

HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management

**Adopted by HAP on
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Humanitarian Accountability Partnership-International

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The HAP 2007 Standard
in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management

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Foreword

After more than six years of dedicated research and extensive consultation, involving so many disaster survivors, aid workers, supporters and specialists that it is impossible to acknowledge them all individually, here at last is the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management*.

Above all else, I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all those people who have contributed their time, energy and knowledge to this important project, and to congratulate them on their wonderful achievement.

The essential advice distilled from the vast reservoir of wisdom and experience that fed this process can be summed up in these words; keep it simple, affordable and effective. Above all, remember that quality management is not a new religion. It is just a practical means through which continual improvements can be made in the accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian work.

Now, all humanitarian organisations can demonstrate their commitment to this vital goal through achieving compliance with the HAP 2007 Standard and by promoting its adoption by their humanitarian partners and other actors. As a consequence, the wellbeing and dignity of disaster survivors will be enhanced. Surely, nothing more important could be said in commending this Standard to the humanitarian community.

With the finalisation of the HAP 2007 Standard, we can now launch the HAP certification scheme, providing the opportunity for all committed agencies to achieve due recognition for their humanitarian quality management systems, irrespective of agency size and place of origin, and whether they implement directly or work with partners.

I invite all to participate in this exciting development.

Denis Caillaux
Chair HAP-International
Secretary-General Care International

Geneva
5 January 2007

1. Introduction

1.1 From Principles to a Standard

Humanitarian agencies exercise significant financial, technical and logistical power in their mission to save lives and reduce suffering. In contrast, disaster survivors have no formal control and often little influence over emergency relief agencies, making it difficult for the people affected by disasters to hold these aid agencies to account. In 2003 the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) was launched to promote accountability to disaster survivors and to acknowledge those agencies that comply with the HAP *Principles of Accountability*. By applying these *Principles*, an agency makes itself accountable to disaster survivors for the quality of its humanitarian work.

The HAP Principles of Accountability

- 1. Commitment to humanitarian standards and rights**
 - Members state their commitment to respect and foster humanitarian standards and the rights of beneficiaries
- 2. Setting standards and building capacity**
 - Members set a framework of accountability to their stakeholders*
 - Members set and periodically review their standards and performance indicators, and revise them if necessary
 - Members provide appropriate training in the use and implementation of standards
- 3. Communication**
 - Members inform, and consult with, stakeholders, particularly beneficiaries and staff, about the standards adopted, programmes to be undertaken and mechanisms available for addressing concerns
- 4. Participation in programmes**
 - Members involve beneficiaries in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and report to them on progress, subject only to serious operational constraints
- 5. Monitoring and reporting on compliance**
 - Members involve beneficiaries and staff when they monitor and revise standards
 - Members regularly monitor and evaluate compliance with standards, using robust processes
 - Members report at least annually to stakeholders, including beneficiaries, on compliance with standards. Reporting may take a variety of forms
- 6. Addressing complaints**
 - Members enable beneficiaries and staff to report complaints and seek redress safely
- 7. Implementing Partners**
 - Members are committed to the implementation of these principles if and when working through implementation partners

* Framework of accountability includes standards, quality standards, principles, policies, guidelines, training and other capacity-building work, etc. The framework must include measurable performance indicators. Standards may be internal to the organisation or they may be collective, e.g. Sphere or People in Aid

However, the *Principles of Accountability* did not include performance benchmarks or verifiable compliance indicators. Nor were the “*humanitarian standards*” and “*rights of beneficiaries*” referred to in *Principle 1* made explicit. As a consequence, the *Principles of Accountability* did not provide a sufficient basis to enable a consistent and coherent approach to compliance monitoring and validation of an agency’s humanitarian quality management system. It has therefore been necessary to develop the HAP *Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management*.

Like HAP’s *Principles of Accountability*, the HAP 2007 *Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* has been developed through extensive consultation and field tests. It is based

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upon a simple but effective humanitarian quality management system that may be applied by all humanitarian agencies. It is rooted in a set of humanitarian principles that drive and shape the humanitarian work of its adherents and by which they voluntarily elect to be held to account. As the HAP 2007 Standard represents a solemn contract to be accountable to people affected by disasters not just now but also in the future, these values are presented in the HAP *Humanitarian Accountability Covenant*¹.

1.2 Putting Principles into Practice

The contexts in which humanitarian action takes place are complex, difficult and sometimes hostile. More often than not, the human and financial resources at the disposal of the humanitarian community are inadequate for the task. In practice, humanitarian organisations frequently face hard choices between bad and worse options. Their aspirations to uphold the highest standards of humanitarian action cannot always be realised due to constraints beyond their control. However, the essence of humanitarianism is about acting upon the moral obligation to express solidarity with those living in distress and suffering, even in situations when an ideal response is impossible. For example, a compassionate embrace of an earthquake victim by a neighbour has the same moral validity in humanitarian terms as a major international relief effort run by "humanitarian professionals". On many occasions the best possible humanitarian action may be incomplete but still worthwhile.

However, when a HAP-certified agency is unable to achieve full compliance with the *Principles of Accountability*, an explanation is required. The *Humanitarian Accountability Covenant* is a practical tool designed to provide guidance for humanitarian agencies facing tough choices. It draws upon, but is not identical to Jean Pictet's classic formulation of humanitarian principles. Each principle is categorised by its relative importance, beginning with the primary principles of humanity and impartiality, followed by the secondary principles of informed consent, duty of care and witness; and concluding with the tertiary principles of independence, transparency, neutrality and complementarity.

In certain circumstances, an agency may find that the immediate consequence of complying with one principle may render it incapable of fulfilling another. For example, the publication of a relief distribution plan may place intended beneficiaries and staff in great danger, justifying in that particular case the application of a non-disclosure policy. In cases of this kind, a HAP-certified agency must be able to explain that it chooses to operate in breach of one or more of the principles as an unavoidable condition for being able to comply with a higher-level principle in those circumstances. By so doing, the agency will have demonstrated that it acted in good faith and thus in accordance with the *HAP 2007 Standard* in that particular situation.

The *Humanitarian Accountability Covenant* also requires HAP-certified agencies to declare any additional interests or policies that may have a significant bearing upon the welfare and safety of disaster survivors, intended beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

¹ "Covenant" is used here to denote a binding commitment.

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1.3 Qualifying norms for certification

Certification under the *HAP 2007 Standard* is open to organisations meeting the qualifying norms described below.

HAP Certification Qualifying Norms

1. Committed to provide humanitarian assistance on an impartial basis
2. Formally declared as a not-for-profit organisation in the country or countries where it is legally registered and where it conducts humanitarian work
3. Complies with the requirements for financial accountability under the law in the country or countries where it is legally registered and where it conducts humanitarian work
4. Makes a publicly available statement of its humanitarian accountability framework

1.4 Key definitions

As the *HAP 2007 Standard* contains many references to *accountability* and *quality*, these terms and the related concepts of a *humanitarian accountability framework*, and a *humanitarian quality management system* are defined below.

Key Definitions

Accountability

Accountability is the means by which power is used responsibly. Humanitarian accountability involves taking account of, and accounting to disaster survivors

Humanitarian Accountability Framework

A humanitarian accountability framework is a set of definitions, procedures, and standards that specify how an agency will ensure accountability to its stakeholders. It includes a statement of commitments, a baseline analysis of compliance, and an implementation policy, strategy or plan. Commitments may include external standards, codes, principles, and guidelines, in addition to internal values, mandate, principles, charter and guidelines. For HAP certified agencies, this will include the *HAP Principles of Accountability* and the *HAP Humanitarian Covenant*

Quality

Quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that makes it fit for the purpose of satisfying the stated or implied needs of the consumer or the intended beneficiary. Quality can be measured in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, outcome and impact

Quality Management System

A quality management system is a set of coordinated processes undertaken to continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation in meeting the expectations of its customers. It comprises a documented quality policy, quality objectives, quality manual, and other documents needed to ensure the effective integration and implementation of the organisation's quality management processes

Humanitarian Quality Management System

A humanitarian quality management system is a designated set of processes that enable continual improvement in an agency's performance in meeting the essential needs, and respecting the dignity, of disaster survivors

2. The Humanitarian Accountability Covenant

2.1 Preamble:

Recognising that the essence of humanitarian accountability is to respect the needs, concerns, capacities and disposition of those we seek to assist, and to be answerable for our actions and decisions to interested parties, especially disaster survivors;

Respecting international humanitarian law, international refugee law, human rights law and other relevant international treaties and national laws;

Reaffirming the primary duty of states to protect and assist people in times of armed conflict and calamity;

Acknowledging the duty of care regarding the well-being of intended beneficiaries incumbent upon all those engaging in humanitarian action;

Asserting the right of all in need to receive humanitarian assistance and protection on the basis of their informed consent;

Noting that operational constraints beyond our control can adversely affect our performance,

Agencies certified as compliant with the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* commit to being accountable for their actions and decisions in so far as these affect their humanitarian work, and in accordance with the principles for humanitarian action, additional declared interests and quality management benchmarks set out below.

2.2 Principles for humanitarian action

Agencies seeking to comply with the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* first commit themselves to accounting for their humanitarian work in relation to the general *Principles for Humanitarian Action*.

Principles for Humanitarian Action

Primary principles

- **Humanity:** upholding the right of all persons to receive and give assistance.
- **Impartiality:** providing humanitarian assistance in proportion to need and with respect to urgency, without discrimination based upon gender, age, race, impairment, ethnicity and nationality or by political, religious, cultural or organisational affiliation.

Secondary principles

- **Informed Consent:** ensuring that the intended beneficiaries, or their representatives, understand and agree with the proposed humanitarian action and its implications.
- **Duty of care:** ensuring that humanitarian assistance meets or exceeds recognised minimum standards pertaining to the wellbeing of the intended beneficiaries.
- **Witness:** reporting on policies or practices that affect the wellbeing of disaster survivors.

Tertiary principles

- **Transparency:** ensuring that all relevant information is communicated to intended beneficiaries or their representatives, and other specified parties.
- **Independence:** acting under the authority of the governing body of the agency and in pursuit of the agency's mandate.
- **Neutrality:** refraining from giving material or political support to parties to an armed conflict.
- **Complementarity:** operating as a responsible member of the humanitarian assistance community.

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2.3 Declaration of additional interests

Organisations that comply with the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* have declared additional affiliations, interests, values and policies where these may have a direct bearing upon the well-being of disaster survivors and intended beneficiaries and the interests of specified stakeholders. These might include, but not be limited to:

- Gender policy
- Age related policy
- Child Protection policy
- Environmental policy
- Physical or mental impairment policy
- Conflict prevention and/or peace-building policy
- HIV/AIDs policy
- Technical specialisation
- Religious or political affiliations
- Conflicts of interests policy

2.4 Humanitarian Quality Management Benchmarks

Organisations that comply with the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* can demonstrate that they meet specified performance benchmarks for:

1. Humanitarian quality management
2. Transparency
3. Beneficiary participation
4. Staff competencies
5. Complaints handling
6. Continual improvement

Under each benchmark, the *Standard* defines requirements that must be met by the agency, with suggested means for verification of each.

Though not yet the subject of detailed requirements and performance indicators, organisations that comply with the *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* will also pay due attention to:

7. Ensuring coordination and collaboration with other humanitarian actors
8. Committing to ethical fund-raising practices
9. Undertaking supply chain management which considers local capacities and resources

2.5 Working with humanitarian partners

Aid agencies deliver humanitarian value in two different ways. Operationally, implementing projects directly through staff or volunteers; and non-operationally, providing financial, material or technical support to a partner that implements projects directly through staff or volunteers. Some agencies combine both approaches. The *HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management* applies to both operational and non-operational modes of humanitarian work.

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- **Humanitarian Partnership defined**

A partnership is a relationship of mutual respect between two autonomous organisations that is founded upon a common purpose with defined expectations and responsibilities. Partnerships can be established with or without formal contractual agreements. Partners can be small community based organisations or large national or international institutions. A humanitarian partnership is one in which two or more bodies agree to combine their resources to provide essential goods or services for disaster survivors.

- **Partnership in practice**

The diversity of humanitarian actors and the varied forms of humanitarian partnership demand flexibility in setting compliance norms for humanitarian partners. In some circumstances the best available humanitarian partners may not meet all technical standards of good practice, or may be unwilling or unable to comply with the certified agency's humanitarian accountability framework. In such cases, a certified agency will use the *Principles of Humanitarian Action* to justify a decision whether to support a partially compliant humanitarian actor. For example, a certified agency might support a humanitarian partner that is unable or unwilling to comply with a tertiary humanitarian principle, provided that the partner is especially well placed to deliver humanitarian assistance that complies with the primary and secondary humanitarian principles.

- **Quality Partnerships**

Quality partnerships are based upon trust and mutual respect. A partnership is undermined when one party tries to impose conditions upon the behaviour or activities of the other. Thus HAP certification neither requires certified status from, nor confers certified status upon, the agency's humanitarian partners. Agencies committed to the HAP Standard may damage the quality of their humanitarian partnerships if they seek to impose the HAP benchmarks upon a partner's management practices. However, good partnerships also entail mutual transparency and a commitment by both parties to the principle of continual improvement. Thus, HAP certified agencies shall at a minimum:

- explain their accountability and quality management obligations as HAP Standard bearers to their humanitarian partners;
- seek ways and means to improve the quality of the partnership with respect to the *Principles of Accountability*, and the *Principles for Humanitarian Action*.

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3. Benchmarks for the HAP 2007 Standard

Benchmark 1:

The agency shall establish a humanitarian quality management system

Benchmark 2:

The agency shall make the following information publicly available to intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff and other specified stakeholders: (a) organisational background; (b) humanitarian accountability framework; (c) humanitarian plan; (d) progress reports; and (e) complaints handling procedures

Benchmark 3:

The agency shall enable beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in programme decisions and seek their informed consent

Benchmark 4:

The agency shall determine the competencies, attitudes and development needs of staff required to implement its humanitarian quality management system

Benchmark 5:

The agency shall establish and implement complaints-handling procedures that are effective, accessible and safe for intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff, humanitarian partners and other specified bodies

Benchmark 6:

The agency shall establish a process of continual improvement for its humanitarian accountability framework and humanitarian quality management system

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Benchmark One

The agency shall establish a humanitarian quality management system

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
1.1	The agency shall document its humanitarian accountability framework referring to all relevant internal and external accountability and quality standards, codes, guidelines, and principles committed to by the agency	1	Review copy of documented humanitarian accountability framework and cross-reference with all relevant agency commitments including the agency's non-disclosure policy.
		2	Verify that the document is made publicly accessible throughout the agency and to its humanitarian partners
		3	Review agency's strategy to support humanitarian partners in developing their capacity to comply with the Principles of Accountability and Principles for humanitarian action.
1.2	The agency shall demonstrate that its humanitarian quality management system enables implementation of its humanitarian accountability framework	1	Confirm existence of and review implementation procedures for the humanitarian quality management system
		2	Interview humanitarian partners to confirm awareness of agency's humanitarian accountability framework

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Benchmark Two

The agency shall make the following information publicly available to intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff and other specified stakeholders: (a) organisational background, (b) humanitarian accountability framework, (c) humanitarian plan, (d) progress reports, and (e) complaints handling procedures

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
2.1	The agency shall ensure that information is presented in languages, formats and media that are accessible and comprehensible for beneficiaries and specified stakeholders <i>See Definitions box below</i>	1	Review how the languages, formats and media have been determined
		2	Review documentation provided on organisational background, humanitarian accountability framework, humanitarian plan and financial summary, progress reports and complaints-handling procedures
		3	Review guidelines for information dissemination
		4	Review information availability and accessibility
		5	Compare languages used by intended beneficiaries, local staff and specified stakeholders with that used in documents provided
		6	Interview beneficiaries to verify information availability
2.2	The agency shall inform disaster-affected communities about beneficiary selection criteria and deliverables as agreed with their representatives	1	Demonstrate that intended beneficiaries have been informed about selection criteria and entitlements whether through minutes of meetings, letters of agreement, information boards or other verifiable means
		2	Interview beneficiary representatives, beneficiaries and agency personnel
2.3	The agency shall include its name and contact details in all publicly available information	1	Review contact details at appropriate and publicly-accessible sites
2.4	The agency shall make available information about the relevant parts of its structure, including staff roles and responsibilities	1	Review availability and accessibility of information provided

Definitions:

Humanitarian Plan: To include overall goal and objectives (outputs / expected results), time frame and linked financial summary.

Progress Reports: To include progress as measured against the humanitarian plan and financial summary. Reports to be made available at agreed intervals.

Benchmark Three

The agency shall enable beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in programme decisions and seek their informed consent

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
3.1	The agency shall specify the processes it uses to identify intended beneficiaries and their representatives with specific reference to gender, age, disability and other identifiable vulnerabilities	1	Review mechanism used to identify and disaggregate intended beneficiaries
		2	Review processes used to enable participation
		3	Interview staff about the processes for enabling participation
3.2	The agency shall enable intended beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	1	Demonstrate how its analysis of capacity has influenced implementation
		2	Review the appointment process of beneficiary representatives
		3	Review actual beneficiary input and impact on project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
		4	Review the process used for establishing beneficiary criteria
		5	Review records of meetings held with beneficiary representatives

Benchmark Four

The agency shall determine the competencies, attitudes and development needs of staff required to implement its humanitarian quality management system

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
4.1	The agency shall maintain a statement of the competencies (knowledge, skills and behaviours) and attitudes required from its staff	1	Review job descriptions, recruitment files and vacancy notices
		2	Interview agency staff responsible for recruitment, assignment and training
4.2	The agency shall ensure that staff are aware of the humanitarian accountability framework and humanitarian quality management system, its relevance and importance, and understand their responsibilities in its implementation	1	Review induction and briefing procedures
		2	Interview staff to check awareness
4.3	The agency shall implement a system to review staff performance and competencies, including their knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes	1	Review the performance management system
		2	Review performance appraisal documents and other formal approaches
		3	Review follow up activities
		4	Interview staff to check the impact of appraisal and performance management
4.4	The agency shall enable continual staff development for more effective implementation of the humanitarian quality management system	1	Review staff training records
		2	Review other staff development approaches
		3	Review agency support for the continual improvement of its humanitarian partners

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Benchmark Five

The agency shall establish and implement complaints-handling procedures that are effective, accessible and safe for intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff, humanitarian partners and other specified bodies

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
5.1	The agency shall ask intended beneficiaries and the host community about appropriate ways to handle complaints	1	Demonstrate that findings from consultations have been incorporated into complaints-handling procedures
5.2	The agency shall establish and document complaints-handling procedures which clearly state: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the right of beneficiaries and other specified stakeholders to file a complaint • the purpose, parameters and limitations of the procedure • the procedure for submitting complaints • the steps taken in processing complaints • confidentiality and non-retaliation policy for complainants • the process for safe referral of complaints that the agency is not equipped to handle • the right to receive a response 	1	Review the documented procedures
		2	Review samples of complaints to verify that complainants have been able to understand and use the procedure
		3	Review budget, contracts and support provided to humanitarian partners to implement this requirement
		4	Interview field staff, affected community members and/or intended beneficiaries about their perceptions and the adequacy of the procedures
5.3	The agency shall ensure that intended beneficiaries, affected communities and its staff understand the complaints-handling procedures	1	Review strategy and activities for raising awareness among these groups of their right to file a complaint and the procedures to use
		2	Review documents about the complaints-handling procedures made available to intended beneficiaries
		3	Interview staff, affected community members and/or intended beneficiaries to verify awareness of and adequacy of the procedures and confidence in its integrity
5.4	The agency shall verify that all complaints received are handled according to the stated procedures	1	Review a sample of both pending and processed complaints, to check the integrity of the system
		2	Review reports on the integrity of the complaints-handling process
5.5	The agency shall establish and implement an effective and safe complaints handling mechanism for its staff, consistent with the requirements set out in 5.2	1	Review the procedure and samples of complaints made
		2	Interview staff to verify awareness of procedure and confidence in its integrity

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Benchmark Six

The agency shall establish a process of continual improvement for its humanitarian accountability framework and humanitarian quality management system

No.	Requirement	No	Means of Verification
6.1	The agency shall specify the processes used for continual improvement of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the agency's humanitarian accountability framework • the agency's humanitarian quality management system, inclusive of all HAP benchmarks 	1	Review continual improvement process document/system
		2	Note the dates when it was created and last updated
		3	Dissemination: note if the latest version is accessible at all levels within the agency
		4	Review meeting agendas and minutes to note discussions held and decisions taken to improve processes
		5	Demonstrate how lessons learned impact current processes
		6	Review feedback from governing bodies
		7	Review internal and external audits and evaluations pertinent to the agency and how evaluation recommendations are acted upon and learning is incorporated
6.2	The agency shall together with its humanitarian partners monitor and evaluate the agreed means to improve the quality of the partnership with respect to the Principles of Accountability, and the Principles for Humanitarian Action	1	Review improvement plans (agreed actions, strategies for learning) for partners, noting date of drafting
		2	Review monitoring and evaluation reports and note impact on improvement plan
		3	Review partner contracts and note inclusion of relevant contractual support and expectations of both parties