

What is the CHS (Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability)?

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Bio: Ms. Matsuo joined the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) after working for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and a secondment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). She is currently mainly in charge of organizational capacity building and human resource development among Japanese NGOs. Since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, she has been working towards more widespread use of the Sphere Handbook and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), which are used in relief operations around the world. Ms. Matsuo is a board member of Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQA), the independent certification body for the CHS.

Nine Points for High-Quality Assistance

Did you know that there is a set of standards on how assistance should be provided, compiled from past experiences of aid provision? The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) outlines Nine Commitments that humanitarian responders, both organizations and individuals, must meet to provide high-quality and effective assistance. Commitments can be described as promises we make when providing aid, and they have been put together to protect the dignity of survivors and to implement relief that does not diminish their capacity to live. Survivors and communities receiving support have the right to expect that high-quality support will be provided to them.

CHS is a standard for responders, and each commitment (or promise) is paired with a Quality Criterion, which describes the action that can fulfill this promise. Responders (who, again, include both organizations and individuals) can refer to the Key Actions, Organizational Responsibilities, and Guidance Notes laid out in CHS, and use Performance Indicators to measure the degree to which they have achieved the commitment and to improve and enhance their future responses.

By implementing the CHS, responders can better meet the needs of survivors and affected communities and win their trust and participation. Also, through the CHS becoming a common language among multiple aid organizations involved in the same response, it can help complement each other's activities and facilitate a smooth handover according to the phase of recovery.

Assistance Needed Around the World

Recently, due in part to the effects of climate change, natural disasters have become more frequent and more damaging in many parts of the world including Japan. In addition, an increasing number of people are forced to leave their homes and live as asylum seekers and refugees due to conflicts and persecution. News coverage of people and regions affected by disasters and conflicts, as well as calls for help, are instantly shared via the Internet, especially on social media. As a result, not only governments, international organizations such as the United Nations, NGOs, and other aid professionals, but also many ordinary people and businesses have become involved in responses.

It All Started with a Single Question – “Are We Doing Enough to Save Lives?”

In 1994, when ethnic conflict in Rwanda led to a genocide, more than 200 organizations came together to provide assistance to over 2 million refugees. But more than 80,000

people died in refugee camps from preventable infectious diseases such as cholera and dysentery.

Why did this had to happen even though professionals were providing assistance?

An evaluation conducted in 1996 highlighted many issues. Firstly, the response efforts were rather ad hoc. There was not a full assessment of the assistance the survivors and their communities really needed. Secondly, there was a lack of coordination. There was not sufficient understanding or supplementation of information among various responders. Finally, there was a lack of accountability. Some responders insisted on providing aid only in their own areas of expertise. All in all, it became clear that in some cases, even with the best of intentions, assistance did not and could not help the survivors and the affected communities overcome difficulties and regain their livelihoods.

To change this situation, there began a process to establish a set of ideals and principles that can be shared among all responders around the world, as well as indicators that define what should be achieved through assistance work.

Reasons for Failure as Identified in the Evaluation of Aid to Rwanda:

- Lack of accountability
- Insufficient understanding of needs
- Ad hoc response
- Lack of coordination among aid organizations
- Lack of unified indicators and standards

While international organizations and NGOs have developed multiple standards in their own sectors or geographical regions, the most widely used among not only international organizations and NGOs but also governments is The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. The Sphere Handbook is a document that outlines minimum standards for major aid sectors based on the protection of the dignity of the people affected by crisis and their right to receive assistance.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) became part of this Sphere Handbook starting with the Handbook's 2018 edition as a single set of core standards. Consisting of Nine Commitments that set out the essential processes and organizational responsibilities in humanitarian aid, CHS's purpose is to achieve minimum standards and to ensure quality and accountability in response provision. Today, CHS is being used to prevent self-complacency among responders around the world and to support proactive recovery efforts among the survivors and affected communities rather than imposing “good intentions” from the outside.

CHS Allowing for More High-Quality Assistance

CHS is not only used for monitoring humanitarian aid. It has also introduced a certification system, in which the implementation of the Nine Commitments at the organizational level is verified by a third party and the results are disclosed to the public. As of December 2021, 40 organizations have disclosed the results of their efforts in some


certification system (including third-party certification and self-verification). There is also a trend for more funding to go to responders who are making efforts toward high-quality and effective response.


CHS is a standard that can be used anywhere in the world. We hope you will use the experiences of all responders introduced in this booklet as tips to make your own responses even better.


CHS was published in December 2014 as a direct result of initiative to seek greater coherence of humanitarian standards by the Sphere Project, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International, People in Aid and the Groupe URD. It is now jointly copyrighted and managed by the CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, and Sphere.


*With the consent of the copyright holders, the Japanese version of this booklet uses official icons and Japanese translations of the CHS while also paraphrasing and supplementing CHS text wherever appropriate, according to our editorial policy. This English version of the booklet, therefore, also uses paraphrased and supplemented English texts wherever appropriate.


The Nine Commitments and Quality Criteria


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1 Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.
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2 Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is effective and timely.
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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.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.
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4 Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.
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5 Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.
Quality Criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.
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6 Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.
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7 Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.
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8 Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers. Quality Criterion: Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and
Quality Criterion: Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably.
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9 Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.
Quality Criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.