

# Recapping the Core Humanitarian Standard training: Activities and results

## Introduction

Quality and accountability are increasingly placed on the agenda for many larger development organizations. In order to be able to obtain funding they have to document and be certified on the Core Humanitarian Standard Regime – a demand which is commonly presented by numerous government donor modalities. It is no longer enough for organizations to ensure the technique, structure and deliverables. They equally have to relate to the ‘soft issues’ and values related to development work.

For smaller NGOs it is a cumbersome and expensive process to become certified on the Core Humanitarian Standard Regime which limits their engagement in the process. However, for the four participating NGOs it is not the size of capability which determines the good practice of work and level of accountability. With a mindset focused on improving, the four NGOs have jointly engaged in a process to become stronger at integrating values such as local participation, human rights, an open dialogue, and accountability.

The initiative was motivated by the wish to secure and enhance good practice and knowledge of the underlying values in development work and to develop tools for training and capacity building adapted to the needs by the participating organizations. Working mainly with volunteers the capacity building gave consideration to the level of experience, diverse backgrounds, time resources and economy.

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)<sup>1</sup> was introduced globally in 2004. The guide has become a widely known and used tool for aid workers around the world to minimize the risk of mistakes, abuse, and corruption. The code sets out nine commitments to ensure that aid is delivered on grounds of humanity and in an impartial and neutral way.

Although being a small and volunteer-based organization the lead of the initiative Engineers without Borders Denmark (EWB-DK) is working with a deeply professional approach and therefore find it equally important to work strategically with the values set out in the CHS.

On that basis Engineers without Borders Denmark teamed up with Emergency Architecture & Human Rights (EA-HR) and initiated a training on the CHS. With funds from Civil Society in Development (CISU) they invited two of their partner organizations, SEND Sierra Leone and Think Green Zambia, to a joint training called *Core*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>

*Humanitarian Standard: Upgrading of applicant organizations, interventions, and effects.*

This document recaps the essentials of the Core Humanitarian Standard training and summarizes the key results and experiences from the organizations involved.

## **Process**

The joint training consisted of various workshops, including several sessions with a specific emphasis on a dynamic and action-based learning atmosphere using relevant examples relating to real life situations.

The purpose being to implement the values from the Core Humanitarian Standard on both a management and implementing level in all four organizations: SEND Sierra Leone, Think Green Zambia, Emergency Architecture & Human Rights and Engineers without Borders Denmark.

Moreover, to additionally create a united platform to share knowledge and engage in future activities.

Below is a short introduction to each organization and their key learnings from the training.

## **Engineers without Borders Denmark (EWB-DK)**

Engineers without borders Denmark (EWB-DK) is a technical and humanitarian organisation that has been working to improve the living conditions of people in the developing world since 2001. EWB-DK mainly works with small partner organizations where volunteers can make their technical skills and knowledge available into local projects.

Engineers without Borders Denmark co-hosted the training on the Core Humanitarian Standard and contributed with experiences, cases as well as exchange of knowledge.

As a result of the CHS engagement EWB-DK has incorporated the toolbox developed during the initiative in the due diligence process when initiating partnerships. EWB-DK now rely on a simple and approachable instrument when developing a dialogue about accountability and underlying values in future partnerships. The CHS training moreover resulted in the continued process of addressing the value and importance of volunteers in development projects. EWB-DK plans to use the specific game “Code of Conduct” when introducing new volunteers to the organization.

## **SEND Sierra Leone (SEND-SL)**

Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND) West Africa registered to operate in Sierra Leone in 2002. Since then, the national NGO has undergone significant development and growth. The mission of SEND Sierra Leone is to promote good governance, accountability, basic services and equality for women and men. Their work includes community development, WASH, nutrition, health, agriculture, and women’s empowerment.

SEND-SL was first introduced to the Core Humanitarian Standard in 2017, but the need for a broader engagement in the CHS attracted SEND-SL to participate in the training. Both staff from SEND-SL's Head Office and staff from other field offices participated in sessions to share and explore best practice of humanitarian and development aid and discuss the CHS work going forward.

As a result of the training SEND-SL has set up a reliable **Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM)** across all its project communities. The system secures that both beneficiaries and staff can file a complaint by either sending a letter or making a call. The complaint will be handled by the organizations HR-staff with the option to remain anonymous.

The CRM functions as a platform where the community can ask questions and raise critique. The system further has a database to log all complaints and other activities. The management team in SEND-SL can discuss the addressed issues, think of an appropriate response or action and in general use the Complaints Response Mechanism to make sure that the work is recognized as an advantage for the local communities.

Since the launch in January 2021, SEND-SL has received 8-10 cases showing how responsive complaints systems can increase participation and accountability.

Other results from SEND-SL include:

- Reviewing and improving existing HR-policies.
- Developing a staff Code of Conduct and a Safeguarding Policy.
- Hosting weekly staff meetings with focus on policies and principles.
- Conducting ongoing capacity building for the staff.

## Think Green Zambia (TGZ)

Think Green Zambia (TGZ) was founded in 2013 with its mind set on promoting a Zambian movement towards a climate resilient society. As part of the NGO's work, they conduct trainings, education and actions on tree planting, organic gardening, waste management, upcycling, and water harvesting. Further, they engage civil society actors to raise awareness through advocacy campaigns on climate-related issues.

Throughout the CHS training Think Green Zambia, as a rather small and new NGO, quickly discovered a need for a more structural approach to their work. Not having a professional organizational framework constituted an obstacle to deliver in accordance with the CHS. As a result, the first step for organization naturally became to set up **an Advisory Board** and draft both a **Code of Conduct** and a **Strategy**, which gave the organization a sense of finding its identity.

The Code of Conduct allows Think Green Zambia to hold people accountable when improper behavior or actions are taking place. Furthermore, it has strengthened both the communities' understanding of their role as somebody who are free to complain in any case of misconduct or violation of the Code of Conduct. The volunteers view on their role has likewise been clarified. While some volunteers prior to the CHS training in

some instances represented a behavior in public that did not reflect the values of Think Green Zambia, this is now a rare case.

Other results from Think Green Zambia include:

- Creating an organizational identity with a strategy and Code of Conduct in place.
- Introducing a Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM).
- Planning to communicate the Strategy and Code of Conduct in visible and easily accessible posters and hand-outs.
- Planning to incorporate the CHS and human rights in their educational program to beneficiaries.

## Emergency Architecture & Human Rights (EA-HR)

EA-HR was founded in 2015 and brings together two normally different disciplines: Architecture and buildings with human rights. The organization focus on integrating human rights into the process of creating physical spaces. It has previously worked with homes for refugees in the Middle East, the reconstruction of housing after the Nepal Earthquake in 2015 and latest in Denmark with refugees and vulnerable youths in public housing-areas. Moreover, EA-HR educates several of its partners in sustainable and resilient construction techniques.

Being a small NGO and often working in territories affected by conflict the wish for clear principles and guidelines has been on the agenda for long. The commitment to the Core Humanitarian Standard was thus an obvious choice to give accountability and transparency a central position in the organization.

As a part of the CHS training EA-HR dedicated itself to the first five commitments with a plan to expand to all nine commitments in the future.

EA-HR particularly focused on commitment 4 regarding communication, participation, and feedback noting how difficult it is to make sure to include and secure **participation of the local communities in projects**.

The training stressed the importance of not always pick the most easy and accessible locals for a project but also look to the most marginalized ones. The organization furthermore focused on the value of getting locals on board with plans making the project more sustainable and responsible.

## Concluding remarks

In recent years it has become increasingly evident to introduce a set of guiding principles that constitute a clear way for NGOs to conduct their work with a higher focus on improving the quality, accountability, and effectiveness in projects.

The Core Humanitarian Standard has proved to be a relevant tool. The joint training on the CHS has underlined the potential of growth and success when fostering a more humanitarian-focused way of working.

The involved organizations in the CHS training have found a deeper understanding of the values of accountability making it clear, that the Core Humanitarian Standard is fundamental to any organization engaging in humanitarian, technical and development aid.