Quality and Accountability:
It is not enough to do the things right, the right things have to be done

Quotes from the WHS side event organized by CHS Alliance, the Sphere Project & Groupe URD, an event sponsored by Switzerland and Denmark

Arno Wicki, Deputy Head of Swiss Humanitarian Aid and SHA, Head of Multilateral Division
Our opinion is that with standards and quality, we can put people at the centre while at the same time being more effective.

Stephan Schønemann, Director for Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
With the attempt to raise the bar and setting the standard, a new quality and accountability tool - the Core Humanitarian Standard - was launched 1 ½ years ago in Copenhagen. The Standard places people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action, and it sets out nine commitments that organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide.

With the recent adoption of the Core Humanitarian Standard by the Global Clusters to complement existing international technical standards, and with the support this common standard has garnered as a baseline for organizational accountability from NGOs to actors such as the European Commission, we have a real opportunity to strengthen a framework which puts people at the center of humanitarian action.

When response plans, common priorities and collective goals are informed by evidence and analysis against internationally recognized standards – significant shifts in practice can be seen. To make this happen requires strong leadership at country level.
Amina Labarakwe, Community member, Baringo County Kenya

*(translation into English provided by Ruth Obwaya, ActionAid Kenya)*

Accountability is a bottom up process. It needs to involve community members, because we are key in responding to disasters.

My message today is that the current accountability model where we are more concerned with the donors does not work for communities; rather what we should have is accountability towards both the community and the donors.

Alejandro Maldonado Executive secretary, CONRED, Guatemala

Standards are indispensable tools for a better response. They help to better prepare our response, allow to reduce the time needed to respond, and are important for our accountability and transparency.

Lise Grande, Resident Humanitarian Coordinator, Iraq

Accountability was recognised as something aspirational but the lack of an agreed approach gave us an alibi, allowing us to avoid really having to do anything serious about it.

Because of the efforts of many organisations and members states and people, the accountability agenda is moving. One of the best examples of this are the nine commitments which make up the Core Humanitarian Standard. These commitments are a manifesto of how we should be working, and it’s great it features in the Grand Bargain. The Standard is a very clear statement that humanitarians must see accountability to the people we serve as our fundamental responsibility – something all of us are obliged to do. The Standard is a way of concretising our ethical commitment and putting it literally at the centre of everything we try to do.

We’d like to suggest that there are at least four ways in which Humanitarian Country Teams can take the CHS and really make it work.

**First**, we can insist that all organisations wishing to submit projects to a Humanitarian Response Plan show that they are working to reach Sphere standards and the quality criteria in the Core Humanitarian Standard. A dashboard can be used to do this.

**Second**, we can insist that all clusters develop work plans based on the Core Humanitarian Standard cycle and that all clusters are working to deliver assistance at Sphere standards. The HCT can collectively review these work plans to ensure full support for them across the operation.

**Third**, we can insist that only organisations which are working to reach Sphere standards and the quality criteria in the CHS are eligible to seek funds from the in-country pooled fund and from the CERF.

**Fourth**, we can insist that HCTs conduct biannual strategic reviews of their operations to monitor collective progress against the CHS and Sphere standards. If we do just these four things, this will put accountability at the very centre of our collective efforts.

Making sure that all Humanitarian Country Teams do these four things requires two steps: First, the IASC needs to change the terms of reference for Humanitarian Coordinators to include direct responsibility for integrating the Core Humanitarian Standard, and Sphere Standards, into the operations they preside over. Second, the IASC needs to do exactly the same thing for all cluster leads agencies. Accountability is too important to leave to the good will and good intention of humanitarian actors. It’s time to make accountability compulsory.
A principled approach means we need to assess needs collectively, on the basis of an agreed methodology, then calculate the costs of meeting these needs at Sphere standards and use the Core Humanitarian Standard to ensure we are accountable to populations. Any other approach, honestly, isn't really ethical.

François Grünewald, Executive Director, Groupe URD, France

The good thing about the Core Humanitarian Standard is that is is not a technical solution, it’s about asking questions. At Groupe URD, we like being confrontational and asking (the right) questions. At the end of the day, we need to avoid just coming with a recipe book and using standards as such. Accounting for context is not an easy task and it requires more than a book. It requires engagement with local actors if you don’t want to end up doing by the book things that are totally stupid.

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, at the World Humanitarian Summit session on People at the Centre

We commit to the Core Humanitarian Standard to make humanitarian assistance more responsive to the needs of people and communities we are serving. It’s time for us to trust first-responders and people affected by crisis with their own future.

Kevin Jenkins, President of World Vision International, at the World Humanitarian Summit High-level Leaders Roundtable on Changing People’s Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need

As a member of the CHS Alliance, we call on others to adopt the Core Humanitarian Standard. We will carry out our own self-assessment against this standard by the end of 2017.

From the World Humanitarian Summit’s Grand Bargain:

The following commitments will help promote the Core Humanitarian Standard and the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations.

Aid organisations and donors commit to:

1. Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.
2. Develop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation, with the emphasis on inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for sharing and analysing data to strengthen decision-making, transparency, accountability and limit duplication.
3. Strengthen local dialogue and harness technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback.
4. Build systematic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming.