

Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

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ABBREVIATIONS

AWD: Acute watery diarrhoea

CHS: Core Humanitarian Standard

DAC: Development Assistance Committee

FRC: Free residual chlorine

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HNO: Humanitarian needs overview

HRP: Humanitarian response plan

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IDP: Internally displaced person

INEE: Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

JNA: Joint needs assessment

LGBTQI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex

MIRA: multi-cluster/sector initial rapid assessment

NDC: National Disaster Centre

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

VCA: Vulnerability and capacity assessment

WASH: Water, sanitation and hygiene

DEFINITIONS

Humanitarian response refers to response at local, country or regional level.

Humanitarian programme refers to a programme carried out by an agency or organisation.

Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Sphere's vision is that people affected by crises must be at the centre of decisions about humanitarian protection, assistance, recovery and resilience. They have the right to prompt, effective and quality humanitarian assistance which enables them to survive crises, rebuild their lives and recover their livelihoods with respect and dignity.

The mission of Sphere is to establish, promote and review quality standards for humanitarian action which provide an accountable framework for preparedness, resource allocation, response, monitoring and advocacy, before, during and after disasters and crises.

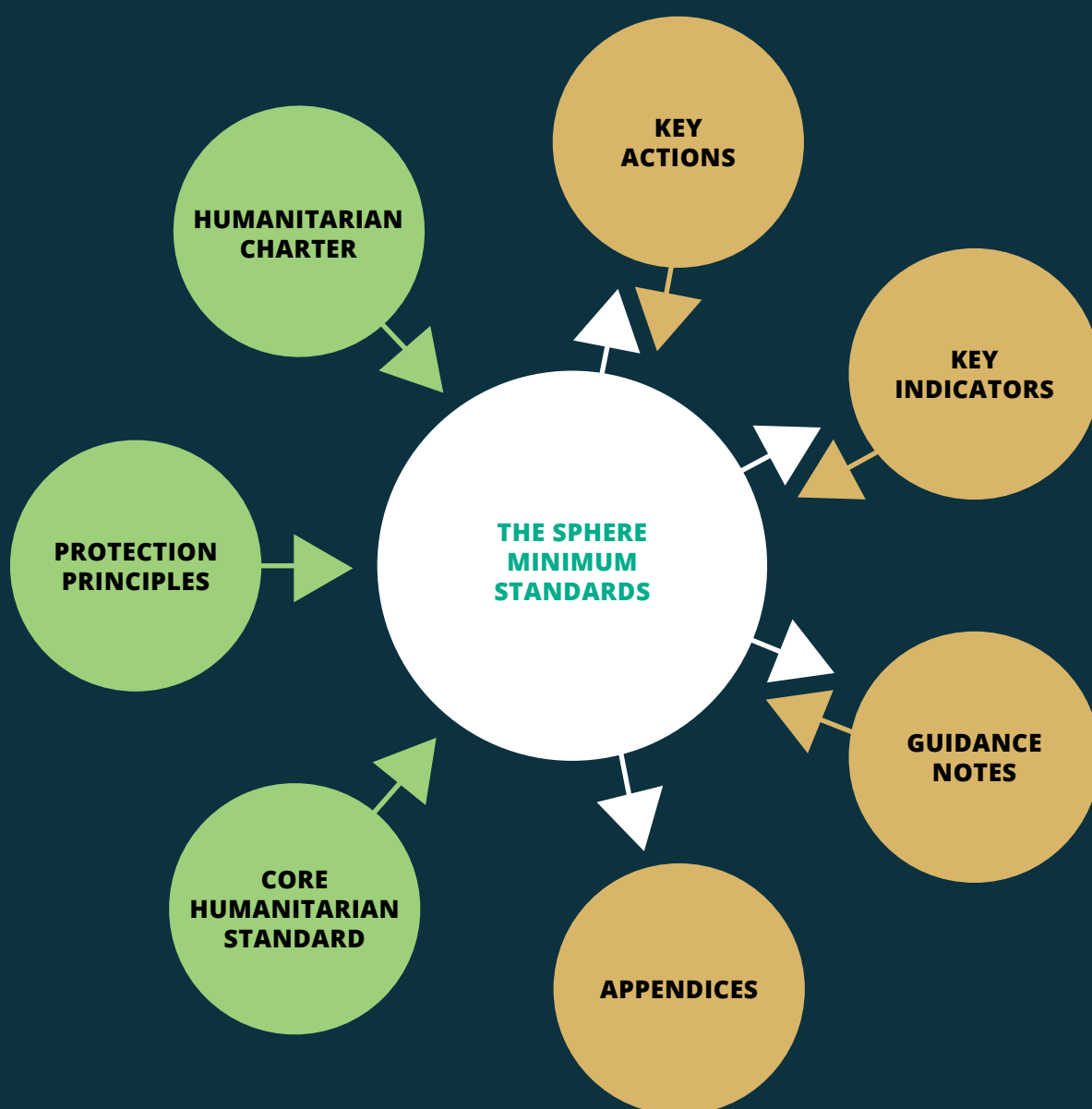
This implementation guide supports Sphere's vision and mission. It focuses on context and on some key ways to work with humanitarian standards.



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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COMPONENTS OF THE SPHERE HANDBOOK



Introduction

Sphere believes that in increasingly complex and drawn-out crises, it is beneficial for all levels of humanitarian response to work within internationally accepted quality standards and with a specific focus on accountability and crisis-affected people.

It is therefore important to understand how to work with standards, how to contextualise their indicators and what the advantages are of including Sphere indicators throughout the humanitarian programme cycle. This guide provides answers to these questions.

It assumes access to the Sphere Handbook and a basic understanding of assessment, monitoring, evaluation and learning processes. It is intended to complement and support existing guidance.

This modular document has five chapters, which can be downloaded individually:

1. Context
2. Assessments
3. Monitoring
4. Evaluation
5. Learning

The chapters can be downloaded separately or in combination. However, chapters 1 and 5 (Context and Learning) will be included automatically when you download chapters 2, 3 or 4.

The Sphere Handbook

The Sphere Handbook is one of the most widely known and internationally recognised sets of common principles and universal minimum standards for the delivery of accountable and quality humanitarian response. It offers an integrated approach to humanitarian action, including purpose, process and concrete activities. It supports populations affected by disaster and crisis to survive and recover with dignity. The Handbook thus provides a holistic entry point to humanitarian response at all stages of the programme cycle. It also helps inform preparedness and early recovery.

The **Humanitarian Charter** is the cornerstone of the Sphere Handbook, expressing the shared conviction of humanitarian agencies that all people affected by crisis have a right to receive protection and assistance. This right ensures the basic conditions for life with dignity. The Charter provides the ethical and legal backdrop to the Protection Principles, the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Minimum Standards. It therefore spells out the rights-based and participatory approach (paras 1 and 8), the importance of meeting people's basic needs (para. 2), and the do-no-harm principle (para. 9).

The **Protection Principles** are a practical translation of the legal basis and rights outlined in the Humanitarian Charter into four principles that inform all humanitarian response.

The Protection Principles help people:

- stay safe,
- access assistance,
- recover from violence and claim their rights.

The **Core Humanitarian Standard** (CHS) sets out nine Commitments to improve the quality and effectiveness of assistance. It facilitates greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis, staff, donors, governments and other stakeholders. The CHS is applicable across humanitarian response.

Minimum Standards help humanitarian actors determine **areas of need and gaps** to focus on. For each technical sector, they state **what response outcomes need to be reached as a minimum**. They are expressions of rights rooted in the Humanitarian Charter, Protection Principles and the CHS – Sphere's three foundation chapters.

- **Key actions** help identify activities to reach the standard.
- **Key indicators** help identify priorities. In certain situations, the targets accompanying the indicators can be **carefully adapted** to fit the context. Some of the quantitative targets constitute cut-off points between survival with dignity and heightened risks of mortality and morbidity. Therefore, they must not be adapted lightly. Indicators that help you determine **people's perception** – for example, whether they feel well informed or their needs are being met – are **a direct expression of the CHS Commitments**.
- **Guidance notes** help put actions and indicators into context in an inclusive manner. Cross-cutting themes are reflected in the guidance notes.
- **Appendices to each chapter** provide supporting guidance and information.

Two annexes include the documents upon which the Humanitarian Charter is built: the legal foundation to Sphere and the NGO-RCRC Code of Conduct.

Humanitarian Standards Partnership

Sphere and six other humanitarian standards initiatives joined to form the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP).¹ All these standards share the same rights-based foundation consisting of the Humanitarian Charter, the Sphere Protection Principles and the Core Humanitarian Standard.

The HSP's aim is to harmonise and facilitate access to humanitarian standards and thereby support the quality and accountability of humanitarian action across all sectors.

The partner standards are all organised similarly to the Sphere Handbook, with standards, actions, indicators and guidance notes in most cases. They complement each other. Depending on the sectors covered, you may want to work with two or three Handbooks in parallel.

While much of this guide discusses Sphere Standards, its content and rationale are also applicable to the HSP standards. Each HSP Handbook includes sections with focus on similar topics to those covered in this guide.

The HSP standards are:



Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS). See Core Standard 4: Initial Assessment; and Core Standard 6: Monitoring and Evaluation; plus tools and checklists in Chapter 3: Initial Assessment and Identifying Responses.



Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS): Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.



Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). See Domain 1, Foundational Standards – Analysis Standards 1 – 3.



Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS): Small Enterprise Education and Promotion (SEEP) Network.



Minimum Standard for Market Analysis (MISMA): Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP).



Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities: Age and Disability Consortium (ADCAP).

1. www.humanitarianstandardspartnership.org

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Context

Why is contextualising humanitarian standards so important?

Humanitarian response takes place in many different contexts. Culture, language, responders' capacity, security, access, environmental conditions, markets, resources and other elements will all influence the response. Contexts are dynamic: they must be continuously assessed and programme assumptions reviewed. The chapter *What is Sphere?* is a good entry point to understanding the various contextual considerations that are addressed throughout the *Sphere Handbook* ➤ see *Sphere Handbook: What is Sphere?* (p.16).

Applied well, standards are powerful tools to understand and take actions in difficult contexts with a view to improving people's lives. They are supported by indicators that make it possible to record progress over time and to review the gaps between **what should be** (the minimum standard) and **what is** (the current reality).

Because they state **commonly agreed outcomes**, humanitarian standards and indicators are an excellent support to a collective and coordinated response. They should be used not only by all humanitarian actors individually, but also to formulate **response-wide outcomes**.

Sphere's definition of context

Contextualisation is the process of interpreting the indicator baselines and targets according to context. A number of Sphere's cross-cutting themes help with understanding context.

People at the centre of each context

Involving affected people at all stages is key to accountable humanitarian response. Participatory practices should be applied to assessment, monitoring, evaluation and learning. They involve a cross-section of the affected population, and other stakeholders, providing a broader perspective, building ownership and empowering people. In particular, participatory approaches help to identify the contributions and capacities affected populations bring to their own recovery.

Crisis-affected people are the best judges of changes in their lives,

and their views should be included in assessments, monitoring, evaluations and organisational learning processes. Ask for people's feedback: engage them in open-ended listening and other participatory approaches. Also share and discuss organisational learning with communities and ask them what they would like to do differently and how to strengthen their role in decision-making ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.2*.

Involving local actors and affected populations:

- Provides a holistic view of the situation on the ground ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA 1.2* and *CHS Commitment 6: Guidance note*.
- Helps the humanitarian sector to determine context-specific indicator values and design effective and relevant humanitarian programmes informed by evidence ➤ see *PP 1* and *CHS Commitments 1 and 2*.
- Facilitates effective and appropriate engagement with stakeholders ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1*.
- Supports flexibility and adaptiveness ➤ see *CHS Commitments 1 and 2*.
- Helps ensure we do no harm ➤ see *PP 1; CHS Commitment 3*.

Participatory approach in South Sudan

In South Sudan, a community-based animal health system was developed in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The NGOs worked with communities to prioritise local livestock diseases and train community animal health workers. This strong community partnership and participation was key to eradicating rinderpest²

➤ see CHS Commitment 7.

Supporting national and local actors in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea, the government's National Disaster Centre (NDC) saw the need to redevelop the tools available for assessing needs after disasters. Through a UNDP disaster risk management project funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ACAPS supported the NDC in strengthening its assessment approach. The project involved revising questionnaires and tools, field testing in two locations and training.

Six months later, one of the testing locations experienced flooding and applied the assessment tools, leading to the release of funds based on the assessment report. Soon after, the NDC used the tools again to assess an eruption of the Manam volcano and has also built a National Assessment Standby Team with 30 individuals from key government line ministries, UN agencies, the Red Cross and international NGOs, trained by ACAPS.

A key feature in Papua New Guinea has been the NDC's ownership of the entire process, from identifying the need to improve its assessment capacity after disasters, including drought in 2015 and an earthquake in Hela province in 2018, to establishing the National Assessment Standby Team and looking to expand it to provincial levels. The project exemplifies how international actors such as ACAPS can support national and local actors adapt their systems in line with international standards, while remaining locally owned and relevant.

Source: ACAPS

Inclusion, vulnerabilities and capabilities in context

Individuals and groups within a population have different capacities, needs and vulnerabilities, which change over time. Individual factors such as age, sex, disability, legal or health status, nationality, ethnicity, language, or religious or political affiliation can limit access to assistance. In certain contexts, entire communities and groups may have limited access to assistance and protection because they live in remote, insecure or inaccessible areas, or because they are geographically dispersed or otherwise difficult to find.

A truly inclusive participatory approach is one in which everyone's perspective is considered, including those who may not always be able to make their voices heard on issues and programming decisions that are important to them ➤ *see PP 1 and all CHS Commitments*. An inclusive approach will strive to defend and safeguard people's rights and help them claim their rights ➤ *see PPs 1 to 4*.

In the Sphere Handbook, potentially vulnerable groups are consistently mentioned to ensure they are not forgotten. Other HSP handbooks focusing explicitly on inclusion are the **Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities**, the **INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies and the Child Protection Minimum Standards**.

Disaggregated data (data separated into multiple categories) helps to identify people most at risk and obstacles they face to receive humanitarian assistance. It also helps reveal the impact of actions and events on different groups.

The Handbook is based on consistent **minimal data disaggregation** by sex, age and disability³ ➤ *Disaggregation table in What is Sphere?*. Additional appropriate categories should be included to target specific groups identified as vulnerable and less likely to receive impartial assistance ➤ *see What is Sphere?*

Examples of inclusion in the Sphere Handbook

The Humanitarian Charter

The Humanitarian Charter states the fundamental rights to life with dignity, to receive humanitarian assistance and to protection and security. These rights apply to everybody. The right to humanitarian assistance is based on need (impartiality), which reflects the wider principle that:

"No one should be discriminated against on any grounds of status, including age, gender, race, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, health status, political or other opinion, and national or social origin."

➤ *see Humanitarian Charter, paras 4 to 6.*

Protection Principles

- **Protection Principle 2**, Guidance notes: Address barriers that may restrict access by some groups and individuals, resulting in inequitable assistance and discrimination. Note: at times, urgency of need and lack of access to populations make inclusive participation difficult. The Sphere Handbook provides consistent reminders to help identify and overcome such barriers.
- **Protection Principle 4 (also CHS Commitment 4)**, Guidance notes: Provide information in languages that affected people can understand. Use multiple formats (such as written, graphic or audio) to make information as widely accessible as possible. Test message comprehension with different groups, considering variations in age, gender, education level and mother tongue.

Core Humanitarian Standard examples

- **CHS Commitment 1**, Guidance notes: "Existing capacity: Targeted efforts may need to be undertaken to strengthen participation of typically under-represented groups, such as women, children, older people, people with disabilities, and linguistic or ethnic minorities."
- **CHS Commitment 5**, Guidance notes: Designing a complaints mechanism: Pay attention to the needs of older people, women and girls, boys and men, persons with disabilities and others who might be marginalised. Ensure they have a say in the design and implementation of complaints systems.

3. For disability disaggregation, best practice is to use the Washington Group Short Set of Disability Questions

- **CHS Commitment 8, Guidance notes:** Policies should promote a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Technical standards examples

- **Water, sanitation and hygiene** – Excreta management standard 3.2: Guidance notes: Accessible toilets, or additions to existing toilets, may need to be constructed, adapted or bought for children, older people and people with disabilities or incontinence.
- **Food security and nutrition** – Food assistance standard 6.3: Guidance Notes: In relation to safety during food, voucher and cash distributions, carefully plan the site layout at distribution points so that they are safe and accessible for older people, people with disabilities and people with functional difficulties. Include female guardians to oversee off-loading, registration, distribution and post-distribution monitoring of food.

Do no harm and protection

If we do not understand the local dynamics we work in, we may end up doing more harm than good and fuelling existing conflict dynamics
➤ see PP 1 and CHS Commitment 3.

Several themes that have the potential to influence people's safety and security are included in the Sphere Handbook: civil-military coordination, safety of medical staff, psycho-social support to survivors, urban contexts, camp settings, civil-military coordination, disaster risk reduction and environmental sustainability. All these external factors are of direct importance to people's protection and well-being. They are introduced in *What is Sphere?* and included throughout the entire Handbook. Organisations need to address these themes as appropriate.

Security and risks

A well-designed programme includes a robust risk analysis and assumptions that have been made accordingly ➤ see PP 1. This risk analysis provides a good starting point for ongoing monitoring of the context ➤ see CHS Commitment 1.

Protection concerns to consider when monitoring security and risks ➤ see PP 1: GN:

- What are the protection threats, risks and vulnerabilities across the whole population? What capacities does the population have to minimise those?

- Do some groups face specific risks? Why? Consider, for example, ethnicity, caste, class, gender, sex, age, disability or sexual orientation.
- Are there obstacles preventing people from accessing assistance or participating in decisions? These may include security, social or physical barriers, or how information is provided.
- Are there punitive laws that pose a protection risk, such as mandatory testing for HIV, criminalisation of same-sex relationships, or others?

Coping

People affected by a disaster find ways to cope with the changed situation. Some coping strategies have negative consequences. Monitoring people's coping strategies can provide valuable information about changes to context, as well as the outcomes of interventions
➤ see PP 1 and PP 3.

Protection concerns to consider when monitoring coping ➤ see PP 1: GN:

- Are people engaged in negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex, early marriage, child labour or risky migration? What can be done to mitigate underlying vulnerabilities?
- What are local communities doing to protect themselves? How can humanitarian organisations support and not undermine these efforts? Are there risks to people protecting themselves?

Markets

All humanitarian activities providing cash, goods or services will have an impact on local market systems. While these impacts will normally be positive for the target group of the intervention, they may have less positive impacts for other actors, such as food producers or traders. The impact of humanitarian interventions on market systems and prices should be monitored and agencies must be willing to change approaches to minimise negative impacts ➤ see CHS Commitment 3: KA 3.5 and *Delivering assistance through markets (appendix to What is Sphere?) and Food security and nutrition assessments standard 1.1: GN.*

Protection concerns to consider when monitoring markets ➤ see PP 1: GN:

- Are humanitarian activities having unintended negative consequences on markets?
- Are they putting people at risk or causing division within the community or with host communities?
- What can be done to reduce this risk?

Adopting Sphere throughout your organisation

The guidance you're reading here must be anchored in organisational ethics, policies and practice if it is to be fully effective. Below are the key elements to consider:

Doing quality humanitarian work in an accountable and respectful way starts with an **organisational commitment to the Humanitarian Charter** at the level of senior management. Some senior managers may be unfamiliar with Sphere, and you may have to work with them to demonstrate Sphere's relevance to agency processes.

Human Resources, including staff development, is another key area to build an accountable organisation. All staff should be aware of the Protection Principles, CHS and relevant technical standards and know how to work with them in their specific field of expertise. Staff should also abide by the organisation's code of conduct.

CHS Commitment 8 covers this in detail.

Logistics are covered in **Livelihood standard 7.1** for Supply Chain Management and in the Appendix to "What is Sphere": **Delivering assistance through markets** – it includes a Checklist for supply chain management and logistics.

For **inclusive security planning**, see **CHS Commitment 1**: KA 1.1 which addresses the importance of assessing the safety and security of affected, displaced and host populations to identify threats of violence and any forms of coercion, denial of subsistence or denial of basic human rights (linked to Sphere's technical chapters expressing these basic human rights).

Organisational learning is key ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7 and Chapter 5 of this guide*.

Standards and indicators used collectively

Organisational and response levels

Sphere was built on the lessons learned from the Rwanda genocide, which recognised that many lives could have been saved if the response had been coordinated better. Consequently, one of the key messages of this guide is to use the CHS commitments and Sphere standards and indicators for a collective response.

- For response coordination levels, Sphere standards and CHS commitments offer globally agreed outcome statements with a focus on the well-being of an entire affected population. The supporting indicator values should be collectively determined for each response context.
- Organisations can then plan their programmes in relation to those specific indicators and contribute to the collective outcome.

Coordination and collaboration in the Core Humanitarian Standard

- **CHS 2.4:** Coordination "with relevant stakeholders to advocate for the use of globally agreed standards to complement national ones" (including Sphere and partner standards in related sectors).
- **CHS 6:** Coordination between communities, host governments, donors, the private sector and humanitarian organisations to avoid duplication, and to ensure a coherent approach and response-wide monitoring and information sharing.

Protracted settings

When crises become protracted, underlying systemic weaknesses may intensify needs and vulnerabilities, requiring additional protection and resilience-building efforts. Some of these will be better addressed through or in cooperation with development and peace actors. For more information on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus ➤ see *What is Sphere?* and ➤ *OCHA New Way of Working*. For applying Sphere standards in protracted settings, ➤ see *Sphere Standards in protracted crises*.

2019-2021**Nigeria Humanitarian Response Strategy**

Water, sanitation and hygiene priorities agreed on within the humanitarian response strategy

- Provision of safe water through the construction and rehabilitation of water systems: Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) partners will seek to consolidate and expand coverage to comply with international standards, including the provision of at least 15 litres of safe water per day per person ➤ *see Water Supply Standard 2.1.*
- Provision of sex-segregated sanitation facilities (latrines, showers and handwashing stations) in camps and settlements: WASH partners will consolidate and expand coverage to reach the international standard of a maximum of 50 people/latrine and 100 people/shower. Each block of latrines and showers will have one compartment built for easy access and use by people with disabilities and older people. Additionally, locks will be installed on latrines to allow users security and privacy ➤ *see Excreta Management Standard 3.2; PP 1 and 2; CHS Commitments 1 to 6.*

Source: Nigeria Humanitarian Response Strategy 2018

Sphere and Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster guidance

Sphere standards and indicators align with Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster guidance and are ideal for inter-agency, inter-cluster and response-wide coordination and collaboration. This helps to avoid response gaps and duplication and improves the response quality.

Such standardisation maximises the usefulness of monitoring and evaluation data for accountability and learning at all levels, empowers effective advocacy (for example, the call to close funding gaps), increases donor confidence and helps minimise avoidable mistakes resulting from poor information and response coordination.

Humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans

Humanitarian response plans (HRPs) are prepared for protracted or sudden onset emergencies that require international humanitarian assistance.

An HRP articulates a shared vision of how to respond to the assessed and expressed needs of affected people and builds on the results of a humanitarian needs overview (HNO) or other joint needs assessment and analysis processes. HRPs are produced once a year and lay out common objectives, indicators and targets for the full response. Both HNOs and HRPs reference Sphere and other standards (for example, the INEE Minimum Standards for Education). Sphere advocates for further strengthening the consistent use of standards.

National disaster preparedness and response standards

Many national disaster management authorities have adopted disaster management policies and guidelines, some of which make explicit reference to humanitarian standards. Such standards bring clarity about the expected quality of humanitarian response, strengthen preparedness before an emergency, improve coordination and save time during a response.

The Sphere Standards provide an excellent basis on which to build these policies and guidelines, and many countries already work with the standards. This includes contextualising Sphere indicators to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and realistic. This process of contextualisation often takes place on a case-by-case basis during an emergency response.

In cases where a national exercise takes place to adapt and contextualise standards, it can happen ahead of an emergency in a participatory and thorough manner, which helps increase humanitarian actors' sense of ownership of the standards.

If, during an international disaster response, national and international standards are different, tensions may arise where different response levels apply to displaced and host communities ➤ *see PP 1: GN.* The challenge here is for humanitarian organisations to determine – in coordination with the national or local authorities – the most appropriate course of action and communicate it effectively to all concerned ➤ *see CHS Commitments 4 and 6.*

Standards and indicators in context

Above, we discussed the importance of humanitarian standards to collective and organisational contextualisation. Here we look at the concrete steps for contextualising Sphere. For this we need clarity about the relationship between a standard and its indicators and, based on this understanding, the process for choosing and adapting indicators to context.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A STANDARD AND ITS INDICATORS

STANDARD	INDICATORS
Each standard expresses a right (the right to protection, water, food, shelter, health care, etc.).	Key indicators help us understand and determine the minimum conditions needed so that people can survive and recover safely and with dignity in a variety of contexts.
Standards are universal in scope and apply everywhere.	
Standards describe outcomes . They use qualitative terms such as 'sufficient', 'appropriate', 'acceptable' and 'adequate' to ensure they are useful in a wide range of situations.	Key indicators measure elements that are needed for meeting the outcomes . Process indicators: yes or no. Progress indicators: include a baseline, a set target and measurement of progress; some have suggested quantities associated with them. Target indicators: need to reach a certain value.
Standards cannot be changed .	The key indicators themselves cannot be changed . The value associated with a progress indicator can be adjusted to context (see below: Indicator tracking table). The values of target indicators should not be changed lightly ; many of them, such as vaccination coverage, are important for the survival of a population.
You adopt the Sphere approach when you:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand context and people's needs, vulnerabilities and capacities. • Understand, explain and address the gaps between what is and what should be. • Strive to do the best with the resources available and explain how you did that. • Advocate for more resources if possible, to close the gap. 	
You do not conform with Sphere if you just provide the required goods, services or items without understanding people's needs and capacities and their sense of security and well-being.	

What is the difference between process, progress and target indicators?

All Sphere indicators support the outcome-oriented standards. They examine progress on activities that ensure that a population will survive and recover with dignity. Therefore, standards can be used at organisational and response levels.

Sphere standards are supported by three kinds of indicators, which are easily adapted to context.

- a. Process indicators** are objective statements. They express something that must be done. You can answer them with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

For example: "Standardised protocols are used to analyse food security, livelihoods and coping strategies" ➤ see *Food security and nutrition assessments standard 1.1*.

You can easily re-phrase the indicator as a yes/no question: "Are standardised protocols being used to analyse food security, livelihoods and coping strategies?"

If the answer is 'no', you should work towards using such protocols for your next Food security and livelihoods analysis.

- b. Progress indicators** provide the units of measurement (or scales) to use but do not set a specific target. Targets will vary depending on the context and/or because a widely agreed norm has not been established. Units of measurement (or scales) need to remain consistent across contexts (see below: indicator tracking table).

For these indicators, the correct approach in practice is to:

- 1. Establish** a measurable baseline using the unit of measurement (or scale) provided in the indicator.
- 2. Determine** a context-specific, realistic and time-bound goal. This presents a great opportunity to work with partners and stakeholders in the field to determine the most appropriate goal.
- 3. Measure** progress on a continuous basis to achieve the goal.

For example: "Percentage of shelter and settlement activities that are preceded by an environmental review" ➤ see *Shelter and settlement standard 7*.

The indicator does not specify what that percentage should be. After conducting contextual analysis, establishing a baseline and consulting with partners and stakeholders, practitioners should be confident enough to set an appropriate goal.

- c. Target indicators** set specific thresholds that represent the measurable minimum below which the standard is not being met. They are like progress indicators, with goals included that apply across contexts, usually because a norm has been established based on empirical evidence. Achieving these targets is critical to achieving the standard they support. Most of these indicators can be found in the WASH, Nutrition and Health chapters of the Handbook.

This is an example, an indicator whose target should not be adapted: "Percentage of children aged six months to 15 years who have received measles vaccination: 95 per cent" ➤ see *Child health standard 2.2.1*.

Some of these targets may be adapted carefully (see below: *When to adapt targets associated with indicators to the context*).

How to choose the right indicators

Good practice suggests that in most situations, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative indicators provides the best understanding of the situation. Qualitative indicators are often used to understand if people feel they are heard and their needs are met. A well-selected indicator can flag up when something is going wrong. Equally, it can provide assurance that things are going to plan.

The following two-step process may help get you started when selecting indicators.

**STEP 1**

Make a list of indicators based on the following criteria:

- Standard indicators for the sector, where these exist
- Standard indicators of the organisation, where these exist
- Expectations of consortium members, partners, stakeholders and donors
- Context analysis, including protection context and scenario planning
- Resources available (which will influence the type and number of monitoring tools used).

**STEP 2**

Reduce this to the minimum list needed to answer the following questions:

- Are people's needs being met?
- Are Sphere Minimum Standards being met?
- Is it easy and cost effective to collect the related indicators?
- Do the indicators avoid duplication of service provision?
- Will the results of the data collection be robust and free from bias?
- Can we effectively report on processes and results?
- Will we know in a timely manner if the programme is off track?
- Will the selected indicators tell us about programme-critical changes in context, as identified in our risks and assumptions?

When to adapt indicator targets to the context

Ideally, contextual adaptation of the targets that support the indicators are agreed upon before the onset of a crisis. In this case, the adapted target is informed by a deep understanding of local norms; by political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental data; and by analyses of, and lessons learned from, recurring disasters and disasters in comparable contexts. In practice, crises are complex and this does not always happen.

Target indicators should be adapted with great care, for example, when:

- Adapting the target does not cause harm to the beneficiaries.
- Adapting the indicator helps the affected community return to their normal way of living and promote life with dignity.
- Practitioners can adequately describe, explain and mitigate the gaps between the Sphere target and those possible in practice. This ensures conformity to Sphere standards and accountability both to affected people and donors.

Other context-relevant information and guidance in the Sphere Handbook

The Sphere Handbook supports the standards and indicators with a wealth of additional information and guidance, which will help you put standards and indicators into context:

- **Chapter and section introductions:** These contain a wealth of useful information. They create the link between the technical chapter and the human rights spelled out in the Humanitarian Charter.
- **Key actions and guidance notes:** These prompt you to ask the right questions. Key actions offer practical steps to ensure standards are met. Guidance notes expand on what the key actions offer and provide references to the cross-cutting themes, the Protection Principles, the CHS, other standards within the Handbook and HSP standards.
- **The Protection Principles and Core Humanitarian Standard:** You will get most out of the Sphere Handbook if you combine the Protection Principles and CHS commitments with the technical guidance: they complement each other (see table following).

ADAPTING KEY INDICATORS TO CONTEXT WITH THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD

	CHS COMMITMENT	TECHNICAL STANDARD
CHS commitment/Standard	Commitment 1 Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs	Water supply standard 2.1 Access and water quantity: People have equitable and affordable access to a sufficient quantity of safe water to meet their drinking and domestic needs
Key action/Key indicator	KA 1.1 Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders KA 1.3 Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context	Key indicator Average volume of water used for drinking and domestic hygiene per household <i>Supporting information:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 15 litres per person per day • Determine quantity based on context and phase of response
Implied metrics to be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical aspects of context (political situation, epidemiological and other data) are monitored at an appropriate frequency • Needs, capacities and coping strategies are monitored at an appropriate frequency • Changes in programme design, implementation modality are tracked 	Needs quantity (litres/person/day) <i>Note: Remember to adapt to context based on climate and individual physiology, food type and social and cultural norms</i>

Example of using key actions and guidance notes for contextualisation

Health systems standard 1.1: Health service delivery states:

"Have access to integrated quality healthcare that is safe, effective and patient-centred."

How can we reach that standard?

We can look at the key actions to see what steps can be taken to reach this standard. KA 1 states: "Provide sufficient and appropriate healthcare at the different levels of the health system."

How do we know what "sufficient and appropriate" means?

We can look at the guidance notes, which state: "A broad guideline for planning coverage of fixed healthcare facilities is: One healthcare facility per 10,000 people; and one district or rural hospital per 250,000 people."

Note that the number, type and location of each will vary by context.

Clusters regularly adapt indicator targets to context. In 2012, the Somalia WASH Cluster adapted the Sphere indicators for water quantity and quality:⁴

- Drought: 6 litres per person per day of chlorinated water (0.5mg/l FRC [free residual chlorine])
- IDP [internally displaced population] settings: 7.5 litres per person per day of chlorinated water (0.2–0.5mg/l FRC)
- AWD [acute watery diarrhoea]/cholera response: 15 litres per person per day of chlorinated water (0.5mg/l FRC)
- Non-emergency settings (e.g. urban/rural water scheme) – minimum 15 litres per person per day.

Another example is the 2010 Pakistan floods, where the WASH Cluster set the emergency level of water per person per day at 3 litres.

Note: *In both cases, the reality is that water quantities in the emergency setting are below the recommended minimum of 15 litres per person per day. If you acknowledge this, understand its implications on people's health and well-being, actively search for mitigating activities (both in WASH and other sectors) and identify ways to raise the quantity over time, you are conforming with Sphere standards.*

Operationalising indicators

Any indicator you select should be useful and help you gather and analyse important information about your programme or response in a meaningful way and over time. Here are a few questions that will help you determine how feasible your indicator selection is:

Where will the data be collected from?

- Who will collect the data?
- When will data be collected and how frequently?
- How will the data be collected and stored?
- Who will analyse the data?
- How will the data be reported?
- How will management decisions be made based on the monitoring report?

When needs outweigh resources

As we saw above, there may be ways to mitigate the negative impact of not meeting an indicator target. In certain situations, and for a limited time, it may be better to provide everybody with a basic level of assistance rather than fully meeting the indicators for a small proportion of the affected population. At the same time, the identified response gap should be used to advocate with partners and donors to close the funding gap, explaining the negative consequences of a sub-standard response on affected people's lives and wellbeing. With additional funding, increase the level of provisions appropriately ➔ see *CHS Commitment 2: KA2.3*.



Do not lower a target indicator due to funding shortfall! Rather, advocate for closing the funding gap.

It is important not to shy away from projects that are important to you, on the grounds that they are insufficiently funded. When you can explain the reason for the response gap and offer convincing plans on how to close the gap, donors will usually support you. The risk of not meeting the indicators' is far less important than the risk of doing nothing.

4. Examples adapted from: *Quality and Accountability for Project Cycle Management A Pocket Booklet for Field Practitioners Third edition 2020*

EXAMPLE OF WHEN AN INDICATOR CANNOT BE MET AND NEEDS OUTWEIGH RESOURCES: BANGLADESH

EXAMPLE SPHERE INDICATORS	AS ASSESSED IN EARLY 2018	EXPLANATION
45m ² per person for overall site <i>Metric supporting Indicator 4 of Shelter standard 2</i>	9.5m ² per person for overall site	The Government of Bangladesh made public land available for around 900,000 refugees. However, the land was very steep, easily eroded and far too small an area to meet the Sphere indicator of 45m ² per person.
% of shelters in areas with no or minimal known natural or human-made threats, risks and hazards <i>Indicator 1 of Shelter standard 2</i>	Entire site at risk of flash flooding; 300,000 people at risk of slope collapse in monsoon season	UNHCR and IOM shelter experts estimated that around 9.5m ² per person was actually available. The result was a crowded camp with services such as water pumps and latrines virtually on top of one another.
% of water quality tests meeting minimum water quality standards: <10 colony-forming unit (CFU)/100ml at point of delivery (e-coli contamination) <i>Metric of indicator 1 of Water supply standard 2.2</i>	Around 50% of all water sources have >10 CFU/100ml	
All affected households have access to the minimum quantity of essential hygiene items: 250g of soap per person per month <i>Metric of indicator 1 of Hygiene promotion standard 1.2</i>	"Soap is scarce"	n/a
% of people receiving 2,100 kCal per person per day <i>Guidance note to Food assistance standard 6.1: Design for food rations and nutritional quality</i>	Initial food distributions amounted to around 1,755 kCal per person per day	Food distributions were made to families rather than individuals and were based on family size as a practical approach to simplifying and managing the overall process with available staff, storage and other resources. Calculations based on the distribution scheme revealed an average kCal support of 1,755 kCal per person per day on average. This is about 84% of the 2,100 kCal per person per day guidance provided by Sphere.

Source: Taken from Sphere Training: STP 11 Using Sphere in Practice.

When the host population's living conditions are below Sphere Standards

When the host population's living conditions are below the Sphere Minimum Standards, meeting the standards would provide displaced people with a higher level than the host community and this could cause tension between the two groups ➤ see PP 1: GN.

In this situation, an organisation or collective response mechanism may choose to adapt the target value to a slightly lower level, in accordance with Protection Principle 1. It may also be appropriate to provide support to the host community. Any adaptation of targets should be clearly explained and justified.

Sphere supports the humanitarian programme cycle

Assessment, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning relate to and build on each other. Working with globally agreed standards across these processes allows for timely and evidence-based programme and management decisions within a response. It also allows for system-wide comparisons and identification of funding and response gaps.

- Ideally, joint needs assessments include globally agreed and collectively adapted Sphere indicators. Monitoring, evaluation and learning processes can use these indicators as essential tools to measure change.
- Effective monitoring is built on a strong foundation of needs assessment and analysis.
- Useful evaluation is built on solid monitoring data and reports.
- Strong assessment, monitoring and evaluation create a basis for accountability and learning.

Assessments

Assessments – and the analysis of assessment data – are the necessary basis for useful monitoring and evaluation over time ➤ see CHS Commitment 1: GN. They can even be a valid target of evaluation (see below: Evaluating needs assessments).

As a coordination tool, Sphere supports joint context analysis and needs assessments across organisations and sectors. At the onset of a crisis, Sphere standards help to identify immediate needs and prioritise response activities accordingly.

Assessment checklists are provided in each of the Sphere Handbook's technical chapters.

Affected people and communities should be involved in assessments as actively and as early as possible.

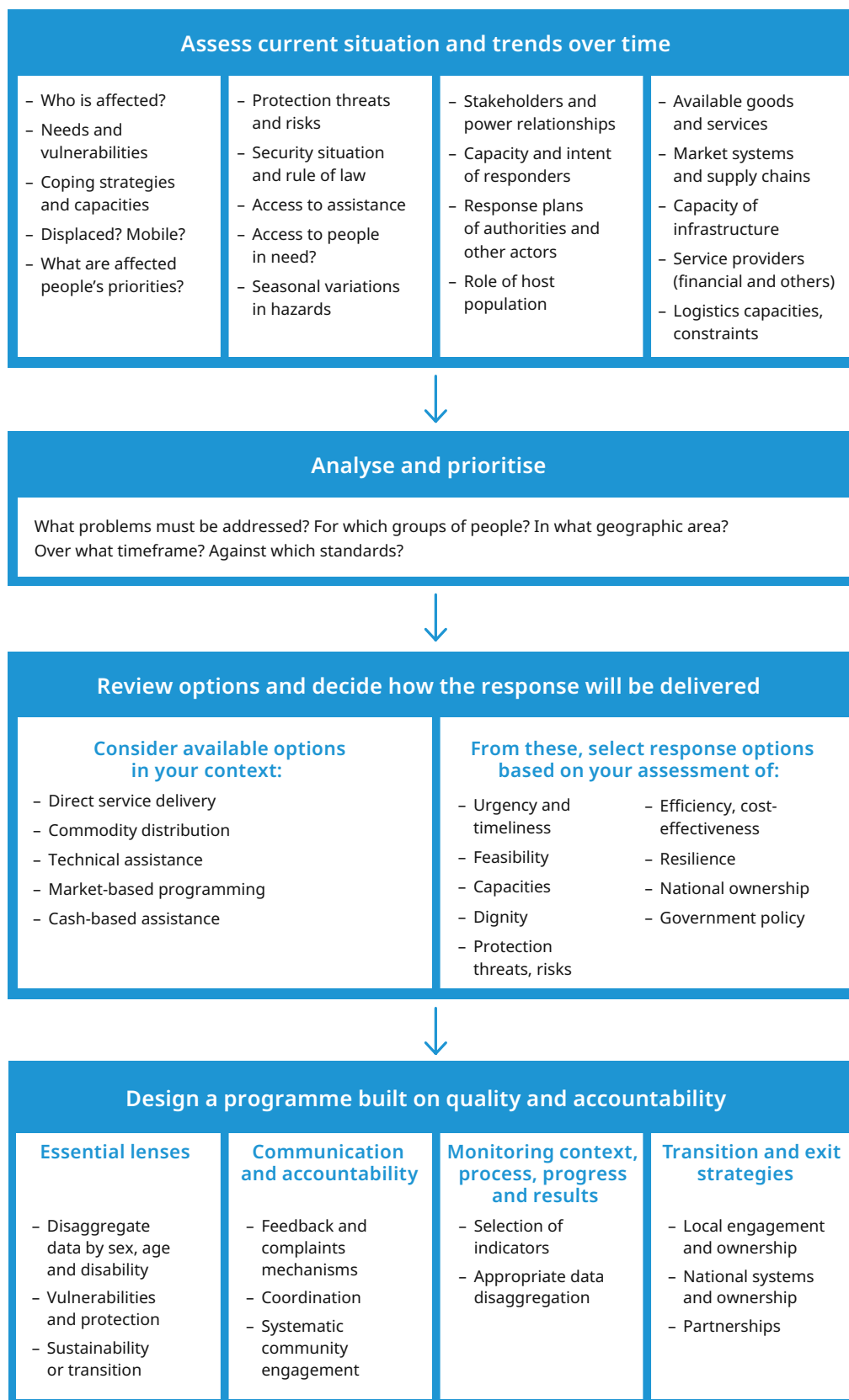
Strategy development and programme design

The Sphere Handbook provides a framework to identify priorities, determine planning figures and coordinate across sectors. Sphere standards outline the quality of assistance that should be attained and provide a basis for identifying the best way to meet needs and minimise potential harmful side-effects.

Programme design usually involves analysis of several **response options**, such as in-kind provision of goods, cash-based assistance, direct service provision, technical assistance or a mix of these. The specific combination of response options chosen usually evolves over time.⁵ The full participation of the affected population and coordination with national and local authorities is essential to achieve this across all sectors.

5. See also the CaLP Programme Quality Toolbox, directly supporting the Sphere standards.

UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT TO APPLY THE STANDARDS, SPHERE HANDBOOK PAGE 11.



Implementation

While implementation is not the object of this guide, it is directly supported by Sphere's key actions and guidance notes. Use progress indicators to establish baselines and set benchmarks during implementation, so that monitoring can be done effectively (see also below: indicator tracking table). When implementing programmes, **CHS Commitments 4, 5 and 8** help organisations to be accountable to affected people by inviting their feedback and complaints and by ensuring staff are trained and have an appropriate worth ethic.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)

Monitoring is usually continuous – or at least periodic and frequent – and internal. It is largely concerned with activities and their immediate results, as well as with systems and processes. It answers the question, “Are we doing the job right?”

All Sphere indicators and certain key actions can be turned into indicator questions.

Evaluation tends to be an episodic – and often external – assessment of performance and can look at the whole of the results chain from inputs to outputs, sustainability and impact. It answers the question, “Are we doing the right job and have we achieved the desired results and outcomes?”

Evaluation, though happening towards the end of an operation, needs to be considered as early in the response as initial assessments.

Accountability must be included throughout all phases of the response. Agencies are accountable to affected populations and to upholding the right to life with dignity by including people in decisions that affect their lives, thereby restoring some degree of power to them.

Learning through monitoring and evaluation happens when the programme is running, activities are taking place and outcomes are being produced. It allows humanitarian programmes to adjust to changing contexts and needs, and to learn from any mistakes made ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7*.

Evaluating needs assessments

The needs assessment itself is a valid target for evaluation. The quality of needs assessment could be studied through evaluation questions such as:

- To what degree did the needs assessment accurately reflect the situation on the ground?
- Was the assessment used effectively to influence decision-making in the early phases of the response?
- Was the assessment inclusive of all affected people?

Assessment, monitoring and evaluation questions in the Sphere Handbook

- **CHS Guiding Questions** for all nine commitments can be used to support programme design or as a tool for reviewing a project, response or policy (➤ see *Sphere Online Handbook: Appendix to the CHS*).
- Detailed **assessment checklists** can be found as appendices to each of the technical chapters.

Turning indicators into questions

1. Find indicators that relate to your concern (e.g. minimum 3.5m² per person living space).
2. Identify who the indicator applies to and how (e.g. *people in temporary camps or in damaged shelters*).
3. Convert this to a question to be asked (e.g. “How many people are living in this space/tent/room/gymnasium?”).
4. Design the question scope and format (e.g. multiple choice/one answer regarding size of covered living space: <3.5m²; 3.5–4.5m²; >4.5m²).
5. Decide on the best way to collect the information (e.g. household face-to-face interview or direct observation or measurement).

Indicator tracking table

CHS Commitment 2: KA 2.2 states: “Deliver humanitarian response in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without unnecessary delay”. The timing of data collection and analysis may be critical for understanding changes caused by the project or the context and for reacting appropriately.

It is therefore important to consider the frequency with which each indicator is measured. A monitoring plan and an indicator tracking table can make this process easier by providing structure to the task. It makes monitoring and reporting more transparent and supports the process of making decisions on the basis of monitoring data.

The indicator tracking table provides a simple but thorough means of tracking the changes in the values of important indicators through the life of the programme. The programme will set performance targets, which may take the form of qualitative statements (such as the Sphere

Minimum Standards), quantitative targets (as found in Sphere indicators) or a combination of these.

For any indicator, the following information may be collected or calculated

- The **reference (or normal) value** of the indicator (and a source) – a note on the range of the indicator may be appropriate if it varies seasonally.
- The **baseline value** (after the shock and before the intervention) with a date.
- The **target value for the end of the intervention**, based on Sphere Minimum Standards where appropriate.
- The **target value for the end of each period** (daily, weekly, quarterly, monthly) for the duration of the intervention.
- The **actual value of the indicator at the end of each period** (or the number achieved during that period).
- The **actual value as a percentage of the target value** for that period.

Below is an example of an indicator tracking table:

INDICATOR	REFERENCE VALUE	SOURCE	BASELINE VALUE	DATE	TARGET VALUE	SPHERE STANDARD

Then each indicator can be tracked over time using a structure similar to this example.

	PERIOD 1	PERIOD 2	PERIOD 3	PERIOD 4	PERIOD 5
Target value	8	9	10	10	10
Actual value	7	8	9	10	10
Actual as % of target:	87%	89%	90%	100%	100%

Context Appendix:

Case study | Mosul crisis:

Unconditional multi-purpose cash transfer

In 2017, prior to the military offensive that ousted ISIS, the Al-Tamuz neighbourhood in Mosul was under ISIS control and isolated by Iraqi forces. Residents suffered from severe shortages of basic services, food and water.

The objective of this project was to reduce vulnerability and strengthen the resilience of conflict-affected households in Iraq through, unconditional multi-purpose cash transfers.⁶

Assessment and learning

- A rapid needs assessment was conducted in coordination with the local government in West Mosul, the Cash Working Group and development actors in Mosul ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1* and *CHS Commitment 6: KA 6.2*.
- A vulnerability assessment was conducted, interviewing 666 households ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.2: GN*.
- A rapid gender analysis was conducted at the beginning of the project to increase the understanding of roles and responsibilities between men and women in their local community and to involve all beneficiary groups (by age and gender) from the beginning of the project cycle to the end ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.2: GN*.
- A security assessment was conducted in the targeted area and distribution sites to identify risks, analyse the severity of threats, and determine and deploy mitigation measures, including designated entry and emergency exits at the distribution site ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.2: GN*.

Strategy development, planning, and programme design

- Of the 666 households interviewed in the vulnerability assessment, 294 eligible households in 17 Al-Tamuz neighbourhoods were supported with multi-purpose cash ➤ see *CHS Commitment 3: KA 3.5*.

Monitoring

- Post-distribution monitoring was conducted after each round of unconditional cash distribution to inform the cash assistance programme ➤ see *CHS Commitment 4: GN*.
- Women-headed households, child-headed households and households with people with disabilities, older people and households representing minority and/or marginalised groups were prioritised for the household visits and focus group discussions ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*.

Evaluation

- The project evaluated the appropriateness, effectiveness and targeting of the distribution of unconditional, unrestricted cash to internally displaced people (IDPs), and returnees in targeted neighbourhoods ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*.
- The project measured strengths and weakness in implementation procedures ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: KA7.1*.
- The project made recommendations to improve ongoing and future cash distribution programming ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.2*.

6. Post Distribution Monitoring Report for the Project: Cash support for vulnerable families affected by the Mosul crisis. CARE, 2018. Available at: www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Cash-support-for-vulnerable-families-affected-by-the-Mosul-Crisis.pdf

2

Sphere for assessments

How to incorporate Sphere principles, standards and indicators into assessment processes.

The content of this chapter is platform neutral and does not suggest a standardised version, tool or format for assessments.

This chapter shows you:

- How Sphere supports assessment;
- The components of the assessment cycle;
- The principles of a coordinated joint needs assessment;
- Best practices for needs assessments;
- Where to find assessment information in the Sphere Handbook.

What is a needs assessment?

Needs assessments answer the question, “What assistance do disaster-affected communities need?” These priority needs are identified through a systematic assessment of the context, risks to life with dignity, and capacity of the affected people and authorities to respond to humanitarian needs. Specific aspects are⁷:

- The impact of a disaster or conflict on a society.
- The political, social and economic context within which aid is to be provided.
- The priority needs and risks those affected by a disaster face.
- The available capacity to respond, including that of the affected people themselves (their coping mechanisms).
- The most appropriate forms of response given the needs, risks and capacities.
- The possibilities for facilitating and expediting recovery and development.

Needs assessments use various methods to collect and analyse information. These enable the organisation to make good decisions about how to gather and allocate resources to meet the needs of disaster-affected communities ➤ see *Good Enough Guide*.⁸

Practical advice

- Consult and use the assessment checklists supporting each of Sphere’s technical chapters; these lists help to ensure no one is forgotten and that you ask the right questions.
- Coordinate with other organisations on needs assessments and share findings with other agencies, government and affected populations ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1, KA 1.1*.
- Listen to an inclusive range of people to achieve the most representative possible assessment. This is part of a people-centered approach.



We must be thoughtful and ambitious in applying the Sphere standards. Meeting them may mean reaching indicator targets over time and in alternative ways.

7. See Sphere’s assessment definition in the Sphere Glossary: <https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Glossary-2018.pdf>

8. *Good Enough Guide*. NRC, 2014. Available at: www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/humanitarian_needs_assessment-the_good_enough_guide_2014.pdf

How does Sphere support assessments?

The Sphere Standards – with assessment checklists for each chapter – provide the basis for context analysis, initial, rapid and in-depth assessments, as well as **joint needs assessments** (JNAs). They help to identify immediate needs and prioritise activities that address these needs. Planning figures and minimum assistance levels are outlined globally to help formulate minimum response-wide outcomes. The standards therefore also serve to improve coordination across organisations and sectors ➤ see *Sphere Glossary*.

The Sphere Standards also ensure that the capacities, voices and safety of the affected people are respected. They add value through their rights-based and participatory approach.

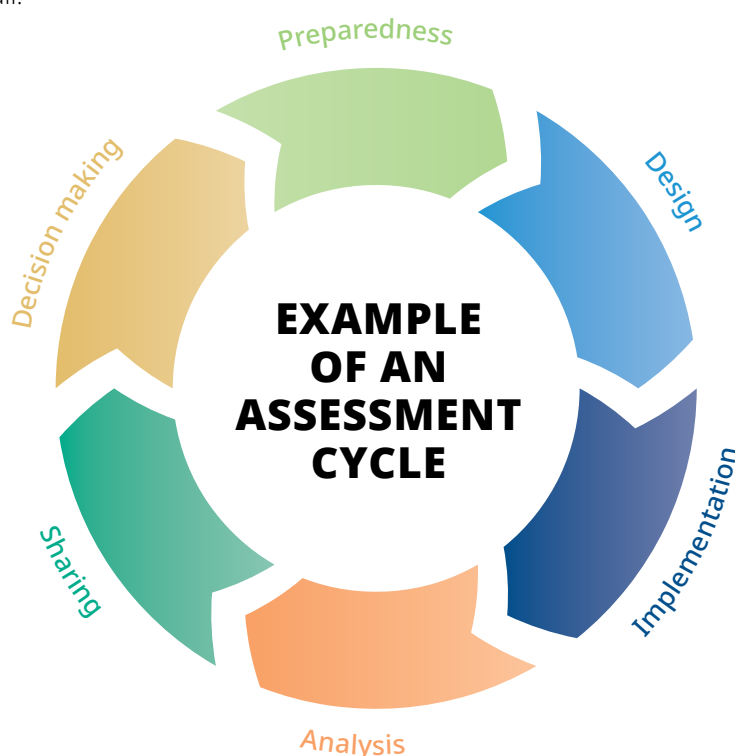
Sphere indicators help monitor key issues over time and enable assessors to:

- Develop a shared understanding of what should be assessed.
- Compare different sectors, assessments and projects.
- Improve coordination and collaboration, with the indicators providing a common language for identifying and discussing critical issues during assessment and project implementation, both inside and outside your organisation (in particular for JNAs).
- Create a framework for data collection over time, with increasing levels of detail.
- Create the basis for monitoring and evaluation.

The assessment cycle

The assessment cycle is a conceptual tool to help understand the different stages of an assessment. You can follow the assessment process from start to finish, or use each section, as you need it. The Sphere Handbook covers the first five stages of the assessment cycle. These will be the tasks that assessment teams will usually be responsible for. Decision-making is usually the responsibility of a wider group than the assessment team and often the responsibility of senior managers.

Assessments should be implemented in the context of the wider project cycle – the coordinated series of actions that are necessary for a successful humanitarian response. As formulated by the UN, needs assessment and analysis is the first step in project cycle management, since without this information, it is not possible to effectively implement the following steps of strategic planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and monitoring, and operational review and evaluation.





STEP 1: ASSESSMENT PREPAREDNESS

Your organisation should prepare for assessments even before an emergency, usually by developing an assessment plan that fits into wider organisational processes (see Chapter 1: Adopting Sphere throughout your organisation). To develop an assessment plan, an organisation will need to establish a policy on humanitarian needs assessments. Such a policy will outline the steps your organisation must take to be ready to implement an assessment plan. Your policy and plan should be integrated with any preparedness activities the organisation undertakes.

Sphere provides :

- Guidance to prepare your organisation for assessments (see Chapter 1: Adopting Sphere throughout your organisation).
- Guidance on factors to consider for your context analysis.



STEP 2: ASSESSMENT DESIGN

Assessment design methods will vary according to context. Therefore, the Sphere Handbook does not provide guidance on how to design assessments.⁹ The Handbook does, however, outline the design steps necessary to gather information systematically, suggesting that you: “Cross-check and verify information, acknowledging that assessment data will initially be imperfect, but should not impede life-saving action” ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1*. There are a wide variety of technical approaches to assessing humanitarian needs. You must clarify your objectives and methodology, using a mix of quantitative and open-ended listening, and other qualitative participatory approaches ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.2*.

Assessment design must be **context and protection sensitive**. For example, you should consider that speaking openly may be difficult or dangerous for some people. Consider how collecting information may cause or increase people's vulnerability or create new threats to their protection ➤ see *CHS Commitment 4: GN*.



STEP 3: ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

CHS Commitment 1 covers some of the most important issues that any assessment design and implementation must account for, starting with the need to be people centred, context sensitive and rights based. Its guidance note reminds us that assessment and analysis are a process, not a single event. See below: Learning Appendix 1: CHS Commitments supporting Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

Assessments are done throughout the programme cycle, and in high-risk areas should be done even before crises erupt. The **assessment checklists** in the appendices of each of the Handbook's technical chapters are useful resources.

Different types of assessments over time

Pre-crisis and development-oriented assessments

- These are essential to establish a pre-disaster baseline to assess the impact of the disaster and identify any factors that may contribute to vulnerability.
- A vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) should be conducted. A VCA enables local priorities to be identified and appropriate action taken to reduce disaster risk and assists in the design and development of programmes that are mutually supportive and responsive to the needs of the people most closely concerned.
- Events that are warning signals for an impending emergency should trigger a VCA.

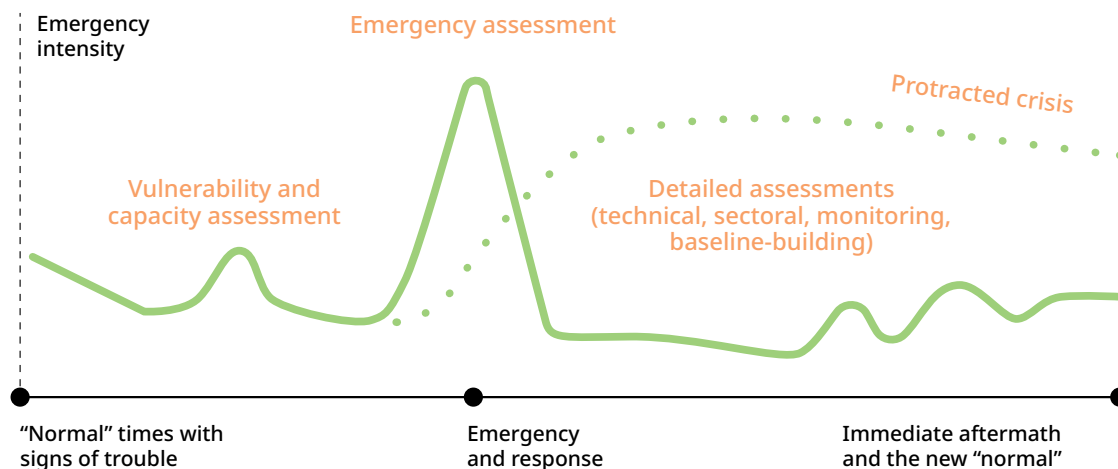
Emergency assessments

- These include priority needs, capacities, and operational settings ➤ see inclusion and contextual considerations in *What is Sphere?*
- They are typically carried out in the first hours following a disaster, and should be coordinated and shared with interested agencies, government and affected populations ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1* and *Humanitarian Charter para. 12*.¹⁰

9. For guidance on assessment methodologies, see the *Good Enough Guide to Needs Assessment* and the *IASC MIRA tool*.

10. Emergency assessment; for example, *IASC Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) tool*.

DIFFERENT ASSESSMENTS OVER TIME



Source: Illustration by Jim Good

- They should start by using mostly secondary data from various sources,¹¹ including pre-disaster information about local humanitarian capacity, the affected and wider population, the context and other pre-existing factors that may increase people's susceptibility to the disaster ➤ see CHS Commitment 1: KA1.2: Guidance note.
- You should then decide if primary data collection is needed, including direct observation, focus group discussions, surveys and discussions with as wide a range of people and groups as possible ➤ see CHS Commitment 1: GN.¹²
- They should deepen (but not repeat) earlier assessment findings, close information gaps and collect additional information if this is needed for programme design, to measure programme outcomes or for advocacy ➤ Food security and nutrition assessment standard 1.2: Guidance note: Scope of analysis.
- They take place with direct field presence and community engagement, with a focus on vulnerabilities and capacities, as well as needs.
- They can be very different in terms of speed, methodology and application, depending on the sector.
- They should be coordinated with other assessments.¹³
- They benefit from Sphere guidance.

Improved or programme-focused assessments

- These are intended for developing and chronic emergencies, and longer-term programmes and programme improvements (technical/sectoral). **The full Sphere Handbook is directly applicable for these assessments.**
- They follow up the emergency assessment as the operating environment, time and resources allow. They should be undertaken as soon as possible (in the first days or weeks of the emergency) ➤ see CHS Commitment 1: GN.



Initial assessment information often comes from satellite, fly-over photography and drones. Once people are on the ground and can make human contact, technical experts and their trained teams do a wide range of specialised assessments. These take careful planning and time to organise and implement.

11. Sources can include government ministries, academic or research institutions, community-based organisations, and local and international humanitarian agencies that were present before the disaster. Other important sources: disaster preparedness and early warning initiatives; and new developments in web- and mobile-enabled data collection platforms (CS3 GN1).

12. For more details about how to carry out these approaches, refer to ECB/ACAPS 2012.

13. For example the IASC MIRA approach.

Specialised assessments can include: nutritional surveys; education surveys; health screenings; public health epidemiological surveys; shelter surveys; and water use surveys. Consult the Sphere Handbook's assessment checklists and other humanitarian standards handbooks as appropriate.

Assessment considerations based on the Core Humanitarian Standard

Preparation

Cross-check, validate and reference as many sources as possible, noting data sources and levels of disaggregation ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*. Clarify your objectives and methodology, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods appropriate to the context ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN* and *CHS Commitment 7: GN*.

Building on local capacities

Assess the capacity and plans of both the community and the state to cope with and recover from disaster, with an understanding of the importance of involving the participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN* and *CHS Commitment 4: KA 4.3*.

Assessment teams

An effective assessment team should comprise a mix of women and men, and generalists and specialists; have skills in gender-sensitive data collection and communication with children; be familiar with languages and locations; and be able to communicate in culturally acceptable ways. Human resources systems should be flexible enough to recruit and deploy assessment teams rapidly ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: Guidance note*.

Coordination

Coordinating with others is important to avoid burdening communities with multiple assessments. Joint assessments and findings should be shared with interested agencies, governments and affected populations ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA 1.1*. They should participate in any government or IASC systems set up to coordinate assessments. Where these do not exist, agencies should make cluster or sector meetings aware of their assessment plans

and establish bilateral coordination with other agencies working in the same locations or sectors. Working through national and local governments is preferable where it is possible and appropriate.

Inclusiveness and vulnerability

Special efforts are needed to ensure that vulnerable and hard-to-reach people are included, taking into account the social and contextual factors that contribute to vulnerability. Policies should take into account the diversity of crisis-affected populations, including disadvantaged or marginalised people.

Disaggregation of population data

Although detailed disaggregation may not be possible from the beginning, strive for a minimum initial breakdown by sex, age and disability ➤ see *disaggregation table in What is Sphere?* Disaggregation enables analysis of the needs of different groups, considering vulnerability based on the risks different groups and individuals face in the context of wider social and economic factors ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA 1.2, OR 1.5 and GN* and *CHS Commitment 4: KA 4.3*. Excluded areas or groups should be clearly noted in the assessment report and returned to at the earliest opportunity ➤ see *CHS Commitment 2: KA 2.1 and GN*.

Consultation

Listen to an inclusive range of people to achieve the most representative possible assessment ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.2*. Acknowledge and identify any limitations if it is not possible to assess and meet the needs of a specific area or population group, including hard-to-reach locations and refer any unmet needs to those organisations with the relevant technical expertise and mandate or advocate for those needs to be addressed ➤ see *CHS Commitment 2: KAs 2.1 and 2.3*.

Security concerns

Include security concerns of disaster-affected and host populations in contextual analysis. This should not be limited to violence or the threat of violence, but also include identifying "any forms of coercion, denial of subsistence or denial of basic human rights" and assessing the impact of the disaster on the psychosocial wellbeing of individuals and communities ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1, CHS Commitment 4 and PP 3*.

ISSUES CONTRIBUTING TO VULNERABILITY

ISSUE	POSSIBLE AFFECTED GROUPS
Discrimination/marginalisation	Women and girls, people living with HIV
Social isolation	Older people and people with disabilities
Environmental degradation	People on marginal land
Climate variability	People living in coastal areas
Poverty	Low-income groups
Lack of land tenure	Displaced communities, slum residents
Ethnicity, class or caste	Minority groups
Religious or political affiliation	Minority groups

Protection issues

The Protection Principles provide guidance to ensure that assessments include protection issues and that the assessment process itself does not compromise the protection needs of crisis-affected populations.

Assessments should incorporate rights-related issues to provide a foundation for future protection activities, including advocating for the rights of affected people and groups with relevant authorities and actors. However, it is important to remember information collected in assessments may be highly sensitive and should be protected. Examples include, but are not limited to, refugee status and official registration data, political or religious affiliation, sexual orientation and sensitive protection issues (sexual and gender-based violence).

Recording the “illegal status” of migrants in some countries may make them vulnerable to deportation, incarceration or worse. Data on people who report sexual abuse is highly confidential and may put the person at higher risk if known in the community. Programming for LGBTQI people can be critical to help them claim their rights. But, again, in many situations such information if made known can lead to abuse, detention and even death.

Staff who handle sensitive data must be trained and only data necessary for programming should be collected. This data must be protected if it is sensitive and destroyed as soon as it is no longer required. Neglecting protection aspects can have implications for all initial and subsequent assessments.



STEP 4: ANALYSIS

Analysis is the process of turning the data gathered during an assessment into useful information for decision-making. The following steps should be taken:

- Cross-check and validate as much of your data as possible, noting your data sources and levels of disaggregation ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*.
- Use Sphere's sectoral assessment checklists during analysis to enhance the coherence and accessibility of data to other agencies, to ensure that all key areas have been examined and to reduce organisational or individual biases ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: Guidance note* ➤ see *Appendix 1 of each technical chapter in the Sphere Handbook*
- Analyse and interpret disaggregated population data (see above: Assessment considerations based on the CHS Commitment). This is a necessary basis for using standards in context because it shows who has been most affected, who is able to access assistance and where more needs to be done to reach at-risk populations ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1*.



STEP 5: SHARING

CHS Commitment 6: KA6.4 states: "Share necessary information with partners, coordination groups and other relevant actors through appropriate communication channels". Sharing assessments assists other humanitarian agencies in their work, contributes to the overall baseline data available to the humanitarian community and increases the transparency of the response. Information should also be shared with the assessed populations, who have a right to accurate and up-to-date information about actions taken on their behalf, using appropriate language and a variety of media so that the information is accessible ➤ see *CHS Commitment 6: KA 6.4 and GN*; and *CHS Commitment 4: OR 4.5, 4.7 and GN*.

Coordinated and joint needs assessments

A coordinated assessment is planned and carried out in partnership with other humanitarian actors, and includes single-agency assessments that are harmonised and inter- and intra-cluster/sector joint assessments¹⁴ ➤ *IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises* calls for the implementation of a joint assessment during the first two phases of an emergency and, thereafter, for the coordination of in-depth agency and cluster assessments.

CHS Commitment 6: KA 6.1: Humanitarian actors should collaborate to optimise the capacity of communities, host governments, donors, private sector and humanitarian organisations (local, national, international) with different mandates and expertise. They should also suggest and lead joint assessments, trainings and evaluations across organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a more coherent approach.

The collection and analysis of data and information affects the lives and livelihoods of people. It is important to understand the impact of joint needs assessments on people and to ensure that the resulting analysis is credible and useful. Ultimately, all needs assessments must be carried out with respect for those we seek to assist remains. To this end, ➤ *12 Grand Bargain Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessment Ethos*¹⁵ were developed. They outline the values, principles and ethical behaviour within the work of coordinated needs assessment and analysis for humanitarian situations, representing core values that have been agreed on by organisations at global level, in particular the Code of Conduct and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter (for the full text, see below Assessment Appendix 1).

Joint needs assessments

Joint needs assessments (JNAs) are increasingly being used. The most prominent JNA tool is the multi-cluster/sector initial rapid assessment (MIRA) developed by the IASC Task Force. If a common inter-agency assessment format has been developed prior to a disaster or agreed during the response, agencies should use these formats (and any accompanying processes).

Sphere indicators and assessment checklists facilitate joint assessment because they reflect globally agreed best practice. Where multi-sectoral assessments are not initially possible, agencies should pay extra attention to linkages with other sectors, protection and cross-cutting assessments ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*.

14. ACAPS Glossary

15. See reference section: *Grand Bargain Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessment Ethos*

Assessment Appendix 1:

Grand Bargain Principles for a coordinated needs assessment ethos

The purpose of this document is to outline the values, principles and ethical behaviour within the work of coordinated needs assessment and analysis for humanitarian situations. These principles represent core values that have been agreed on by organisations at global level, in particular, the Code of Conduct and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, and are implemented at global, regional and operational levels.

1. People-centred and inclusive

Needs assessment activities are guided by the interests and well-being of the population, who, to the maximum extent feasible, are invited to participate and are included or represented in all relevant phases of the assessment, from data collection to analysis ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: OR 1.4* and *CHS Commitment 4: KA 4.3*.

2. Do no harm

A needs assessment does not result in harm to affected populations, data collectors or any other staff or individuals contributing to the exercise, nor does it constrict humanitarian space for actors participating in the assessment or in the entire response ➤ see *PP 1* and *CHS Commitment 3: GN*.

3. Impartiality

All assessments are undertaken in an impartial manner, while identifying and minimising bias and avoiding pre-identified conclusions ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: GN*.

4. Competency and capacity

Actors engaging in needs assessment activities are accountable for ensuring that these are guided and conducted by staff in a multi-functional team who are appropriately skilled in the requisite needs assessments and data management competencies and/or thematic areas they are assessing ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: OR 1.6: GN*.

5. Clear objectives

Assessments are designed to inform specific response decisions that seek to meet the clearly identified humanitarian needs of crisis-affected populations, while enabling early recovery and preventing the creation of new risks ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA 2.1*.

6. Coordination and data minimisation

All actors implementing assessment activities commit to coordinate on assessments, promote a shared vision of needs and priorities, ensure compatibility, quality and comparability, and avoid over-assessment ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA 1.1*.

7. Minimum technical standards

All assessments adhere to minimum technical standards appropriate to the context and assessment objectives ➤ see *IASC Common Operational Dataset and Sphere Standards*.

8. Informed consent, confidentiality and data security

Persons providing information in a needs assessment must grant permission in full knowledge of how the information they provide will be used, how it will be processed and who will have access to it ➤ see *CHS Commitment 3: OR 3.8* and *CHS Commitment 4: GN*.

9. Transparency

A clear explanation of the assessment methodology, tools and approaches should be available. This includes any assumptions, concerns over data quality/sources and limitations ➤ see *CHS Commitment 4: GN*.

10. Enabling joint analysis

Actors implementing coordinated needs assessments (both multi-sectoral and sector-specific) commit to designing data collection instruments and coordinating the assessments to enable joint analysis ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1* and *CHS Commitment 6: KA 6.1*.

11. Documenting and addressing alternative or dissenting interpretations

During the joint needs assessment and analysis process, alternative or dissenting interpretations of shared evidence are documented and addressed ➤ see *CHS Commitment 1: KA1.1*.

12. Sharing results (open data and analysis)

Organisations commit to open data and transparency in balance with risks of reidentification of personal data or doing harm ➤ see *PP 1*, *CHS Commitment 1: GN* and *CHS Commitment 3: GN*.

Assessment Appendix 2:

Case Study: Joint Rapid Needs Assessment Northern Governorates of Yemen

BACKGROUND

Conflict in Yemen between the Al-Houthi movement on the one side and the Yemeni military and government-backed tribal fighters on the other. In the Sa'ada governate, the conflict has caused ongoing cycles of displacement. In 2011, the Al-Houthi took over Sa'ada city, displacing 15,000 people in an area already burdened by poverty, food insecurity and

limited resources. The purpose of the *Joint Rapid Assessment of the Northern Governorates of Yemen* was to analyse humanitarian needs, identify a collaborative response and ensure synergies in targeting, intervention and approach.

The following two tables explore concrete ways to address CHS Commitment 1 and FSN assessment standard 1.1

COMPLIANCE WITH CHS COMMITMENT 1

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

Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	KEY ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	CONFORMITY
1. Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the response takes account of their specific needs, culture, and preferences.	KA 1.1: Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders.	A joint needs assessment (JNA), consisting of primary-source surveys, in-depth stakeholder consultation, community group discussions with the affected population and joint analysis) was conducted in the four northern governorates affected by the internally displaced population crisis. It was developed based on baseline data and experience gained from other assessments. The assessment team was instructed to respect the dignity and culture of participants and to provide them with information about the activity.
2. The assistance and protection provided correspond with assessed risks, vulnerabilities and needs.	KA 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.	The JNA consisted of 46 community interviews or community group discussions (50% male, 50% female) and 96 key informant interviews, including 50 stakeholder interviews.
3. The response takes account of the capacities, skills and knowledge of people requiring assistance.	OR 1.6: Processes are in place to ensure an appropriate ongoing analysis of the context.	The target group included not only IDPs, but different categories of "conflict-affected people", including vulnerable IDPs, returning IDPs, other conflict-affected populations and host communities. 14 assessment team leaders were trained by ACAPS and then carried out the same training with their assessment teams.

COMPLIANCE WITH FSN ASSESSMENT STANDARD 1.1

Food security and nutrition assessments standard 1.1: Where people are at risk of food insecurity, assessments are conducted to determine the degree and extent of food insecurity, identify those most affected and define the most appropriate response.

Key indicator: Standardised protocols are used to analyse food security, livelihoods and coping strategies.

Metric: Percentage of analytical reports that synthesise findings, including assessment methodology and constraints encountered.

KEY ACTIONS	CONFORMITY
<p>1. Collect and analyse information on food security at the initial stage and during the crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include analysis of critical issues linked to food security, such as environmental degradation, security and market access. 	<p>Desk review of previous food security surveys and vulnerable groups and regions.</p> <p>Data was disaggregated by families, male and female and governorate.</p> <p>Food security-related needs were identified during focus group discussions and household surveys (100 men and 80 women), with an emphasis on the inclusion of vulnerable segments of the area.</p>
<p>2. Analyse the impact of food security on the nutritional status of the affected population.</p>	<p>Food security-related impact was assessed, noting the “reduced size and number of daily meals, fasting, and borrowing or buying food on credit.”</p>
<p>3. Identify possible responses that could help to save lives and protect and promote livelihoods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include market assessments and capacities of government and other actors to respond to needs. 	<p>Recommendations for possible response activities were given, including: “Expand current targeting to include all vulnerable families, through updating the government Safety Net beneficiaries list. Cash transfers in areas where food is available but less accessible due to lack of purchasing power. Establishment of a food security monitoring system. Advocacy on the needs of returnees.”</p>
<p>4. Analyse available cooking resources and methods, including the type of stove and fuel and availability of pots and utensils.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to the rights and protection needs of women and girls, who are most commonly responsible for fuel collection and food preparation. 	<p>Assessment questions included: “Which items and quantities are required for these people in the next three months?”</p>

3 Monitoring

How to incorporate Sphere principles, standards and indicators into monitoring processes

The content of this chapter is platform-neutral and does not suggest a standardized version, tool or format for assessments.

This chapter shows you:

- How to monitor the results of interventions using Sphere indicators
- How to adapt a programme in response to monitoring
- Where to find monitoring questions in the Sphere Handbook

What is monitoring?

Monitoring is an ongoing and usually internal process of data collection. It compares intentions with results by measuring progress against project objectives. It also measures programmes' influence on people and contexts, and tracks implementing agencies' systems and processes.

Monitoring enables decision makers to respond to community feedback and identify emerging problems and trends.

It guides project revisions, verifies targeting criteria and confirms that aid is reaching the people intended. Monitoring data should be disaggregated for different groups – women, men, boys and girls and other groupings – as appropriate.

How does Sphere support monitoring?

The Sphere Handbook can be used to support monitoring throughout the project cycle. Sphere standards provide a common language when monitoring response activities.

There is valuable guidance throughout the Handbook that relates to monitoring, and all parts of the Handbook have monitoring activities associated with them. For guiding questions related to the CHS key actions and organisational responsibilities ➤ see *Sphere Online Handbook: Appendix to the CHS*. These questions can be used to support programme design or as a tool for reviewing a project, response or policy.

Practical advice

- Meet relevant adapted indicator targets or work towards Sphere indicator targets while at the same time explaining gaps.
- Promote Sphere standards and indicators internally, with partners and within coordination mechanisms.
- Adapt programmes in response to monitoring results.



We must be thoughtful and ambitious in applying the Sphere standards. Meeting them may mean reaching indicator targets over time and in alternative ways

CHS Commitment 7 states: “Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.” This commitment stresses the importance of looking at lessons learned and prior experience when designing programmes.

Monitoring the results of interventions

CHS Commitment 7 states that monitoring systems should be simple and accessible. Monitored information should be representative of different groups, clearly articulating who benefited from previous programmes and who did not. It also emphasises the importance of considering failures as well as successes.

The purpose of monitoring is to better understand humanitarian activities and, ultimately, to improve outcomes for disaster-affected populations. This means humanitarian action should be explicitly designed to consider and respond to monitoring data.

To monitor the results of a project, practitioners need to measure a **change in an indicator**, and the change must be attributable to the project activities, in part or in full.

This means that you must know the initial value of the indicator and that the programme logic is sufficiently robust for you to be confident that the change observed has been caused, to some degree, by the programme intervention. It also requires that you can have confidence in the quality of the data you have collected.

Note that it may not be appropriate to try to measure the impact of an intervention in the early stages of a humanitarian response, especially in sudden-onset emergencies. In other situations, it may be appropriate. However, efforts should always be made to measure outcomes.

The Sphere Minimum Standards often include quantitative guidance or targets within the guidance notes or within the appendices to each Handbook chapter. Indicators of results can be expressed in qualitative or quantitative terms.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESULTS INDICATORS WITHIN SPHERE

	EXAMPLE OF A QUALITATIVE INDICATOR OF RESULTS	EXAMPLE OF A QUANTITATIVE INDICATOR OF RESULTS
Minimum Standard	<p>Excreta management standard 3.1: Environment free from human excreta</p> <p>All excreta is safely contained on-site to avoid contamination of the natural, living, learning, working and communal environments.</p>	<p>Child health standard 2.2.2: Management of newborn and childhood illness</p> <p>Children have access to priority healthcare that addresses the major causes of newborn and childhood morbidity and mortality.</p>
Key indicator	There are no human faeces present in the environment in which people live, learn and work.	Effective anti-malarial treatment provided in a timely manner to all children under age five years presenting with malaria.
Implied metrics to be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical aspects of context (political situation, epidemiological and other data) are monitored at an appropriate frequency. Needs, capacities and coping strategies are monitored at an appropriate frequency. Changes in programme design, implementation modality are tracked. 	Proportion of children treated within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Note: Results monitoring must include monitoring the **levels of satisfaction among the target population, partner organisations and other stakeholders**. This provides important additional perspectives rather than seeing everything from the viewpoint of the project implementers. This aspect can be linked with other accountability processes, particularly **CHS Commitments 4 and 5**.

QUANTITATIVE TARGETS DESCRIBED IN SPHERE GUIDANCE NOTES

Minimum Standard	Food assistance standard 6.1: General nutrition requirements The basic nutritional needs of the affected people, including the most vulnerable, are met.
Key indicator	Percentage of targeted households that receive the minimum food energy requirements and recommended daily micronutrient intake.
Implied metrics – to be measured	2,100 kCal per person per day with 10–12 per cent of total energy provided by protein and 17 per cent provided by fat

Complaints mechanisms

Another way to monitor results and ensure accountability is through feedback and complaints mechanisms.

These are ways for crisis-affected populations to raise concerns about the assistance they receive and the behaviour of aid organisations and staff. The process should cover programming, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other abuses of power. This is commonly done through complaints boxes, hotlines, listening sessions or exit interviews. The provision of complaints mechanisms is included in **CHS Commitment 5: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.**

Complaints mechanisms should be:

- **Accessible:** Ensure older people, women and girls, boys and men, people with disabilities and others who might be marginalised have a say in the design and implementation of complaints systems. Put time and resources into raising awareness to ensure the affected people know how and where to make a complaint.
- **Effective:** Provide a response within a specified time frame and ensure complainants know when to expect a response.
- **Confidential:** Assure people that they can always make a complaint confidentially and without fear of retaliation.
- **Safe:** Explain the complaints process to communities and staff. Include mechanisms both for sensitive issues (such as those relating to corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, gross misconduct or malpractice) and for non-sensitive information (such as challenges to the use of selection criteria).

Example of a complaints mechanism for a cash transfer programme after Cyclone Enawo

In 2017, Cyclone Enawo hit Madagascar resulting in severe flooding and displacement. As part of the response, the Danish Red Cross supported by the Madagascar Red Cross Society provided unconditional cash grants to cover the basic needs of people living in informal settlements in the capital Antananarivo. To respond to rumours, feedback and complaints in the community mechanisms were put in place to ensure the community felt listened to and respected:

- Local volunteers were hired to conduct home visits in which they collected and shared information, and listened to and discussed peoples' concerns, fears and rumours.
- A helpdesk was set up during distributions to respond to feedback and complaints. Contact telephone numbers that community members could call for more information were displayed and distributed during awareness-raising activities.
- After the first distribution, an exit survey, focus group discussions and post-distribution monitoring was carried out, where communities were invited to openly discuss their perceptions of the project, including complaints and fears.

Source: Community Engagement and Accountability in Cash Transfer Programming: A Best Practice Example from Madagascar. IFRC, 2018

Unintended effects of monitored programmes

Protection Principle 1 calls on humanitarian actors to “take steps to reduce overall risks and vulnerability of people, including the potentially negative effects of humanitarian programmes.” Monitoring systems need to consider these possibilities and management systems need to be willing to recognise and respond to them.

The Humanitarian Charter is explicit that humanitarian actions may have complex consequences and that some of these will be unintended, adverse, or both. **Humanitarian Charter para. 9** states: “We are aware that attempts to provide humanitarian assistance may sometimes have unintended adverse effects. In collaboration with affected communities and authorities, we aim to minimise any negative effects of humanitarian action on the local community or on the environment.”

Similarly, **Protection Principle 1** urges practitioners to avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of their actions. CHS Commitment 3 echoes this.

Unintended results

After floods in 2010 in Sindh, Pakistan, aid agencies bought bamboo from businesses that could handle large contracts. These businesses bought bamboo from the regular traders for around half the price the aid agencies were paying the businesses for it. This meant that only half of the aid budget benefited the flood-affected people.¹⁶

Adapting a programme in response to monitoring

Using Sphere guidance and indicators (including the CHS) helps organisations standardise activities and coordinate with each other.

CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.2 stresses the importance of learning, innovating and implementing changes on the basis of monitoring and evaluation, feedback and complaints. It emphasises the use of open-ended listening and other qualitative participatory approaches and sharing and discussing learning with communities, asking them what they would like to do differently and how to strengthen their role in decision-making or management.

- Monitoring data is management information – that is, timely and well-organised information that can be used to inform management decisions.
- It is not enough to collect information – efforts must be made to understand it and, where appropriate, respond.
- It is a waste of resources and a missed opportunity to collect data if there are no processes or commitment to act on it.

The Indicator Tracking Table in Chapter 1: Context provides a simple but thorough means of tracking changes in the values of important indicators over the life of the programme.

Wherever the indicator is a number of people, values should be disaggregated for age, gender and disability as a minimum. See also Chapter 1: Context).

Indicators will often only suggest that a programme is not delivering as expected. They may not explain why not. Further research or analysis might be necessary prior to taking a decision.

16. *Markets in crises: the implications for humanitarian action*. Levine, Simon, 2017. Available at: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11722.pdf

In addition to monitoring progress, the relevance of the programme should also be monitored. Changes in context can alter the relevance of an intervention. **CHS Commitment 1: KA 1.3** states:

“Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context.”

- *Monitor the political situation and adapt stakeholder analysis and security.*
- *Monitor epidemiological and other data regularly to inform ongoing decision-making and prioritise life-saving interventions.*
- *Remain flexible enough to redesign any intervention in response to changing needs. Confirm that donors agree with programme changes as needed.”*

Monitoring cross-cutting themes

Cross-cutting themes in humanitarian action focus on particular areas of concern in disaster response and address individual, group or general vulnerabilities. All Sphere standards refer to a number of cross-cutting themes as stated in the Handbook's introduction chapter. Depending on the context and type of intervention, monitoring data should be disaggregated by group taking into account: children, gender, people living with and affected by HIV, older people, people with disabilities, LGBTQI, mental health and psychosocial support. As an absolute minimum, monitoring data should be sufficiently detailed to allow disaggregation by age, gender and disability, as outlined in **CHS Commitment 1: GN¹⁷**. See also Chapter 1: Context.

EXAMPLES OF DATA DISAGGREGATION IN SPHERE INDICATORS

Minimum standard	Key indicator	What to measure	Disaggregation
Excreta management standard 3.2: Access to and use of toilets People have adequate, appropriate and acceptable toilets to allow rapid, safe and secure access at all times.	Ratio of shared toilets	Minimum 1 per 20 people. Disaggregated data on use	Age, sex, disability
Shelter and settlement standard 4: Household items Household item assistance supports restoring and maintaining health, dignity and safety and the undertaking of daily domestic activities in and around the home.	People have sufficient and appropriate quality clothing Minimum two full sets of clothing per person, in the right size and appropriate to culture, season and climate, and adapted to any particular needs	Availability and number of sets of appropriate clothing	Age, sex

17. The degree of disaggregation by age varies with the context and the nature of the indicator. There is no common set of age breakdowns that applies across all sectors and in all situations. For example, for specific health indicators (p.351). Age can be further disaggregated, as feasible: for example 0–11 months, 1–4 years, 5–14 years, 15–49 years, 50–59 years, 60–69 years, 70–79 years and 80+ years.

Where appropriate to the context and programme intervention, climate change issues and the environment should be monitored, as noted in **Shelter and settlement standard 7: Environmental sustainability**. One key indicator states: “Percentage of shelter and settlement activities that are preceded by an environmental review”. This implies that the metrics being measured are specifically related to the environment. For example: Environmental assessment has been carried out, sources of construction materials, erosion mitigation measures.

Sphere supports internal monitoring within organisations

Organisations should have a performance review and improvement plan based on measurable, objective indicators in their learning cycle.

Many Sphere indicators, key actions and guidance notes are designed to support these internal monitoring processes.

They include mechanisms to record knowledge and experience and make them accessible throughout the organisation. Staff need to understand their responsibilities in relation to monitoring the progress of their work and how learning can contribute to their professional development ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.4*. It is also important to monitor and report expenditure against budget to ensure programme objectives are met, including procedures to mitigate key financial management risks ➤ see *CHS Commitment 9: KA 9.3*.

What are examples of questions for monitoring the CHS key actions and organisational responsibilities?

All CHS Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities can be easily re-formulated as indicators.

In addition, a set of guiding questions related to monitoring the CHS key actions and organisational responsibilities can be used to support programme design or as a tool for reviewing a project, response or policy ➤ see *Guiding questions for monitoring key actions and organisational responsibilities* as an appendix to the CHS chapter in the Sphere Online Handbook.

Responding to monitoring data: Unconditional cash transfers in the Philippines

Through monitoring the political situation, programme staff determined that the proximity of a cash transfer programme's implementation timeline to that of local elections generated much confusion around the purpose of the cash transfers. In response, programme staff increased information in the targeted area about the organisation's political neutrality and changed the monitoring plan to include more self-reporting instead of involving local government units in monitoring community livelihood groups.

Source: CaLP Case Study Unconditional Cash Grants for Relief and Recovery in Rizal and Laguna, The Philippines (Post-Typhoon Ketsana). Oxfam GB, 2012

4

Evaluation

How to incorporate Sphere principles, standards and indicators into evaluation and learning processes

The content of this chapter is platform-neutral and does not suggest a standardised version, tool or format.

This chapter shows you:

- The difference between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact;
- The different types of evaluations;
- How to use Sphere throughout the evaluation process.

What is evaluation in humanitarian crises?

According to ALNAP,¹⁸ evaluation is:

The **systematic and objective examination** of humanitarian action, to determine the worth or significance of an activity, policy or programme, intended to **draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability**.

How does Sphere support evaluations?

Sphere provides two distinct types of guidance on evaluating humanitarian action:

- **Internal aspects and processes**, such as programming processes, systems, capacities and performance. These can be found mostly in the CHS, but also in the technical chapters.
- **External aspects**, as the degree to which technical humanitarian standards are met. Evaluating against Sphere indicators allows for a more coordinated and all-encompassing understanding of needs, response gaps and overlaps.

Both aspects are linked to the two main purposes of evaluation in humanitarian action.¹⁹

a. Learning: The process through which experience and reflection lead to changes in behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities.

CHS Commitment 7 offers the following:

- **KA 7.1:** “draw on lessons learned and prior experience when designing programmes.”
- **OR 7.4:** “evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices.”
- **OR 7.6:** “the organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response among peers and within the sector.”

b. Accountability: The means through which power is used responsibly. It is a process of taking into account the views of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily the people affected by authority or power.

In a similar way, Sphere defines evaluation as:

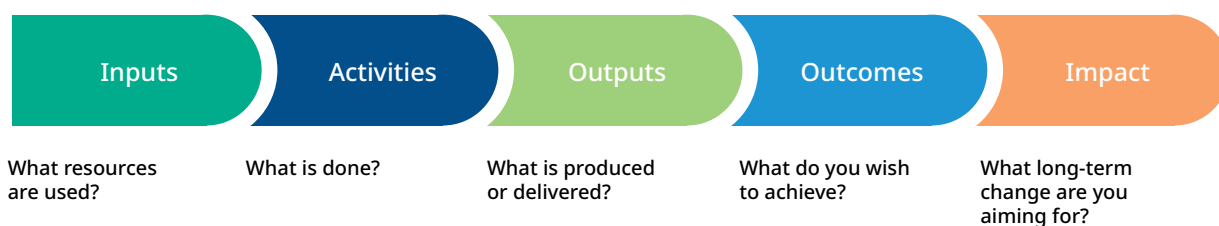
“An episodic assessment of performance, focused on results (outcomes and impacts) that can be internal or external. Evaluations can provide assessments of what works and why, and highlight intended and unintended results for accountability and learning purposes.”²⁰

18. ALNAP: *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide*

19. ALNAP: *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide*

20. Sphere glossary: <https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Glossary-2018.pdf>

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT



Source: Norad (1999)

Practical advice

- Meet relevant adapted indicator values or work towards Sphere indicators while at the same time explaining the gaps.
- Measure and analyse performance and outcomes in order to strengthen quality, accountability and learning.
- Learn from the results of monitoring and evaluation activities by sharing lessons with other humanitarian actors and integrating lessons into future programme activities.
- Understand, share and act on gaps in the response, as well as feedback from stakeholders, especially affected populations (see Chapter 3: Monitoring: Complaints Mechanisms).

Improving humanitarian activities in reaction to data and feedback is what ultimately constitutes active learning.



We must be thoughtful and ambitious in applying the Sphere standards. Meeting them standards may mean reaching indicator targets over time and in alternative ways.

Some key evaluation concepts

The difference between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact

- **Inputs:** The financial, human and material resources used in the humanitarian action.
- **Outputs:** The products, goods and services that are the result of inputs received and activities conducted by an actor or group of actors. An output must be fully attributable to an actor or group of actors (for example, water points provided by an aid agency in a camp for internally displaced people).

- **Outcomes:** Intended or unintended changes or shifts in conditions due directly or indirectly to an intervention. They can be desired (positive) or unwanted (negative). They can encompass behaviour change (actions, relations, policies, practices) of individuals, groups, communities, organisations, institutions or other social actors. They are only partially attributable to the actor responsible for the intervention (for example, how the water from water points newly installed by an NGO is used).
- **Impact:** Looks at programmes' wider effects – social, economic, technical and environmental – on individuals (men and women), age groups, communities and institutions. Impacts can be intended and unintended, positive and negative, macro (sector) and micro (household, individual), short or long term.

Some key evaluation concepts

The difference between attribution and contribution

When evaluating humanitarian action, it is important to distinguish between attribution and contribution.

- **Attribution:** This is the causal link between changes observed – or expected to be observed – and a specific intervention. In complex humanitarian interventions, it is rarely possible to attribute a result to one specific cause. For example, a food aid agency may attribute reduced malnutrition to food distribution. But the reduction could also be caused by improved water quality, childcare practices, hygiene, health care, sanitation, vector control or even normal seasonal changes.

- **Contribution:** This refers to finding credible ways of showing that an intervention played some part in bringing about results. Contribution analysis is a kind of evaluative analysis that recognises that several causes might contribute to a result, even if individually they may not be necessary or sufficient to create impact.

Note: it is usually easier in evaluations to assess contribution than attribution.

Where can I find evaluation information in the Sphere Handbook?

Every part of the Sphere Handbook contributes in different ways to evaluations.

The **Humanitarian Charter** is the cornerstone of the Handbook and provides the ethical and legal backdrop for humanitarian action. The 12 clauses of the Humanitarian Charter may even serve as a people-centred alternative to the commonly used OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria as a framework for evaluation. The Humanitarian Charter provides an alternative, unique and globally recognised framework for the evaluation of humanitarian action.

The **Protection Principles** provide a framework to ensure that the rights articulated in the charter can be achieved and describe how humanitarian agencies can contribute to the protection of those faced with the threat of violence or coercion. These factors should be included in evaluation processes.

The entire **Core Humanitarian Standard** can be used for evaluations. All key actions and organisational responsibilities can be formulated as outcome indicators. The CHS guiding questions help formulate questions for each commitment (➔ see *Sphere Online Handbook: Appendix to the CHS*).

The **technical chapter introductions** (*Essential concepts*) explain how people's inalienable rights to water, food, shelter and health translate into technical guidance. They are excellent ways to understand how rights and humanitarian action connect.

Each **standard** is accompanied by indicators that can be used for evaluations.

Using Sphere through stages of the evaluation process

While every humanitarian evaluation is different, the table below represents a fairly typical process for an external evaluation towards the end of a humanitarian response. It is not intended to be prescriptive or universal: a participatory evaluation, for example, would follow a different path (see following).

How can evaluation be participatory?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Sphere strongly supports participatory practices, including participation in evaluation processes. If the participatory approach is adopted early enough in the process, agencies can include affected people in the design of the evaluation itself. This ensures that their perspectives contribute to setting the key questions addressed and the ways in which information is collected and triangulated.

When making use of the Sphere Handbook, as well as relevant participatory evaluation guides, participatory approaches can be adopted relatively easily and add a valuable perspective and foundation to both evaluation processes and findings.

Several of the key actions and organisational responsibilities within **CHS Commitment 4** specifically address issues of two-way communication with the affected population, including **OR 4.4**: "Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received, paying particular attention to the age, sex and diversity of those giving feedback."

In addition, **CHS Commitment 7: KA 7.2** states:

Learn, innovate and implement changes based on monitoring and evaluation, feedback and complaints.

- Use open-ended listening and other qualitative participatory approaches. People affected by crisis are the best sources of information about needs and changes in the situation.
- Share and discuss learning with communities, asking them what they would like to do differently and how to strengthen their role in decision-making or management.

USING SPHERE AT DIFFERENT POINTS THROUGH A TYPICAL EVALUATION PROCESS

OUTPUT	ACTIVITIES	APPLICATION OF THE SPHERE HANDBOOK
	Identify the need for an evaluation; clarify the main purpose; identify stakeholders.	Consider the CHS or the Protection Principles as the guiding framework for the evaluation.
Terms of reference	Outline key questions and preferred methodology.	Use CHS and Minimum Standards as an explicit reference point against which to set key questions.
	Identify external evaluator.	Consider an evaluator with proven experience in the application of Sphere.
	Refine key questions and scope.	Use key actions, operational responsibilities, key indicators and guidance notes to inform the development of sub-questions.
Inception report	Describe and justify methodology. Outline sub-questions.	Use key actions, operational responsibilities, key indicators and guidance notes to inform the development of sub-questions and data collection tools.
	Propose report structure.	
	Collect and analyse data.	
Draft report	Present draft report.	Reference Sphere in the framing of findings.
	Respond to draft findings.	
	Revise findings based on stakeholder feedback.	
Final report	Present final report: observations, findings and recommendations.	Use Sphere to frame and ground the recommendations, where appropriate.
Publication	Independent report and agency response published together.	Share findings.

It is also possible to evaluate the quality of participatory processes within the project itself, as described within **CHS Commitment 4**. These could be explored through evaluation questions or sub-questions such as:

- In what ways were the affected population involved in the various phases of the response: in a needs assessment, in setting priorities, in selecting appropriate response mechanisms, in targeting, in monitoring processes and results?
- Did effective and safe feedback mechanisms exist for the affected population?
- Did the population use them, and if not, why not?
- What changes were made to the programme as a result of such feedback?

The link between programming and evaluation

Sphere describes good practice in setting programme activities and targets, and in the design of the monitoring framework. This means that two separate groups of questions can be used in evaluation processes:

- **Did the designed activities themselves meet the Sphere technical standards?** Evaluation questions might focus on the qualitative standards or on the quantitative measures found in some of the indicators and guidance notes.
- **Were CHS commitments met during the processes of analysing potential response options, design of activities and project delivery?** The evaluation can also consider the internal logic of the response and provide commentary on the quality of the logframe. To evaluate these areas properly, it is essential to keep accurate documentation about decision-making throughout the project design phase.

These areas could be studied through evaluation questions such as:

- What factors were considered in the process of deciding the most appropriate response? How were the various factors weighted? Which options were discarded and why? What can be learned from the quality of the response to influence this decision-making process in the future?
- Was the risk analysis adequate for the context and the programme? Were the actions put in place to mitigate risk sufficient?

An evaluation can also look at the ways in which the project used the monitoring data and how it reacted to unexpected results and events. Referencing **CHS Commitment 7** in this process is helpful.

Can Sphere standards be applied retrospectively?

Is it acceptable to evaluate a programme against Sphere standards if they were not explicitly referenced in the programme design?

If the agency has made a general commitment to observe or work towards Sphere standards, then it is appropriate to use them in evaluation. This commitment might be in policy documents, in the agency's publications or on its website, or in an agreement with a donor.

However, if no such commitment exists, then evaluators can work with the agency to find an appropriate benchmark to use in the evaluation process. Sphere standards and the companion standards all provide such a benchmark, as they are widely accepted within the humanitarian domain and do not 'belong' to any agency, donor or sector.

If Sphere is used retrospectively in an evaluation, then this should be made explicit in the evaluation report.

Sphere and Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria

DAC criteria are widely used as a framework for humanitarian (and development) evaluations, although not every evaluation uses all of the criteria. Some evaluation processes use only two or three as a result of prioritisation or resource constraint.

Although the DAC criteria provide a rather different lens to that used in participatory approaches, there are also strong overlaps. Sphere's technical chapters will find their greatest expression within the DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness and impact.

The CHS and Protection Principles find expression throughout the DAC criteria.

DAC CRITERIA

DAC criteria and Sphere	Example questions
<p>RELEVANCE/ APPROPRIATENESS</p> <p><i>“Relevance is concerned with assessing whether the project is in line with local needs and priorities (as well as donor policy). Appropriateness is the tailoring of humanitarian activities to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability and cost-effectiveness accordingly.”</i></p> <p>► CHS Commitments 1, 4 and 5</p>	<p>To what degree did the activities undertaken meet the needs and expectations of the affected population?</p> <p>To what degree were community aspirations actually canvassed?</p> <p>To what degree was disaggregated assessment data available and to what degree did such data enable the design of responses?</p> <p>Did project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries have access to a safe and impartial complaints mechanism?</p> <p>To what degree were Sphere technical standards applied during the design phase to ensure the relevance of the response to the affected population? To what degree was this population consulted?</p> <p>To what degree were the capacity, resources and cultural practices of the affected population taken into account in the design of health promotion activities?</p> <p>What systems were put in place to monitor changes in the external context, the security situation or the nature of vulnerability during the implementation period? What changes were made to activities or methods as the situation changed and evolved?</p>
<p>CONNECTEDNESS</p> <p>► CHS Commitments 1 and 2</p>	<p>Were the planned activities appropriate, given the history of tension between the various resident groups in the area? Did emergency activities support or undermine the long-term development plan of the local authority? To what degree did immediate response actions support or undermine the potential of medium-term recovery activities?</p>
<p>COVERAGE</p> <p>► Protection Principles 2 and 4</p> <p>► Design and implementation</p>	<p>Did the response target and reach all groups affected by the disaster?</p> <p>What process was used to prioritise needs and responses?</p>

DAC criteria and Sphere**Example questions****EFFICIENCY**

"Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – achieved as a result of inputs. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving an output to see whether the most efficient (economically viable) approach has been used."

► **CHS Commitments 6, 7 and 9**

Were the financial, human, physical and information resources available used efficiently? (e.g. were inputs used in the best way to achieve outcomes and in a cost-effective manner?) If not, why not?

Was assistance provided in a timely manner to meet beneficiary and community needs?

Did the integration approach adopted affect the timeliness of delivery? If so, how?

Were staffing requirements correctly estimated, and were staff appropriately recruited and deployed?

What process was put in place to consider the full range of possible options to respond to the needs identified in the needs assessment?

What factors were considered in selecting the chosen response modality, targeting and scale? Were these factors appropriate and sufficient?

EFFECTIVENESS

"Effectiveness measures the extent to which an activity achieves its purpose or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs. Implicit within the criterion of effectiveness is timeliness."

► **CHS Commitment 2.6**

To what degree did the action complement, compete with or duplicate the activities of other humanitarian actors?

IMPACT

"Impact looks at the wider effects of the project – social, economic, technical and environmental – on individuals, sex- and age-groups, communities and institutions. Impacts can be intended and unintended, positive and negative, macro (sector) and micro (household)."

► **Humanitarian Charter para. 9**

► **Protection Principle 1**

Did the humanitarian action reach all the people it intended to reach?

What impact was experienced by the affected population in addition to that planned and anticipated?

SUSTAINABILITY

"Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable."

► **CHS Commitment 9**

What were the major factors that influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the sustainability of the programme or project?

5 Learning

How Sphere principles, standards and indicators support active organisational and response-wide learning, reflection and sharing

Practical advice

- Learn from the results of monitoring and evaluation activities by sharing lessons with other humanitarian actors and integrate lessons into how the organisation functions and into future programme activities.
- Use Sphere as a yardstick against which to measure performance and outcomes as part of accountability and learning and as a means of strengthening quality.
- Understand and act on protection and response gaps – it is this last point that constitutes active learning.



We must be thoughtful and ambitious in applying the Sphere standards. Meeting them may mean reaching indicator targets over time and in alternative ways.

Evaluation should include systematic **opportunities for reflection** on the part of the programme team. As **CHS Commitment 7: GN** suggests, humanitarian agencies can and should make an active effort to learn, develop and improve practices even at the height of a humanitarian operation.

Course correction can be achieved through:

- Real-time reviews, one-off assessment exercises, involving people working on the project;
- Feedback received from affected people who are the best judges of changes in their lives.
- Reflection following the completion of activities – for example after action reviews – which seeks to influence future responses by identifying elements to retain and change in future projects.

Organisations may also use CHS commitments to evaluate their own performance. These could be used in a self-assessment exercise or participatory approaches could be used (see Chapter 4: How can evaluation be participatory?) and key informants identified to evaluate the organisation's performance. In each case, the reflection process would lead to an action plan.

Reflective practices can be evaluated with questions such as:

- What actions were taken during the assessment, design and response phases to ensure that opportunities were created for reflection and learning?
- To what degree did affected people's perspectives influence these activities?
- Were identified issues documented and acted on?

Collaborative learning

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

Various organisations have used **peer-learning** exercises. They can be undertaken to monitor progress in real time or as a reflective exercise post-crisis.

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

Evidence that is available across sectors is particularly useful. Learning and reviewing evidence among organisations is more likely to contribute to organisational change than lessons learned within a single organisation ➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: Guidance note*.

Sharing lessons learned

When an agency learns something valuable through the evaluation process, it becomes their responsibility to share these lessons with the sector. This avoids repeating mistakes and duplicating effort, and promotes collective resource efficiency, increased effectiveness and sector-wide accountability. This responsibility is reflected in **CHS Commitment 7**:

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

- Identify ways to support system-wide learning activities.

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

- Compile and publish reports on humanitarian responses, including key lessons learned and recommendations for revised practices during future responses.



“Lessons cannot be considered learned unless they have brought about demonstrable changes in current or subsequent responses.”
➤ see *CHS Commitment 7: GN*.

Learning Appendix 1:

CHS commitments supporting assessment, monitoring, evaluation and learning

KEY ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES EXPLANATION

CHS COMMITMENT 1

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

Assessment	<p>1.1 Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>1.5 Policies set out commitments, which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and to collect disaggregated data.</p> <p>1.6 Processes are in place to ensure an appropriate ongoing analysis of the context.</p>	<p>CHS Commitment 1: is a powerful tool for advocating that the response takes account of the specific needs, culture and preferences of crisis-affected communities. It includes consideration of vulnerabilities, protection and assistance needs of different groups (i.e. disaggregated data is necessary to understand how best to fill these needs).</p> <p>It also acts as a foundation for planning an assessment ensuring management support to acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary to manage and carry out assessments.</p>
Monitoring	<p>1.3 Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context.</p> <p>1.5 Policies set out commitments, which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and to collect disaggregated data.</p>	<p>CHS Commitment 1 stresses the importance of monitoring the political situation, context, epidemiological and other data regularly to inform ongoing decision-making and prioritise life-saving interventions. It promotes flexibility and can be used to advocate redesigning an intervention in response to changing needs.</p>
Evaluation	<p>1.5 Policies set out commitments, which take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and to collect disaggregated data.</p>	<p>CHS Commitment 1 stresses the importance of understanding the impact of actions or events on different groups.</p> <p>Analysis of disaggregated data is necessary when using standards in context and for monitoring. Good use of disaggregated data can show who has been most affected, who is able to access assistance and where more needs to be done to reach an at-risk population.</p>

KEY ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES EXPLANATION

CHS COMMITMENT 2

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

Assessment	<p>2.1 Design programmes that address constraints so that the proposed action is realistic and safe for communities.</p> <p>2.4 Use relevant technical standards and good practice employed across the humanitarian sector to plan and assess programmes.</p>	<p>CHS Commitment 2 can be used as a tool to advocate for unmet needs to be addressed. It also supports local response capacity in accessing hard-to-reach areas and providing assistance for affected populations facing access constraints.</p>
Monitoring	<p>2.2 Deliver humanitarian response in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without unnecessary delay.</p> <p>2.5 Monitor the activities, outputs and outcomes of humanitarian responses in order to adapt programmes and address poor performance.</p> <p>2.7 Policy commitments ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. systematic, objective and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities and their effects; b. evidence from monitoring and evaluations is used to adapt and improve programmes; and c. timely decision-making, with resources allocated accordingly. 	<p>CHS Commitment 2 is a tool for ensuring that monitoring and evaluation reports show whether the humanitarian response meets its objectives in terms of timing, quality and quantity. It also helps practitioners ensure that national technical standards, where these exist, are adapted to the humanitarian context and globally agreed standards are used.</p>
Evaluation	<p>2.4 Use relevant technical standards and good practice employed across the humanitarian sector to plan and assess programmes.</p> <p>2.7 Policy commitments ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. systematic, objective and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities and their effects; b. evidence from monitoring and evaluations is used to adapt and improve programmes; and c. timely decision-making, with resources allocated accordingly. 	

KEY ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES EXPLANATION

CHS COMMITMENT 3

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

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

CHS Commitment 3 is associated with understanding and addressing needs and capacities of different groups who are exposed to different levels of risk.

CHS COMMITMENT 4

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

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

CHS Commitment 4 is associated with the functions of evaluation and monitoring and their role in supporting transparency and improving the quality of responses. Formal feedback can be sought through specific evaluations (using group discussions or interviews), post-distribution monitoring, or questionnaires. Explore different methods of providing informal and formal feedback, including methods for confidentially sharing the feedback.

CHS COMMITMENT 5

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

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

CHS Commitment 5 is associated with designing, implementing and monitoring complaints processes functions in partnership with communities.

CHS COMMITMENT 6

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

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

CHS Commitment 6 is associated with leading joint assessments, trainings and evaluations across organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a more coherent approach.

KEY ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES EXPLANATION

CHS COMMITMENT 7

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

Monitoring	7.1 Draw on lessons learned and prior experience when designing programmes.	<p>CHS Commitment 7 is associated with the performance and learning design. It can be used to advocate for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring systems that are simple, accessible and are representative of different groups. Collaborating and sharing information and lessons, including sharing, storing and effectively using organisational knowledge and learning.
Evaluation	7.4 Evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices.	
Monitoring and evaluation	<p>7.2 Learn, innovate and implement changes on the basis of monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints.</p> <p>7.3 Share learning and innovation internally, with communities and people affected by crisis, and with other stakeholders.</p> <p>7.5 Mechanisms exist to record knowledge and experience and make it accessible throughout the organisation.</p> <p>7.6 The organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response among peers and within the sector.</p>	

CHS COMMITMENT 8

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

Evaluation	<p>Guidance note Performance standards and development of competencies: There are various methods that can be used to assess a staff member's skills and behaviours, including observation, reviewing work output, direct discussions with them and interviewing their colleagues. Regular documented performance appraisals should allow managers to identify areas for support and training.</p>	<p>CHS Commitment 8 is associated with ensuring that staff and volunteers' performance and work are evaluated.</p>
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CHS COMMITMENT 9

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

Monitoring	9.3 Monitor and report expenditure against budget.	<p>CHS Commitment 9 is associated with ensuring that finances are well-managed. It also encourages staff to report any suspected fraud, corruption or misuse of resources.</p>
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Learning Appendix 2:

Ethics – Zooming in on bias in humanitarian response

Motivated reasoning

When responding to humanitarian crises, we hope our work is useful and never wasteful. While conducting assessments, we may be motivated to find evidence suggesting the work of our organisation is needed, or to amplify the size of this need. In the process of monitoring and evaluation, we may be motivated to demonstrate programme effectiveness instead of identifying faults and ineffectiveness leading to lessons learned. As humanitarian actors, remaining objective is the best way to promote life with dignity.

Confirmation bias

The tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories. In the process of assessment, monitoring and evaluation, we need to be sure of remaining objective when interpreting new information.

Anchoring bias

Decisions made at the onset of an operation are based on uncertain or incomplete information. Given the time pressure, this is an initially effective strategy. As initial decisions provide the basis for the response, they have a powerful tendency to establish a status quo that becomes difficult to deviate from. While decisions should be adjusted in light of new information, anchoring bias can prevent adequate adaptation and is particularly difficult to overcome if combined with confirmation bias.

Hindsight bias

Driven by the need to justify the use of resources to donors, other agencies, HQ colleagues, the public and policymakers, there is a tendency to provide explanations that make the order of events seem more predictable than they actually were. This can distort accounts of what actually happened and hinder learning and accountability.

In-group bias

In-group bias causes members of a group to give preferential treatment to others who are members of the group. In crises, such groupings can divide NGOs from UN agencies from governmental agencies, one sector from another sector, humanitarian actors from development actors, local agencies from international agencies, field teams from HQ teams, etc. It is important to always remember and remind colleagues that we are all here for the same reason and that we are much more effective at promoting life with dignity when working cohesively.

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