How Can and Should Sphere Monitor and Evaluate its Theory of Change?

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1. Introduction

Executive Summary

- Sphere's Theory of Change (ToC) guides the development of a unique monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and strategy, leveraging points from multiple frameworks as Sphere's extensive network necessitates an original framework.
- 15 interviews were conducted from Focal Points, Trainers, Sphere Members, and those working in Government spaces.
- Each section of the ToC has a unique framework for its accurate M&E activities, largely based on the Logical Framework, Outcome-Mapping, Evaluation Change for Social Network and Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Models.
- The M&E frameworks can be implemented using a simple scoring method, on a 5-point scale to evaluate the applicability and success of Sphere's activities in relation to identified long-term objectives, under the "Targeted Change".
- This research provides a blueprint for other network-based organizations wanting to develop their own organization-specific M&E frameworks, bringing in case studies from international examples.

Relevant Background and Guiding Documents

Sphere is a worldwide network of people and organizations committed to accountable and quality humanitarian assistance. It is active in every region of the world thanks to its users, members, focal points, partners, donors, and other champions. It also hosts the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP), a network of standard-setting initiatives and organizations. It supports quality and accountability in humanitarian action by promoting the development and cross-sectoral use of standards. Sphere defines, promotes, and applies humanitarian principles and minimum standards to ensure lifesaving, protective, and accountable response to crises. The knowledge, integration, and application of minimum standards in policy and practice strengthens the capacity, resiliency, and agency of people affected by crises to survive and recover with dignity.[1] Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) will be generally done as compared to these goals.

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[1] "A Global Community Committed to Humanitarian Quality and Accountability.," Sphere, n.d., https://www.spherestandards.org.

Theory of Change

In 2024, Sphere published the **Theory of Change** within four areas showcasing long-term objectives, standards, challenges, and progress on development indicators. The areas include: the **Handbook, Champions Network, Policy and Advocacy, and Strategic Partnerships**.[2]
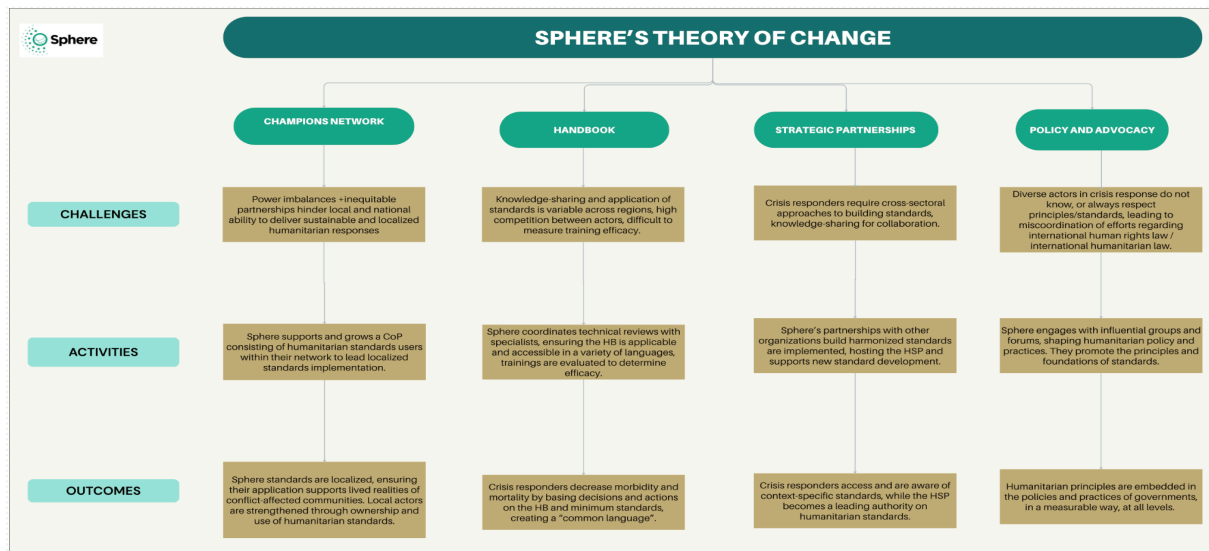
Sphere's ToC focuses on fostering coordinated, accountable, and efficient actions grounded in its principles and standards to reduce negative humanitarian impacts during ongoing or new crises, but also during everyday situations. The Sphere Handbook serves as a foundational tool, providing a "common language" for humanitarian actors. However, inconsistent knowledge and application across regions present difficulties. Sphere addresses this by regularly updating the handbook, translating it into multiple languages, adapting formats for accessibility, and training users to apply it effectively. Through the Champions Network, Sphere strengthens locally led humanitarian responses by supporting members, trainers, and partners to promote and implement standards. It also works to address power imbalances and inequitable partnerships that hinder local leadership. The ToC envisions humanitarian principles embedded in policies and practices at all levels, but this is challenged by varying levels of awareness and respect for these principles. To overcome this, in its Policy and Advocacy activities, Sphere engages with influential groups and forums to shape humanitarian policy and practice, while promoting the minimum standards and principles. As host of the HSP, Sphere collaborates with other standard-setting bodies to harmonize cross-sectoral standards, ensuring equitable, accountable, and efficient humanitarian responses while fostering resource-sharing and learning among actors[3].

The **Sphere Handbook**, first released in 1998, plays a central role as a guiding document for various stakeholders involved in humanitarian response, including the vast majority of aid agencies, practitioners, governments, donors, the military, and the private sector. The Handbook is based on the Humanitarian Charter, protection principles, and Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), forming the basis for appropriate and ethical humanitarian responses. Within the handbook, Sphere identifies four key areas of need: **Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene Promotion (WASH); Food Security and Nutrition; Shelter and Settlement; and Health.**

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[2] "ToC | Sphere," Sphere, 2018, https://www.spherestandards.org/theory-of-change/.
[3] Ibid

The Humanitarian Charter emphasizes the principles of humanity and humanitarian imperative, the right to life with dignity, the right to receive humanitarian assistance with impartiality and non-discrimination, and the right to protection and security. It also establishes Sphere's responsibility to offer standards that guide organizations in protecting civilians and minimizing the risks they face. This is reflected in the **protection principles**:

Enhance safety, dignity, and rights of affected populations while avoiding further harm.

Ensure that people have access to impartial assistance based solely on need.

Support the recovery of those affected by physical or psychological harm, violence, coercion, or deprivation.

Help individuals claim their rights.

The principles are supported by the CHS, as shown in the infographic. These commitments guide stakeholders toward compliance with the protection principles and ensure that humanitarian actions are accountable, effective, and centered on the needs and rights of affected people.[4]

2. Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview of frameworks that will be synthesized when developing an M&E Framework for Sphere, including relevant Sphere documents. Further, case studies of network-based programs will be analyzed, demonstrating their application and learnings for our team.

Sphere's 5-Year Plan and Midterm Review

Four Main Strategic Priorities (2021–2025)

1. **Sphere Standards**: The organization emphasizes promoting awareness, localization, and institutional ownership of its standards. Efforts are directed toward digital accessibility, translations, and user guidance to expand global awareness and usability.

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[4] SPHERE, "The Sphere Handbook," Spherestandards.org, 2018, https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/sphere/#ch001.

2. **Sphere Community and Membership**: A priority for Sphere is to diversify and expand its membership, particularly in the Global South. Sphere aims to improve engagement with focal points, trainers, and donors, thus strengthening institutional ownership of standards.[5]

3. **Humanitarian Standards**: Sphere positions itself as a thought leader and global resource, promoting collaboration within the HSP to ensure quality, consistency, and user-friendly practices in humanitarian standards.

4. **Accountability, Evidence, Impact, and Learning**: Sphere strives to promote accountability through consistent standards application, expand the evidence base, measure impact, and foster continuous learning across its community [6]

Mid-Term Strategic Review Findings

In 2023, Sphere conducted a mid-term review to evaluate its progress. Key achievements include **significant expansion within the global network, with >100,000 subscribers and focal points across 49 countries**. The revised 2018 Sphere Handbook was noteworthy, **following >1,400 consultations with trainers, increased translations, and enhanced accessibility in training materials.**[7]

Major **progresses**:

1. Awareness and Localization: Sphere's efforts to localize standards through regional adaptations were seen as successful. The promotion of digital accessibility and the release of Sphere standards in 40 languages also improved global reach.[8]

2. Institutional Ownership: By embedding standards into institutional practices, Sphere ensured consistent application across different contexts. This was further supported by partnerships with humanitarian organizations and government bodies.[9]

However, the review notes **major challenges** and areas needing improvement:

1. Evidence and Impact Measurement: Although Sphere has been successful in expanding the evidence base, it faces challenges in systematically measuring the impact of its standards on humanitarian outcomes. The organization aims to refine its impact metrics to better capture anecdotal and empirical data.[10]

2. Community Engagement: While Sphere's membership has grown, the review noted the need to further diversify its membership structure to include more local humanitarian actors. This shift would make the organization more representative and inclusive, thereby strengthening its community.[11]

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Sphere. "Sphere's Mid-Term Strategic Review." Https://Www.Spherestandards.Org/, 2023.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

By expanding its global network and promoting localization, Sphere has taken concrete steps to ensure standards are contextually relevant and widely adopted.[12] However, the challenge of systematically demonstrating measured impact remains a critical area for evidencing to (potential) donors. Sphere's focus on increasing inclusivity within its community reflects an understanding that local engagement is essential for the implementation of sustainable standards. Sphere's strategic framework demonstrates a balanced approach between standardization and flexibility, allowing for adaptation across diverse settings. By addressing the challenges identified in the mid-term review, particularly in evidence and community diversification, Sphere can further solidify its role as a leader in humanitarian standards and accountability.

Evaluating Frameworks

This section examines frameworks that Sphere can use to monitor and evaluate its activities. The goal is not to select a single framework but to draw elements from each to create a tailored approach for Sphere, developed further in the Methodology. This section examines how other network-based organizations integrate similar frameworks into their M&E processes, utilizing a results-based approach in our methodology.

A) Logical Framework

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) provides an organized matrix for project design, implementation, and assessment. The Logframe, which USAID initially adopted in the 1960s, divides project components into four levels of hierarchy: the **main goal** (impact), the **specific objectives** (purpose/outcomes), the **tangible deliverables** (outputs), and the **activities** (actions performed to produce outputs).[13] These levels are backed by assumptions pinpointing outside variables essential to success, modes of verification that guarantee data reliability, and indicators tracking progress.[14]

The LFA should ideally be created through a **consultation approach** that includes the beneficiaries as well as the implementing partners. Because of its methodical approach, the Logframe approach works especially well for projects that call for stakeholder accountability, coordination, and standardization. It works best in settings with several stakeholders where precise objectives and quantifiable results are crucial.[15] However, the **rigidity of the structure** may restrict flexibility in creative or dynamic initiatives where conditions and aims may adapt to situations over time. In certain situations, complementary or alternative approaches better meet the needs of the project.

Practical Examples– CHS Alliance and REACH Initiative

The LFA is used by the CHS Alliance to monitor and evaluate compliance with the CHS.[16] These indicators evaluate how well humanitarian operations adhere to the standards, and robust monitoring is ensured by

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Jensen, Greta. "The Logframe Approach." How to Guide, July 2010.
https://resources.peopleinneed.net/documents/37-the-logical-framework-approach-greta-jensen-2010.pdf.

[14] "Logframe Approach - LFA - EXACT External Wiki - EN - EC Public Wiki," n.d.
https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/Logical+Framework+Approach+-+LFA#:~:text=The%20Logical%20Framewo
rk%20Approach%20is,results%20(I.e.%20behavioural%20changes).

[15] Sartorius, Rolf H. "The Logframe Approach to Project Design and Management." Evaluation Practice 12, no. 2 (June 1, 1991):
139–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821409101200204.

[16] "Launching the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework (CHCF) Project." CHS Alliance, n.d.
https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/article/launching-the-core-humanitarian-competency-framework-chcf-project/.

integrating verification methods such as self-assessments and third-party certifications.[17] The LFA fits Sphere's objective of establishing explicit minimum benchmarks within defined indicators. **Verification procedures** could also be advantageous to Sphere, as they would enable monitoring the application of
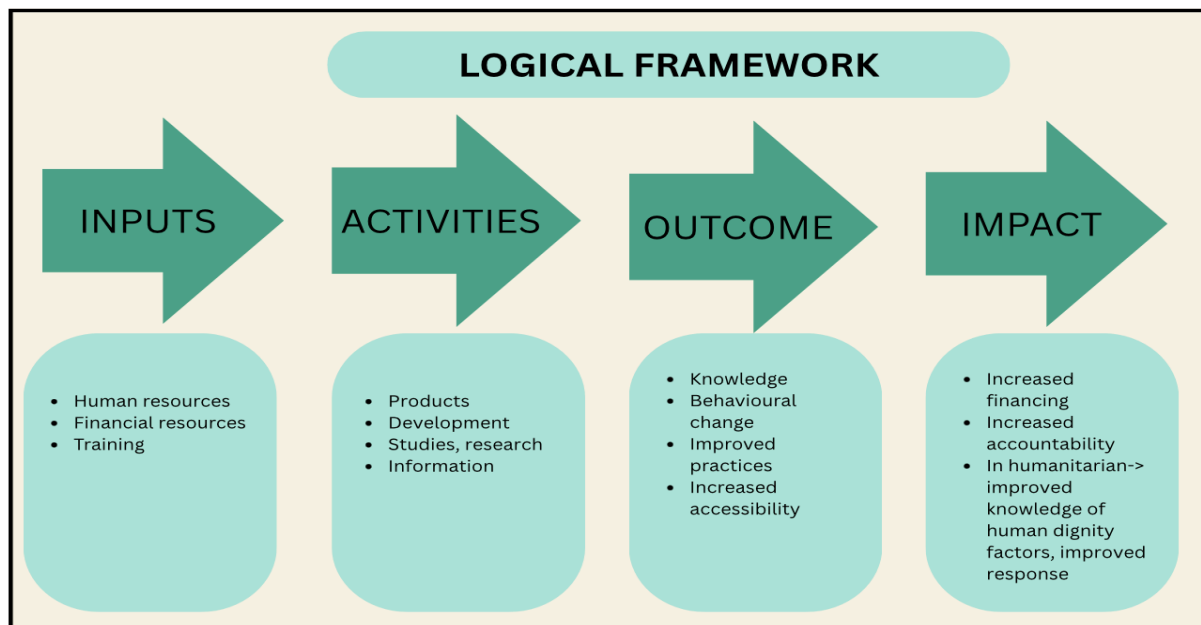
standards throughout its heterogeneous network.[18] However, the inflexibility and **dependence of LFA on conventional indicators** overlook the diverse and situation-specific circumstances inside Sphere's worldwide network, reducing adaptability to deal with new issues in dynamic humanitarian contexts.

The REACH Initiative uses the LFA for M&E, combining **demographic and geographic data** in humanitarian responses to guarantee that interventions are strategically developed to meet situation-specific needs.[19] This strategy parallels Sphere's focus on **contextual relevance** and data-driven decision-making, enabling localization; however, Sphere's decentralized network may face challenges in data collection and processing utilized by REACH. Additionally, REACH's emphasis on quantitative metrics does not account for qualitative elements that are essential to Sphere's purpose, including human dignity and community empowerment.

Logical Framework in the Sphere Context

LFA could be a fundamental tool for Sphere, a network-based organization that advocates for minimum humanitarian standards, to match its ToC with quantifiable results. LFA can improve accountability, especially when it comes to monitoring the adoption and application of Sphere standards among its varied member organizations, by precisely outlining its actions, outputs, and indicators. Additionally, the framework might offer a consistent method for tracking Sphere's **advancement in capacity-building programs** and encouraging the global adoption of its standards.

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[17] Balint. "CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators." CHS Alliance, n.d. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-guidance-notes-and-indicators/.
[18] "How Is the Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework Being Used Around the World?" CHS Alliance, n.d. https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/article/how-is-the-core-humanitarian-competencies-framework-being-used-around-the-world/.
[19] "REACH | Impact," IMPACT Initiatives, December 26, 2018, https://www.impact-initiatives.org/what-we-do/reach/.
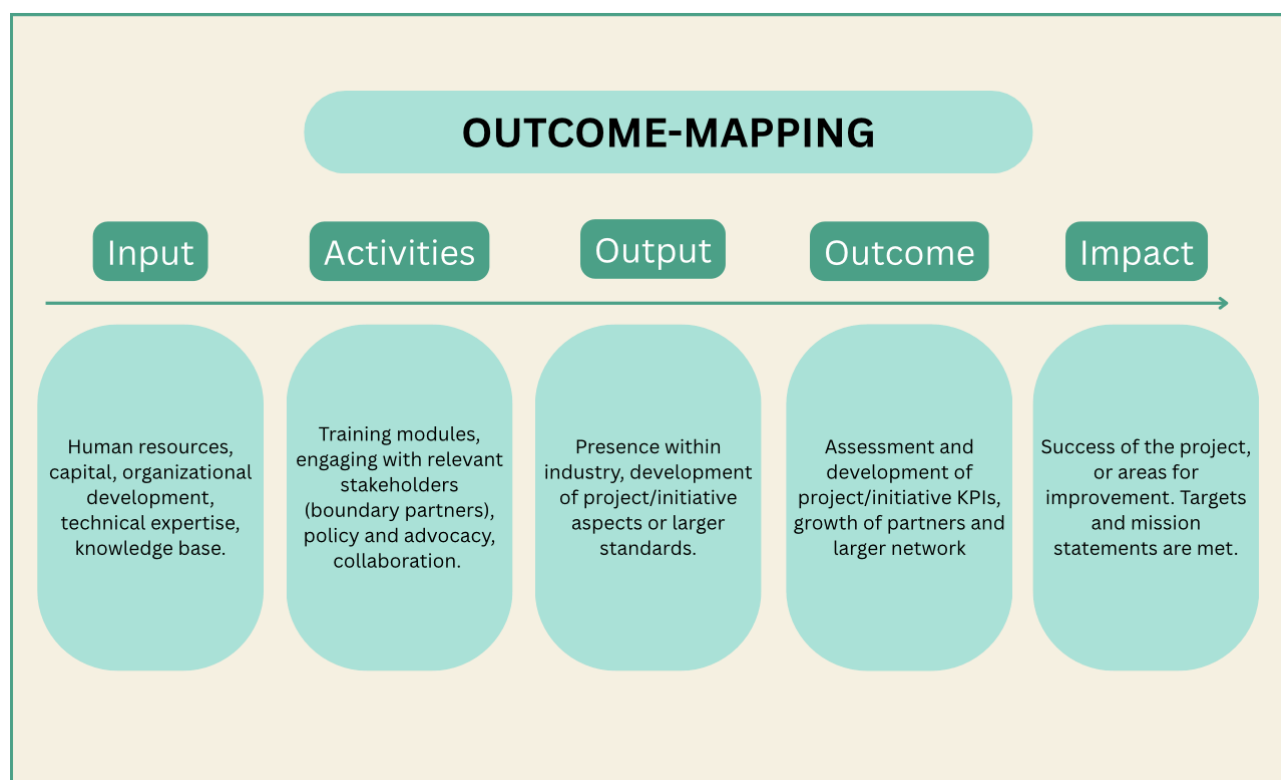
However, in its applicability, due to its rigidity and linear design, LFA might be **limiting** for Sphere. While useful for tracking measurable, quantitative outcomes, the LFA struggles to capture the systemic and qualitative changes that Sphere promotes, such as shifts in organizational practices and collaborative learning. Its structure assumes predictable cause-effect relationships and predefined objectives, which are difficult to maintain in Sphere's complex network. For example, Sphere's focus on influencing policies and standards adoption across diverse contexts relies heavily on non-linear processes and external stakeholder engagement, which are not adequately addressed in the LFA. Other frameworks must be assessed to better accommodate Sphere's mission.

B) Outcome Mapping in Network Organizations

Outcome Mapping (OM) is a multi-sector approach to performing results-based evaluation through a participatory model, identifying progress within a program or initiative's sphere of influence. It is suited for network-based organizations by examining all program priorities, goals, and activities in relation to different stakeholders, known as boundary partners, and targeting outcomes that may be achieved given a set of performance indicators and standards. OM can be implemented to evaluate networks of actors by viewing the development and improved livelihoods of the individual as a layered process. **Outcomes** are defined as the changes in human behavior, groups, relationships, activities, and actions of boundary partners due to resource allocation and monitoring systems. **Boundary partners** are individuals, groups, and organizations with whom the program or initiative interacts frequently.[20] OM offers a methodology for developing planning, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms allowing organizations to create improved resources for learning, documentation, human resources change management, and best reporting practices.[21]

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[20] Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo, *Outcome Mapping Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs* (Ottawa Idrc Books / Les Éditions Du Crdi, 2014): p. 1
[21] Ibid, p. 5.

OUTCOME-MAPPING

Input	Activities	Output	Outcome	Impact
Human resources, capital, organizational development, technical expertise, knowledge base.	Training modules, engaging with relevant stakeholders (boundary partners), policy and advocacy, collaboration.	Presence within industry, development of project/initiative aspects or larger standards.	Assessment and development of project/initiative KPIs, growth of partners and larger network	Success of the project, or areas for improvement. Targets and mission statements are met.

Developing Outcome Mapping Frameworks

Following the framework structure of CARE International and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the sections below will guide our framework development for Sphere. The IDRC recommends that organizations answer four principal questions:

1: Planning and Assessment
- **What** is the vision to which the program wants to contribute?
- **Who** are the boundary partners, and what networks exist?
- **What** activities should be initiated to bring around outcomes?
- **How** will the initiatives contribute to the change process?

2: Research and Preparation
According to the WHO, a **question-based M&E framework** should be developed in conjunction with local actors. For example, the WHO Handbook for Guideline Development on "Women living with HIV as equal partners in research" articulates that performance indicators must be assessed with local governmental authorities against meaningful baseline measures, evaluating their changes in short-term and long-term contexts.[22] Qualitative research undertaken in this local context must be equitable, sustainable, and gender-sensitive to achieve the best outcomes and practices.

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[22] World Health Organization, "9. STAGE FIVE: M&E M&E from Translating Community Research into Global Policy Reform for National Action: A Checklist for Community Engagement to Implement the WHO Consolidated Guideline on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women Living with HIV on JSTOR," *Jstor.org*, 2024, https://doi.org/10.2307/resrep27893.15: p. 21.

3: Development of M&E Frameworks.
This phase will include the compilation of research findings into the M&E Framework for Sphere.

4: Using the M&E Framework for Improved Learning and Knowledge
Sphere can continue to be a leader by **developing training tools and methodological guidelines** for other network-based organizations to build unique M&E frameworks.[23] This can be accomplished by developing workshops on framework development for humanitarian organizations, including the following:

A. Evaluation planning- priorities, issues, questions, designating human resources to conduct M&E, costs, and timeline;
B. Self-assessment for organizational development- performance journals;
C. Representation of the logic, linkages to ToC, and mission statements.

These workshops can be conducted in small group settings by Sphere employees and transformed into reports that may be circulated online to further Sphere's international reach and increase those within the Champions Network and Partnerships. Partner organizations should regularly report back through performance journals to streamline internal policy review and impact. Refer to Sphere's "Standards vs. Targets" activity and (HSP) Learning Management System.

Practical Examples- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) *Care In Community* (CIC) Programme: Learnings for Sphere

The IFRC's CIC programme leverages World Health Organization (WHO) practices and CHS to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". This is accomplished through developing CIC programmes, where Community-based health workers (CBHWs) are trained to implement local healthcare initiatives. The network reach of IFRC's CIC programme includes 192 National Societies (NS) with National Action Plans (NAPs), >170,000 branches in affected communities, with volunteers and paid staff reaching >118 million individuals since 2017.[24]

While IFRC does not explicitly coin their guideline frameworks for M&E as "OM", they provide an indicator table listing key outcomes in local branches of the CIC program. Standards include "year of implementation", "disease prevention, and rehabilitation", and "community mobilization and engagement", similar to standards found in the Handbook. To compile this information on programme outcomes and impact tracking, IFRC collects reports from each NS throughout the project cycle. While CIC is one example of an initiative across IFRC's greater network, it exemplifies the strength of choosing case studies for greater organizational findings. It also suggests that Sphere can improve on reporting frameworks and systems with partners, as researching the HSP yielded 3 examples. It also recommends that NS have **"strong built-in reporting mechanisms"** adapted to local, national, and international measures.

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[23] Earl, Carden, and Smutylo, "*Outcome Mapping*": p. 19.
[24] Monica Singh Pant, "Care in Communities: Guidelines for National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies," ed. Vivienne Seabright, *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2020), https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/IFRC_CIC_Guidelines_EN_20200212_Web.df.

C) Evaluating Networks for Social Change Framework

The Evaluating Network Framework aims to assess whether a network is achieving its intended change or outcome. This approach focuses on network effectiveness to measure impact through three key pillars: network connectivity, network health, and network results.

Network connectivity examines membership, people, and organizations that make up the network, specifically looking at their connections' structure and flow between members. For Sphere, this includes partner organizations, trainers, and specialists who build and maintain relationships with one another, to apply Sphere's standards in humanitarian work.

Network health assesses the resources, infrastructure, and internal systems that sustain the network, and its ability to create a joint value. In Sphere's context, this would relate to the Sphere Handbook and other standard-setting activities, evaluating how partner organizations utilize these resources and the effects on their humanitarian operations.

Three Dimensions of Focus for a Network Evaluation

Pillar	Focus	Example Evaluation Questions	Casebook Examples (evaluation funder)
1) Connectivity	**(a) Membership** *The people or organizations that participate in a network*	• Who participates in the network and what role does each member play? • Who is connected to whom? Who is not connected but should be? • Has the network assembled members with the capacities needed to meet network goals (experience, skills, connections)? • Is membership adjusted to meet changing network needs?	• Reboot *(Jim Joseph Foundation)* • Barr Fellows Program *(Barr Foundation)* • Safe Schools/Healthy Students *(federal government)*
	(b) Structure *How connections between members are structured and what flows through those connections*	• What are the number, quality, and configuration of network ties? • What is flowing through the network — information and other resources? • How efficient are the connections the network makes? • How dependent is the network on a small number of individuals? • Is structure adjusted to meet changing network needs and priorities?	
2) Health	**(a) Resources** *The material resources a network needs to sustain itself (e.g., external funding)*	• Has the network secured needed material resources? • What type and level of resources does the network have? • How diverse and dependable are these resources? • How are members contributing resources to the network? • Is the network adapting its business plan over time?	• Urban Sustainability Directors Network *(multiple funders)* • RE-AMP *(Garfield Foundation)* • KnowHow2Go *(Lumina Foundation)*
	(b) Infrastructure *Internal systems and structures that support the network (e.g., communication, rules and processes)*	• What infrastructure is in place for network coordination and communications? • Are these systems efficient and effective? • What are the network's governance rules and how are they followed? • Do decision-making processes encourage members to contribute and collaborate? • How are the network's internal systems and structures adapting?	
	(c) Advantage *The network's capacity for joint value creation*	• Do all members share a common purpose for the network? • Are members working together to achieve shared goals, including goals that emerge over time? • Are all members contributing to network efforts? • How are members adding value to one another's work? • Are members achieving more together than they could alone?	
3) Results	**(a) Interim Outcomes** *Results achieved as the network works toward its goal or intended impact*	• Are there clear signals of progress/interim outcomes for the network and are they understood and measured by members? • Is the network making progress on interim outcomes that signal progress on the way to longer-term goals or intended impacts?	• MA Regional Networks to End Homelessness *(Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation)* • The Fire Learning Network • International Land Coalition
	(b) Goal or Impacts *The ultimate goal or results the network is after*	• At which level(s) are impacts expected — on individual members, on members' local environments, and/or on members' combined impact on their broader environment? • If the goal is achieved or ultimate impacts observed, can a plausible and defensible case be made that the network contributed to them?	

Network results measure the outcomes and achievements of the network in relation to its goal. For Sphere, this would involve assessing how well the network contributes to improving the quality of humanitarian operations overall.

The Guide for Network Evaluation includes case studies and identifies key questions to evaluate each of the three pillars. For each organization, the guide explains data collection methods, such as interviews and focus groups. These examples provide valuable insights for evaluating Sphere by informing the selection of effective data collection methodologies.[25]

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[25] "Part 1 of a Guide to Network Evaluation Framing Paper: The State of Network Evaluation," accessed November 12, 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/609440c6377a035b5b025596/t/6248b7b47dbc8d157406e64a/1648932789178/NetworkEvalGuidePt1_FramingPaper.pdf.

D) Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model

Training is one of the most frequently conducted activities at Sphere, playing a vital role in promoting the use and adoption of Handbook standards. Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model is used to assess the extent to which training leads to improved outcomes:
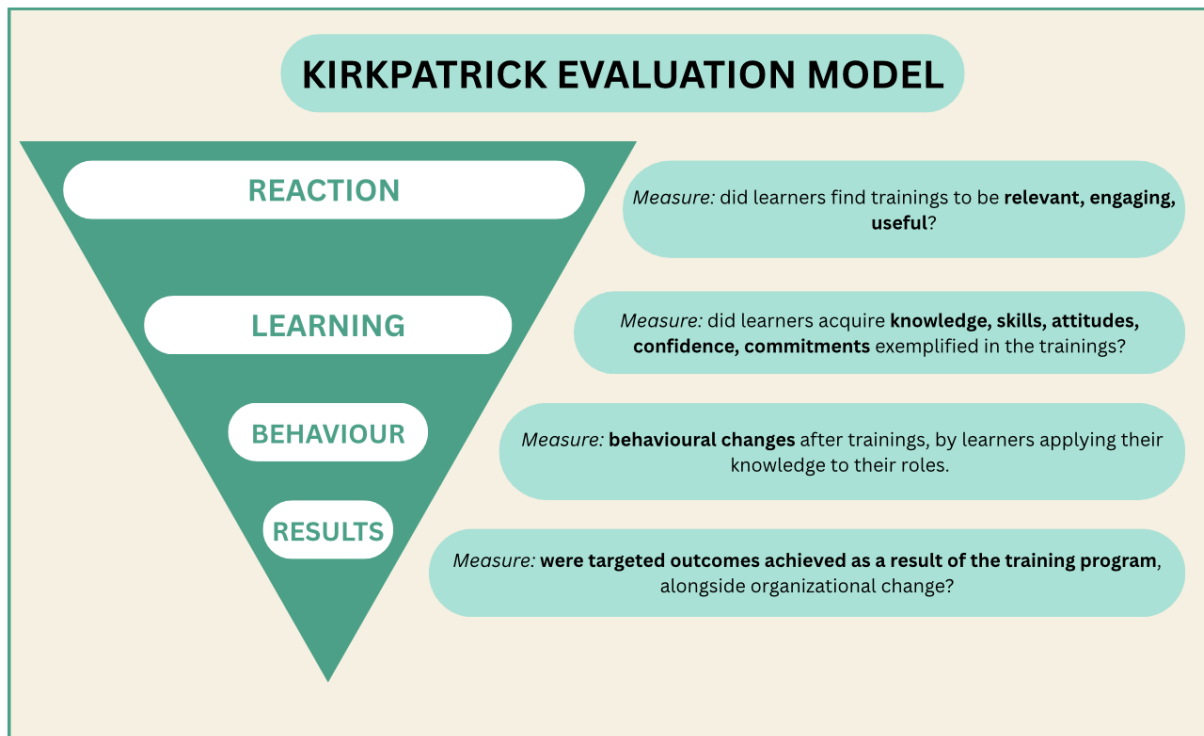
Reaction measures how engaging, relevant, and favorable the training was to participants in relation to their jobs. It is most commonly assessed through a post-training survey, where participants rate their overall experience.

Learning evaluates whether the learners acquired the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence, and commitment to the training. This is evaluated through formal and informal assessments, often comparing pre- and post-training evaluations to gauge knowledge retention and understanding.

Behavior assesses whether participants apply what they learned during the training in their actual work.

Results examine whether the training has led to the expected outcomes. It involves the use of standards in humanitarian operations, ultimately improving conditions on the ground.

By analyzing data at each of these levels, organizations can better understand the connections between them, allowing for adjustments to be made throughout the learning process and ensuring more effective training outcomes.[26]

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[26] Ardent Learning, "What Is the Kirkpatrick Model? Learn the 4 Levels," www.ardentlearning.com (Ardent Learning, February 19, 2020), https://www.ardentlearning.com/blog/what-is-the-kirkpatrick-model.

E) Ladder Framework

The Ladder Framework **assesses** and **categorizes levels of access** to essential services or standards. It visualizes service quality as a series of progressive rungs on a ladder, ranging from the most basic form of access to the highest, safest, and most reliable service levels. Higher rungs represent safely managed services, where access is consistent, clean, and meets standards, while lower rungs indicate limited or unimproved services, such as unreliable or unsafe sources. The lowest rungs represent no service at all. This framework helps organizations track progress in service delivery, identify gaps, and prioritize interventions to move communities up the ladder, ultimately improving service quality and ensuring access to safe and reliable services for all.

EVALUATION CATEGORY	TRAINER-CENTERED	LEARNER-CENTERED
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES	The program objectives were clearly defined. The program objectives were covered by the instructor. The material was the right level of complexity for my backgroud.	I understood the learning objectives. I was able to relate each of the learning objectives to the learning I achieved. I was appropriately challenges by the material.
COURSE MATERIALS	The course materials were well organized. The course materials complemented the course content.	I found the course materials easy to navigate. I felt that the course materials will be essential for my success.
CONTENT RELEVANCE	The material was relevant to my needs.	I will be able to immediately apply what I learned.
FACILITATOR KNOWLEDGE	The facilitator demonstrated a good understanding of the material. The facilitator shared his/her experiences in regards to the content.	My learning was enhanced by the knowledge of the facilitator. My learning was enhanced by the experiences shared by the facilitator.

The Ladder Framework can support Sphere Standards by providing a structured way to assess and track the service delivery level in humanitarian contexts. By categorizing services into different levels, such as safely managed, basic, or unimproved, Sphere can evaluate whether interventions meet the minimum standards and monitor progress over time. The framework identifies service gaps, sets measurable targets, and ensures that humanitarian efforts move communities toward higher, more sustainable levels of service, aligning with Sphere's goal of improving the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian responses[27].

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[27] "WASH in Health Care Facilities 2023 Data Update: Special Focus on Primary Health Care | JMP," Washdata.org, 2023, https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2024-wash-hcf.

F) Results-based approach

A Results-Based Approach to M&E focuses on **tracking the progress and effectiveness** of interventions by measuring specific, predefined outcomes rather than just monitoring activities or outputs. This approach emphasizes the alignment of resources and actions with clear, measurable results that contribute to achieving the overall goals of a program. It involves setting objectives, continuously monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes to determine if desired changes have occurred. Feedback loops and adaptive management are integral parts of this approach, allowing for adjustments based on real-time data to ensure greater impact and accountability.

For Sphere, a Results-Based Approach can enable those implementing the Minimum Standards to monitor and evaluate their activities by **ensuring that interventions meet minimum standards** and achieve specific, measurable outcomes. By setting clear performance indicators within Sphere's standards, this approach can assess whether communities are progressing towards safe water access, improved sanitation, and adequate shelter. Regular monitoring ensures that Sphere's interventions remain focused on achieving lasting results, and by evaluating the outcomes, Sphere can adjust its strategies to enhance the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian responses.[28]

Case Studies for Mixed-Methodology Frameworks in M&E

Joint Monitor Programme (JMP) between UNICEF and WHO in WASH

The JMP, co-led with UNICEF, WHO's primary tool for tracking global WASH progress toward Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 6, emphasizes clean water and sanitation. JMP's framework involves extensive data collection and monitoring, allowing WHO to evaluate the accessibility, quality, and safety of water and sanitation services in different regions. WHO and UNICEF collect data on key metrics, such as the percentage of populations with access to safely managed drinking water or basic sanitation, allowing for assessment of the global reach and effectiveness of WHO standards. The JMP framework also identifies gaps in WASH services, guides future interventions, and supports global health improvements.

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[28] "Results-Based M&E Approach - EvalCommunity," Eval Community, n.d.,
https://www.evalcommunity.com/career-center/results-based-monitoring-and-evaluation-approach/.

SERVICE LEVEL	WATER	SANITATION	HYGIENE	WASTE MANAGEMENT	ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING
BASIC SERVICE	Water is available from an improved source[a] on the premises.	Improved sanitation facilities[b] are usable, with at least one toilet dedicated for staff, at least one sex-separated toilet with menstrual hygiene facilities, and at least one toilet accessible for people with limited mobility.	Functional hand hygiene facilities (with water and soap and/or alcohol-based hand rub) are available at points of care, and within five metres of toilets.	Waste is safely segregated into at least three bins, and sharps and infectious waste are treated and disposed of safely.	Protocols for cleaning are available, and staff with cleaning responsibilities have all received training.
LIMITED SERVICE	An improved water source is available within 500 metres of the premises, but not all requirements for a basic service are met.	At least one improved sanitation facility is available, but not all requirements for a basic service are met.	Functional hand hygiene facilities are available either at points of care or toilets but not both.	There is limited separation and/or treatment and disposal of sharps and infectious waste, but not all requirements for a basic service are met.	There are cleaning protocols and/or at least some staff have received training on cleaning.
NO SERVICE	Water is taken from unprotected dug wells, springs or surface water sources, an improved source that is more than 500 metres from the premises, or there is no water source.	Toilet facilities are unimproved (e.g. pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines, bucket latrines) or there are no toilets.	No functional hand hygiene facilities are available either at points of care or toilets.	There are no separate bins for sharps or infectious waste, and sharps and/or infectious waste are not treated/disposed of.	No cleaning protocols are available and no staff have received training on cleaning.

Multiple framework components measure the impact of WASH activities. For instance, the LogFrame is indirectly present in the structure of the JMP's indicators, as the report tracks outputs (e.g., access to clean water) and links them to broader goals like improved health. The CIIPP model is not directly used, but context (e.g., regional and socio-economic disparities) and inputs (such as financial resources and data sources) are considered in analyzing progress. The ToC is also reflected in how the JMP tracks the pathways from interventions (e.g., building water infrastructure) to outcomes (e.g., reduced waterborne diseases), focusing on assumptions and long-term impacts like improved public health. These are incorporated into a **Monitoring ladder and Results-based Management framework**. As shown below, the ladder categorizes access to water and sanitation into levels, from "no service" to "basic service," providing clear, measurable indicators of progress and the achievement of standards[29].
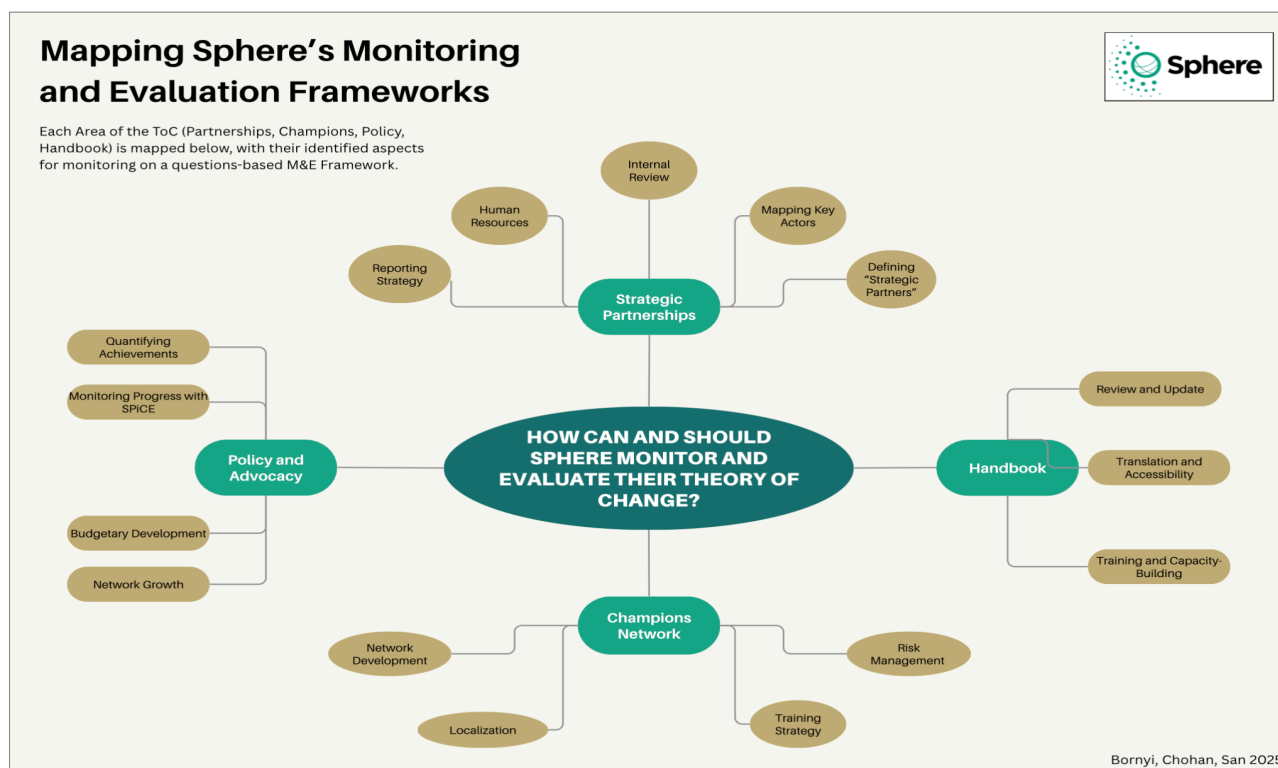
Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013–2019

The Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013–2019 utilizes several key frameworks to assess the effectiveness and impact of the organization's interventions. These included the ToC to **map out the pathways between inputs, activities, and outcomes**, ensuring that Oxfam's strategy was aligned with its goals. **Results-based management** was used to track measurable outcomes, focusing on achieving specific results and assessing the effectiveness of Oxfam's activities. LFA helped structure the evaluation, identifying **key indicators** for tracking progress and aligning outcomes with strategic objectives. While the Kirkpatrick Model was not explicitly mentioned, its principles of evaluating reaction, learning, behavior, and results aligned with Oxfam's focus on knowledge management, learning, and capacity-building initiatives. Together, these frameworks enabled a comprehensive, context-specific evaluation that informed decision-making and improvements for future strategies[30].

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[29] "WASH in Health Care Facilities 2023 Data Update: Special Focus on Primary Health Care | JMP," Washdata.org, 2023, https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2024-wash-hcf.
[30] "Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013 2019," Issuu, June 17, 2013, https://issuu.com/0xfam/docs/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=www.oxfam.org.

3. Methodology

Mapping Sphere's Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Each Area of the ToC (Partnerships, Champions, Policy, Handbook) is mapped below, with their identified aspects for monitoring on a questions-based M&E Framework.

Bornyi, Chohan, San 2025

As part of our methodology, we conducted **15 interviews, including three members from Sphere, six trainers, four focal points, one board member, and one partner from the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP)**. The questions asked during these interviews informed our M&E Framework, particularly regarding the format in which this framework should be developed, and the questions that should be included. It was important to understand the information that various stakeholders possessed and whether they were willing to share it with Sphere. As a network-based organization, measuring the long-term impact with the current information that Sphere collects is challenging. Therefore, it was crucial to explore the possibility of obtaining more external information on long-term impacts during Sphere's implementation of the framework. Additionally, we aimed to determine whether the questions we asked would be useful for future M&E surveys, a consideration evident in both the interviews and the final questions of the M&E framework. Understanding the relevance of these questions was also important for providing a model, should Sphere choose to conduct in-person interviews in the future.

In terms of the different stakeholders that were interviewed, the **Trainer** questions aim to understand how Sphere trainers deliver and adapt training, and if and how they currently measure their effectiveness. The aim is to learn what makes a training successful, what challenges trainers face, and how they evaluate whether trainees are engaging with and applying Sphere standards in practice. By focusing on real experiences, the questions help identify practical ways to track the long-term impact of training, including how local and national actors are strengthened. This will allow Sphere to build an M&E system that is feasible, grounded in the realities of field training, and sensitive to different contexts, especially in light of political or financial changes affecting the humanitarian sector. Trainers' input is essential for designing tools that support, rather than burden, their work. Similarly, the interview questions towards the Sphere focal points aim to build a practical system to track the use and impact of Sphere standards. They explore what Focal Points do to

promote Sphere, what challenges they face, and how standards are adapted locally. The goal is to learn what support and resources focal points receive and what they still need. By collecting this information, Sphere can improve how it supports focal points and ensure that the M&E system reflects real experiences on the ground, highlighting successful approaches, and encouraging stronger use of Sphere standards worldwide.

The questions aimed at **HSP partners** track the use and impact of their humanitarian standards. The goal is to understand what tools, indicators, and methods are already working across the network, and to see what lessons or best practices Sphere can apply to its own M&E. By looking at how HSP partners gather and use data, Sphere can explore ways to align efforts, reduce duplication, and improve collaboration. This helps Sphere develop a simple, useful M&E framework that fits real needs and works well with others in the humanitarian standards community. At an organisational level, the questions for the **Sphere Board Members** aim to understand how an M&E framework can best support the organization's long-term vision and governance. They focus on identifying key success indicators, benchmarks, and best practices that should shape how Sphere tracks the use and impact of its standards. This ensures that M&E efforts are aligned with the board's priorities, contribute to strategic decision-making, and reflect changes in the humanitarian sector, such as shifts in policy or organizational behavior. Input from board members also helps define what effectiveness means at a global level and ensures that governance, accountability, and that intersectional issues like gender are fully integrated into the monitoring approach.

Finally, the questions asked to **members of Sphere** gather input on how Sphere's impact should be measured and what success looks like in practice. This identifies meaningful outcomes, such as changes in response quality, policies, or behaviors, showing Sphere standards are making a difference. Members' perspectives help Sphere understand how to measure long-term effects, not just short-term outputs, and how to include local knowledge and cultural relevance in the process. The questions also explore what resources or support members would need to carry out their own M&E, and what examples Sphere can learn from. This ensures the framework is useful, inclusive, and built around the real experiences of those who use the standards. For a list of questions asked in our interviews, please refer to the Appendix.

4. MEAL Framework and Research Findings

The following sections present four M&E tables, each focusing on a different aspect of the ToC as illustrated in the graphic above. The application and flexibility of the models for creating a specific framework for Sphere was essential. This is why the comprehensive case studies referenced in the literature review were particularly useful, presenting a rich understanding of why a combination of multiple models is necessary for Sphere.[31]

We effectively utilized the **Outcome Mapping Framework** and **Logframe Approach**[32], incorporating the four steps needed to develop an appropriate framework. The case studies of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) provided insights that reinforced the significance of the selected questions, ensuring robust built-in reporting mechanisms adapted to local, national, and international standards.[33]

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[31] IMPACT Initiatives, "REACH | Impact.
[32] Earl, Carden, and Smutylo, *Outcome Mapping*.
[33] World Health Organization, *Checklist for Community Engagement*, p. 21.

Here, our approach to analyzing the ToC and developing a M&E model for Sphere emphasizes inputs, activities, and outputs, while outcomes and impacts will be discussed later. The inputs consider what Sphere contributes to support the activities, while the activities outline how Sphere implements these actions. The questions related to the activities are informed by the Evaluating Networks for Social Change Framework referenced in the literature.[34] This framework highlights the health and connectivity of the network as Sphere undertakes its activities. Finally, the outputs refer to the immediate results of these activities, focusing on how Sphere effectively executes them to achieve short-term outcomes. All this information should be accessible within Sphere, enabling them to monitor their immediate progress and direction.

Other models were utilized to construct this framework, particularly the **Kirkpatrick model** when assessing training activities. The surveys developed to measure training effectiveness followed a structure similar to that of the Kirkpatrick model.[35] For the sake of complexity, the four levels of understanding—reaction, learning, behavior, and results—were adapted into pre-training and post-training surveys. The questions derived from this model were informed by a significant training session delivered by Sphere during the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW), as detailed in the methodology. The Results-Based approach was integrated to ensure that the questions are specific, with clear, measurable results that can be easily evaluated using the scoring method outlined in Section 5.[36]

The analysis of mid-term review findings proved helpful in identifying the indicators that Sphere can collect, focusing on what we need to measure and inquire about in the four areas of the ToC. Examples include the number of translations of the Handbook, the embedding of standards in various organizations or governments, and the engagement of different stakeholders, among others.[37]

We replaced the outcome and impact columns with a single column titled "Targeted Change." Differentiating between the two was challenging, complicating the interpretation of results. By combining them into one column, we defined the desired effects of the ToC. The insights gathered from interviews were particularly useful in understanding how to best collect information from different stakeholders, enabling us to analyze whether Sphere has achieved the impacts outlined in the ToC. From the interviews, we found that most participants were willing to share their activities and evaluations, which could be valuable for the impact and targeted change aspects that Sphere might not currently address. Interviewees emphasized the importance of keeping the surveys simple, especially since they may be conducted every six months or annually. Thus, we aimed to strike a balance between the simplicity of the questions and the need to gather comprehensive information. Due to the difference between surveys it might be helpful to have a form that contains all the areas in different windows and responders can just answer the questions that are applicable to their role.

A. Sphere Handbook

The questions developed were informed by the findings from the interviews conducted. This process incorporated insights from both the interviews and the post-training surveys designed by one of the trainers. Our findings highlight how focal points and trainers integrate the Handbook's minimum humanitarian standards into their activities. Participants mentioned that Sphere's online information was easy to access. However, while they appreciated that the Handbook is available in multiple languages, some noted that

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[34] Guide to Network Evaluation, Part 1.
[35] Ardent Learning, "What Is the Kirkpatrick Model?"
[36] "Results-Based M&E Approach," *Eval Community*.
[37] Sphere, "Mid-Term Strategic Review."

individuals in local NGOs faced challenges if they did not speak any of those languages. One participant even created a pocket version of the Handbook in their own language, which could be easily referenced for Standards when working in the field, or that could use more straightforward language to aid non-native speakers' understanding.

Updating translations and tracking the impact of these updates is essential, as reflected in the questions measuring "outputs" below. Additionally, the interviews highlighted the need to identify challenges related to Sphere, both locally and in the international context. Recognizing these challenges is crucial for implementing local solutions that ensure standards are applied to the best of our ability, which is also one of the objectives of the questions.

	Input	Activities	Outputs	Targeted Change
1- Review and update of the Handbook	Were the appropriate technical specialists engaged for the Handbook review and update process? How many people were contributing to the review and update of the handbook? How many stakeholder organizations contributed to the review process? Was there a budget allocated for the update and review of the Sphere Handbook? Were the necessary resources (staff, equipment, tools) available to support the update process? Were partners and stakeholders identified and consulted early in the planning process?	Was a structured review process developed and followed? Is there good coordination between Sphere and the specialist? Were the changes made based on evidence and feedback? Were collaborating NGOs, trainers, and technical specialists aligned and committed to the planned activities? Were the staff members properly trained or prepared to carry out the tasks?	Was the Sphere Handbook successfully revised and finalized? Was the updated Handbook validated by relevant stakeholders? Was a final version published and made available to the public?	Involving local and national actors in consultations to reduce power imbalances in standard-setting. Updating content to address context-specific needs. Making the Handbook more usable in different cultural, political, or operational contexts.
2- Translation and Accessibility	Were qualified translators available for language versions of the Handbook? Were qualified accessibility specialists engaged to ensure the	Was the quality of translation and formatting adequate? Was a plan developed to prioritize key languages and accessible formats?	In how many and what languages and formats was the Handbook published? How many copies of each version	Enabling local actors to fully engage with and apply standards without language or format barriers. Promoting equitable access to global

	Handbook was accessible? Was there sufficient funding for translation services and accessible formatting?	Were qualified translators and accessibility specialists engaged? Was the feedback from previous translations incorporated into the updated versions of the Handbook?	(language/format) were distributed or downloaded? Was the Handbook disseminated to underrepresented regions?	humanitarian knowledge.
3- Training and Capacity Building	Were training plans and materials developed or updated? If yes, was previous feedback taken into account? Were there adequate financial resources to conduct the training sessions and workshops? How many people were involved with the training?	How many people were trained to use the Handbook? Were participants selected based on clear criteria (e.g., roles, geography)?	How many training sessions/workshops were conducted? How many participants were trained (disaggregated by gender, location, etc.)? Do pre and post survey training evaluation (more info below)	Supporting local ownership through capacity building and peer-led training. Growing a community of practice to sustain standards use at country level.

As outlined in the table above, it is highly recommended doing a pre and post training survey.This approach will allow Sphere to assess the impact of their training, particularly when training new participants. The survey below is designed according to Kirkpatrick's model, as discussed in the literature review, specifically evaluating immediate learning in comparison to participants' prior understanding of the Handbook. Additionally, the feedback gathered from these surveys can be used to continuously update and improve training activities.ing activities.

A. Proposed Pre-Training Survey   (Can be found here)

Section 1: Participant Information

1. Name (optional):
2. Organization:
3. Role/Job Title:
4. Country/Region of work:
5. Have you used the Sphere Handbook before? (Yes / No)

Section 2: Knowledge & Experience (Self-assessed) Please rate your knowledge of the following on a scale of 1 (None) to 5 (Excellent):

Topic	1	2	3	4	5
The purpose and structure of the Sphere Handbook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technical standards (e.g., WASH, shelter, health, nutrition)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using Sphere standards in program design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using Sphere to assess quality and accountability	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 3: Confidence & Expectations

6. How confident are you in applying Sphere standards in your work?
☐ Not at all confident
☐ Slightly confident
☐ Somewhat confident
☐ Very confident
☐ Extremely confident

7. What do you hope to gain from this training?
8. Are there any specific challenges you face in using humanitarian standards?

B. Proposed Post-Training Exit Survey (Can be found here)

6. Name (optional):
7. Organization:
8. Role/Job Title:
9. Country/Region of work:

Section 1: Reflection on Learning

1. Please rate your knowledge *after* the training (same scale):

Topic	1	2	3	4	5
The purpose and structure of the Sphere Handbook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technical standards (e.g., WASH, shelter, health, nutrition)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using Sphere standards in program design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using Sphere to assess quality and accountability	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 2: Outcomes

2. How confident are you now in applying Sphere standards in your work?
☐ Not at all confident
☐ Slightly confident
☐ Somewhat confident
☐ Very confident
☐ Extremely confident

3. What were the most valuable aspects of the training for you?
4. Do you plan to apply what you learned? If yes, how?
5. Do you have suggestions to improve this training?

Section 3: Feedback

6. How would you rate the training overall?
☐ Poor
☐ Fair
☐ Good
☐ Very good
☐ Excellent

7. Would you recommend this training to others? (Yes / No)

The survey below should be distributed to assess the changes made by the handbook. The survey questions are designed to gather feedback on how well the handbook is understood, applied, and its impact over time. The responses will provide valuable information for evaluating the outcomes and effectiveness of the handbook in the M&E process. You can also find it here

Short-Term Effects:

1. Understanding and Clarity:
   ○ How clear was the information provided in the handbook?
   ○ Did the handbook help you understand the key concepts and practices better? (Yes/No)
   ○ How useful did you find the examples and guidelines in the handbook?
2. Application:
   ○ Have you been able to apply the information from the handbook in your work? (Yes/No)

- How often do you refer to the handbook in your daily activities? (Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently)
- How confident are you in using the practices outlined in the handbook? (Not confident, Somewhat confident, Very confident)
- Are the Sphere Handbook or materials translated into local languages? If so, how effective has this been?
- In what ways do you modify Sphere standards to fit local humanitarian needs?
3. Support and Guidance:
   - Did the handbook provide enough support for your tasks and decision-making? (Yes/No)
   - What parts of the handbook were most useful to you?

Long-Term Effects:

1. Behavioral Change:
   - Since using the handbook, have you noticed any changes in how you approach your work or projects? (Yes/No)
   - In what ways has the handbook influenced your approach to [specific activity or task]?
2. Effectiveness:
   - Do you believe the handbook has contributed to improving your overall performance? (Yes/No)
   - Has the handbook led to any improvements in the quality of your work or the outcomes of your projects? (Yes/No)
3. Satisfaction:
   - How satisfied are you with the content and structure of the handbook? (Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neutral, Satisfied, Very satisfied)
   - Do you feel the handbook meets the needs of your work? (Yes/No)
4. Suggestions for Improvement:
   - What additional topics or information would you like to see included in future editions of the handbook?
   - How could the handbook be improved to better support your work?

General Feedback:

1. Overall Impact:
   - On a scale of 1 to 5, how impactful has the handbook been in achieving its intended goals?

B. Champions Network Framework

In the interviews conducted at HPNW, we found that the activity of "growing a community of practice" including focal points, trainers, and partner organizations could be improved by greater communication across trainers and focal points, as this was cited by one participant to be a strength. Therefore, achieving localization and community-driven achievement of human dignity can be best measured by following a similar approach taken by the outcome-mapping model; firstly by identifying targeted 'ouputs' and long-term changes, then by working back into internal and organizational changes required to achieve these objectives.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Targeted Change
1- Network Improvement	Has Sphere identified a network of practitioners to best develop their influence?	How does Sphere support the community of practice (humanitarian standards-users, members, focal points, trainers, partners)?	How has the champions network increased in size and visibility in the humanitarian sphere?	Are Sphere standards locally driven, ensuring their application supports sustainable humanitarian outcomes?
2- Localization	Has Sphere identified a network that can effectively lead localisation efforts and disseminate training?	Does the network effectively lead local implementation, advocacy, training, and network-growth initiatives? Are local actors the ones delivering the training, and taking part in them where possible?	Are advocacy, training, and network-growth initiatives occurring regularly to deepen localised ownership of Sphere Standards?	Are local and national actors strengthened through their ownership and use of globally recognised humanitarian standards?
3- Training Strategy	Has Sphere identified a strategy for trainers that can be changed according to local standards?	Are Sphere trainers interacting with individuals living in disaster-affected regions to share relevant information on their minimum	Are people aware of Sphere standards when a humanitarian crisis has emerged?	Is "human dignity" (in broad terms) achieved through localization and understanding of Sphere Standards in crisis-affected populations?

		standards?		
4- Risk Management and Network Growth	Has Sphere identified challenges that may impede a Champions Network development (power imbalances, inequitable partnerships)?	Has there been a plan to overcome these challenges? What steps have been taken to include local actors to combat power imbalances and inequitable partnerships?	Has the Community of Practice (CoP) been connected and set up in regional and local settings? How do these CoPs communicate with each other, and how frequently?	Has Sphere created knowledge-sharing mechanisms and internal practices with other humanitarian networks, increasing the sustainability of the Champions Network?

Collecting feedback for Sphere's Champions Network could be gathered by collecting a brief feedback form, hosted on the Sphere website. This could include questions included on our MEAL framework, in order to best inform internal practices and developments required to advance Sphere's achievements as a sustainable and forward-thinking organization. The survey may be completed using these questions, and is also available online here.

1. What is your name?

2. What is your affiliation with Sphere?
   a. Trainer
   b. Focal point
   c. Government personnel
   d. Staff member
   e. Other (describe)

3. What is your email? Please indicate if you would be interested in having us follow up with you.

4. Network Improvement: Are Sphere standards locally driven, ensuring their application supports sustainable humanitarian outcomes?
   a. Please indicate on a scale of 1-5 how strongly you agree or disagree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
   b. Please describe your ranking below, with any qualitative or quantitative support.

5. Localization of Standards: Are local and national actors strengthened through their ownership and use of globally recognised humanitarian standards?
   a. Please indicate on a scale of 1-5 how strongly you agree or disagree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
   b. Please describe your ranking below, with any qualitative or quantitative support.

6. Training Strategy: Is 'human dignity' (in broad terms) achieved through localization and understanding of Sphere Standards in crisis-affected populations?
   a. Please indicate on a scale of 1-5 how strongly you agree or disagree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

b. Please describe your ranking below, with any qualitative or quantitative support.

7. Risk Management and Growth: Has Sphere created knowledge-sharing mechanisms and internal practices with other humanitarian networks, increasing the sustainability of the Champions Network?
    a. Please indicate on a scale of 1-5 how strongly you agree or disagree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
    b. Please describe your ranking below, with any qualitative or quantitative support.

C. Policy and Advocacy Framework

The following table illustrates five aspects to monitoring and evaluating the achievements of Sphere's successes in Policy and Advocacy: quantitative progress, use of the SPiCE database, budgetary and financial development, growth of a community of practice, and increasing network size. Targeted changes include quantifying governmental standards which mention or integrate Sphere Standards into policy, internal budget coordination of Sphere with a potential support for governments aiming to adapt their finances to humanitarian needs, and partner coordination to localize humanitarian advocacy and response.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Targeted Change
1- Quantifiable Achievements	How many team members are involved in policy and advocacy? (including team and board members)?	Has Sphere participated in policy dialogues and forums where their standards can be promoted? How many meetings include governmental policy officials or in advocacy efforts?	How many forums does Sphere attend in a year?	How many governments include Sphere standards in their policy?
2- Monitoring Progress with SPiCE	Have mechanisms been developed to track changes in government policy as a result of Sphere Standards?	Has the SPiCE database been developed? Is the database updated frequently?	How many governments have updated and been made aware of the SPiCE database?	How many governments have integrated Sphere standards in their national policies?
3- Budgetary Development	How much of a budget has Sphere allocated to policy and advocacy efforts?	How does Sphere intend to use this budget (specific breakdown)?	Are budgets set to reflect humanitarian crises and real costs?	How does this budget aim to apply Standards universally in local and national government policy? Does this change with national authority stances?
4- CoP Development	How many	Have there been training sessions for	How many strategic	Are Sphere Standards applied universally in

	advocacy materials have been done? What type of advocacy materials are they?	policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders on Sphere Standards?	partnerships have been developed with key action-makers in policy and advocacy?	local and national governmental policy regardless of changes in authorities?
5- Network Growth	Has Sphere identified influential groups that could be useful for Standards dissemination?	Have there been any forums/activities to introduce/update the "influential groups" about Sphere standards?	How many governments have shown interest at various levels in support for training and engagement?	Are humanitarian principles and quality and accountability standards embedded in the policies and practices of organisations and authorities at all levels, from local to international?

Following in the steps of the SPiCE database, we recommend that individual government progress is regularly monitored using the above framework, and that responses are proactively sourced using the survey below. This form is accessible online here, and utilizes the questions-based approach modeled above.

Proposed Policy and Advocacy Feedback Form

1. What is your name?

2. What is your email? Please indicate if you would be interested in being followed up with for further information or communications.

3. What is your country and area of work (position) including affiliation with Sphere?

4. Quantifying Achievements: Has your government integrated Sphere Standards into National Action Plans, Regional policy, etc?
   a. Please indicate below how strongly you disagree or agree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
   b. Please provide your reasoning, including quantitative information or reference to documents/links if possible.

5. Monitoring Progress with SPiCE: Are you able to monitor your government's progress on integrating Sphere Standards into policy?
   a. Please indicate below how strongly you disagree or agree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
   b. Please provide your reasoning, including quantitative information or reference to documents/links if possible.
   c. Are you aware of the SPiCE database? Have you used the database? (yes, have used it/yes, have not used it/no)
   d. Is there a designated person able to update the SPiCE database? If not, who should be?

6. Growing a Community of Practice: Are Sphere Standards are applied universally in local and national governmental policy regardless of changes in authorities?
    a. Please indicate below how strongly you disagree or agree with the above statement (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).
    b. Please provide your reasoning, including quantitative information or reference to documents/links if possible.
    c. What partnerships do you know of that are between civil society actors and governments, or interactions where Sphere Standards are utilized in policy/advocacy efforts?

7. Network Growth: Humanitarian principles and quality and accountability standards are embedded in the policies and practices of organisations and authorities at all levels, from local to international. This includes developing local action plans, successful peer reviews, and integration of Sphere Standards in Disaster Management. What steps has your government taken to achieve the above?
    a. Please list any actions or policies that you know of, including any data we may be able to access.

D. Strategic Partnerships

In the interviews and literature review, we found that Sphere's strategic partnerships are an important part of how its standards are promoted, localized, and applied in different contexts. These partnerships include a range of actors, such as INGOs, national NGOs, government bodies, donors, and standard-setting organizations. Many of them co-develop tools, contribute to training and advocacy, and help expand Sphere's reach. The goal of this section is to better understand how these partnerships support Sphere's Theory of Change, and how their role can be monitored and strengthened over time. The table below focuses on how partnerships are formed, what activities they lead to, and how these contribute to long-term change. It also considers how Sphere can improve coordination and learning across its partner network.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Impact/Targeted Change
Has Sphere mapped its key strategic partners across sectors (INGOs, NGOs, government actors, donors, standard-setting bodies)?	Are there regular engagement mechanisms (e.g., joint webinars, co-published materials, working groups) with partners?	How many strategic partnerships are active in the current year?	Do strategic partners report internal changes (policy, programs, training) based on engagement with Sphere's standards?
Does Sphere have clear internal criteria or guidelines for what qualifies as a strategic partner?	Are Sphere's strategic partners actively involved in revising standards, shaping advocacy, or	How many co-developed tools, position papers/reports, or resources have	Are partners consistently using or promoting Sphere standards within their own networks or operations?

	influencing humanitarian practice?	emerged from these partnerships?	
How much human and financial resourcing is dedicated specifically to managing strategic partnerships (e.g., staff, time, travel, joint activities)?	Are roles and responsibilities in joint initiatives clearly defined between Sphere and its partners?	Are there public-facing outputs (e.g., events, publications) that show collaboration and visibility of these partnerships?	Has joint work through strategic partnerships contributed to harmonization of humanitarian standards across sectors (e.g., via HSP)?
Are strategic partnerships integrated into Sphere's broader strategic documents and annual work plans?	Has Sphere facilitated knowledge-sharing platforms between partners (e.g., through the Humanitarian Standards Partnership)?	Has the partner network expanded into new sectors or geographies aligned with Sphere's localization goals?	Are partners more likely to sustain collaboration or integrate Sphere's principles without direct prompting?
Has Sphere conducted an internal review of the relevance and utility of existing partnerships?	Are there activities designed to localize strategic partnerships, such as including national-level actors from the Global South? How many?	Are there feedback mechanisms from partners on the effectiveness and relevance of their relationship with Sphere?	Has Sphere's involvement in partnerships influenced broader humanitarian coordination mechanisms (e.g., UN clusters, inter-agency initiatives)?

The nature, effectiveness, and impact of Sphere's strategic partners collaboration can be measured by the following proposed survey, which complements the above framework. Following the question-based approach, this survey allows Sphere to assess the qualitative and quantitative measures: how partnerships are contributing to shared standards development, localization efforts, and broader humanitarian outcomes. This approach allows Sphere to inform future engagement strategies, identify strengths and gaps, and support continuous learning across the partnerships network. The survey can be found here

Section 1: Basic Information

1. Name (optional):
2. Organization Name:
3. Your Role or Title:
4. Type of Organization:
   ☐ INGO
   ☐ National NGO
   ☐ Government body
   ☐ Donor agency
   ☐ Standards setting body or alliance
   ☐ Other (please specify):
5. Country or Region of Primary Operations:

Section 2: Nature of the Partnership

6. How would you describe the nature of your organization's engagement with Sphere?
   ☐ Joint programming
   ☐ Policy and advocacy collaboration
   ☐ Co-developed tools or standards
   ☐ Training and capacity-building activities
   ☐ Knowledge-sharing and research
   ☐ Other (please specify):

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how well-defined are the roles and responsibilities between your organization and Sphere in joint initiatives?
   (1 = Not at all clear, 5 = Very clear)
8. Has your organization contributed to the revision or co-development of any Sphere standards, tools, or position papers?
   ☐ Yes (if yes, how)
   ☐ No
   ☐ I don't know

Section 3: Use and Promotion of Sphere Standards
9. Has your organization integrated Sphere standards or principles into your own policies, training, or field operations?
   ☐ Yes, widely
   ☐ Yes, partially
   ☐ No
   ☐ Not applicable

10. Please describe how you use Sphere standards internally or promote them in your networks (if applicable).
11. Have you supported local partners or governments in applying Sphere standards?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ Planning to

Please share an example if possible.

Section 5: Effectiveness and Value of Partnership

12. On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent has working with Sphere influenced your organization's strategic direction, priorities, or operational practice? (1 = No influence, 5 = Very high influence)

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall effectiveness of the partnership with Sphere in the past 12–18 months? (1 = No effect, 5 = Very high effect)

14. What have been the greatest strengths, challenges, and suggestions (if any) of your partnership with Sphere?

Section 6: Follow-Up

15. Would you be open to being contacted for a brief follow-up interview or focus group discussion? (Yes/No)

5. Evaluation and Determining Impact

We propose a ladder-based method to assess progress across the four areas of Sphere's Theory of Chang. This model draws from the Joint Monitoring Programme developed by WHO and UNICEF, which evaluates levels of service by recognising change as a gradual process rather than a binary outcome[38]. A similar approach works well in the context of a decentralised, influence-based organisation like Sphere, where uptake often occurs over time and through layered engagement[39].

5.1 The Sphere Ladder: A Scoring Scale (1-5)

Each area of work is assessed through a set of monitoring questions, developed earlier in the MEAL frameworks. These questions reflect the kinds of shifts Sphere aims to contribute to, such as the practical use of the Handbook, national-level recognition of Sphere standards, and the strengthening of local ownership through the Champions Network. Rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all impact, each response is evaluated on a five-point ladder. A score of one refers to no awareness or engagement, while a five reflects full, sustained use or integration.

5.2 Weighting for Composite Scores

Some questions are more central to Sphere's mission than others, and so each one is assigned a weight. For example, in the Policy and Advocacy area, the extent to which Sphere's standards are included in national policy carries greater weight than whether advocacy messages were shared through events. This helps ensure the scoring reflects what matters most in terms of long-term change. These weights were developed in line with Sphere's priorities and can be adjusted as those priorities evolve[40].

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[38] WHO and UNICEF (2021). Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2020: Five years into the SDGs. Geneva: Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene.

[39] The ladder framework is especially useful in network-based systems, where change tends to occur in stages and across diverse actors.

[40] Patton, M. Q. (2008). Utilization-Focused Evaluation. Sage Publications.

Once each question is scored, the result is multiplied by its weight. The total for that area is then calculated by summing these values. A question weighted at thirty percent with a score of four contributes 1.2 points. One weighted at ten percent with a score of two adds 0.2. These scores are then added to produce a composite result out of five.

This result can be interpreted using broad ranges.

Score	Definition
> 4	high levels of embedded practice and alignment with Sphere's objectives.
4 < Score > 3	meaningful progress but with space for further strengthening
3 < Score > 2	early or partial uptake
< 2	require additional support or reflection

The ladder and weighting system offer a structured way to engage with the kinds of progress that are often difficult to quantify. They are also intended to remain flexible. Scores can be tracked over time, and both the questions and the weights can be revisited as needed. In this way, the approach is not just a tool for monitoring, but one that supports learning and strategic adjustment over time[41].

6. Limitations and Recommendations

A. Handbook:

Limitations

An issue related to the framework of the Handbook is that not all trainers, focal points, and Sphere members may respond to our proposed surveys, leading to respondent bias within our data collection. This also may not provide an accurate representation of other factors leading to problems encountered when using the Handbook, or active results in humanitarian response as a result of using the Handbook. These differences may be due to external factors, such as local conditions (linguistic, resources available, personnel available), and time constraints which impede evaluating the efficacy of short-term progress.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, it is often best to start small and gradually build the system. This approach makes it easier to manage and adjust as needed. Providing staff with basic training can help boost their

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[41] Earl, S., Carden, F., and Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping: Building learning and reflection into development programs. International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

confidence in using the tools and encourage more effective use of the framework. Feedback methods should be simple and diverse; while short surveys are useful, it is also important to incorporate other ways to gather input, such as brief talks, group discussions, or suggestion boxes.

Moreover, it is essential to distribute surveys both before and after training sessions in an online format, allowing participants ample time to complete them within the session. Reminding community members why their feedback is important can also increase participation. Tracking progress over time and remaining flexible for any necessary adjustments is crucial. Involving all stakeholders, including focal points, trainers, community members, and Sphere staff can improve trust and support, ultimately strengthening the adoption of our proposed MEAL frameworks.

B. Champions Network:

Limitations

Within our interviews, particularly when talking with individuals who were both regional focal points and trainers, we often struggled to separate our findings due. Within our methodology for producing the MEAL frameworks, we developed questions that were specific for each person holding a stake in Sphere. However, one participant disclosed that one barrier to tracking change in the Champions Network was that there lacked accountability and measurement on his end for how governments could adapt Sphere's Standards into national action plans or policy recommendations. For him, this made it challenging to receive accurate analysis on how his training, or contact with trainers was being put into practice at the international level. This relates to the Policy and Advocacy section of the ToC, demonstrating how utilizing a strong network base can translate to the international level. Another limitation to our research was the response level of participants at HNPW or within Sphere's Champion Network who could attest to network sustainability or provide input on developing our MEAL framework. Therefore, we feel that the Champion Network relies heavily on Strategic Partnership development and raising awareness of Sphere.

Recommendations

Within the Champions Network, we recommend that regular status updates be collected from regional focal points using the proposed survey underneath the MEAL framework for monitoring and evaluating progress. This helps to identify common challenges across regional entities, and would also leverage strengths for implementing best practices across Sphere's Champions Network. This can be done bi-annually, and can be developed into a short report so that focal points may improve their cross-regional communication and collaboration on shared initiatives that might impact localization effectiveness. Sharing best practices will also increase the ability of Sphere to identify needs and respond to these needs, either in re-framing the Handbook, identifying policy recommendations, developing budgetary requirements and making adjustments within the organization moving forward. This was identified by one Focal Point in Latin America, which he states would increase his ability to track changes and the impact of his work across all trainers and areas affected by humanitarian crises or ongoing conflict.

C. Policy and Advocacy:

Limitations

Tracking changes at the governmental level can be quite challenging without a formal system in place. Sphere is currently working on creating a centralized database of case studies and other learning resources, but this process will take time. Until it is fully established, consistently collecting reliable information

remains difficult. A significant issue is that even when governments recognize the Sphere Standards or claim to use them, it is not easy to demonstrate that any specific policy or practice change resulted directly from Sphere. Many factors, such as political priorities, international pressures, and budget adjustments, influence government decisions, making it unclear how progress is connected to the Sphere Standards.

Recommendations

To improve this situation, several steps can be considered. Sphere could begin by further investing in a formal, open-access database that will help gather and organize information about government involvement with Sphere, including how standards are integrated into national policies, training activities, and participation in related events. We recommend the SPiCE database for this measure, alongside increased collaboration with local actors and civil society organizations to identify ground-level changes representing shifts in governmental policy. Next, governments should be encouraged to annually report (through a simple template such as the survey provided above, on an annual basis), on how they are implementing Sphere principles, increasing accountability towards commitments. To ensure impact, we recommend transforming SPiCE into a knowledge-sharing platform, particularly to highlight how Sphere standards influence national/regional policy development. Government authorities also working with Sphere can find local points of contact, and small civil society organizations may seek inspiration for targeting their advocacy or find collective strength in shared vision for improving human dignity.

D. Strategic Partnerships:

Limitations

Since many of these changes occur through multi-actor cooperation and cooperative activities, it is frequently challenging to directly credit developments in the humanitarian sector to Sphere's impact alone. Because of the incorporation of strategic alliances, Sphere's contributions are often incorporated into larger group projects, making it difficult to pinpoint certain results or changes in policy that come from Sphere alone. It's also difficult to create a feedback system to track their contributions. Depending on a variety of criteria, the feedback obtained may differ in depth, perspective, and clarity due to the large number of partners engaged. These include, but not limited to, partner's role, level of engagement, and familiarity with Sphere's standards.

Recommendations

In order to improve its strategy for partnerships, Sphere might think about setting up a centralized system to monitor partner participation, actions, and results over time. This would enhance network-wide coordination and offer more information into how collaborations support Sphere's goals. Making sure that regional and local players are effectively included as strategic partners is also crucial, especially for those operating in humanitarian contexts where the application of Sphere norms is most vital. Lastly, collaboration initiatives must to be closely coordinated with Sphere's more general advocacy and policy objectives. This would ensure that coordinated efforts lead to structural change in the humanitarian sector and promote coherence across sectos.

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7. Appendix

A) Project Description

47: Sphere- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework based on Sphere's Theory of Change

Summary of research project
Output #1: An M&E framework for Sphere (based on our new ToC)
Output #2: A methodology for organisations like Sphere to follow to convert their ToCs into M&E Frameworks

Research Context and Problem Statement: In 2023, Sphere developed a Theory of Change (www.spherestandards.org/theory-of-change), and in 2024 made it public for the first time. Sphere's Theory of Change (ToC) outlines the global changes that Sphere is achieving (or would like to achieve) in four key areas: Policy and Advocacy; Strategic Partnerships; The Sphere Handbook; and Champions Network. We would now like to develop a framework for monitoring and evaluating our work based on our ToC, which we will use to measure the extent to which we are achieving our stated mission, outcomes and impacts through our activities.

Research needs and objectives: The purpose of this research project is therefore to define an M&E framework for Sphere based on the ToC, which will include indicators and approaches for testing the assumptions and measuring the outcomes in the ToC. This will also include research into different approaches to defining M&E frameworks (based on ToCs) before selecting and applying an appropriate one. A Theory of Change is required by some donors as part of grant applications, including by a key donor in the humanitarian sector, USAID, which also provides tools and guidance on how to develop and present ToCs (usaidlearninglab.org/resources/theories-change). Sphere's ToC is an essential policy document that guides the direction of the entire Sphere humanitarian standards community.

This research complements a concurrent research project into how operational humanitarian organisations are using the Sphere Handbook in their everyday work. If we can understand better how organisations are using Sphere, we will be better able to evaluate the impact, activities and outcomes of Sphere as described in its Theory of Change.

Activities:
- To research methodologies and approaches for building M&E frameworks based on ToCs.
- Define a comprehensive M&E framework for evaluating Sphere activities based on Sphere's ToC.

Main research question(s)

- What are the most suitable methodologies for a network organisation such as Sphere to evaluate its impact, activities and outcomes?
- How can and should Sphere monitor and evaluate its activities based on its ToC?

Proposed research methodology
- Desk research on methodologies for development of ToC-based M&E frameworks.
- Focus group with Sphere network to guide development of the ToC-based M&E framework.
- Key informant interviews with Sphere's network of members, focal points and trainers as well as individual specialists.

Expected outcomes: This research project will provide Sphere and similar organisations with a framework for monitoring and evaluating change (as defined in their ToCs).

B) Interview Guides

TRAINERS

1. Do the people you train find the Sphere Handbook easy to understand and apply? (Yes/No, with space for explanation)
   a. Purpose: Evaluates how accessible and useful the Handbook is for trainees.
2. What improvements could make the Sphere Handbook more useful for training purposes? (Open-ended)
   a. Purpose: Evaluates how accessible and useful the Handbook is for trainees.
3. What is the best way to track the long-term influence of Sphere's training on field practice? (Multiple choice: Regular trainer feedback, Case studies, Peer networks, Other)
   a. Purpose: Defines practical, non-data-intensive methods for Sphere to measure training impact.
4. In what ways do you modify Sphere standards to fit local humanitarian needs? (Open-ended)
   a. Purpose: Sphere trainers often localize standards, but modifications aren't tracked, which helps Sphere formalize flexible implementation models.
5. Do you currently use any feedback mechanisms to assess whether your training sessions are effective? (Options: Yes, regularly | Occasionally | No formal system but I get informal feedback | No, I do not track impact)
   a. Purpose: Sphere currently lacks a systematic trainer evaluation approach (or maybe I am unaware of it). This also identifies whether peer-led evaluation loops exist that Sphere can formalize.
6. What would make it easier for you to track and report on the effectiveness of your training? (Open-ended)
   a. Purpose: Instead of imposing an M&E model, trainers define what's feasible.
7. Can you give a brief explanation of what regular training could look like?
8. What training resources (e.g., materials, facilitators, venues) are required to carry them out?
9. Are the learnings of the training clear and measurable?

10. What specific outputs from the training should be measured (e.g., number of participants trained, materials distributed)?
11. What skills or knowledge should participants be able to demonstrate by the end of the training?
12. What external factors (e.g., local context, participant background, technological access) might impact the effectiveness of the training?
    a. (these questions will allow us to understand how we can best measure the impact of trainings)
13. How can Sphere best adapt to the current political context and to the changes in the financing in the humanitarian sector? (this will allow to get best practices that Sphere will be able to compare to their current ones)

14. What feedback mechanisms have you implemented to evaluate the level of engagement that trainees have with Sphere Standards, after training?
    a. What practices have you found useful?
    b. What challenges have you encountered in monitoring and evaluating performance and better implementation of the Standards?
15. Sphere states that a target outcome in the Theory of Change is that "local and national actors are strengthened through their ownership and use of globally recognised humanitarian standards". Have you measured this by your training? (Yes/no)
    a. If YES→ How do you know and measure if local and national actors' capacities are strengthened?
    b. If NO→ Is this difficult to measure, or do actors face other barriers to implementing standards?

FOCAL POINTS
1. Can you describe your main responsibilities as a Sphere focal point? What key activities do you carry out to promote Sphere standards in your country?
2. What challenges do you face in promoting Sphere standards?
3. Are the Sphere Handbook or materials translated into local languages? If so, how effective has this been?
4. How can Sphere best adapt to the current political context and to the changes in the financing in the humanitarian sector? (this will allow to get best practices that Sphere will be able to compare to their current ones)
5. What information or resources are flowing from Sphere?
6. What additional support (e.g., tools, funding, training) would help increase the adoption of Sphere? (This will allow us to understand what is flowing between Sphere and the focal points, as well as what is needed. Will it make it easier to identify activities that should be included in the M and E)
7. What are the contributions from your focal point to Sphere, if any?
8. How are Sphere standards being locally driven in your country (for focal points– this will give us an idea of how they are implemented in different cultural contexts)?
9. Do you currently track the impact of Sphere activities in your country? If yes, how?

10. What methods or tools do you think would be most practical for tracking progress?

HSP

1. Do you have a formal M&E framework for tracking the adoption and use of your standards?
2. What tools, methods, or approaches do you use for monitoring compliance and effectiveness?
3. How do you collect and analyze data on the application of your standards?
4. What lessons have you learned about tracking humanitarian standards that Sphere could apply to its own M&E?
5. Are there common indicators or reporting mechanisms across HSP partners that Sphere could align with?
6. How could the HSP network improve collaboration in monitoring the effectiveness of humanitarian standards?
7. Can you share any best practices that Sphere could adopt in its own M&E framework?

BOARD MEMBER

1. What are the key success indicators Sphere should prioritize in its M&E framework?
2. Are there best practices from other humanitarian standard-setting bodies that Sphere could incorporate?
3. How can the board use M&E data to inform Sphere's long-term strategy and decision-making?
4. From a governance perspective, what are the top priorities that this M&E framework should address?
5. What specific criteria or benchmarks should be used to measure the effectiveness of Sphere standards?
6. What long-term changes in the humanitarian sector should Sphere track to demonstrate sustained impact (e.g., policy changes, organizational behaviors)?
7. What should gender m and should include (plan international)

MEMBERS

1. In your opinion, what are the most important outcomes to measure when assessing Sphere's impact (e.g., improvement in response quality, government policy adoption, organizational behavior change)?
2. What indicators of success would help demonstrate that Sphere standards have been effectively implemented and are leading to improved humanitarian outcomes?
3. How can Sphere measure the long-term impact of its standards beyond immediate results or outputs?

4. How can Sphere ensure that local knowledge and cultural contexts are considered in its M&E framework?
5. What types of **resources**, such as tools, guides, or templates, would help organizations implement M&E for Sphere's standards?
6. What other organizations or **best practices** can Sphere look to for guidance as it develops its first M&E framework?