# Core Humanitarian STANDARD

# Meeting report: Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability TAG meeting, 29-30 October 2014

## Overview of Results

The CHS Technical Advisory Group (TAG) met with the goal of finalizing the Standard. The group was provided with the grouped comments received from 369 respondents of the Straw Poll. The poll asked respondents: *In your view, is the CHS good enough to be published?* 79% of respondents voted yes.

All respondents answering no were obliged, before they could submit their response, to indicate what would need to be changed in the Standard for it to be acceptable to them. Addressing these comments as considered critical to ensure the broadest possible acceptance of the Standard.

The TAG was able, through sub-group and plenary discussion, to come to agreement on roughly 90% of the required changes to the CHS. As time ran short, the TAG agreed to delegate their authority for final approval to the Technical Steering Committee (TSC) to finalize the Standard. On 31 October, the TSC met and finalized the CHS. They **voted unanimously to approve the final version of the CHS**, which will be adopted by the Boards of HAP, People in Aid and the Sphere Project in early November.

The key changes that were brought to this final version of the CHS include:

- Greater clarity on the **structure and application** of the Standard;
- Return of the principle of **neutrality**, along with a conditional clause for its application;
- Strengthening of the **rights based approach**;
- Stronger inclusion of **PSEA** (Commitments 3, 5 and 8);
- Reframing the titles of commitments 7-9 to reflect community/people affected by crisis perspective and improve consistency; and,
- Identifying ideas for simplifying the **layout and visual language** of the final version, copy editing issues to be addressed in November and elements to be addressed in eventual guidance notes.

The organizers of the CHS would like to thank the hundreds of individuals and organizations for their commitment of time, energy and reflection in the development of the CHS in 2014. The Standard will be launched in Copenhagen on the 12th of December at a conference entitled, *Launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard and Outcome of the SCHR Certification Review*. In preparation for this conference, we would appreciate support from TAG and TSC members, testers and early adopters in the form of statements on your experience with the CHS, your future intentions as to its use and challenges/opportunities that you think the Standard presents to your organizations and the sector.

This document provides a narrative summary of the TAG meeting; it is complemented by the document, *Synthesis of How Straw Poll Comments Were Addressed.*

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## Wednesday 29 October: Day 1

### Overview

The TAG meeting was held in London, UK on Wednesday 29 and Thursday 30 October 2014, kindly hosted by CAFOD. The workshop was attended by 36 participants representing 34 organisations worldwide. The stated objective of the workshop was to review and address feedback and comments on version 3 of the Standard, gathered through the straw poll, and to leave with a final, approved version of the Standard. Overall, there was broad agreement of the TAG to the amendments made to sections of the CHS, and only outstanding issues were sent to the TSC to address the following day.

This meeting report is intended as a record of the meeting and process. An analysis of the feedback received during the third consultation, and which was addressed during the TAG and TSC meetings, can be found at www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard.

Detail of the changes made to the CHS and the final version that resulted from the TAG and TSC meetings can be found [Raj?]. Participants of both the TAG and TSC, including Terms of References for these entities, are available at www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/get-involved/key-stages.

### Workshop introduction

The workshop began with a round of introductions from participants and an indication of who voted 'yes' or 'no'. Almost everyone in the room indicated that they had voted positively, with only three voting 'no' but they were clear on what they would need to see in order to proceed. There was a general indication of confidence that the TAG would be able to address some of the weak points during the meeting. Issues/weak points highlighted during the round of introductions were:

- Question of neutrality
- Need for more detail in practical applications – limited use without guidelines
- It's a strong document – but will it do any good practically?

Additional comments:

- Indicators and guidance notes would have been useful rather than just viewing the framework
- Some felt that more detail was required – difficult to say yes without more detail.
- A couple were still on the fence and depending on the additional detail their vote could go either way.
- Some reported uneven engagements – coming into the process late, or having fragmented engagement; couldn't commit on behalf of their organisation.

Marian confirmed that there is already a ToR in place to develop guidance notes for the CHS, and a steering group will be formed with opportunities for engagement and consultation built into the process. An outline will be ready in time for the Copenhagen conference, then once written the guide will be opened for consultation. The goal is to have the final guide published by the end of 2015, but the draft guide will be widely available much earlier in the year.

## Objectives

The objective was stated that as a group we will leave the workshop with an approved final version of the CHS. OR, if we can't come to a final version, then we will agree direction as a group on how to reach it. OR, we will revert to the existing version 3 text.

The process for the TAG workshop was explained. Participants were encouraged to be mindful of what has happened before – a lot of decisions which have led to the current text have been based on discussion, content, consultation. As a group the TAG needs to focus on what's essential to move this forward. What is absolutely critical to enable participants to put up a hand and say 'yes, I can live with this.'

Everyone agreed that the roles and rules work, and that if they did not speak up, silence would be taken as consent.

Raj summarised the April TAG, its outcomes, and the process that has been followed to get the CHS to where it is today, including the re-engagement of the Sphere Project. He also reminded participants of the testing and commenting process on version 2 (including the testing), and decisions that were made to get to version 3. (see appendix)

It was noted that the writers group did a tremendous job in taking us to the next version.[1]

Straw poll results

Raj highlighted some of the key points from the straw poll process. It was noted that the number of responses received was exceptional for this far along in the consultation process, as was the high proportion of 'yes, this is ready to publish in its current form'' votes.

There were some comments about the data – for example, where responses are from individuals, or individuals officially representing their organisation – and Raj reminded the TAG that this is not a statistical exercise but a 'straw poll'. It was also raised that the people in the room are not necessarily those who tested the CHS, or voted on it.

There were some similarities in the comments between those voting yes and no. It was decided to remove the comments where we knew there was an answer to be addressed elsewhere (e.g. the future of the Sphere Core Standard). The focus for the day would be addressing the critical comments from the 'no' votes which related to the text of version 3.

Neutrality[2]

There was a discussion around the issue of whether neutrality should be included in the final version of the CHS.

There were six people in the room who required neutrality to be put back into the document in order to move forward. Two felt that it fundamentally had to be put back in. Three felt strongly that it should be put back in but would accept a more balanced view. One person felt it should be put in as an aspiration. The key points and observations are summarised below, with further detail in the appendix:

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[1] See appendix for a more detailed view from the writing group
[2] See appendix for more detail on the discussion points around neutrality

- Removing neutrality would leave the CHS open to adoption by actors who should not be considered as purely civilian, humanitarian actors (armed forces, political groups, etc.)
- There are a number of core issues around the definition of neutrality – e.g. does it exclude campaigning or rights-based organisations from adopting the CHS?
- Whether neutrality is in or out, in its current form, it will exclude certain organisations.
- The perception of neutrality by governments and others is fundamental to be able to gain access – it would impact ability to deliver operationally.

From the perspective of creating a standard, Pierre made the following observation: about 80 per cent of the rationale for voting no is the absence of neutrality. The acceptance of a standard is through a high approval rate (80% is exceptional) but the absence of sustained opposition is the other definition. Because we have 80% sustained against removing neutrality, we need to find a way to address this - without jeopardising the high levels of consensus on other issues

Working groups
Following plenary discussion, the group was split into four different workstations. These workstations presented the text of the following sections of the CHS, in addition to the critical comments that needed to be addressed: Introduction; Structure; Principled Humanitarian Action; Applying the Standard/Claims. Each workstation was manned by a facilitator to manage the discussion and capture comments and suggestions. Groups spent 30 minutes at each workstation.

The day ended with agreement on how to move forward into the next day, which would be to review the work achieved during the afternoon and then move on to examine each of the 9 commitments and the Technical Glossary in the same way.


## Thursday 30 October: Day 2

Thursday continued the workstation-based approach of Wednesday's exercises. Small groups worked to type up the suggestions for the Introduction; the Structure; Applying the Standard/Claims and Principled Humanitarian Action. The rest of the TAG split into small groups to start reviewing Commitments 1-5.

The group came back to plenary where each facilitator gave an overview of the section they covered, and the changes implemented since the previous day. Following the overview, discussion and observations were invited, and specific objections noted. The text was amended in real-time on screen in direct response to the comments and objections, and there was broad agreement on all sections. Any unresolved objections were parked to be addressed later in the day or by the TSC.

Given the real-time nature of the changes made, main discussion points from each section only are highlighted here. The notes are presented in the order in which the sections appear in the Standard, but in

There was discussion around the approval process for the document and what delegating decisions to the TSC actually meant. This was confirmed as follows:

1. If you delegate to the TSC you are delegating the authority for approval to them.
2. Everything discussed and approved to the TAG today is considered 'done' and won't be amended by the TSC.
3. The TSC discussion will also discuss next steps and the process moving forward after Copenhagen.

**Introduction**
- Main requirement was to remove some of the jargon.
- *Who* the CHS is intended for (in terms of use). There was debate around the inclusion of 'whether or not they consider themselves a humanitarian organisation' in the statement about who the CHS is intended for. There was no comment about this in the feedback. Some wanted to delete it because they felt it didn't offer anything by being there and that it contributed to the debate around 'blurring the lines' between civilian humanitarian actors and others seeking to provide assistance with often political objectives. Others raised that it was a fundamental spirit of the CHS to be as broadly applicable and acceptable as possible. [The TSC ultimately removed this line, feeling that this spirit was reflected in the remaining text].
- Coherence – shouldn't refer to the reason behind the work in the introduction – danger of trying to change the emphasis by adding a line about the process.

**Structure of the Standard**
- Principle discussion was around being clear on the difference between Commitments and Quality Criteria. Clarity was sought in the first paragraph to explain that the Commitments are to the communities; these are supported by the Criteria, which are the focus for the organisation.
- The diagram was also addressed – it was felt that the wording (specifically 'quality criteria') was suitable for an organisation but not a community.
- The current structure lists the quality Criteria first and the Commitment second – suggestion was to reverse this.
- There was lack of consistency in terms used throughout – in particular, how policy, systems, and guidance are referred to. It was highlighted that the entire document should be reviewed with this in mind, and 'policies and processes' was the preferred terminology to use.
- Table: idea that the Commitments and quality Criteria should be presented side by side in a table. One column would represent what the communities should *expect*; the other column should represent what the organisation should *do*. This suggestion was accepted.
- Three of the commitments were not written from the perspective of the organisation. It was suggested to amend the wording of Commitments 7, 8 and 9 to present them from the perspective of the community, in line with the other Commitments.

**Principled Humanitarian Action**
- There were three key areas that needed some work.
  - Neutrality.
  - Right to humanitarian assistance (seen as not universally accepted).
  - Independence  - how it was defined.
- Neutrality:
  - Added clauses around neutrality – e.g. if you can't say you're applying neutrality in a situation, you must always be aware that you can't take sides

- The application of the principle of neutrality does not inhibit taking a rights-based approach
- Stated the UN charter and the declaration of human rights
- There continued to be much debate around the issue of neutrality, the key points being summarised as follows:
  - Agreed we should include neutrality in the Standard – but that we should include a sentence that allows a 'get out clause' for organisations who might campaign. Alternative was to lose a lot of people either way.
  - We shouldn't try to redefine neutrality; it is not the remit of the group and could potentially serve to discredit the CHS.
  - It was noted that this isn't a new problem – the principles have been around for years, and we all live with them already in the standards we work with (HAP, Sphere) – so in reality nothing has actually changed.
- A substantially revised version of the Principled Humanitarian Action section was passed and accepted without objection.

**Applying the Standard/Claims**
- There is a need to define partners – clarity that the responsibility for implementation of the CHS falls on the organisations and not on the partners. This includes the responsibility to communicate with partners on the commitments of the organisation.
- There is currently a definition of partners in the Standard, and no comments were received during the straw poll. Further definition needs to be brought in a guide – the issue is broader. Solution won't be in this text, but it needs to be included in the guide.
- Some comments were made about the issue of an organisation taking on responsibilities on behalf of others. Each organisation has their own relationship with the CHS and its up to each organisation to decide since we work with partners, this is how we take it forward.
- It was clarified that this is about responsibility for how we work with partners, as opposed to supporting them.
- There was a lot of debate about whether the CHS was a minimum standard, or aspirational. It was posed that it is in fact both and depended on how an organisation uses it – either as a framework for learning and continuous improvement, or a framework for external verification.
- If you include a statement that it can be both, this doesn't actually add any value
- Should the word 'aspirational' be replaced with 'voluntary'
- This is only about good practice – there are no indicators so we can't call it either aspirational or minimum
- The discussion is semantic – the standard is just a standard, and putting labels such as 'minimum' or 'aspirational' on it confuses the discussion. Once you have voluntarily decided to apply the Standard, you have to follow it.
- If it is a minimum standard, it is very hard – and would need to be radically reconsidered. Needs to be clear it is 'good' humanitarian standard, and leave open the possibility of an aspirational journey.
- Resolution of these issues was deferred to a second, larger sub-group discussion (see following section).

Applying the Standard – second revision
- The issue was: when you commit to the CHS, what do you commit to? The work group wrote a number of solutions:

- In the structure, clarity was added around the key actions and organisational responsibilities.
- Minimum vs. aspirational creates a dichotomy. The group eliminated anything that felt too directive.
- Clarified that where organisations can't comply with aspects of the CHS, so long as they acknowledge and try to learn from it, that's OK – the intent is what matters, not the auditor.

- Every standard has an internal monitoring system – all organisations have their own internal monitoring system. The issue is ensuring that organisations link their own systems to the CHS.

## Commitment 1

- Discussion was around whether to keep transgender in the Standard or take it out. It was agreed to remove it.
- There was an issue around the words: transgender and sexual.
- Some comments were made that given transgender wasn't in version 2, and we have now received a number of comments about it, it should be removed. It was added by the writing group when they decided to remove the phrase LGBT (on the grounds that minority groups remained, and LGBT is considered part of this)
- Diversity includes all – but if we start to enumerate the elements within diversity and don't mention transgender, it's a miss.
- It was agreed to have a shorter list, and generalize, and maintain simpler language. This was undertaken by the TSC.

## Commitment 2

- There were no objections to the suggested amendments and no discussion points.
- On participant flagged that there is a danger of repetition (with Commitment 3) by adding in the word 'safe'. It was agreed to maintain the term.

## Commitment 3

- Changes were nuances rather than substantial.
- Discussions focused around:
  - The use of the word 'vulnerable' – should it be replaced with 'at risk'. This was done, bearing in mind that there is only one other use of the term vulnerable in the document.
  - Should we be increasing resilience? This isn't the humanitarian goal- but there was unanimity amongst the TAG that it should be strong language, in keeping with the Code of Conduct.
  - Difference between reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience.
  - Difference between 'do no harm' and commitment to protection.
  - The issue of where to put PSEA in the Standard was raised (the issue was deferred to and resolved by the TSC who ensured its inclusion in Commitments 3, 5 and 8).

## Commitment 4

- There was an issue with the definitions and concepts that were discussed around: feedback, engagement, participation, appropriate etc.

## Commitment 5

- Discussion around whether the commitment should specifically relate only to complaints, or also include the journey into feedback.
- It was highlighted that the wording needed to be simplified so that it would be easily understood by communities – language needs to be accessible.
- One participant noted that some of the content was leaning towards becoming guidance rather than key actions – and that this is an issue throughout the document. Noted.
- There was discussion around the use of terms: appropriate, fair, safety.
- It was noted that there is no mention of staff in the Commitment – which is a miss, as it's important to include staff as well as communities. The issue was raised that staff complaints in the field tend to relate to other field staff and their work with communities so it's important to include it. There was no resolution so this point was flagged for resolution by the TSC; it was decided that staff complaints were included uniquely in Commitment 8.
- It was felt that PSEA is not getting enough attention throughout the document (as well as in this Commitment) so the TSC needs to check where else it should be included (inclusion in Commitments 3, 5 and 8).

**Commitment 7**
- It was decided to delegate to the TSC to determine the rewritten Commitment. (The TSC successfully re-worded the commitments 7, 8 and 9, revising the wording to be focused on communities and people affected by crisis.)
- Discussion around Key Action 7.2; issue was deferred to TSC who decided to maintain the proposal of, 'on the basis of monitoring and evaluation and feedback and complaints'.

**Commitment 8**
- There was discussion around the addition of the word 'volunteer' and what the definition of this is. It was agreed to include volunteer in the wording of Commitment 8.
- It was clarified that Commitment 8 was written to be the enabler that allows organisations to focus on the performance of staff, that subsequently enables the other Commitments to be delivered. It is intentionally internally focused.

**Commitment 9**
- The rewriting of the Commitment was passed to the TSC (this was done and integrated in the final version of the CHS).
- Discussion around whether organisations are required to publish a report for transparency, or report transparently – these mean very different things, the former being a big accountability and the latter being less of a commitment (and therefore less of a barrier).
- 9.6 e was flagged to the TSC; 9.6 maintained the revised language.

**Future of the CHS**
Jonathan Potter, Marian Casey-Maslan, and Carsten Völz (representing Sphere) each spoke about the future of the CHS and the TAG.

Jonathan: People In Aid and HAP commitment
- People In Aid and HAP have announced that they will merge their assets and experience to create a new organisation, which will strengthen our respective offerings and continue to support the CHS.

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- There will be a number of functions related to the CHS that the new organisation will cover (please refer to HAP and People In Aid websites for a statement on these), but with the caveat that other people will help develop and disseminate tools.
- Revision process: there will be a steering committee in charge of the process. This has not yet been worked out.
- As part of the merger – it is expected that at the November board meetings, HAP and People In Aid will endorse this, and the CHS will replace the HAP Standard and People In Aid Code.

Carsten: Sphere commitment
- Sphere is willing to adopt the Standard on the understanding that it continues to be an inclusive process, and Sphere will be involved in producing it in one way or another.
- Carsten expects the Sphere board in November to sign off on this, endorse it etc. Sphere will be at the launch in December, and will also be one of the key organisations in the steering committee.
- Sphere expects to keep taking responsibilities for how the Standard will be supported in the future. It will also continue to contribute to its promotion and utilization.
- Sphere is embarking on a new strategy which will transfer the Project into a network, where Sphere tries to build links to all the Standards in the sector, and start working on coherence from that side.
- They have hired a new Executive Director, Christine Knudsen, who starts on 01 November.

Marian: future of the TAG
- There is a ToR in place already for the TAG but this indicates it ceases to exist in December 2014. But HAP, People In Aid and Sphere want to keep involvement of the group beyond that, as much work will be happening throughout 2015 (guide, verification framework).
- Will probably narrow the TAG down from 60 to the 40/45 most active participants but welcome interest and involvement.
- We are still working out the steering group post-launch, and it will be important to have a reflection of a wide range of stakeholders.

## Meeting close

The meeting closed and outstanding decisions were approved as delegated to the TSC meeting the following day (31 October). It was agreed that issues that had already been agreed by the TAG could not be reopened and that the TSC would validate the final version of the CHS on behalf of the TAG.

**Core Humanitarian STANDARD**

## Appendix: further discussion points

**Developments of version 3**

Decisions that were taken:

- Structure → moved away from 'relevant staff' and 'organisational leadership' and replaced with 'key actions' and 'organisational responsibilities'
- Language was simplified
- Idea of guidance notes to support verification – to answer the detailed question about how to use it. Conscious decision to step back and ensure the broad framework was right.
- Streamlined to reduce duplications – each commitment has no more than 10 requirements. Commitment 1 was split into 2 → 9 Commitments in total.
- Neutrality: not explicitly included. As it doesn't figure in key reference documents, its omission was seen as consistent with existing and accepted norms. Decided to adopt the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, itself the result of a comprehensive global consultation, as the humanitarian principles and organizational values of the CHS.

**View from the writing group (Nigel Timmins)**

- Coming out of the last TAG with the operational vs. organisational debate, tried to create something where there was a direct flow through commitments to the community, how staff on the ground deliver, to organisational commitments to support people.
- Recognise that there are different theories of change over this. 1) voluntary verification 2) external certification etc. Tried to write something that could be adopted by any of the options. Same framework, language, principles.
- Inclusive. Wanted to make sure it wasn't just speaking to the traditional humanitarian sector – changing dramatically, many new actors (government, militias, faith based groups) who may or may not define themselves as humanitarian organisations, but take humanitarian action.
- Didn't want to create something brand new. Build on existing – lots out there. Pull together and distil down the core principles and things to be used.
- Underlying principles – decided to stick with the Humanitarian Charter and NGO Code of Conduct, as established pieces of work.
- Aimed to create a 1-pager of commitments – something you can photocopy and stick on the village hall wall, a tree... Recognise in order to verify, you need criteria for the org.
- Simple – wanted to keep it as simple as possible (language and duplication)
- Real balance between focus on work and the impact on communities, as well as organisational commitments. Six of the Commitments are largely oriented to communities, three are organisational.

**Discussion points / observations around neutrality (from Day 1)**

- Not including neutrality leaves the Standard open to adoption or use by the military or militia
- Could live with exception clause but couldn't move forward in support if it wasn't there at all

- Fundamental principle and has to be back in there – there was some uneasiness with the fact that there was a wide range of stakeholders who thought it made absolute sense to have it in the Standard, then support the same document where it was absent. Not consistent.
- Is there a way to reflect the comments of the 30 or so people who had a concern with its absence – e.g. written in a more positive way.
- Important to recognize that both neutrality and independence are difficult to measure and determine.
- Hard for governments if neutrality isn't there – is there a way to craft an 'opt-out' – so people could endorse with reservation.
- If we look at the definition of neutrality – it is about not engaging in controversial issues of political or religious nature. If you take a rights based approach to humanitarian action, you're not going to be able to avoid it. Humanity and impartiality are fundamental. But you don't need to be neutral to participate in humanitarian action. We are trying to create a <u>core</u> standard. So if an organisation wants to be neutral IN ADDITION to respecting impartiality and humanity, great, add it in.
- If you include neutrality, you exclude campaigning organisations.
- There was discussion around the definition of neutrality but agreed that this is an accepted definition, one that comes from the Red Cross movement and it is not part of our process to discuss the definition.
- Either put it in, or take it out. But don't put it in and describe it as an aspiration.
- Put in as a principle like all the others, and expect people to comply with it. But be aware that this would defeat the purpose of the CHS because it becomes exclusive rather than inclusive.
- Need to be careful to not say that advocacy of human rights is a violation of neutrality. Advocating against child soldiers is not violation of neutrality for e.g. Want to be careful not to extend the definition of neutrality to all of our work which deals with protection and rights.
- The organisations asking for neutrality are the ones struggling most to implement it.
- Are there two different definitions of neutrality in the same world? Distinguish neutrality as something useful for some people to access the humanitarian space, and neutrality as not taking part.
- It's about the perception of how to maintain neutrality and make sure it doesn't effect your operational ability. There are ways around the wording which can bridge the gap between the two.
- Neutrality is one of the core principles that we recognise. We have got around this by accepting we're not all independent, but we have operational independence.
- Perception of neutrality by governments and others is fundamental to be able to gain access. Difficult to see how we could change that.