

HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT 2022

ACCOUNTABILITY IS
NON-NEGOTIABLE





Humanitarian Accountability Report
CHS Alliance, Geneva (2022)

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The Humanitarian Accountability Report 2022 aims to advance collective efforts to create a more accountable aid system for the people who find themselves caught in crisis. In this spirit, it opens with forewords from **Gloria Soma**, a local civil society leader from South Sudan, who has lived through multiple crises, and another from **Martin Griffiths**, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.



IMAGE Moldova – people embracing as they flee the military offensive in Ukraine.

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Aurel Obreja.



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IMAGE Women attend a vigil in commemoration of the victims of gender-based violence in Ecuador.
© UN Women/ Johis Alarcón.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the many organisations – big and small – around the world who measure their work against the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) so that they can learn and improve for those they serve, this report would not be possible. Therefore, we offer our wholehearted gratitude to each of the nearly 100 committed organisations whose data from CHS measurement are at the core of this report.*

“

We greatly appreciate all those who participated in the conversations reacting to what our analysis shows.”

Huge thanks are also owed to the wide range of experts from different backgrounds and perspectives who shared their views, insights and constructive challenges to create this report. Special thanks go to our valued partners, the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative and Ground Truth Solutions who shared so much of the data that makes the report possible. We also greatly appreciate all those who participated in the conversations reacting to what our analysis shows, and the certified organisations who shared their experiences making improvements.

More than 40 individuals from across the aid system contributed, from research institutes and think tanks, the United Nations, governments and donors, NGOs and NGO Networks, and people with lived experience of crisis.

We extend our gratitude to authors Glenn O’Neil, Lois Austin and Obando Ekesa of Owl RE, whose analysis of CHS verification scores, and wider system trends are the backbone of the report.

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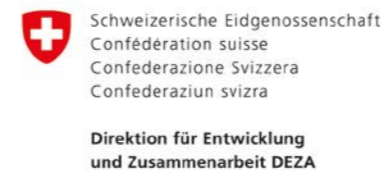


Tanya Wood
Executive Director, CHS Alliance

We offer our wholehearted gratitude to each of the nearly 100 committed organisations whose data from CHS measurement are at the core of this report.

* Organisations are recognised in Annex II.

With deepest thanks to the donors of the CHS Alliance who sustain our work building a more accountable aid system for people affected by crisis:



FOREWORDS



Gloria Soma

Founder and Director,
Titi Foundation,
South Sudan

The Humanitarian Accountability Report 2022 aims to advance collective efforts to create a more accountable aid system for the people who find themselves caught in crisis. In this spirit, it opens with forewords from Gloria Soma, a local civil society leader from South Sudan, who has lived through multiple crisis, and another from Martin Griffiths, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

I know what it's like to not be listened to. It's not until you have been ignored – at the very time you most need help and support – that you understand how it feels. The feeling is the same if you're ignored by a person, an organisation, or a system which has more 'power' than you.

That's why I wholeheartedly welcome this report. The Humanitarian Accountability Report gives us a much-needed, honest look into how well the aid system is listening to and hearing the people who are experiencing the worst the world has to offer. The report helps us to face up to what happens when things go wrong. It also proposes actions that can be taken today to protect the rights and dignity of people in the most vulnerable of situations.

As a 1990s Sudanese child of the Uganda refugee camps, I grew up in places with some of the highest mortality rates in the world at the time. Growing up, we were repeatedly attacked and displaced by rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army, yet unable to go home. We faced looting, violence and many children were abducted. All in all, more than 100,000 people were killed and tens of thousands of children conscripted during those dark days.

The sanctuary of the refugee camps and the kindness of many meant that I received shelter and help to survive. Yet, time after time, my family's needs were not listened to and we felt ignored by all sides. People planned what they gave us without asking about our needs.

I understood they were doing what they could to deliver what they thought we needed, but when you have no choice, you feel powerless. Sometimes the system felt unfair to my family, with inflexible criteria. Hidden vulnerabilities and invisible needs were just not recognised.

This wasn't the last time I was confronted with the harsh realities of war. In July 2016, the fighting in my hometown of Juba reached my family home. Hundreds of women and children needed shelter and protection, with nowhere else to go, so I opened up my family's compound to help.

Moved by the experiences I heard of rape, murder, abduction and forced displacement, I set up a new NGO led by women, for women and their children. Now I strive to lead an organisation where we give space to everyone to make decisions on how they want to be assisted. Just as I would have wished when I faced displacement, uncertainty, violence and loss.

Listening to the people we help just makes sense to me. Every day I see this approach bringing about change and providing a better response – together with those we serve.

So much innovation is brought to the table by people that others have looked down on, underestimated or marginalised. To me, this shows the importance of the aid system having a core standard that puts the dignity of affected people at the heart of response.

Ultimately, to me, this is what accountability really is – everyone, no matter their status, being able to speak truth to power and hold those with authority to account for their actions.

In Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Sahel, Yemen, and dozens of other places, too many people are denied safety and can't get hold of essentials. Their present is grim, and the future bleak.

Yet, the world over, these situations are matched by compassion, empathy, and support. Neighbours chip in, communities rally round, and leaders rise.

The honour, this rare privilege of supporting others, comes with responsibilities. We must take account of, give account to, and be held to account by the people we seek to assist.

Otherwise, what are we? Claiming to help without listening isn't in line with our principles. Not just unaccountable, it's pushy and privileged.

Emergency response is of course urgent, essential. It's the nature of the thing. People in dire straits may forgive some rough edges in the services they receive. But it matters tremendously how we work.

When we fail, as we do too often in sexual abuse, exploitation, or harassment by aid workers; making at-risk groups even more vulnerable; or undermining local leadership, we should ask ourselves some tough questions. Did we miss the warnings of the people in question? Did we check in with them enough? And if we were even partially aware, why didn't we take decisive action?

I'm delighted that so many organisations are making dedicated efforts to put people affected by crisis at the core of their work. Yet what this report shows that these efforts are not always systematic, nor consistent enough, and that good intentions are never enough.

It does show the many ways to make our policies and accountability goals a reality. Leaders, managers and boards can help drive this change just by paying attention.

We can check what we are doing to measure our clients' satisfaction. We can ask to see those feedback reports, even when they are difficult and uncomfortable, and work out how to improve collectively, and go back to the people affected and tell them how we are changing.

It's critical we speak a common language and understand accountability consistently. We need a common picture of where we are, and where we need to do more.

As we see with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's emerging Results Tracker, there are ways to apply and learn from commonly-agreed standards. Leaders of every stripe need to act urgently to close the gap between accountability rhetoric and practice and come together around shared goals and collective solutions.

This 2022 Humanitarian Accountability Report gives us fresh details and insights into how humanitarian agencies are delivering what we have promised to people affected by crisis, and where we need to do better.

Affected people are the ones living through humanitarian crisis. They should help drive the response too. We have promised as much. It's time to keep our promises.



Martin Griffiths

Under-Secretary-General
for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief
Coordinator, United
Nations Office for
the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs

"It's critical we speak a common language and understand accountability consistently."

“

Time after time, my family's needs were not listened to and we felt ignored by all sides. People planned what they gave us without asking about our needs. I understood what they were doing what they could to deliver what they thought we needed, but when you have no choice, you feel powerless.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is widespread agreement that crisis-affected people should be able to hold humanitarian organisations to account. Discord, where it exists, is not *whether* this should be the case, but how it can be facilitated and reinforced.

“*Accountability is paramount and must be acted upon. It is non-negotiable, at all times.*”

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), eight years old in December 2022, has provided the foundational framework that guides organisational capacity and decision-making, informing the sector what best practice looks like and then measuring its application. This dual function of the CHS, that it both sets the standard and also makes possible the verification of its application, is critical. Not only has it established a global understanding of what accountability practically is, but has given us the means by which to measure how accountable we actually are. And when we look at the aggregated data collected by the CHS Alliance, the answer is: still not very. This despite a decade of global collective agreement that accountability is a priority. We talk a lot. We listen less.

This 2022 *Humanitarian Accountability Report (HAR)* unpicks what it takes to make humanitarian organisations listen. How this needs to happen, where and to whom. And this need is urgent. Since the publication of the previous HAR in 2020, the number of people in need of assistance and protection across the world has again increased – dramatically so. Many of those already facing the consequences of conflict, disaster or poverty found themselves in the maelstrom of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, 235 million people were in need of assistance. Today estimates put that figures closer to 274 million.

The environment for providing humanitarian assistance is likely to get only more challenging: failing to instil a robust approach to accountability to crisis-affected people now could risk failing forever. Failure is not an option. As the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) Principals affirmed in their latest statement: “Accountability [...] is paramount and must be acted upon. It is non-negotiable, at all times.”¹

In the past decade, there is no denying that aid organisations have made efforts to become more accountable. Much of this hard work has paid off – great strides have been made, and this has been well documented in this report. Such improvements in the accountability landscape are not abstract:

People affected by crisis are recording significant and tangible improvements in their lived experience as a result of being more involved in the decisions which affect their lives.

The HAR 2022 provides a “snapshot” of accountability, based on a compilation of verification data from 95 CHS-verified organisations (gathered between 2015 to 2021), along with a compilation of verification data from the 12 organisations that have completed a full four-year CHS certification cycle and gone on to be recertified against the CHS. The data shows progress, and that progress is tangible, visible and meaningful. Yet, when the data is aggregated, the stark fact remains; even the organisations most willing to measure and improve their accountability to people affected by crisis are not yet collectively reaching a level that fulfils the requirements for any of the Nine Commitments of the CHS. There is some variation: Commitment 6 on coordination and complementarity is the closest to being met, Commitment 5 on complaints being welcomed and addressed the furthest from being fulfilled – a trend which has remained consistent through the years.

The positive news is that the organisations that have completed the CHS certification cycle show a clear improvement on seven of the nine Commitments, illustrating that dedicated and focused action by organisations ultimately improves their accountability performance.

So, what’s missing? What needs to change? We have identified five thematic issues, intimately linked to the successful application of the Nine Commitments of the CHS, on which this report focuses.

- 1 Organisational culture and leadership** has a critical role to play in instilling accountability to people affected by crisis. Leaders have begun to examine how to change their organisational culture to be more supportive and accountable, with a stronger duty of care and safeguarding approach. Leaders can no longer ignore structural power relations within their own organisations, and how this impacts their values, the diversity and inclusivity of the work environment, how staff are supported and – critically – what it means to centre their organisations around the needs of crisis-affected people.
- 2 Preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH)** is perhaps the most horrifying of accountability failures. While organisations have paid great attention to this in recent years, CHS verification data indicates that, as a collective, aid organisations are not yet fulfilling any of the requirements of the CHS PSEAH indicators. Although organisations have made systematic efforts to apply PSEAH best practice in their people management policies, there is a lack of participatory communication between organisations and crisis-affected people on expected staff behaviour. Organisations in the CHS certification cycle have shown improvements on the lowest-scoring PSEAH indicators, indicating that aid organisations can improve their performance on PSEAH with a dedicated focus and an organisation-wide attention. Improvements are needed to increase political will and greater system-wide coordination and urgently bridge the gap between PSEAH guidance and practice.

- 3 Local and national leadership** is critical when we are talking of increasing accountability to affected people. Positively, the CHS Localisation Index scores highest of the three CHS thematic Indicies. However, the organisations in the CHS certification cycle have largely stalled in their progress, possibly reflecting the persistent inequalities between international and local actors and systemic obstacles. Urgent action is required by the aid system, notably donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies to accelerate their commitments to localisation.
- 4 Inclusive action** implies that all voices and needs of affected people are included in the decisions and interventions of aid organisations.

The CHS data indicates that aid organisations are communicating through appropriate channels and in locally relevant ways to reach diverse communities, but are less able to act when inclusive action is negatively impacted.

Aid organisations can become better sensitised to a wider range of vulnerabilities and must do more to include a greater diversity of people at all stages of the humanitarian response, as well as considering diversity in their own organisations.

- 5 Environmental issues and climate change** are increasingly recognised as key contributors and root causes of crisis globally. Aid organisations are making systematic efforts to ensure programmes improve the resilience of communities in the face of environmental degradation and climate shocks. However, aid organisations are less able to act when their programming negatively impacts the environment. Organisations need to do far more to respect and protect the natural environment, understand the implications of climate change and integrate this within their accountability commitments.



PEOPLE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE

2021:
235
MILLION PEOPLE

2022:
274
MILLION PEOPLE

The 2022 HAR advocates for change through an Accountability Manifesto emphasising:

1 Learning, responding and – importantly – adapting to the views of crisis-affected people needs higher prominence in all programming.

The engagement of people affected by crisis in the decisions and actions that impact their lives is critical. Aid organisations need to better engage with people affected by crisis and identify and act upon potential long-term negative consequences of their actions.

2 Engaged leadership for accountability.

Aid leadership needs to champion integrating accountability to people affected by crisis in a whole-of-organisation approach. Leaders need to spearhead culture change in their organisations by creating caring and compassionate workplaces that reflect the values they promote in how staff are managed and supported. They need to lead by example with zero tolerance for inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of staff, volunteers and partners.

3 Accelerate accountability through local leadership.

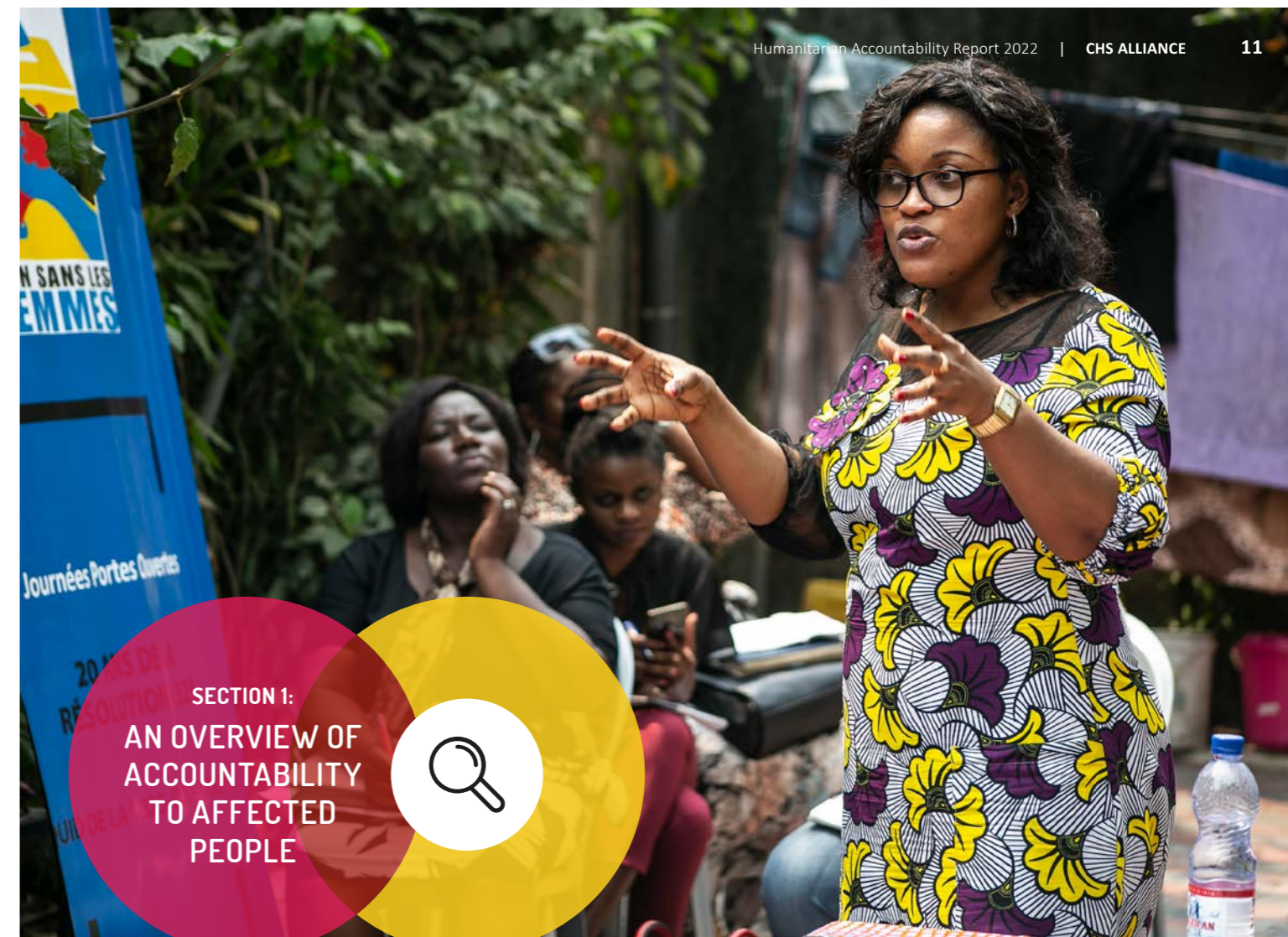
This requires shifts in power, roles, business models, decision-making, the structure of aid organisations and efforts to continue to reduce the inequalities between international and local actors. The CHS offers a common, universal accountability framework that can be contextualised, and which is expected to improve as the CHS is revised and strengthened.

4 Driving a collective approach to accountability.

This requires the substantial collective and global effort of donors, INGOs, local/national NGOs, UN agencies and other multilateral organisations to make systemic changes to challenge unequal power dynamics and champion new systemic ways of working grounded in local realities. New ways of harnessing collective initiatives need to be scaled up with increased funding and far greater efforts to improve coordination and collaboration.

Accountability to crisis-affected people risks becoming a slogan, a term that lives in the mind but can't survive in the light of the practical reality of delivering aid. Ultimately, accountability underpins effective programming: when we get accountability right, we get the response right.² Accountability is practical and tangible to aid workers and is critical and meaningful to people affected by crisis. We have the tools to deliver it, all that's needed is the will.

“The data shows progress, and that progress is tangible, visible and meaningful.”



CHAPTER 1:

The why of accountability: crisis-affected people

Today, some 274 million people are in need of assistance or protection worldwide.³ Conflicts continue to shatter the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia – to name but a few locations of continued hardship.⁴

At the start of 2022, the conflict in Ukraine served to highlight again the terrifying consequences of war, causing massive, rapid large-scale displacement and immense human suffering.⁵

Climate change and environmental degradation are increasingly being recognised as key contributors and root causes of crisis around the world: generating food insecurity, water shortages, displacement, and threatening livelihoods and indirectly increasing the risk of conflict.⁶

People's vulnerability to crisis has been further exacerbated by COVID-19, with more than

160 million people pushed into poverty since the pandemic began.⁷

Access to the people in need of assistance continues to be challenging: the lives of aid workers, most frequently national personnel, are at risk as they try to work in constantly fluctuating and extremely dangerous operating environments.

The pressure on the aid system to address all these assistance and protection needs in an effective way is immense.

IMAGE ABOVE
Fifi Baka is a feminist and human rights activist living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo working to expand women's political space in peace building and disaster risk reduction.
© UN Photo/Ley Uwera.



© CHS Alliance, Sphere, Groupe URD.

Yet, to be effective means that regardless of challenges, all the efforts undertaken by the aid system need to be accountable to those they are intended to serve – the people affected by crisis – as reconfirmed in 2022 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a body comprised of leading humanitarian United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs):

“As humanitarians, our primary responsibility is to people affected by crisis. They are the sole reason our institutions and programmes exist. How communities experience and perceive our work is the most relevant measure of our performance. Hence, our accountability to them is paramount and must be acted upon. It is non-negotiable, at all times.”

IASC Principals Statement 2022

In times of increasing need, maintaining the prominence and non-negotiability of accountability across the aid system requires sustained

commitment, creativity and collaboration. It requires a universal framework that can guide and then measure how effective efforts are in helping people facing disaster, conflict or poverty determine their own futures.

This report will show there is significant work being done to address the power imbalances inherent in the aid system, but they are not nearly consistent or systematic enough to deliver the commitments on accountability that have been made to those we serve.

However, there are clear signs of progress. When organisations invest in the right policies, ensure these are put into practice throughout the organisation, continuously learn from their application and constantly seek feedback from the people they serve; change does happen. People affected by crisis are more involved in the decisions which affect their lives, have greater awareness of their rights, are treated with greater equality and, as a result, receive humanitarian and development assistance that is more dignified and effective.

THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD

The CHS is a set of Commitments to people affected by crisis. It describes the fundamental elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian and development assistance.⁸

If the aid system is to be accountable to the people it serves, it needs to be held to account for meeting these Commitments. This is why the measurable nature of the standard is so critical: application can be measured, and that measurement can be shared – with the organisation for continuous improvement, aggregated and shared across the sector to demonstrate the state of accountability in the system, and with crisis-affected people.

The Nine Commitments of the CHS promise crisis-affected people that the aid they receive:

- 1
 Is appropriate and relevant
- 2
 Is effective and timely
- 3
 Strengthens local capacity and avoids negative effects
- 4
 Is based on communication, participation and feedback
- 5
 Welcomes and addresses complaints
- 6
 Is coordinated and complementary
- 7
 Improves as organisations learn
- 8
 Is facilitated by competent, well-managed staff
- 9
 Comes from organisation that responsibly manages resources

CHS Verification

The CHS Verification Scheme offers organisations a systematic process to assess the degree to which they are meeting their CHS Commitments.

This is done by consultations with the staff of an organisation, local authorities, partners and, most importantly, the people affected by crisis whom they serve. This triangulation of views and perceptions is key to verifying the degree to which an organisation meets the 62 indicators that make up the Nine Commitments of the CHS.⁹

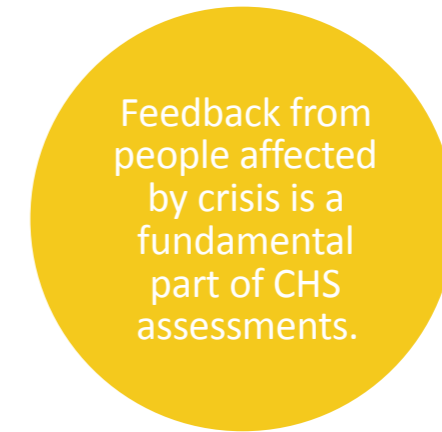
More than 130 aid organisations big and small, working locally and across different world regions, have used – or are starting to use – CHS verification to understand the degree to which they are meeting their Commitments to crisis-affected people and pinpoint where improvements are needed.¹⁰

The CHS Verification Scheme offers three verification options

- ✔ **Self-Assessment** is designed to be a learning exercise; it helps an organisation gain an understanding of its performance against the CHS and highlights areas in need of improvement. It is supported by the CHS Alliance.
- ✔ **Independent Verification** provides organisations with an external, independent assessment of application of the CHS and areas where improvement is needed.
- ✔ **Certification** also provides organisations with an external, independent assessment, measuring adherence to the CHS, and, depending on the result, provides a certification of compliance against the CHS.

Independent verification and certification are undertaken by conformity assessment bodies. These pathways are currently conducted by the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI).¹¹

Feedback from people affected by crisis is a fundamental part of these assessments and is reflected in the CHS verification results used in this report.



CHS VERIFICATIONS 2015 – 2021

130+

Organisations have been verified against the CHS, or have started the process



95

Verification reports used for analysis in this report



43

CHS self-assessments



29

Independent verifications



23

Certifications

REPORT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The report calls for action on the organisational, system-wide and collective efforts necessary to achieve a more accountable and transparent system for people affected by crisis.

Using CHS verification data, and secondary sources, this report provides an analysis of how well organisations have been delivering against their accountability commitments over the nearly eight years since the launch of the CHS, with a deep dive into four key cross-cutting themes.

The report also documents and examines progress made by organisations that have completed a full CHS certification cycle.¹²

METHODOLOGY

To provide an evidence-based overview of the state of adherence to the CHS by the organisations who have used it to measure their performance, this report uses two data sets:

Data set one: Aggregated trends – a compilation of the most recent verification scores from reports of the 95 organisations that have been verified against the CHS between 2015 and the end of 2021:¹³ (43 CHS self-assessments, 29 independent verifications¹⁴ and 23 certifications). This data set is large enough to allow for an analysis of global trends.

Data set two: Progress over time – a compilation of verification scores from the 12 organisations that have completed a full cycle of CHS certification.¹⁵ This data set allows for the tracking of progress over time.

READING THE CHS SCORES

Exemplary performance

4

3

2

1

0

Weakness so serious requirement not met

How to read the CHS scores

Each Commitment has between six and nine associated indicators. Each indicator has a score of between 0 and 4.

- A score of 0 indicates a weakness that is so significant that the organisation is unable to meet the requirement.
- Scores between 1 and 2 signify efforts are being made to apply this requirement, but they are not systematic.
- Scores between 2 and 3 signify systematic efforts towards applying this requirement are being made, but certain key points are still not addressed.
- Scores above 3 signify full compliance with the requirement.
- A score of 4 indicates exemplary performance in the application of the requirement. See Annex III for the full scoring grid.

The CHS verification data is drawn from the commendable work of the organisations that have had their work verified against the CHS Commitments.

These organisations cover the full spectrum, from global to very local organisations working in crisis across all regions of the world.

And while this data provides only one lens by which to examine the broader efforts that are being made towards increasing accountability within and across the aid system and cannot claim to be representative of the system in its totality, data such as this is relatively unique in the sector.

These data sets rely on aggregated data. The data does not, therefore, offer a comparison between organisations, countries, nor types of crisis. It also does not reflect the performance of any specific organisation, nor distinguish between those organisations that have performed well, and those that have not.

This CHS verification data is complemented by research from secondary sources and relevant publications, particularly from Ground Truth Solution’s research into the perceptions of people living through crisis across many responses.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The opening chapters provide an overview of how well CHS-verified organisations are meeting the Nine Commitments of the CHS and consider what it means to take a whole-of-organisation approach to accountability.

Then, through four thematic chapters, the report provides an overview of accountability topics, trends, weakness, strengths and progress for the following:

- **Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment**
- **Local and national leadership**
- **Inclusive action**
- **Environmental issues and the climate crisis**

These four cross-cutting themes have been selected based humanitarian and development challenges perceived as urgent at this time. Each theme references a compilation of indicators drawn from the Nine Commitments of the CHS – allowing us to see how well aid organisations are delivering against these thematic areas and what issues this raises. This is complemented by a case study detailing accountability improvements in action, as well as lively conversations between thought leaders, reacting to the picture that the CHS verification data and other research paints.

These serve to highlight why action on each topic is critical to creating a more people-centred and effective aid system.

The final chapter draws on these findings to outline an Accountability Manifesto to make the aid system more accountable to people affected by crisis, so that their power and dignity is never negotiable, even in the most difficult of times.

“CHS verifications are done by consultations with the staff of an organisation, local authorities, partners and, most importantly, the people affected by crisis whom they serve.”



The learning in summary:
A systematic process of verification leads to improvements.

CHAPTER 2:

The what of accountability: trends in the sector

For decades, many aid actors have made serious commitments and undertaken diligent work to become more accountable to those they aim to support and protect.¹⁶

However, scores from the 95 CHS-verified organisations show that – as an aggregated group – organisations are not yet fully meeting any of the Nine Commitments (see Figure 1, page 16).

This is a stark finding. One that is mirrored in other studies looking at how accountable the aid system is to people facing crisis.¹⁷

“WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE”

Despite this disappointing overall finding that we are still not doing enough to listen, respond and learn from the people we serve, there is a positive message.

When there is a clear commitment and buy-in from organisations to assess themselves against, sector-wide commitments, and make the needed improvements – there is progress.

We see the progress in organisations who have verified their efforts in meeting the CHS (see Figure 3, page 18). This report takes a subset of 12 organisations who have completed the full certification cycle to evidence the improvements made.

IMAGE ABOVE
The midwife of Nawdamorra Sub Health Center in Laghman province conducts an awareness raising session of COVID-19.
© Community World Service Asia.

Figure 1: Average scores for all CHS-verified organisations, ranked by Commitment

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



Source: Data from CHS verifications (all options) for 95 organisations from 2015 to 2021

Key: Commitments 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Certification against the CHS offers organisations a robust diagnostic of the degree to which organisations have applied the CHS throughout their work.

Independent auditors conduct rigorous assessments of an organisations' evidence for how well they are applying each of the 62 indicators that make up the Nine CHS Commitments.

This evidence includes policies and documented processes. Importantly, it also includes confidential interviews with staff, volunteers, partners and, critically, the people who the organisation works to support. The process provides organisations with an independent, external assessment which, if the criteria are met, will provide a certification of compliance against the CHS.

The CHS certification cycle requires regular external checks to see if organisations are making sufficient progress against their weakest areas, with a summary of their results made public for transparency.

The improvement in the majority of scores from the certified agencies (see Figure 3, page 18) is a clear indication that a clear and measurable accountability framework leads organisations to take focused action to improve their performance for people affected by crisis.

The data from certification scores demonstrates that against all but two of the Nine CHS Commitments, improvements have occurred by CHS-certified organisations over time. The learning in summary: a systematic process of verification leads to improvements.

A LENS ON TRENDS

Complaint non-compliance

Commitment 5 on complaints being welcomed and addressed yet again scored the lowest among all the aggregated CHS verification scores (see Figure 1).

The 2018 and 2020 HARs reported the same observation. In fact, Commitment 5 has been the lowest-scoring Commitment since the creation of the CHS, never reaching an average score of 2. This low score signals that organisations are making efforts to take complaints seriously and act on what they hear, but these are not systematic, meaning organisations could be failing individuals and missing important warning signs for wider problems.¹⁸

People affected by crisis have the right to complain to an aid organisation and to receive an appropriate and timely response. Formal mechanisms for complaints and redressal are an essential component of an organisation's accountability delivery.

Complaints can also alert an organisation to serious misconduct or failures in the response, allowing them to take timely action to improve the quality of their work, protect people in vulnerable situations and stop serious wrongdoing.

All organisations are susceptible to fraud and abuse of power; a complaints system can help an organisation to recognise and respond to malpractice, manipulation and exploitation.

Looking across system-wide research, there are factors that may be contributing to aid organisations' failure to meet Commitment 5. A 2021 Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) and CHS Alliance study¹⁹ of 2,845 crisis-affected people's perceptions of the humanitarian response in Chad found only 49% of respondents knew how to submit complaints, while 78% of humanitarian staff surveyed thought affected people knew how to do so, illustrating a clear gap between the perceptions of those delivering and those using the mechanisms. In the same study, 36% of crisis-affected people who had submitted a complaint said they never received a response, with their feedback indicating that they were also concerned about the risks of making a complaint:

"People do not want to know about complaint mechanisms because it will not improve anything apart from exposing them to other risks, such as a cut-off of assistance."

Community leader, Liwa, Lac, Chad

"I cannot submit a complaint without having problems."

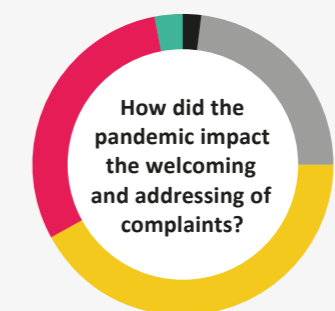
Female refugee, Belom, Moyen Chari, Chad

Other reasons for the low score for Commitment 5 include the challenge of ensuring consistent application of complaints mechanisms across operations, as well as knowing how to respond to complaints made. A lack of follow-up from aid organisations can (further) reduce trust and engagement with people affected by crisis and different actors in the architecture of aid over time, creating a reluctance to complain.

Meeting Commitment 5 during COVID-19

The impact of the pandemic on welcoming and addressing complaints cannot be overlooked. In research conducted at the height of the pandemic with CHS Alliance members,²⁰ 75% of respondents surveyed from aid organisations said that the pandemic had a "moderate" "a lot" or "great deal" of impact on complaint mechanisms.

Figure 2: Impact of COVID-19 on complaints mechanisms

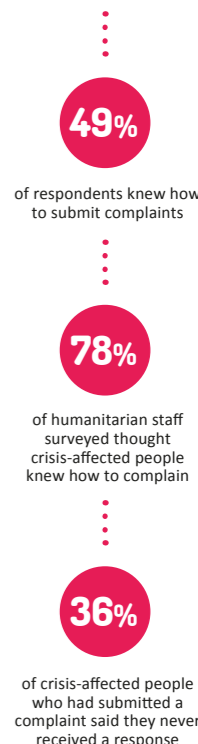


● Not at all, 2% ● A little, 23%
 ● A moderate amount, 42% ● A lot, 30% ● A great deal, 3%

Source: Data from 76 survey responses (CHS Alliance and ISS/EUR (2020))

The research underlined the importance of deploying different communication channels, continuous learning regarding power relations, and the inclusion of different communities, including marginalised groups, in deciding on the type and manner of complaint channels. The importance of design and preparation for context changes was highlighted: those organisations that already had remote options and budgets available to fund such changes tended to perform better.

A 2021 STUDY OF 2,845 CRISIS-AFFECTED PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS FOUND:



Signs of progress

Organisations that have made dedicated improvements over the CHS certification cycle showed the greatest improvement on Commitment 5, with the average score for this group rising from 1.94 (making efforts, but not systematically) at the first audit, to 2.22 (making systematic efforts) at the final audit (see Figure 3).

An uplift in the aggregated scores signifies that organisations made more systematic efforts to welcome and address complaints by the end of the CHS certification cycle than at the start.

This demonstrates that even for the most persistently challenging of accountability commitments, focused action that is rigorously measured can help organisations adapt how they work and improve performance over time for the people they serve.²¹

Failures in feedback mechanisms

Another area of weak performance among CHS-verified organisations is Commitment 4, concerning communication, participation and feedback from communities. Commitment 4 is centred on aid organisations making information on their activities available to people affected by crisis, receiving their feedback and engaging with them throughout all stages of their work.

Commitment 4 emphasises the need for the inclusive participation of crisis-affected people. This requires a willingness to allow and encourage people receiving aid to speak out and influence decisions. Information and communication are critical forms of aid, without which affected people cannot access services, make the best decisions for themselves and their communities, or hold aid organisations to account.

Sharing information, listening carefully to affected communities and involving them in decision-making contributes to more effective programmes and improves the quality of services delivered.



When people have the opportunity to voice their opinions, this enhances their sense of well-being, helps them adapt to the challenges they face and better enables them to take an active role in their own recovery.

While studies such as the 2021 independent Grand Bargain Report show that aid organisations are making efforts in this area, pointing towards the increase of guidance and frameworks for engagement with people affected by crisis, they note that it falls far short of the “Participation Revolution” that the Grand Bargain promised.²² GTS surveys of people affected by crisis from across the many crisis responses since 2017 show that crisis-affected people do not feel that communication from aid actors is “working” and that they are listened to – less than half of the people GTS surveyed in 2021 in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, and Uganda said their opinion was considered by aid organisations.²³

Within Commitment 4, indicator 4.1, on providing information to communities about the organisations, how they expect staff to behave and what they intend to deliver, is especially weak (full CHS indicator-level scores are listed in Annex IV). This is alarming considering that providing information is a first basic step to greater participation. This was confirmed in a 2022 GTS survey in earthquake-affected areas of Haiti that found that only 17% of people surveyed reported they were informed about available aid. As one person commented: “I only find out about aid distributions after the fact.”²⁴

However, collective forms of communication, participation and feedback between different aid organisations show promise.²⁵ Recent examples include the Communication and Community Engagement Initiative piloted by UNICEF in the Central African Republic in 2020-21.

This collective approach was made up of multiple mechanisms that collected and analysed information from affected people through a single information management system for all aid organisations operating in a response, including UN agencies, INGOs and local actors.²⁶

Innovative collective feedback mechanisms are constantly evolving, as seen with recent initiatives such as Loop,²⁷ Kuja Kuja,²⁸ and Ushahidi²⁹ – digital tools that support open feedback directly from communities, enabling greater engagement.

These new channels support crisis-affected people to use the internet or SMS to speak about their experiences with multiple aid actors anonymously.

Lacking a learning culture

Commitment 7 on people affected by crisis receiving improved assistance as organisations learn from experience also showed a low average score among CHS-verified organisations (see Figure 1, page 16). This suggests an insufficient record of organisational knowledge and the ability to transform it into learning.

Learning from success and failure and applying these insights to modify and adapt current and future work is a cornerstone of accountability and quality management. A culture of learning and continuous improvement should lie at the heart of an aid organisation and is fundamental to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency.

Regular interaction with those affected by crisis is necessary so that changes and adaptations can be made as soon as possible.

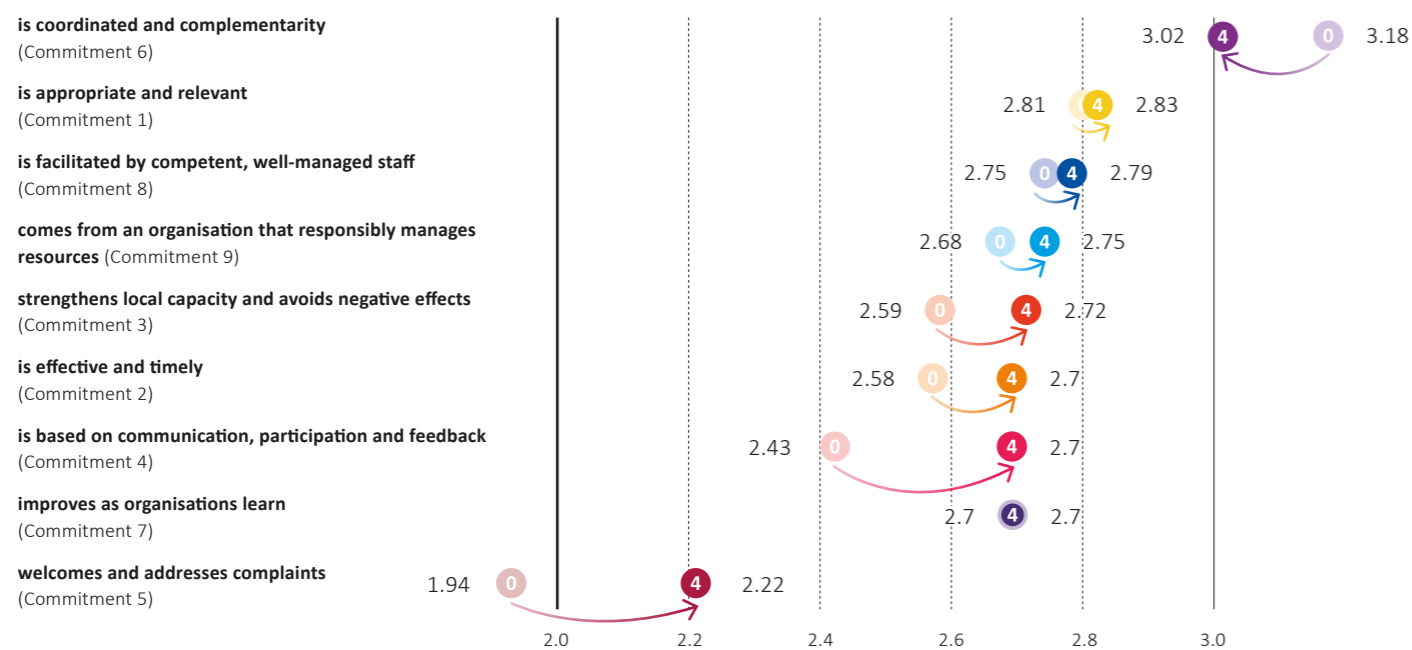
While the aid system has placed a strong emphasis on professionalising monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems, these policies do not yet seem to feed into a better experience for those facing crisis.

“Regular interaction with those affected by crisis is necessary so that changes and adaptations can be made as soon as possible.”

Figure 3: Average change in scores for CHS-certified organisations over a full cycle

Measuring change over time: average scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



Source: Data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Scores shown are the average aggregated scores at the initial audit, compared to those at the recertification audit.

Key: 0 4 Year of audit

The aggregated scores for the indicators that make up Commitment 7 show that organisations are better at coordinating amongst themselves than with the communities, with organisations stronger on sharing learning with peers (indicator 7.6), but weaker in sharing with communities (7.3) and in having evaluation and learning policies in place (7.4). However, we can see determined attention by organisations making progress on both indicators 7.3 and 7.4 over the CHS certification cycle (full CHS indicator-level scores are listed in Annex IV).

System-wide research shows that, generally, aid organisations have been slow to adopt learning-oriented approaches. There is a longstanding concern that MEL systems have focused too heavily on donor accountability, with reflection and learning for programme improvements more of an after-thought. Organisational culture and leadership are seen as being key to breaking this impasse and nurturing the genuine “learning organisation” as discussed in the next chapter.

Coordination success

The strongest average score for the CHS-verified organisations was on Commitment 6 concerning coordination and complementarity.

This strong result reflects the sustained coordination efforts that have been made in the system, specifically with traditional power holders such as the IASC, in coordinating responses, committing to working with coordination bodies, and valuing partnerships and the development of common approaches such as joint inter-sectoral analyses and assessments.³⁰ Consultations with local and national actors have also evolved but still need considerable improvements, as outlined in chapter five on local and national leadership.

Overall, CHS-verified organisations have also shown strong efforts in meeting their Commitments on managing resources responsibly (Commitment 9) and providing support to staff (Commitment 8).

The strengths and weaknesses seen for these Commitments are discussed further in the thematic chapters of this report.

COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY: A SYSTEM-WIDE APPROACH TO MAKING HUMANITARIAN ACTION MORE ACCOUNTABLE AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN

Accountability to people facing crisis needs to be assessed and improved at the collective response level. The way that people experience assistance is the result of interwoven and interdependent actions by different humanitarian actors. The actions of one organisation can severely affect the whole response. People facing conflict, disaster or poverty do not care about the small policy differences between different organisations supporting them. It is therefore critical that accountability to crisis-affected people can be assessed – and, more importantly, improved – at the collective level.

The trends in this report from aggregated organisational CHS verification results show where we must focus our efforts.

Building on this, there is a need to provide targeted actionable information for humanitarian country teams (HCTs) and national AAP networks to use for collective decision-making. This has already been a focus of the humanitarian system, as championed by the IASC and the CDAC Network, as described in Chapter 2.

Collective action needs real-time information about performance. The promising IASC Results Tracker, looking at collective efforts based on the CHS offers a promising development in this regard.

In support of collective accountability, ACTED and CHS Alliance, funded by USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, are working on a programme to make accountability at the collective level faster and more responsive. This project focuses on supporting aid organisations to strengthen their organisational complaints mechanisms, a key part of delivering the lowest-scoring Commitment of the CHS on welcoming and addressing complaints.



All of the layers of power must be understood and sustainably engaged to create an organisation accountable to those it serves.

CHAPTER 3:

The who of accountability: an accountable culture

Accountability to people affected by crisis requires a whole-of-organisation mind-set, meaning leadership and a culture that enforces this approach and builds it throughout the organisation.

Genuine accountability requires a holistic approach across the whole organisation and effective linkages, from governing boards and senior leadership to programme staff and support services. Protection and assistance are strengthened by policies and processes that stress quality and accountability.

These must be reflected and reinforced by an organisation’s values in how volunteers and staff engage and interact with their partners and the communities they serve.

Power plays out in aid organisations at different levels. Formal power is held by CEOs and managers, governing boards and donors. Institutional power lies in processes and systems. All these layers of power must be understood and sustainably engaged to create an organisation accountable to those it serves.

Accountable leadership, solid processes, and a values-aligned culture are crucial to maximising opportunities for crisis-affected people to exercise their own power.

IMAGE ABOVE
Marthe Mbita holds a series of official functions with women’s organisations in the Central African Republic.
© UN Photo/Leila Thiam.

“
Building an accountable culture and having engaged leadership drives a much-needed “whole-of-organisation” approach to accountability.”

As highlighted throughout this report, building an accountable culture and having engaged leadership drives a much-needed “whole-of-organisation” approach to accountability. The CHS focuses on changes throughout the whole organisation and, therefore, must be reflected in the organisation’s values and culture.

*Culture within an organisation can be viewed as “multi-layered, interacting, dynamic system/cycle of ideas, institutions, interactions and individuals”.*³¹

Culture can be seen through the visible behaviours or actions of organisations, which are in turn guided by invisible beliefs, values and assumptions.³² For example, a CHS Alliance study on alleviating sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) found that the organisational culture in some aid organisations downplayed or ignored reports of SEAH when they occurred.³³ These organisations showed inaction in dealing with SEAH; behaviour that reflected the invisible force of their organisational cultures that were stronger than their stated SEAH policies and procedures.

The organisational cultures of international aid organisations have been described by the media and their own internal investigations as unhealthy, dysfunctional, toxic, macho, hostile and subject to a “martyrdom” or having a “white saviour” complex. Humanitarians have been observed behaving in ways characterised as bullying, mobbing,³⁴ sexist and racist.³⁵ Given the strength of organisational culture, it can be challenging to bring about changes to workplaces and tackle such beliefs and behaviour to implement a more substantial and serious approach to accountability.

From the frontline – humanitarian workers challenged to uphold accountability:

Research in 2021 on the Rohingya refugee response in Cox’s Bazar found that frontline humanitarian workers were not always enabled to engage with refugees in a way that upheld accountability principles. The research found that humanitarian workers could have technocratic, risk-averse and even paternalistic attitudes towards the Rohingya and their potential for greater ownership of humanitarian programming.

Refugees expressed frustration at being cut out of decisions affecting their lives and noted that their voices were excluded from strategic and operational agendas.

The research concluded that considerable effort was needed by aid organisations to address the prejudices and assumptions engrained in organisational cultures. These prejudices and assumptions were having a direct and detrimental effect on humanitarian programming and accountability and on the Rohingya refugees.³⁶

However, faced with the growing attention to accountability, and particularly allegations of SEAH in the aid system in recent years, many organisations have begun to examine how to bring about cultural changes that are more supportive and accountable, in addition to a stronger duty of care to their staff and safeguarding approach. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, under his IASC Championship on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) for 2020, collated a selection of promising practices of aid organisations, mainly from UN agencies and INGOs, on organisational culture with the objective of specifically curbing the underlying elements at the centre of sexual misconduct.³⁷

These practices, which include capacity building, community engagement, staff and leadership dialogue, illustrate that cultural change needs long-term investment, leadership commitment and multiple targeted interventions.

As highlighted in this report with the brief verification improvement case studies and results, the commitment shown by organisations going through CHS certification illustrates that where organisations understand and act upon their weaknesses in a targeted manner, even in the face of the most challenging aspects of accountability that require cultural change, progress can be seen.

The role of leadership is critical in setting the tone from the top. The 2021 CHS Alliance and International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) study on leadership, culture and staff well-being highlighted the role that leaders of aid organisations must play today in bringing about change within their organisations. In addressing issues of race in Christian Aid, the CEO, Amanda Khozi Mukwashi commented:

“Sometimes you have to be willing to be unpopular for the right reasons... it’s a long journey which will not be smooth”.


Leaders in the study explained how they needed to re-think their structures, re-address power imbalances, increase leadership diversity, encourage a more supportive work culture and re-centre their organisations around the needs of crisis-affected people.³⁸ A more inclusive leadership style has also been found to encourage more innovation within aid organisations.³⁹ Leaders emphasised the need to develop a caring and compassionate organisational culture that values the well-being of its staff, as Reza Chowdhury, Executive Director, COAST Foundation, commented:

*“How do we expect to care for affected populations if we’re not taking care of our own?”*⁴⁰

Leaders of aid organisations need to acknowledge that in order to effectively provide humanitarian assistance and protection to crisis-affected people, there is a need to ensure that their own staff are respected and valued.

“
Culture can be seen through the visible behaviours or actions of organisations, which are in turn guided by invisible beliefs, values and assumptions.”


Top ten humanitarian leadership practices from the 2021 CHS Alliance and ICVA study on Leading Well:

- 


01 MODELLING SELF-CARE
- 

02 OPENLY DISCUSSING MENTAL HEALTH WITH STAFF
- 


03 RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHERS
- 


04 CHALLENGING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR
- 

05 USING THEIR POSITION RESPONSIBLY AND FAIRLY
- 

06 ACTIVELY LISTENING TO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
- 

07 COMMUNICATING CONSISTENTLY AND WITH AUTHENTICITY
- 

08 PRIORITISING THE WORKLOAD
- 

09 GIVING PEOPLE SPACE TO DO THEIR JOBS
- 

10 CULTIVATING A CARING, COMPASSIONATE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

“ In conversation with Ann Muraya and Kelly Clements

To debate how to transform accountability action within organisations and across the aid system, Ann and Kelly exchange their views on cultivating cultures of accountability.



Ann Muraya

Director of Organisational Health, Thrive Worldwide, Nairobi, Kenya



Kelly Clements

Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland

Q. What is your reaction to our findings – do they resonate with your experience?

KELLY: I find what is outlined here to be really important. Back in 2016, UNHCR published the results of a survey on mental health risks for UNHCR staff, which found that work-related stress was having a profound impact on our people.⁴¹ Since then, pressures have only increased as our staff have tried to do their part on safeguarding, addressing social injustice, adapting to a pandemic, responding to emergencies from Kabul to Ukraine, and more.

I believe strongly that we need a much deeper examination of how we exhibit our values, beliefs and behaviours in our day-to-day work as humanitarians. It's not just about what's written in policies and procedures. It's about how we run our meetings, the tone of our emails, the way we manage teams, and the opportunities we take to approach someone on our team we feel might be struggling.

For me, it also hits home that the culture of an organisation is set from the highest level. I always try to keep front and centre my commitment to tackle abuse of power and be held accountable for my actions. In my town hall meetings with staff, for example, I try to show that I care about their well-being, and I can empathise with the amount of pressure they are under.

All of us – and I agree, this starts at the top – must scrutinise the environments of our teams and within our organisations. It's hard, but we all need to look at how we as individuals lead, how we manage, and the values we promote. This takes time and space. In UNHCR, we've created dedicated opportunities for staff to reflect on their personal values and how these align to UNHCR's values.

ANN: I really appreciated how this chapter talks about the whole: in terms of cultures of accountability, the whole system of an organisation. Too many times we don't look at the whole of an organisation, a team or even a person. Yet every single part affects all the others. Working on important concepts like accountability in a fragmented way means that we can be trying really hard, putting in the time, energy and even money 'implementing activities' – looking like we're doing a lot, but not really achieving what we need.

Q. What is one key behaviour change you'd like to see within organisations and within the sector as a whole?

KELLY: Personally, I think we need to see more leaders speak explicitly on organisational culture. For them to talk about the how underlying values and beliefs of individuals affect behaviours and organisational actions, as well as the policies and procedures. For them to role model the kinds of behaviours they want others to replicate. For them to walk the talk. I think culture can get deprioritised among the myriad pressures and more formal necessities. Its intangibility makes it easy to overlook but is also why it can have such an outsized impact.

ANN: Leadership self-awareness and modelling is critical. Exhibiting the behaviours leaders want reflected in their organisations builds up a strong culture of accountability to the people that an organisation is trying to support – collaboration, compassion, integrity. **The biggest part of setting the tone is what you do – I love the saying "I can't hear what you're saying, because what you're doing is speaking so loudly."**

There are so many different aspects of accountability – the system we work in is multi-layered and historically complex, how do you break down the negative legacies of power imbalances in aid, unless leaders understand and model these? As a first step, leaders need to work on themselves to become self-aware of their own personal biases and vulnerabilities, we're all human after all. This isn't just about self-improvement – if you are triggered by certain things, or have a blind spot, you are not in a position to model certain behaviours. For example, you can have zero tolerance to a behaviour as an organisation, but you have to be able to notice that behaviour as a leader, in order to address it. The things we don't recognise, or understand can be trivialised to the detriment of the organisation.

Q. How can we support this behaviour change collectively?

ANN: **We must support our leaders more. We require so much of them, but who is supporting them? They're holding the space for so many things. Leading within the aid system has unique challenges, leaders don't just grapple with what they do as an organisation, but also the culture, more so than in other sectors, especially in 'field offices'.** In the aid system, leaders are often dealing with never-ending fires. Demands are always time sensitive; decisions really can be life or death. The latest crisis take precedent and so tackling the culture of an organisation can be left by the wayside.

There's also the pressure to focus on performance, on what gets measured, which at the moment is the what, not the how. For leaders to perform better on culture change – they need to be supported to prioritise the measurement of behaviours and values, alongside the more tangible aspects of a response. People can think this is impossible – behaviours are invisible right? But they're not actually – they show up in systems, processes, and results of an organisation so can be measured and improved with technical frameworks.

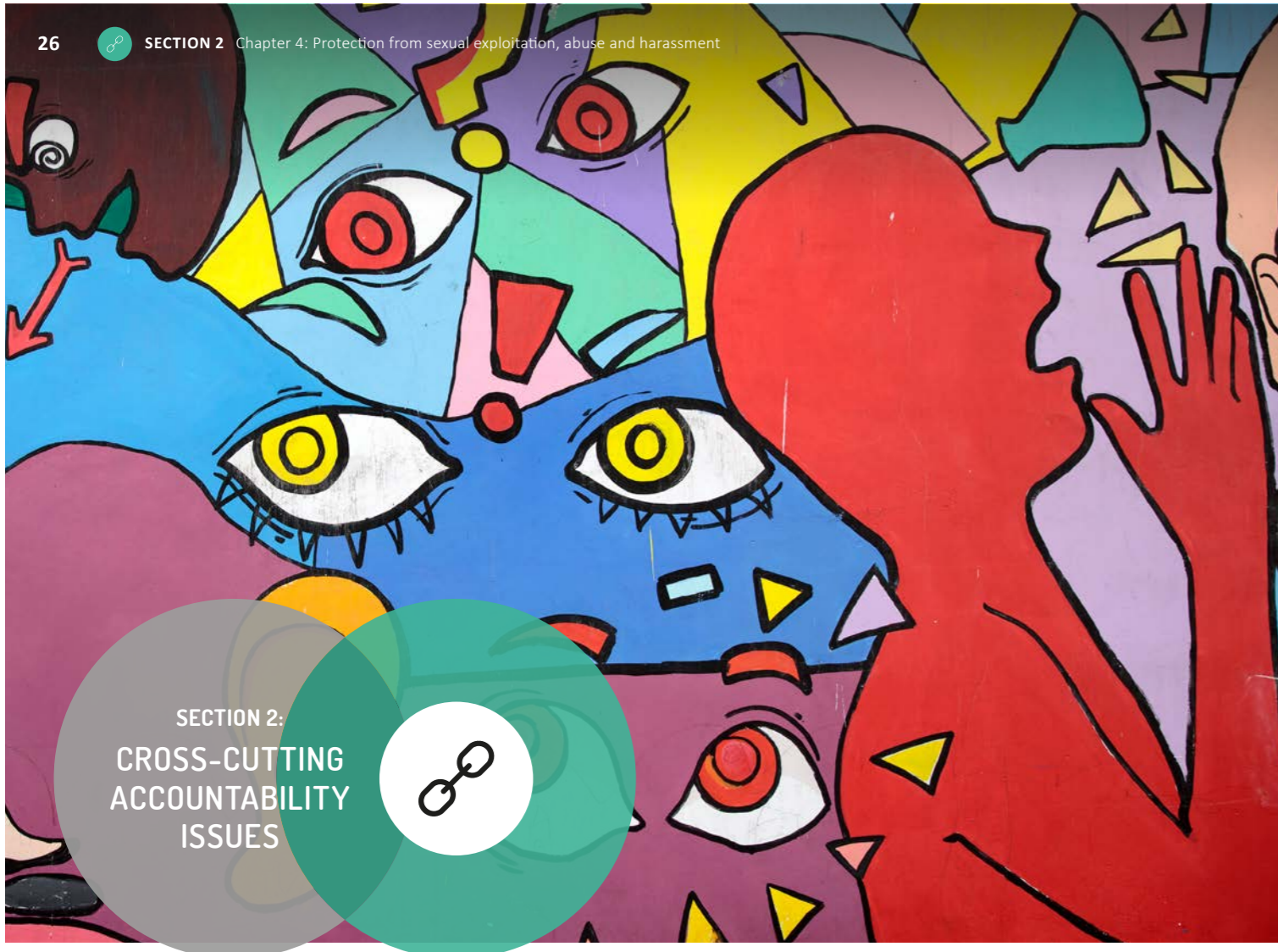
But, as I said, this performance measurement should come with support. I remember a recent programme for leaders of civil society organisations. Within a peer-cohort, leaders openly shared their experiences on how to pass on values. As they listened to each other they picked up the answers. Peer support groups are invaluable, they are a safe space. Being with peers who are going through the same things helps leaders to discover for themselves what could work best for their organisations, which is a powerful motivator.

KELLY: Ann is so right, despite our differences, many organisations are facing the same challenges. By being more open and vulnerable about our own attempts to do better, we can inspire and support others. There is power in numbers after all. I want to see more exchanges across organisations about our common challenges, more chances to inspire each other with good practice, and ways to build solidarity in an ecosystem that is all too often seen as competitive. I want us to bring the "human" back into the "humanitarian" sector.

“ As a first step, leaders need to work on themselves to become self-aware of their own personal biases and vulnerabilities, we're all human after all.”

“We must support our leaders more. We require so much of them, but who is supporting them? They're holding the space for so many things.”

Ann Muraya, Director of Organisational Health, Thrive Worldwide



SECTION 2:
CROSS-CUTTING
ACCOUNTABILITY
ISSUES

CHAPTER 4:

Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) of crisis-affected persons by aid workers are among the most egregious failures of accountability.

SEAH is characterised by some of the most brutal and life-changing acts of violence and aggression, often, but not always, against women and girls, including rape and sexual assault.

Every time a case of SEAH occurs, the system is completely failing those it is there to support. Each time a survivor, victim, volunteer, or staff member does not feel confident or know how to report abuse safely, it is a failure. Every time a complaint or report is made, but not effectively addressed, is a failure.

In the last decades, and particularly the last five years, protecting people in vulnerable situations from SEAH has seen greater sustained attention within the aid system. Many donors now also

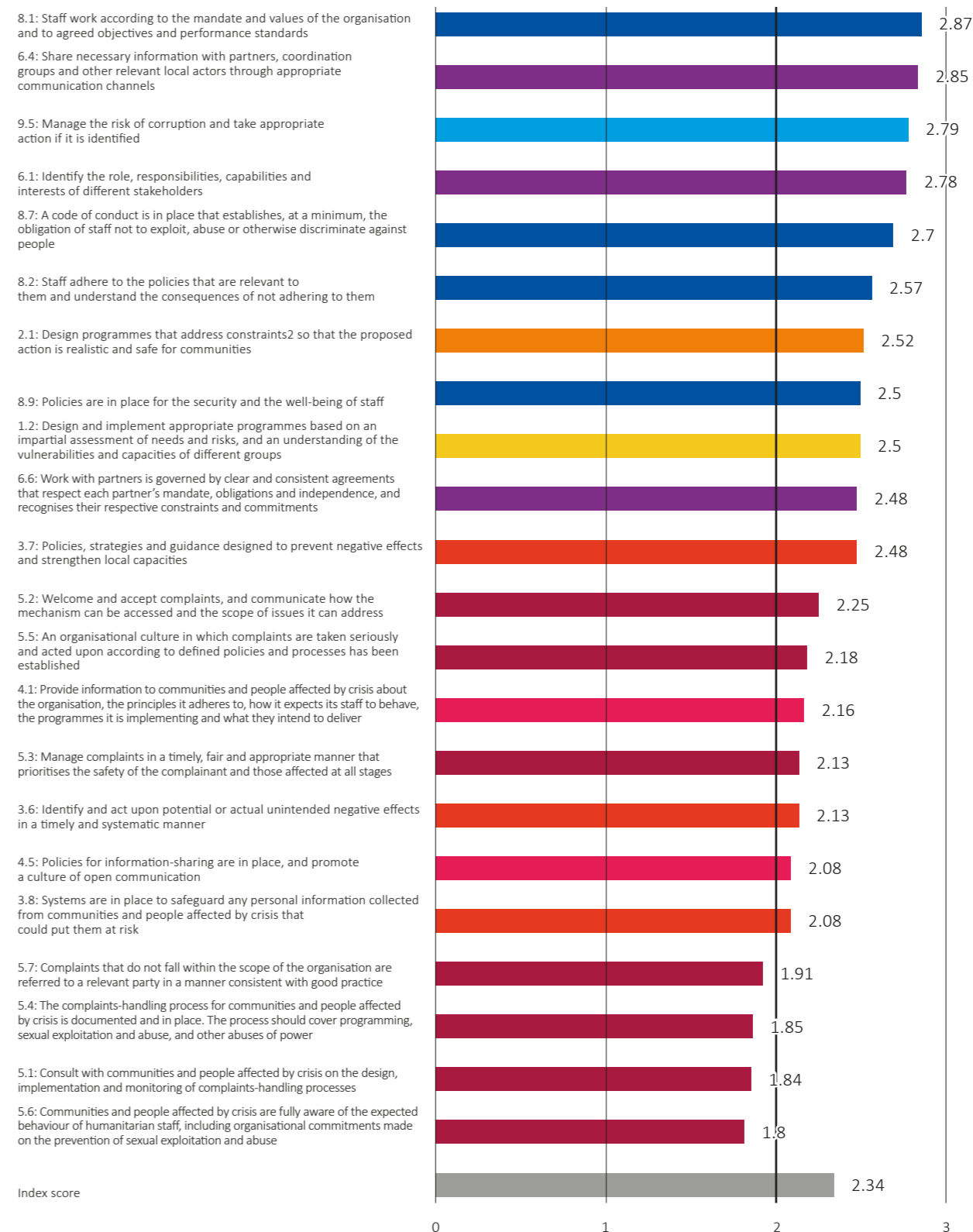
require organisations they are funding to adhere either to the CHS or the IASC Minimum Operating Standards.⁴² There are also promising signs of a more concerted systemwide effort to clarify and harmonise expectations and actions to prevent SEAH.

This is essential. We need to be absolutely clear about what needs to happen to translate requirements into action in order to ensure positive results for people affected by crisis. Key to this is addressing inequality and power, and the sense of aid worker impunity that prevails.

IMAGE ABOVE
Mural painted by women in Zone 18, one of the most violent neighbourhoods in Guatemala City April 2018.
© UN Women/ Ryan Brown.

Figure 4: PSEAH trends

This graph shows the average scores from all CHS verified organisations for each of the indicators that make up the CHS PSEAH Index. Scores between 1-2 mean that CHS verified organisations are not making systematic efforts to fulfill the requirements of the indicator. Scores between 2-3 mean organisations are making systematic efforts, but not addressing all the requirements. Scores above 3 mean organisations are meeting all the requirements for the indicator.



Source: Data from CHS verifications (all options) for 95 organisations from 2015 to 2021

Key: Commitments 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

“

Verified organisations show that, on aggregate, they have not met the requirements to fulfil the indicators of the CHS PSEAH index.”

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Despite the sustained attention given to PSEAH, there is a long way to go. Verified organisations show that, on aggregate, they have not met the requirements to fulfil the indicators of the CHS PSEAH index (see more below). The CHS PSEAH index is the lowest scoring of all three CHS indices, with no indicators reaching 3 as illustrated in Figure 4.

Central to the analysis of each theme is a selection of CHS indicators that together make up an index or grouping that is considered indicative of the theme. For PSEAH, this consists of 22 indicators across the CHS Commitments, known as the CHS PSEAH index.

To assess progress on the index, two sets of data are considered:

1. the compilation of verification scores from all 95 CHS-verified organisations (“data set one”); and,
2. compilation of verification scores from the 12 organisations that have undertaken a full CHS certification cycle (“data set two”).

PROMISING PERFORMANCE

PSEAH Index Commitment 8 indicators (*communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers*) score higher, showing that organisations have made more systematic efforts to apply the requirements of this Commitment.

The highest indicator score is for 8.1 (*Staff work according to the mandate and values of the organisation and to agreed objectives and performance standards*).

This suggests that verified organisations have robust recruitment and screening processes to promote safeguarding from SEAH and possess human resources policies with a clear outline on disciplinary actions for staff misconduct, including SEAH.

Some promising developments in this regard are the efforts seen with the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (MDS) which aims to stop perpetrators of sexual misconduct from moving between aid organisations undetected.

*In the three years since the Scheme’s launch, it has been used by more than 130 local and international NGOs, as well as private sector organisations. With nearly 30,000 checks conducted, it has helped to detect more than 140 applications with negative or absent misconduct data.*⁴³

WHERE WE NEED TO IMPROVE

Again we see the lowest scores are those indicators connected to Commitments 4 and 5 – which rely on engagement with the communities.

What should concern us all is that the lowest indicator score was 5.6, which commits organisations to ensure that 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. The second-lowest score was for indicator 5.1, whereby organisations commit to *consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes*.

The importance of addressing this weakness has been acknowledged within the aid system.

A 2020 UNICEF study in the DRC made some powerful findings on PSEAH, including the extreme lack of awareness of the existence of community-based complaints mechanisms for SEAH; the lack of confidence in local and national judicial systems and in mechanisms designed to punish perpetrators of SEAH; and women feeling powerless to demand justice from aid workers given their status and belief that they will not be held to account for their actions.⁴⁴

These two low-scoring indicators point to a widespread lack of communication between organisations and affected people on expected behaviour and what should happen if organisations fall below that standard.

These findings are confirmed by the ongoing CHS Alliance project, *Closing the Accountability Gap to Better Protect Victims/Survivors of SEAH*. This project highlights that although there has been an effort to raise awareness of SEAH, affected people are not consistently listened to and their concerns are not consistently responded to.

Survivors have found it difficult to find ways to report their experiences, often due to social and cultural barriers. In Bangladesh, the project focused on the largest Rohingya refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar. Due to inadequate security, a sense of impunity among perpetrators, and inaccessibility to or lack of justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the camps, there was a rise in sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation of children, adolescents and women reported. Similar concerns were found in Ethiopia and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt): a lack of trust and confidence in reporting mechanisms and beliefs that complainants will not be assured of confidentiality reduced the likelihood of complaints being filed.⁴⁵

In 2021, the CHS Alliance and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), together with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), launched an initiative to develop a harmonised framework for SEAH data collection and reporting in the humanitarian system.⁴⁶ The report made three significant findings:

- 1 Currently NGOs do not take a common or comparable approach to collecting and reporting information on cases of SEAH.
- 2 Organisations are using very different reporting systems and so information is not available or useful for analysis to better understand the extent of SEAH in aid work.
- 3 The current arrangements of NGOs reporting different SEAH information to different donors can lead to challenges in maintaining the confidentiality of the people involved.

Survivors have found it difficult to find ways to report their experiences, often due to social and cultural barriers.

CHANGES OVER TIME

Certified organisations have shown improvements on both the lowest scoring PSEAH indicators during the audit cycle (indicators 5.6 and 5.1 – relating to consulting with communities on complaints mechanisms) indicating that organisations which focus on these, and other crucial areas of accountability (such as Commitment 4 on information sharing) can improve their performance over time, even if incrementally.⁴⁷ However, the biggest decrease in scores over time for certified organisations is on indicator 5.4, which requires documented SEAH complaint handling investigation processes to be in place, indicating that there are still considerable efforts needed.

Other progress in PSEAH includes the efforts of individual organisations and the sector collectively to focus on establishing PSEAH guidelines and processes to ensure that allegations of SEAH are responded to.⁴⁸ Examples include BOND’s set of eight principles for building back trust through feedback.⁴⁹

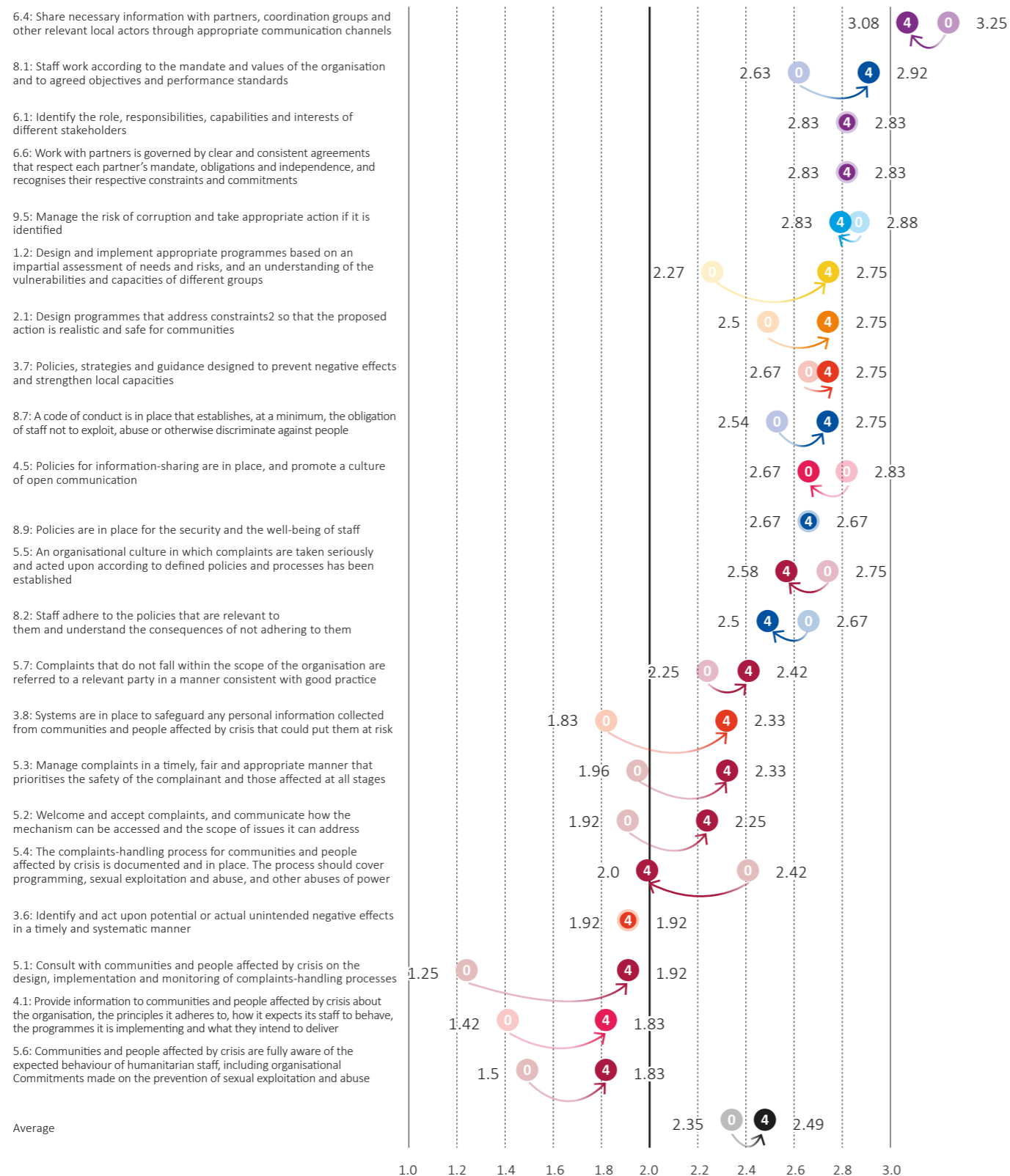
From a regional perspective, the Regional Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Referral Mechanism in the Americas was developed under the umbrella of the Regional PSEA Network and the Regional Safe Spaces Network in the Americas with the support and coordination of the UNHCR’s Regional Legal Unit of the Americas Bureau. The mechanism obliges service providers to fulfil the commitments, obligations and requirements to ensure adequate safeguards and appropriate actions are established on PSEAH.⁵⁰ As highlighted above, practical action remains far behind the development of PSEAH policies and guidance.

“

Beliefs that complainants will not be assured of confidentiality reduced the likelihood of complaints being filed.”

Figure 5: Average PSEAH Index scores

Measuring change over time: average PSEAH Index scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS



Source: Data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Scores shown are the average aggregated scores at the initial audit, compared to those at the recertification audit.

Key: 0 4 Year of audit

How Takaful Al Sham improved their ability to protect crisis-affected people from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment by using the CHS

A group of volunteers established **Takaful Al Sham** in 2012 to respond to the Syrian crisis. They work in Syria and Turkey to ensure equal rights, an opportunity to live in dignity and security, and to end human suffering for all those caught up in the conflict.

Takaful Al Sham started its certification process in 2020 to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of their systems and policies. They were granted a subsidy through HQAI's Facilitation Fund to cover 90% of the audit costs.⁵¹

In the initial CHS certification auditors found that Takaful Al Sham was not fully ensuring that communities and people affected by crisis were aware of the expected behaviour of staff, including organisational commitments made on the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (CHS indicator 5.6). They were given one year to improve this weakness.

The organisation was already working on protecting communities from sexual abuse, exploitation or harassment from staff, but not in a systemic way. The CHS certification audit made clear that their organisational policies needed to be explicit on staff duties around PSEAH and communicate these expectations with the people they served.

In response, Takaful Al Sham leadership created a new PSEAH policy and updated others to be clearer on banned and accepted behaviour, including in their complaints policy. Practically, they became more systematic in raising awareness with staff of what acceptable behaviour around SEAH looks like in practice, making it part of the project management cycle.

They created new project management guidelines, which also included CHS indicator 5.6 (people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff) for the first time.

The guidance explains how to ensure affected communities know about the PSEAH commitments of the organisations, their importance, and how to feedback if these are not met.

As a result, Takaful Al Sham started raising awareness of expected staff behaviours directly with the communities they assist for the first time, with a focus on how to complain if people saw or experienced unacceptable behaviour.

Takaful Al Sham asked the communities they work with how they would prefer to communicate with the organisation, and then set up channels based on this. All project locations now have posters which detail what to expect from Takaful Al Sham staff, and this information is also shared via WhatsApp (including videos) on burner phones provided to community members. The complaints and PSEAH helpline numbers are regularly shared on WhatsApp too.

Takaful Al Sham acted fast, rolling out these improvements in early 2021. By the next audit in the CHS certification cycle, auditors saw the new policies and heard community members say that they knew what to expect from staff on PSEA.

This evidence meant that in Takaful Al Sham's 2021 CHS certification audit report, the weakness against indicator 5.6 had been resolved.

Now, Takaful Al Sham hear from the people they assist that they have more trust in the organisation, particularly in terms of their information, accountability, and complaints systems.

They are seeing more complaints across all their projects, to which they respond well, and so encourage more to come forward. Before CHS certification, around 65-75% of programme participants knew how to complain; since the implementation of changes, this has increased to 90%.

“Before CHS certification, around 65-75% of programme participants knew how to complain; since the implementation of changes, this has increased to 90%.”

“ In conversation with Lola Adeola-Oni, Jane Connors and Andrew Morley

To debate how to urgently tackle the scourge of SEAH in aid work, Jane, Lola and Andrew exchange their views on the PSEAH findings from the 2022 Humanitarian Accountability Report.



Lola Adeola-Oni

Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub, Chair of the National Expert Board of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria



Jane Connors

United Nations' Victims' Rights Advocate, New York, the United States of America



Andrew Morley

World Vision International President and CEO, IASC PSEAH Champion, London, the United Kingdom

Q. What are your reactions to the lowest scoring areas of the CHS PSEAH Index?

LOLA: The low result on indicator 5.6 (people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff) does not shock me, as both international NGOs and local civil society organisations (CSOs) are struggling to fully inform people affected by crisis of what they should expect. I know it's linked to resources, but for me it goes beyond limited resources – it's about how to communicate key PSEA messages and forms of abuse that constitute SEAH in local languages so that people affected by crisis can grasp what PSEA is all about. It is also about being culturally sensitive – in a way that empowers people to clearly understand what unacceptable behaviour is.

ANDREW: I think Lola hit the nail on the head, as we are all trying to move to a victim/survivor-centred approach, defining what that means and having common standards. From the perspective of communities in fragile contexts, we know that they may already have a mistrust of the local authorities and are reluctant to come forward. So, we have to work extra hard to build their trust in NGOs and CSOs.

JANE: Building on what Lola and Andrew said, a victim/survivor rights approach is essential, we need to step up and accelerate this. Look at the low scores around SEAH complaints – for people being consulted on how the process is run, for having proper investigations and for referrals. This shows **we need to re-think our reporting pathways; complaints mechanisms cannot only be “complaint boxes” – we need people on the ground to vocally champion the rights of the victims/survivors – someone that people can trust.**

People are unlikely to come forward if they are terrified as, understandably, they need to have some sort of support and protection. Yes, it is a resource-poor area across the system, but the more we think of protection from SEAH as a fundamental right, the more it is empowering.

Q. What are your reactions to the highest-scoring areas?

JANE: As the CHS results show, the organisations are doing quite well on processes, such as recruitment checks as seen with the ClearCheck and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (MDS) – there has been a lot of buy-in and getting leadership support for these has been positive. But still, what is disappointing is that we haven't been sufficient in addressing the core issues – inequality and power – there is a still a sense of impunity among those whose engage in this behaviour. Setting the tone from the top has been useful and that our leadership takes these issues seriously is a good sign. We need to build on this.

LOLA: As Jane mentioned, the processes are mostly in place, we see safeguarding in job descriptions and onboarding of new staff. **Where the challenges remain is in embedding PSEAH in the everyday work of the staff – that is, how do staff know what is expected of them as they go about their day-to-day tasks?** We need to see more use of minimum annual safeguarding objectives for all staff and ongoing assessments of staff performance in meeting their personal safeguarding objectives.

ANDREW: I agree with Lola and Jane on where we've seen strong results and improvements: organisations are putting more effort into having competent and well-managed staff and volunteers to help meet the CHS Commitments. What I've been championing in my role with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the MDS (Misconduct Disclosure Scheme); to really stop perpetrators moving between organisations undetected. Since its launch three years ago, it has been used by 130 organisations with over 10,000 checks and 140 cases detected with negative or absent misconduct data. This sends a strong message that the aid system is not a place that will tolerate abuse. We also know that such abuse is happening in other sectors and we can't ignore that it's a larger societal challenge.

JANE: To follow-up on Andrew's last comment, we have to understand that our personnel is working in entities that are built on principle, we are based on principles, and it is hurtful for some like myself that admires these organisations, to see that people are not abiding by these principles. We are privileged to be working in this sector and the predatory behaviour is more shocking than in some other sectors.

Q. What are the key actions needed now to combat SEAH?

JANE: From our discussion, I think we really need to have a common definition of what is a victim/survivor-centred approach, as it's a relatively new concept. We have to create an enabling environment, in prevention as well as in response. We should not put the reputation of the organisations before the rights of the victims/survivors. We need to work together, it's not a competition between organisations. The real issue is the harm being done to individuals and communities – not to the reputation of organisations. Sexual exploitation also needs more attention – being clearer about how unequal power dynamics can result in unacceptable exploitative situations.

LOLA: I'd add to what Jane said by saying that a victim/survivor-centred approach also means focusing on the sharing of information between organisations (indicator 4.5) and having a documented process for SEAH complaints mechanisms in place (indicator 5.4). We need to see more sharing of information between organisations who are all trying to fight SEAH, and part of this is ensuring that complaints and investigations are properly documented. There should be proper safeguards in place in the way SEAH incidents are being shared or used among different networks.

ANDREW: Building on what Jane and Lola said, we need a common language and approach for all organisations, whether it's a local CSO or an INGO. Leaders have got to lead from the top on this – we have to set the strategy for the organisations, and make safeguarding part of everyone's job. For example, at World Vision we had a “safeguarding week” where all staff learned and were tested on their safeguarding knowledge. It is challenging for organisations, but it is at the heart of our work.

JANE: Yes, it is challenging and we need all organisations to stop thinking that the victims/survivors are the predators, we need to change attitudes of our staff through initiatives such as the example provided by Andrew.

“Since the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme's launch three years ago, it has been used by 130 organisations with over 10,000 checks and 140 cases detected with negative or absent misconduct data. This sends a strong message that the aid system is not a place that will tolerate abuse.”

Andrew Morley, World Vision International President and CEO, IASC PSEAH Champion



Action needed for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

On the basis of the identified gaps and progress to date, the following improvements are required to meet the commitments that have been made to crisis-affected people:

Aid organisations:

- ✔ Constantly raise awareness internally of what SEAH is and reinforce the message that misconduct will not be tolerated in an organisation; there must be no impunity.
- ✔ Create a safe environment for staff and volunteers to share concerns or report misconduct.
- ✔ Regularly check how complaints – particularly sensitive ones – are received and handled.
- ✔ Report publicly (and safely) on SEAH cases to bring transparency to the issue.
- ✔ Sign up to the Inter-Agency MDS and other mechanisms to check on new staff recruits.
- ✔ Measure how well they are delivering against the CHS PSEAH Index and use the data to plan how to improve – prioritising indicators that require deep engagement with communities.

Collective and multilateral efforts:

- ✔ Ensure PSEAH is not seen as a stand-alone topic, but a critical accountability issue that all aid actors must confront.
- ✔ Support different organisations to take a harmonised approach to reporting SEAH incidents.
- ✔ Foster more common learning around complaint and investigation handling.

Donors:

- ✔ Require more open and transparent reporting on SEAH to encourage actions to tackle it. Do not penalise for reporting, penalise only for inaction in tackling the issue.
- ✔ Use influence to bring greater coherence to tackling SEAH.
- ✔ Make the requirements on PSEAH explicit and integral to all funding in tandem with adequate support for different kinds of aid actors.



There is a lack of progress in shifting power, roles, business models and decision-making to local leadership.

CHAPTER 5:

Local and national leadership

Local and national leadership⁵² of aid organisations has an important role to play in ensuring people affected by crisis are better able to hold power to account.

Local and national organisations are more likely to speak the same language as those they serve. They are better placed to use tried and tested, flexible, local solutions, and leverage existing resources because they deeply understand the local situation, even when things change rapidly. Their staff and volunteers often come from communities affected by crisis, creating long-term relationships between the organisation and the community.

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, targeted attention to “localisation” and has continued to maintain sustained rhetoric in policy discussions, with the 2021 Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework positioning the importance of “meaningful engagement of national and local actors”.⁵³

System-wide efforts towards greater local leadership during the past few years have been impacted by two external disruptors: the COVID-19 pandemic and the calls to decolonise aid sparked by global conversations about race, privilege and power following the wave of the Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd in the USA in 2020.⁵⁴

Although efforts have grown in the past few years towards accountability to affected people and its critical link to localisation, there is a real lack of tangible progress for the required shifts in power, roles, business models, decision-making structures of aid organisations, and the need to dismantle persistent inequalities between international and local actors.⁵⁵

IMAGE ABOVE
Discussion group
in Dourbali, Chad.
© Shutterstock/
Xavier Boulenger.

Figure 6: Local leadership trends

This graph shows the average scores from all CHS verified organisations for each of the indicators that make up the CHS Localisation Index. Scores between 1-2 mean that CHS verified organisations are not making systematic efforts to fulfill the requirements of the indicator. Scores between 2-3 mean organisations are making systematic efforts, but not addressing all the requirements. Scores above 3 mean organisations are meeting all the requirements for the indicator.



Urgent action is required by donors, INGOs and UN agencies to accelerate and honour their commitments to localisation and accountability.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

The indicators in the CHS Localisation Index have the highest average score of the three indices. While the average score from the verified organisations is 2.59, still below the score 3 (demonstrating that the requirement has been fulfilled), some indicators are close to the required fulfilment (indicators 3.1, 4.2, 6.1 and 6.2), reflecting the progress and remaining challenges in this area.

Central to the analysis of each theme is a series of CHS indicators that make up an index or grouping that is considered crucial to the theme. The CHS Localisation Index consists of 13 indicators which are drawn from Commitments 3, 4, 6 and 9. To assess progress on the index, two sets of data are considered: 1) the compilation of verification scores from all of the 95 CHS verified organisations' reports ("data set one"); and 2) compilation of verification scores from the 12 organisations that have completed the CHS certification cycle ("data set two").

PROMISING PERFORMANCE

The highest average score for the CHS Localisation Index was on indicator 6.2 (*Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other aid organisations*). It is possible that this may partially be due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only provided opportunities and impetus to accelerate changes in the aid system in favour of local organisations but necessitated this change.⁵⁶

Other well-performing indicators of the CHS Localisation Index were 3.1 (*Ensure programmes build on local capacities and work towards improving the resilience of communities and people affected by crisis*), 6.1 (*Identify the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of different stakeholders*).

These results suggest that CHS-verified organisations are putting strong efforts into working with national partners, affected communities and authorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic had both positive and negative impacts on the localisation agenda. The pandemic was seen as providing some gains to local leadership such as: the travel restrictions enabled some governments to better coordinate responses; strengthening of local leadership due to reduced physical presence of international aid workers; innovation in supporting remote and participatory humanitarian aid delivery; efficiency gains in communication across responses through the use of more informal means of communication, such as social media platforms; and increased dialogue over localisation. However, these gains have not necessarily resulted in longer-term transformational change.⁵⁷

They also produced negative effects including:

- The attempts to 'localise' during the pandemic were more pragmatic than meaningful;
- The international aid system tended to give power to local actors only for a short period and at their convenience, undermining the notions of partnership and complementarity in local organisations;
- Some believed that the pandemic undid the progress made on localisation because remote management imposed a more top-down disciplinary control on local actors, thereby consolidating the different forms and levels of power.⁵⁸

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The COVID-19 pandemic had both positive and negative impacts on the localisation agenda.”

WHERE WE NEED TO IMPROVE

The lowest average score for the verified organisations was on indicator 3.6 (*Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner*). In relation to local leadership, this indicator considers the effect of competition on existing local capabilities to respond to emergencies.

Planning 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 (indicator 3.4) was another low scoring area that puts the emphasis on working in longer-term collaborative approaches rather than focusing on what is under the organisations immediate control.

Against indicator 6.6 on working with partners is governed by clear and consistent agreements, organisations also scored low.

With all the intentions of working in local partnerships, there is an inherent challenge for local NGOs needing to manage and juggle a host of different due diligence requirements.

This does not work and, despite the Grand Bargain commitment to reduce duplication in this area, there has been no progress.

There is an urgent need for greater harmonisation of due diligence, compliance and audit requirements to support working in multiple, equal and fruitful partnerships that keep people affected by crisis as the basis for action.⁵⁹

These weaknesses are confirmed by the Charter for Change alliance of INGOs and local/national NGOs (L/NNGOs) on the acceleration of localisation. In 2021, Charter for Change reported that while there had been increased attention paid to the capacity strengthening of local organisations to reduce dependency, spending on local organisations accounted for

just 3% of humanitarian expenditure, down from 6% in 2020.

They also found a rise in the number of international aid organisations reporting that they had poached staff from local and national organisations within six months of a crisis – an approach which undermines local capacity.

This indicates that some international aid organisations may in fact be – unintentionally – but actively undermining local leadership.⁶⁰

Figure 7: Average Localisation Index scores

Measuring change over time: average Localisation Index scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS



Source: Data set two - data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Key: 0 4 Year of audit

CHANGES OVER TIME

For the CHS-certified organisations, there is only a marginal improvement seen over the cycle (an average difference of 0.06). **This is the lowest progress seen across the three CHS indices.** This illustrates that despite the progress seen on local leadership overall, it has largely stalled for these organisations, possibly reflecting the challenges described in this chapter.

It is important to note that since the WHS in 2016, there has been varied progress on the local leadership discourse and practices, with progress in some areas and stagnation in others. The 2021 Independent Grand Bargain Report highlights the progress seen in the Grand Bargain Workstream for localisation, including: the development of a comprehensive package of guidance and increasing strategic engagement by and with local actors at field and HQ level; a gradual expansion in the operational practice of localisation; and a marginal increase in the funds allocated to local and national responders.⁶¹

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has been recognised as an external driver for some change, internal drivers in the aid system are noted to have often been slow and met with resistance.⁶² However, the CHS-certified organisations show that change can happen from within, even for a limited number of indicators that make up the local leadership index.

For indicator 3.2 (*Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities*), at recertification, the 12 organisations scored 2.83, nearing the required acceptable (“fulfilled”) level of 3.

This implies that certified organisations are increasing their use of assessments and the involvement of communities.

For indicator 3.3 (*Enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first-responders in the event of future crisis, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented*), at recertification, the 12 organisations having completed the certification cycle scored 3, which is the required acceptable (“fulfilled”) level.

This reflects the considerable effort by organisations to increase local leadership capacity and ensure that people affected by crisis are appropriately represented.

However, the aid system in general has struggled to put into practice its global policies on participation, inclusivity and localisation as described throughout this report.

The third indicator that shows progress is indicator 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*). The recertification score was 2.83, up from 2.50 at the initial audit. This implies that the certified organisations are understanding and appreciating the varying communication and information needs of different groups and taking action to address this.

However, two indicators, 6.2 (*Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other aid organisations*) and 6.5 (*Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles*), while meeting the Commitment with a score of at least 3, also showed a slight decrease over the certification cycle. This possibly illustrates the challenges of organisations to maintain their commitments in this area systematically.

How Danish Red Cross improved their support to local and national partners by using the CHS

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Danish Red Cross started to ask that their partner organisations all have dedicated and anonymous complaints mechanisms, and pressed the need for responsive feedback mechanisms.”

The **Danish Red Cross** is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which assists people in need all over the world, aiming to bring hope to the lives of thousands of people every day.

About 35,000 volunteers from 204 local Red Cross branches across Denmark work to alleviate social distress and make a humane difference based on local needs and the individual's life situation.

Danish Red Cross started their CHS certification journey in 2018. As part of the initial CHS certification audit in 2018, Danish Red Cross was found to have limited formal procedures in place for identifying unintended negative effects (CHS indicator 3.6).

To address this and responding to other recommended actions from the audit on strengthening partnerships with local actors, Danish Red Cross began to scale up support to their partners, these being the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies in the countries where Danish Red Cross operates.

Danish Red Cross started to ask that their partner organisations all have dedicated and anonymous complaints mechanisms, and pressed the need for responsive feedback mechanisms.

To help their partners overcome barriers to creating and running sustainable accountability systems, Danish Red Cross provided dedicated funding for community engagement and accountability (CEA) activities. As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Danish Red Cross developed and supported the creation of a wealth of guidance and tools that were then shared with partners to build up technical skills.

They also gave briefings on the CHS and offered a support system of focal points who could advise and train partners on which accountability tools were best to use for each context. This cross-organisational group of in-house experts were highly trained in CEA and protection, including trainers of trainers to support strengthening the longer-term abilities and knowledge of partner organisation staff.

Danish Red Cross have sustained these efforts to train and strengthen their local partners, so that they could provide local support and increasing meaningful participation with the communities.

By their CHS certification audit in 2020, there were more procedures in place to avoid unintended negative effects. This contributed to Danish Red Cross resolving the corrective action on CHS indicator 3.6 in the 2020 audit.

“ In conversation with Anita Kattakuzhy and Sudhanshu S. Singh

To debate how to make real our promises on shifting the power closer to the people affected by crisis, Anita and Sudhanshu exchange their views on the local leadership findings from the 2022 HAR.

Q. What are your reactions to the lowest scoring areas of the CHS Localisation Index?

ANITA: *What really struck me is the weakness in exit planning and transition. Thinking about what this looks like – NEAR network's Executive Director recently visited Gaziantep, where so much funding for the Syria response is winding up; they are moving into recovery and reconstruction. Everyone – in theory – understands that there should be a transition, but there doesn't seem to be any concerted discussion, or planning, even in a phased way. Yes, this a very difficult conversation. A very political conversation, but it needs to happen. International actors need to position the resources they have now to ensure that local groups can keep delivering their commitments during times of recovery and reconstruction.*

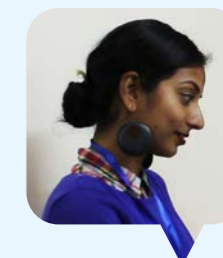
For me, these lower scores on transitional stages are really a symptom of a much wider problem. *The Syrian organisations in Gaziantep are saying they are facing the exact same problems as three years ago, five years ago, seven years ago. This is all about access to long-term quality funding, sustained resources and supportive partnerships. Without these ingredients, local actors always need to start and stop their work, which weakens them and makes things less predictable for those they support.*

Q. What are your reactions to the higher-scoring areas and signs of progress?

ANITA: *I found it interesting that the indicators on building local capacities – both for communities and local organisations – seemed to score relatively well, and improve over time, yet those on exit planning were low. To me this shows that there may be lot of activities around capacity strengthening that are not actually capacity strengthening – they are just activities to deliver a programme. While investment in delivering quality is important and good to see, there needs to be a clear mapping of the capacities for local actors to lead the response and investments are matched to that, then those capacity investments would have a much bigger impact.*

SUDHANSHU: *I agree – there are a lot of capacity-building programmes aimed at local organisations for specific projects or programmes, but how do they retain this 'capacity'? If they don't have any funding to keep staff or other resources over the long term, then staff get well trained, or relationships are built up, but then they can get poached by international NGOs. Capacity building and capacity strengthening is strongly linked to quality funding to not only hire and train, but also retain staff and non-human resources.*

It's interesting to see that CHS verification scores on local leadership indicators may have improved due to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think we need to be careful when looking at the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic as helping bring about more localisation, because in India, at least, the response showed an ugly and unethical side of localisation. Why? As international actors could not travel because of the risk of the virus, local actors were those taking the lead but were getting exposed to the virus without any kind of risk-sharing.



Anita Kattakuzhy

Director of Policy,
Network for Empowered
Aid Response, Nairobi,
Kenya



Sudhanshu S. Singh

CEO Humanitarian Aid
International, New Delhi,
India



A very political conversation, but it needs to happen!”

ANITA: Yes, it’s a shame, there was the possibility that the COVID-19 response would shake things up and shift the way that resources flowed. Risk sharing continues to be one of the biggest issues for local organisations, not just in health crisis, but also in conflicts. We need more focus on defining and monitoring all the risk-sharing components that are needed for fair partnerships.

Q. What are the key actions needed now to enhance local and national leadership?

SUDHANSHU: We need to be clear on what we mean by local leadership – for me this cannot include the country offices of international NGOs, or it kills the political movement. **We also need to question many of the assumptions that underpin some of the concepts we use to talk about localisation. Why is it assumed that local actors and governments require support from international actors to begin with? There’s also a huge need for more of an appreciation of the nexus approach, that local actors tend to do anyway.** Finally, I’m keen to see more context-specific results for CHS verification scores – we need more mechanisms to give further details of specific countries and responses.

ANITA: Ultimately, there really must be significant breakthroughs in the way resources are allocated – the control of resources – and how resources are divided. There are ways in which the international community could better collaborate to make their investment go further, particularly through partnership models, partnership capacity assessments and risks assessments – all of these require better collaboration between members of the international aid community.

Overall, there needs to be bigger shifts on how funding is used to deliver better programmes for communities, rather than simply aligning with donors’ priorities. Here the CHS plays a role in pushing international humanitarian agencies to change the way aid is delivered to focus more on the people and communities. As many reform processes have fairly short lifecycles, the CHS is a way to ensure our sector continues with the commitments made to the localisation agenda.

SUDHANSHU: I agree with what you have said Anita – and the biggest challenge of these localisation commitments – whether the Grand Bargain or Charter for Change – is that they are voluntary and only involve self-reporting. Once signed up, it should not be voluntary whether you want to deliver or not. As the CHS is entirely devoted to the delivery of accountability, I can see a clear way CHS certification can help with this. The CHS is also more global and universal than other reform mechanisms, so it can hold organisations to account in a way that becomes system-wide, while allowing for the much-needed plurality – to have a fair and equal system that has many different types of organisations.

“International actors need to position the resources they have now to ensure that local groups can keep delivering their commitments during times of recovery and reconstruction.”

Anita Kattakuzhy, Director of Policy, Network for Empowered Aid Response, Nairobi



Action needed for greater local and national leadership

On the basis of the identified gaps and progress to date, the following improvements are required to meet the commitments that have been made to crisis-affected people:

Aid organisations:

- ⊗ Consider the effect of competition on existing local capabilities to respond to emergencies, do not poach local staff.
- ⊗ Prioritise exit strategies and transitional planning in all programming.
- ⊗ Put in place clear and consistent partner agreements that support organisational strengthening and a people-centred approach.
- ⊗ Measure how well they are delivering against the CHS ‘Localisation’ Index and use the data to plan how to improve – prioritising indicators that require deep engagement with communities.

Collective and multilateral initiatives

- ⊗ Accelerate the aid system’s commitments to shift the power closer to affected people through an increase in local leadership by ceding some authority and power in decision-making fora.
- ⊗ Adopt harmonised due diligence processes to ease the burden on smaller organisations, based on the commitments to people affected by crisis.
- ⊗ Raise awareness of support available to local and national organisations to verify against the CHS.⁶³

Donors:

- ⊗ Increase direct support and flexible funding to national and local organisations.
- ⊗ Reduce the burden of due diligence requirements with local and national funded organisations by using the CHS as a people-centred basis of partnership arrangements.





People affected by crisis must be able to hold those providing support to account for the consequences of their actions.

CHAPTER 6:

Inclusive action

The needs and rights of all people affected by crisis must be the defining force behind the work carried out by aid organisations. Every human has many different needs and abilities, and each person is exposed to different risks.

How people experience crisis depends on factors that overlap and intersect with others. These factors can be visible or hidden, such as age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, race, tribal identify, religion, language spoken as well as many more.

Including the voices of people affected by crisis in the decisions and interventions of aid organisations is essential to the delivery of high quality, accountable assistance that meets people's needs.

People affected by crisis must be able to hold those providing support to account for the consequences of their actions.

That aid organisations must tailor interventions according to the needs, rights, capacities and experiences of different people has long been recognised. This was reaffirmed in the IASC 2022 Principals statement that called for greater inclusion and diversity "at every level of humanitarian decision-making".⁶⁴

However, the often-formulaic way in which aid is designed and delivered means the first barrier to inclusive humanitarian action is frequently the inability to identify the very groups who are most at risk of exclusion. Translating inclusivity into system-wide and systematic action remains slow and organisations must be proactive to include a diversity of people at all stages of an aid response.⁶⁵

Inclusive accountability to people affected by crisis involves a number of different actions. Key actions include crisis-affected people's participation at all stages of a response, particularly through participatory and collaborative decision-making processes, and the establishment of safe, culturally appropriate and accessible two-way communication and complaints channels.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Central to the analysis of each accountability theme is a set of CHS indicators that make up an index or grouping crucial to the cross-cutting area. For inclusive action, the data used is the aggregated scores from the CHS Gender and Diversity Index. The Index consists of 10 indicators, which are drawn from CHS Commitments 1, 3, 4 and 8. To assess progress on the Index, two sets of data are considered: 1) the compilation of verification scores from all 95 CHS-verified organisations ("data set one"); and, 2) compilation of verification scores from the 12 organisations that have completed the CHS certification cycle ("data set two").

Overall, verified organisations are making systematic efforts to include a diversity of people in their work, but not yet addressing all the key points they need to make sure every person is supported or protected equally. As a group, the aggregated scores of verified organisations do not achieve a score of 3 (requirement fulfilled) for any of the indicators central to providing an inclusive response.

PROMISING PERFORMANCE

When measured against the Gender and Diversity Index, verified organisations are doing best at meeting their commitment to 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 (CHS indicator 4.2). This shows that organisations appreciate that diverse groups have different communication and information needs and may have different trusted sources of communication. It also suggests that aid organisations are making a robust effort to use new communications technology, an issue which was brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁶

Over the last two decades, digital technology is facilitating more communication and greater community engagement (CCE) as well as enabling the collection of data. Examples include the use of hotlines – run by aid organisations or through third-party service providers, mobile phone data collection, and virtual discussion groups. This has come with both risks and benefits. CCE systems are often designed by aid organisations with limited participant collaboration or collaboration from the very people with whom they need to establish open and two-way communication.⁶⁷ This risks the creation of engagement mechanisms which are remote and are not tailored to communities being supported. More positively, digitalisation done right can make communication more secure or confidential and can help with collecting data from more people.⁶⁸

Verified organisations score higher on having fair, transparent, non-discriminatory staff policies and procedures which are compliant with local employment law (CHS indicator 8.5), as well as having codes of conduct in place which oblige staff not to exploit, abuse or otherwise discriminate against people (CHS indicator 8.7). These are vital documents that underpin the behaviours of those representing aid organisations but are not in themselves enough and need to be actioned across an organisation to be effective.

“*Digitalisation can make communication more secure or confidential and can help with collecting data from more people.*”

IMAGE ABOVE
Elena Sam Pec participates in a programme on economic self-reliance in rural Guatemala.

© UN Women/
Ryan Brown.

“*The IASC 2022 Principals statement called for greater inclusion and diversity “at every level of humanitarian decision-making.”*”

Figure 8: Inclusive action trends

This graph shows the average scores from all CHS verified organisations for each of the indicators that make up the CHS Gender and Diversity Index. Scores between 1-2 mean that CHS verified organisations are not making systematic efforts to fulfill the requirements of the indicator. Scores between 2-3 mean organisations are making systematic efforts, but not addressing all the requirements. Scores above 3 mean organisations are meeting all the requirements for the indicator.



Source: Data from CHS verifications (all options) for 95 organisations from 2015 to 2021

Key: Commitments 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

WHERE WE NEED TO IMPROVE

Once again, we are seeing lower scores – and so more problems to face up to and address – for the CHS indicators that require organisations to engage, listen and learn from those we serve. Accountability to people affected by crisis is an approach, not a policy document. It requires organisations to seriously analyse their approaches to the different experiences people face and cultivate a culture that responds.

Verified organisations struggle to identify and act on potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner (CHS indicator 3.6). Indicator 3.6 covers key aspects of inclusive action such as the cultural, gendered, social and political relationships between members of crisis-affected communities.

A weak performance here suggests that aid organisations are not doing enough to identify, monitor or prevent negative effects in the provision of aid to amplifying unequal power relations between different groups of people, an issue which is underlined by existing research.⁶⁹ The low score for verified organisations and lack of progress over time for certified organisations on indicator 3.6 (see Figure 9, page 48) is a significant concern given that this is a key action required of organisations to ensure that aid does not accidentally (re)marginalise or (further) exclude people affected by crisis.

Wider research indicates that a barrier to better identifying and preventing the unfair provision of aid to different groups (linked to indicators 3.6 and 1.2 – *Design and implement appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs and risks, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups*) may lie in the fragmented, technical categorisation approach aid organisations often adopt. For humanitarian and development action to be fully inclusive, proactive consideration must be given to all potential forms of marginalisation or exclusion. This requires that organisations themselves are structured and managed in an inclusive manner (from the leadership all the way across the workforce). Staff must also be aware of, respect, and work in a way which actively understands and engages with the rights, needs and capacities of crisis-affected people, including excluded, discriminated and marginalised groups, as well as the drivers behind why this occurs.⁷⁰

A better understanding of the multidimensional drivers of inclusion and exclusion – how they relate to each other and intersect – is needed if aid is to become more systematically inclusive.⁷¹

Cash and voucher assistance has long been recognised as way to provide people with increased choice, dignity and agency, as it can be more responsive to each individual’s own needs.

Verified organisations also show poor performance when it comes to having policies that set out commitments which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and collecting disaggregated data (indicator 1.5). The low scores mirror research that finds that humanitarian and development organisations lack data about persons with disabilities.⁷² Many aid organisations do not know how to collect or use data concerning people with disabilities and the challenges they face in accessing services.

A lack of diversity in leadership across the aid system may contribute to lower levels of understanding of – and responsiveness to – how people and communities with different characteristics and risks experience the world.⁷³ Homogeneity can show up in the mechanisms established for addressing power imbalances, and so affect the extent to which people affected by crisis are able to hold organisations to account. A 2021 survey by *The New Humanitarian* found that aid workers felt there was more talk than action on diversity, equality and inclusion, with very few international NGOs having made this central to their strategies.⁷⁴

CHANGES OVER TIME

For CHS-certified organisations, the average score for the Gender and Diversity Index increased over the course of the verification process – the largest increase of all the CHS Indices – with seven of the ten indicators scoring higher at the end of the process than at the start. This shows that progress is being made on inclusive action by organisations that are regularly measured against the CHS.

Certified organisations made the biggest improvements on designing and implementing appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs and risks, and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups (CHS indicator 1.2). This illustrates that, with targeted action, organisations can improve their understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of diverse groups and reflect this back into their programming.

After going through a cycle of the CHS certification process, organisations were also better at ensuring inclusive representation, participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of their work (CHS indicator 4.3). This improvement illustrates that organisations which focus on listening and learning from those they assist can start addressing some of the power imbalances that run through the system.

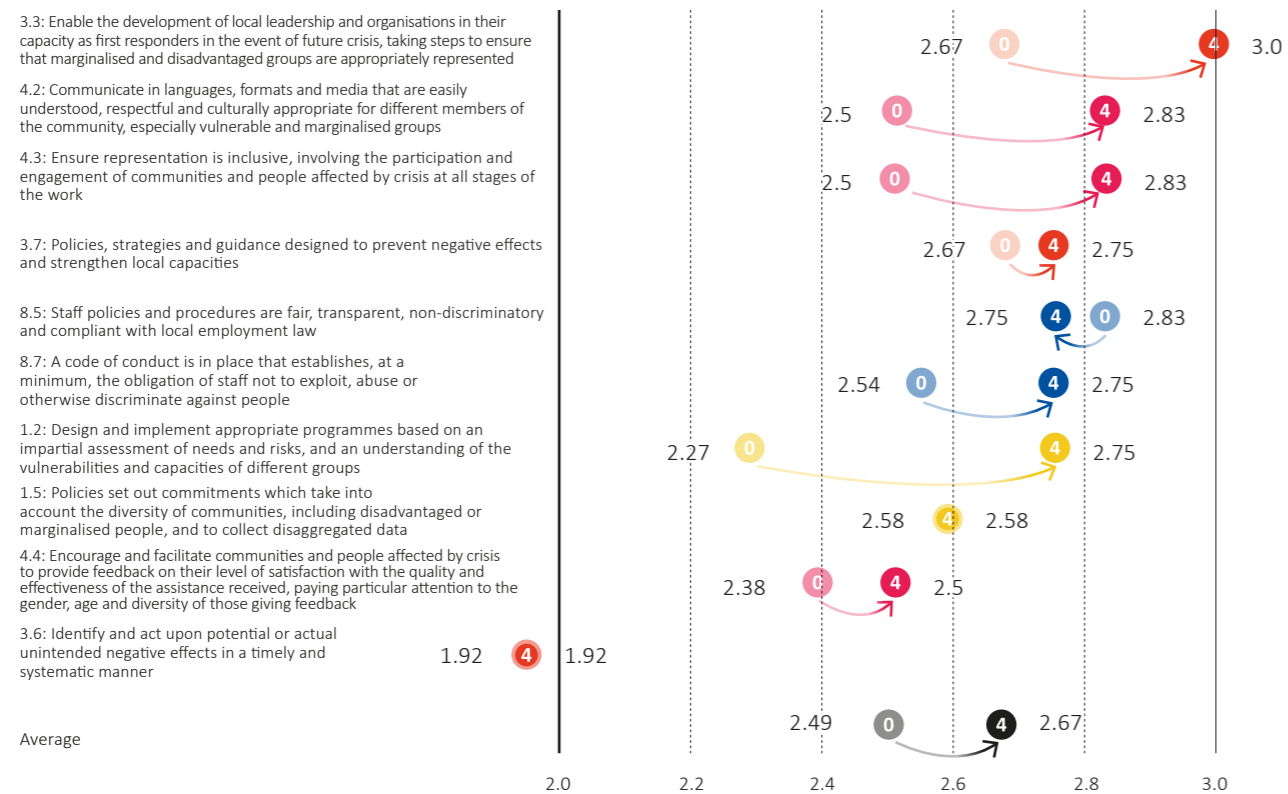
Certified organisations were also better able to meet their commitment to enable the development of local leadership and organisations in their capacity as first responders in the event of future crisis, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented (CHS

indicator 3.3). This could reflect an increased attention to the importance of building diverse and inclusive workplaces in organisational strategies and performance.⁷⁵

The only indicator which saw a decrease in score over time for certified organisations was having staff policies and procedures that are fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and compliant with local employment law (CHS indicator 8.5). This is the only reduced performance area that is directly within an organisation's control, and so runs counter to the otherwise strong trend we see of aid organisations better delivering their accountability commitments in terms of the policies, processes and actions that are directly with their control. More research exploring why this is happening would be welcome.

Figure 9: Average Gender and Diversity Index scores

Measuring change over time: average Gender and Diversity Index scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS



Source: Data set two - data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Key: 0 4 Year of audit

How COAST Foundation became more inclusive by using the CHS

COAST Foundation emerged in 1998 in the southern part of Bhola Island in Bangladesh – one of the world's most dangerous cyclone zones.

Currently the organisation serves around 1.7 million people, 95% of which are women. COAST exists for the poor and fights for their interests. Therefore, the concept of putting "people first" and holding the organisation accountable to the community they serve has always been at the centre of its response.

COAST is a long-time member of the CHS Alliance. Believing in quality and accountability to its core, the organisation embarked on a CHS certification with the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI) in 2017. The main objective of starting a verification journey was to strengthen the organisation's institutional governance system and compliance with the CHS.

The initial CHS certification audit by HQAI identified that COAST excels in coordinating assistance with other actors and ensuring that communities receive complementary assistance. But the audit also identified an area of non-compliance against CHS indicator 4.4. The audit reported that communities and people affected by crisis were not systematically encouraged by COAST to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of assistance. And that no attention was paid to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback. This non-conformity led to a minor Corrective Action Request (CAR). COAST was given two years to address this problem as part of the CHS certification process.

At the time of the initial audit, COAST staff felt that their work had been going well, as they often received good feedback. Yet they were not aware that the feedback wasn't being collected systematically. They also did not realise the need to pay specific attention to the differences between the people they were seeking feedback from, in terms of things like gender, age or sex diversity. The findings of the initial audit were a wakeup call that COAST needed to be more proactive in encouraging feedback from all of the different groups of people they served.

Reacting to the findings, the COAST Senior Management Team revised COAST's Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) policy. The policy changed to require feedback to be collected systematically from the people COAST supports every three months through surveys, focus group discussions and personal interviews. COAST developed a new format for conducting these discussions and interviews, training staff on how to ensure inclusive participation by actively collecting views from people of different genders, ages and from those with diverse characteristics.



Systematically encouraging and acting on feedback from everyone that COAST serves became an integral part of the organisation."

COAST also improved how the organisations created and shared learning from feedback. The organisation designated a MEAL section leader to compile all feedback reports into a single, accessible document that was widely circulated for internal learning and making changes.

Systematically encouraging and acting on feedback from everyone that COAST serves became an integral part of the organisation. Feedback and the changes in response are discussed at every monthly project coordination meeting. Each project team also prepares a monthly newsletter that details changes made as a result of feedback, which if shared throughout the organisation.

By the mid-term CHS certification audit in 2019, auditors found that COAST had in place a systematic process of seeking feedback from communities affected by crisis on the organisation, behaviour of staff, its programmes, and unintended negative impacts. COAST had also established a system of regular meetings at all levels to share information and reflect on feedback results. Therefore, the audit closed the CAR and recommended continuation of the certification for COAST.

“ In conversation with Martha Nemera Woyessa and Christian Modino Hok

To debate how to make aid work better for everyone in crisis, Martha and Christian exchange their views on the inclusive action findings from the 2022 HAR.



Martha Nemera Woyessa

Executive Directress – Women Empowerment–Action, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Christian Modino Hok

Humanitarian Director – CBM Global Disability Inclusion, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Q. What are your reactions to the lowest scoring areas?

MARTHA: Here in Ethiopia, these low scores reflect the reality on the ground. There are key areas which need improvement in terms of inclusion and diversity because one of the key gaps is diversity of leadership, particularly women’s participation and inclusion at the leadership and expert levels in humanitarian response. There are different humanitarian coordination clusters in Ethiopia where the participation of women is minimal. I am the only female participant in one of the clusters and it’s down to me to raise the issue of women’s participation as well as to ensure that cluster members are gender aware.

In Ethiopia inclusion challenges are linked to social norms. Gender and power dynamics discriminate against women – not just at the leadership level but also against women affected by crisis as they are not given a voice. Women in this country can face double discrimination – firstly, because they are women but then for women with disabilities or those who are socially outcast due to their livelihoods, for example, as commercial sex workers, they face further discrimination. Social norms must be considered when trying to address these issues and norm setters, who tend to be influential leaders, must be part of the deconstruction of these barriers to inclusion.

Another key area that needs addressing is the lack of gender-responsive recruitment policies in both humanitarian and development organisations. If we don’t address this, scores will remain low.

CHRISTIAN: None of this is surprising. These are areas where many organisations score low – not because of lack of effort but lack of capacity and resources to be able meet all the sector’s accountability demands.

So, for me, there are four “must-do” actions for the sector to ensure inclusion – firstly, one already mentioned by Martha, which is ensuring the participation of groups representing at-risk communities. Secondly, the identification, understanding and removal of barriers that prevent those groups from participating in the decision-making processes on an equal footing with other organisations. Thirdly, investing more in building the capacity of these organisations so they are better equipped to engage in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and better understand how the humanitarian and development system operates. Fourthly, ensure data is collected and disaggregated to inform programme design and implementation and ensure no one is left behind. If there is no consistent investment in these four key areas then inclusion will always be challenging. These four minimum must-dos are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

I also want to highlight that donors have a big responsibility in ensuring that enough resources are allocated for humanitarian actors to take appropriate actions in this regard, including lifting barriers for grass-root organisations, such as women’s associations or organisations of persons with disabilities to access funding.

MARTHA: Just to give more emphasis to what Christian has raised about the capacity of local humanitarian organisations, despite a lot of effort on the localisation of aid there is a long way to go to realise the actual localisation of aid programmes. **Despite the local organisations having adequate knowledge from the ground and knowing that social and gender norms can bring out different strategies for inclusion of diverse groups, there remains a huge gap in terms of accessing humanitarian funds and capacity building programmes.**

Q. What are your reactions to the progress seen in the scores?

MARTHA: In relation to the high scores, I can speak from my own organisation’s perspective as we have undergone independent verification. Through the different capacity-building processes we have good results. Being a member of CHS Alliance has helped put in place policies and guidelines for verification, as we’ve received training and coaching support. But what is lacking is monitoring and learning in relation to the implementation of policies and guidelines. In our case, having appropriate policies is also part of government compliance so it’s a double compliance which is maybe why most organisations comply.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, I agree with what Martha has said. But it’s difficult to judge as there are gaps. For example, with indicator 4.2, many organisations still do not consider consistently accessibility issues in their communications, such as using sign language interpretation, captioning, appropriate rights-based language or simply consulting with communities and different groups on their communication preferences. This needs to be improved. On indicator 8.5, as already highlighted by Martha, the challenge is monitoring and bringing evidence on the application policies. **Rolling out policies is a big job and ensuring they are understood by staff is important.**

Q. What are the key actions needed now to enhance and improve inclusive humanitarian action?

CHRISTIAN: I have already mentioned four main actions all organisations should do, but I think having a better common understanding of what we mean by inclusion and the barriers to it is a key first step. But this is not new! There are already very good guidelines, training materials, and cases studies that have been developed to support policymakers and practitioners make their work more inclusive. Humanitarian and development actors need to make inclusion an organisational priority and ensure they have the appropriate mechanisms in place to track and assess how inclusion principles are incorporated in internal policies and applied in practice. Finally, more investments in research and evidencing would be very important to keep informing advocacy efforts and programme work. With regard to technology, we need more specific practical tools for example to help collect and disaggregate data by disability.

MARTHA: Yes, we need to put more emphasis on tools, mechanisms and the capacity to transform commitments into action.

CHRISTIAN: Connected to this is more participation of representative groups in coordination mechanisms. Here international organisations and national governments have a role to play.

Finally, **funding is critical and it’s important that donors provide targeted funding for inclusion – if there is no funding and support for organisations to develop capabilities around inclusion then it will become more challenging.** All organisations need to have robust feedback and complaints mechanisms in place before a crisis and to proactively ensure that those systems are accessible to everyone they assist. There is a need for organisations which work through national partners to understand the diversity of the partners and the capacities that need to be built so that these can also meet the accountability Commitments of the CHS. Resourcing is required for all of this.



Action needed to strengthen inclusive action

On the basis of the identified gaps and progress to date, the following improvements are required to meet the commitments that have been made to crisis-affected people:

Aid organisations:

- ✔ Continually carry out robust assessments and analysis of the drivers of exclusion and the barriers and enablers of access to assistance, services, protection, information, communication and participation to proactively identify and mitigate unintended (further) marginalisation or exclusion.
- ✔ Work collaboratively with development, peacebuilding, human rights and other specialised actors as well as social scientists, in particular from crisis-affected locations, to analyse and account for patterns of discrimination and marginalisation.
- ✔ Improve and scale up the ethical disaggregation of data on the experiences of people affected by crisis.
- ✔ Regularly review the diversity of their boards, leadership and staffing. If needed, make clear targets to improve.
- ✔ Measure how well they are delivering against the CHS Gender and Diversity Index and use the data to plan how to improve – prioritising indicators that require deep engagement with communities.

Collective and multilateral efforts

- ✔ Support collective assessments, analysis, data collection and (safe) sharing of this information to mitigate exclusion or marginalisation of people or groups affected by crisis.
- ✔ Research and raise awareness of the multidimensional vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups of people facing crisis and share knowledge on programme design that respond to differential needs and risks.

Donors:

- ✔ Incentivise programming that is designed to include excluded and hard-to-reach groups, ensuring they are able to hold aid organisations to account for their actions.
- ✔ Consider their own diversity and inclusion within their leadership and hiring practices.



Listen to communities and engage them in decision-making that put people, climate and nature at the centre of all actions.

CHAPTER 7:

Environmental issues and climate change

Climate change and environmental degradation are key contributors and root causes of crises around the world, generating food insecurity, water shortages, displacement, threatening livelihoods and indirectly increasing the risk of conflict.

In the past ten years, 83% of all disasters triggered by natural hazards were caused by extreme weather- and climate-related events, such as floods, storms and heatwaves. The number of climate- and weather-related disasters has been increasing since the 1960s and has risen almost 35% since the 1990s.

These disasters have killed more than 410,000 people in the past ten years, the vast majority in low and lower-middle-income countries. A further 1.7 billion people around the world have been affected by climate and weather-related disasters during the past decade, effectively displacing millions and indirectly increasing

the risk of conflict.⁷⁶ Humanitarian responses often takes place in countries vulnerable and unprepared for climate change; of the top ten countries classified as the most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change, seven had a Humanitarian Response Plan in 2021.⁷⁷

Aid organisations need to be accountable to people affected by crisis for any negative effects to the local environment they cause and their role in potentially increasing vulnerability. Above all they must listen to people affected by the climate crisis, as the 2021 IASC Principal's Statement on climate emergency and humanitarian action urged:

IMAGE ABOVE
Residents of Bangkok's Dusit district make their way through flooded streets after the Chao Phraya River bursts its banks.

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beemanja.

“Listen to communities and grassroots leaders, particularly women, youth and indigenous people, and engage them in decision-making and co-creating and owning solutions that put people, climate and nature at the centre of all actions.”⁷⁸

People in crisis rely on their own communities’ natural resources and biodiversity as coping and, potentially, survival mechanisms. Aid organisations need to do far more to understand, respect and protect the natural environment of their operations and the existential threats posed to climate-at-risk communities. Given the urgency and increasing global focus on environmental issues and climate change, the aid system has become more active.

In 2021 in the lead-up to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), the IASC issued the above-mentioned Principal’s Statement and a Common Narrative on the climate emergency and humanitarian action.⁷⁹ The Red Cross and partners developed a Climate and Environment Charter for aid organisations which aligns with and builds upon the CHS Commitments and, by early 2022, had been signed by over 220 organisations.⁸⁰ There have also been global cross-organisational initiatives to promote environmentally-responsible humanitarian programming.⁸¹

However, aid organisations have been slow to integrate environmental issues in their responses and have not fully engaged with or understood how climate change will increasingly impact their humanitarian action and accountability to affected communities, as described in this chapter.⁸²

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

An assessment of the relevant indicators of the CHS-verified organisations illustrates that they are making systematic efforts towards addressing the environmental issues and climate change related indicators of the CHS, although key points are still not addressed with the scores ranging between 2.13 to 2.82. No indicator scores have reached the acceptable score of 3.

Central to the analysis of each theme is a series of CHS indicators that make up an index or grouping that is considered crucial to the theme. For environmental issues and climate change, this consists of eight indicators that are not a formal index. To assess progress on these indicators, two sets of results data are considered: 1) the compilation of the verification scores from all of the 95 CHS-verified organisations (“data set one”); and 2) compilation of verification scores from the 12 organisations that have completed the certification cycle (“data set two”).

PROMISING PERFORMANCE

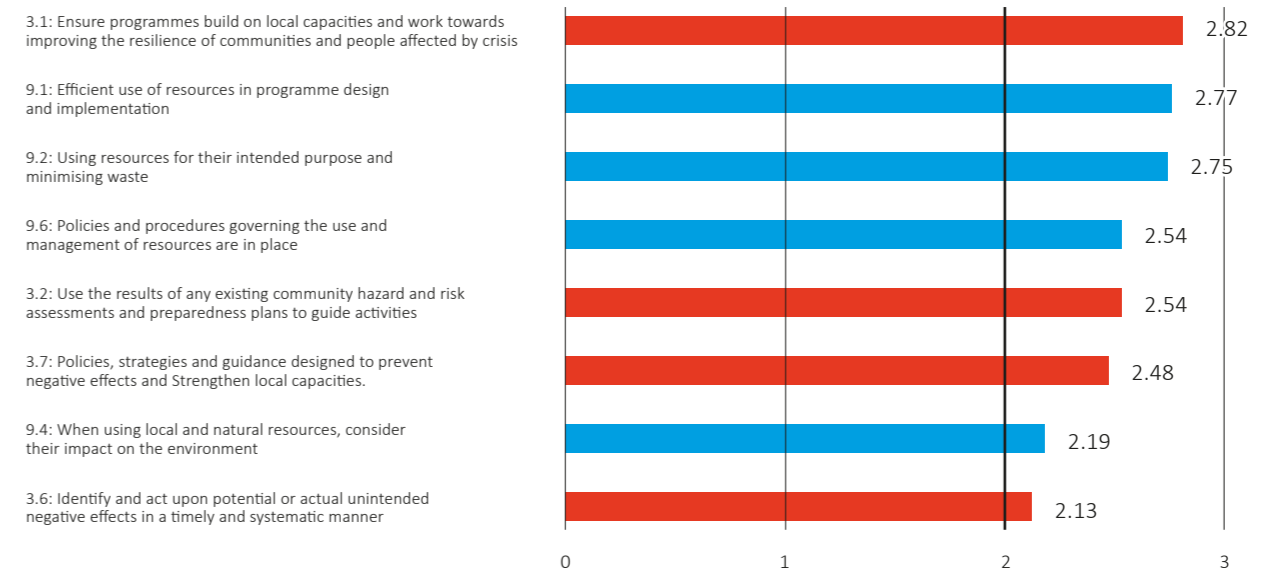
Figure 10 shows that the highest average score was on indicators 3.1 (*Community resilience*), 9.1 (*Efficient use of resources in programme design and implementation*) and 9.2 (*Using resources for their intended purpose and minimising waste*).

The good score for indicator 3.1 (Community resilience), indicates that organisations are making more systematic efforts to ensure their programmes work towards improving the resilience of communities affected by crisis. Community resilience involves designing services with affected populations that can reduce the impact of hazards, such as drought management and floods, hurricane- or earthquake-resistant structures.⁸³

Indicator 9.1 (*Efficient use of resources in programme design and implementation*) scored the second highest and encompasses the resources the organisation needs to deliver its mission, while indicator 9.2 (*Using resources for their intended purpose and minimising waste*) was the third strongest for verified organisations. All aid organisations are accountable to both donors and affected communities and should be able to demonstrate that resources have been used wisely, efficiently and to good effect. While organisations are improving their management of resources for intended purposes based on their procurement, finance, and tendering policies, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in large increases in plastic waste, exacerbating the environmental impact of disposing of single-use items.⁸⁴

Figure 10: Environmental issues and climate change trends

This graph shows the average scores from all CHS verified organisations for each of the indicators that are most relevant to environmental issues and climate change. Scores between 1-2 mean that CHS verified organisations are not making systematic efforts to fulfill the requirements of the indicator. Scores between 2-3 mean organisations are making systematic efforts, but not addressing all the requirements. Scores above 3 mean organisations are meeting all the requirements for the indicator.



Source: Data from CHS verifications (all options) for 95 organisations from 2015 to 2021

Overall, aid organisations are better at considering immediate hazards for communities and the management of the resources they have direct control over (indicators 3.1, 9.1, 9.2), rather than the longer-term environmental and climate implications of their actions in humanitarian response (indicators 3.6, 9.4), as confirmed also by broader research.⁸⁵

WHERE WE NEED TO IMPROVE

The lowest average score for verified organisations was on indicator 3.6 (*Programmes identify and act upon unintended negative effects*). The lower score indicates that aid organisations still need to address key points in considering the wider consequences of contributing to the climate crisis and other environmental issues, as reflected in broader research of the system.⁸⁶ To fulfil the requirements against this indicator, organisations must consider how their response can cause environmental degradation (i.e., soil erosion, aquifer depletion, overfishing, or pollution), and so amplify a crisis or vulnerability levels that are already at critical levels.⁸⁷ Measures to reduce negative effects depend on the intervention,

but could include reforestation, rainwater harvesting, efficient use of resources, and ethical procurement policies and practices.

The second-lowest score for verified organisations was indicator 9.4 (*When using local and natural resources, consider their impact on the environment*). This suggests that aid organisations are not placing enough emphasis on understanding the impact of a response on the environment, i.e., producing large amounts of waste, degrading natural resources, contributing to the depletion or contamination of the water table, deforestation and other environmental hazards.

A rapid environmental impact assessment involving affected populations and host communities can help to determine the risks and makes it more likely that mitigation measures are put in place. Positive examples exist of such assessments, for example, the development and deployment of the multi-stakeholder Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+) and its deployment in Uganda, Myanmar, Colombia and on the DRC/Zambian border.⁸⁸ However, the relatively low score of this indicator points to organisations not always using the available tools with the participation of affected communities.

CHANGES OVER TIME

For the 12 CHS-certified organisations, all indicator scores show a positive increase with the exception of indicator 3.6 (*Identifying and acting upon negative effects*) that neither increased nor decreased and indicator 3.1 (*Community resilience*) that decreased slightly but remained above the fulfilled score of 3.

The changes in scores over the cycle illustrate that the certified organisations have been making performance improvements on most indicators with links to the environment and climate change (6 out of 8 indicators). This implies that a focus on these indicators by organisations can contribute to improved performance on environmental issues and climate change.

The greatest improvement for these organisations was for indicator 9.6 (*Managing resources, including in an environmentally responsible way*).

This is encouraging, showing that certified organisations have been making progress on committing to environmentally sound procurement

policies and practices and making use of existing guidelines to help use resources in environmentally responsible ways in crisis situations.

Supporting the progress seen and building on decades of experience in disaster risk preparedness, aid organisations have increasingly focused on preparation and planning, including anticipatory action and early-warning mechanisms for environmental and climate shocks that place importance on the role of local institutions, knowledge and participation.⁸⁹ However, this type of humanitarian response remains fragmented and lacks inclusion and information for and from affected communities.⁹⁰

Another indication of progress can be seen with the recent launching of the Climate and Environment Charter as described above.⁹¹ Its adoption by aid organisations illustrates that they are taking a greater responsibility to reduce the impact of environmental and climate shocks with a “people-centred” and accountable approach. The Charter and its strong support to date sends a clear signal that aid organisations have a key role to play in addressing the climate crisis and it needs to be a collective endeavour.

How Naba’a improved its care of the environment by using the CHS

Naba’a is a Lebanese non-profit organisation established in 2001. It focuses on human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights and community development targeting the most marginalised and vulnerable communities, including Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians and migrant communities, focusing on bridging common ground.

Naba’a decided to complete a CHS certification six years ago in 2016 to demonstrate their commitment to accountability, credibility, and transparency to their international partners and those they serve, and have remained in the process ever since, improving their work over time.

As part of their 2020 certification audit it was found that Naba’a were not systematically covering and acting on potential effects on the environment in their Baseline Analysis, Risk Analysis or Participatory Needs Assessments (CHS indicator 3.6).

In response, Naba’a updated their standard analysis and needs assessments to consider environmental impacts, such as degradation

to the local areas where they ran activities, i.e., soil erosion or adding to pollution, to avoid unintendedly amplifying vulnerability levels for the people and communities they serve and work with.

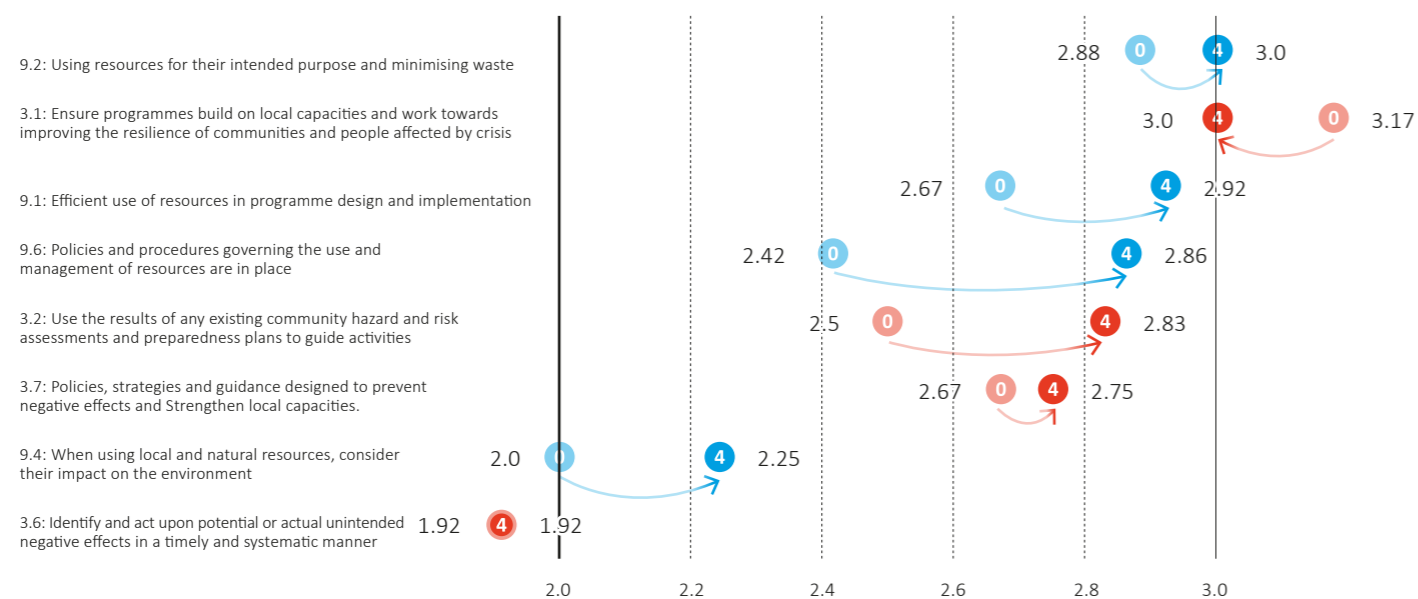
As a result of these improvements, Naba’a now runs activities to reduce negative effects on the local environment, including a programme of “Naba’a is Eco Friendly” which informs the community they serve about the importance of conserving the local environment, and carrying out agricultural activities such as tree planting.

“Naba’a now runs activities to reduce negative effects on the local environment.”

By the next audit in the CHS certification cycle, auditors saw that Naba’a’s relevant analysis and assessments considered potential effects on the environment, contributing to the closing the corrective action on CHS indicator 3.6 in the 2021 CHS certification audit.

Figure 11: Environmental issues and climate change

Measuring change over time: average scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS



Source: Data set two - data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Key: 0 4 Year of audit

“ In conversation with Vani Catanasiga and Irfan Ullah

To debate how to confront making aid accountable to those vulnerable to environmental changes and the climate crisis, Vani and Irfan exchange their views on the environmental findings from the 2022 HAR.



Vani Catanasiga
Executive Director,
Fiji Council of Social
Services, Suva, Fiji

Q. What are your reactions to the highest-scoring areas?

VANI: To be honest, I was quite surprised to see the strong performance in community resilience (indicator 3.1); perhaps it is happening elsewhere but I do not see it yet in the Pacific. As a local organisation, we have struggled in our past work with INGOs and donors, particularly in prioritising strengthening local organisations and communities. Only very recently do we see a greater acceptance to place community resilience at the heart of our efforts.

In general, on environmental issues and climate change in humanitarian response, we see some efforts on the periphery. Only as recently as last week, the Pacific Islands Associations of NGOs (PIANGO) held a meeting on the greening of humanitarian response systems and that, for me, is just a starting point here in the Pacific.

The 2022 Tsunami in Tonga is a case in point on minimising waste (indicator 9.2) when we are working on humanitarian response. The drinking water was declared unsafe and much of the initial response encompassed sending bottled water. I don't think there was much thought given to contingency plans for waste management, people and organisations were really just trying to send help to those affected in Tonga and not considering the implications of plastic waste on those communities. Luckily when we partnered with PIANGO to send relief to our Tongan sister organisation, Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT), our members donated water buckets. These buckets had taps and CSFT had access to a water purification system. So it worked out well.

IRFAN: I would support Vani on community resilience, it has started but it is very much dependent upon region and context.

There is still a lot of work to be done, particularly on the coping capacity of people vulnerable to climate change. And, in this work, there is also missing a gender, culture, youth and children lens for the response and resilience to climate change.

Waste management is also very context specific. In Pakistan for example, we have had multiple disasters, the impact of climate change and then, on top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic. And that's added to the challenges where we are at the initial states of waste management, even less so for humanitarian crises.

Q. What are your reactions to the lowest-scoring areas?

VANI: I would agree that we don't see enough long-term thinking among aid organisations on negative effects or impact on the environment yet (indicators 3.6 and 9.4). **80% of our members are community-based organisations and they are pushing to connect our responses to longer-term environmental issues and climate change solutions. Perhaps what is quite concerning for us is that donors do not always understand the need to bridge from response to recovery, long-term adaptation and climate change.**

Unless donors understand that connection, we must expect that the humanitarian sector in the Pacific will continue to be characterised by short-term and often environmentally-unsustainable services and support.

Aid organisations must continue to advocate for using local solutions, such as indigenous housing, even if transitional; we need to be using more local and natural resources.

That requires political will at national and regional level. We need all sectors – government, private sector and civil society – to move from rhetoric to action. If not, in settings like ours where we are already reeling from the impacts of climate change, humanitarian action will certainly do more harm.

IRFAN: I have seen that aid organisations are becoming more aware of bringing climate aspects into humanitarian and recovery activities. But I would agree with Vani that **a systemic, long-term approach is missing; organisations are all carrying out different response activities but there is no common broader approach and thinking about long-term impacts.** For example, a humanitarian actor may take flood reduction measures upstream but does not necessarily consider its impact on the communities living downstream. We need to have more synergies between organisations and build more partnerships. Tackling climate change is not a one-organisation responsibility; all the organisations need to come together to build links to address its long-term impacts.

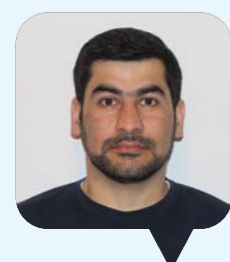
Q. What are the key actions needed now for humanitarian organisations to improve their accountability on environmental issues and climate change?

VANI: We need to monitor carefully how our climate change adaption and humanitarian activities are being funded by donors. What are their priorities and where are they dedicating the funding – does it match our needs on the ground? If we are not careful, these may be funding “confusion” initiatives that are counterproductive to community resilience and undermine national solutions. This is what I saw in the Pacific with the COVID-19 and cyclone responses that happened simultaneously.

Furthermore, in the Pacific, we are confronting the reality that some communities will have to move due to rising sea levels; in fact this is happening already. In these cases, we need to ensure that we are accountable to these people who are “climate displaced”. We need to make sure that, at a minimum, the principle of free, prior and informed consent is upheld and respected. Why? Because we are working in challenging contexts with multiple crisis, political instability and conflicts. For me, working in the Pacific humanitarian space, the solution is the CHS – to require that regional and national frameworks that guide how humanitarian activities are conducted embed the Core Humanitarian Standard. How do we do that effectively in the region when the awareness of the CHS is minimal among both authorities and CSOs? That's the challenge for aid organisations going forward.

IRFAN: I think aid organisations should align their activities with the countries climate and disaster risk reduction policies. And consider how their activities can contribute to these policies. Building on Vani's point on funding, we need to see resources going to the local actors, the first responders, as this will support building their resilience and more adaptive capacity to face climate change. We need more transparency on funding and data availability, in addition to knowledge transfers between the global south and north.

Youth are also seen as the victims of crisis but they are often the first responders and also very active in recovery. Keeping in mind the growing number of youth in developing countries, it's a resource that has to be engaged – not an “if” but “how”. Having youth involved will only build a more effective response and adaptability to the challenges of climate change and other environmental issues. After all, they are the ones who will face the future fall-out.



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Switzerland



Action needed for more environment and climate-sensitive responses

On the basis of the identified gaps and progress to date, the following improvements are required to meet the commitments that have been made to crisis-affected people:

Aid organisations:

- ✔ Work with local communities to identify and act upon potential long-term negative consequences for the environment and climate change.
- ✔ Accelerate and prioritise the inclusion of and information for affected communities in anticipatory action and early-warning mechanisms.
- ✔ Commit to lower carbon emissions, including by reducing consumption, promoting sustainable means of travel and using environmentally-friendly products/services.

Collective and multilateral efforts

- ✔ Accelerate and prioritise the adoption of common and collective measures for environmental assessments, such as NEAT+ and other common assessment tools and mechanisms.
- ✔ Collaborate to produce shared approaches to accountability to affected people in terms of the environment, such as building on the positive adoption of the Climate and Environment Charter through creating further alignment with the CHS Commitments.

Donors:

- ✔ Vocally support and fund initiatives that are accountable to people facing the impact of the climate crisis and other environmental risks.



CHAPTER 8:

Conclusions and looking to the future

The 2022 Humanitarian Accountability Report provides a mixed picture of progress on accountability to crisis-affected people, one that requires serious consideration, reflection and action.

The report highlights three findings echoed throughout the data, analysis, case studies and conversations:

- **To further reinforce accountability to crisis-affected people, there is a long reform road ahead. One indicator of the degree to which this is happening is the measurement of the application of the CHS Commitments, which illustrates there is still a long way to go.**
- **Progress can be seen when organisations take these Commitments seriously, assess how they are meeting them and make concerted efforts to improve where they are not delivering. As evidenced in the snapshot of those committed to the certification cycle, such an enduring commitment results in real change over time.**
- **Overall, organisations best deliver CHS Commitments over which they have control of the changes needed to meet them.**

They do less well on Commitments that require deep and sustained efforts to engage the people they serve. This is shown in how organisations are consistently failing to meet Commitment 5 on complaints and Commitment 4, related to communication, participation and feedback. This has to change.

Genuine commitment to accountability will require reform of the aid system, something that has proven elusive. As the 2018 edition of the HAR concluded, adaption rather than overhaul is how the aid system really changes.⁹² Findings from the 2022 HAR suggest that CHS verification can be the system of adaption for accountability that galvanizes change – one that can lead to reformulating how aid workers, leaders, organisations and the system as a whole understand, use and are held accountable for their power.

IMAGE ABOVE
Moldova – people as they flee the military offensive in Ukraine.

© UN Women/
Aurel Obreja.

“ In conversation with Regina “Nanette” S. Antequisa and Michael Barnett

To debate how to effect transformative system change on accountability to affected people, Nanette and Michael exchange their views on the findings from the 2022 HAR.



Regina “Nanette” S. Antequisa

Executive Director of ECOWEB, Iligan City, the Philippines



Michael Barnett

University Professor, George Washington University and CHS Board member, Washington DC, the United States of America

Q. What are your initial reactions?

NANETTE: I firmly believe that all organisations who raise money in the name of people affected by crisis must be held accountable. However, it is important to contextualise how standards are applied by different actors. Many local organisations are already meeting lots of their accountability commitments, like ensuring participation of affected-people in decision making and inclusion of the most vulnerable – as it is just the way many local organisations work naturally. How well smaller organisations can demonstrate they’re meeting their accountability commitments is an important question, considering the limited resources we have. We need to first of all see support from partners and donors for all types of organisations to make the most of tools like the CHS to measure, learn and improve accountability.

MICHAEL: Nanette identifies a critical issue: calls for accountability and other sector-wide standards have various unintended effects that can unintentionally work against local organisations and reproduce existing inequalities in the aid sector. Some aid organisations are more easily able to meet these measures of accountability – usually those who are already well-resourced. And while measures of accountability can seem “objective” and “neutral” they immediately sort agencies into “good” and “bad” categories, even though, as Nanette points out, “bad” agencies might be doing as well as, and maybe better than, “good” agencies.

Although there has been some improvement in accountability, the collective effort far outpaces the change. Why? Those in power rarely want to be accountable – and especially to those without power. Also, real accountability depends on sanctions.

Without sanctions, there is no incentive to be accountable. Sanctions can be financial, ostracism, criminal, removal from power, and so on. The point is that when those in power fail to do what they are supposed to or violate fundamental rules, there is a price to be paid. The aid sector has responded to the demand for accountability with voluntary measures that are absent any sanctions. This “voluntary” accountability is toothless, and it is not surprising because these accountability measures were created two decades ago by those in power. Agencies have drastically ramped up action on SEAH over the last few years. Why now? SEAH was always a problem, but agencies used to ignore violations. But times have changed, impunity is no longer acceptable, and donors and others are prepared to impose costs. Accordingly, aid organisations have had to begin to clean up their act.

Q. What actions are needed to make the aid system deliver on their accountability commitments?

NANETTE: I think we need to change how we conceive of ourselves as aid organisations. If we make the people affected by crisis the centre of our every action, then we need to reflect and change how we think about our roles as aid providers. Being mindful of that which has been raised having been done so in the name of the people, that should make everyone humbler and more respectful of rights of the people. We should look at being primarily complementary, as no one can effectively and adequately address all the complex rights and needs of crisis-affected people alone. With people and communities as the starting point, the role of each actor can be defined more effectively in terms of others, keeping in mind the important role of local actors who have innate capacities and strategic abilities to deliver more accountable aid.

We need also to get back to the idea that governments – or states – are the main duty bearers of rights, and so should be pushed to improve on their national humanitarian and development policies and programming, as well as the NGOs. This is where civil society has an important role to play with sustained advocacy, so that all parts of the system are accountable to people affected by crisis.

And, of course, **the donors are key to making changes happen across the whole system. “Those who hold the purse have greater power.” Using that power to support system change is essential, otherwise we may still be having these conversations centuries hence.**

MICHAEL: In addition to Nanette’s excellent observations and my previous commentary on sanctions, let me add the following. Accountability can also be understood as being obligated to give an account to the public. A central feature of democracy is that officeholders must explain to the public why they did what they did. And anticipating that they will be forced to give an account can have a major disciplinary effect: if we know we are going to have to explain our decisions to those affected by them, we will be more careful about the decisions we make. Sometimes such pronouncements alongside the public response can lead to positive change – but this is all about providing more voice and influence to people who live with the consequences of the actions taken by those with power.

I want to add something that often gets lost in the demand to shift power from the international to the local. Even if it happens (which is a big unknown), this does not end the demand for accountability. Presumably international actors will still be involved in various ways, including funding and technical assistance. If so, local actors will have some measure of accountability to international actors. More importantly, the shift in power from the international to the local means that local power holders will and should be accountable to those affected by their decisions. The recognition that accountability never ends, no matter how local it becomes, also warns against romanticising the local. The local can

be quite conservative, traditional, and resistant to social change. As someone who supports greater inclusion and diversity in the United States, I am not very enthusiastic about the “local” in various parts of the United States.

Q. What do you see as the role of the CHS in system change?

MICHAEL: The CHS has an incredibly important role, but it is important to recognise its place. Accountability in the humanitarian sector is multi-layered, multilevel, and multisided. **Greater compliance with a core standard should undoubtedly improve humanitarian effectiveness, save lives, and ameliorate suffering – the ultimate measure of success.** And while it’s promising to see the emerging evidence on the CHS certification process maintaining and improving scores over time, we need to know more about whether greater accountability is bringing about better outcomes for affected people. The ongoing wager is that accountability is critical for producing better life chances for affected people. Let’s find out whether that is happening and, if it is, let’s find out why. We need evidence. And, if we find evidence that accountability improves lives, the case for accountability will become even harder to resist. I look forward to the upcoming CHS verification Impact Study becoming the start of a new chapter on research into accountability.

NANETTE: The CHS already has an emphasis on supporting and capacitating local partners – international NGOs that act as intermediaries who believe in accountability to people affected by crisis must do all they can to support their local partners to improve their work and demonstrate that they meet the CHS.

Also, that idea of defining effective roles for aid actors in co-creation with the views and perspectives of the people affected by crisis needs a common framework – a common language – and this is where I see the CHS being valuable.

“ That idea of defining effective roles for aid actors in co-creation with the views and perspectives of the people affected by crisis needs a common framework – a common language – and this is where I see the CHS being valuable.”

HAR 2022 ACCOUNTABILITY MANIFESTO

This report demonstrates that accountability to crisis-affected people is not a nice-to-have, nor an add-on, but an essential and foundational component of the humanitarian or development endeavour, but one that is not yet being fully delivered.



Accountability is what every person touched by a crisis has a right to expect, and here is our guide to making it happen:

01 Far higher prominence to learning, responding and adapting to the views of people affected by crisis:

Accountability is an approach not an activity. Aid responders need to fully engage with people affected by crisis and act upon any potential long-term negative consequences of their actions. People affected by crisis must be involved in creating mechanisms and approaches to ensure their voices are being heard and taken seriously. They must be given the means by which to hold organisations to account when things go wrong. A far more adaptive, dignified, inclusive approach, working with people in solidarity and being able to adapt and respond to their needs must be the goal.

03 Accountability as a clear, stated non-negotiable for leadership:

Leaders of organisations (both governance and management) have to champion integrating accountability to people affected by crisis in a whole-of-organisation approach. This requires organisations that stay true to their values, not only in their programmes, but reflected across the organisational culture. Leaders must create caring and compassionate workplaces for how staff and volunteers are managed and supported, modelling the behaviour expected and establishing a clear “zero tolerance” policy for inaction on inappropriate attitudes and behaviour.

02 Accelerate accountability through commitment and action for greater local leadership:

International actors need to consider how they need to adapt their organisations to accelerate their commitments to local leadership if the system is serious about delivering greater accountability to people affected by crisis. This requires deliberate shifts in power, funding models, decision-making and structures, to reduce the inequalities between international and local actors. One concrete example is to base partnership arrangements around a common core set of Commitments to people affected by crisis, the CHS, rather than reinforcing the inequality through top-down divergent funding arrangements.

04 Prioritising and contributing to collective, system-wide approaches to accountability:

Accountability to people affected by crisis will not see the advances needed if it relies on siloed organisational approaches. It requires a systematic approach to make the changes needed. This means a substantial collective and global shift of efforts by donors, INGOs, local/national NGOs, UN agencies and multilateral organisations to challenge unequal power dynamics and champion new ways of working grounded in local realities. Collective initiatives need to be scaled up with increased funding and far greater coordination and collaboration than has been seen to date.

The CHS can serve as an important evidence base for how the system is achieving the Commitments made to people affected by crisis. As more data becomes available from the efforts of those organisations committed to improving their performance against the CHS, it starts to tell an important evidence-based story about which gaps are being experienced by multiple organisations, warranting deeper structural adjustments to reduce barriers to meeting the Commitments. This will support system-wide reform beyond simple adjustments.

HOW TO MAKE ACCOUNTABILITY A REALITY

To achieve the aims of the Accountability Manifesto, we need a far greater concerted effort across the aid system. Everyone, including you, reading this, need to ask yourself what role you can play to embed great accountability.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Leaders of aid organisations:

- ✔ Promote a whole-of-organisation approach to accountability to the people that humanitarian organisations exist to serve, from governing boards, senior management, programme staff and volunteers.
- ✔ Initiate organisational culture change initiatives to reinforce an accountable culture and encourage a learning environment on accountability through conscious and deliberate learning processes.
- ✔ Measure and improve the organisation's accountability values and behaviours through how well it meets its CHS Commitments.

Local and national NGOs and responders:

- ✔ Demand participation in collective humanitarian coordination mechanisms, to bring closer the reality of affected communities to their discussions.
- ✔ Advocate to funding partners for flexible funding schemes to support the changes needed to better meet the needs of people affected by crisis.
- ✔ Undertake a CHS verification process and advocate that partners accept this as a core aspect of their due diligence.

International NGOs:

- ✔ Ensure that the voices of the people they are working for are being heard and responded to.
- ✔ Raise awareness with partners on the importance of accountability and build knowledge around the CHS and consider how partnership agreements can be adapted to use CHS verification in due diligence requirements to build accountability into every part of the system.
- ✔ Undertake a CHS verification process and advocate to donors to create an environment that better supports organisations meeting their accountability commitments.

Multilateral organisations – including the UN and Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:

- ✔ Prioritise and invest in collective initiatives to tackle common barriers to accountability to affected people.
- ✔ Accelerate and prioritise the adoption of common and collective measures for accountability, such as the IASC Accountability Results Tracker.
- ✔ Use CHS verification as part of partner agreements.

Donors and government:

- ☑ Provide financial support and incentives to accelerate the adoption of common and collective measures for accountability.
- ☑ Provide financial and other support for organisations, notably local and national NGOs, to meet their accountability commitments to people affected by crisis.
- ☑ Use the CHS as an enabler for increased openness and transparency; encourage organisations to engage in open and transparent reporting and do not penalise them for honest and difficult feedback.
- ☑ Require funded organisations to be CHS-verified and lead the efforts towards a common passporting approach to partnership arrangements.

CHS Alliance will continue to support all our members, partners and the wider aid community in delivering on our accountability commitments. The first full revision of the CHS is currently underway, and we will ensure that the findings and action calls of this report are reflected in the revision process. The CHS revision offers an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to people affected by crisis and challenge ourselves to put aside our individual organisational mandates.



Together, we must fire up our collective energies to meet the collective commitments made to the people we are here to serve.

Because being held accountable for the use of power over – and with – the people facing the worst of the world is not a nice to have, or an add on, it's a matter of respecting the inherent rights, dignity and agency of our fellow humans, the very foundations of all our work.

It's non-negotiable.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAR	Corrective Action Requests
CCE	Communication and community engagement
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
CSO	Civil society organisation
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FCDO	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GTS	Ground Truth Solutions
HAR	Humanitarian Accountability Report
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HQAI	Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO	International non-governmental organisation

L/NGOs	Local/national non-governmental organisation
MDS	Misconduct Disclosure Scheme
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation accountability and learning
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
NEAT+	Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Associations of NGOs
PSEAH	Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

ANNEX II

CHS verified organisations

We offer our wholehearted gratitude to each of the committed organisations whose verification data is the backbone of this report, including:



Change lives. For good.
act:onaid
16 ActionAid organisations' verification scores were used in this report



8 World Vision organisations' verification scores were used in this report

To see the full list of organisations who have completed a CHS verification today, visit:
<https://www.chsalliance.org/about/our-members/> and <https://www.hqai.org/en/network/audited-partners/>

ANNEX III

CHS Alliance 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.	<p>Score 0: indicates a weakness that is so significant that the organisation is unable to meet the Commitment. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<p>Score 2: indicates an issue that deserves attention but does not currently compromise the conformity with the requirement. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<p>Score 3: indicates full conformity with the requirement. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<p>Score 4: indicates an exemplary performance in the application of the requirement.</p>

ANNEX IV

Full CHS Verification Scores

The first set of data shows average scores from the most recent report from all 95 CHS-verified organisations (all options) from 2015 to 2021 (for organisations that completed more than one verification, only the last set of verification scores have been included in the data set).

The second set of data shows average scores from the initial audit of the 12 organisations who had completed a four-year CHS certification cycle at time of writing. The third set of data shows scores from the recertification audit for these 12 organisations:

Commitment and indicator	Averages across all verification types	Averages at initial audit for certified organisations	Averages at recertification audit for certified organisations
Commitment 1	2.51	2.81	2.83
1.1	2.61	2.83	2.67
1.2	2.50	2.27	2.75
1.3	2.71	2.92	2.83
1.4	2.63	3.08	3.08
1.5	2.19	2.58	2.58
1.6	2.45	3	3
Commitment 2	2.54	2.58	2.7
2.1	2.52	2.5	2.75
2.2	2.65	2.58	3
2.3	2.47	2.33	2.58
2.4	2.72	2.79	2.92
2.5	2.43	2.67	2.42
2.6	2.45	2.83	2.58
2.7	2.52	2.63	2.75
Commitment 3	2.48	2.59	2.72
3.1	2.82	3.17	3
3.2	2.54	2.5	2.83
3.3	2.67	2.67	3
3.4	2.37	2.75	2.75
3.5	2.72	2.96	2.92
3.6	2.13	1.92	1.92
3.7	2.48	2.67	2.75
3.8	2.08	1.83	2.33
Commitment 4	2.43	2.43	2.7
4.1	2.16	1.42	1.83
4.2	2.77	2.5	2.83
4.3	2.54	2.5	2.83
4.4	2.42	2.38	2.5
4.5	2.08	2.83	2.67
4.6	2.28	2.67	3
4.7	2.71	2.75	2.83

Full CHS Commitment Indicators descriptions and guidance on how the scores are decided can be found on the CHS website at <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

Commitment and indicator	Averages across all verification types	Averages at initial audit for certified organisations	Averages at recertification audit for certified organisations
Commitment 5	1.94	1.94	2.22
5.1	1.84	1.25	1.92
5.2	2.25	1.92	2.25
5.3	2.13	1.96	2.33
5.4	1.85	2.42	2
5.5	2.18	2.75	2.58
5.6	1.80	1.5	1.83
5.7	1.91	2.25	2.42
Commitment 6	2.80	3.18	3.02
6.1	2.78	2.83	2.83
6.2	2.95	3.33	3.08
6.3	3.00	3.5	3.08
6.4	2.85	3.25	3.08
6.5	2.73	3.25	3.17
6.6	2.48	2.83	2.83
Commitment 7	2.41	2.7	2.7
7.1	2.56	2.75	2.83
7.2	2.29	2.33	2.33
7.3	2.27	2.17	2.58
7.4	2.27	2.58	2.75
7.5	2.37	2.75	2.67
7.6	2.73	3.67	3.08
Commitment 8	2.63	2.75	2.79
8.1	2.87	2.63	2.92
8.2	2.57	2.67	2.5
8.3	2.73	2.75	2.92
8.4	2.41	2.67	2.67
8.5	2.69	2.83	2.75
8.6	2.61	3.04	2.75
8.7	2.70	2.54	2.75
8.8	2.59	3.08	2.92
8.9	2.50	2.67	2.67
Commitment 9	2.66	2.68	2.75
9.1	2.77	2.67	2.92
9.2	2.75	2.88	3
9.3	2.92	2.92	2.83
9.4	2.19	2	2.25
9.5	2.79	2.88	2.83
9.6	2.54	2.42	2.86

ENDNOTES

- 1 IASC (2022, 14 April) Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Accountability to Affected People in Humanitarian Action. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-and-inclusion/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-iasc-accountability-affected-people>
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- 7 Oxfam Policy and Practice (2022, 17 January) Inequality Kills: The unparalleled action needed to combat unprecedented inequality in the wake of COVID-19. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/inequality-kills-the-unparalleled-action-needed-to-combat-unprecedented-inequal-621341/>
- 8 The CHS is managed by the CHS Alliance, Sphere and Group URD. The CHS is integrated within the Sphere Standard and supplementary and accountability methods such as COMPASS.
- 9 See: <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-verification-scheme-overview/>
- 10 95 organisations had completed a least one form of CHS verification as at 31 December 2022, with 35 in the process of undertaking a form of CHS verification for the first time at the time of writing
- 11 See: <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-verification-scheme-overview>
- 12 The CHS certification cycle was reduced from four to three years in May 2022
- 13 For all organisations that completed CHS verification pathway, only the last verification report completed has been considered. For example, an organisation that completed a CHS self-assessment and then, at a later date, went on to complete certification, only the last certification report is considered. If organisations have conducted more than one self-assessment, only their most recent self-assessment results have been included
- 14 This figure includes as single organisations the 16 Action Aid organisations audited under the group verification scheme
- 15 The certification cycle length for the organisations in this report was four years. Since 2022 this has been changed to a three-year cycle length
- 16 IASC (2022, 14 April) Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Accountability to Affected People in Humanitarian Action. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-and-inclusion/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-iasc-accountability-affected-people>
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CHS Alliance is a movement of humanitarian and development organisations committed to making aid work better for every single person facing conflict, disaster, or poverty. Its goal is for a greater number and diversity of organisations delivering on the CHS, by making improvements, verifying their performance and driving systemic changes needed for people affected by crisis to hold organisations accountable.



IMAGE Hawa Games Dahab Gabjenda the co-founder of Nora, an organisation combating violence against women and girls in Sudan. © UN Photo/Maimana El Hassan.



**HUMANITARIAN
ACCOUNTABILITY
REPORT 2022**

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ACCOUNTABILITY IS

NON-NEGOTIABLE