



CHS Alliance
MAKING AID WORK BETTER FOR PEOPLE

CHS Alliance's response to UK International Development Committee Report: "Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries"

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The CHS Alliance welcomes the UK International Development Committee's report "Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries", which shows that while some progress has been made, the aid sector has to do far more to protect people in vulnerable situations and to ensure the rights and dignity of people affected by crisis.

As the report recognises, **sexual exploitation and abuse is about systemic power imbalances, and the sector needs to do more to transfer meaningful power into the hands of people affected by crisis**. This is the driving force of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). The 150+ members of the CHS Alliance are united in their commitment to ensure that no woman, man, boy or girl suffers from sexual abuse, exploitation or harassment (SEAH) in any form at the hands of aid workers, and that action is taken when these abuses do occur.

Initiatives to Tackle Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

The CHS Alliance is collaborating with our members to drive forward important initiatives to make the sector safer and that directly respond to the findings in the report. These include:

- making sure that reporting mechanisms are designed in collaboration between the aid organisations and the people who will use them
- increasing investigation capacity through expanding our investigation training scheme
- ensure people receiving aid who are victims or survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse have access to support services
- developing whistleblower guidance and continuing to develop our guidance on the use of Non Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)
- addressing the power imbalances in the sector by empowering people affected by crisis to be involved more directly in aid delivery, while recognise that changing this culture will, in some instances, "require a root and branch transformation of the culture at the organization"

These activities and initiatives align with many of the recommendations of the report and we will continue to ramp up our work with our members and partners, which is underpinned by the Core Humanitarian Standard.

There is, of course, still much more that needs to be done. I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight how the CHS has been improved as a tool for preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

The CHS and Protection against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment

As stated in the oral evidence we provided to the Committee in September 2020, the Core Humanitarian Standard sets out the essential elements of principled accountable and high-quality aid in a set of Nine Commitments the sector has made to affected populations. Protection against sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH) is critical to meeting these commitments. How an organisation should prevent and respond to allegations of sexual abuse and harassment is integrated throughout the Nine Commitments.

The Standard has significant commitment from the sector. Humanitarian and development organisations working nationally and internationally are implementing the CHS. Government donors, including the UK, have pledged their support to adhere to the CHS¹.

The report recommends "that the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) is amended at the next opportunity to incorporate adequate measures to protect against sexual exploitation and abuse." {Paragraph 86, page 27}. A CHS revision process will start later this year, with engagement and input from across the sector, and this will provide an opportunity for safeguarding and PSEAH elements to be further addressed.

A substantial amount of work was conducted in 2020 to improve the CHS for PSEAH, which was shared with the committee but not fully referenced in the report. Additional areas now covered include more explicit reference to whistleblowing and child protection. Importantly, these additional requirements were developed ensuring it incorporated all the elements of other sector wide PSEA standards, including the FCDO Enhanced Due Diligence for Safeguarding requirements, the IASC PSEA MOS, UN Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment, proposed indicators for MOPAN, and OECD DAC Recommendation. This work was essential to improve the CHS for PSEAH and ensure that any organisation verifying against the Standard has to show how it meets these PSEAH requirements.

In summary, we have a standard that has buy-in from the sector, takes a broad holistic approach to PSEAH, has clear PSEAH requirements aligned with these other international assessments, and crucially, the way organisations are applying it is based on the views and perceptions of the affected communities. We look forward to continuing our work across the sector, and with people in

¹ Safeguarding Summit, 2018, Donor Commitment, Strategic Shift 3. Point 14
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/902420/donor-commitments2.pdf

vulnerable situations, to further strengthen the CHS as new best practices on how to keep people safe and put victims' and survivors' rights at the centre of response emerge.

CHS Verification and Costs of Audits

Linked to this aspect of our work being assessed by the people themselves, we would like to comment on the costs of certification. The CHS Alliance is the owner of the CHS verification scheme, which offers the option of CHS certification. The report states that these "audits cost a significant amount of money" (para 86, page 27). HQAI - who conducts the CHS third-party audits - is a not-for-profit NGO. The cost of its audits is significantly lower than costs charged by the private sector for audits of similar scale and thoroughness.

The report is rightly emphatic about the need to listen to people receiving our services, and the audits are designed to do this in a meaningful way.

As the CHS is a set of commitments to people affected, it is critical that any verification process of an organisation includes the views of the people receiving the services of that organisation. HQAI's CHS certification audits are thorough processes that include this feedback from the affected communities.

In the oral statement given to the committee, we stressed that the sector needs to apply a level of scrutiny on audits and assessments that focus on how we work with vulnerable people or people in crisis that is comparable to those of annual financial audits. If we are serious about improving accountability in the sector, we need to increase, not decrease, the level of scrutiny, accountability and rigour of safeguarding processes.

The CHS Alliance welcomes the opportunity to have contributed to the important work of the IDC committee. We will continue to support the sector on our collective commitment to tackling sexual exploitation and abuse, through better prevention, protection and support, and pushing for the culture changes needed to put more power in the hands of the people affected by crisis who we serve.

Tanya Wood

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