# Sphere standards in national humanitarian response
## *Engaging with National Disaster Management Authorities*

discussion paper

## Acknowledgements

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## Methodology

The content of this Discussion Paper is based on exchanges with a number of Sphere Focal Points and Sphere Trainers, representatives from NDMAs, and individual experts with extensive experience on the application of Sphere standards in a range of disaster- and conflict-related situations. The Paper recognises that every situation is unique and that any indicators adopted must be considered in context, respecting local customs and ensuring that aid is provided in an impartial manner and according to needs.

## Abbreviations

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| CaLP | Cash Learning Partnership |
| CHS | Core Humanitarian Standard |
| CTP | Cash Transfer Programme |
| HAP | Humanitarian Accountability Partnership |
| HCT | Humanitarian Country Team |
| IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee |
| IFRC | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies |
| LEGS | Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards |
| NDMA | National Disaster Management Authority |
| NGO | Non-gouvernemental organisation |
| OCHA | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDAC | United Nations Disaster Assistance and Coordination |

# Contents

# Executive summary

National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs) are often, though not always, a country's principal institution mandated to co-ordinate and manage all aspects related to disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response through their respective national and provincial offices. Many such authorities have now adopted disaster management policies and guidelines, some of which make explicit reference to humanitarian standards.

Such standards bring clarity about the expected quality of humanitarian response, which strengthen preparedness before an emergency as well as improve coordination and save time during a response. However, the process of contextualising and adopting standards can be challenging and time consuming, and governments may have some real and justified reservations about embarking on such a process.

The internationally accepted Sphere standards provide an excellent basis on which to build, and many countries have already begun or completed work using Sphere. The network of Sphere Focal Points is critical to the success of this process, as are national and international NGOs, UN agencies and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies who already use Sphere in their work, and can act as advocates.

While the Sphere standards are universal, they are also qualitative in nature. Indicators are open to local contextualisation to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and realistic. This process of contextualisation often takes place on a case-by-case basis during an emergency response. In cases where a national exercise takes place to adapt and contextualise standards, it can happen ahead of an emergency in a participatory and thorough manner. National contextualisation is a serious undertaking, but can substantially increase the sense of ownership of the standards.

Context analysis and good planning will support an effective process of advocacy to develop national standards for emergency response at the country level. The Sphere standards, which include the Core Humanitarian Standard, as well as Sphere's Partner Standards, are essential elements to support this process. This Discussion Paper considers various ways to approach and work with NDMAs and includes a range of recommendations in support of adopting standards at national level. It is supported by a number of case studies which illustrate some ways to take up the mentioned challenges and take advantage of potential opportunities.

# Introduction

Government authorities are at the frontline for planning, delivering and managing humanitarian assistance, prior to, during and following a crisis. National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs) – or their equivalent structures – are government entities responsible for coordinating response to natural or human-made disasters and for capacity building in disaster resilience. Reliefweb lists more than 100 NDMAs  (or equivalents).

An NDMA's ability to effectively prepare for and respond to a disaster varies according to government structure, political and security context and numerous other factors. Moreover, governments do not always respond to disasters in isolation but in collaboration with a range of different national and international humanitarian actors.

Sphere provides an international reference point for humanitarian response through the Minimum Standards.  These standards are not always well known to NDMA staff, and Sphere works through country level Focal Points to encourage the adoption of international standards in the national context.

## Purpose and intended audience of the discussion paper

This Discussion Paper sets out to understand and describe opportunities for adapting international humanitarian standards to a regional, national or local level in preparing for, or responding to a disaster. It is based on a series of consultations with Sphere country focal points and a literature review, and presents a number of brief case studies to illustrate the main findings and recommendations.  It concludes with a set of suggestions for advocates and Sphere focal points to take forward work with NDMAs.

While the main audience of the paper is humanitarian actors, advocates and Sphere focal points working with government institutions, it is hoped that staff working within NDMAs and other government representatives with disaster management responsibilities will also find it useful.  It may help to create an environment in which a constructive dialogue takes place, to support the contextualisation and adoption of international standards in the national context.

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[1] http://reliefweb.int/topics/ndm-authorities

# National government and disaster management

The primary responsibility for citizens affected by disasters rests with the national government. International agencies and local non-governmental actors should play a supporting role.
However, this responsibility varies according to country and region. At a country level, this responsibility commonly rests with a national disaster management agency – although the name of that office may vary between countries. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or its equivalent) may well have responsibility for the coordination of international assistance.

Many NDMAs can be found within one of the following structures:

1. The NDMA is located directly within the Office of the Prime Minister;
2. The NDMA is positioned within a line ministry, which is one of many that in turn report to the Office of the Prime Minister; or
3. A Disaster Management Unit (or equivalent title) exists in several different line ministries, each reporting to the Prime Minister's Office.

While these are the most commonly represented models seen today, there is on occasion some further divergence and separation of roles and responsibilities. In Kenya, for example, two separate bodies exist: one responsible for disaster management in response to drought, and the other for other forms of natural and human-made disasters.

## Key features of NDMAs and the role of standards

For maximum effectiveness of these structures, Interworks (1998) identified the following components as being of primary importance.

- An appointed contact point – a key agency needs to exist which has the authority and resources to co-ordinate all related bodies for disaster management, such as ministries, international donors, NGOs and the private sector;
- Links between policy and operations – close working relationship is essential between the policy formulating body (often in the hands of a national disaster committee) and the operational agency that implement decisions;
- Links from the central to local government – effective communications and the provision of resources from one to the other is essential;
- Close working relationships between those responsible for relief and mitigation programmes will help ensure that risk measures are addressed and preparedness enhanced;
- Political consensus – all parties must be in agreement to ensure implementation of national plans and legislation;
- NGOs need to be fully integrated with government plans to establish a comprehensive response;
- The National Preparedness Plan should describe a systematic approach to disaster preparedness;
- The scope of disaster response planning – which should be proactive – needs to place emphasis on preparedness.

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[2] This primary responsibility of the state is also explicitly stated in the Humanitarian Charter, paragraph 2 (Sphere Handbook, pp. 20-21)

The tasks listed above will be much easier if there are clear expectations about the scope and nature of the response – to inform policy, to enable effective preparedness, to support accountability efforts, and to implement response actions. In other words, a set of minimum standards for humanitarian response.

Sphere promotes technical and process standards which – applied correctly – ensure that humanitarian response is based on principles and protection considerations, and that the response values the dignity of affected populations. The standards are universal and based on consensus, providing neutral benchmarks valid for all actors.

**NDMA responsibilities – the example of India**

The Indian National Disaster Management Authority, placed directly under the Prime Minister, works closely with the NGO and UN community, to a large extent through the coordination mechanisms provided by Sphere India[3]. It has the following responsibilities:

- Develop and apply policies on disaster management;
- Approve the National Disaster Management Plan;
- Approve plans prepared by the Ministries or Departments in accordance with the National Plan;
- Lay down guidelines to be followed by the State Authorities in drawing up the State Plan;
- Lay down guidelines to be followed by the different Ministries or Departments in order to integrate the measures for disaster prevention or mitigation in their development plans and projects;
- Coordinate the enforcement and implementation of disaster management policies and plans;
- Recommend provision of funds for disaster mitigation;
- Provide such support to other countries affected by major disasters as may be determined by the Central Government;
- Take other measures for disaster prevention, mitigation or preparedness, as well as capacity building for dealing with threatening disaster situations as it may consider necessary.
- Lay down broad policies and guidelines for the functioning of the National Institute of Disaster Management

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[3] Sphere India is a national consortium of nationals and international relief organisations: sphereindia.org.in

# The roles of other actors in adopting Sphere standards

Many other actors work with governments in emergency responses, starting with the affected communities and their leadership, and including national NGOs, international NGOs, and international bodies including UN agencies and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

This section introduces the Sphere Standards and goes on to consider a number of key actors and their potential roles in supporting the national adoption of Sphere Standards.

## Sphere Humanitarian Standards in preparedness, response and recovery

Sphere promotes minimum standards for use in humanitarian response globally.  Initiated in 1997, Sphere Standards aim to improve the quality of assistance to people affected by a disaster or conflict, following a rights-based approach and highlighting affected people's dignity and right to assistance and protection, as set out in the Humanitarian Charter.

Sphere promotes the active **participation** of affected communities as well as of local and national authorities, at all stages of a response. It strongly encourages international humanitarian actors taking part in a response to consciously address and support local and national actors, building on existing **capacities**. At the same time, attention is also drawn to the **accountability** of humanitarian agencies and governments towards those affected populations, donors and representatives from the private sector who might support a particular humanitarian response and civil society in general.

The Sphere minimum standards have from the outset focused on key life-saving areas of humanitarian response - that is: water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion; food security and nutrition; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health action.

However crucial the above-mentioned areas are, they do not exhaust the components of the humanitarian response to disaster and conflict. Sphere has therefore recognized a series of standards produced by other organizations and networks active in specific sectors as companion standards to its own Handbook. These standards coordinate their efforts as the Humanitarian Standards Partnership :

- *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery* by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE);
- *Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards* (LEGS);
- *Minimum Economic Recovery Standards*, by the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion (SEEP) Network;
- *Child Protection Minimum Standard* (CPMS);
- *Minimum Requirements for Market Analysis in Emergencies* (CaLP)

While representing a set of globally agreed best practices that should be strived for, Sphere standards are not intended as a binding set of rules but rather to be used to influence and inform on best humanitarian practices – as **benchmarks** to strive towards achieving. As noted in the Handbook's introduction, "*The degree to which agencies can meet standards will depend on a range of factors some of which are outside their control.*"

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## Sphere Country Focal Points

In more than 40 disaster- and conflict-affected countries an individual, organisation or coalition serves as a Sphere Focal Point . Their role is to be a champion for Sphere: to actively promote Sphere principles and standards among humanitarian practitioners and – where feasible – advocate with Governments for the use of Sphere in their humanitarian and disaster management policies.

These are voluntary undertakings. The country-specific humanitarian needs will define the activities of the focal point at the country level. Depending on the situation they may initiate, delegate, coordinate or complete a variety of activities.

## International actors at the national level

While Sphere was first developed, and used mostly by NGOs and parts of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, today the Sphere Standards are broadly accepted also by the UN system, at both headquarters and national levels. This fact provides an additional incentive for promoting standards with NDMAs, to support the coordination of national and international relief efforts around jointly stated goals and benchmarks.

Two international response structures can contribute further to promoting standards in preparedness and in ongoing operations:

The **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)**, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, is composed of organisations that undertake humanitarian action in-country and that commit to participate in coordination arrangements. Its objective is to ensure that the activities of such organisations are coordinated. The HCT is ultimately accountable to the populations in need. Appropriate and meaningful mechanisms are designed and implemented at the local level to achieve this goal. Whenever possible, the HCT operates in support of, and in coordination with, national and local authorities.

There is growing recognition of the value of using standards (in particular Sphere) at the strategic country-level response planning level.

**IASC Clusters** group UN and non-UN operational agencies along technical sectors. Clusters work at the global and country levels to support national governments in managing international assistance. To the extent possible, clusters mirror national response structures, use terminology that is close to that used by national sectors and are co-chaired by government representatives. Nine clusters have been established, with designated lead agencies that are accountable to the IASC.
The WASH, Shelter, Health, Nutrition and Food Security Clusters use indicators that are based on Sphere. The Protection Cluster refers to the four Sphere Protection Principles.

Other potential entry points are listed in page 17.

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[5] See the Sphere Focal Points database at SphereProject.org/community

## The role of NGOs

Strong institutionalisation of standards in an NGO structure can help set an example for government agencies. Where NGOs collaborate or coordinate with government agencies, their work with standards is a direct way to show their usefulness and advocate with government for using them.

For example, **Indonesia's** national standards were developed through a two-year broad consultative process. Technical committees working on the standards were led by the National Disaster.

Management Agency and included representatives of the Indonesia Red Cross Society. Humanitarian NGOs provided input to the process. The inclusion of international quality and accountability standards in the Indonesian humanitarian guidelines is largely due to the advocacy efforts deployed by the Indonesian Society for Disaster Management (MPBI), which is the Sphere Focal Point in the country. Indonesian national standards are not legally binding but are seen as an invaluable reference for all those involved in humanitarian response in the country.

Evidence of Sphere uptake by Trocaìre and its partners in **Zimbabwe** have shown recognition of Sphere by one local government department in the way that now considers service delivery programmes such as water supplies, sewage, public health, housing and community services and public safety (Trocaìre, 2013). In this instance, identifying precisely how Sphere standards and principles linked with the country's own national disaster management policy, legislation and strategy was instrumental in enabling support from the country's NDMA, the Department of Civil Protection.

In a similar situation, the fact that an NGO consistently designs and implements national activities in accordance with Sphere standards, for example in the case of **ADRA Argentina**, has been found of benefit as it builds trust with government authorities.

Not all situations, however, are as straightforward. In the case of **Egypt**, for example, Sphere standards are clearly addressed in the Egyptian Red Crescent contingency plan but, to date, there has been no access to the respective government authority to do likewise.

## Regional structures

In certain situations, such as the South Pacific and Central and South America, the establishment of regional structures has proven to be an effective component in support of integrating humanitarian standards into response.

Examples include the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management, in central America CEPREDENAC (Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central – Co-ordination of Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

# Contextualisation: making standards work locally

Contextualising international standards is a process of agreeing on a set of relevant indicators based on Sphere. This is done by starting from a baseline analysis, identifying areas where indicators need to be adapted, understanding the potentially negative implications of unmet needs in terms of public health or protection threats, and having processes and response adjustments in place to address those needs and threats.

Contextualisation must be rights-based and culturally appropriate, and expressed in an easily understood way. Key to this process is an open dialogue on the issue, a firm understanding of the situation and peoples' needs and agreement on what then constitutes a mutually acceptable set of indicators.

In the Sphere context, this requires people to have a thorough understanding of how to work with Protection Principles and the Core Humanitarian Standard, as well as the Minimum Standards and their respective Guidance Notes. Carried out in a consultative manner, this process helps build the common framework and understanding needed to reach these agreements.

Recognising this, some governments have chosen to adopt Sphere as it is; others have provided guidance on how it can be adapted to suit the local situation; while others have used Sphere and the companion standards as a starting point to develop national standards themselves.

However, some countries have preferred to develop humanitarian standards independently, and in some cases, this may be based on negative perceptions about international standards. Some of these perceptions are outlined below.

Successfully adapting international standards requires a solid understanding of the national context. It is easiest in situations where government and humanitarian actors are involved together, in training and planning, from the beginning of the process. This results in a common framework and understanding of Sphere as well as a balanced understanding of the actual situation, for example through context and needs assessments.

Guidance on contextualising Sphere standards is also developed in some detail in all existing Sphere Unpacked guides (*Sphere for Assessments, Sphere for Monitoring and Evaluation, Sphere for Urban Response*).

**Haiti – Reference to standards in determining safe land access for shelter**

Following the January 2010 earthquake, the Government of Haiti recognized a need to move families from dangerous informal camps in Port-au-Prince to safer locations, and to reduce the concentration of people living in Port-au-Prince itself by establishing new suburbs north of the city. The government declared an area north of Port-au-Prince as public domain and agreed with the humanitarian community to temporarily move families living in dangerous informal camps in Port-au-Prince to this area as quickly as possible. However, even while this movement was underway, it was not clear which parts of the designated public domain lands were best suited for settlement, or what work might be needed to make the new temporary and eventual permanent sites suitable for safe and sustainable use.

As part of USAID-funded support to the relocation, an environmental review of the project included a review of the whole public domain area designed by the government for relocations to identify specific sites which best matched established criteria for safe and sustainable settlements. Sphere standards and other humanitarian guidance were used to define criteria for optimal settlement sites, with a focus on shelter and settlement and WASH, as well as minimising negative environmental impacts. While other references could have been used in the site selection process, **the Sphere standards provided clear, concise and agreed standards and indicators which filled a gap in the absence of other nationally or internationally accepted criteria for site selection.**

*Source: Charles Kelly*

## Contextualisation of indicators, not of standards

Practitioners are often concerned that they cannot reach the indicators of a particular standard. For example, it is not always possible to provide 15 litres of water per person per day. If we take a look at this particular standard, however, we see that the Standard calls for a **sufficient quantity** of water, while the 15 litres in the indicator are a **suggested value** that may need to be contextualized according to the guidance notes, and taking into account such varied factors as, for example, climate, cultural practices and hygiene or shelter conditions.

For example, the WASH cluster in Somalia in 2012 generated a contextualized understanding of what was meant by a 'sufficient' quantity of water. In drought times, this was just 6l of chlorinated water: five for the person and one for the animals. The amount was greater for an IDP situation, greater in the event of a cholera outbreak, and the per-patient amount suggested for a health centre exceeded the relevant Sphere indicator. Similarly, in Pakistan, the WASH cluster in the 2010 floods defined a survival need of water to be 3l per person per day. In both cases, the rationale for reaching those levels was explained. It is important to note that contextualization does not always imply adapting the indicator downwards. In many contexts where culture and expectations are different, the minimum requirements may need to be increased. This is particularly the case in middle- or high-income countries struck by disaster.

The following example describes the process of contextualisation of Sphere companion standards in Vietnam, in particular relating to disaster preparedness. This process led to the publication of *Contextualised INEE Minimum Standards for Vietnam.*[6]

**Adapting Standards for Disaster Preparedness – Vietnam**

As part of the INEE programme, formal contextualisation exercises were used to support the education response as part of disaster mitigation and preparedness in Vietnam. The following approaches/activities provide an indication of how this process was managed, and highlights some of the learning from the process.

Process:

- National and sub-national workshops were held with school principals to receive their feedback. This was helpful in strengthening the process and final outcome document, and is believed to be particularly relevant in complex and conflict situations.

- Contextualised standards were used to carry out government advocacy for strengthening a national law on preparedness and disaster response, to train school principals on school preparedness as well as to develop a school self-assessment tool.

- A working group established to support in-country implementation and applications in schools helped translate the outcomes into practice.

- Contextualised standards have since enabled advocacy with government for the development of national policy on education and disaster risk reduction.

Learning:

- Contextualisation should ideally take place over a period of a few months, rather than weeks or days.

- Small group work is important during the development of indicators as it allows time for reflection, discussion and exchanges of ideas and opinions.

- Feedback on an initial draft of contextualised standards should be obtained from as many reviewers as possible.

- A separate workshop, or similar event, should be held to present initial findings: this helps build ownership and gain further buy-in from people.

- Locally organised events help introduce and adopt the contextualised Standards framework. Some materials will likely need to be presented in local language to ensure a truly participatory process.

- Strong host partners and prior relationship and collaboration with the relevant government agency are essential to build on this confidence and experience.

*Source: Adopted from Laub (2013)*

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[6] Contextualised INEE Minimum Standards for Vietnam, 20 September 2011,
http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1154/Vietnam_MS_full_contextualized_handbook.pdf

# Advocating and supporting NDMAs to contextualise and adopt indicators: challenges and recommendations

There are number of advantages to governments having a well-defined, locally appropriate set of indicators for humanitarian response, and there is a strong case for these standards to be well aligned with international standards such as Sphere and its companions. Yet the process by which such standards are agreed and adopted may be quite different in each environment.

This section identifies some of the challenges identified through the literature review and consultation process for this study, and sets out a range of approaches and recommendations to mitigate and address them.

The section is followed by a number of case studies which illustrate many of the points made below.

## Common misconceptions about international standards

> **"Sphere standards are only intended for developing countries"**
While technical standards may be achieved relatively easily in mid- to high-income countries, technical assistance must still be carried out in consideration of human dignity, protection, inclusion and psycho-social aspects. These are spelled out in the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Protection Principles). There is value in having defined standards in all countries.

> **"Sphere standards have been developed for the (international) non-governmental aid community"**
While the Sphere Handbook was originally developed by NGOs, it was always intended to be universal and is now being used by a wide range of humanitarian actors and an increasing number of governments. Providing a common language and framework, it is a key coordination tool with the power to unite different actors around a common humanitarian or protection goal.

> **"Using standards creates an imbalance between those receiving assistance and those who do not"**
Targeting the populations that need assistance most is a key aspect of humanitarian response. The Sphere and Companion standards all discuss this and the identification of vulnerable groups. They also discuss the need to clearly communicate the reasons why certain population groups or individuals receive aid, and they provide suggestions for balancing targeted aid provision with broader aid measures for surrounding populations.
Standards can therefore contribute to greater clarity and transparency in aid delivery, and to reducing corruption.
Working with standards also increases the awareness that protection measures must be taken where needed.

> **"International standards don't correspond to national situations"**
There is an important distinction between the qualitative standard (which suggests that a response must be good enough) and the key indicators (some of which provide guidance on how much, how many, how far, etc.)

- The standard is intended to be universal and reflects core human values, in particular the dignity of affected people.

- Indicators for each standard may need to be reviewed and adapted in the light of the culture and context of the response.

  National governments have a critical role to play in describing how these universal standards and their indicators can be understood in the national context.

## Understanding the context

It is critical to understand the context in which the indicator adaptation process will take place, in order to develop an advocacy strategy which is likely to be effective.

- Understand the government structures at national and sub-national levels.
    - Is disaster management the responsibility of a single ministry, or is it divided between several?
    - Is it different in urban areas, where municipalities might play a role?
    - Are natural disasters managed differently from complex emergencies?
    - Do parallel systems exist (NDMA, civil defence, military, Humanitarian Country Team, for example)?

- Consider both the policy environment and the operational capacity.
    - Is it necessary to invest in capacity for the contextualisation process to take off?

- Map the stakeholders, within government and outside it.
    - Which are likely to act as champions?
    - Which might seek (for whatever reasons) to block the process?

- Recognise that the NDMA itself may have an implementation role but may not be the decision maker, so may not be the best or the only point of entry.

- Consider the degree to which contextualisation might be necessary and appropriate, which may be different for different sectors.

- Understand the degree to which different types of arguments might be more or less successful.
    - Is a rights-based approach likely to be persuasive?
    - Might another angle (for example anti-corruption, a specific identified need, the advantage of pre-positioning goods as a preparedness measure, etc) be more pragmatic?

- Understand the resource base of the host government.
    - To what degree will the process be dependent on external funding?
    - Where might this funding come from?

## Opening the doors

The hardest part of the process might be the initial step. In some cases, the need for standards has become apparent in the aftermath of a major disaster. Elsewhere, it is part of a longer-term development process. Some governments may not see this as necessary, or they may be concerned that having a set of standards creates expectations that they may struggle to meet. This is a valid concern which must be addressed:

- Explain that not reaching specific indicators does not mean failing to conform to the standard as such. It means that a potential response gap has been identified which needs to be kept in mind and potentially acted upon. Some indicators may have to be adapted to national circumstances, in order not to raise wrong expectations.

- Using the stakeholder mapping and the understanding of the government structure and responsibility, identify both the most appropriate people to approach and those most likely to be influential and successful.

- Using the stakeholder mapping again, identify the institutions or people best placed to make the initial introductions, or to raise the issue with key decision makers. This could be humanitarian actors from NGOs, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, or the UN or HCT. But it could also be the donor community, neighbouring countries, or the private sector.

- Seek a wide range of entry points: response to natural disasters is the obvious one, but consider planning, preparedness, recovery and development, industrial disasters and complex emergencies. Look across the range of sectors: if standards already exist in health or WASH, could these be used as a springboard for a wider process? Look also at climate change mitigation and adaptation, migration and displacement, and other fields.

- Choose the best moment to make the intervention. This is probably not at the height of an emergency response. Seasonal planning or post-disaster reflection may be a better time.

## Opportunities and entry points in the humanitarian architecture

NDMAs can be supported in a variety of ways in preparedness or in the midst of an emergency. Identifying potential entry points for discussion and sharing of information is a critical first step. Several possibilities exist, as described below:

- **NGO Contacts with Governments:** At the institutional level, having a consistent contact within a NDMA greatly facilitates discussions and allows both parties to engage in open discussion, opening the door for possible trainings and workshops.

- **The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) – ISDR's** regional offices serve as a support secretariat for regional platforms which are intended to provide a forum for all those engaged in disaster risk reduction to showcase practical applications for disaster risk reduction, exchange experience and develop joint statements, strategies and action plans, which guide decision makers and practitioners.

- **OCHA** – This is a good entry point to facilitate and accommodate discussions on contextualising and adopting minimum humanitarian standards in preparedness (and response) through a range of entry points such as:

    o   Directives and guidance to Humanitarian/Resident Co-ordinators and cluster lead agencies;
    o   Endorsement of a few core standards which should be reflected in more than one sector;
    o   Information and experience sharing;
    o   Training and capacity building;
    o   Advocacy at senior political levels.

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and Cluster system** (see page 9).

- The IASC's **Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP)** initiative identifies potential priority actions, gaps and possible constraints, and attempts to strengthen readiness and ensure that co-ordination mechanisms are in place.

- The **United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC)** is part of the international emergency response system for sudden-onset emergencies. It also assists in the co-ordination of incoming international relief at national level and/or at the site of the emergency.

  A general level of humanitarian standards is promoted in UNDAC response. It is assumed that members being deployed already have the necessary sectoral experience.

- The **Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance** is intended to assist states to strengthen their legal preparedness for international disaster co-operation (IFRC et al, 2013). Given that legal and disaster management systems vary significantly from country to country, the "Model Act" serves as a reference tool and example to law-makers as they develop legislation on managing outside aid in a manner appropriate to their national circumstances.
  The Model Act requires Assisting Actors to:

    o   ensure that the Goods and Services they provide are appropriate to the needs and circumstances of persons affected by the disaster and in compliance with the requirements of the Model Act and all applicable laws of that particular country;
        and
    o   in light of the circumstances, ensure that the Goods and Services provided conform to the Sphere minimum standards.

## Making the most of existing opportunities

In addition to creating an environment in which a dialogue can begin, seek out existing forums and frameworks and engage with them. Build on what exists and what is working.

- If Sphere is already being used (for example by the NGO community) then develop an evidence base to show how using standards has improved process and outcomes for affected people.

- Seek examples of successful processes from neighbouring or regional countries, or from countries with which the host has a strong relationship.

- Identify meetings or workshops where NDMA (or the identified target) is going to be present, and use these opportunities to make the case for the added value of clear contextualised standards.

- Seek out linked development processes, and explore whether they could be strengthened by including international standards as a reference point. This may be particularly helpful if external funding is required.

- Aim to raise awareness both directly with the NDMA and decision makers, and with external actors with the ability to influence. Use the stakeholder mapping and approach donors, development partners, and the private sector.

## Ensuring a high-quality response outcome

The Sphere standards present an integrated approach, describing the process and approaches for high quality humanitarian response, as well as the details across technical sectors. A nationally contextualised set of indicators will be a similarly comprehensive project.

- Recognise that the process should be participatory and comprehensive, and as such is likely to take time and resources. Ensure that adequate resources are in place for the process, and support capacity building where that is required. Consider that changes in governments bring changes in priorities, and these can undermine multi-year projects.

- If Sphere is already being used (for example by the NGO community) then develop an evidence base to show how using standards has improved process and outcomes for affected people.

- Seek to engage humanitarian practitioners in the contextualisation process.

- Ensure that the process covers the whole spectrum of humanitarian process – from preparedness and risk-reduction to response, recovery and transition. Ensure it looks at all the essential sectors as well as the process and approach. Consider other sectors such as markets, education, child protection in addition.

- Recognise that there may be challenges (but also opportunities) in bridging the humanitarian-development gap, and this might require a widening of the participants to the process. For example, other agencies may well take back responsibilities from NDMA once the emergency phase is declared 'over'.

# Case studies

The five case studies below (Argentina, Chile, China, Ecuador and Japan) are meant to illustrate the numerous ways in which NDMAs may want to engage in adapting international standards and their indicators to national or provincial situations. Many of the challenges and recommendations are reflected in these case studies as well.

These case studies are based on reflections of Sphere Country Focal Points and other sources. They are not directly endorsed by governments.

# *Argentina*

*In Argentina, efforts by a leading NGO have encouraged the adoption of Sphere by local authorities across the country, despite the lack of a national adoption. At the national level, although political changes have caused a temporary loss of momentum, efforts continue.*

## Adopting Sphere at sub-national level

Though a national Plan for Emergency Response exists, the Argentinian government has not incorporated the Sphere Standards into its legal framework. However, significant progress has been made in promoting Sphere towards local authorities across the country.

As a result of these efforts, the Sphere focal point, ADRA Argentina (the Adventist Development and Relief Agency) ran a Sphere training at the provincial level in 2014 and 2015. For instance, a training course was conducted for a number of ministries in the Salta province. The course was designed based on the needs of the government institution. As part of the final outputs, participants had to deliver a draft of an emergency response plan based on Sphere standards.

It is worth noting that the training participants highlighted they had been looking for something to work with, such as the Sphere Standards in their disaster response, but were not previously aware such a tool existed.

The training has allowed a much better coordination between ADRA Argentina and the Salta provincial Government during the flood response in late 2015. While the government usually focuses on food security and health, it showed that in future disaster response, the Salta government should consider more strongly the humanitarian needs in other essential areas such as the WASH sector, particularly in hygiene promotion and sanitation.

In 2015, ADRA Argentina had also managed to secure an agreement at the national level with the NDMA (Secretaría de Protección Civil y Abordaje Integral de Emergencias y Catástrofes) aiming at conducting a Sphere training course for staff in offices. However, the momentum was lost when Argentine's new government was elected in December 2015.

As per the end of 2016, ADRA Argentina was engaged in building further trust and strong relationships with the new NDMA authorities, with the prospect of conducting Sphere training courses in 2017.

## Considerations and Learning

- Conducting trainings on Sphere standards to NDMA´s requires strong advocacy efforts. ADRA managed to conduct trainings in provinces where it implements strong programs, which in turn allowed for identifying the right entry level to government.

- Emergencies may act as an entry point. When disasters occur, a government´s capacity to respond may be stretched. In such a situation, it it unlikely that government authorities will work towards humanitarian standards without prior training.

- However, emergencies can be regarded as entry points to present Sphere standards to authorities (perhaps starting by conveying a need to improve quality and accountability), especially in those municipalities or provinces where focal points do not have strong presence.

- Key government contacts at national and provincial level were lost due to staff rotation after presidential elections in 2015.

- More evidence at a global level could help Sphere focal points develop stronger strategic plans in order to address obstacles in promoting Sphere standards amongst NDMA´s.

- Government authorities´ requests to receive training on emergency response can happen at any time. Focal points should be quickly able to offer a training package based on Sphere Standards based on government´s needs. For instance, ADRA lost some training opportunities for not being able to deliver a training plan to government authorities in a timely manner.

# *Chile*

*The Chile government approached UNDP in 2014 to support an analytical and reflective process to review and strengthen their emergency response capacity and processes, at national and local level. It was at that point that Sphere was introduced to the government.*

## Building on Government development processes

Chile has been hit by a number of natural disasters in recent years and the emergency role of government agencies has particularly developed since the tsunami of 2010, but until recently without including international standards.

The NDMA in Chile is the National Emergency Office, ONEMI, which is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Vice Ministry for Regional and Administrative Development (SUBDERE) was responsible for the capacity development programme with local governments. The Sphere Focal point is UNDP-Chile.

## Introducing Sphere Standards in Chile

Until a few years ago, Sphere was not known in government circles, although it was being used by NGOs in Chile.

UNDP worked to introduce the standards in order to provide a framework and a benchmark for the development process. It did this both at the national and the local level, and adopted different approaches at each level, catering to different incentives: Municipalities had a responsibility to respond, but did not have the tools or staff to manage a response or to present a convincing case to the Mayor. Centrally, SUBDERE has a responsibility to support the municipalities in the implementation of their development plans.

UNDP then ran three national-level workshops with government (ONEMI). In the first workshop, the standards were presented and discussed in broad terms with regard to their appropriateness and adaptability to the Chile context. The second workshop looked at all the standards in detail, and focused on the key actions and the key indicators, trying to identify what problems they would have to implement them. The third workshop developed an action plan.

In 2015, UNDP began working with 87 municipalities. An initial round of capacity development workshops brought together focal points for emergencies and the secretary for local planning. They took Sphere as a framework. The second stage required six weeks of work in each municipality and took a DRR and preparedness perspective, including characterisation of territory, actor mapping and risk scenarios. The emphasis on participation and dignity was maintained. In a third stage, the results of the planning processes were presented in the form of a peer review.

National institutions now work on adequate standards for Food Security and Nutrition, WASH and Shelter, Settlements and non-food items, as well as response sectors covered by Sphere Partner standards. The standards cover disaster risk management, including DRR, climate change and the Sendai Framework. In addition to improving the capacity of the responsible bodies and providing a framework for considering preparedness and response, the process appears to have strengthened the linkages between central and municipal levels, and between municipalities. By 2017 it is expected that Chile will have produced a central Handbook of contextualised standards based upon Sphere.

## Considerations and Learning

A structured approach was taken to engagement with government at several levels, which recognised from the start the importance of contextualisation.

A holistic approach was taken which embraced the whole risk management process, from DRR through the response phase to recovery.

The process of introducing standards was part of a broader capacity building approach, which ensured that the standards were realistic and grounded in actual response capacity.

# *China*

*Ongoing efforts by NGOs to raise awareness of Sphere and support government processes to develop contextualised standards.  Sphere tends to be better known among NGOs than with the government.*

## Introduction

The NDMA in China is the Chinese National Commission for Disaster Reduction (NCDR).  The NCDR is an inter-ministerial conference and co-ordination body under the leadership of the State Council. It is responsible for coordinating effective disaster response.[7]  The Commission is also responsible for formulating the national disaster reduction plans, guidelines, policies and action plans, and for organising and coordinating major national disaster risk reduction activities.
At Province level, cross-unit commissions are formed to coordinate different related departments in humanitarian response.
The Chinese government has developed official humanitarian standards and indicators in different sectors, including WASH and Shelter.  Some of the indicators established by the Chinese government exceed those of Sphere[8].

## Introducing the Sphere Standards in China

Oxfam Hong Kong acts as the Sphere focal point in China and is committed to promoting international humanitarian standards and best practices in China.  Based on the context described above, Oxfam has worked with the government and NGOs across China to develop the understanding of the Sphere Standards and uphold the standards in practice among the NGOs.

Oxfam made a significant contribution to promoting standards by translating the Sphere Handbook 2011 edition into simplified Chinese and subsequently holding face-to-face meetings with the National Disaster Reduction Centre of China (NDRCC) and the Emergency Unit of the National Health and Family Planning Commission to introduce Sphere. Trainings at various government levels and of NGOs were carried out, reaching over 500 people. Oxfam also translated the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

## Considerations and Learning

Local translations of the Handbook and training materials, and dissemination through NGO networks can provide an alternative to direct liaison with State authorities, and may provide a platform from which such liaison can then begin.

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[7] The response is based on the National Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters Response promulgated in March 2016.

[8] Water supply indicators, for example, are 20L/person/day; distance from dwellings to a water source is <100m

# *Ecuador*

*In Ecuador, the Sphere standards were adopted in 2013 and some contextualisation has taken place, but challenges remain in implementation.*

## Background

Sphere minimum standards were adopted in Ecuador a couple of years ago as the standards to comply with in regards to humanitarian response, including the provision of shelter services. As a result, several different government ministries and departments have included Sphere Standards in their own policies and guidelines. For example, Sphere, UNHCR and IOM recommendations were all included in shelter management plans and contextualized accordingly.

In 2015, Ecuador revised its policies in disaster preparedness and response after one of its most dangerous volcanoes, the Cotopaxi, started showing signs of unrest, posing a high threat to the local population living in the surrounding urban areas. Increased volcanic activity encouraged the central government to review its contingency plans as well as the standards concerning the purchase and the storage of humanitarian aid.

Yet, the use of Sphere is still relatively new in Ecuador and until 2016 the challenges in implementing the Sphere Standards were mainly due to a lack of technical knowledge. The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), the Secretariat of Risk Management (SGR), and the decentralised local Governments (GAD) put a great deal of efforts to generalise the understanding of these standards and how to implement them in recurrent emergency responses (floods, landslides, etc.).

Sphere standards and indicators faced their greatest test during the latest major earthquake that hit the coastal region of Ecuador in April 2016 with a magnitude of 7.8 and which recorded great devastations and deaths in the provinces of Esmeraldas and Manabi. At least 671 people were killed, more than 50'000 dwellings were affected. As a result, families without housing were internally displaced to other regions. Over 10'000 people were settled into formal shelters (camps) where they could receive appropriate assistance and feel safer.

Formal shelters are state structures set up and run by National Government under the guidelines of the Shelter National Committee. They have been specifically created as spaces to ensure conditions allowing affected population to exercise their fundamental rights while searching for more lasting or definitive solutions. Not only were the Minimum Standards in WASH; food; shelter and health respected and successfully met, but on many occasions, provisions were far exceeding Sphere indicators, particularly regarding water supply.

## Considerations and Learning

Ecuador's National Government demonstrated its capacity to successfully implement the Sphere standards, in particular with regards to shelter management. Equipment and purchased supplies for each shelter were continuously measured against the Sphere standards, resulting in better assessment of the resources needed for the intervention.

The national Government has a clear disaster response vision, which includes the formal adoption of Sphere through a Ministerial Decree in 2013. Through a structured process of advocacy and training, this now informs the guidelines of each ministry with responsibilities in the sector, including the Risk Management Secretariat and ministries of Social Inclusion, Health and Agriculture.

The remaining challenge of implementing Sphere is to make the standards known and used by the humanitarian actors of the state in the field, civil society and private companies.

Efforts have been made to build capacity and technical expertise at every level, not just at the central level. It is recognised that at the time of the 2016 earthquake, there were too few government officials within the existing state structure with good knowledge of the minimum standards, compared to demands of the response.

# *Japan*

*As a developed country with a high response capacity, Japan had little understanding of the Sphere Standards at the time of the 2011 earthquake.*

## Background

The Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE) of 11 March 2011 measured 9.0 on the Richter scale, and triggered what was to become a complex crisis: a tsunami which caused flooding over 500 square kilometres of land and a major accident at a nuclear power plant. Altogether, 20,000 people were declared dead or missing while another 470,000 had to evacuate their homes.

Compared to other disaster-prone countries, Japan's response capacity is high, and it can manage most of the disasters with its domestic resources. As a result, the country is not entirely accustomed to receiving international assistance – neither is it requesting for it.

## The coordination and implementation of the response

During the GEJE, not only governmental and public institutions but also NGOs/non-profit organizations (NPOs), private companies, and individual volunteers played important roles in providing emergency assistance for the affected populations. However, the role of NGOs is not legally defined in Japan, making it difficult for the civil society organizations to provide humanitarian assistance together with local authorities.

As a result, both international and national NGOs were not included in the coordination and planning processes among the disaster responders for assisting the affected populations, which were led by local authorities. Furthermore, the absence of clear mechanisms for coordination and information sharing between aid providers resulted in a number of challenges in terms of providing effective response. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that stakeholders to the response had little awareness of common standards.

Evaluation also revealed that the assistance provided did not sufficiently meet the diverse and specific needs of affected communities, reflecting factors such as gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability, which led to significant protection gaps for the most vulnerable. The Japanese government does not work with international standards, and such standards are simply not known to many Japanese-based NGOs.

In the immediate response to the earthquake, those staff involved in humanitarian assistance overseas and who were aware of the standards had no time to work to promote them or call for compliance to them systematically.

## Considerations and Learning

To date, further efforts are needed for Japan to consider working with international standards in order to provide better assistance to disaster-affected populations within Japan and for a more effective protection of vulnerable groups. As recommended by the GEJE Study Group[9], Japan should formulate national minimum standards that are based on the existing international norms and standards, while ensuring that these do not contradict Japanese values and identity.

Following the GEJE, the Japanese NGO community has been more proactive in promoting and working with international standards, in particular Sphere. The NGO umbrella organization - the Japan NGO Centre for International Cooperation (JANIC) - is a valuable contributor. JANIC worked with a group of Japanese NGOs, mainly members of the Japan Platform[10] , willing to understand and incorporate Sphere and other key standards into their operations. The group attended Trainings of Trainers on Quality & Accountability (Sphere and HAP in 2012, 2013 and 2015 (plus CHS)).

The group developed into the Quality and Accountability Network in Japan (JQAN) in July 2015 to train on Sphere and the CHS, translate key training tools, and to strategically advocate and disseminate a rights-based approach and humanitarian standards both domestically and abroad. JQAN members have also been sharing learnings from past disaster response with neighbouring countries in East Asia region to better serve for the future response in the disaster-prone region.

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[9]Recommendations to prepare for future mega-disasters in Japan. Study Group on the Great East Japan Earthquake & International Humanitarian Assistance, February 2015. Japanese Red Cross Society.
http://reliefweb.int/report/japan/recommendations-prepare-future-mega-disasters-japan-enja

[10] an NGO-Government-Corporate platform for effective humanitarian respons

# Conclusion

Countries that have adapted and adopted humanitarian standards towards internationally recognised levels have witnessed the benefit of doing so. These standards either filled a gap where no national standards existed or supported the collaboration with the international humanitarian community, or both.

In order to encourage and assist other countries to take similar actions, the following approaches and activities might be considered for consistently and appropriately integrating and addressing humanitarian standards in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

- **Awareness raising** events of humanitarian principles and standards – not only sectoral issues such as shelter quality or the quantity of water or food provided, but also a broader understanding of the Humanitarian Charter, human rights and protection principles.

- Focused **training** and roll-out support that is itself contextualized to the audience and situation in which it is being delivered.

- Champion(s) who will **advocate** for the active uptake and application of humanitarian principles and standards – both on the ground during a response but also at political levels to influence and shape policies and laws.

- **Case studies** describing the contextualisation and application of Sphere and other humanitarian standards.

- **Support from donors** in getting standards into proposals: In East Africa, proposals funded by FAO, for example, include an inbuilt LEGS training.

- Guidance on **adapting standards** and integration for cluster co-ordinators and governments.

# Annex I: Countries having adopted Sphere and other international standards

| Country | Situation |
|---|---|
| Bangladesh | The National Plan for Disaster Management (2010-2015) makes specific reference to water quality standards, with specific relation to the arsenic content of groundwater (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. 2010).<br><br>**Note:** *A comparison is made against the WHO standard.* |
| Bolivia | National disaster law has changed because of Sphere: minimum standards in relation to early warning systems and preparedness have been integrated into national law.<br><br>**Note:** *Recognized need to get standards into respective government authorities.* |
| Ecuador | The Risk Management Secretary has signed a ministerial agreement to ensure that adapted Sphere standards are applied by humanitarian organizations during emergency response.<br><br>**Note:** *These standards are actively promoted through, for example, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and the Risk Management Secretariat. The next steps are to adapted and applied at sectoral and local levels.* |
| Ethiopia | The Country Programming Paper to End Drought Emergencies in the Horn of Africa (Ministry of Agriculture, 2012) was prepared in response to the Nairobi Declaration which resulted from the IGAD Heads of States Summit held in 2011.<br><br>**Note:** *While Sphere is not referred to in this paper, mention is given to the intended development of sanitary and phytosanitary standards.* |

| Country | Situation |
|---------|-----------|
| Guatemala | The National Disaster Co-ordination Agency, CONRED (Coordinación Nacional para la Reducción de Desastres), created in 1996, is responsible for the coordination of cross-sectoral disaster relief efforts. In October 2009, CONRED has formally adopted the Sphere Standards, and requires that all requests for assistance address the Sphere Standards.<br><br>**Note:** *CONRED is part of a Central American network of governmental disaster relief agencies known as the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central (CEPREDENAC).* |
| India | The Government of India has adopted Sphere. The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), a government structure, has been appointed as the government's representative on the Sphere India coalition.<br><br>**Note:** *Sphere India's members have contributed to the country's Disaster Management Act (2005). Sphere India has also supported the planning and launch of the NDMAs effort to develop minimum standards in the Indian context.* |
| Indonesia | Sphere, CHS and other humanitarian standards have been adopted in the National Professional Working Competence Standard on Disaster Management and National Standards on Humanitarian Response. The same are also adopted in the regulation of the National Disaster Management Authority and contingency plans.<br><br>Sphere's 1st edition had been adopted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Health Affairs and Ministry of Public Works.<br><br>**Note:** *Indonesia has adopted Sphere and LEGS. Reference is made to Sphere companion standards on education in emergencies, economic recovery and livestock management as well as the HAP Standard and the People in Aid Code of Conduct (now integrated into the Core Humanitarian Standard).* |

| Country | Situation |
|---|---|
| Kenya | Neither the country's draft National Policy for Disaster Management (2009) nor the more recent Ending Drought Emergencies Common Programme Framework (2015) make any reference to Sphere.<br><br>**Note:** *The National Drought Management Authority recognises that the standards outlined in LEGS have application and value beyond the livestock sector and that the application of LEGS will strengthen the quality of response across a range of areas, such as participation and the integration of indigenous knowledge.* |
| Mongolia | In 2010, the National Emergency Management Agency realised 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.<br><br>**Note:** *In the event of such an earthquake, the government and humanitarian community will be able to meet the needs more quickly and consistently since indicators have already been agreed.* |
| Pakistan | The Government of Pakistan has committed to adhere to and promote the Sphere Minimum Standards. The NDMA action is guided by the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) that was developed in 2012 after extensive cross-sectoral consultations. Another document that is constantly referred in the NDMP is the National Disaster Response Plan (NDRP, 2010). Both documents explicitly refer to the Sphere Minimum Standards.<br><br>**Note:** *The National Disaster Response Plan states in details the role of PDMA's[11] and other departments in pre-disaster and response to consider Sphere Minimum Standards. The SoPs are given to ensure that minimum standards for Water, Shelter, Food quality and quantity are maintained. Similarly, the Humanitarian Charter, Core Standards, Cross-Cutting Issues and Protection are also referred.* |

[11]Provincial Disaster Management Authority

| Country | Situation |
|---------|-----------|
| The Philippines | The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) is the agency tasked to prepare for, and respond to, natural calamities, like typhoons and earthquakes. It also monitors human-induced emergencies, such as armed conflicts and maritime accidents. The Department of Health has incorporated the Sphere standards into its Pocket Emergency Tool (Republic of the Philippines Department of Health, 2012).<br><br>**Note:** *The Philippines has a National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan, which has the intention to comply with the Sphere standards through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). An extensive cross-sectoral consultation is currently taking place aiming at formulating a new set of contextualized standards that would meet internationally recognized standards, including Sphere Minimum Standards.* |
| South Africa | In 2009, the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality in Gauteng Province of South Africa accepted the Sphere Standards as the Council Policy that would guide the implementation of humanitarian assistance in any emergencies (IFRC et al, 2013). |
| Vietnam | Vietnam has contextualized and endorsed the LEGS and INEE minimum standards. |

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