

LESSONS LEARNED ON CAPACITY BUILDING

Translating Commitment into Actions to Promote and Implement Sphere Standards

Challenges and Issues

Building local capacity in the knowledge and application of humanitarian standards over time is fundamental for the effective use of standards during a crisis. The lack of understanding how to use standards whether in terms of knowledge or skills, can be seen at various fronts such as with the humanitarian sector, donors, government, academia, as well as community. In certain situations, working with standards is not deemed as a priority. Many donors, for example, don't provide funding to build aid workers' capacity in Sphere Standards in order to improve the quality of service delivery. Similarly, affected governments may have their own national standards without reference to internationally agreed standards such as the Sphere Standards.

One of the inherent challenges within the humanitarian sector is staff turnover. Staff who are trained to work with standards leave a gap when moving to another job or organization. This means that there is a need for continuous training of new staff on humanitarian standards. However, the effectiveness and impact of such trainings are often very difficult to measure.

So What Went Wrong and Why?

Different aspects were discussed:

Language barrier: There are not sufficient tailor-made training materials in local languages to induce interest with the different stakeholders at national and local level. This is a challenge for the proper transfer of knowledge and skills with regards to standards.

Institutionalization/mainstreaming of standards: Often, capacity is built at individual levels and not at the organizational or sector level.

Sustainable trainings: Trainers often focus on the trainings themselves but not on the follow-up: They often don't measure the effectiveness of the trainings or support trainees after the trainings.

Preparedness: Capacity building is often only provided during emergencies and not before. In other words, the element of preparedness is neglected due to limited resources.

So What Went Right and Why?

Context: Localised and contextualised trainings generate a lot of interest and as a result, knowledge and skills are easily transferred.

Target audience: Trainers who stretch beyond classroom trainings and adapt approaches to the target audience yield better results in building capacity on Sphere Standards. Examples are advice on using Sphere Standards in proposals, using Sphere in monitoring and evaluation, using Sphere to audit projects, and more.

In-house trainings: Focus on in-house trainings minimizes the risk of resting capacity at individual levels and increase the potential of **institutionalizing** Sphere Standards within the organization.

Institutionalisation: In some SFP organisations, staff development plans include aspects of quality and accountability such as Sphere Standards.

Follow-up: A strong follow-up and mechanisms that measuring the effectiveness of training have also proven to gauge the knowledge and skills transferred.

Preparedness : Sphere Standards are applied more effectively during disasters if trainings were conducted before emergencies.

Lessons Learned

Building capacity in Sphere Standards for different stakeholders requires targeted approaches that go beyond classroom training, that are directly applicable by the trainees and that consolidate the ability to measure the effectiveness of the capacity building efforts.

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LESSONS LEARNED ON RESOURCES

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Challenges and Issues

Insufficient funding was identified as one of the key challenges to successful implementation of standards in humanitarian programmes. Generally, however, implementers don't hold donors accountable for not funding Q&A. For example, in donor reports, organizations rarely describe what went wrong and/or how it could have been better with higher Q&A funding. Such open reporting requires transparency. Organisations may also not be pro-active enough in showing donors certain projects which did integrate Q&A, for them to better understand the positive effect of integrating a strong Q&A approach in programmes.

So What Went Wrong and Why?

- When allocating funds, donors may prioritise direct programming over Standards work.
- Some donors may not be aware of the vital importance of Sphere Standards in providing humanitarian assistance with integrity.
- Some implementers present Sphere as an entity separate from other programmes and cannot articulate the linkages between Sphere and quality programming and organizational systems and procedures.

So What Went Right and Why?

Mainstreaming Sphere: Donor support is found when Sphere standards are mainstreamed and presented in an integrated way in budgets and proposals. In this manner, funding is less likely to be excluded from budgets. Mainstreaming is when Sphere standards are incorporated in all aspects of the organization's policy, system and practices. For example, to include staff development within project budgets for relevant staff to attend Sphere Quality and Accountability trainings or gain field exposure, while being able to articulate the importance and value of Sphere to rights-based programming.

Donors' exposure to field realities: Donors who understand the realities of field operations tend to understand better how Sphere standards add value to programming.

Continuous awareness-raising: Where organizations regularly raise awareness of Sphere with donors, more funds are made available for implementers.

Clusters: Efforts to bring Sphere standards onto Cluster agendas will influence donors who attend these cluster meetings.

Use limited funds well: Examples for going far with limited funding are:

- Open call Sphere trainings based on cost recovery, advertised through networks and working groups.
- E-learning as an inexpensive staff development method to raise staff awareness on Sphere Standards.

Lessons Learned

Integrating Sphere Quality and Accountability Standards in programmatic activities helps generate more donor support as they don't come across as standalone activities in proposals & budgets.

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LESSONS LEARNED ON GAINING COMMITMENT

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Challenges and Issues

The Sphere Standards are widely accepted as being important contributors to a high-quality and accountable humanitarian approach. However, often the acknowledgment of their importance does not always translate into their active application. Why is this? Are we using the right approach to introduce Sphere Standards? Are we packaging Sphere Standards according to political and cultural context? How can we present the Sphere Handbook as an effective reference tool? How can we ensure stakeholders apply Sphere Standards when it is most needed?

One of the biggest challenges faced by all the Sphere Focal Points is the lack and inconsistent level of commitment from the various stakeholders such as the affected communities, government, UN, INGO, NGO, CBO, Private Sectors and academia to promote and implement Sphere standards.

The limitation of resources also hinder application of standards, e.g. packages based on Sphere Standards are often costlier so when resources are limited standards are compromised.

Given that Sphere Project is based on voluntary commitment, there is a struggle of balancing between 'buying and binding the power of commitment'.

SFPs conduct all the necessary trainings, yet the commitment level is not in proportion to the efforts put in by the SFPs (see also lessons-learned on capacity building).

So What Went Wrong and Why?

Some of the contributing elements hindering full commitment to humanitarian standards are:

Visibility: In order to attract donors and show effectiveness, humanitarian agencies are often compelled to place more importance on responding quickly than to ensure a fully context-sensitive and participatory response.

Accountability to affected populations: While many humanitarian agencies have well-developed feedback and complaints mechanisms, others do not or those are not really fit to the local norms and habits.

Conforming with standards: Humanitarian standards are generally aspirational. Ideally, a country-wide contextualisation of the indicators will help agencies collaborate and coordinate their responses. In the absence of coordination, there can be 'blame games' amongst the stakeholders.

Imposed standards: Stakeholders like the government and the communities perceive the Sphere Standard as something 'foreign' that may hurt their sovereignty and national pride.

Narrow focus: If discussions around Sphere Standards are confined to the inner humanitarian circle (INGO, Humanitarian NGO and Red Cross), this may alienate other stakeholders such as the government authorities or affected populations.

Ineffective training: The Sphere orientations and trainings are irrelevant and untargeted.

Language barrier: The Sphere Handbook is not made available or accessible in the desired language.

Evidence: Most importantly, the humanitarian sector is unable to demonstrate the evidence that effective application of Sphere Standards has a positive impact on humanitarian response.

So What Went Right and Why?

Some SFPs shared examples of high level of commitment from different stakeholders. The contributing factors include:

Timing and resources: being present at the right time during disaster with appropriate materials and resources, translated into local languages where possible.

Preparedness: Focus on preparedness where capacity building is carried out to a wide range of target audience (government, UN, Academia, INGO, NGO, CBO and militaries) prior to the disaster or conflict.

Culture- sensitive presentation of the standards: When presenting the Sphere Standards, a political and cultural sensitivity are key.

Regional learning: At the regional level, networks such as Sphere Focal Point Forum are useful to share experience, ideas and challenges to support each other's growth and development.

Lessons Learned

Sphere Focal Points and others promoting the Sphere Standards who are present, ready, culturally sensitive, and who maintain good rapport and are ready to share with stakeholders through collaborative networks and advocacy, gain high level of commitment which is translated into concrete action. One specific example of this commitment is the inclusion of Sphere Standards into national law.

One of the best practices seen as a result of this lessons learned is in the case of Indonesia where Sphere Standard is embedded into their national law for disaster management since 2007. The law outlines the importance and requirements of technical standards as well as protection issues. Although there is no direct and specific mention of the Sphere Standards, clearly they have been taken into account in the formulation of this law. Communities are made aware of this law about what they can expect from the relevant stakeholders during disasters. While the effectiveness of the law remains to be reflected, it has clearly set the foundation and tone for quality delivery of service during disasters at the policy level.

For further reference of the law please visit:

http://www.preventionweb.net/files/10841_indonesialaw242007concerningdisaste.pdf

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LESSONS LEARNED ON COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Translating Commitment into Actions to Promote and Implement Sphere Standards

Challenges and Issues

One of the key roles of a Sphere Focal Point (SFP) is to coordinate and collaborate with other humanitarian stakeholders in country, where possible. Many SFPs are making progress in this regard, but there is certainly room for improvement.

In-country:

- Some SFPs struggle to maintain their own focal point commitments.
- SFPs are not always fully informed of Sphere activities carried out by other stakeholders.

So What Went Wrong and Why?

Resources: SFPs lack finances, time and technical resources. Often the role of Sphere Focal Person is not embedded in the job description and seen only as an 'add-on'. The lack of resources hinders SFPs from arranging and administering coordination and collaboration efforts with wider stakeholders.

Authority: A SFP does not have the authority to ensure there is commitment from other agencies in promoting Sphere or in updating the SFP on Sphere activities.

Acceptance: The lack of acceptance of SFP in-country is yet another reason for the lack of coordination and collaboration.

So What Went Right and Why?

Country-level: The SFP is (part of) a group: Where the SFP is part of or even is a group of agencies, acceptance, resources and authority are increased. Examples are the Accountability and Learning Working Groups (ALWGs) in Pakistan, Japan, Myanmar and Philippines, with clear ToRs. While the name of these groups may vary, their role is predominantly to promote quality and accountability within their respective organizations and in the country. Joint planning carried out by ALWGs, such as in the Philippines, creates greater cohesiveness amongst organizations that are committed to promoting quality and accountability through Sphere Standards. Organizations that are part of the ALWG often allocate adequate resources, and their leadership is committed towards the application of Sphere Standards within their own organizations or with their partner organizations.

Regional level : The role of a regional Sphere partner (in South Asia this is Community World Service Asia) in facilitating sub-regional collaboration strengthens coordination at the sub-regional level. The Sphere regional partner played a role in strengthening the role of country SFPs especially in the Philippines and Japan during disasters. This included enhancing in-country coordination and collaboration.

Lessons Learned

SFPs are effective where there is a clear mandate in the form of an MoU or ToR, commitment from the leadership, and allocation of adequate technical and financial resources to carry out its role.

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LESSONS LEARNED ON WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT

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Challenges and Issues

One of the key opportunities for Sphere Focal Points is to advocate with their local, national or central Disaster Management Agencies for inclusion of internationally agreed humanitarian standards such as the Sphere Standards. There are numerous examples of such advocacy efforts. This dialogue is not always easy:

Government has no or limited coordination capacity: In some cases, the governments do not adhere to the minimum standards and are unable to coordinate relief efforts.

Level of the standards: The Sphere Standards are sometimes perceived to be aiming too high, which leads to a lack of openness from the government to engage in a dialogue on standards.

Humanitarian agencies prefer not to work through the government: In certain countries, there is resistance from aid agencies to work with the government for various reasons and this is compounded by the lack of capacity of the government. Aid agencies find it difficult to maneuver through the various government structures in order to coordinate relief efforts and it may seem easier to them to implement their programmes directly. Needless to say, it is not always possible for aid agencies to work independently without working with the government who is the duty bearer.

Politicized aid: In some cases, aid is politicized and access to communities is hampered by government restrictions.

So What Went Wrong and Why?

Some of the challenges of NGOs working with government may be:

Insufficient coordination: Whilst working with government, aid agencies experience uncoordinated and non-standardized approach to aid provision to affectees during emergencies.

No preparedness: Often the minimum standards are only introduced during emergencies when there exist various other competing priorities for the government to consider.

Already existing national standards: Governments may not be able to consider international standards if they have their own standards and protocols to adhere to.

Approaches: Sphere focal points and aid agencies may be unable to generate the government's interest in Sphere due to lack of a targeted approach and materials. The lack of unity and inability to advocate the use of Sphere Standards within the humanitarian sector contributes.

Materials: Currently, most of the Sphere modules and materials are targeted towards aid workers. Approaching governments requires specific materials.

Accountability mechanisms: The lack of accountability mechanisms such as Complaint Response Mechanism (CRM) for affected communities.

So What Went Right and Why?

A few factors appear to play a conducive role when it comes to Sphere Focal Points working with government agencies:

Unity and cohesiveness: Collective voice proves to be effective when working with government. Greater cohesiveness and coordination amongst the aid agencies led to lesser conflict in the communities, which was appreciated by the government leading to more openness about working with aid agencies on standards.

Accountability: The role of accountability working groups and SFP is critical in constantly keeping the

accountability agenda high on the list of priorities during emergencies. Accountability mechanisms such as Complaint Response Mechanisms (CRMs) is found to increase accountability towards communities as there is a platform for the communities to voice out their grievances in case of poor service delivery or poor quality of items.

Preparedness: SFPs that train government authorities on Sphere Standards before emergencies found it easier to work with the government to implement standards during emergencies. SFPs and aid agencies that carry out advocacy before the emergencies cite successful working relationship with the government.

Lessons Learned

Capacity building prior to emergencies and collective voice from the aid agencies and the communities to advocate standards draw attention and action from government.

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