

1st Edition

**LEARNER'S
GUIDE**



CORE COMPETENCY UNIT

ADM.COR 001.1

Apply the Core Humanitarian
Standard and Principles



ASCEND

ASEAN Standards and Certification
for Experts in Disaster Management

ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management

APPLY THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD AND PRINCIPLES

ADM.COR.001.1

Learner's Guide



ONE ASEAN
ONE RESPONSE



Project Sponsors:



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The "ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management (ASCEND)" is under Priority Programme 5: Global Leadership of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021 - 2025 that envisions ASEAN as a global leader in disaster management.

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**ASCEND programme and
Toolbox:**

Introduction



ASCEND

1.1

The ASCEND Programme

Southeast Asian governments, through the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), continue to invest in strengthening disaster management systems for a more secure and resilient region. However, the compounding risks and increasing uncertainty of disasters in our new climate reality threaten to set back the socioeconomic development gains of ASEAN societies. Widespread and recurring disaster damages and losses can overwhelm national capacities and worsen regional transboundary effects.

The Declaration on One ASEAN One Response (OAOR) at the 2016 ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR, reaffirms ASEAN's vision to move towards faster and more integrated collective responses to disasters inside and outside the region. However, ASEAN's past experiences responding to large-scale disasters showed that realising the OAOR can be challenging. Various responders from different countries, institutions, organisations, and companies seek to contribute to the overall response. Their goodwill is appreciated, and several provide much-needed assistance. But ASEAN and affected Member States sometimes found it challenging to determine what knowledge and skills responders have and how they can effectively contribute to national and regional efforts.

Learnings from past experiences and shared commitment to realising the OAOR vision increased the need to develop regionally recognised Competency Standards and a certification process for disaster management professionals. The increased support led to initiatives that eventually created the ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management (ASCEND) Programme. ASCEND is now part of Priority 5: Global Leadership of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025, a programme that envisions ASEAN as a global leader in disaster management.

1.2

The objectives of ASCEND

- To enhance the capacity of the ASEAN countries in the implementation of ASCEND.

- To establish regionally recognised Competency Standards and assessment processes covering five professions in disaster management.
- To improve the capacity of the AHA Centre to serve as the ASCEND Secretariat.
- To promote understanding of the ASCEND Framework among the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and other ASEAN sectors in preparation for the inclusion of ASCEND into the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA).

1.3

Advantages and benefits of an ASCEND certification

For ASEAN

The ASCEND certification can assist Member States in ensuring that competent disaster management professionals handle emergency assistance and disaster relief across the region. It also supports mutual recognition of disaster management competencies to facilitate acceptance of external aid and faster response.

For AHA Centre

ASEAN, a rapidly developing and hazard-prone region, will need more competent disaster management professionals. The ASCEND certification can narrow current knowledge and skills gaps. It can also enable stronger cooperation and interoperability between disaster managers in their home countries and across regions.

For disaster management professionals

Disaster management professionals can use their ASCEND certification to promote themselves professionally and serve as evidence of their experience and qualifications. It can also make it easier for organizations to determine the ability of certificate holders to perform critical work functions of specific occupations in the disaster management sector.

These ASCEND toolbox documents support the ASEAN Member States in identifying, building the capacity of, and mobilising competent disaster managers across Southeast Asia that are highly capable of contributing to reducing disaster risks and disaster losses in the region through timely and effective response.

1.4

The ASCEND Toolbox

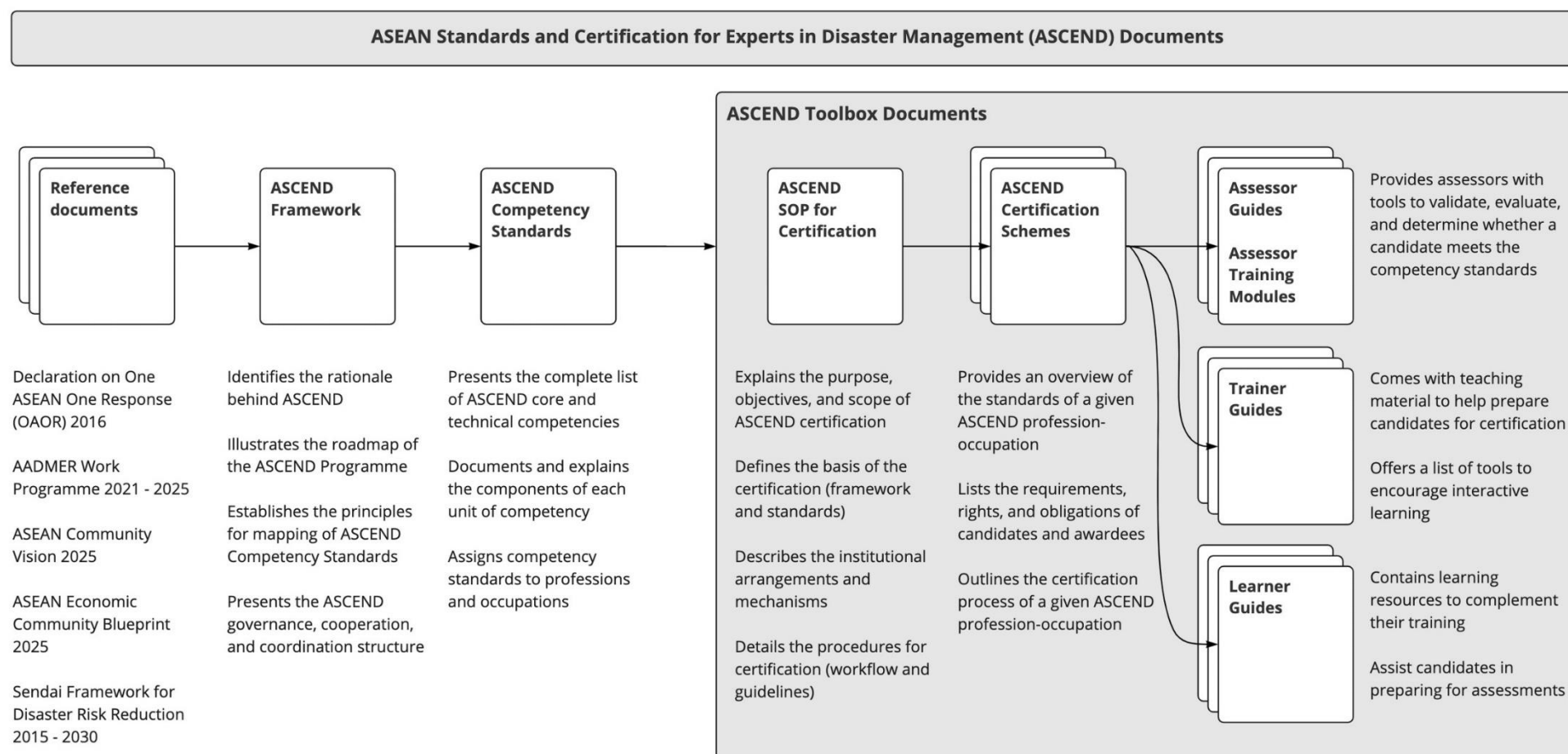
A set of technical requirements must exist before it is possible to implement the ASCEND programme in participating ASEAN Member States. The first requirement is the ASCEND Competency Standards, containing forty-three (43) regionally recognised core and technical competencies in selected disaster management professions. The Competency Standards outline the work elements and performance criteria that guide for certification of disaster management professionals across the region.

Another requirement is the development of an ASCEND Toolbox for five professions. These professions are Rapid Assessment, Humanitarian Logistics, Information Management, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Shelter Management. The ASCEND Toolbox consists of an SOP, Certification Schemes, Assessor Guides, Trainer Guides, and Learner Guides. The ASCEND Competency Standards, approved by the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, are the primary basis of the Toolbox documents.

The SOP defines the basis of ASCEND, describes the institutional arrangements and mechanisms, and details the certification procedures. Certification Schemes present an overview of the standards of each profession-occupation and certification requirements, the rights and obligations of candidates and certificate holders, and general guidelines on the certification process. Assessor Guides provide assessors with tools to validate, evaluate, and determine whether a candidate meets the Competency Standards. Trainer Guides come with PowerPoint slides and presenter notes to help trainers prepare candidates for certification. It also offers a list of tools that trainers may use to encourage interactive learning. Learner Guides assist candidates preparing for ASCEND certification in their chosen disaster management profession and occupation. It contains learning resources and complementary readings to help prepare them to undergo the required assessment.

The ASCEND Toolbox documents can assist the ASEAN Member States to identify, build the capacity of, and mobilise competent disaster managers across Southeast Asia to help reduce disaster risks and disaster losses in the region through timely and effective response.

Figure 1: Overview of ASCEND Toolbox Documents





The Learner Guide: Introduction for Candidates



ASCEND

Welcome and thank you for your interest in pursuing an ASCEND certification. This Learner Guide is for you to read. It contains learning resources and helps you prepare for the required assessments: oral interviews, written tests, and observation checklists.

Competency-based learning and assessment

Competency is the attitude and ability to use or apply one's experience, knowledge, and skills-sets to perform critical job functions in a defined work setting.

Table 1: Competency areas and descriptions

Competency area	Description
Experience	Refers to the qualifications of the candidate that make them eligible to pursue certification. It includes the candidate's formal education, work experience, professional training, and job-relevant life experiences.
Knowledge	Refers to what the candidate needs to know to make informed decisions on how to perform the work effectively.
Skills	Refers to the ability of the candidate to apply knowledge to complete occupational tasks and produce work outcomes or results at the standard required.
Attitudes	Refers to associated beliefs, feelings, motivations, and values that influence a candidate to make decisions and act according to occupational standards and the professional work setting.

There is one Learner Guide for each unit of competency. The Competency Standards and Unit Descriptor section of this document outlines the content you will be studying – broken down into elements and performance criteria

that will be covered during training and assessed using competency-based methods. This guide contains a glossary of terms, a list of abbreviations, readings and activities, a self-assessment checklist, and information about the oral interviews and written tests.

Competency-based methods help ensure that the ASCEND certification process is relevant, valid, acceptable, flexible, and traceable – in alignment with the ASEAN Guiding Principles.

The relevance principle confirms that the ASCEND certification reflects the current professional needs in the disaster management sector. The validity principle relates to the consistency and equitability of the assessment process. The acceptability principle is about aligning the ASCEND certification to other disaster management professional standards and good practices. The flexibility principle refers to the responsiveness of the ASCEND certification to changes or differences in disaster management work settings and job requirements. The traceability principle ensures that evidence is sufficient to grant the ASCEND certification.

Competency-based assessment (CBA) is the process for evaluating whether a professional is qualified and competent to perform in a particular occupation. CBA is used to determine if the candidate's experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes meet the standards and performance criteria defined in a unit of competency.



ASCEND Competency Standards and Unit Descriptor



ASCEND

3.1

Competency standards

Competency standards are a set of industry-accepted benchmarks that defines the experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes professionals need to perform well in an occupation. It also reflects the requirements of work settings and considers the developments in the disaster management profession.

3.2

ASCEND Competency Standards

The ASCEND Competency Standards identify the key features of work in selected disaster management professions and performance standards professionals need to meet to be deemed competent. It also provides the list of the forty-three (43) core and technical competencies that serve as the basis for defining the regionally recognised disaster management qualifications across the ASEAN Member States. The five (5) professions covered by the ASCEND Competency Standards include Rapid Assessment, Humanitarian Logistics, Information Management, WASH, and Shelter Management. Under these professions are five (5) categories of occupations: Manager, Coordinator, Officer, Promoter, and Engineer. Overall, there are fifteen (15) profession-occupation combinations (e.g., humanitarian logistics manager, information management coordinator, WASH promoter).

Each ASCEND Competency Standard has its dedicated Toolbox documents: an SOP, Certification Scheme, Assessor Guide, Trainer Guide, and Learner Guide. One SOP applies to all profession-occupation combinations covered by the ASCEND certification. The Certification Schemes, one for each of the profession-occupation combinations. Both these documents align with the AQRF Level Descriptors, Section 4: Guiding Principles and Protocols for Quality Assurance of the AGP, and ASEAN Disaster Management Occupations Map. The Certification Schemes also outline the ASCEND competencies under selected professions and occupations, eligibility criteria, basic requirements and rights of candidates, and obligations of certification holders. Assessor Guides describe the components of particular competency standards and offer tools to determine the candidate's qualifications. Trainer and Learner Guides expound on a given competency standard's elements and performance criteria for learning and assessment preparation purposes.

The Toolbox documents may also serve as a reference for ASEAN Member States' seeking to develop and implement national-level competency-based certification processes based on their respective capacities and needs. The ASCEND Competency Standards and its derivative Toolbox documents will be reviewed and updated every five (5) years to ensure they reflect changes in the disaster management profession and remain relevant. Table 2 describes its main components.

Table 2: Components of the ASCEND Competency Standards

Component	Description
Unit title	Describes the critical work function to be performed in an occupation
Unit number	<p>A coding system to organise the units of competency. It also indicates the types of competency standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADM.COR.000.0 are core competencies. These are general professional knowledge and skills related to international humanitarian principles and disaster management standards, including ASEAN mechanisms and procedures. ADM.TEC.000.0 are technical competencies. These are specific knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively in work areas under their chosen disaster management profession and occupation.
Unit description	Provides information about the critical work function covered by the unit.
Elements	Presents the occupational tasks required to perform the critical work function in the unit.
Performance criteria	Lists the expected outcomes or results from the occupational tasks to perform and the standard required.

3.3

Unit descriptor

Unit title : **Apply the Core Humanitarian Standard and Principles**

Unit number : **ADM.COR.001.1**

Unit description : This unit deals with the skills and knowledge required to describes the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action context based on Core Humanitarian Standard as part of the Global Humanitarian Framework on Disaster Management

Element 1.

Adhere to Principled Humanitarian Action

Performance Criteria

- 1.1 Address human suffering wherever it is found
- 1.2 Carry out humanitarian action on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no adverse distinction based on nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion
- 1.3 Perform humanitarian action autonomously from the political, economic, military or other objectives
- 1.4 Conduct humanitarian action without taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies

Element 2.

Design logistics planning and response

Performance Criteria

- 2.1 Give appropriate assistance to communities and people affected by the crisis and relevant to their needs
- 2.2 Ensure timely humanitarian assistance
- 2.3 Let communities and people affected by crisis be more prepared, resilient, and less at-risk due to humanitarian action
- 2.4 Assist communities and people affected by crisis on their rights and entitlements to access information and participate in decisions that affect them

- 2.5 Facilitate communities and people affected by the crisis to access safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints
- 2.6 Deliver humanitarian assistance in a coordinated and complementary manner
- 2.7 Show ability to learn from experiences for improved assistance
- 2.8 Ensure own and team members' competencies and management of assistance
- 2.9 Able to manage resources effectively, efficiently and ethically

3.4

Glossary of Terms and List of Abbreviations

Terms and abbreviations	Descriptions
AHRD	ASEAN Human Rights Declaration
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CPMS	Child Protection Minimum Standards
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
MIRA	Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
REA	Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment
RTP	The Right to Protection and Security
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



Unit Readings and Activities



ASCEND

4.1

Element 1. Adhere to Principled Humanitarian Action

All emergency responders in ASEAN, representing their states or civil society organisations, must be guided by the four humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. These four principles are the foundations for emergency response and interventions. They are central to establishing and maintaining access to crisis-affected people, whether triggered by natural hazards, a complex emergency, or armed conflict.

The principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality are derived from: The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement proclaimed in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent; United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 46/182, 19 December 1991; UN General Assembly Resolution 58/114, 5 February 2004.

1.1 Address human suffering wherever it is found

A. Introduction

Humanity, as one of the humanitarian principles, believes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. All people affected by disaster or conflict have a right to receive protection and assistance to ensure the basic conditions for life with dignity. Based on this principle, the purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings. Hence, that action should be taken to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after human-induced crises and natural disasters, as well as action taken to prevent and prepare for them.

B. The right to live with dignity

The right to life with dignity is reflected in the provisions of international law, specifically the human rights measures concerning the right to life, to an adequate standard of living, and freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The right to life entails the duty to preserve life where it is threatened. Implicit in this is the duty not to withhold or frustrate the provision of life-saving assistance. Dignity entails more than physical well-being; it demands respect for the whole person, including the values and beliefs of individuals and affected communities, and respect for

their human rights, including liberty, freedom of conscience and religious observance.

C. Enhance people's safety, dignity and rights and avoid exposing them to further harm

In Sphere Handbook 2018, protection principle can be defined as a practical translation of the legal principles and rights outlined in the Humanitarian Charter into four principles that inform all humanitarian responses. The first principle suggests that humanitarian actors should take steps to reduce people's overall risks and vulnerability, including the potentially negative effects of humanitarian programmes.

Several actions including in this principle, as follows:

- **Understanding protection risks in context;**
- **Providing assistance that reduces risks that people may face in meeting their needs with dignity;**
- **Providing assistance in an environment that does not further expose people to physical hazards, violence or abuse; and**
- **Supporting the capacity of people to protect themselves**

Central to this principle is the importance of avoiding negative effects caused by humanitarian programming. (See Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 3)

In carrying out humanitarian action, each officer, coordinator and all the team members must comply with the humanity principle above by considering the following:

- **Context analysis**
Understand the context and anticipate the consequences of humanitarian action that may affect the affected population's safety, dignity, and rights. Work with partners and groups of affected women, men, boys and girls to do regular risk analysis as the situation changes over time.
- **Avoid becoming complicit**
Avoid becoming complicit in violations of people's rights through activities that legitimise the policies and practices that cause the problem. Examples may include activities that enable the forced relocation of populations for political or military reasons or indirectly

increase conflict through the careless choice of partners or commercial contractors. This analysis may involve difficult choices and decisions, but it should be explicitly considered and reviewed as circumstances change.

- **Humanitarian assistance**

The way that assistance is provided, and the environment in which it is provided, can make people more vulnerable to harm, violence or coercion.

- Assist in the safest possible environment and actively look for ways to minimise threats and vulnerabilities. For instance, provide education and healthcare in locations that all people can safely access. (see INEE Handbook)
- Take all reasonable steps when providing and managing assistance to protect people from physical and sexual assault. For example, valuable commodities or cash-based assistance can be subject to looting, putting recipients at risk of harm.
- Help people find safe options for meeting basic needs in a way that reduces exposure to risks. For example, provide fuel alternatives that reduce collecting firewood in dangerous environments.

- **Community protection mechanisms**

Understand how people try to protect themselves, their families, and communities and support community-led self-help initiatives. Humanitarian interventions should not compromise people's capacity to protect themselves and others.

- **Sensitive information**

Ensure that people are not put at risk as a result of the way that humanitarian actors record and share information. Establish a policy on collecting and referring sensitive information. It should define the circumstances under which information may be referred and respect the principle of informed consent. Failure to do so may compromise the safety of survivors and staff.

D. Summary

- Each responder at all levels must comply with the humanitarian principle. An emergency response mission and actions should save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after

human-induced crises and natural disasters, as well as action taken to prevent and prepare for them.

1.2 Carry out humanitarian action based on need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no adverse distinction based on nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion

A. Introduction

Each response officer, manager and coordinator must comply with the impartiality principle, which demands humanitarian emergency response must be carried out to ensure people access impartial assistance according to their needs and without discrimination. It relates to prioritising the most urgent cases of distress, being objective and not discriminating because. Acting impartially does not mean that all people should be treated the same because different groups will have different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities.

B. The right to receive humanitarian assistance

The right to receive humanitarian assistance is a necessary element of the right to life with dignity. Such a right encompasses the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, and reasonable health requirements, which are expressly guaranteed in international law. The Core Humanitarian Standard and the Minimum Standards reflect these rights and give practical expression, specifically concerning assistance to those affected by disaster or conflict. Any such assistance must be provided according to the principle of impartiality, which requires that it be provided solely based on need and in proportion to need. Where the state or non-state actors are not providing such assistance themselves, they must allow others to help do so.

Groups may be under-served and discriminated against because of nationality, ethnicity, language, or religious or political affiliation, which requires special attention to reflect the principle of impartiality. In many contexts, entire communities and groups may also be vulnerable because they live in remote, insecure or inaccessible areas or are geographically dispersed

with limited access to assistance and protection. Disaster response must reflect the wider principle of non-discrimination: that no one should be discriminated against on any status grounds, including age, gender, race, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, health status, political or another opinion, and national or social origin.

C. Ensure people's access to impartial assistance, according to need and without discrimination

Second protection principle in Sphere Handbook emphasizes that humanitarian actors should identify obstacles to accessing assistance and take steps to ensure it is provided in proportion to need and without discrimination. Several actions including in this principle, as follows:

- Challenging any actions that deliberately deprive people of their basic needs, using humanitarian principles and relevant law (see Humanitarian Charter)
- Ensuring people receive support based on need and that they are not discriminated against on any other grounds
- Ensuring access to assistance for all parts of the affected population.

Central to this principle is the idea that communities should have access to the humanitarian assistance they need (See Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 2)

Response officers, managers and coordinators must ensure that in carrying out humanitarian actions, they must comply impartiality principle by ensuring that:

- **Impartiality**
Prioritise assistance based on need alone and assist in proportion to need. This principle of impartiality is affirmed in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (see Humanitarian Charter). Humanitarian organisations should not focus uniquely on a particular group (for example, displaced people in a campsite or specific minority groups) if this focus is to the detriment of another group in the affected population in need.
- **Right to receive humanitarian assistance**
Advocate for the right of people affected by the crisis to receive humanitarian assistance. Where people cannot meet their basic needs and the relevant authorities cannot assist, they should not deny access

to impartial humanitarian organisations. Such denial may violate international law, particularly in situations of armed conflict. People affected by crisis do not need a special legal status to receive humanitarian assistance and protection. Authorities should not deny the existence of humanitarian needs or use bureaucratic barriers to restrict the movement of humanitarian workers

- **Barriers to access**

Monitor people's access to humanitarian assistance to identify and understand any barriers they may face. Take steps to address these where possible.

- Consider barriers that reduce people's freedom of movement or physical access to humanitarian assistance. This includes blockades, landmines and checkpoints. In armed conflict, parties may establish checkpoints, but these should not discriminate between categories of affected people or unduly hinder people's access to humanitarian assistance.
- Address barriers that may restrict access by some groups and individuals, resulting in inequitable assistance. Barriers may lead to discrimination against women and children, older people, persons with disabilities or minorities. They may also prevent people from accessing assistance on the basis of ethnic, religious, political, sexual orientation, gender identity, language or other considerations.
- Provide information, in accessible formats and languages, about entitlements and feedback mechanisms. To facilitate their safe access to assistance, promote outreach with "hidden" at-risk groups, such as persons with disabilities, children living on the streets, or those living in less accessible regions.

- **Right to receive humanitarian assistance**

Advocate for the right of people affected by the crisis to receive humanitarian assistance. Where people cannot meet their basic needs and the relevant authorities cannot assist, the authorities should not.

D. Summary

- Humanitarian action must be carried out to ensure people have access to impartial assistance according to their needs and without discrimination.

- Acting impartially does not mean that all people should be treated the same because different groups will have different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities.

1.3 Perform humanitarian action autonomously from the political, economic, military or other objectives

A. Introduction

Independence principle requires humanitarian actors to be autonomous. They are not to be subject to control or subordination by political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold about areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

B. Settings with domestic or international military forces

When humanitarian organisations respond in the same area as domestic or international military forces, it is important to be aware of each other's mandates, modus operandi, capacities and limits. In disaster and conflict settings, humanitarian organisations may work closely with a range of militaries, including host government forces, non-state armed groups and international peacekeepers. Humanitarian actors should note that host governments are obliged to provide assistance and protection to people affected by a crisis in their territory. Domestic military forces are often mandated to do this.

Humanitarian principles must guide all humanitarian–military dialogue and coordination at all levels and stages of interaction. Information sharing, planning and task division are three essential elements of effective civil-military coordination. While information sharing between humanitarian and military actors can occur, it must depend on the context of operational activities. Humanitarian agencies must not share information that gives one party to a conflict a tactical advantage or endangers civilians.

At times, humanitarian organisations may need to use the unique capabilities of militaries to support humanitarian operations. Military support to humanitarian organisations should be limited to infrastructure support and indirect assistance; direct assistance is a last resort.

Cooperation with militaries has an actual or perceived impact on a humanitarian organisation's neutrality and operational independence, so it must be carefully considered in advance. Internationally agreed guidance documents should inform any humanitarian–military coordination arrangements. (see Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 6 and References).

C. The right to protection and security

The right to protection and security (RTP) is rooted in the provisions of international law, in resolutions of the United Nations and other inter-governmental organisations, and in the sovereign responsibility of states to protect all those within their jurisdiction. The RTP has become a particular humanitarian concern, including the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. To the extent that a state cannot protect people in these circumstances, it must seek international assistance.

During armed conflict, as defined in international humanitarian law, specific legal provision is made to protect and assist those not engaged in the conflict. In particular, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols of 1977 impose obligations on the parties to both international and non-international armed conflicts. We stress the general immunity of the civilian population from attack and reprisals, and in particular, the importance of:

- The principle of distinction between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives; the principles of proportionality in the use of force and precaution in attack;
- The duty to refrain from the use of weapons that are indiscriminate or that, by their nature, cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering; and
- The duty to permit impartial relief to be provided.

Much of the avoidable suffering caused to civilians in armed conflicts stem from a failure to observe these basic principles.

D. Summary

- Independence in humanitarian action must be carried out for protection and assistance to be given to those not engaged in the conflict
- Humanitarian–military coordination arrangements have an actual or perceived impact on a humanitarian organisation's neutrality and

operational independence, so they must be carefully considered in advance.

- Humanitarian actors provide immediate and sustained support to those harmed by violations to recover from the physical and psychological effects.

1.4 Conduct humanitarian action without taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies

A. Introduction

Neutrality principle guarantees that all humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in political, racial, religious, or ideological controversies. Perceptions of neutrality and impartiality may affect community acceptance. Humanitarian organisations may have to accept military help in some situations, such as transportation and distribution. However, the impact on humanitarian principles must be carefully considered and efforts made to mitigate protection risks.

B. The right to seek asylum or sanctuary

It remains vital to the protection of those facing persecution or violence. Those affected by disaster or conflict are often forced to flee their homes in search of security and the means of subsistence. The provisions of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (as amended) and other international and regional treaties provide fundamental safeguards for those unable to secure protection from the state of their nationality or residence who are forced to seek safety in another country.

Chief among these is the principle of non-refoulment: the principle that no one shall be sent back to a country where their life, freedom or physical security would be threatened or where they are likely to face torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The same principle applies by extension to internally displaced persons, as reflected in international human rights law and elaborated in the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and related regional and national law.

C. Help people to claim their rights

Along with adjusting neutrality in humanitarian actions, humanitarian actors can help affected communities claim their rights through information and documentation and support efforts to strengthen respect for rights. This principle includes:

- Supporting people to assert their rights and to access remedies from government or other sources;
- Assisting people to secure the documentation they need to demonstrate their entitlements; and
- Advocating for full respect of people's rights and international law, contributing to a stronger protective environment.

Central to this Principle is that people affected by crisis should know their rights and entitlements (see Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 4)

Several things that need to be considered in carrying out humanitarian actions to comply with the first principle are:

- **Accessible information**

Provide education and information that enable people to understand and advocate for their rights. Inform people of their entitlements, for example, in relation to return and resettlement options. Work with specialised organisations providing legal aid to inform people of their rights under the laws and regulations of the country.

Provide information in languages that affected people can understand. Use multiple formats (such as written, graphic or audio) to make the information as widely accessible as possible. Test message comprehension with different groups, considering variations in age, gender, education level and mother tongue.

- **Documentation**

People generally have rights, regardless of whether they possess particular documentation. However, without some form of documentation such as a birth certificate, marriage certificate, death certificate, passport, land title or education certificate, people may face barriers to accessing their rights or entitlements. Refer them to agencies that can provide or replace these documents.

Legal documentation recognised by the relevant authorities should not be confused with documents issued by humanitarian organisations, such as ration cards or registration documents. Documentation issued

by authorities should not determine who is eligible for assistance from humanitarian organisations

- **Access to legal support and justice systems**

People are entitled to seek legal and another redress from the government and relevant authorities for the violations of their rights. Such support can include compensation for loss or restitution of property. People are also entitled to expect that the perpetrators of the violations will be brought to justice. Assist those who choose legal remedies to access justice mechanisms in a safe manner. Effective referral requires an understanding of which agencies can provide legal support.

Avoid promoting access to justice in situations where the judicial process might cause further harm to victims. For instance, healthcare providers and gender-based violence referral networks should be aware of the national medico-legal system and the relevant laws on sexual violence. Inform survivors about any mandatory reporting laws that could limit the confidentiality of the information patients disclose. Such mandatory reporting may influence the survivor's decision to continue care or reporting, but it must be respected.

During crises, affected communities may use alternative and informal dispute-resolution mechanisms, such as community-level mediation. Such mediation exists, inform people and explain how they can access the services. Land access and ownership can be major points of contention. Encourage authorities and communities to work together to resolve issues relating to access or ownership of land.

D. Summary

- Neutrality guarantees that all of the humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature
- The right to seek asylum or sanctuary remains vital to protecting those facing persecution or violence affected by disaster or conflict.
- Adjusting neutrality in humanitarian actions can help affected communities claim their rights.

4.2

Element 2. Uphold the Nine Commitments and Quality Criteria

2.1 Give appropriate assistance to communities and people affected by crisis, and relevant to their needs

A. Introduction

Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant. Commitment 1 captures the primary objective of a humanitarian emergency: to alleviate distress and suffering, uphold people's rights to assistance, and ensure their dignity as human beings. A response that automatically treats everybody and every situation in the same way, may fail to meet its objectives and is unlikely to maximise its potential benefit to those in need.

Commitment 1 stresses the importance of understanding the context and the needs of the different people affected and how these needs might change over time, as well as the necessity to recognise the capacity of different groups of people. It also highlights the role of policies and processes to drive the ongoing assessment of needs, impartial assistance, and acknowledging gender and diversity in the response.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the response accounts for their specific needs, culture, and preferences.
- The assistance and protection provided correspond with assessed risks, vulnerabilities and needs.
- The response takes account of people's capacities, skills, and knowledge requiring assistance and protection.

C. Help people to claim their rights

- **Conduct a systematic, objective and ongoing analysis of the context and stakeholders.**

Assessment and analysis:

- Assessment and analysis is a process, not a single event, and, as time allows, an in-depth analysis should be carried out. The needs of affected communities should not be assumed but identified through assessments that engage them in an ongoing discussion to find appropriate responses.
- It is vital to cross-check and verify (i.e. triangulate) information, acknowledging that assessment data will initially be imperfect but should not impede life-saving actions
- Planning is required to coordinate with others and avoid burdening communities with multiple assessments. Wherever possible, joint assessments (such as the multi-cluster/sector initial rapid assessment (MIRA)) should be carried out, and information (including selection criteria) shared with interested agencies, government and affected populations
- An assessment of:
 - The role and capacity of local government and other political and non-political actors and the impact of the crisis on them.
 - Existing local capacities (material, human, markets) to meet priority assistance and protection needs, understanding that these will change over time.
 - 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 fundamental human rights.
 - Gender-related and power dynamics, as well as social marginalisation, to define a more effective and sustainable response.
- **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.**

Assess the protection and assistance needs of women, men, children and adolescents of those in hard-to-reach locations and at-risk groups such as persons with disabilities, older people, socially isolated individuals, female-headed households, ethnic or linguistic minorities and stigmatised groups (for example, people living with HIV).

Appropriate programme:

- Humanitarian response must be acceptable to the different groups affected within the community and should seek to uphold the rights of all community members by meeting their basic needs (such as for clean water and healthcare); responding to their protection concerns (preventing sexual exploitation and violence, for example); and enabling people to maintain their sense of dignity and self-respect. Programmes should be designed to cater to each particular context and its conditions, whether rural or urban.
- Some culturally acceptable practices violate people's human rights or are founded on misconceptions (e.g. biased targeting of girls, boys or specific castes, denial of education to girls, refusal of immunisation, etc.) and should not be supported.

Impartial assessment:

- Special efforts are needed to assess the needs of people in hard-to-reach locations, such as people who are not in camps, are in less accessible geographical areas, or stay with host families. The same applies to 'at-risk people – such as those with disabilities, older people, housebound individuals, children and adolescents – all of whom may be subject to coercion, exploitation and abuse.
- Acting impartially does not mean treating all people the same. Providing rights-based assistance requires an understanding of differing capacities, needs and vulnerabilities. People may be vulnerable because of discrimination based on individual factors such as age, sex, disability, health status, sexual orientation or gender identity, or because they are caring for others who are vulnerable.

Vulnerability:

- People may be vulnerable because of individual factors such as age (particularly the very young and the very old), disability or illness (e.g. people with mobility problems or people living with HIV and AIDS), or caring for others who are vulnerable.
- Social and contextual factors also contribute to people's vulnerability. These include discrimination and marginalisation

(e.g. in some contexts, the low status and power of women and girls), social isolation (including the lack of access to information), environmental degradation (e.g. soil erosion or deforestation), climate variability, poverty, lack of land tenure, poor governance, ethnicity, class, caste, and religious or political affiliations.

Existing capacity:

- The state has the primary role and responsibility to provide timely assistance and protection to affected people within its borders. Intervention by other humanitarian actors should occur only if the affected population and/or the state does not have sufficient capacity or willingness to respond (particularly during the early stages of the response). Intervention may also be justified if the state or authorities actively discriminate against certain groups and/or people living in a particular affected area.
 - Women and men affected by the crisis (including older people and those with disabilities) already possess and can further acquire skills, knowledge and capacities to cope with, respond to and recover from disasters. They will usually be the first to respond. Actively engaging affected people in humanitarian response is essential for upholding their right to life with dignity.
- **Design Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context**

Adapting programme:

- Throughout the response, field workers should continuously consult with communities to determine how far the response meets their needs and whether additional or different responses are required.
- Monitor the political situation and adapt stakeholder analysis and security.
- Epidemiological and other data must be monitored regularly and used to inform ongoing decision-making and identify life-saving priorities.

Responders will have to remain flexible enough to redesign any intervention in response to changing needs, and discussions may be needed to ensure that donors agree with this

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Policies commit to providing impartial assistance based on the needs and capacities of communities and people affected by the crisis.**

Organisational policies relating to impartial assistance and diversity:

- An organisation needs policies, processes and systems that articulate and support a commitment to humanitarian principles and respect for gender, age, ability and diversity.
 - All staff and volunteers should understand their responsibilities concerning these policies and how they may be held to account.
 - Organisations share these policies transparently with other stakeholders to make them aware
- **Policies set out commitments that take into account the diversity of communities, including disadvantaged or marginalised people, and collect disaggregated data.**

Data disaggregation

- Organisational policies should clarify the required levels of data disaggregation for assessment and reporting. Such data must provide evidence of impartial assistance and indicate if aid is reaching the intended groups.
- Data disaggregation is important to understand the impact of actions or events on different groups. At a minimum, the good practice encourages disaggregation by sex, age and disability. Additional factors should be based on context.
- Analysis of disaggregated data is necessary to use standards in context and monitor. Good use of disaggregated data can show who has been most affected, who can access assistance and where more needs to be done to reach an at-risk population. (see What is Sphere?)

- **Processes are in place to ensure appropriate ongoing analysis of the context.**

Processes for ongoing analysis and effective use of the data:

- Humanitarian agencies should provide appropriate management and supervisory support to enable humanitarian workers to acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary to manage and carry out assessments.
 - Human resources systems should be flexible enough to rapidly recruit and deploy assessment teams. Adequate numbers of qualified staff should ensure that ongoing assessment and analysis is feasible.
- Programme budgets and resources should be allocated according to need and ensure that funding allows for ongoing analysis of assistance and protection needs and for programmes to be adapted and corrected, including measures to facilitate access (such as outreach mechanisms, accessibility of facilities and communication)

2.2 Ensure timely humanitarian assistance

A. Introduction

In commitment 2, communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time. Hence, the humanitarian response needs to have an effective system that supports timely, evidence-based decision-making, together with both adequate and timely geographical coverage of both assistance and protection needs.

It recognises the challenges of access, security, funding, logistics, capacity, and conflicting priorities. Still, it requires that the humanitarian community, acting together, find ways to overcome these to provide a comprehensive response to people's needs. Anticipating and preparing for crises in advance increases the response's speed, appropriateness, and efficiency and ensures that decisions are based on more reliable information. Responses must not just be timely but also adhere to minimum technical standards if they are to help protect people's lives and livelihoods.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by the crisis, including the most vulnerable groups, consider that the timing of the assistance and protection they receive is adequate.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the response meets their needs.
- Monitoring and evaluation reports show that the humanitarian response meets its timing quality and quantity objectives.

C. Key Actions

- **Design programmes that address constraints so that the proposed action is realistic and safe for communities.**

Addressing constraints and realistic programming:

- Insecurity or logistical problems may limit access to populations, including hard-to-reach locations. Funding may be insufficient and local authorities may not allow humanitarians to respond. Meeting requirements of technical standards may not be feasible because of access or funding constraints. Organisations and their staff may also lack the required experience, systems or competencies to meet minimum standards—identify and state any limitations.
 - Diplomacy, lobbying, and advocacy with government, other organisations, and donors may be required to overcome constraints locally, nationally or internationally. Prioritise support to local response capacity in advance where contingency planning shows areas or populations are vulnerable and may prove hard to access in the future
 - Collaborative work is often required to develop strategies (e.g. advocacy, referral systems, contingency planning) that are flexible enough to respond to new information from ongoing assessments and overcome challenges that prevent the humanitarian response from meeting this Commitment. Within an organisation, delegate decisions and resources as close to the implementation site as possible
- **Deliver humanitarian response in a timely manner, making decisions and acting without unnecessary delay.**

Timeliness:

- Be aware of factors that influence providing the right services at the right time. Timeliness refers to a rapid response that avoids delays and the provision of the right services at the right time. For example, affected people may have different needs in summer and winter. Activities such as the distribution of animal fodder, seeds, or tools will need to account for the agricultural calendar.
- Programme plans need to include timeframes for delivery and monitoring systems to identify and flag delays proactively. The IASC humanitarian programme cycle (see the links to further guidance below) provides more information on expected timelines for slow and sudden-onset emergencies.
- Using forecasts and early warning systems to carry out contingency planning before a crisis allows communities, authorities and agencies to be ready to intervene on time, so that affected people can protect their assets before their lives and livelihoods are at risk.

Decision-making:

- A wide range of factors influences the decision to respond to a humanitarian crisis, including the availability of funds, access to information, level of preparedness, expertise of an agency or the need to demonstrate impact. Political considerations will also influence donor governments. Decision-making should be based on an objective analysis of needs. Still, in reality, in-depth information will often be absent in the early stages of an acute disaster, and decisions will have to be made based on imperfect knowledge.
- Decision-making needs to be flexible and respond to new information from ongoing assessments. Decision-making arrangements will vary within different organisations and the response, but the ultimate responsibility for decision-making should rest with national authorities.
- Decisions and decision-making processes should be well documented to allow for transparency and should be based on consultation and coordination with others to develop shared

strategies to address collective issues that block timely assistance (see Commitment 6)

- **Refer any unmet needs to those organisations with the relevant technical expertise and mandate or advocate for those needs to be addressed**

Unmet needs:

- Some needs cannot be met without government intervention (e.g. access to land or land ownership rights), and other needs may fall outside of an organisation's expertise and experience. However, organisations have a responsibility to refer these needs to appropriate organisations and lobby for these needs to be met.
- Policies reflect the importance of using agreed humanitarian technical quality standards and developing expertise in chosen areas of intervention.
- **Use relevant technical standards and good practices employed across the humanitarian sector to plan and assess programmes**

Technical standards and good practice

- In general, agencies should be guided by national technical standards for all sectors. However, sometimes these may only apply to longer-term situations, be outdated, or not align with accepted best practices. As time affords, it may be possible to make national standards fit for future humanitarian responses.
- Coordinate with relevant stakeholders to advocate for globally agreed standards to complement national ones (including Sphere and partner standards in related sectors).
- **Monitor the activities, outputs and outcomes of humanitarian responses to adapt programmes and address poor performance**

Monitoring activities, outputs and outcomes

- Monitoring informs project revisions, verifies application of selection criteria and confirms if aid is reaching the people, it is intended for. It enables decision-makers to respond to feedback

from different groups (for example, redress gender imbalances) and identify emerging problems or trends.

- Monitoring should measure progress against project objectives and include time-bound and context-specific performance indicators, rather than only focusing on activities and outputs (such as a number of facilities built). Monitor project outcomes related to the desired result of activities such as the use of facilities or changes in practice. Timeliness of results should also be monitored.
- Monitoring systems should be reviewed regularly to ensure that only useful information is collected updated contextual information (such as local market function change in security). Monitoring activities should also involve and rely on affected people and key stakeholders (see Commitment 7).

Addressing poor performance

- The findings from monitoring activities must be used to correct mistakes, address weaknesses and improve the intervention. Changes as a result of monitoring should be documented (see Commitment 7)

B. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Programme commitments are in line with organisational capacities**

Organisational capacity

- Organisational policies should reflect the importance of applying agreed humanitarian technical quality standards and developing and maintaining expertise in the agency's chosen areas of intervention. However, some organisations may have unique access to an area and may be forced to provide or support important services outside their area of expertise until other agencies can gain access.
- Workforce planning can help to ensure that the different functions and expertise within an organisation work collaboratively together (see Commitment 8). It is also important to remember that focusing on disaster preparedness and

contingency planning can contribute to a more effective and timely response in subsequent crises.

- **Policy commitments ensure:**

Organisational policies, processes and systems

- Evidence is defined as data on which an objective judgment or conclusion can be made. It can take varying forms and offer varying degrees of validity (not necessarily scientific). There is a need to develop the documented evidence base for humanitarian action to improve outcomes, with a systematic, objective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of activities and their effects contributing to this process.
- An organisation should be able to show the evidence how data from monitoring and evaluation is used to adapt programmes, policies and strategies and improve preparedness and performance in a timely manner (see Commitment 7). This might involve ensuring that staff can be recruited or redeployed quickly when needed or the existence of an emergency response fund.

Organisational decision-making

- Timely decision-making, with resources allocated accordingly. The responsibilities and processes for decision-making within organisations must be clearly defined and understood, including who is responsible, who will be consulted and what information is needed to inform decision-making.

2.3 Let communities and people affected by crisis be more prepared, resilient, and less at-risk due to humanitarian action

A. Introduction

This Commitment recognises the need to acknowledge and build on local and national capacity when responding to disasters and forge stronger links with local organisations. Ensuring that individuals, communities and countries

affected by the crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action. They also have greater control over decision-making and become more resilient, leading to a quicker recovery and a greater capacity to withstand future shocks. Humanitarian action may have unintended, harmful consequences – organisations must recognise this and collaborate with others to prevent or mitigate such effects. Hence, the humanitarian response should strengthen local capacities and avoid adverse effects to reach the goal.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis consider themselves better able to withstand future shocks and stresses as a result of humanitarian action.
- Local authorities, leaders, and organisations with responsibilities for responding to crises consider increased capacities.
- Communities and people affected by the crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised individuals, do not identify the adverse effects resulting from humanitarian action.

C. Key Actions

- **Ensure programmes build on local capacities and improve the resilience of communities and people affected by the crisis**

Community resilience

- Support self-help initiatives and community preparedness actions through building their capacity and state, including skills, knowledge, networks, organisations and initiatives. Building capacity can include resources (such as funding, materials, etc.) and governance and management systems support.
- Resilience can also be strengthened by designing services that can reduce the impact of hazards (such as drought management and floods, hurricane- or earthquake-resistant structures).
- **Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities**

Community hazard and risk assessments

- The more vulnerable an individual, community, or country is, the more likely adverse effects will be.
- Women, men, children and different groups within society are exposed to different levels of risk. It is important to use participatory, community-based assessments to understand and address how local hazards affect different vulnerable groups and their capacity to cope with them
- **Enable the development of local leaders and organisations in their capacity as first responders in the event of future crises, taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented**

Development of local leadership and capacity

- Local agencies and communities are usually the first to act and have in-depth knowledge of the situation. Some local organisations will better know specific groups' needs, such as those working with women, children, or people with disabilities.
- Local NGOs, in particular, may be seen as a way to deliver programme goals rather than as equal partners. However, there is a compelling case for channelling much more aid through local organisations (including those representing women or people with disabilities) to develop their capacity and provide them with the resources needed to mount a large-scale response.
- Changes in attitudes and international NGOs to international NGOs take a longer-term view of response that gives local partners the same treatment with autonomy to control the process, including design and/or leading a response. It also requires a commitment of international and local agencies to engage in open dialogue and constructive criticism.
- **Plan a transition or exit strategy in the early stages of the humanitarian programme that ensures longer-term positive effects and reduces the risk of dependency**

Transition and exit strategy

- Services should be provided support to strengthen existing state and community systems rather than as parallel entities that will not last beyond the duration of the response.

- In collaboration with authorities and affected communities, early exit-planning encourages the design of services that will continue after the programme has closed (for example, introducing cost-recovery measures, using locally available materials or strengthening local management capacity) and gives more time to prepare a transition.
- **Design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy**

Economic recovery

- Actions that strengthen local capacities and restore services, education, markets, transfer mechanism and livelihood opportunities that cater to the needs of vulnerable groups to promote early recovery
- Actions that benefit the local economy include buying goods and services locally and providing cash-based assistance (see Minimum Economic Recovery Standards 2010)
- Fully consider market conditions when analysing which form of assistance (cash, voucher, or in-kind) will have the most significant positive outcome.
- Mitigate negative repercussions on the market to the extent possible.
- **Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended adverse effects in a timely and systematic manner, including in the areas of:**
 - **people's safety, security, dignity and rights;**
 - **sexual exploitation and abuse by staff;**
 - **culture, gender, and social and political relationships;**
 - **livelihoods;**
 - **the local economy; and**
 - **the environment.**

Negative effects and 'do no harm.'

- The high value of aid resources and the powerful position of aid workers can lead to exploitation and abuse, competition, conflict, misuse or misappropriation of aid. Aid can undermine livelihoods

and amplify unequal power relations between different groups and/or between men, women and children. These potential adverse effects should be monitored, and actions are taken to prevent them

- Safe and responsive feedback and complaints mechanisms can reduce abuse and misuse (see Commitments 4 & 5), and staff should welcome and seek out suggestions and complaints. Staff should be trained in how to exercise confidentiality and refer sensitive information, such as disclosures of exploitation and abuse.

Environmental concern and climate change

- Humanitarian response can cause environmental degradation (e.g. soil erosion, aquifer depletion, overfishing, or pollution), thus amplifying a crisis or vulnerability levels.
- Measures to reduce negative effects depend on the intervention. They could include reforestation, rainwater harvesting, efficient resources, and ethical procurement policies and practices. Major construction activities should only be carried out following an environmental assessment

Sexual exploitation and abuse by staff

- All staff share a responsibility to maintain an environment free of exploitation and abuse. Staff members are responsible for reporting any abuse they suspect or witness, whether within their organisation or outside.

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Policies, strategies and guidance are designed to:**
 - **Prevent programmes having any negative effects such as, for example, exploitation, abuse or discrimination by staff against communities and people affected by the crisis; and**
 - **Strengthen local capacities.**

Organisational policy:

- Organisations are encouraged to have a clearly documented risk management policy and systems in place.

- Policies and procedures should reflect a commitment to protecting vulnerable people and outline ways to prevent and investigate the abuse of power.
- Careful recruitment, screening and hiring practices can help reduce the risk of staff misconduct, and codes of conduct should clarify what practices are forbidden. Staff should formally agree to adhere to these codes and be aware of the sanctions they will face if they fail to do so (see Commitment 8).
- Complaints and grievance procedures, including whistle-blowing policies, should be in place and staff aware of how to access these.
- Green procurement policies can help to ensure that unintended negative environmental effects are avoided (see Commitment 9)
- **Systems are in place to safeguard any personal information collected from communities and people affected by a crisis that could put them at risk**

Safeguarding personal information

- All personal information collected from communities should be treated as confidential. This is particularly the case concerning handling complaints about sexual exploitation and abuse (see Commitment 5), where assurances of confidentiality are essential to prevent further harm from occurring.
- The increasing use of electronic registration and distribution systems in humanitarian response makes the need for clear and comprehensive policies on data protection greater than ever before. Agreements obliging third parties such as banks and commercial organisations to take appropriate measures to safeguard information are essential. Clear guidance about data collection, storage, use, and disposal aligned with international standards and local data protection laws.
- Systems to mitigate the risk of data being lost should be put in place.
- Data should not be held longer than is required and should be destroyed as soon as possible.

- Those receiving aid should be informed about their rights concerning data protection, access the personal information that an organisation holds about them, and expect any concerns about misuse of information to be investigated

2.4 Assist communities and people affected by crisis on their rights and entitlements to access information and participate in decisions that affect them

A. Introduction

Commitment 4 emphasises the need for the inclusive participation of crisis-affected people. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them. This requires a willingness to allow and encourage people receiving aid to speak out and influence decisions. Information and communication are necessary forms of aid, without which affected people cannot access services, make the best decisions for themselves and their communities, or hold aid agencies to account.

Sharing information, listening carefully to affected communities and involving them in decision-making contributes to more effective programmes and improves the quality of services delivered. When people have the opportunity to voice their opinions, this enhances their sense of well-being, helps them adapt to the challenges they face, and enables them to take an active role in their own recovery.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by the crisis are aware of their rights and entitlements.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider having timely access to clear and relevant information, including issues that may put them at further risk.
- Communities and people affected by the crisis are satisfied with the opportunities they have to influence the response.

- All staff are trained and provided with guidance on the rights of the affected population.

C. Key Actions

- **Provide information to communities and people affected by a crisis about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, how it expects its staff to behave, the programmes it is implementing, and what it intends to deliver**

Sharing information with communities

- The sharing of accurate, timely and accessible information strengthens trust, increases understanding, deepens levels of participation and improves the impact of a project. It can help to reduce the number of formal complaints received and is a key to being transparent.
 - Sharing financial information with communities can also improve cost-effectiveness and help communities to highlight waste or fraud.
 - Suppose an organisation does not share information appropriately with the people it aims to assist. In that case, this can contribute to misunderstandings and delays, inappropriate projects that waste resources they intend to deliver. And negative perceptions about the organisation can generate anger, frustration and insecurity.
 - Without accurate information, people cannot make informed decisions. They may be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (including sexual abuse) if they don't know what they are entitled to, what behaviour to expect from aid workers and how to complain if they are not satisfied with the level of services provided).
- **Communicate in languages, formats and media that are easily understood, respectful and culturally appropriate for different members of the community, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups**

Effective and inclusive communication

- Different groups (e.g. mothers with young children, older men or women with disabilities) will have different communication and information needs and may well have different trusted sources of communication
- Instead of using one-way communication, organisations should ensure that existing communication systems are used and that people are consulted on their preferences and the degree of privacy required
- Care is needed to ensure that new communications technology is used effectively and safely
- **Ensure representation is inclusive, involving the participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work**

Participation and engagement

- Local populations are usually the first to react to a disaster. The degree of community participation is possible early in a response. Affected populations will have ideas on how to respond appropriately to the crisis, and their views on programme design should be sought on an ongoing basis. Time spent consulting early can save a lot more time trying to fix inappropriate decisions later on.
- Different levels of participation may be appropriate at different times. For example, in the early stages of an acute response, consultation might only be possible with limited numbers of affected people. Still, more people and groups will have more opportunities to be more involved in decision-making over time.
- As a result of the context pre-existing differences in power (e.g. based upon gender, race, class, caste, or other characteristics), participation will not usually occur spontaneously. Instead, aid organisations may have to foster a process of mutual learning and dialogue to stimulate greater participation.
- Particular attention should be given to groups or individuals traditionally excluded from power and decision-making processes. Systematically consider ethical ways of engaging with these individuals and groups to respect the dignity and avoid increased stigma.

- Consider the balance between direct community participation and indirect representation by elected representatives through the various stages of response.

Informed consent

- Another aspect of participation is that of informed consent. People may express consent without fully understanding the implications. While this is not ideal, a degree of consent and participation may initially have to be assumed, based on expressed willingness to participate in project activities, observation, knowledge, or legal or other documents (e.g. contractual agreements with the community)
- **Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by the crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received, paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback**

Feedback

- Formal feedback can be sought through specific assessments (group discussions or interviews), post-distribution monitoring, or questionnaires. Informal feedback received in daily interaction should also be valued and used to develop trust and improve programmes on an ongoing basis (see the links to further guidance below)
- People may fear that critical feedback will lead to a loss of assistance or have negative repercussions. There may also be cultural reasons why criticism of an intervention is unacceptable. Exploring different methods of providing informal and formal feedback is important.
- All field-based staff should understand how to gain and maintain people's trust, welcome people's suggestions and comments, know how to respond to both positive and negative feedback and be observant of the reactions of different community members to the way services are provided.

- Feedback mechanisms should be designed in coordination with other agencies. They should be seen as separate from complaints mechanisms for serious infringements of practice or behaviour (see Commitment 5). However, there is usually an overlap in the type of feedback and complaints received in practice. Acknowledging and following up on the feedback received and adapting the programme if appropriate is crucial if the process is trusted.
- Share response to the feedback with the community.

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Policies for information sharing are in place and promote a culture of open communication**

Promoting a culture of open communication

- An organisation should define and document its processes for sharing information, for example, its commitment to accurate and timely information sharing; what information it will share with the people it seeks to assist and other stakeholders; how decisions will be made about when and how to share information; and the criteria used in deciding not to share information.
- Meeting this Commitment also requires that organisations state publicly (e.g. on their website or in promotional material) additional interests and commitments such as political or religious affiliations. The purpose of this declaration of additional interests is to encourage a “no surprises” approach, giving all stakeholders an opportunity to understand better the nature of the organisation and its likely affiliations, policies, partnerships and relationships.
- Organisations should strive to share information about their successes and failures more openly to help promote a system-wide culture of openness and accountability. Organisations that are transparent and open in sharing information with their staff are more likely to be open with communities and the public.

- **Policies are in place for engaging communities and people affected by the crisis, reflecting the priorities and risks they identify in all stages of the work**

Organisational commitment to participation and listening to communities

- Policies and strategies should outline how staff members are being developed to facilitate community engagement and decision-making, listen to affected people and manage negative feedback. Gender and diversity policies can also help promote the organisation's values and commitments and provide concrete examples of expected behaviour. Feedback from crisis-affected communities should also inform strategy and programme development.
- Design policies and strategies to help create space and time for community dialogues, decision-making and self-help.

Restricting information, confidentiality and non-disclosure

- Not all information can or should be shared with all stakeholders. Decisions about what information to share should be based on an assessment of risk. For example, publicising information about cash distributions might put people at risk of being attacked in some insecure areas.
- **External communications, including those used for fundraising purposes, are accurate, ethical and respectful, presenting communities and people affected by the crisis as dignified human beings**

External communications

- Share information based on risk assessment. Consider potential harm to the population, such as when sharing information about cash distributions or demographics of specific settlements, which can put people at risk of being attacked.
- Due care must be exercised when using stories and images from affected communities (particularly children) as this can be seen as an invasion of their privacy and a breach of confidentiality if their permission is not sought. Fundraising material and photographs were taken out of context can often be misleading.

They can make the viewer assume that those receiving aids are all needy and helpless and may fail to highlight people's dignity and capacity to help themselves. Policies and guidelines relating to external communications should be available to all staff and can help to ensure that these mistakes are not made.

2.5 Facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to access safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints

A. Introduction

Formal mechanisms for complaints and redress are an essential component of an agency's accountability and give affected communities some element of control over their lives. This commitment ensures that the affected people have the right to complain to an agency and receive an appropriate and timely response. A complaint contains a specific grievance and can alert an organisation to serious misconduct or failures in the response, allowing them to take timely action to improve programme quality. All organisations are susceptible to fraud or abuse of power, and a complaints system can help an organisation recognise and respond to malpractice, manipulation and exploitation.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis, including vulnerable and marginalised groups, are aware of complaint mechanisms established for their use.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider the complaints mechanisms accessible, effective, confidential and safe.
- Complaints are investigated, resolved, and results feedback to the complainant within the stated timeframe.

C. Key Actions

- **Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design implementation and monitoring of complaints processes**

Designing a complaints mechanism

- Affected communities and other stakeholders (including staff and groups who might be particularly vulnerable) should be consulted about: how they view complaints mechanisms; how complaints are currently dealt with; how they would like to submit complaints to the organisation(s); what might potentially prevent them from complaining; and how they wish to receive feedback about complaints. The procedures should be designed to fit the requirements for each context, and the feasibility of joint complaints mechanisms with other agencies should be explored.
- Staff members will need the training to understand the rationale behind the complaints mechanism and the procedures for operating it. It is also important to consider how complaints received will be recorded and tracked and how learning will be incorporated into future planning.
- **Welcome and accept complaints, and communicate how the mechanism can be accessed and the scope of issues it can address**

Raising awareness about how to make a complaint

- Time and resources will be needed to ensure that different groups within the affected population know what they can expect from agencies in terms of services, staff attitudes and behaviour, as well as what to do and where to go if they want to make a complaint because the agency has failed to meet these standards. They should also be assured that they can make a complaint confidentially and without fear of retaliation.
- An information campaign may help raise awareness of the system and procedures, and people should be allowed to ask further questions about how it will work.
- Managing expectations is essential, as communities may believe that the complaints process can solve all of their problems. This could generate frustration and disappointment if the expected changes are outside the agency's control.
- **Manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner that prioritises the complainant's safety and those affected at all stages**

Managing complaints

- All complaints should be dealt with individually even though they may cover similar issues. A response should always be provided within a specified timeframe, and the complainant made aware of when they should expect a response (for example, seven days for non-sensitive complaints)
- When the complaint falls outside the control and responsibility of the organisation, this should be explained clearly to the complainant and, where possible and in agreement with the complainant, referred to the appropriate organisation. Coordination with other agencies and sectors will be required to function effectively.
- Anonymous and malicious complaints present specific challenges because their source is unknown. They may be a warning signal to the organisation of underlying discontent, and any follow-up will need to investigate any previously unacknowledged cause for complaint.
- Only trained staff should investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)

Documentation

- Record should be kept of how the complaints mechanism was set up (including on what basis decisions were made), all complaints made, how they were responded to and within what timeframe. Care must be taken to ensure that information on complaints is kept confidential, strictly according to data protection policies. That information is only stored for as long as is needed.

Protecting complainants

- Social and power dynamics must be assessed before deciding on the best way to interact with communities. Particular attention should always be paid to the specific needs of older people, women, children, people with disabilities and others who might be marginalised to ensure they have a say in the design and implementation of complaints-handling systems.

- Care must be taken in deciding who needs to know what information within the organisation. Given the social stigma associated with sexual abuse and the genuine danger that women and children reporting such abuse could face from perpetrators and their own families, it is essential to ensure that their complaints will be treated confidentially and reassure them that they will face no danger of retaliation. A whistle-blowing policy should offer assurance of protection to staff who highlight concerns about programmes or colleagues' behaviour.

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **The complaints response process for communities and people affected by crisis is documented and in place. The process should cover programming, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other abuses of power**

Complaints handling process

- An organisation should ensure that both its staff and the communities it serves have the opportunity to complain. Such complaints can be seen as an opportunity to improve the organisation and its work. Complaints can indicate the impact and appropriateness of intervention, potential risks and vulnerabilities, and the degree to which people are satisfied with the services provided.
- The complaints process needs to be clearly explained to communities and staff, and mechanisms are needed for sensitive (i.e., corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, or gross misconduct or malpractice) and non-sensitive information (e.g. challenges to using of selection criteria)
- Guidelines should state which complaints fall within the agency's remit and when and how to refer them to other service providers. The roles, responsibilities and timeframes agreed must be indicated. The right to appeal should also be built into complaints mechanisms.
- The possibility of working with other agencies on complaints mechanisms in specific locations, consortia or sectors should also be considered as this may be less confusing for communities and staff.

Sexual exploitations and abuse (SEA)

- An organisation and its senior management are responsible for ensuring that complaints mechanisms and procedures for SEA are safe, transparent, accessible, and confidential. Organisations should consider including specific statements about cooperating with investigations into SEA cases, where appropriate, in their partnership agreements.
- **An organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously and acted upon according to defined policies and processes has been established**

Organisational culture

- Policies relating to an organisation's duty of care to the people it aims to assist, its codes of conduct and how it will protect potentially vulnerable groups such as women, children and people with disabilities should be well publicised to all staff.
- Managers and senior staff should model and promote a culture of mutual respect between all staff, partners, volunteers and people affected by crisis. Their support for the implementation of community complaints mechanisms is vital.
- Organisations should have formal investigation procedures that adhere to the principles of confidentiality, independence and respect. Investigations must be conducted thoroughly, timely, and professional and meet legal standards and local labour law requirements. Designated managers should have access to specialist advice or training on investigations and handling staff misconduct.
- A grievance procedure and whistle-blowing policy should also be in place to deal with staff complaints.
- Organisations working with partners should agree on raising and handling complaints (including against each other)
- **Communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse**

Staff behaviour and codes of conduct

- Organisations meeting this Commitment should have a staff code of conduct well publicised and endorsed by senior management.
 - A child safeguarding policy should apply to all staff and partners, and inductions and training should be provided on expected standards of behaviour.
 - Explain the complaints process to communities and staff. Include mechanisms for both sensitive issues (such as those relating to corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, gross misconduct or malpractice) and non-sensitive information (such as challenges to the use of selection criteria). They also should know and understand the consequences of breaching the code (see Commitments 3 & 8)
- **Complaints that do not fall within the organisation's scope are referred to a relevant party consistent with good practice**

Scope and referral

- Staff should be aware of how to handle complaints or allegations of abuse. In criminal activity or where international law has been broken, liaison with the appropriate authorities will be necessary.
- Clarify guidance on which complaints fall within the organisation's remit and when and how to refer to other service providers.

2.6 Deliver humanitarian assistance in a coordinated and complementary manner

A. Introduction

Communities and people affected by crisis should receive coordinated, complementary assistance. Adequate programme coverage and timely, effective humanitarian responses require collective action. Coordination

mechanisms, such as the cluster system, are required to establish a clear division of labour and responsibility and identify coverage and quality gaps. It is vital to prevent the duplication of efforts and the waste of resources. The sharing of information and knowledge between stakeholders, joint planning, and integrated activities can also ensure that organisations manage risk better and improve response outcomes.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis do not identify gaps and overlaps in the response.
- Responding organisations share relevant information through formal and informal coordination mechanisms.
- Organisations coordinate needs assessments, deliver humanitarian aid and monitor its implementation.
- Local organisations report adequate participation and representation in coordination mechanisms.

C. Key Actions

- **Identify the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of different stakeholders**

Consider collaboration and, where possible, the sharing of resources and equipment to optimise the capacity of communities, host governments, donors, private sector and humanitarian organisations (local, national, international) with different mandates and expertise. Suggest and lead joint assessments, training and evaluations across organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a more coherent approach

Working with the private sector

- The private sector can bring commercial efficiencies, complementary expertise and resources to humanitarian agencies. An information-sharing is required to avoid duplication and promote good humanitarian practice. Partnerships with the private sector should ensure explicit benefits for people affected by the crisis whilst recognising that private sector actors may have additional objectives of their own

Working with the military

- The military brings particular expertise and resources, including security, logistics, transport and communication. However, any association with the military should be in the service of, and led by, humanitarian agencies and according to endorsed guidelines. Some organisations will maintain a minimum dialogue to ensure operational efficiency (e.g. basic programme information sharing), while others may establish stronger links (e.g. the use of military assets)
 - In all cases, humanitarian agencies must remain distinct from the military to avoid any actual or perceived association with a political or military agenda that could compromise the agencies' neutrality, independence, credibility, security and access to affected populations.
- **Ensure humanitarian response complements that of national and local authorities and other humanitarian organisations**

Complimentary assistance

- Recognise that the overall planning and coordination of relief efforts is ultimately the responsibility of the host government. Humanitarian agencies have an essential role in supporting the state's response and coordination function.
 - Local organisations and civil society networks will have a significant amount of context-specific knowledge and experience. Still, they may need support in re-establishing themselves following the effects of a disaster.
 - Humanitarian actors should use their judgement regarding the authorities' independence, keeping the interests of the affected populations at the centre of their decision-making.
- **Participate in relevant coordination bodies and collaborate with others to minimise demands on communities and maximise the coverage and service provision of the wider humanitarian effort**

Coordination bodies

- Participation in coordination mechanisms before a disaster establishes relationships and enhances coordination during a response. Efforts must often be made to encourage

coordination; as local actors may not participate if coordination mechanisms appear to be relevant only to international agencies. The location of meetings or language can be a barrier to the participation of local actors. National and sub-national mechanisms are required, and clear reporting lines will need to be established.

- Where parallel coordination structures are necessary, there should be a clear strategy for linking with longer-term coordination bodies. The cluster system is a recognised mechanism for coordinating emergencies but should support national coordination mechanisms.
 - Meetings that bring together different sectors can enable people's needs to be addressed as a whole, rather than in isolation (e.g. people's shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and psychosocial needs are interrelated).
 - In all coordination contexts, the commitment of agencies to participate will be affected by the quality of the coordination mechanisms. Coordination leaders are responsible for ensuring that meetings and information sharing are well managed, efficient and results-oriented. The coordination body needs to determine the scope of its activities and commitments, the overlap with other coordination bodies, and how this will be managed (e.g., accountability, gender and protection).
 - A key coordination function is ensuring the application and adherence to quality standards and guidelines, and achieving impact is only possible through collaborative working and mutual accountability. This can be done by reminding agencies of the need to adhere to technical standards and technical standards and the CHS. The performance indicators for the CHS are adapted to the context and used to monitor and evaluate the response.
- **Share necessary information with partners, coordination groups and other relevant actors through appropriate communication channels**

Sharing information

- Sharing information (including financial) between different stakeholders and coordination mechanisms makes it more likely to identify gaps or duplication.
- It is essential to respect the use of the local language(s) in meetings and other communications and examine barriers to communication so that local stakeholders can participate.
- Care must be taken to speak clearly and avoid jargon and colloquialisms, especially when other participants do not speak the same language. There may also be a need to provide interpreters and translators.
- Consider the location of meetings to allow local actors to participate.
- Work with networks of local civil society organisations to ensure their members' contributions are included

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Policies and strategies include a clear commitment to coordination and collaboration with others, including national and local authorities, without compromising humanitarian principles**

Commitment to coordination and collaboration

- An organisation needs to ensure that the Commitment to coordination is included in organisational policies and resourcing strategies. The organisation should provide a statement on how it will engage with partners, host authorities and other humanitarian (and, where appropriate, non-humanitarian) actors.
 - Staff representing agencies in coordination meetings should have the appropriate information, skills and authority to contribute to planning and decision-making. Coordination responsibilities should be clearly articulated in their job descriptions.
- **Work with partners is governed by clear and consistent agreements that respect each partner's mandate, obligations and**

independence, recognising their respective constraints and commitments

Working with partners

- Both local and national organisations should engage or collaborate with partners. A clear and shared understanding of each other's organisational mandate, and mutual roles and responsibilities, is needed if partnerships are effective and accountable.
- There may be different arrangements with partners, ranging from purely contractual to shared decision-making and shared resources.
- A partner organisation will have its own mandate and vision and maintain its independence in most situations. However, there will always be opportunities for mutual learning and development. Both parties stand to gain from the partnership as they increase their knowledge and capacities and ensure better response preparedness and more varied response options, especially in longer-term collaborations between local and national civil society organisations and international organisations.

2.7 Show ability to learn from experiences for improved assistance

A. Introduction

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection. Learning from success and failure and applying these insights to modify and adapt current and future work is a cornerstone of accountability and quality management. A learning and continual improvement culture should lie at the heart of a professional and committed organisation and is fundamental to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency. Constant interaction with service users is necessary to make changes and adaptations as soon as possible. Collaboration with other agencies can also enhance learning.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis identify improvements to the assistance and protection they receive over time.
- Improvements are made to assistance and protection interventions due to the learning generated in the current response.
- The assistance and protection provided reflect learning from other responses.

C. Key Actions

- **Draw on lessons learned and prior experience when designing programmes**

Learning from experience

- Different approaches and methods suit different performance, learning and accountability purposes. Learning should take account of failures and successes, and agencies can arguably learn more from the former.
- Effective monitoring uses qualitative and quantitative data and draws on various methods to triangulate data and maintain consistent records.
- Clarity about the intended use and users of the data should determine what is collected and how it is presented. Care must be taken not to collect data that is not analysed or used.
- Monitoring systems should be made as simple and accessible as possible whilst recognising that information should represent different groups.
- People affected by the crisis are the best judges of changes in their lives and quantitative methods. The use of open-ended listening and other qualitative participatory approaches and quantitative methods should be encouraged. Learning should also be shared and discussed with communities.
- When evaluating a programme, the information from feedback and complaints mechanisms should be reviewed. A realistic and agreed action plan can help to ensure that evaluation and review recommendations are followed up.

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

Innovation

- In recent years, there has been a greater focus on using innovative approaches, methods and tools for solving some of the challenges in humanitarian response. Funding streams have been made available to agencies wishing to develop new and creative ideas, such as the use of new technologies for sanitation and cash-based programming or greater use of digital tools and media.
 - People affected by crisis have also always been innovative in adapting to changing circumstances, and support could be provided to involve them in a more systematic innovation and development process.
 - Share and discuss learning with communities, asking them what they would like to do differently and strengthening their role in decision-making or management.
- **Share learning and innovation internally, with communities and people affected by crisis, and with other stakeholders**

Collaboration and sharing of lessons

- In the interest of transparency and programme effectiveness, information from monitoring should be regularly shared with affected communities. Monitoring carried out by the people can further enhance transparency and quality and encourage their ownership of the information.
- Collaborative learning with other agencies and academic bodies is a professional obligation and can introduce fresh perspectives and ideas and maximise the use of limited resources. Collaboration also helps to reduce the burden of repeated evaluations in the same community.
- Peer learning exercises have been used by various organisations and can be undertaken to monitor progress in real-time or as a reflective exercise post-emergency.

- Any information collected through monitoring and evaluation should be analysed and presented in a brief, accessible format that facilitates sharing and decision-making. Short summaries, briefing papers, meetings or films help make information and knowledge more accessible.

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices**

Evaluation and learning policies

- Key lessons and areas identified for improvement are not always addressed systematically. Lessons cannot be considered learned unless they have brought about demonstrable changes in current or subsequent responses.
- In its learning cycle, an organisation should include a review and improvement plan for its performance that is based on measurable, objective indicators.
- All staff should understand their responsibilities in relation to monitoring the progress of their work. They also need to understand how learning can contribute to their personal development.

- **Mechanisms exist to record knowledge and experience and make it accessible throughout the organisation**

Knowledge management and organisational learning

- Knowledge management involves collecting, developing, sharing, storing and effectively using organisational knowledge and learning. Organisational learning should lead to practical changes such as improved strategies for carrying out assessments or reorganising teams to ensure a faster and more cohesive response or more precise articulation of decision-making responsibilities.
- Longer-term national staff are often crucial to preserving local knowledge and relationships

- **The organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response among peers and within the sector**

Peer and sector learning

- The creation of networks and communities of practice (including the involvement of academia) and opportunities to learn from peer groups – both in the field and in after-action reviews or learning forums – can make an important contribution to organisational practice and system-wide learning. Sharing challenges and successes amongst peers can enable humanitarians to identify risks and avoid future mistakes.
- The amount of evidence available across the sector is much greater than what is available to any single organisation. Therefore, economies of scale can be achieved through system-wide learning activities. There is also a strong indication that organisations learning and reviewing evidence together are more likely to provide the catalyst for organisational change than lessons learned within a single organisation

2.8 Ensure own and team members' competencies and management of assistance

A. Introduction

Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers. Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably. Staff actions are the foundation of each of the Nine Commitments and the basis for an effective response. Responsibilities related to staff, and the organisation's approach to its workforce as a whole, are also included in the other eight Commitments. An organisation's capacity to recruit, train and manage staff and volunteers is at the heart of adherence. Staff-related costs are often the largest proportion of an organisation's costs and of most programme budgets, and investments in staff should be carefully nurtured if they are to yield the best outcomes for communities affected by crisis.

B. Performance Indicators

- All staff feel supported by their organisation to do their work.
- Staff satisfactorily meet their performance objectives.
- Communities and people affected by crisis assess staff to be effective in their knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes.
- Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of humanitarian codes of conduct and raise concerns about violations.

C. Key Actions

- **Staff work according to the mandate and values of the organisation and agreed objectives and performance standards**

Staff and volunteers

- Support Any designated representative of the organisation, including national, international, permanent or short-term employees, and volunteers and consultants, is considered to be a member of staff. However, different terms and conditions apply to different types and levels of staff.
 - National employment law will often dictate the status of an individual working for the organisation, and such laws must be respected. All staff members must be made aware of their legal and organisational status.
- **Staff adhere to the policies that are relevant to them and understand the consequences of not adhering to them**

Adhering to organisational mandates, values and policies

- Staff are expected to work within the legal scope, mission, values and vision of the organisation, which should be defined and communicated. Beyond this wider understanding of the organisation's role and ways of working, an individual should work to a set of personal objectives and the performance expectations agreed together with their manager.
- Whilst the organisation should make policies easily accessible, staff and external partners (contractors and services providers) should also know the policies and codes of conduct that apply to them and the consequences of non-compliance (such as termination of contracts).

- Policies should make explicit commitments to gender balance with staff and volunteers and promote a work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible to a person with disabilities.
- The need for inductions and training relating to the organisational mandate, policies and codes of conduct will apply to all situations (even during a rapid deployment or scale-up).
- **Staff develop and use the necessary personal, technical and management competencies to fulfil their role and understand how the organisation can support them to do this**

Performance standards and development of competencies

- Staff and their employers are mutually accountable for their skills development - including management skills. With the help of clear objectives and performance standards, they should understand what skills, competencies and knowledge (including, for example, the ability to listen well) are required to perform their current role. They should also be made aware of the opportunities for growth and development that might be available or required. Competencies can be improved through experience, training, mentoring or coaching.
- In the early phase of a disaster, opportunities for formal staff development may be limited, but managers should, as a minimum, provide induction and on-the-job training.
- Various methods 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 (see the links to further guidance below).

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **The organisation has the management and staff capacity and capability to deliver its programmes**

Staff capacity and capability

- People management systems will depend on each agency and context but should be informed by good practice. They need to be considered and planned at a strategic level with the support of senior management. Organisation and project plans must consider staff capacity to ensure that the right numbers of staff with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to deliver short- and long-term organisational objectives.
 - While this does not mean that organisations must only undertake a project if they have managed to assemble all the necessary resources and expertise at the start, organisation-wide preparedness (involving operations, HR, finance and other functions) is vital to agree on how the resources required will be mobilised.
 - Hire people who will increase the accessibility of services and avoid any perception of discrimination (considering language, ethnicity, gender, disability and age), as well as the locally recruited staff who are likely to stay for longer periods.
 - Adopt ethical recruitment practices to avoid the risk of undermining local NGO capacity.
 - Organisations also need to plan in advance to address peaks in demand for qualified staff. As will internal decision-making responsibilities and communication, country-level roles and responsibilities will also need to be clarified.
 - High staff turnover can undermine programme quality and continuity. It can also lead to staff avoiding taking personal responsibility and failing to develop trust between the organisation and the communities it is working with.
- **Staff policies and procedures are fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and compliant with local employment law**

Policies and procedures

- The style and complexity of staff policies and procedures will depend on the size and context of each agency. However simple or complex the agency may be, staff should participate in developing and reviewing policies where possible to ensure that their views are represented. A staff manual facilitates knowledge of and consultation on policies.

- Local labour laws must be understood and respected, and organisational policy and practice should promote the role of national staff at the management and leadership level to ensure continuity, institutional memory, and more contextually appropriate responses.
- An effective response is not simply about ensuring that skilled staff are present – it will also depend on how individuals are managed. Research from emergency contexts shows that effective management, frameworks and procedures are as important as, if not more important than, the skills of personnel in ensuring effective response. Staff must be trained in applying standard operating procedures as this allows for higher levels of delegation and faster responses.
- **Job descriptions, work objectives and feedback processes are in place so that staff have a clear understanding of what is required of them**

Staff guidance

- Job descriptions should clarify what is expected of each staff member and should be kept up to date. In addition, each staff member should identify individual objectives that cover their work aspirations and the competencies they hope to develop or improve and document these in a development plan.
- Research from emergency contexts shows that effective management, frameworks, and procedures are as important as the skills of personnel in ensuring effective response.
- **A code of conduct is in place that establishes, at a minimum, the obligation of staff not to exploit, abuse or otherwise discriminate against people**

Staff conduct

- It is paramount that the organisation's code of conduct is understood, signed and upheld, making it clear to all representatives of the organisation (including staff, volunteers, partners and contractors) what standards of behaviour are expected from them and what the consequences will be if they breach the code.

- **Policies are in place to support staff to improve their skills and competencies**

Staff competencies

- Focusing on competency and capacity development can motivate staff and lead to greater effectiveness. The organisation should have mechanisms for reviewing staff performance and assessing capacity gaps and a strategy for developing competencies and capacity to contribute to talent development. Performance review schedules must be flexible enough to cover staff who only work short-term and those who are on open-ended contracts.
- The organisation should agree with its partners on the competencies required for staff to meet the agreed Commitments.

- **Policies are in place for the security and the well-being of staff**

Security and well-being

- Staff often work long hours in risky and stressful conditions. An agency's duty of care to its workers includes promoting well-being and avoiding long-term exhaustion, burnout, injury, or illness.
- Managers must make aid workers aware of the risks and protect them from exposure to unnecessary threats to their physical and emotional health. Measures that can be adopted include effective security management, preventative health advice, active support to work reasonable hours and access to psychological support when required.
- Establish a policy that expresses zero tolerance for harassment and abuse in the workplace and holistic prevention and response strategies to address incidents of sexual harassment and violence as experienced or perpetrated by their staff.
- Managers can promote a duty of care by modelling good practice and complying with the policy personally. Aid workers also need to take personal responsibility for managing their well-being. Psychosocial support should be immediately available to

workers who have experienced or witnessed extremely distressing events.

- Train staff to receive information on incidents of sexual violence experienced by their colleagues. Provide access to robust investigative and deterrence measures that promote trust and accountability. When incidents occur, adopt a survivor-centred approach to medical and psychosocial support, including recognising vicarious trauma. Support should be responsive to and inclusive of the needs of expatriate and national staff.
- A culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health professional should contact all national and international staff and volunteers one to three months after surviving a potentially traumatic event. The professional should assess the survivor and refer them for clinical treatment if appropriate.

2.9 Able to manage resources effectively, efficiently and ethically

A. Introduction

Resources are finite and need to be used with care. Being accountable is intrinsically linked with being responsible for the effective and efficient use of resources donated to and managed by the organisation. Communities affected by crisis bear the true costs of mismanagement, negligence or corruption, so organisations must use resources wisely and honestly to ensure maximum impact.

B. Performance Indicators

- Communities and people affected by crisis are aware of community-level budgets, expenditures, and results.
- Communities and people affected by crisis consider that the available resources are being used:
 - a. for what they were intended; and
 - b. without diversion or wastage.
- The resources obtained for the response are used and monitored according to agreed plans, targets, budgets and time frames.

- Humanitarian response is delivered cost-effectively.

C. Key Actions

- **Design programmes and implement processes to ensure the efficient use of resources, balancing quality, cost and timeliness at each phase of the response**

Programme issues

- In high-profile acute emergencies, there is often pressure to quickly spend large amounts of money and demonstrate that agencies are doing something to address the situation. This can lead to poor project planning and insufficient emphasis on exploring the different potential programmes and financial options (e.g. the use of cash) that may offer better value for money.
 - In rapid onset emergencies, it may be necessary to adapt procedures to enable faster financial decision-making and cope with humanitarian challenges (e.g. a lack of available suppliers to carry out competitive tenders). However, the elevated risk of corruption in humanitarian contexts means it is important to provide training and support to staff and complaints mechanisms to prevent adapted systems from being open to corruption (see Commitments 3 & 5).
 - Deploying experienced senior staff during this time can help mitigate the risks and ensure that a balance is struck between providing a timely response and maintaining standards and limiting waste.
 - Collaboration and coordination between organisations can also contribute to a more efficient response (e.g., conducting joint assessments or evaluations and supporting interagency registration and logistics systems).
 - At the end of the project, the remaining assets and resources will need to be donated, sold, or returned responsibly.
- **Manage and use resources to achieve their intended purpose, minimising waste**

Using resources for their intended purpose

- All humanitarian actors are accountable to both donors and affected communities and should demonstrate that resources have been used wisely, efficiently and to good effect.
- Fraud, corruption and waste divert resources away from those who need them most. However, an intervention that is not effective because it is understaffed or under-resourced cannot be said to be accountable, and economical does not always equal value for money. A balance will often need to be struck between economy, effectiveness and efficiency.
- Aid must not be diverted to support terrorist activities, and many donors impose vetting systems on potential partners to mitigate this risk.

- **Monitor and report expenditure against budget**

Monitoring and reporting on expenditure

- Financial management is an important aspect of programme management, and good quality financial planning and monitoring systems are required to ensure that programme objectives are met. Systems and procedures should be in place to mitigate key financial management risks and track all financial transactions.
- Key risks that require specific skills and systems to mitigate are procurement, cash-transfer programming and stock management. Accounting records should satisfy accepted national and/or international standards and be applied systematically.
- All staff members are responsible for ensuring that finances are well managed, but it is important to have people specially designated to compile financial reports. Staff should be encouraged to report any suspected fraud, corruption or misuse of resources (see Lewis, T. 2010).

- **When using local and natural resources, consider their impact on the environment**

Environmental impact and use of natural resources

- Humanitarian responses can negatively impact the environment, producing large amounts of waste, degrading natural resources, contributing to the depletion or contamination of the water table, deforestation and other environmental hazards.
 - A rapid environmental impact assessment (REA) can help determine the risks and make it more likely to put mitigation measures in place.
 - Involving affected communities and their concerns in this process is key, and support for the local management of natural resources should be integrated into programming.
- **Manage the risk of corruption and take appropriate action if it is identified**

Managing corruption risks

- The definition and understanding of corrupt practices are different in all cultures. A clear definition of the expected behaviour of staff (including volunteers) and partners is fundamental in addressing this risk (see Commitment 8).
- Being more open and transparent with project information, encouraging stakeholders to report abuses of power, careful on-site monitoring, and treating community members with respect can help reduce corruption risks. Whilst it is important to have robust systems in place to counter corruption, in the early stages of an acute emergency, it may be necessary to have more flexible controls in place for a limited amount of time (see Hees et al. 2014)

D. Organisational Responsibilities

- **Policies and processes governing the use and management of resources are in place, including how the organisation:**
 - **Accept and allocates funds and gifts-in-kind ethically and legally;**
 - **uses its resources in an environmentally responsible way;**
 - **prevents and addresses corruption, fraud, conflicts of interest and misuse of resources;**

- **conducts audits and verifies compliance and reports transparently;**
- **assesses, manages and mitigates risk on an ongoing basis; and**
- **ensures that the acceptance of resources does not compromise its independence.**

Funding and gifts-in-kind

- Funding criteria and funding sources should be documented and open to public scrutiny. The use of some funding sources could compromise an organisation's operational independence and impartiality, and efforts should be made to mitigate such risks by producing guidance for staff and encouraging transparency.
- Gifts-in-kind may also create ethical dilemmas. Giving gifts in many cultures is seen as an important social norm, and refusing a gift would appear rude. If receiving the gift causes a sense of indebtedness, the receiver should politely refuse it. But if it is accepted, it is wise to declare this and discuss with a manager if concerns remain. Staff should be made aware of such policies and possible dilemmas (see Hees et al. 2014)

Environmentally responsible organisations

- Organisations should commit to environmentally sound policies and practices and use existing guidelines to help address environmental issues in an emergency.
- Green procurement policies help reduce the impact on the environment but need to be managed in a way that does not or minimises delay in assisting.

Corruption and fraud

- Fraud includes theft, diversion of goods or property, and falsifying records such as expense claims. Every organisation must keep an accurate record of financial transactions to show how funds have been used. Systems and procedures need to be set up to ensure internal control of financial resources and prevent fraud and corruption.
- The organisation should support recognised good practice in financial management and reporting. Organisational policies

should also ensure that procurement systems are transparent and robust and incorporate counter-terrorism measures (see Hees et al. 2014)

Conflicts of interest

- Staff must ensure that there is no conflict between the aims of the organisation and their own personal or financial interests. For example, they must not award contracts to suppliers, organisations or individuals if they or their family stand to gain financially.
- There are various forms of conflict of interest, and people do not always recognise that they contradict organisational codes and policies. For example, using the organisation's resources without permission or taking gifts from a supplier might be construed as a conflict of interest.
- Creating a culture where people can openly discuss and declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest is key to managing them.

Auditing and transparency

- Audits can take several forms – internal audits check that procedures are being followed; external audits verify whether the organisation's financial statements are true and fair; an investigative audit is carried out when an organisation suspects a specific problem – usually a fraud.
- Independently and externally audited annual accounts provide some measure of guarantee against fraud and the misuse of funds. Audited accounts and other regular financial reports should be published transparently and communicated in ways accessible to both staff and affected communities

Risk management

- This entails identifying, assessing and prioritising risks and then identifying strategies to reduce, monitor and control them. The risks that incur the greatest loss and the greatest probability of happening should be handled first.



Self-assessment Checklist



ASCEND



Self-assessment Checklist

Please use the checklist below to help you determine whether you are prepared to be assessed in this unit of competency. The boxes without tick mark indicate that there may be some areas you need to work on to become ready for assessment.

Instructions

Please tick (✓) the box if your answer is yes

Questions

☐

Have I read the Learner Guide and understood its contents?

☐

Have I attended, participated in, and completed all training sessions and activities?

☐

Have I reviewed the learning resources to reinforce what I've learned in training?

☐

Am I able to demonstrate my understanding of each element and performance criteria of this unit of competency by writing a summary in my own words?

☐

Am I able to communicate how my experience, knowledge, skills-sets, and attitudes make me qualified and competent enough to perform the job related to this unit of competency?



ONE RESPONSE

Oral Interview and Written Test Guide



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Oral interview and written test guide

This section guides candidates on how to communicate, demonstrate, or present evidence, responses, and their work in a professional manner. There are three primary ways the candidates will be assessed: through observation, oral interview, and written test. The assessor will determine the final assessment methods and tools depending on several factors like the local context, professional needs, and the like.

On observations

Assessors will observe the candidate over a period of time to collect evidence of their capability to meet the required standards and performance criteria. Assessors may attend selected learning sessions, if any, to witness how candidates complete their activities and participate in exercises. In doing so, assessors can get a sense of the candidate's key strengths and areas for improvement concerning the unit of competency. It will benefit candidates to ensure their work is always complete and presentable.

On oral interview

Assessors will conduct oral interviews to confirm and evaluate the candidate's experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding the unit of competency under assessment.

Please review the Unit Readings and complete the Self-assessment Checklist in this document. It may include verification questions about what you learned from the training content and material. It may also include competency questions about your knowledge and skills. Assessors may ask you what knowledge or skill you will use or apply to address a specific occupational issue or problem. Candidates need to think about how they will carry out their critical job functions in a defined work setting.

Finally, the interview may also include behavioural questions that focus on attitudes. Assessors may ask for examples of what you will do when a particular situation happens or when circumstances change. Candidates will need to support their answers with reflections on their own or other's experiences and the lessons learned from those.

On written tests

Assessors will also present a written test to candidates to confirm whether candidates learned and understood the training content and material concerning the unit of competency under assessment.

Accuracy, brevity, and clarity are the ABCs of good writing. The first thing candidates are suggested to do is answer the questions as accurately as possible. It helps structure your response and sharpen your main points in an outline before writing them down. Candidates are advised to use short and simple sentences and paragraphs. The key messages and transitions between your sentences and paragraphs need to be clear. Your answers need to be easy to read and understand. It includes removing and leaving out irrelevant material. Candidates are also expected to write coherently and logically so that readers can follow their thought.

Proofread and correct errors in your work before submitting it. How you format your work also matters. If you are using a computer, please check whether your indentions, margins, spacing, listings (bullets, numerical sequencing), and page numbers are in order.



ONE RESPONSE

Recommended Readings



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Recommended readings

ACAPS & ECB (2014). *Humanitarian Needs Assessment: The Good Enough Guide*. Accessible [here](#)

ALNAP & Groupe URD (2009). *Developing a participatory approach to involve crisis-affected people in a humanitarian response. The Participation Handbook*. Accessible [here](#)

ALNAP (2014). *Closing the Loop – Practitioner guidance on effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts*. ALNAP Practitioner Guidance. London: ALNAP/ODI. Accessible [here](#)

Bond (2012). *Value for money – what it means for UK NGOs* (Background paper). Accessible [here](#)

Buchanan-Smith, M. & Cosgrave, J. (2013). *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action: Pilot Guide*. ALNAP. Accessible [here](#)

Catley, A., Burns, J., Abebe, D., Suji, O. (2013). *Participatory Impact Assessment: A Design Guide*. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, Somerville. Accessible [here](#)

CBHA (2010). *Core Humanitarian Competencies Guide: Humanitarian Capacity Building Throughout the Employee Life Cycle*. Accessible [here](#)

CHS Alliance (2015). *HR Tool*. Accessible [here](#)

Christian Aid (2012). *Building the future of humanitarian aid: Local capacity and partnerships in emergency assistance*. Accessible [here](#)

CRS (2013). *Communication Toolbox: Practical guidance for program managers to improve communication with participants and community members*. Accessible [here](#)

Danish Refugee Council (2008). *Complaints Mechanism Handbook*. Accessible [here](#)
ECB (2007). *Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The Toolkit for Emergency Response*. Accessible [here](#)

Groupe URD (2013). *Reaching Resilience: Handbook Resilience 2.0 for aid practitioners and policymakers in Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Poverty Reduction*. Accessible [here](#)

Groupe URD/UNEP. *Training toolkit: Integrating the environment into humanitarian action and early recovery*: Accessible [here](#)

Hallam, A. and Bonino, F. (2013). *Using Evaluation for a Change: Insights from humanitarian practitioners*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI. Accessible [here](#)

Hees, R., Ahlendorf, M. & Debere, S. (2014). *Preventing corruption in humanitarian operations*. Transparency International. Accessible [here](#)

IASC Taskforce on PSEA (2009). *Guidelines on Setting Up a Community Based Complaints Mechanism Regarding Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and non-UN Personnel*. Accessible [here](#)

IASC (2012). *Reference module for cluster coordination at the country level*. Accessible [here](#)

IASC (2015). *Multi-sector initial rapid assessment guidance*. Accessible [here](#)

IASC (2015). *Reference module for the implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*. Accessible [here](#)

IASC (2006). *Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs, Equal Opportunities*. *The Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*. Accessible [here](#)

IFRC (2006). *What is VCA? An introduction to vulnerability and capacity assessment*. Accessible [here](#)

Infoasaid (2013). *Diagnostic Tools*. Accessible [here](#)

Infoasaid (2015). *E-learning course*. Accessible [here](#)

Knox Clarke, P. and Campbell, L. (2015). *Exploring coordination in humanitarian clusters*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI. Accessible [here](#)

Lewis, T. (2010). *Financial Management Essentials: Handbook for NGOs*. Mango. Accessible [here](#)

Mango (2013). *Top Tips for financial governance* (webpage). Accessible [here](#)

Mazurana, D., Benelli, P., Gupta, H., & Walker, P. (2011). *Sex and Age Matter: Improving Humanitarian Response in Emergencies*. Feinstein International Center Tufts University. Accessible [here](#)

Norman, B. (2013). *Monitoring and accountability practices for remotely managed projects implemented in volatile operating environment*. Tearfund: Accessible [here](#)

NRC (2008). *Camp management toolkit*. Accessible [here](#)

OCHA & UNEP (2014). *Environment and Humanitarian action* (factsheet). Accessible [here](#)

People In Aid (2011). *Debriefing: building staff capacity*. Accessible [here](#)

Save the Children (2013). *Putting Accountability into Practice*. Accessible [here](#)

SEEP Network (2010). *Minimum Economic Recovery Standards*. Accessible [here](#)

Slim, H. & Bonwick, A. (2005). *Protection: An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies*. Accessible [here](#)

The Sphere Project (2011). *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*. Accessible [here](#)

The Sphere Project (2015). *Sphere Unpacked series: Sphere for monitoring and evaluation*. Accessible [here](#)

Turnbull, M., Sterret, C. & Hilleboe, A. (2013). *Toward resilience, a guide to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation*. Practical Action. Accessible [here](#)

Learning resources

The Sphere Project (2018). *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*. Accessible [here](#)

CHS Alliance et al. (2015). *Core Humanitarian Standard: CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators*. Accessible [here](#)

CHS Alliance (2015). *Training Handbook: Introduction to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)*. Accessible [here](#)



Training Evaluation Sheet



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Training evaluation sheet

Name of Training

Competency unit title and number

ADM.COR.001.1 Apply the Core Humanitarian Standard and Principles

Location of training

Date of training

Instructions

Please tick (✓) your level of agreement with the statements below

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree or Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Training content and facility

The training objectives were clearly defined and met.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

The training content was organized and easy to follow.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

The training material was relevant and useful to me.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

The training facility is adequate and comfortable.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Training delivery and activities

The trainers/presenters were knowledgeable and well prepared.

☐☐☐☐☐

The trainers/presenters were engaging and helpful.

☐☐☐☐☐

The length of the training was sufficient for learning.

☐☐☐☐☐

The pace of the training was appropriate to the content and attendees.

☐☐☐☐☐

The activities and exercises encouraged participation and interaction.

☐☐☐☐☐

What did you like most about this training?

What parts of the training could be improved?

Other comments and feedback:

**Thank you for completing this training evaluation form.
Your response is appreciated.**



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ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management

THE AHA CENTRE

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