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## Part I: Introduction

<b>1. Accountability: 'the responsible use of power'</b>	<b>2</b>
Too many humanitarian standards?	5
How were the HAP Standard and Certification Scheme developed?	6
HAP Standard: urgent corrective procedure	7
Nomenclature: beneficiaries or survivors?	8

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## 1. Accountability: ‘the responsible use of power’

*I succeeded in getting together a certain number of women who helped as best they could to aid the wounded. It was not a matter of amputations or operations of any kind. But food, and above all drink, had to be taken around to men dying of hunger and thirst; then their wounds could be dressed and their bodies washed. ...*

*Oh, how valuable it would have been ... to have had a hundred experienced and qualified voluntary orderlies and nurses! ... As it was, there was no time for those who knew their business to give the needful advice and guidance, and most of those who brought their own goodwill to the task lacked the necessary knowledge and experience, so that their efforts were inadequate and often ineffective.*

*[Meanwhile] looters stole even from the dead, and did not always care if their poor wounded victims were still alive.*

— Henri Dunant, 1859<sup>1</sup>

*Whenever a [humanitarian] body is called upon to act or make a decision, it must first of all ask itself what the interests of the victims are, and if the action will serve those interests. This ‘golden rule’ will always enable the [agency] to solve most of the problems it encounters, with no danger of going wrong. In moments of difficulty, it will point the way more surely than the needle of a compass.*

— Jean Pictet, 1979<sup>2</sup>

In 1859 a young Swiss traveller called Henri Dunant found himself caught up in the humanitarian tragedy that followed one of the most terrible battles of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> While Dunant witnessed many extraordinary acts of kindness amidst the harrowing scenes he so vividly described, the founder of modern humanitarianism also made two profound observations. First, the ever-present risk that ill-directed compassion can do more harm than good. Second, that traumatic events are inherently disempowering, exposing all those affected to opportunistic and sometimes extreme forms of exploitation.

While Dunant recorded these observations nearly 150 years ago, he might equally have been describing a contemporary disaster relief operation. The joint evaluations of the international responses to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami both drew attention to the harmful and wasteful consequences of humanitarian action launched without adequate consultation with the people affected by the disaster. So why, after 150 years of institutionalised humanitarian assistance, should there be so many emergency relief programmes that fail to live up to Jean Pictet's<sup>4</sup> 'golden rule'?

In every humanitarian transaction there is an imbalance of circumstantial power between those able to give help and those in urgent need of assistance. This inequality between provider and receiver means that the act of giving is often exercised without the consent of the person in need.

When compared with the wider community of professions dedicated to improving human welfare, the scope for emergency relief workers to misuse or abuse their power is perhaps exceptional. While many public services are governed by professional associations that define standards, set entry qualifications, and deal with allegations of professional negligence and misconduct in order to protect the lay public, humanitarian work has generally been practised outside the scope of such regulatory systems.

It would clearly be wrong to insist that all acts of human compassion be administered by ‘licensed humanitarians’, but in the absence of such controls the humanitarian community is consequently largely self-selected, with no mandatory qualifications for either individuals or organisations engaging in emergency relief work. Furthermore, as a great many humanitarian disasters occur in situations where administrative systems are weak, contested, or compromised by the crisis itself, the humanitarian giver–receiver relationship is often conducted in a state of virtual judicial impunity. Relief agencies usually work under no immediate political or legal obligation to gain the consent of persons affected by disasters, or to offer complaints-handling and redress mechanisms to correct mistakes and compensate people unintentionally harmed by the emergency response.

However, through observing basic ethical safeguards and applying relevant management and technical skills, it is possible to assure the quality of humanitarian work, and to ensure that the power of the humanitarian giver is neither misused nor abused.

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) defines accountability as ‘the responsible use of power’. The body was founded in 2003 to promote the HAP Principles of Accountability – seven basic rules that together can ensure the responsible use of humanitarian power. In 2007 HAP released its Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management, against which it is now possible to assess compliance with proven good practice in humanitarian work. The Standard is a rigorously researched and tested product that identifies six practical ‘benchmarks’ for effective humanitarian quality management. Each benchmark has been selected because disaster survivors, in dialogue with the humanitarian community, have confirmed that the prescribed practice is necessary for achieving the best possible humanitarian results in an accountable and affordable manner.

As a consequence, agencies that attain compliance with the HAP Standard will raise the quality, impact, and efficiency of their

humanitarian work, protect the dignity of those affected by disasters, and improve the security, job satisfaction, and reputation of participating humanitarian aid workers.

HAP is founded upon the belief that such accomplishments deserve wider recognition, and the HAP Certification Scheme has been developed to serve this objective. Subject to a thorough independent analysis of an organisation's management system, HAP Certification can be conferred upon an agency that has proved that it can be relied upon to deliver quality humanitarian work wherever circumstances allow.

This Guide is designed to provide practical advice for the leaders, managers, and staff of organisations which want to comply with the HAP Standard and to enjoy recognition of this achievement through attaining HAP Certification.

## **Too many humanitarian standards?**

HAP is not the first inter-agency initiative to seek to address the observed shortcomings of the humanitarian aid system. These go back at least as far as Henri Dunant himself and the founding of the Red Cross movement. The *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* and The Sphere Project's *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* have further elaborated the ethical and technical frameworks for humanitarian response. People In Aid, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), and the Compas Qualité of Groupe URD and Coordination Sud have designed systems, codes, and tools for improving human resource management, monitoring and evaluation, and programme quality management respectively. So, in a field where some argue that there are already more than enough standards, codes, and principles, was it really necessary for HAP to create its own Accountability and Quality Management Standard?

The answer to this question lies in HAP's basic purpose as a voluntary international regulatory body devoted to promoting humanitarian accountability. When HAP was mandated in 2003 by its founders to 'monitor and report on the implementation of HAP International's Principles of Accountability and to accredit its members accordingly', it was apparent that it could not do this in a fair and affordable manner using any of the existing codes, standards, or tools. This was simply because none of the existing tools had been designed to verify compliance with HAP's Principles of Accountability.

Furthermore, while other inter-agency initiatives have made important contributions to the identification and promotion of good humanitarian practices, these have not necessarily been developed to fulfill all the criteria required for inclusion in the HAP Standard, namely mission-criticality, affordability, and measurability.

## **How were the HAP Standard and Certification Scheme developed?**

HAP initiated the development of its Accountability and Quality Management Standard in 2005, using a consensus-building process that placed great emphasis on consulting all interested parties. A stakeholder analysis was carried out and a reference group was established, comprised of representatives of disaster-affected people, NGOs, various humanitarian quality and accountability initiatives, United Nations agencies, government donors, host authorities, and other interested individuals. The development of the HAP Standard followed the International Organization for Standardization's Directives on *Rules for the Structure and Drafting of International Standards*, ensuring that all interested parties in the humanitarian community were consulted. The process was divided into three main stages:

- A broad consultation with key stakeholders took place between July 2005 and December 2006. The reference group provided

feedback on each draft and regional consultations were held in Bangladesh, Kenya, and the UK. The Standard was field-tested in three countries using three very different agencies.<sup>5</sup>

- The Editorial Steering Committee met and finalised the draft Standard in December 2006 and, with a few changes, the Standard was formally adopted by the HAP Board in January 2007.
- Finally, certification trials were conducted with MERCY Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur and with the Danish Refugee Council in Copenhagen, to fine-tune the Certification process and the audit guidelines. A group of independent auditors was selected, and trained to carry out baseline analyses and Certification audits from early 2007.

The principle of continual improvement applies as much to the ongoing development of the HAP Standard as it does to agencies that comply with it. In this respect, learning about humanitarian accountability and quality management continues, and it is expected that a revised HAP Standard will be released in 2009, taking account of lessons learned during the application of the 2007 version.

## **HAP Standard: urgent corrective procedure**

Although there is an ongoing process of continual review of the Standard, there is also a mechanism that can be invoked for urgent review and correction. Where there is firm evidence or plausible grounds for believing that compliance with any element of the HAP Standard will compromise the safety or well-being of disaster survivors, agency staff, or third parties, the HAP Secretariat should be notified immediately.

Agencies and individuals should send details of the circumstances of the case to: [secretariat@hapinternational.org](mailto:secretariat@hapinternational.org) or to the Executive Director of HAP (e-mail address available at: [www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org)). To enable the matter to be reviewed quickly, please provide the following information:

- Identify the component of the Standard that is causing concern (e.g. the qualifying norms, the Principles for Humanitarian Action, working with partners, Benchmarks 1–6, their related requirements, or means of verification).
- Identify who may be adversely affected by the application of this element of the Standard.
- Explain why, how, and when they may be affected, giving as much detail as possible.
- If possible, recommend specific changes (additions, deletions, or modifications) to the text of the Standard that would resolve the problem identified.

On receipt of such information, the Secretariat will review the case, notify the HAP Board accordingly and, if necessary, issue a corrective to the Standard and distribute an urgent advisory notice to HAP members, Certification applicants, and other interested parties.

## **Nomenclature: beneficiaries or survivors?**

While setting up HAP and then developing the Standard, there was much debate about terminology, especially with regard to terms used to describe persons of concern to humanitarian agencies. Throughout this text, the phrase ‘disaster survivors’ is used to refer to all living persons who have been directly affected by armed conflict or by other calamitous events such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and famines. The term ‘beneficiary’ refers only to persons who have been designated as the intended recipients of humanitarian assistance or protection. In this Guide, the term ‘beneficiary’ is concerned with the transactional relationship between the agency and the persons to whom the agency has given an undertaking of assistance.

HAP intends no value judgement about either the aid provider or the aid recipient when using the term ‘beneficiary’, and indeed is sympathetic to the view that other terms such as ‘claimant’, ‘customer’, or ‘client’ may be more appropriate with regard to

acknowledging the dignity and rights of disaster survivors. However, 'beneficiary' is used throughout HAP's founding Statute and it appears no less than six times in the HAP Principles of Accountability. To drop the term altogether would serve little useful purpose, while potentially giving the misleading impression that HAP has changed its focus or mandate – which is certainly not the case.

It needs emphasising that beneficiaries should never be viewed, addressed, or assisted as a homogenous group, with a fixed universal culture that either cannot or should not change. Beneficiary groups contain the same diversity and complexity of social, cultural, gender, and political differentiation as any other group of individuals, and good humanitarian management practices will recognise and engage with this at all stages of the project cycle. For example, in assessing needs, the disaggregation of those affected by a disaster will highlight diverse needs and capacities in relation to women, girls, men and boys, separated children, elderly people, people with disabilities, and other minority or potentially marginalised groups.

Field practitioners and policy makers are equally responsible for ensuring that humanitarian action is designed as far as is practically possible to meet the specific assistance and protection needs of individual disaster survivors, rather than some sort of generalised and abstract beneficiary.

## Notes

- 1 H. Dunant (1986) *A Memory of Solferino*, ICRC: Geneva.
- 2 J. Pictet (1979) 'The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross – Commentary', ICRC: Geneva.
- 3 Henri Dunant (1828–1910) estimated that 80,000 combatants died from wounds, infections, and epidemics following the battle of Solferino. His first-hand memoir inspired the founding of the Red Cross Movement.

- 4 Jean Pictet (1914–2002) was Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the lead author of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross.
- 5 World Vision International in Sri Lanka, OFADEC in Senegal, and the Danish Refugee Council in Somalia.