

the affected population and participating agencies". Disclosure of information (essential for accountability) and cooperation are similarly required for monitoring and evaluation.

Through the Minimum Standards for human resource capacity and training, Sphere acknowledges that effective aid relies on experienced staff who are properly managed and supported by their employers. These standards draw on the *People in Aid Code of Best Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel*, currently being implemented by a number of British and Irish agencies, and appended in the Sphere binder (see box 8.3). The *People in Aid* code complements Sphere by making explicit the link between staff and programme effectiveness. Support and development for staff often come as after-thoughts. Sphere was no exception: initially, only one of the sectors allocated a full standard to human-resource issues. Making concessions on staff management compromises programmes, and the challenge for Sphere will be to ensure that care for staff infuses all aspects of future implementation.

Agencies are under pressure to account for how resources are managed, and how their interventions impact on the political and physical environment. Some are concerned that 'do no harm' principles are not explicitly addressed in the Minimum Standards. Although this terminology is not used, Sphere does seek to minimize negative impacts of aid. Responsibility should be allocated where it belongs: agencies have a duty to minimize "any such adverse effects of our interventions." But it is often the failure of "warring parties to respect the purpose of humanitarian interventions that [may] bring unintended advantage to one or more of the warring parties".

To minimize negative effects of aid on the physical environment, Sphere suggests taking proactive steps from the planning stage onwards, and advocates a 'smart' approach to aid based on good stewardship of resources and transparent systems of management. The most valuable resource – not only for donors and agencies supplying it but also for combatants – is food aid. Sensitivity over this has warranted two food-aid standards to insist that food and funds "are managed, tracked and accounted for using a transparent and auditable system"; and to ensure that "agencies have the necessary organizational and technical capacity to manage the procurement, receipt, transport, storage and distribution of food commodities efficiently and effectively."

The implication is that if agencies can't do this properly, they shouldn't get involved. Critics could argue that agencies won't respond to food-crisis situations for fear of failing to meet such standards. But the spirit of this standard implies a collective responsibility – all agencies involved in logistics must function efficiently and effectively both individually and as a whole.

Collective responsibility will need to encompass Southern NGOs working in disaster response. Such organizations may be disadvantaged because they lack the capacity to implement the Minimum Standards. Sphere's participating agencies see resource problems as an issue for Northern and Southern NGOs alike. During the second phase, the International Federation will be working with the Iranian Red Crescent and the Red Cross societies of Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala to pilot Sphere in the field.

Accountability – problems and ideas

Sphere sets agencies standards not just of performance but accountability as well. Systems only partially exist, so agencies face two challenges: to ensure the Minimum Standards are known and used, and simultaneously, to develop ways of accounting to all their stakeholders.

Pressure to get on with implementing standards in the field should not prevent agencies from proactively promoting their accountability to all stakeholders. Sphere member agencies know that accountability to local partners and beneficiaries needs improving. NGOs are values-driven organizations, strong on the rhetoric of participation and people-centred

development, but when it comes to accountability these values are all too often a one-way street. Agencies expect their partners in the South to account to them, rather than the other way round. Unlike market-oriented businesses, agencies are wary of 'consumer' feedback, feeling more threatened by donor displeasure than dissatisfied local populations.

There is a danger of 'signing up' to codes or standards at executive level without taking them right into the organization. A study analysing the grasp of humanitarian principles by staff in the 15 agencies of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee found very little usage or practical awareness of the *Code of Conduct* (see box 8.5), which all these agencies had signed. Staff from the participating agencies agreed that better individual and institutional awareness of humanitarian principles was required, and that leadership was needed to ensure that these were 'internalized' by agencies

Sphere offers agencies the chance to find new, more effective ways of working which incorporate principles of accountability. The buy-in and collaborative approach of the first year got the project off to a good start. The implementation of the second phase uses the same kind of approach. The plan is to pilot the implementation of the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards "as a way of gaining more detailed knowledge of the common problems and opportunities" faced by agencies as they start practical application. This is accompanied by a programme of training and dissemination.

Some ideas from Sphere member agencies for Phase II are as follows:

- Caritas is planning an information and educational campaign about the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards, followed by the incorporation of the standards into their *Emergency Manual*.
- The International Federation will allocate a staff member to get the Sphere standards into training, manuals and operating procedures. International staff will be trained to pass on the standards to Red Cross/Red Crescent societies. It also plans to put the Sphere standards before its General Assembly and ask all National Societies to endorse their use. In November 1999, the International Federation expects to present Sphere to the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent attended by all 175 states party to the Geneva Conventions.
- For LWF, internal training and ongoing monitoring will ensure the standards 'become a posture of our work'
- For Oxfam, Sphere will be integrated into programmes and advocacy, starting with the South Asia region.

As well as developing training around the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards, some agencies will look at ways of improving organizational learning. These may include:

- adopting a 'learning-process approach' to management and evaluation;
- investing in staff management and support by following the principles of the *People in Aid Code of Best Practice*;
- establishing outlets for staff to voice concerns and ideas for policy improvement;
- learning from other organizations and developing networks for the exchange of information;
- exchanging staff evaluators; and
- incorporating the affected populations in evaluation processes.

The onus for linking Sphere's principles and standards to the reality on the ground will fall on programme staff and their partner organizations. Workshops to explore problem-solving and ethical decision-making could help, focusing on a particular country or area of complexity. Such workshops would provide a creative learning environment away from work pressures and could offer a means of developing best practice through exchanging experience and

views. And key aspects of IHL and human rights conventions relevant to the situations under discussion could be identified.

The outcome of such proactive learning activities could be documented and shared with other agencies, trainers, evaluators and academics, contributing to a cycle of experience-based learning that aims for continuous improvement. The inter-agency group ALNAP (Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Assistance – see box 8.4) will continue to be an invaluable forum, and it will be important to make good use of existing information networks, the internet and e-mail lists to develop and exchange knowledge.

The big question remains: How will donors, supporters, staff and end-users of humanitarian services know that agencies are meeting Minimum Standards? Will agencies monitor themselves and each other? Who will call them to account?

Phase II of the Sphere Project is exploring and suggest complaint-handling mechanisms. Current preference is for self-assessment and peer pressure. One member of the Sphere Project management committee suggests agencies adopting the Minimum Standards need to build "a culture of cooperative support...we should stay committed to trying to watch and help each other do the best work we can."

Both InterAction and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation require member agencies to self-certify with reference to ethical standards. But will 'accounting to ourselves

Box 8.3 People in Aid: from piloting to policing

In 1997, 11 UK agencies started piloting the *People in Aid Code of Best Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel*. And while addressing the issue of compliance, they found that implementation and monitoring go hand-in-hand.

Getting started wasn't easy, but a year later agencies had begun to realize what they needed to do to apply the code in their organizations. Progress included.

- real commitment to the code from chief executives and senior managers – not just signatures on a dotted line;
- responsibility for the pilot process entrusted to a senior manager;
- support to that manager through a cross-organizational steering group to offer advice. In one case, this includes a director of marketing to help with internal communication about the code;
- consultation with field staff to find out what issues are important to them; and
- participation in workshops organized by People in Aid.

The project's completion date of March 2000 gave the agencies a target to work towards. But how monitor compliance? And why? Agencies needed a monitoring mechanism to meet managerial and ethical performance

objectives. And it needed to tell people inside and outside the agency what they had achieved and have them believe it. They identified three different verification models:

Model 1: Code implementation monitored internally. Monitoring not verified or certified externally (e.g., *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response*).

Model 2: Code monitored internally. Monitoring verified externally. No certification (e.g., parts of the fair trade sector).

Model 3: Code monitored internally. Monitoring verified and certified externally (e.g., UK Investors in People award).

The second model was chosen, and the methodology of social auditing seemed closest to what was needed. People in Aid pilot agencies agreed to monitor their activities and achievements, and in March 1999 produced an internal report. They will use its findings to help determine next year's activities, since one of the principles of social auditing, like 'total quality management', is constant improvement. In 2000, a new report will be externally verified by social auditors and published. Disclosure with communication is another principle of social auditing, so the report will be made accessible to staff and other stakeholders, including donors and partner organizations.

and our donors' be enough? In recent years, NGOs have been concerned to find ways of widening their accountability. Sphere could tap into the experience of agencies implementing the *People in Aid Code of Best Practice*. The *Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice* produced by the Commonwealth Foundation may provide another precedent. Sphere will also need to clarify its relationship with the Ombudsman initiative for humanitarian assistance.

Making it everybody's business

For the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards to be used to greatest effect, they must become everybody's business within agencies and at all levels of the humanitarian

Box 8.4 Building consensus and 'best practice'

ALNAP was established during 1997 in response to the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. Its objective is to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance programmes by providing a forum for the identification and dissemination of best practice and the building of consensus on common approaches. It comprises of two membership levels (full and observer members), a steering committee and a secretariat, the latter based at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London.

There are 40 full members and around 120 observer members representing bilateral donor organizations and governments, multilateral donors, UN agencies, NGOs and their umbrella organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and selected academics and consultants. An explicit commitment to maintain a 'balance' among full members between the principal types of organization which comprise the international humanitarian system ensures no one type dominates. Members are encouraged to go beyond perceived individual agency interests in their discussions. Continuity and good personal relationships between full members are encouraged through regular meetings.

The steering committee is composed of eight regularly-rotated full members with two representatives from each of the four principal types of organization listed above. The steering committee's current chair is the representative of MSF (Holland).

Funding is provided principally by four bilateral donor organizations (the UK Department for International Development, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Swedish International Development Agency and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs), complemented by smaller contributions from three UN agencies (UN Children's Fund, WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization), MSF (Holland), the International Federation and the British Red Cross.

ALNAP's activities are determined by the steering committee. Currently they include:

- Reports database of humanitarian assistance evaluations to share among members and others. Access to confidential reports is restricted to full members, but key sections of over 100 documents are available online in fully searchable format (<http://nt1.ids.ac.uk/alnap/alnap.htm>)
- Synthesis studies of humanitarian assistance evaluations on particular sectors or themes (e.g., peace-building activities).
- Two-day meetings twice a year when full members discuss ways to improve accountability within the international humanitarian system. Detailed reports on these discussions are provided to all members.
- 'Small' studies by the secretariat on particular issues to promote understanding and discussions at the twice-yearly meetings
- Development of research ideas, up to the proposal stage, on key issues in the accountability field, so that members and their organizations could carry research forward.
- Dissemination of information on accountability issues within the international humanitarian system through a monthly update e-mailed to all members.

To keep the number at less than 40, full membership is fixed and can only be altered with the approval of the steering committee and the full members. However, anyone with e-mail access is welcome to become an observer member of ALNAP provided they can demonstrate an interest in accountability and performance issues and have a commitment to humanitarian action. They will receive the records of meetings, be able to search the open-access section of the reports database and receive monthly updates and those papers and synthesis studies which have been approved for wider dissemination by the full members.

For further information, contact the ALNAP secretariat at the ODI, London (j.borton@odi.org.uk) or visit <http://www.oneworld.org/odi/alnap.htm>

system. This means giving all staff the opportunity to understand the humanitarian principles embodied in the charter. It means learning from existing experience and piloting how to meet the Minimum Standards in a way that ensures the dignity of people affected by disasters. It means incorporating Sphere into policies and developing accountability-friendly management systems. And it means continuing to work together to resolve differences and build on strengths.

The key messages of the Sphere Project must become part of the language and culture of humanitarian agencies, donors and policy-makers. The real value of this document is in giving agencies a common platform, based on a consensus for rights-based humanitarian assistance, from which to lobby in support of disaster-affected people. It provides the basis from which to push for more resources and changes to system-wide problems. Some even argue that Sphere could help define a 'humanitarian zone' extending beyond natural disaster and war into places where people's lives fall below Minimum Standards, because of the economic forces which plunge so many into poverty and constant struggle for survival.

The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards won't solve these problems, but they make a start in defining the task ahead. With energy and imagination, agencies have a unique opportunity to right past wrongs and continue to improve the lives of people ruined by natural and man-made disasters.

Box 8.5 Code of Conduct: sponsors and signatories

The agencies sponsoring the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response* are.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

International Committee of the Red Cross

Caritas International

Catholic Relief Services

International Save the Children Alliance

Lutheran World Federation

Oxfam

World Council of Churches

As at March 1999, the following humanitarian organizations support the *Code of Conduct* and are endeavouring to incorporate its principles into their work

Argentina	Fundación Evangélica "El Buen Pastor"
Australia	CARE Australia Pax Christi Australia
Austria	Austrian Relief Programme (ARP) Association for Afro-Asian Affairs
Bangladesh	Youth Approach for Development and Cooperation (YADC)
Belgium	Agora - Vitrine du Monde Centre de Formation des Cadres du Développement (C.I.F.C.D.) Handicap International ICA - ZAGREB (Institute of Cultural Affairs International) Médecins sans Frontières (International) Oxfam
Benin	Conseil des Activités Éducatives du Bénin
Canada	Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Canadian Feed the Children Family to Family Oxfam
Congo, DR of	Humanitas, Corps de Sauvetage Oxfam
Côte d'Ivoire	ADRA
Croatia	ADEH International Pax Christi (Germany)
Denmark	ADRA Dan Church Aid Danish Refugee Council Save the Children
Djibouti	Caritas

Dominica	Brisin Agencies, Ltd. Dominica Christian Council Society of St Vincent de Paul
Ethiopia	Selam Children's Village
Finland	Save the Children
France	ADRA Benoit Frankel Estate Enfants du Monde Enfants Réfugiés du Monde Handicap International Médecins du Monde
Germany	ADRA Deutsche Welthungerhilfe Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V. TERRA TECH
Greece	Institute of International Social Affairs
Guinea	Commission Africaine des Promoteurs de la Santé, et des Droits de l'Homme (CAPSDH)
Haiti	Star of Hope International
Hong Kong	Oxfam
India	ADRA Armbiha Charitable Trust ASHA (Action for Social & Human Acme) Centre for Research on Ecology, Environmental Education, Training and Education (CREATE) Federation of Interfaith Orphanage and Allied Educational Relief Technical Training Institutions Global Forum for NGOs for Disaster Reduction Institute for Youth and Disaster Preparedness Joint Assistance Centre Mahila Udyamita Vikas Kalya Evan Siksha Sanstha Tear Fund India Committee on Relief and Rehabilitation Service (TFICORRS)
Ireland	Concern Worldwide Express Aid International GOAL Trocaire
Italy	Associazione Amici dei Bambini Centro Internazionale di Cooperazione allo Sviluppo C.I.C.S. Comitato Collaborazione Medica (CCM) Comitato di Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP) International College for Health Cooperation in Developing Countries (CUAMM)

	Movimondo Reggio Terzo Mondo (R.T.M.) Volontari Italiani Solidarietà Paesi Emergenti (V.I.S.P.E.)	Switzerland	Association for the Children of Mozambique (ASEM) Commission Internationale Catholique pour les Migrations Food for the Hungry International Foundation AMURT Interaid International MEDAIR RedR International World Vision International
Japan	Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA)		
Laos	ADRA		
Lebanon	Disaster Control Centre		
Luxembourg	Amicale Rwanda-Luxembourg	Thailand	ADRA
Myanmar	ADRA	United Kingdom	Action Against Hunger Actionaid ADRA, Trans-Europe CAFOD Children in Crisis Children's Aid Direct Christian Aid Christian Children's Fund of Great Britain Christian Outreach Community Aid Abroad European Mental Health Trust Feed the Children FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance Europe Foundation International Care and Relief (ICR) Helpage International Help the Aged Hope and Homes for Children Human Appeal International Islamic Relief ITACoR International Association for Conflict Resolution International Extension College Marie Stopes International Medical Emergency Relief International (MERLIN) Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) RedR Save the Children Fund Tear Fund The Ockenden Venture The Salvation Army UK Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific War on Want World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
Netherlands	Cantus Nederland Disaster Relief Agency Dorcas Aid International Dutch Interchurch Aid Memisa Medicus Mundi Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB) Tear Fund Terre des Hommes ZOA Refugee Care		
New Zealand	Oxfam Tear Fund		
Norway	Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers Norwegian Refugee Council		
Pakistan	Caritas		
Philippines	ADRA Star of Hope Philippines Inc.		
Portugal	Instituto Portugues de Medicina Preventiva (I.P.M.P.)		
Russia	ADRA, Euro-Asia Division		
Sierra Leone	Association for International Development and Services (AID-SL)		
Somalia	Caritas		
Spain	Intermón Radioaficionados Sin Fronteras		
Sri Lanka	ADRA Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies The Family Rehabilitation		
Swaziland	Save the Children Fund		
Sweden	African Medical Association in Scandinavia (AMAS) International Aid Sweden PMU Interlife Qandil Project SAMS (Scandinavian African Mission Sweden) Sangha Societas Work of Charity Star of Hope International Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SWEFOR)/Kristna Fredsrorelsen Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief (SOIR)	United States of America	American Refugee Committee International Medical Corps International Rescue Committee Lutheran World Relief MAP International Operation USA Oxfam Truck Aid International Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
		Zambia	PIMPRO International NGO for Relief and Development

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Web sites

AccountAbility: <http://www.accountability.org>

Canadian Council of International Cooperation: <http://www.web.net/ccic-ccc>

InterAction: <http://www.interaction.org>

International Federation: <http://www.ifrc.org>

New Economics Foundation (for Monitoring and Verification Working Group): <http://www.neweconomics.org>

Sphere Project: <http://www.sphereproject.org>