox Clarke, P. (2017) *Transforming Change*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.
2. For the full list of lessons around change, see chapter 8 in CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.
3. CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.
4. Tearfund's CHS Certification Mid-term Audit Report in 2018.
5. Case study shared at CHS Exchange in Bangkok in November 2019. See CHS Alliance (2019) *Bangkok CHS Exchange Report*. CHS Alliance, Geneva. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/2019-bangkok-chs-exchange-report/
6. CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

Already there are examples of good practice. Medair used unrestricted funds[7] (which are more flexible) to pay for unexpected needs that arose from community consultation, while EFICOR used partnerships[8] to meet these needs by referring people to other organisations better able to address user requirements. Many of these initiatives – including Oxfam's Your Word Counts[9] and ACTED's complaint and response mechanism (CRM) – also benefited from the use of information technology. Change takes place when humanitarians use technology to better engage with each other and with crisis-affected people.

Amplification through the system

The humanitarian system is full of small-scale, innovative projects. Left as they are, however, these projects cannot create the necessary change unless the ideas and approaches they embody can spread and replicate across the system.[10] Change takes place when people from different agencies and sectors come together to create a common understanding of what is needed, and how it can be achieved[11]. One powerful way of achieving this is to show what is possible: the approaches that communities have designed to meet the needs that they identify, and have been implemented elsewhere.

The results of the CHS verification data show that organisations are doing a good job of collaborating over knowledge sharing across organisations (Section three, Commitment 7). This can be achieved through platforms and networks, but also through working together (as COAST and other organisations have done to conduct joint advocacy in Bangladesh); through building common systems for use by several organisations (such as Oxfam's Your Word Counts feedback system) and – as we have seen – by working with partners who can meet needs that the agency itself cannot address.

The results of the CHS verification show that organisations are, on the whole, poor at breaking down internal silos and sharing information internally.

But even here there are stories of success. Save the Children has ensured that staff from across the organisation work together to develop and implement the Safer Programming Initiative.

Changing the environment

The third element of successful change is to transform the organisational and systems' environment to make it more receptive to learning and doing things differently. We have seen already that there is no simple or agreed way of doing this. The 'hard' incentives that structure the environment are determined, in general, by actors with little interest in transformation. The 'soft' element – culture – is notoriously difficult to pin down, let alone change. The HAR 2018, at least, tells us what not to do: "The humanitarian sector has the standards and policies it needs to be effective. Change occurs when humanitarians apply and learn from the standards to which they have committed." Rather than focusing on, and continually adding, policies, we should aim to make change in the areas where there is already some measure of agreement, especially as the nature of the system means that changes in one area are likely to have a ripple effect into others. Within these boundaries, change takes place when commitment to the implementation of these instruments comes not simply from senior management, but also from donors and frontline practitioners. Nothing succeeds like success: one way of making people across the system more receptive to change is showing not only is it possible, but that it is actually happening on the ground. Another important approach is to introduce new voices, and so new perspectives, into the conversation. This can be done both indirectly – by showcasing projects designed by people affected by crisis – and directly, by enhancing links with civil society, scientists and social scientists, civil protection agencies and the private sector at all levels of humanitarian debate.

---

7.   Example revealed in Medair's CHS Self-Assessment process in 2018.

8.   EFICOR's CHS Certification Initial Audit Summary Report in 2019.

9.   Case study shared at CHS Exchange in Bangkok in November 2019. See CHS Alliance (2019) *Bangkok CHS Exchange Report*. CHS Alliance, Geneva. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/2019-bangkok-chs-exchange-report/

10. For more information on successful innovation processes, see: Obrecht, A., Warner, A. (2016) *More Than Just Luck: Innovation in Humanitarian Action*. HIF/ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

11. CHS Alliance (2018) *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector. CHS Alliance, Geneva.

SECTION 5.
....

CONCLUSION

Five years after the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability was introduced, the organisations that have measured its application have demonstrated individual progress. As a group, they have also demonstrated progress over time on a number of the Commitments.

Change occurs slowly in the humanitarian system, and the CHS is contributing to movement in areas that organisations have been attempting to change for decades.

However, in none of these areas can the majority of CHS-verified organisations claim that they are meeting the Standard consistently, in all operations and at all times. Only Commitment 6, on coordination and complementarity, is close to being systematically conformed to, following investments made in these areas. Commitment 5, on complaints' handling, is the weakest of the Commitments. Significant efforts are required to collect and respond to complaints and ultimately to protect people affected by crisis from harm.

The slow pace of change overall has long been a concern to many people and today it poses an existential risk to the humanitarian system as a whole. This system has struggled to adapt to new and unexpected crises such as mass migration into G20 countries and regional epidemics (at the time of writing, it is too early to comment on performance in response to Covid-19). The principles and legal framework on which the system relies are under sustained pressure, even from countries that have traditionally been supportive of the humanitarian endeavour. Formal humanitarian funding is plateauing and may be much more difficult to access as the economic effects of Covid-19 are felt.[1] Meanwhile many states have become more assertive in their emergency response activities, particularly when tackling Covid-19, and are operating in a way that raises questions about the balance between crisis response and rights, which may resonate far into the future.

The world is changing very fast indeed. There is a good case to be made that by failing to change at the same speed, the humanitarian system is becoming weaker and less relevant even as Covid-19 and climate change threaten new and unprecedented needs.

The CHS provides an established tool for driving this change. It describes the consistent standards of quality and accountability that are needed to accelerate progress. While progress over its first five years has been mixed, with some significant successes and some areas of notable weakness, it does provide an established and agreed framework for measurable change.

As a sector, we have the potential to achieve real change for people affected by crisis if more organisations apply and verify their work against the CHS. That work must be supported by more resources and greater recognition of the Standard by donors.

It is entirely possible that a new system, or group of systems, will arise to address the needs and rights of the people affected by the crises of the future, and that today's humanitarians will need to earn their place. Whatever the system, a commitment to principled humanitarian action, as embodied in the CHS, will be essential.

---

1. For more information on all of these trends: ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. ALNAP/ODI, London.

CEO PLEDGE

As leaders of aid organisations, we the undersigned reaffirm our commitment to meet the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) to make aid work better for people affected by crisis.

We commend the great efforts that organisations have made to verify themselves against the Nine Commitments of the CHS, contributing to the data that informs the Humanitarian Accountability Report 2020. However, we recognise that significant challenges remain in some areas. As a sector we need to take greater steps to meet these essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action.

By signing the 2020 CHS CEO Pledge we commit ourselves to:

1. Deliver change within our organisations by applying, measuring and improving our work to meet the Nine Commitments of the CHS, the commitments we made to the people we serve.

2. Advocate for increased recognition of the CHS with our partners, donors and other aid organisations to grow the groundswell of support for meeting the Standard set by the sector, for the sector.

Line Hempel, Director of Operations, **ACT Alliance**

Jean-Michel Grand, Executive Director, **Action Against Hunger UK**

Erik Lysén, Director, **Act Church of Sweden**

Marie-Pierre Caley, Co-founder and CEO, **Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique Et au Développement (ACTED)**

Julia Sánchez, Secretary General, **ActionAid International**

Michael Kruger, President, **ADRA International**

Charles-Emmanuel Ballanger, CEO, **Aide et Action International**

Mubashar Nabi, CEO, **Aiming Change for Tomorrow (ACT) International**

Kamel Mohanna, President, **Amel Association International**

M.A. Jalil, Executive Director, **Amra Kaj Kory (AKK)**

Rahima Sultana Kazal, CEO, **Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS)**

Judy Slatyer, CEO, **Australian Red Cross**

Rory Downham, Director, Learning and Development, **Bioforce**

Martin Ballantyne, CEO, **Brighter Communities Worldwide**

Michael Adamson, Chief Executive, **British Red Cross**

Christine Allen, Director, **CAFOD**

Sofia Sprechmann, Secretary General, **CARE International**

John Abraham Ayieko, Director, **Caritas Catholic Diocese of Homa Bay**

Evans Onyiego, Director, **Caritas Maralal**

Isacko Jirma Molu, Director, **Caritas Marsabit**

Alistair Dutton, Chief Executive, **Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)**

Sean Callahan, CEO, **Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

Piersilvio Fagiano, General Manager, **Cesvi**

Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, Chief Executive, **Christian Aid**

Rainer Brockhaus, Chief Executive Officer, **Christian Blind Mission (CBM)**

M Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director, **COAST Trust**

Kamal Sengupta, Deputy Executive Director, **Community Development Centre (CODEC)**

Marvin Parvez, Regional Director, **Community World Service Asia**

Dominic MacSorley, CEO, **Concern Worldwide**

Birgitte Qvist-Sørensen, General Secretary, **DanChurchAid**

Klaus Nørlem, Secretary General, **Danish People's Aid**

Charlotte Slente, Secretary General, **Danish Refugee Council**

Mathias Mogge, Secretary General/CEO, **Deutsche Welthungerhilfe**

Lena Ingelstam, Secretary General, **Diakonia**

Hala Al Humaidhi, Director of External Relations, **Direct Aid Society**

Saleh Saeed, CEO, **Disasters Emergency Committee**

Rita Nkemba, Country Director, **Dwelling Places**

M Ramesh Babu, Executive Director, **EFICOR**

Jouni Hemberg, Executive Director, **Finn Church Aid**

Abdus Salam, Chief Executive, **Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK)**

Siobhan Walsh, CEO, **GOAL**

Justin Derbyshire, CEO, **HelpAge International**

Valeria Fabbroni, Director of Programmes, **Helpcode**

Mohamed Dahir, Executive Director, **Humanitarian Initiative Just Relief Aid (HIJRA)**

Nancy A. Aossey, President & CEO, **International Medical Corps**

David Miliband, President & CEO, **International Rescue Committee**

Naser Haghamed, Chief Executive Officer, **Islamic Relief Worldwide**

Susanne Wesemann, Director International Assistance, **Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V.**

Killen Otieno, Chief Operations Officer, **Joint Aid Management (JAM)**

Robert Hedlund, President/CEO, **Joint Development Associates International**

Sarah Blakemore, CEO, **Keeping Children Safe**

Rommie Nauta, Head, **Kerk in Actie**

Lars Arrhenius, Secretary General, **Läkarmissionen**

Kishore Kumar Nag, Acting Executive Director, **Lutheran World Service India Trust**

Annette Wächter-Schneider, Program Director, Deputy Secretary General, **Malteser International**

David Verboom, CEO, **Medair**

Aimee Shalan, CEO, **Medical Aid for Palestinians**

Martha Holley Newsome, President & CEO, **Medical Teams International**

Darren Cormack, CEO, **Mines Advisory Group**

David Fyock, CEO, **Mission Aviation Fellowship International**

Kim Hartzner, Managing Director, **Mission East**

Irfan Khan, Director Humanitarian and International Partnerships, **Muslim Hands**

Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Khan, Chairman, **New World Hope Organization**

Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General, **Norwegian Church Aid**

Abdoulaye Dione, General Manager, **Office Africain pour le Developpement et la Cooperation (OFADEC)**

Abby Maxman, Executive Director, **Oxfam America (on behalf of Oxfam International)**

Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen, CEO, **Plan International**

Niclas Lindgren, Director, **PMU InterLife**

Eunice Ndonga Githinji, Executive Director, **Refugee Consortium of Kenya**

Hemayet Hossain, Executive Director, **RISDA-Bangladesh**

Inger Ashing, CEO, **Save the Children International**

Manu Gupta, Co-Founder, **SEEDS**

Asif Hussain, CEO, **SKT Welfare**

Felix Gnehm, Director, **Solidar Suisse**

Tineke Ceelen, CEO, **Stichting Vluchteling**

Anders Malmstigen, Secratary General, **Swedish Mission Council**

Othman Moqbel, Chief Executive Officer, **Syria Relief**

Matthew Maury, CEO, **TEAR Australia**

Nigel Harris, CEO, **Tearfund**

Maria Immonen, Director, **The Lutheran World Federation**

Patrick Sambaga, Country Director, **TPO Uganda**

Caoimhe de Barra, CEO, **Trócaire**

Tjipke Bergsma, Managing Director, **War Child Holland**

Martha Nemera, Executive Directress, **Women Empowerment-Action**

Tim Breene, CEO, **World Relief**

Andrew Morley, CEO, **World Vision International**

Sari Mutia Timur, Director, **YAKKUM Emergency Unit**

Chris Lukkien, CEO, **ZOA**

"TO PROMOTE RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES VULNERABLE TO RISK AND AFFECTED BY DISASTER, CONFLICT OR POVERTY AND ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT OF ASSISTANCE BY BUILDING A CULTURE OF QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY."

CHSAlliance

www.chsalliance.org