

Notes from the meeting of the Standard Review Steering Committee

Geneva, 4 May 2009

Steering Committee:

1. David Bainbridge (Tearfund)
2. Esther Majawayo (Independent)
3. Jan Pieter Lingen (INTOSAI)
4. Maria Thorin (SIDA)
5. Marie-Luise Ahlendorf (TI)
6. Michelle Brown (Save the Children UK)
7. Nicholas Morris (Independent)
8. Niels Bentzen (Danish Refugee Council)
9. Pauline Wilson (Independent)
10. Steve Darvill (OECD)
11. Yeshey Pelzom (Independent)

From the HAP Secretariat:

1. Monica Blagescu, Policy Services Coordinator
2. Sheryl Haw, Chief Auditor
3. Coleen Heemskerk, Complaints Handling Trainer
4. Jamie Munn, Research & Communications Manager
5. Lyla Rogan, Organisational Development Advisor
6. Katharina Samara, Regulatory Services Director
7. Nicholas Stockton, Executive Director

Apologies: Ivone Atar Adaha – Independent

Observer: Mamadou Ndiaye (OFADEC)

1. Main objectives:

- For participants to become acquainted with each other and to build an understanding of each other's background, views, concerns and expectations in relation to the HAP Standard, Certification scheme and the review process;
- To familiarise participants with relevant aspects of HAP;
- To discuss the aims, key areas for consideration and critical factors in the review process; role and responsibilities of the Steering Committee; and its working modalities;
- To review proposed approaches that satisfy the critical factors highlighted in the Terms of Reference of the review process.

2. Welcome

Nicholas Stockton welcomed Steering Committee members, provided an overview of the 2007 Standard development process and highlighted three opportunities in the review process:

- Making financial accountability more explicit in the Standard
- Explore options to make the HAP Standard more explicitly applicable to multi-mandate agencies
- Strengthening the Standard with regards to prevention and investigation of exploitation and abuse of communities by aid workers

Monica highlighted the following: the agenda for the day, the main areas and critical factors in the [Terms of Reference](#) for the review, the Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee, and the package of documents for review circulated prior to the meeting.

Main discussion points

- Differences and similarities with other quality and accountability initiatives, the need for collaborative approaches, including joint communication. The Secretariat highlighted recent collaboration between HAP and People In Aid (the only other external compliance verification system), including joint assessments where possible; and ongoing efforts to align the Sphere and HAP review processes; building on recent progress made through the joint deployment in Myanmar.
- Donors will be looking for more of a joined-up approach between quality and accountability initiatives. With findings from the HAP external evaluation informing both the Standard review and the HAP strategic planning process, it is advisable that the evaluation provides an accurate overview of HAP's efforts to work in collaboration, particularly with Sphere and People In Aid.

3. Participants' Introduction: Participants shared their experiences and relevant background with each other. The following concerns and expectations in relation to the review process were shared and discussed by Committee members.

Concerns to be addressed

1. How this process links with plans of other quality and accountability initiatives
2. « sticking » points from the 2007 Standard development process
3. Methods of assessing the impact of the HAP Standard
4. Wider consideration on the "attractiveness" of the Standard
5. Understanding factors that affect agencies' choices to engage in the review process, utilise the Standard and achieve certification; (peer pressure, pressure from donors, etc)
6. Depersonalise the review process
7. Awareness that reaching broad consensus may go against some strong yet minority voices
8. HAP members' shared responsibility to engage in the review process to build ownership of the Standard
9. Language accessibility in communicating the Standard and certification process

Expectations

1. Applicability of the Standard to multi-mandated agencies
2. As a group, to understand and acknowledge the work of other quality and accountability initiatives
3. Maintain a robust but sufficiently broad Standard
4. Feasibility at the field level (the Standard fits with the actual needs at programme site)
5. To address the question of quality assurance for partners of certified agencies (including when these are bilateral agencies or the UN)
6. Clarify the Auditor Guidelines in relation to the Principles of Humanitarian Action
7. Produce other materials to communicate and promote the Standard and the certification process
8. Facilitate the collection and dissemination of success stories and case studies on the experience of using the HAP Standard
9. Operating norms established for the Steering Committee during this meeting
10. Criteria for deciding what changes will be included in the final draft to be submitted to the Board

Main discussion points

- Questions were asked on why HAP certification is not a requirement for members and on the slower than anticipated rate of certification;
- In relation to research: consider HAP's contribution versus attribution;
- If the Standard becomes "more simple" and more easily attainable, there is a risk of compromising the Standard and certification scheme. The Standard shouldn't be just "good enough" or the "gold standard" but a reflection of what is possible so as to drive meaningful improvement.
- Donors play a role in influencing and providing incentives for improvements in quality and accountability demonstrated through certification;
- The need to use approaches that are attractive to agencies to seek membership and certification; promotion of "what the Standard can do for you"

4. Criteria / Operating norms

Pauline Wilson divided the participants into 5 groups to propose criteria (on which basis changes in the 2007 Standard will be recommended to the Board) and operating norms for the committee.

Criteria for recommending changes in the 2007 Standard

1. Promotes primary purpose, i.e. accountability to beneficiaries
2. Clear, relevant and realistic for key stakeholders
3. Practicality, i.e. applicable at programme site
4. "Added Value" (coherence with other accountability systems)

5. Credible / evidence based
6. Affordable and measurable
7. Coherent with other aspects of the Standard (completeness and encompassing)

Operating Norms

1. The work of the Steering Committee is to review and improve the HAP 2007 Standard
2. Individual members of the Committee will make sure that they have a clear understanding of relevant issues and options
3. Decisions are based on evidence
4. Right of reply for organisations & donors (validated evidence)
5. Seek to achieve consensus but recognise diversity and reflect this in recommendations and feedback to the Board (Criteria apply to minority views communicated to the Board for reference)
6. Clarify assumptions
7. Decisions based on knowledge of consequences
8. Agreement on definition of key terms (included in the Standard)

5. Principles of Humanitarian Action

There was discussion on the Covenant, Principles of Humanitarian Action in particular. Nicholas Morris was asked to provide a brief overview of the role played by Principles of Humanitarian Action; there are circumstances where humanitarian space does not exist, and it is thus important that agencies are ready to recognise that. In such circumstances, exoneration for non-compliance is possible, but only by reference to a specific situation that imposes a choice between Principles. Exoneration is justified only when a breach of one principle has been necessary as a condition of complying with a higher-level principle.

The Secretariat clarified that this approach offers an auditor a consistent and principled means by which to judge whether non-compliance can be justified.

Main discussion points

- There was discussion on the need to more clearly communicate the role of the Principles of Humanitarian Action in relation to “organisational principles” that agencies declare (benchmark 1).
- On the hierarchy of Principles – what if an agency stated their own order and kept to this transparently (publicly stated and also used by auditors); is the hierarchy still necessary in the Standard?
- For multi-mandate agencies, the term “humanitarian” is often the sticking point, rather than the principles themselves.
 - Agencies may understand the line between emergency and development work but this is likely to be irrelevant to beneficiaries; comments were made that a set of transparent Principles that apply to certified agencies across the board assures beneficiaries.
 - Based on the experience of the Danish Refugee Council, multi-mandated agencies can, and often do, still share a corporate sense of ownership on Principles of Humanitarian Action
 - It was clarified that, currently, the 2007 Standard has been applied to and adopted by development programmes of multi-mandated agencies, large, medium and small NGOs.

Next steps

- The overall view was for the Secretariat to more clearly communicate the need for, and the role of, such principles (not necessarily as the principles). NM ended the discussion by stating that the Review Committee needed to better understand agencies' concerns – if any – in respect to the Covenant and Principles of Humanitarian Action before making any recommendations to change the current text.
- NM ended the discussion by stating that the Review Committee needed to know what agencies currently hold as their concerns – if any – in respect to the Covenant and Principles of Humanitarian Action.
- The review process will explore options to develop a “modular” approach where the benchmarks remain consistent for various sectors (advocacy, development, emergency, etc) and the qualifying norms (and possibly parts of the covenant) differ.

6. Financial Accountability

The [INTOSAI discussion paper](#) was presented, with options for strengthening the financial accountability aspect of the HAP Standard.

Main discussion points

- Potential effect of strengthening the financial accountability aspects of the Standard both **on agencies** (particularly workload for those interested in certification) and **on communities** (i.e. would beneficiaries be better off if agencies had more accountable financial systems?)
- Jan Pieter Lingen clarified that the aim of strengthening financial accountability is to harmonise financial reporting not to burden agencies. The importance of engagement with the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative and directly with bilateral donors was emphasised and options for advocacy approaches discussed.

Next steps:

- Jan Pieter Lingen will report to the Committee on the Good Humanitarian Donorship meeting on Thursday, 7 May 2009.
- Proposals in the discussion paper will be tested in the review process and the Committee will make recommendations to the Board based on the agreed criteria.

7. Working Groups

Based on learning to date on the application of the HAP 2007 Standard and suggestions from preliminary consultation with members on the review process, two working groups were proposed by the Secretariat

1. Handling Complaints of Exploitation and Abuse (facilitated by Coleen Heemskerk) to:
 - a. Strengthen the HAP Standard Benchmark 5
 - b. Develop requirements and means of verification on prevention and investigation of exploitation and abuse particularly of a sexual nature
2. Partnerships: to review the Standard specifically from the perspective of agencies working in partnership and make recommendations for changes to the Standard in this regard.

Considerations:

- Clarify the types of complaints that the working group will focus on.
- Keep the working groups manageable in size, agency-led and facilitated by the HAP Secretariat.

Next steps:

- Terms of Reference will be developed and the Working Groups established with further feedback from the Steering Committee.
- The Secretariat will facilitate the Working Groups and manage them as per agreed workplans, with support and active engagement from member agencies.

8. Other business

Maria Thorin encouraged the Committee to consider their collective and individual role in promoting collaboration and convergence between relevant quality and accountability initiatives; and asked whether a working group on this topic was suitable.

Next steps:

- The Secretariat to circulate relevant materials that map similarities and differences between quality and accountability initiatives as they become available. Based on this information and next developments amongst quality and accountability initiatives (as part of a community of practice joint project), the Committee will reassess the proposal of a working group and feasibility of having this as part of the Standard Review.

Conclusion: Monica thanked participants for their contributions. Although this was the first time for the Committee to meet, many areas were covered, and the general outcome and issues raised will inform the review process. Specific comments are sought on materials circulated prior to the meeting and the Committee will be contacted for further feedback late June-early July.