



The Sphere Project

*Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards
in Humanitarian Response*

Sphere 2020

Strategic Plan 2015-2020

SphereProject.org/Sphere2020

Contents

Executive summary	3
Sphere in the changing humanitarian landscape	4
Sphere 2020	5
Strategic priorities	6
Supporting priorities	8
Monitoring Sphere 2020	8

Sphere 2020, the Sphere Project Strategic Plan 2015-2020, was endorsed by the Sphere Board in January 2015. Should you have questions or feedback, please contact the Sphere office: info@SphereProject.org | SphereProject.org/contact-us

Executive summary

Established in 1997, the Sphere Project has become a leading supporter of humanitarian standards grounded in rights, evidence and best practice, promoting quality and accountability in humanitarian response at field level.

Over nearly two decades, Sphere has evolved into a common language across the humanitarian sector and a force for collaboration among quality and accountability initiatives. Building on this experience, Sphere is well positioned to rise to today's complex humanitarian challenges.

The time is ripe for Sphere to consolidate its organic growth, respond to the priorities of the community of Sphere practitioners and advocates and establish an ambitious agenda to continue fulfilling its unique role within the humanitarian sector.

Sphere 2020 sets about to transform Sphere from a project into a vigorous, deeply connected network of practitioners and organisations which will act as a global catalyst for humanitarian quality and accountability.

Four strategic priorities will enable realisation of this ambitious goal:

- **Priority 1:** The establishment of a robust, inclusive network of Sphere practitioners will allow humanitarian actors and first responders to develop greater capacity to put humanitarian principles and standards into practice.
- **Priority 2:** The collective ability of the Sphere network to carry out training and advocacy will be strengthened, targeting first responders, traditional and new humanitarian actors, international systems as well as local and national authorities.
- **Priority 3:** A revision of the Sphere Handbook will offer the opportunity to sharpen the relevance and usability of Sphere standards by consolidating the evidence base and aligning them with innovative best practice in the sector.
- **Priority 4:** The progressive formalisation of a global standards alliance will improve coordinated action, allowing humanitarian standards to better influence humanitarian response, building greater ownership by individuals, communities and organisations.

Dynamic fundraising and communication strategies will support the achievement of **Sphere 2020**'s strategic priorities.

Sphere in the changing humanitarian landscape

The Sphere Project was established in 1997 to consolidate the combined experience of humanitarian practitioners committed to quality assistance across the world. Since then, it has become a leading supporter of humanitarian standards grounded in a rights- and evidence-based approach, promoting quality and accountability in humanitarian response at field level.

Over the years, humanitarian action has continued to evolve, remaining responsive to new realities in a changing context. A certain consensus has emerged among practitioners and academics with regard to the main trends that will bear on the humanitarian landscape in the future. Some of the most frequently cited are climate change, urbanisation, changing demographic patterns, new types of conflicts, technological developments and connectivity, and the shift away from a mono- or bi-polar global power structure.

Such macro-trends suggest an increasingly complex landscape for humanitarian action while at the same time pointing to new actors inside and outside the traditional humanitarian community. Although there is a risk of fragmentation, there is also an opportunity to encompass this diversity through a common language for effective assistance.

Sphere is well positioned to rise to this challenge, building on the collective experience of the community of Sphere practitioners. A voluntary initiative, Sphere has strongly contributed to moving assistance from a supply-chain and delivery-driven approach to one rooted in technical expertise and respect for the rights and dignity of those affected. Sphere standards have clarified the understanding of what quality humanitarian action is, establishing a common language across the sector and contributing to its professionalisation as well as to greater accountability.

The *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, also known as the Sphere Handbook, is widely seen to be the most popular basic text in humanitarian assistance. Its usefulness and practical value have led to spontaneous translation into more than 40 languages.

At a global level, Sphere has not only emphasised the central place of disaster- or conflict-affected communities in humanitarian action but has also helped donors to align their priorities. Local organisations and authorities champion Sphere in their countries, emerging as strong advocates for quality in preparedness and response. Sphere standards have been integrated into disaster management policies at national or district levels in a range of countries.

Sphere has established itself as the primary multi-sector reference, a viable and responsive model and a key custodian of standards for humanitarian action. A growing number of formally related Companion Standards complement the Sphere Handbook, providing humanitarian professionals with a pool of harmonised quality standards that drive more effective humanitarian action¹.

Working in a collaborative manner with other quality and accountability initiatives, Sphere has contributed to the development of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)², which will be fully integrated into the Sphere Handbook.

¹ These include the Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS); the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards in Education; the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS); and the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS). Other humanitarian standards have also expressed interest in joining the family of Sphere companions.

² The CHS has been jointly developed by the *Groupe URD (Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement)*, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project.

Sphere 2020

Within the above-described context, the time is ripe for Sphere to consolidate nearly two decades of organic growth, respond to the priorities of the community of Sphere advocates and establish an ambitious agenda so as to continue fulfilling its unique role within the humanitarian sector.

Sphere 2020 establishes strategic and supporting priorities for two differentiated periods: 2015-2017 and 2018-2020.

The first period will serve to consolidate the current body of work by *transforming Sphere from a project into a robust, deeply connected network of practitioners and organisations* committed to applying humanitarian standards in practice and advocating for quality humanitarian action.

In line with its values and history, the shape of the Sphere network will be defined through consultation with the vast, informal and diverse community of Sphere practitioners.

The 2018-2020 period will build on the fully constituted Sphere network, which we envision as a *global catalyst for humanitarian quality and accountability*.

This period will focus on expanding further local, national and regional ownership of standards; their tailored application in diverse contexts so as to improve field practice; and on using collective experience to inform key global policies and decisions on humanitarian effectiveness, quality and principles.

Guiding values

- Dignity** All people have intrinsic human dignity and a right to control and live their lives with dignity.
- Evidence** Sphere develops practical tools for field workers based on evidence and best collective practice.
- Collaboration** Sphere values the leadership and engagement of diverse constituents as well as inclusive, consultative processes that distil the collective knowledge of the sector.

Vision and mission

- Vision** Sphere envisions a world in which all people affected by disaster or conflict are able to re-establish their lives and recover their livelihoods in ways that respect and promote their dignity.
- Mission** Sphere convenes and supports individuals, communities, organisations and like-minded standards-setting bodies who apply, promote and encourage voluntary adherence to humanitarian standards and principles.

Strategic priorities

Priority 1: Sphere network

Objective: Humanitarian actors and first responders have greater capacity to put humanitarian principles and standards into practice, upholding the rights of vulnerable and affected communities.

Actions:

1. Building on the informal yet vibrant community of Sphere practitioners at field, national, regional and headquarters levels, establish a robust, inclusive network of Sphere practitioners to leverage global learning and advocacy³.
2. Strengthen the capacity of the Sphere network through the creation of opportunities for mutual learning, knowledge-sharing and collaboration in the pursuit of principled humanitarian response through the implementation of quality standards.

Priority 2: Training and advocacy

Objective: Humanitarian actors and first responders deepen their knowledge, acquire skills and increase their commitment to humanitarian principles and quality standards.

Actions:

1. Leverage the collective influence of the Sphere network to engage with international systems in order to seek greater adherence to quality humanitarian standards.
2. Boost the advocacy engagement throughout the Sphere network to increase the commitment of humanitarian actors to humanitarian principles and quality standards.
3. Foster the capacity of the Sphere network to work with local and national authorities with a view to integrating humanitarian principles and standards into their disaster management policies.
4. Enhance the ability of the Sphere network to provide quality training on Sphere principles and standards to traditional and new actors as well as to increase the availability and quality of trainers and training tools and activities.

³ 2015: scoping and consultation; 2016: formal establishment with adapted structure.

Priority 3: Sphere standards

Objective: The Sphere standards' relevance and usability is sharpened by consolidating the evidence base and by aligning them to innovative best practice in the sector.

Actions:

1. Research and disseminate evidence of how applying Sphere standards improves the quality and accountability of humanitarian response.
2. Develop guidance and tools to facilitate the use of Sphere standards⁴ throughout project cycle management, with renewed focus on implementation in operational contexts and ownership by disaster-affected communities.
3. Establish the framework for and conduct the revision of the Sphere Handbook, fully informed by innovation in the fields of humanitarian response, social collaboration and information technologies.

Priority 4: Global standards alliance

Objective: Coordinated action allows humanitarian standards to better influence humanitarian response, building greater ownership by individuals, communities and organisations.

Actions:

1. Implement joint activities focused on field application of humanitarian standards, knowledge-sharing, operational contextualisation and advocacy with Sphere companion standards and other emerging humanitarian standards initiatives.
2. Convene and progressively formalise a global alliance of humanitarian standards initiatives, building on the strengths of the Sphere companionship model, to increase impact and provide for cross-sectoral learning and joint services to practitioners.
3. Improve and further develop consistent standards models and approaches in order to continue building greater coherence and compatibility amongst humanitarian standards.
4. Track humanitarian action to identify trends and gaps where the development of standards may become necessary.

⁴ Including the CHS, adopted by the Sphere Board in November 2014.

Supporting priorities

Priority 5: Fundraising

Objective: Sphere's funding base is broad and diverse, allowing for the mobilisation of the financial resources required to achieve its strategic priorities.

Actions:

1. Through targeted fundraising strategies, actively pursued by staff and Board members alike, increase the current bilateral funding contributions and develop new resource partnerships with bilateral donors, multilateral organisations, private foundations and the corporate sector.
2. As part of the scoping of a revitalised and independent Sphere network, develop and implement a viable "business model" that upholds Sphere's value of collaboration.

Priority 6: Communication

Objective: Sphere develops and deepens trustful relationships with key constituencies through fresh and innovative communications in support of its strategic priorities and resource mobilisation.

Actions:

1. Increase the reach of Sphere's communications and promotion work as well as the quality of exchanges with key constituencies, leading to greater engagement and sense of ownership.
2. Develop further the Sphere brand within the humanitarian sector as well as with governments, militaries, civil protection actors, the private sector, academia and the general public, ensuring greater impact of the values Sphere stands for.
3. Expand the use of traditional communication media and explore new means to convey Sphere's messages with the best effectiveness and quality.

Monitoring Sphere 2020

To monitor implementation of **Sphere 2020**, Sphere staff and Board will:

- Develop and review annual work plans in line with **Sphere 2020** priorities;
- Set key performance indicators (KPIs) with targets and track progress annually.

A mid-term strategy review will be conducted in 2017, engaging not only traditional Sphere constituencies but also new ones mobilised through our transformation into a global network.

