

An introduction to the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP)

HAP is the humanitarian sector’s first international self-regulatory body. It is made up of over 85 humanitarian and development agencies ranging from International federations such as Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision, to National NGO’s such as COAST Bangladesh, OFADEC Senegal and Sungi Development Foundation Pakistan. Our mission is to make humanitarian action accountable to the people we serve, as well as upholding the rights and dignity of affected populations. We define accountability as ‘the responsible use of power’. Founded in 2003, the HAP Secretariat is based in Geneva and our members operate in over 70 countries worldwide.

HAP is part of the wider quality and accountability movement and has recently started a collaboration with People In Aid and the Sphere Project, in an effort to make standards more coherent. This is called the Joint Standards Initiative, www.jointstandards.org

2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management

The HAP Standard helps humanitarian organisations to design, implement and improve high quality and accountable programmes. The 2010 edition of the Standard was developed through an extensive review process with over 1,900 crisis-affected people, aid workers and donor representatives. Within the HAP Standard 2010, **6 Benchmarks** define key aspects of accountability to affected populations, as follows:

1. Establishing and delivering on commitments	the organisation sets out the commitments that it will be held accountable for, and how they will be delivered
2. Staff competency	the organisation ensures that staff have competencies that enable them to meet the organisations commitments
3. Sharing information	the organisation ensures that the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders have access to timely, relevant and clear information about the organisation and its activities
4. Participation	the organisation listens to the people it aims to assist, incorporating their views and analysis in the programme decisions
5. Handling complaints	the organisation enables the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders to raise complaints and receive a response through an effective, accessible and safe process
6. Learning & continual improvement	the organisation learns from experience to continually improve its performance

Services to HAP members and the wider humanitarian community

- **Baseline audit** - to assess agencies current accountability practices against the HAP Standard.
- **Certification** – through external verification of agencies accountability practices against the Standard
- **Peer support and Capacity Building** to members e.g. providing training in accountability, complaints and response mechanisms and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- **Sharing good practice** and key messages through the HAP website, publications and workshops
- **Complaints handling** – offering a collective complaints mechanism with expert investigators
- **Advocacy** – together shaping the global accountability agenda & championing the voice of beneficiaries
- **Field deployment** – providing on-the-ground support to members on accountability

An introduction to the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) – August 2012

Over the last 20 years the humanitarian sector has become increasingly professionalised, with the development of a variety of standards and accountability mechanisms to ensure high quality humanitarian assistance. In recent years there has been a proliferation of such initiatives, which has in turn led to confusion, lack of awareness and inconsistent application of standards amongst field workers and others.

HAP International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project have therefore decided to seek greater coherence for field workers and humanitarian agencies through a process that will consider the convergence of our Standards, which in turn will improve humanitarian action to the people we assist. This pioneering collaborative effort to transform the quality & accountability system is called the Joint Standards Initiative. The key components of the Joint Standards Initiative are:

- **JSI Steering Group**

The Steering Group is responsible for the overall process, ensuring communication between its different elements and integration of the outputs as well as forging an agreement to be approved by the respective governing Boards in 2013. They will also be addressing the practical implications of any recommended changes, such as; co-habitation, governing Boards, standards, certification, organisational change etc. The Steering Group is composed of; the Chairs of the HAP/People In Aid/Sphere Boards and the respective Project Manager/Executive Directors. Chairing of the Group is on a 6 month rotating basis. The Steering Group has been meeting since Autumn 2011 and has jointly authored the JSI proposal.

- **Consultation with Stakeholders**

A major consultation will take place over the next 6 months, with a broad range of stakeholders, to confirm our hypothesis that there is a proliferation of standards and to solicit views and ideas on what a new joint standard might look like and whether there is support for it. The variety of expert views will feed into the Working Group deliberations. The consultation will actively include; beneficiaries, agencies in the Global South, aid workers, member organisations, those who have contributed to the Standards, UN agencies, companion standards, donors and funders, academics and others. Methods to be used will include surveys, individual interviews, focus group discussions and desk research, as well a series of conferences in the global South and Europe. Consultation and inclusion of Southern stakeholders will be maximised.

- **Working Group on Standards and Organisations**

The focus of the Working Group is to examine the standards themselves and the challenges and opportunities offered to the 3 initiatives in any re-alignment of the standards. The findings from its work will be considered at a 'Humanitarian Standards Forum' scheduled for late Spring 2013 in Switzerland. The Working Group is comprised of board members HAP, People In Aid and Sphere, senior humanitarian specialists from a range of agencies and networks including SCHR, as well as representatives from the UN and donors and an independent. Working with external organisational development specialists the group will also consider the wide range of options for the configuration of a joint standard and organisation.

- **www.JointStandards.org**

The new website (www.JointStandards.org) was launched in early April. The site provides access to the key standards in over 15 languages, as well as the opportunity to search for resources across the HAP, People In Aid and Sphere websites. This is a major step forward in bringing about greater coherence amongst standards and strengthening aid workers' ability to put these standards into practice around the world.

For more information about the Joint Standards Initiative please visit www.jointstandards.org or contact Robert Schofield, JSI Coordinator at rschofield@jointstandards.org or phone +44 (0)207 733 7900 x7212