



# The Sphere Project

*Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards  
in Humanitarian Response*

## **The Sphere Project strategy for working with regional partners, country focal points and resource persons**

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The latest version of this document can be found at:  
[SphereProject.org/focal-points](http://SphereProject.org/focal-points)*

# 1. Background

The Sphere Project is structured very loosely, without any membership or sign-up process for organisations. This constitutes its unique strength, and a vast variety of organisations have taken ownership of Sphere on their own initiative. While mostly not directly involved in institutionalisation and advocacy activities, the Sphere Project office has an important role to play in overseeing the implementation of Sphere. The idea of creating Sphere country focal points was born out of the search for the right balance between oversight and maintaining the free application of Sphere: the role of Sphere regional partners and country focal points is to promote the institutionalisation of Sphere at various levels, building on the work that has already been done over the past 15 years.

Since 2008, Sphere's focus is on reaching the "critical mass" (The Sphere Strategy 2015) of Sphere users by further promoting the institutionalisation process. In light of this goal, the Sphere Project office has set out to review its overall focal point approach.

Sphere's aim is that agencies use Sphere minimum standards in emergencies, to the benefit of affected populations. To achieve this, the agencies need to know how to use the Sphere Handbook. Sphere users need to receive the appropriate resources from the Sphere Project office, and information exchange among Sphere users and with the Sphere Project office must be encouraged.

## 2. Aim and objectives

### **Aim:**

The Sphere Project office fosters an active and diverse global network of partners, focal points and resource persons who are on-the-ground experts and promoters of the Humanitarian Charter and minimum standards.

### **Objective 1:**

The Sphere focal point network is empowered and made more active through increased engagement by the Sphere Project office and improved provisioning of tools for focal points.

#### Indicators:

- Number of focal points contacted by the Sphere Project office over a given year
- Collection of best practices on Sphere website, as received from partners, country focal points and thematic resource persons
- Increased use of Sphere materials (downloads), in particular the advocacy and promotion tool boxes

## Objective 2:

Over 80 percent of focal points are actively engaged with stakeholders on humanitarian intervention in their regions of practice, with the result that over two-thirds of agencies in those regions use the Sphere Handbook in emergencies.

Indicators:

- Number of evaluation reports mentioning Sphere
- Number of national governments using Sphere (ex: DM guidelines)
- Number of reported Sphere trainings remains consistent or increases in a given country

## Objective 3:

The majority of focal points contribute to, and benefit from, a vibrant community of practice, fostered by the Sphere Project office, that shares practical tools and lessons learned to further the impact of focal points

Indicators:

Number of Sphere country focal points actively contributing to CoP

# 3. Implementation

**Objective 1:** The Sphere focal point network is empowered and made more active through increased engagement by the Sphere Project office and improved provisioning of tools for focal points.

Activity	Who	Timeframe
1-2 staff lead on engagement with focal points, 20-40% FTP	Sphere Project office	Ongoing
Pilot this strategy with 10 focal points	Sphere Project office	Nov-Dec 2012
Implement this strategy by reaching out to each focal point, assisting with drafting their ToR if necessary ➤ <b>Communications strategy (CS):</b> Announce the focal point system in February newsletter, facebook, twitter	Sphere Project office Sphere partner	Dec 2012 – June 2013
Contact every focal point on a personal level at least once a year, ideally twice (Skype, telephone or in-person), according to calendar (to be established)	Sphere Project office Sphere partners	Ongoing 10-20 contacts/month

<p>Create advocacy and promotion toolboxes with existing tools, share them on Sphere website and invite focal points to share more tools for the toolboxes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>CS:</b> Announce the toolboxes in newsletter, facebook, twitter</li> </ul>	<p>Sphere Project office</p>	<p>2013</p>
<p>Informal survey among focal points on current use of the Sphere Handbook ; how to improve networking across focal points ; tools needed for better support.</p>	<p>Sphere Project office Sphere partners</p>	<p>March 2013</p>
<p>Share key advocacy messages and dates with focal points (UN GA meetings, World Humanitarian Day, donor conferences for specific crises, etc).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>CS:</b> Use social media and focal point mailing list for outreach</li> </ul>	<p>Sphere Project office Focal points</p>	<p>January 2013 and ongoing</p>

**Objective 2:** Over 80 percent of focal points are actively engaged with stakeholders on humanitarian intervention in their regions of practice, with the result that over two-thirds of agencies in those regions use the Sphere Handbook in emergencies.

Activity	Who	Timeframe
Discuss March 2013 survey results with focal points (social media, CoP)	Sphere Project office, in connection with	April - May 2013
Based on survey, identify two regions interested in organising a regional focal point meeting and start organising the meetings	Sphere Project office	March - May 2013
Carry out 2 regional focal points/trainers meetings	Sphere Project office	June - Nov 2013

**Objective 3:** The majority of focal points contribute to, and benefit from, a vibrant community of practice, fostered by the Sphere Project office, that shares practical tools and lessons learned to further the impact of focal points

Activity	Who	Timeframe
Encourage focal points' participation in the Sphere CoP as soon as it is available (in 4 languages)	Sphere Project office	ASAP

## 4. Targets

- Current partners, focal points and resource persons
- Prospective partners, focal points and resource persons
- Indirectly, targets of focal points (to be determined by focal points themselves), which may include governments, humanitarian agencies, youth, news media, teachers, people affected by disasters, etc.

## 5. Risks

With limited human resources, the Sphere Project Office needs to plan its engagement very carefully.

This strategy empowers focal points to design their own work and may require them to engage with high-level targets, advocating for the Sphere standards.

**Risk:** Misrepresentation by the focal point of the Sphere standards, the Sphere Project office or themselves as extended representatives of the Sphere Project office, or other.

**Mitigation:** **a)** Clear purposes and limitations are given to the role of focal point, including the requirement of transparency and minimal reporting in all Sphere-related activities of focal points. (Regional partners engage with the Sphere Project office with an MoU, resource persons have a different role.) **b)** It is made clear that being a Sphere focal point does not imply any right to exclusivity, be that for providing trainings or representing Sphere or any other. **c)** The Sphere Project office reserves the right to remove a focal point from its website if sufficient objective evidence is available to support such a move (see annex 2).

**Risk:** The network may not succeed because of its global and diverse nature.

**Mitigation:** The Sphere Project office engages actively with all focal points and regional partners. The office provides a strong package of support tools and – as possible – other incentives, like regional or face-to-face meetings.

## 6. Monitoring and evaluation

At the end of 2013, the focal point system will be reviewed and evaluated by an external consultant. The evaluation will follow the indicators set out in section 2 (Aim and objectives).

## ANNEX 1

# Roles and responsibilities

### a) **Regional Sphere partnerships**

A regional Sphere partner is an agency or group of agencies chosen by the country focal points of that region and with the potential to carry out quality and accountability activities beyond their country limits. Regional partners support national agencies within a defined region in strengthening their Sphere activities and their Q&A activities in general. Regional Sphere partners may also coordinate regional Sphere activities and regional advocacy for Sphere.

How to identify regional Sphere partners:

- Select a region based on a perceived need to strengthen the use of Sphere
- Consult with existing country focal points on their need for organising themselves regionally.
- Based on these consultations (for example by holding a regional country focal points meeting) and together with the country focal points, determine the best way forward, for example by choosing a regional partner organisation, a rotating chair, or other

**Website criteria and quality control:** A separate MoU between the Sphere Project office and the regional partner determines the tasks and ensures that the set goals are worked towards from both sides. MoUs are to be reviewed and adapted regularly. The MoU is made public on the Sphere website, along with the contact details of the regional partner.

### b) **Country focal points**

A Sphere country focal point is a (group of) organisation(s) or an individual actively promoting and advocating for Sphere country-wide. Often, there is one focal point per country which will coordinate and encourage coordinated Sphere activities. When there are more than one, they are expected to be informed of each others' activities and collaborate as opportunities arise.

The country-specific humanitarian needs will define a country focal point's activities. Depending on the situation, they may initiate, delegate and/or complete a variety of activities (see suggested activities in the sample ToR, Annex 1).

Sphere focal points have no exclusive right to carry out Sphere-related activities (for examples trainings).

The role of country focal point is a voluntary one. Focal points receive no financial contribution from the Sphere Project office.

**Website criteria and quality control:** Based on the sample ToR, country focal points develop their own country-specific ToR which will be validated by the Sphere Project office and published on the Sphere website along with the country focal point's contact details.

By validating a country focal point ToR, the Sphere Project office agrees with the ToR's overall quality and feasibility, but does not oversee the activities deriving from that ToR. Rather, by publishing their ToR on the Sphere website, country focal points become publicly accountable to the Sphere community. Where problems are brought to the Sphere Project office's attention, it will intervene to help solve them as appropriate, and it reserves the right to remove a country focal point from its website if their activities do not correspond with Sphere's approach.

**c) Thematic resource persons**

Thematic resource persons are experts on a particular theme or cluster. With a strong understanding of the Sphere philosophy, they promote Sphere within their own networks and provide advice and support to Sphere users.

**Website criteria and quality control:** Thematic resource persons are identified by the Sphere Project office: they are either approached by the office or considered for inclusion on the website upon recommendation. It is the Sphere Project office, along with the resource person, that determines tasks and oversees a resource person's contributions.

**d) The Sphere Project office**

To reach the objectives stated in this focal point strategy, the Sphere Project office will:

- Support Sphere country focal points in advocacy or promotional activities (for example with messaging, content advice, support letters for funding etc, to the extent possible)
- Provide tools to support Sphere country focal point activities (to be downloaded from the Sphere website)
- Provide advice (if requested) on Sphere training and learning activities
- Use information provided by country focal points in its own global advocacy and promotional work
- Communicate directly with each country focal point at least once a year
- Involve and inform country focal points on global developments regarding Sphere as appropriate
- With the online Sphere Community of Practice, provide focal points a platform to interact with the Sphere community
- Promote regional meetings and activities for country focal points

- Promote and support the creation of new country focal points
- Publish on the Sphere website the list of country focal points
- Maintain a country focal points mailing list

**Quality control:** The Sphere Project office will collect its partners' feedback and adjust its strategy and activities accordingly, at least once a year, as stated under « Monitoring and evaluation ». Results of feedback and learning are made public on the Sphere website.

Nota bene:

In this strategy, **focal points within organisations** are not considered because they won't be represented on the Sphere website. However, all organisations are invited to mainstream Sphere in their programme activities as much as possible. Annex 3 suggests a list of indicators for institutionalising Sphere. These indicators are also useful for country focal points.



## ANNEX 2

### Lessons learned and recommendations

This strategy is based on lessons learned by the Sphere Project office staff, on various feedback from existing Sphere country focal points, a regional country focal point meeting in Bangkok and an indepth survey among existing and potential country focal points carried out by the Sphere Project office in 2012.

#### Lessons learned from the Bangkok meeting regarding regional partners:

- The selection process for regional partners must be more open and democratic
- The working relationship between the regional partner and the country focal points must be horizontal

#### Lessons learned from country focal points:

- Some degree of screening of country focal points is necessary to make them feel valued
- Country focal points should not be determined by the Sphere Project office but within the country itself
- Existing country focal points need more structure and clarity about their role, which will make it easier for them to navigate the humanitarian community « representing » Sphere
- Need for increased support and communication
- Need for guidance on advocacy activities
- Need for assistance with donors or finding financial support for Sphere-related activities

#### **Survey recommendations:**

The sustainability of the focal point system relies on the independence of each country focal point, but structure is needed to help define their role in their country and maintain the engagement with the Sphere Project office.

→ Include a sample ToR. This will assure continued independence while creating a common ground with the Sphere Project office and on goals to be accomplished.

→ Ensure regular communication between the country focal points and the Sphere Project office, for example by phone/skype at least once a year, ideally twice; this will improve the relationship between the office and the country focal points.

→ Develop tools to help focal points advocate for the Sphere minimum standards.

Examples could include advocacy guidelines, key messages and a best practice collection of successful advocacy to government.

→ Create a country focal points mailing list and in time a country focal points forum or community of practice in order to create a sense of community among the country focal points and a place for them to share experiences and information.

Based on the feedback received, this strategy strives to do justice to the need for balancing guidance and support with respect for diversity.

## ANNEX 3

### Sample ToR for Sphere country focal points

Roles and activities of Sphere country focal points will vary greatly from country to country. Therefore, and in order to maintain the greatest possible flexibility, the Sphere Project office can only **suggest activities**, based on previous experiences of Sphere country focal points. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it mandatory. Points from the list can be included in country-specific ToRs. Upon request, the Sphere Project office can assist in setting up country focal point ToR.

#### **Sample ToR**

##### Objective

The overall aim of the Sphere Project is to enhance quality and accountability in humanitarian response through the use of Sphere in emergencies – to the benefit of affected populations.

To achieve this, the agencies need to know how to use the Handbook, Sphere users need to receive the appropriate resources from the Sphere Project office, and information exchange among Sphere users must be possible.

The various forms of Sphere partnerships are meant to achieve these objectives by wielding mutual benefits: the Sphere Project office provides promotion, advocacy and training tools and materials to the country focal points who inform the office of their activities and needs. This information will in turn help the office improve and expand the palette of tools – which helps country focal points carry out their activities more effectively and will lead to active uptake of Sphere in emergencies.

**A Sphere country focal point** is an organisation or group of organisations or individual actively promoting Sphere country-wide. A country focal point is recognised as such by the humanitarian community in-country and can demonstrate that they regularly carry out or initiate Sphere-related activities. There is no hierarchy among country focal points and they work with each other in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation as opportunities arise.

Country focal points coordinate their activities – as appropriate – among each other, with the regional Sphere partner and with the Sphere Project.

**[here appropriate wording for the specific focal point. Information on the person/organisation/contact person, motivation, detailed description of experience with Sphere]**

**Suggested criteria for country focal point (refer to these as appropriate and/or add new criteria)**

- Is ideally one of the following: organisation, agency, network, advocacy or umbrella organisation (to ensure continuity), but can also be an individual

- The person identified within the focal point organisation or the individual focal point has a extensive experience in Sphere implementation in the field
- Has a proven track record of promoting Q&A within the country
- Has the potential to successfully promote Sphere in his/her country, both with humanitarian agencies, donor groups, relevant government bodies etc
- Can dedicate time to Sphere activities

**Role of the country focal point (Here are suggestions, please select the ones most appropriate for you)**

- **Advocate** with relevant government ministries, for example in the context of disaster management, civil protection etc to use Sphere
- Be the **point of contact** for people and organisations seeking support to implement Sphere
- **Promote** the use of the Sphere Handbook with national and international NGOs and UN agencies in country, including clusters and other inter-agency structures
- Encourage the formation of a country-level **Q&A working group** and actively participate in such a group
- Carry out or initiate the **translation** of Sphere training and promotional materials into local languages
- Conduct, coordinate or promote **training and learning activities** on Sphere and Q&A in general
- **Interact** with a regional Sphere partner where applicable
- **Communicate** to the Sphere Project office and – where feasible and applicable – to the regional Sphere partner any activity updates and examples of best practice, at least twice a year, if wished by phone/skype
- In the case of an **emergency** in that particular country, communicate the use of Sphere within that specific emergency response to the Sphere Project office on an ongoing basis
- **Interact** with the Sphere community through different means, including the Sphere Project website and the Sphere **Community of Practice**.
- **Subscribe** to the Sphere Project newsletter and disseminate it further within their network
- Promote and coordinate with the **Sphere companions** (INEE, LEGS, SEEP) where feasible

## **Plans for 2013 and onward (if applicable)**

### **Possible success indicators**

- Has organised the translation of Sphere materials
- Has set up a Q&A working group or similar
- Has organised or initiated joint Sphere trainings
- Has been approached by NGOs for supporting their Q&A activities
- Involved with the Sphere online Community of Practice (forthcoming)
- Involved in discussions with the government on including Sphere in national guidelines

### **The Sphere Project office**

To reach the objectives stated above, the Sphere Project office will support the focal point to the extent possible with the following activities:

- Support Sphere country focal points in advocacy or promotional activities (for example with messaging, content advice, support letters for funding etc, to the extent possible)
- Provide tools to support Sphere country focal point activities (to be downloaded from the Sphere website)
- Provide advice (if requested) on Sphere training and learning activities
- Use information provided by country focal points in its own global advocacy and promotional work
- Communicate directly with each country focal point at least once a year
- Involve and inform country focal points on global developments regarding Sphere as appropriate
- With the online Sphere Community of Practice, provide focal points a platform to interact with the Sphere community
- Promote regional meetings and activities for country focal points
- Promote and support the creation of new country focal points
- Publish on the Sphere website the list of country focal points
- Maintain a country focal points mailing list

## ANNEX 4

# Indicators of interagency coordination using Sphere in a single country context

These indicators were developed in 2002 in the document «Institutionalisation of Sphere: great start, next steps». They provide useful guidance for a coordinated country-wide approach to promoting Sphere:

### **1: Discussion on common principles relevant for the context**

- As many agencies as possible participating in the disaster response discuss codes and principles and their contextual significance
- Agencies develop a shared understanding of humanitarian principles and common language (including agreement on the importance of participation and gender issues)

### **2: Activities which facilitate joint application**

- Systematic introduction of Sphere in coordination/sectoral meetings
- Joint assessments leading to consistency and equity in outputs (quality and quantity) across area of service provision
- Inter-agency Sphere training
- Agreement on which criteria for distribution will be shared with the affected population with a view to transparency and accountability
- Agreement on indicators for joint monitoring (including what data should be collected, how, frequency and methodology/repository for collation). Monitoring should include humanitarian principles as well as minimum standards
- Joint sectoral programming decisions are made based on humanitarian principles and minimum standards
- Where appropriate, Memoranda of Understanding between agencies refer to use of the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards as a framework
- Local good practice case examples of Sphere application are shared amongst agencies
- Joint agencies share Sphere with government bodies and consider how Sphere could inform national disaster response policy
- Joint agencies use Sphere as a tool in the formulation of Provincial and/or National Disaster Preparedness and Response plans

### **3: Procedures defined for systematic review of progress**

- Agencies undertake a joint periodic evaluation of progress relative to Sphere application: humanitarian principles and minimum standards
- Agencies periodically jointly consult the affected population in relation to the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance (this should include issues of participation and gender)

## ANNEX 5

# Indicators for institutionalising Sphere – single agency

Indicators for single agency institutionalisation of Sphere (from « Institutionalising Sphere: great start, next steps», The Sphere Project, 2002). These indicators are not directly meant for country country focal points but may be an additional source of inspiration.

### **1: Policies**

Sphere is incorporated into policies:

- Sphere is presented to and endorsed by the Board within emergency policy
- Disaster response/emergency policies explain why the agency endorses Sphere and how it will be applied
- Policy is disseminated to staff at all levels and alliance partners, if appropriate
- Vision/strategic plan reference Sphere

### **2: Procedures**

Sphere is integrated into tools and procedures:

- Formats for assessment, project proposals, monitoring tools, evaluation and reporting formats
- Logistics (procurement and pre positioning) procedures
- The organisation's emergency manual

### **3: Human resource management**

Sphere is integrated into agency-wide staff development:

- Staff performance is evaluated against achieving objectives of Sphere
- Sphere is included at all stages of recruitment procedures for disaster response staff/consultants and for Country Directors in countries vulnerable to disaster
  - Job descriptions/Terms of Reference
  - Candidates are asked questions on Sphere at interview
- Orientation briefings refer to Sphere and a copy of handbook is provided
- Sphere handbook is available for all staff, including in district offices



- Non-operational departments are briefed on Sphere (e.g. Press office, Finance)

#### **4: Projects and programmes**

Sphere is applied in assessment and data analysis leading to proposals that reflect:

- Sphere guidance i.e. seek to achieve indicators and/or explain why they cannot be achieved in current context
- Programmes are monitored against selected indicators based on Sphere
- Programmes are evaluated against achieving the objectives of Sphere, including analysis of humanitarian principles, participation and gender
- Disaster response projects include a budget line for Sphere dissemination and learning from best practice
- Sphere is incorporated into broader work plans/action plans at country level

#### **5: Demonstrated commitment**

- Agencies monitor organisation-wide application of Sphere
- Country directors show leadership on Sphere application
- Agency senior management has attended a Sphere training workshop

## ANNEX 6

# The Sphere Project visual identity guidelines (excerpt)

The text below is an excerpt from the Sphere visual identity guidelines (see the full text on the Sphere website: [SphereProject.org/visual-identity](https://SphereProject.org/visual-identity)).

### **Use and misuse of the Sphere Project logo:**

“The Sphere Project logo may be used to identify products and activities related to the Sphere Handbook and developed by the Sphere community – that is, organisations and individuals committed to the Sphere principles and standards.

However, certain conditions apply:

- the authorship of these products needs to be clearly identified and prominently displayed so as not to imply endorsement by the Sphere Project office;
- the logo cannot be used in any way that might suggest endorsement by the Sphere Project office (please consult the Sphere Project office in case of doubt);
- the logo cannot be reproduced *alone* on the cover of publications (print or electronic) websites or other products (please consult the Sphere Project office in case of doubt);
- the logo cannot be used for commercial purposes nor be displayed on items designated for sale without prior agreement by the Sphere Project office;
- the logo cannot be used in business cards, letterheads or personal websites.”