



The Sphere Project

*Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards
in Humanitarian Response*

Humanitarian standards in context *Bringing the Sphere Handbook to life*

Video guide

training and learning

Humanitarian standards in context
Bringing the Sphere Handbook to life
Video guide

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INTRODUCTION

Global standards and contextualisation

The development of global standards has become increasingly prevalent from the earliest examples of standardised principles, such as the Order of Malta in 1048, up to the International Standards Organisation 9001 used today, which sets out quality standards for the private sector.

Standards are a commonly used tool to ensure consistency, quality and accountability in personal conduct and professional activities. The success of global standards depends on their being equally applicable in a wide range of contexts, taking into account political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors. Global standards give us a way of analysing and communicating about our performance both formally and informally so we can improve for the future.

The Sphere Handbook sets out global minimum standards to improve quality and accountability in humanitarian responses.

What does Sphere say about context?

Effective humanitarian response must be based on a comprehensive contextualised diagnosis attained through assessment, monitoring and evaluation. The context in the aftermath of a disaster is dynamic and can impact the capacities and vulnerabilities of affected people. For example, a disaster may change normal social structures such as gender roles within the affected population.

The change in the context may present challenges to be overcome, or opportunities to bring a community closer to meeting their rights. The Sphere Handbook's elements – minimum standards, key actions, key indicators and guidance notes – all provide information on assisting people to meet their rights after a disaster. Minimum standards are an expression of these rights rooted in the Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles and should not be adapted to the context.

They help humanitarian actors determine the cut-off point between stable survival in dignity and heightened risks of mortality and morbidity. Key actions and key indicators, however, need to be selected for relevancy and, in certain situations, carefully adapted to fit the context.

Adapting a key action or indicator means changing aspects of it in order to make it more suitable to the specific situation. Guidance notes help practitioners to put indicators into context properly.

The purpose of the “Humanitarian standards in context” Video guide

Gaining a collective understanding of how to use the Sphere Handbook appropriately in context has been a challenge for the Sphere Project. Users of Sphere may read parts of the Handbook and believe that certain Sphere standards and indicators are unattainable in a particular context, and thus inapplicable.

Conforming to Sphere does not mean meeting all the standards and indicators exactly as they are written in the Sphere Handbook. Understanding the difference in function between the various Sphere elements (minimum standards, key action, key indicators and guidance notes) as described above has been another significant challenge for Sphere users. When the terms “minimum standard” and “key indicator” are used interchangeably (and thus, incorrectly), this undermines the ability to apply Sphere in context.

The purpose of the “Humanitarian standards in context” video and this Video guide are to provide clarification on the issue of using Sphere in context. The video highlights five diverse contexts around the world, and explores how Sphere has been applied in each. In some cases, the Sphere key indicators were applied as they are written in the Handbook in a context-sensitive manner. In other cases, the key indicators were adapted to make them appropriate to the context in which they were being applied.

This Video guide have three sections: I) An introduction, which describes the background to the video and notes; II) The Video scenarios summary, which is for all video viewers. For each scenario, the background, links to the Sphere Handbook, issues at stake and contextualisation are discussed. The summary ends with information on the outcome and lessons learned from application of Sphere in context. III) The “Humanitarian standards in context” training session plan, which is for Sphere trainers who may wish to incorporate a session into existing Sphere training to focus on the issue of Sphere in context. The session uses the video in an interactive exercise and promotes an open discussion on correct usage of Sphere’s elements.

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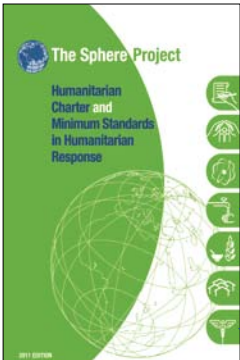
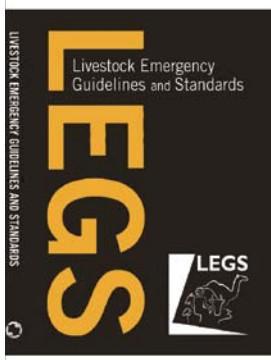
Scenario 1: **Floods in Sindh,** **Pakistan (2010) –** **Livestock support**

Background

In 2010, the monsoon season in Pakistan overwhelmed the country with floods which affected 21 million people. In Thatta district, Sindh province, an NGO responded with a programme that involved re-stocking of livestock to affected families. This scenario explores how the organisation dealt with principles and key indicators that were difficult to implement in context.

NOTES

Links with Sphere

Related elements of the Sphere Handbook	Page	Companion	
	Humanitarian Charter and Code of Conduct Principles 1, 5-9	20-24 370-372	
	Protection Principle 1	33	
	Core Standards 1, 3 and 4	55, 61, 65	
	Hygiene promotion standard 1	91	
	Control of communicable diseases standard 1 (key indicator 1)	312	

Issues at stake and contextualisation

Through context assessment, the organisation observed that before the floods, people lived very close to their livestock, which can cause increased levels of disease. The issue for the organisation was whether to meet the expressed need of the affected people, given that to do so could perpetuate unhealthy practices and make them more vulnerable to disease.

The Code of Conduct and Core Standards remind us that we should respect culture and custom and develop strategies that are explicitly linked to community-based capacities. At the same time, the Control of communicable diseases standard 1 (key indicator 1) and Protection Principle 1 explicitly say that disease levels should be kept stable and no further harm should be caused by humanitarian interventions.

Outcome

Based on a participatory needs assessment, the organisation designed a programme that met the community's need to re-establish livelihoods by re-stocking with animals. Steps were taken to mitigate the negative impacts of people living close to animals through hygiene promotion activities. Control of communicable diseases standard 1: key indicator: Incidence of major communicable diseases relevant to the context are stable (not increasing) was met.

Lesson learned

Sphere key actions and key indicators can be selected and prioritised to fit the context. Shorter-term programmes can be designed to get people back to normal while mitigating any risks. Longer-term programmes could address the underlying causes of vulnerability by, for example, educating people so they may eventually decide to change unhealthy cultural practices.

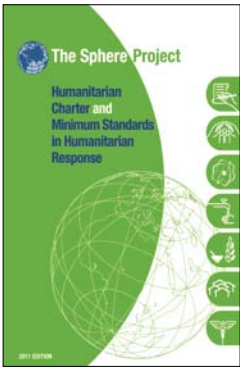
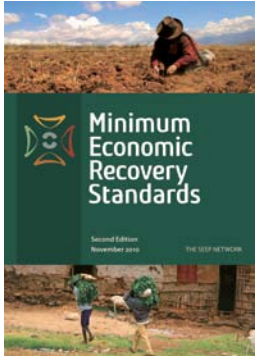
Scenario 2: Earthquake in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), Pakistan (2005) – Cash for work

Background

In 2005, northern Pakistan experienced an earthquake which killed over 70,000 people. A local NGO responded by helping survivors to re-establish livelihoods. This scenario explores how a change in context may present an opportunity to bring people closer to meeting Sphere key indicators.

NOTES

Links with Sphere

Related elements of the Sphere Handbook	Page	Companion	
	Humanitarian Charter and Code of Conduct Principles 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9		
	Protection Principles 1 and 2		20-24 370-372
	Core Standards 1, 3, 4 and 5		33, 36
	Livelihoods standard 2 (key indicator 2)		55, 61, 65, 68 208

Issues at stake and contextualisation

The social context in KPK changed because of the earthquake in that many male heads of household were lost, leaving females in a position to assume responsibility for their families. Through monitoring activities, the organisation saw that females were often left out of assistance and decision-making processes. The Code of Conduct, Protection Principle 2 and Livelihoods standard 2 all highlight that men and women should have equal access humanitarian aid based on their needs. The issue for this organisation was how to provide cash-for-work assistance appropriately in the context while yet respecting culture and custom in a traditional society in which females who work, their families and the aid agency could run risks if they are seen as going against social norms.

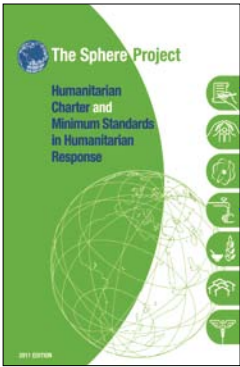
Outcome

The organisation opted to keep the key indicator as it was and use the change in context as an opportunity to bring people closer to the livelihoods indicator. The organisation took a phased approach that included raising awareness of rights for both men and women. They gained acceptance from the community to ensure that the programme did not increase vulnerability or pose further risks. Livelihoods standard 2, key indicator 2 was partially met. Men and some women were given opportunities for employment without increasing their vulnerability.

Lesson learned

Organisations, even if they have been working in a country for a long time, need to assess how a disaster has changed the context in order to make effective programming decisions. When the decision is made to introduce new concepts and approaches, it is important to gain acceptance from the community at each stage to ensure that people are protected from harm and risks are managed.

Links with Sphere

Related elements of the Sphere Handbook	Page		
	Humanitarian Charter and Code of Conduct Principles 1, 2, 5-8	20-24 370-372	
	Protection Principles 1 and 2	33, 36	
	Core Standards 1, 3 and 4	55, 61, 65	
	Water supply standard 1 (key indicator 1)	97	
	Water supply standards 2 and 3	100, 103	

Issues at stake and contextualisation

In this context, people are made vulnerable by on-going conflict which has put pressure on environmental and technological resources throughout the province. The issue in this scenario was that it was physically impossible for the organisation alone to provide Water supply standard 1, key indicator 1 (15 litres of water per person per day (pppd) for cooking, drinking and personal and domestic hygiene) for the target group.

The Code of Conduct, Protection Principles and Core Standards indicate that local capacities should be built upon while vulnerabilities are addressed. The needs assessment also revealed that in this context, men often bathed in the river (local capacity), while women and children bathed at home because it was safer for them.

Outcome

The organisation analysed the situation and looked for ways to build on the community's existing capacity and address the water supply needs of the entire target group. The organisation provided a water supply programme that met Water supply standard 1, key indicator 1 using a combination of assistance from the organisation and local capacity.

Lesson learned

Guidance notes help to interpret indicators and prioritise activities in an environment of limited resources. A solid understanding of the social, technological and environmental context along with Sphere guidance notes helped the NGO to find a solution that met the needs.

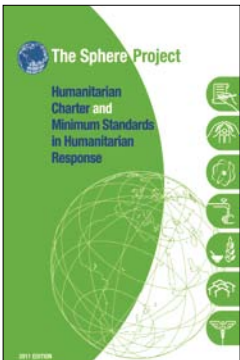
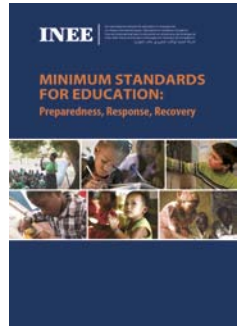
Scenario 4: Protracted conflict, Bunagana, DRC – School supplemental food programme

Background

For many years, the conflict taking place in DRC has limited the communities' ability to produce/ provide enough food for themselves. An NGO is providing supplemental food rations in a school. This scenario explores how organisations may adapt a quantitative key indicator to the context.

NOTES

Links with Sphere

Related elements of the Sphere Handbook	Page	Companion
	Humanitarian Charter and Code of Conduct Principles 1, 5, 6-8	20-24 370-372
	Protection Principle 1	33
	Core Standards 1, 2, 3, 4	55, 58, 61, 65
	Hygiene promotion standard 1	91
	Food transfers standard 1 (key indicator 1)	180
	Food transfers standards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	184, 186, 188, 192, 197
		

Issues at stake and contextualisation

Guidance note 2 accompanying the first key indicator of Food Transfers Standard 1 says that nutritional requirements equal 2,100 kilocalories (kcal) pppd, but people in this community have no more than 1,600 kcals pppd even in non-disaster times. The organisation had to decide whether to adapt the indicator to align it with the norm in the society or to provide the Sphere indicator as written.

The Code of Conduct says that aid should be based on need alone, and scientific evidence has shown that human beings need a certain number of calories with specific nutritional content to lead an active and healthy life. Protection Principle 1 also states that we should not cause further harm through our actions by not providing enough food or by providing too much food.

Outcome

Children at the school received a supplemental wet food ration to close the gap between existing food capacity and the key indicator. The key indicator was adapted from 2,100 kcal pppd to 1,600 kcal pppd because this is the norm in the context and the organisation determined that the recipients could live a healthy and active lifestyle on the adapted indicator. Active participation and collaboration with parents of the students and other actors in the humanitarian community have been essential to the success of the programme. The contextualised Food transfers standard 1: key indicator 1 was met.

Lesson learned

Members of the humanitarian community worked together in order to gain a consensus on the context. Based on their understanding, they adapted the number of kilocalories in the Sphere key indicator to a lower amount. Effective collaboration with the community ensured that parents take an active role in the programme to meet their children's needs. Sphere key indicators can be adapted with a sound understanding of the context. If a Sphere indicator is thus adapted, monitoring mechanisms should be designed to ensure that no harm results. (Ex: In this scenario, applicable health and nutrition-related indicators for the recipients should be monitored).

A large rectangular area on the left side of the page, bounded by a red line at the top and bottom, containing 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

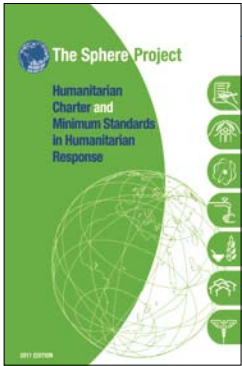
**Scenario 5:
Earthquake and
floods, La Paz,
Bolivia – Disaster
risk reduction**

Background

As part of a disaster risk reduction initiative, the Bolivian government has used Sphere for guidance. The scenario explores how a government can benefit from Sphere in context.

NOTES

Links with Sphere

Related elements of the Sphere Handbook	Page	
	Cross-cutting issues	14-17
	Humanitarian Charter and Code of Conduct Annex 1	20-24 373
	Protection Principles 3 and 4	38, 41
	Core Standard 2	58
	Shelter and settlement standards	240-267

Issues at stake and contextualisation

The issue here is the extent to which a government can use a tool developed by and primarily for the humanitarian community. This scenario indicates that there are specific parts of the Sphere Handbook which can be applied:

- The Humanitarian Charter, which reminds us that the state holds primary responsibility to respond to disasters in a timely manner.
- The Code of Conduct Annex I: Recommendations to the Governments of Disaster-Affected Countries.
- Protection Principles 3 and 4, which are directly linked to a specific set of legal obligations of states.
- Core Standard 2, which specifically discusses the role of government in collaboration and coordination of humanitarian response.
- Cross-cutting issues which can be applied through government response, including children, disaster risk reduction, environment, gender, HIV and AIDS, older people, persons with disabilities and psychosocial support.
- Technical standards, which can also be used by governments throughout the disaster management cycle.

Certain countries have adapted and included elements of Sphere into their policies and contextualised indicators to align with national standards.

Outcome


A government has used Sphere standards to develop disaster risk reduction policies and train staff members so they are ready to respond to future disasters. Sphere indicators have been adapted so they conform to Bolivian standards and policies.

Lesson learned

Sphere can be a useful tool for any actor engaging in humanitarian work. Sphere provides information on fundamental global humanitarian principles that can be applied in any context. Sphere minimum standards are an expression of these rights. Key actions and key indicators may be selected and adapted to the context for effective use of the Sphere Handbook.

TRAINING SESSION PLAN

Session outline

Introduction	
<p>The Sphere Handbook, <i>Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response</i>, is one of the most widely known and internationally recognised sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in life-saving areas of humanitarian response.</p> <p>One of the major challenges in using the Sphere Handbook is to contextualise it correctly. In view of this on-going challenge, Sphere is providing a video entitled “Humanitarian Standards in context”. The following session plan accompanies the video and provides suggested content for a session on Sphere in context.</p> <p>The session is for participants who already know the background of Sphere and the structure and content of the Handbook.</p>	
Learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify elements of the humanitarian context which should be considered when applying Sphere.• Describe how video scenarios link to Sphere principles, standards and indicators.• Explain considerations for adapting key indicators to the context.• Identify when it is not appropriate to adapt key indicators.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context considers political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors.• Minimum standards are universal, but key actions and key indicators must be selected and, where appropriate, adapted to the context. Guidance notes provide advice on how to do this appropriately.• Key indicators should not be adapted simply because there is a lack of resources to meet them.• If your organisation is unable to meet the Sphere indicators, you should acknowledge and report it, describe the potential negative consequences of not meeting the indicators and mitigate the negative consequences where possible.
	90'
	Flip chart papers Colour pens Post-its Masking tape or blue tac Sphere Handbooks Projector, laptop, speakers for showing the video
Preparation	<p>Review the chapter “What is Sphere?” of the Handbook, the “Humanitarian standards in context” video and Sections I and II of this Video guide.</p> <p>Select 2-3 of the most relevant scenarios from the video for your training participants.</p> <p>Photocopy this Video guide sections I and II as a hand-out for participants, if needed.</p>

Timeline

Timing	Topic	Method
15'	Activity 1: Introduction to context	Presentation and brainstorming
45'	Activity 2: Video and exercise	Video and small group work
30'	Activity 3: Using indicators effectively in context	Discussion and presentation

Activities

Activity 1: Introduction to context

15'

Distribute sticker notes to participants and ask them to write down some examples of contextual information that it is important to know for designing an effective humanitarian response: one idea per sticker note.

Show flipchart with “Context” written across the top and P-E-S-T-L-E written vertically down the left side.

Explain that the PESTLE model is an easy way to remember the different elements of context.

Dimension	Example type of contextual information
Political=	government structure, political history, conflicts, security
Economic=	livelihoods, markets, banking system, poverty levels
Social=	social structures, gender roles, culture, religion, education levels
Technological=	infrastructure, communications, transportation, facilities
Legal=	justice system, rule of law, international laws ratified by the country
Environmental=	Natural resources, climate, geography, topography,

Ask participants to place their stickers on the flipchart beside the element of context that it most closely matches, and debrief.

Ask: How might a disaster change elements of the context? (Examples: damages to infrastructure, breakdown of justice system, social structures change in a camp situation)

Review how the structure of Sphere supports contextualisation: minimum standards → key actions → key indicators → guidance notes. Minimum standards are universal, but key actions and key indicators must be selected and, where appropriate, adapted to the context. Guidance notes provide tips on how to do this appropriately.

Explain that this session will address how to use Sphere appropriately in context.

Activity 2: “Humanitarian standards in context” video and exercise

45’

Divide participants into groups of 4-5 people, but keep the group in plenary to watch the video together. Assign one video scenario to each group. (There may be more than one group assessing the same scenario.)

Present the discussion questions on a flipchart. Discussion questions:

- What elements of the context affected the situation (PESTLE)?
- What are the related Sphere principles, standards and indicators?
- What are the issues at stake in the scenario?
- How did the organisation/agency apply Sphere in context taking the above issues into consideration?
- What could be improved?

Show the entire video to the plenary.

Explain that groups have 20 minutes to create a flipchart with the responses to the discussion questions for their assigned scenario only.

Have each group report back in turn. You may play each group’s video scenario one more time before the report to refresh the participants’ memory of the situation.

Note to facilitator: Use the video scenarios summary as a basis for feedback to the groups. At the end of the activity, you may distribute the “Humanitarian standards in context” Video guide sections I and II as a handout to summarise the exercise.

Activity 3: Using indicators effectively in context

30'

Explain: Sphere indicators have been developed using a wide-ranging consultative process using experienced humanitarian practitioners and scientific experts over several years. In most situations, assessments are made against selected Sphere indicators as they are written. For project planning and implementation, key actions and indicators should be selected according to the assessed situation and the agency's role in the response.

Key actions provide guidance on what needs to be done, but they do not explain how to do them. The most appropriate actions to achieve a minimum standard could vary widely from context to context. Therefore, practitioners should select and use relevant actions or devise alternative actions that will result in the standard being met.

Comment that once your agency has selected key indicators that apply to your situation, you may consider whether they need to be adapted to the context. However, considering the process that was undertaken to create these indicators, adapting them should not be taken lightly.

Review the point that indicators can be adapted if:

- The organisation has a sound understanding of the context before and after a disaster and has analysed the impacts of the context on the capacities and vulnerabilities of the affected population. Changes in context could present challenges to overcome or opportunities to bring people closer to meeting Sphere indicators; and
- Adapting the Sphere indicator would help bring the affected community back to their normal way of living and promote life with dignity. Example: Scenario 4: The organisation brought them back to the normal amount they eat every day); and
- Adapting the indicator would not cause harm to the beneficiaries. Example: Water supply standard 1, key indicator 2: The maximum distance from any household to the nearest water point is 500 metres. In some communities where people remained in their homes after the disaster, it was perfectly normal and safe for the women to walk 1 km to the water point. It was part of the normal daily routine and the women looked forward to the social aspects of going to collect water together. Changing the water point location in the humanitarian response (to 500m closer to the households) would potentially take away an element of the women's lives that they see as living with dignity. In this case, the quantitative key indicator was correctly adapted to 1km.

Note that ideally, the humanitarian community would have consensus on the understanding of the context and would pre-select and agree appropriate indicators before a disaster happens as part of disaster risk reduction activities. Example: In Mongolia in 2010, the National Emergency Management Agency understood and noted that Ulaan Bataar, the capital, was at risk of an earthquake which could potentially affect 300,000 people. The Food Cluster created an earthquake response plan for food aid that considered the urban context of Ulaan Baatar, national food and health standards and Sphere indicators. In the event of such an earthquake, the government and humanitarian community will be able to meet the needs more quickly and consistently since the indicators have already been agreed.

TRAINING SESSION PLAN

Comment that the potential of causing harm by not following the Sphere indicator as it is written is a common issue of concern. Guidance notes were specifically designed to help practitioners put the indicators into context appropriately. They highlight the areas of controversy and points to consider when implementing the key actions and indicators.

Ask participants to review when it is not appropriate to adapt Sphere indicators. Highlight that Sphere key indicators should not be adapted when:

- There is not enough information about the context before and after the disaster and how it has impacted capacities and vulnerabilities. If you do not have a solid understanding of the context, the indicators should be used as they are written. Monitoring can build on your understanding of the context and any required adaptations can be made later.
- Needs outweigh the available resources to meet them (lack of funding, lack of community contribution, lack of infrastructure).
- There is generalised poverty and Sphere standards cannot be met even in times of no disaster.

In other words, the key indicators should not be adapted simply because your agency cannot meet them.

Point out that sometimes in emergency situations, an organisation or the humanitarian Clusters may decide to set targets that do not align to Sphere indicators on purpose.

- When the humanitarian needs far outweigh the resources available in the short term, an organisation or a cluster may choose to provide a lower level of service to all people in need rather than meeting Sphere indicators for a small proportion of them. Example: after the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, a WASH cluster technical working group, in coordination with the Pakistan government, agreed on a target of 50 people per latrine in the short term (where the Sphere Excreta disposal standard 2, key indicator 2 is 20 people per latrine). The target was used as a benchmark for monitoring and when the situation improved, indicators were reviewed again against Sphere.
- Another example, based on humanitarian principles, is where through assessment or monitoring of the context, it is discovered that the host population lives below Sphere standards in non-disaster times. The organisation may choose not to provide services that reach certain key indicators because it could cause tensions (and potentially harm) between the host and displaced people. Example: In Darfur, Sudan, in 2005, the humanitarian community discovered through monitoring that some people living in the camps were not actually affected by the conflict, but by saying they were displaced they could receive a higher standard of living and services as compared to their own homes. The humanitarian agencies became concerned that their assistance was creating a culture of dependency (causing harm) where it did not exist before. In some instances, organisations chose to set their humanitarian assistance targets below Sphere indicators to avoid causing harm and to reduce tensions between affected people and the host communities.

In the examples just discussed, the humanitarian community chose to set targets lower than Sphere ones, and thus, not to meet Sphere indicators.

Review with participants why it is sometimes difficult to implement Sphere indicators as they are written. (Ex: lack of funds, lack of access, lack of capacity, etc.)

Elicit from participants what they think they should do if standards and key indicators are not met. Add to their responses by recommending the steps:

- Describe in their reports (assessment, evaluation etc.) the gap between the relevant Sphere indicators and the ones reached in practice.
- Explain the reasons for this and what needs to be changed.
- Assess negative implications for the affected population.
- Take appropriate mitigating actions to minimise the harm caused by these implications.

Summarise by saying that by committing to the above steps, agencies demonstrate that they are conforming to Sphere. They are being accountable even though they have not been able to meet all the standards and indicators as they are written.

If agencies or clusters elect to set targets below Sphere standards in the emergency phase, they should follow the above steps and set a date to review the targets when the situation has improved.

Review the session content and respond to any outstanding questions.



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