Current Status and Issues in the Utilization of Sphere Standards for Humanitarian Aid in Japan
Abridged version of the interview survey report

Outline
    Since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, the Cabinet Office has emphasized the use of Sphere Standards as a minimum benchmark for humanitarian assistance in domestic disaster response. In this study, with the collaboration of aid organizations involved in disaster aid in Japan, an interview survey was conducted to ascertain the actual use of these standards in Japan and to identify suggestions for their further promulgation.
    Results revealed that those who had received training on the Sphere Standards had a higher awareness of standards-based support. However, the results also indicate that awareness and use of the Sphere Standards remains low among local government officials, Councils for Social Welfare ("CSW") and other public disaster responders. It also became clear that the content of the handbook, which is not aligned with the Japanese lifestyle and culture, is a hindrance to the dissemination of the standards. Data suggests that more user-friendly educational materials and efforts to incorporate Sphere Standards into evacuation manuals and other disaster response plans may be conducive to their further dissemination.
    A review of individual supporters' and organizations' efforts in light of the mandatory criteria for humanitarian assistance, a chapter in the Sphere Handbook, revealed that individual and organizational efforts do not fully correspond. Even though the subjective evaluation showed an overall higher rating for organizational efforts than for individuals, the results were reversed in the evaluation using specific parameters. These reflections have enabled prioritization of items to be addressed for higher quality humanitarian aid, both as individuals and as an organization.
    In addition, the series of interviews revealed the need to establish careers specializing in disaster relief in domestic NPOs as well as to revamp the funding system. To achieve these tasks, we must exhort the managers of funding and supporting organizations to recognize the value of the Sphere Standards, the international benchmark. The government is also required to raise its awareness of organizations that provide assistance in line with these standards, and to continue to encourage the promotion of quality assurance of humanitarian aid in a country as disaster-prone as Japan.

   Introduction
    The Sphere Standards have a long history in Japan, having been localized from the first edition of the Sphere Handbook in 1997, and have also been used by some Japanese NPOs that provide humanitarian assistance overseas. However, it was not until after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 that the application of these became more widely called for in disaster response in

Japan. One factor was that while the [Sphere Handbook](#) had been used by aid organizations in humanitarian relief around the world, the Great East Japan Earthquake led to domestic disaster response involving such international organizations in addition to those in Japan. By coincidence, the 2011 edition of the handbook was translated into Japanese, and a trainer education program was launched with the aim of providing more support based on the Sphere standards in Japan.

As of 2022, approximately 70 Japanese trainers have been educated through this training program. In 2013, the Cabinet Office also referred to the Sphere Standards as a resource that "should be leveraged to improve the quality of shelters" when drafting guidelines for the operation of shelters. These efforts have borne fruit in the form of continued interest in the Sphere Standards at the prefectural and municipal level, as well as in other activities such as ongoing awareness-raising activities. However, it is hard to claim that the Sphere Standards have permeated the municipalities that have primary responsibility for disaster response, as stipulated in the Basic Act on Disaster Countermeasures.

In Japan, shelters are set up by municipal governments as a temporary place to stay when a disaster strikes and it becomes difficult to live in one's own house. When a large-scale disaster occurs and many houses are damaged, the length of stay for evacuees can be several months. The living conditions that they face have been criticized as being no different from the shelters of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, raising concerns about secondary physical and mental health problems caused by residing in an undesirable living environment after the disaster. In Japan, the Sphere Standards have been used primarily to improve the environment of such shelters.

The purpose of this study was to clarify how the Sphere Standards - used internationally in humanitarian relief - have been applied to disasters striking Japan, through interviews with aid organizations that have responded, and to explore how they might be applied in the future.

Method

A two-day interview survey was conducted in February 2023 with full-time NPO employees (hereafter referred to as "interviewed staff") of aid organizations based in Japan (NPOs that specialize in disaster relief and operate domestically and internationally). The survey was conducted by three individuals: the main interviewer, an interview assistant, and the project administrator. Interviews were conducted on the collaborating organization's premises for a total of nine hours: five hours with four interviewed staff on the first day and four hours with five interviewed staff on the second day.

The structure of the interviews began with inquiring about the technical chapters of the Sphere Handbook, and then proceeded to the basic chapters. The reason for conducting the interviews in the reverse flow of the handbook structure is that we aimed to start by comparing more tangible aid experiences to the handbook, thereby making it as easy as possible for interviewed staff to cross-reference their own activities to the more abstract standards in humanitarian aid to which the basic chapters refer.

The specific interview flow is as follows: on the first day, the collaborator introduces himself/herself, including his/her experience in providing aid, minimum standards in the shelters and shelter settlements, and minimum standards for health care.

The second day was a continuation of the minimum standards for health care and a survey of the [Core Humanitarian Standard](#) (hereinafter referred to as CHS) for humanitarian aid.

We attempted to visualize the efforts to attain CHS by using the checklist in the handbook in order to check each collaborator's efforts to achieve the CHS from each perspective of the individual and organizational levels, and in light of past aid experiences.

The survey team consisted of three people: one principal interviewer, one interview supporter from a collaborating NPO, and one person in charge of operations. The principal interviewer is a university affiliated humanitarian worker and researcher who completed the Quality Assurance and Accountability in Humanitarian Aid trainer training in 2013 and has since worked as a trainer and in the implementation of this training in the health sector. The principal interviewer had a long-term relationship with the collaborating organization through cooperative work in domestic disasters and quality assurance and accountability training in humanitarian aid; the interview was thus conducted with an understanding of the practices and other aspects of the collaborating facility. The interview supporter is a senior manager of a collaborating organization and a member of the Executive Committee of a network promoting quality assurance and accountability in humanitarian aid in Japan. With in-depth knowledge of quality assurance and accountability in humanitarian aid, they were responsible for ensuring psychological safety between interviewed staff and principal interviewers, as well as providing supplemental information on previous experiences of the collaborating organization. The operational manager is the focal point for quality assurance and accountability in humanitarian assistance in Japan and has in-depth knowledge of the Sphere Standards and other standards in humanitarian assistance, as well as the evolution of activities by the nonprofit sector (*NPOs) in the context of domestic disasters. He/she assisted with facilitating the interview environment and recording the interviews. In this report, "NPO" is used as a generic term for organizations and personnel involved in disaster relief other than national and local government officials and private companies in Japan.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the verbal consent of the interviewed staff, and verbatim transcripts of these data were analyzed. A draft of the report was published after review and concurrence from all interviewed staff.

Results

All five interviewed staff had attended some type of Sphere Standards-related training in the past. One collaborator had attended 2 days of in-person training and the others had attended online training after the COVID-19 pandemic

outbreak. It is apparent that after the training, participants became constantly aware of the Sphere Standards as a self-evaluation criterion for aid. In terms of the front line of aid (the "field"), while self-assessments were divided on whether the standards were utilized or not, it was also clear that the 4th edition is now available in PDF format and is being searched and cited in the field. It was also evident that the standards are utilized to provide a rationale to counterpart administrative personnel and other support organizations with which they collaborate, when planning aid based on the Sphere Standards.

> (As an aid worker) I am aware of them as a base. When we are running an (aid) project, it is not always the case. When explaining to government officials or other organizations, there are times when I use them as a basis, like when I explain to them that there are such and such standards.

> As an individual, I do know that there are international standards. However, to be honest, I (feel) that I still need to refine my skills to the point where I can implement them in the field. It's not the case that I am going about my work with the handbook in one hand, following all of the stipulations one by one. I do have the impression that (the training) has slightly sharpened the resolution of my knowledge.

> I was involved first (as an aid organization), and then underwent training while conducting (aid activities). The course made me rethink how the activities I had been involved in would lead to this kind of thing, and how to formulate this kind of aid.

> I don't remember everything (the standards) as I actually go into aid mode, but I am aware that these things now are connected to what I received during Sphere (training) as I conduct my activities. But I can't say that I have internalized all of the standards in the back of my mind, or I can't figure out how to connect them, or haven't quite figured them out yet. I do hope that we can incorporate them into our activities to provide aid (as an organization).

> As an organization, we have instilled that Sphere Standards as a baseline, so we see no difference in perception between the individual and the organization.

> Since the training, I have referred to the standards to the extent that I remember as a yardstick when needing to convince someone of something by providing evidence.

> I do communicate that these (standards/handbooks) are a

thing. I utilize the web version and look things up in (the handbook) as an indicator when in the field.

I am aware of CHS. I do tell people that the (Standards/Handbook) exists. I use them when looking back to see what I could have done better from the perspective of what I could have done with the residents or how much of the local culture I could have incorporated, which are things that tend to get left out.

We use them when communicating both to the government and to residents. They are more receptive to (our recommendations) when we point out that there is this book that says so and so here. We are merely NPO workers, so no matter how much experience we have, we are still outsiders. We are just NPO employees, so people want to know the grounds for the (aid) that we provide.

Sometimes medical doctors and university professors show up, and even if we point out the metrics (provided in the handbook), it's not the case that they will remedy (the situation) together with us.

Both axes are needed, and it's only once you have the rationale and the field situation in sync that the field starts to really work. So, the (handbook) is required due to this mechanism.

I think it's because we have received education (on Sphere standards) within our organization - including training - but I think we learn a lot from experience.

But (the handbook) has verbalized the need for things that we, as supporters, don't usually take for granted. So we definitely use it for understanding things for ourselves and also for explaining to others why something is necessary. When I am explaining something, I can (re-read) the handbook and reflect on what is effective when making a point, or to reflect on what it is I am engaged in.

While it provides an opportunity for reflection, it also allows for conceptualization of personal experiences and activities and is a resource for accountability to external organizations. It (the role of the handbook) is an absolute must.

On the other hand, concerns were apparent that local government officials, who have primary responsibility for disaster response, are not well aware of the

existence of the Sphere Standards and are not actively utilizing the handbook in disaster management. It was also reported that awareness is low among Councils for Social Welfare (CSW), which often provide long-term support to residents of the disaster-stricken areas.

> (Many municipal employees) don't know about them. While many responded that they are familiar with the (existence of) the Cabinet Office Guidelines, many also admitted (not being well-versed in the contents.) When it comes to CSW, it's my impression that perhaps around 1% (of people know about them.)
> CSW have (the remit of) running the disaster volunteer centers. Knowledge of the standards is limited (even among CSW employees) when it comes to the CSW running the disaster volunteer centers.
> In terms of CSW as a whole, (many of them are) completely unaware of the standards, even though they present them at the trainings (they convene.)
> Many of those who work with people are unaware of the Standards, especially those in the welfare sector, but also those in the medical and health professions.
> When helping to rebuild lives, the public health nurses are extremely preoccupied with what is written in here (Sphere Handbook), so there are many aspects that would be greatly enhanced by everybody reading from the same music sheet. I see it (the handbook) as a tool that can be used as a lingua franca.
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> CSW are (very much) concerned with how to run the disaster volunteer centers, and there (are often cases where there) isn't such a strong inclination to provide comprehensive support from an overarching perspective in a wide range of areas
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> Around that time, an employee from an aid organization in Tokyo turned up and had (all these) ideas about what we should do, but I thought that rather than making proposals about what to do, it was more a case of doing what we can with the limited resources that we have and that there was a limit to what we could achieve. If you've got nothing to back it up then it sounds unreasonable, so It's definitely helpful to have (the Standards.)

It was also observed that the handbook has not been widely used by those who respond to domestic disasters - such as governments, CSW, and other disaster relief organizations - because they are not fully aware that disaster aid is a kind of humanitarian aid.

When I went to provide aid, one of the (local) CSW staff said to me, "It's amazing that Peace Boat is delivering aid in conflict areas in Ukraine. It's like real humanitarian aid, isn't it".
("So that's how they see us…") is what I thought - but assisting victims in disaster-stricken areas is also humanitarian aid, isn't it? While there may be differences in the magnitude and scale of what is happening, they don't feel that what we are doing is equal to humanitarian aid, so I think that's why they are making such comments.

I think we (will need to) renew our awareness or sense of what it is that we are trying to accomplish, or what it is that we are involved in. For example, when people see the title of this (handbook), I think there is a sense of perhaps (feeling of a faraway world) like, "Humanitarian aid, huh?" because we're just a volunteer center.

When I started to get involved in this kind of disaster work, regardless of whether it was with CSW or not, I felt (the need) to start with so-called humanitarian aid, with a view to providing overall support to those affected by disasters. I feel a sense of urgency about how to approach the issue from here onward.

In the case of CSW and volunteer centers, I think there are many people who have a sense of what they can do from the context of individual volunteer activities, and I think in that sense there is a difference in the starting point for many people.

So I think that when it comes to disseminating these (Sphere Standards), I do feel that the starting point is difficult and this may stop them from permeating.

We read them because we consider ourselves in charge of humanitarian aid. But I also want to promote them with governmental employees, but with both prefectural and municipal employees it is the case that they may be in charge (for that year), but they are not in charge (in the long run), right? So they don't end up (with the mindset of wanting to use the Sphere Standards.)

When it comes to the crisis management division, I don't think they read through (the handbook), and just tell the employee in charge to teach certain sections. Since it's a case of assigning tasks to specific people, they probably think that it's

the job of the employee in the section in charge to become familiar with the handbook.

Aid for disaster victims involves what is now called in poverty aid "a minimum standard of healthy and cultural life," which includes the word "cultural" in it. There might not be many people who would reconcile that (as applying to) "disaster afflicted persons". But this handbook is the baseline, the absolute minimum standards for enabling victims to lead a healthy and cultural life. In order for the disaster victims to be able to live healthy and minimally cultural lives, people (who provide aid) must have read this.

As one of the characteristics of Japanese disaster response is that it is based on a pre-existing response plan, it was indicated that incorporating the Sphere Standards into evacuation shelter operation manuals could lead to their further dissemination.

The mindset is more about implementing what has been prepared in advance or how to implement it, rather than looking at the situation through a humanitarian assistance lens and thinking about what needs to be done in the moment. So, whether or not the standards really permeate, if the manuals for shelters and volunteer centers, or the manuals themselves, could include a statement that this is a good reference (material to be used as a reference) and that it is based on these standards, then I imagine the standards would be more widely recognized than they are now.

Talking about toilets is a pretty clear and specific issue, isn't it? If there is a manual or a plan, but it is not executed during a disaster, I think it is more likely that the contents of the plan or the manual are probably not ready (to be used) in the first place.
I guess the situation is like it is now because the manual prescribes that we do this, that and the other but then fails to reflect the perspectives that the Sphere Standards are proposing.

I think it is more common for (municipalities) to think that (Sphere Standards) are not in the (disaster response) plan or that (disaster response using Sphere Standards) is not being envisaged.

If it had been planned from the beginning based on the Standard 3.2, Access and Usage of Toilets, no one would have been in trouble presumably.

It should all be included in the plan.

Whenever I do disaster relief, it always strikes me that the government are very capable people who can do things according to a manual. So I think we can do it as long as it is in the plan. (The Sphere Handbook) should be used as a reference guide when making the plan.

Sometimes, when I feel helpless (the authorities don't understand or the onsite people are stuck), I go back and read the manual prepared by the authorities and point out to the evacuation shelter that it is also written in the manual.
We don't ask the impossible of course, but we do urge them to incorporate it (because it is written in this way in the manual).

Sometimes Sphere doesn't make sense to them, but if you talk about the issue from a gender equality perspective, they may get the message.

It was also proposed that greater penetration could be achieved through providing a more user-friendly resource for government employees and disaster aid providers who balk at the thickness of the Sphere Handbook.

I imagine it would be easier for people to understand if they could learn and assimilate in a step-by-step process what they need to know and utilize when operating in the aid context.

I thought that if there was something really relatable and simple to start with, something that people in the CSW and the government would definitely be involved in, such as water and toilet problems and other everyday life issues, and if there was a step-by-step guide that people could follow in order to deepen their understanding, they might become a little more interested in it. I just thought it would be easier for me to understand if I had it. For example, for people who are wondering what to do if they have to set up a new evacuation shelter, it would be good to have information on how wide (the corridors) need to be, and the details are listed here, in order to instill the impression that it is useful and usable.

It was mentioned that one of the impediments to the spread of the handbook is that its contents are not in line with the lifestyle and culture of Japan, a developed country.

For example, it says 250 grams of soap a month. (But how would they give out that amount (during the disaster response in Japan) in a month? It seems to imply (that in Japan people

tend to use body shampoo) rather than solid soap.

One additional factor that has hampered the penetration of the Sphere Standards in Japan was implied to be the insignificant number of career paths in disaster relief in Japan that offer disaster relief as a livelihood.

> There are not many aid workers in Japan. If you are an aid worker, you would read this, but (Japanese disaster aid workers) don't. They are volunteers or civilians, or rather, people who do it temporarily. There are almost no full-time aid workers in Japan who make a living through aid work. Our organization operates on that premise, and see it as our job to provide aid, but when it comes to (very localized) activities, there are some people who don't do it for pay, some who do it only for a limited period, and many do it part time.
> The CSW are the same, they don't consider it (disaster aid) as their main line of work, so they don't think they need a handbook (for temporary work), and I think they aren't convinced of the need to read such a long book (for temporary work).

It was suggested that the fact that many of the grant programs related to disaster aid in Japan do not account for personnel costs, is also

a relevant factor hindering the penetration of the standards.
In Japan, few grants related to disaster aid include personnel costs.
Many of the cooperating organizations in this study are systematically striving to ensure that their staff can provide support based on the Sphere Standards. Furthermore, it became clear that these organizations had experienced receiving business consignment from the government in the past for evacuation shelter management support activities, rather than doing it pro bono. It was suggested that if the government recognizes the existence of this form of support, disaster response based on international standards may spread.

> The authorities were doing a lot to stay on top of the operations but had some trouble.

Backup staff from other prefectures had been coming in for a long time, but when COVID-19 took hold, it (support from other prefectures) was pulled back. We had requests from support organizations in the prefecture, but we were unable to produce the number of people needed. So this was the first case in which NPOs were properly paid (for their activities). The supporting municipality would draw on the budget and the NPO would be included within that budget. I don't know all the details, but this is a case where an outsourcing fee was paid to an NPO within the framework of the Rescue Act to handle the situation.

The structure involved one or two government people in charge, one to two people from in-prefecture support organizations, and about 15 members from our organization who were permanently stationed. Then on top of this there were some local aid organizations involved too.

It was also indicated that there are issues to be addressed regarding how to hold training sessions in Japan.

Every time (I feel when I take the training), I don't mesh with the supporters who are helping people overseas, including in refugee camps, and those who are helping people in Japan. (The Sphere Handbook) is a common language, and we are reading from the same music sheet, but what we imagine (in the field) is completely different, so we don't mesh.

Technical Chapters

All interviewed staff (5) indicated that the most used chapters were the minimum standards for shelters and shelter settlements. Next in use were the chapters on food security and nutrition and on water supply, sanitation, and hygiene improvement. It became evident that the manner in which they are used is not so much that the basic behaviors, basic indicators, and guidance notes are systematically incorporated into the support plan, but rather that they are used to raise his/her awareness as more ethical supporters during day-to-day activities.

Rather than the Sphere being the yardstick, it is more that they are (perceived as) being embedded as the standards for aid work as a matter of course. There's not much looking back at the handbook before doing something.

Rather than looking at the handbook for directions, I often respond by rule of thumb. After (a day's aid activities), I read it over and then realize that what I was just saying or doing that day matches up with what is prescribed here in the standards,

which is pleasing.

It was pointed out that it would be good to have a description of what evidence the listed indicators are derived from. It was reported that when providing aid activities in Japan, supporters have further searched for publications written in Japanese and have used them.

> Regarding the distance of water stations, there is an indicator that the distance of the nearest water station from a home must be less than 500 meters. I would like to know for whom and why 500 meters. I can imagine that it is 500 meters to ensure that waiting times are kept below 30 minutes, but it would be great to have as a reference when improving the (on-site) situation, to be able to cite (the reason.)
> For negotiating with the authorities.

> We look at Japanese language dissertations, and if it is a shelter layout, we look into what construction laws are in place. With the Sphere Standards as an axis, we will gather further information sources and be better poised to explain things to the authorities.

It was mentioned that when working with other organizations, the lack of a lingua franca such as the Sphere Standards has hindered aid in lifeline-related areas such as water supply. The problem with the issue of installing hand washing stations in restrooms could have been avoided if the departments involved had been aware of the criteria for "Sanitation Promotion Standard 1.1" within the Minimum Standards for Water and Sanitation and Sanitation Promotion chapters. Another point revealed that in Japan, retort foods are sometimes used for food distribution, but these often go uneaten because the departments concerned are not aware of the item "Standard 4: Household goods" within the minimum standards chapter for shelters and shelter settlements. Also raised were the problems with power distribution, i.e., the infrastructure of the evacuation shelter. This problem could have been averted if they were aware of the minimum standards for "Standard 1: Planning" and Standard 2: Planning for location and shelter residence" within the Minimum Standards for Shelters and Shelter Residences chapter.

> The public health nurse comes to us and points out that there is a hand-washing toilet here, but there is no place to wash hands. We are aware of the need for this. We know we need it, so if they are going to point it out, they should prepare a temporary tank themselves. But they haven't thought about who is going to get this water from every day or where. Can the residents do that kind of work?　（Do the (evacuation shelter) operators have the resources to do that? I always think that it is easy to say. If you look at the people who do it

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and the circumstances (quite a tall order), yet we are told to be self-directed and self-managed, I don't see how we can do it.

There are very few (municipalities) that have plans that include the installation of temporary toilets and arrangements for their preparation. Basically, it is assumed that permanent toilets will be used. If you think in terms of (number of) permanent toilets and (assumed) number of people to be accommodated, there are not enough at that point anymore. And yet, there are so many places that are not planned in the first place.

In an evacuation shelter that is designed to accommodate about 300 people, they are trying to provide only three permanent toilets for women, two for men, and three for everyone; when asked if they are planning to prepare temporary toilets, many shelters respond that they are not.

(A lot of aid) does not make provisions for the end users. Both for supplies and shelters. For example, retort pouch foods. In addition to (rationed meals,) retort foods are also provided (to replenish calories and balance nutrition.) Yet there is no microwaves or hot water to heat them up with. There are also no plates. So you end up with all these retort foods I(left uneaten,) not that it is particularly surprising given people can't actually eat them.
  (The people providing aid) are only really concerned about doing the job assigned to them of distributing food, and as long as (that is done) they don't think about it anymore.

In terms of why this situation (with retort foods) doesn't improve, we often hear that there isn't enough electric power for a microwave, or that there is no refrigerator.

The public health nurses often come and ask if we are airing the mattress outside. We and the residents of course want to do so. But where are we supposed to hang out 150 mattresses? Then they came back the following week and asked if we had hung them out. Yes we have, although only a few at a time.

I think that if they (the authorities) would just physically prepare things in the first place - a futon dryer, a screen door, a refrigerator- it would solve the problem.
As for whether the local government and public health officials have pushed a bit more for this as a disaster relief law, until now, there has been very little in that area. It has been my experience that people are in trouble right in front of our eyes,

so the private sector (manages to) does something about it. I (wonder) why this is the case, including at shelters where our organization did not step in to provide aid.

In the face of these obstacles, the cooperating organizations described a practical approach to solving problems one at a time through careful engagement with people impacted by the disaster who are living in shelters. Such an approach demonstrates that the victim-centered support that Sphere underscores throughout the basic and technical chapters is being put into practice. There was also talk of support based on partnerships, which involves putting together the voices of the inhabitants, discerning what support they can provide and what support they want from the government side, and then gaining understanding from the government.

> (If the community (in the shelter) has not yet been divided into groups, we will create a group for each area (living space in the evacuation shelter) and appoint a leader. Then we create a place for leaders to get together and share information with each other and with the operators. We then create a venue for residents (to express their opinions) on sanitation and toilet issues within that place. Then and there, our side (the aid providers) will ask why they cannot clean the area.
> For example, if the problem is the lack of cleaning supplies or the timing (of cleaning,) we will work together to try to make time for everyone (to clean.)

> We often work together with residents. If there are people like group leaders (who can organize) at the (evacuation shelter), we hold a meeting once to discuss how to go about it. The group leaders would then bring back what was agreed upon and ask the residents to confirm whether they could do it or not.

> Depending on their situation, for example, those (with jobs) have different hours of activity, so we will check again whether moms can do it or dads can do it. We also have a process of creating a forum to inform residents who want to know the rules of the center.

> In the information-sharing sessions at meetings, we can only take in what we hear from those who are able to speak up, and to be honest, a lot of it doesn't get absorbed. So we start from the regular conversations at the reception desk (of the evacuation shelter) or when we take them to the living spaces.

> In the case of minorities, we would start from when someone in their household comes to make contact with one of us. The

person's partner or a member of the household, including the person himself/herself, checks how much that person can normally do (in terms of transportation, daily living support, communication level, etc.,) and then indicates that he/she can do up to this level as support. If the person makes it clear that they want assistance, we will provide another opportunity to share this information with others.

Chapter with the Fundamentals: Essential Criteria in Humanitarian Aid

For CHS, interview supporters also participated, and data was collected from a total of six individuals. First, each collaborator was asked to rate on a three-point scale (high, medium, low) the achievement for each commitment by the individual supporter and the organization against the commitments on page 50 of the handbook (Tables 1 and 2). Next, in order to identify more specific efforts toward attainment, the "Questions for Monitoring Basic Actions and Organizational Responsibilities" (p. A1-A8) in the handbook were used to evaluate individual supporters and the organization's efforts as a whole. Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had made efforts to address the question items (Tables 3 and 4).

3-level evaluation of the achievement of each commitment in the individual supporter and the organization

Individual aid providers generally reported moderate to high self-ratings in their evaluations (Table 1). Commitment 4: " Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them." was rated as being tackled by all interviewed staff.
On the other hand, in terms of organizational achievement (Table 2), five respondents responded positively regarding Commitment 1 ("Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.") 2 ("Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.") 6 ("Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.") and 9 ("Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organizations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically."), but none of the respondents gave a high evaluation to Commitment 8 ("Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.")

Table 1：3-level Evaluation of Attainment of Basic Behaviors

CC	High	Medium	Low
1	3	3	0
2	3	3	0
3	2	3	1
4	6	0	0
5	3	3	0
6	2	4	0

7	3	2	1
8	2	3	1
9	3	3	0

Note: Green: 5-6 persons, Green: 3-4 persons, Orange: 1-2 persons, Red: 0 persons

Table 2：3-level Evaluation of Organizational Achievement

CC	High	Medium	Low
1	5	0	0
2	5	0	0
3	4	2	0
4	3	2	0
5	3	2	0
6	5	1	0
7	4	2	0
8	0	4	2
9	5	1	0

Note: Green: 5-6 persons, Green: 3-4 persons, Orange: 1-2 persons, Red: 0 persons

The questions used in monitoring basic behaviors and organizational responsibilities were used to evaluate the achievement of individual aid workers (Table 3). At the individual level, the most tackled commitment was 4 ("Affected communities and people know their rights and what they are entitled to, have access to the information they need, and are able to participate in decision-making on matters that concern them." with 5 or 6 people responding that they were engaged in 3 out of the 8 questions. However, none of the interviewed staff responded that they were tackling question 8, ("If assistance is provided via the Internet, are there multiple ways for people to provide feedback without the opportunity to meet face-to-face with staff?")

The most contentious is Commitment 3: " Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action."; with just one collaborator responding that they were working on 3 out of 10 questions (Question 5: "Do the structures, organizations, voluntary groups, leadership positions, support networks, etc., have a plan in place to understand the resilience of the community and build their capacity? "Question 6 "Do the staff of the support organization effectively support the community, especially marginalized minority groups, in developing their capacity for community-driven mutual aid, initial response, and future response?" Question 9: "Has an assessment of the local market and economy been completed to identify the potential impact of the support activities on the local economy?)

Table 3：Assessment of individual aid worker achievement using questions on monitoring basic behaviors and organizational responsibilities.

Commitment 1：Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5	Individual 6
4	2	3	4	4	3

Commitment 2: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5	Individual 6	Individual 7
3	3	3	3	2	2	2

Commitment 3：Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5	Individual 6	Individual7	Individual 8	Individual 9	Individual 10
3	3	3	3	1	1	2	2	1	2

Commitment 4：Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5	Individual 6	Individual 7	Individual 8
6	1	3	2	5	5	2	0

Commitment 5：Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5
1	1	2	2	2

Commitment 6：Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5
2	2	2	2	2

Commitment 7：Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organizations learn from experience and reflection.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4
3	3	3	2

Commitment 8：Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5
2	2	2	2	2

Commitment 9：Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organizations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

Individual 1	Individual 2	Individual 3	Individual 4	Individual 5	Individual 6
2	2	2	1	3	0

Note: Numbers in the upper row are the numbers for the question items, numbers in the lower row are the number of respondents who answered that this is applicable (n=6).
Blue: 5-6, Green: 3-4, Orange: 1-2, Red: 0

Next, an organizational assessment of attainment was carried out using the questions to monitor basic behaviors and organizational responsibilities (Table 4). Commitment 1, 'Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.', was the question that was most frequently reported as being tackled by organizations. Five or all respondents answered that they are tackling the issues in Question 1 ("Does the organization have a firm policy of impartial and independent humanitarian aid in accordance with human rights? Are staff aware of it?"), Question 2 (Question 2: 'Do stakeholders feel that the way the organization is run is fair, independent

and non-discriminatory?) and Question 5 (Does the organization have the flexibility in its funding formula, manpower allocation policies and support plans to meet changing needs?).

Overall, it was evident that more question items were evaluated as not being tackled by organizations as compared to individual efforts. Commitments 3, 5, 6 and 8 were the items that no collaborator responded that they were tackling.

The commitment which was reported as being tackled the least was 8: 'Affected communities and people receive the support they need from well-competent and well-managed staff and volunteers'.

The question items were 1, 2, 5, 8, 9 and 10. Question 1: "Are procedures in place to select the quality and quantity of personnel in line with the scale and focus of support?" Question 2: "Does the organization's scale plan take into account the development of future leaders and new capacities?" Question 5: "When recruiting, training and assessing staff, do you take into account the qualities associated with the ability to listen to and respond to the views of those affected?" Question 8: "Are all staff briefed and kept up to date on performance management, staff development policies and procedures?" Question 9: "Are all staff and contractors required to sign a code of conduct that refers to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and are they briefed on key aspects of the code at the time of appointment?" Question 10: 'Do contracts with financiers and commercial organizations include clear statements, clauses and codes of conduct to prevent sexual exploitation and other forms of exploitation?'

For Commitment 3, the only questions for which there were no responses indicating proactive engagement was 1 ('Does the organization have a mandatory risk assessment of vulnerable populations in the areas where it provides assistance and the implementation of initiatives to mitigate these risks? Are these made known to staff?) and 4 (Are policies and procedures in place to deal with sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination, including discrimination against diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity? Are these made known to staff?) .

For Commitment 5, with regard to question 4 (Are the organization's policies and procedures on sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination prevention recognized by affected populations and people?) and question 2 (Criteria for selecting partner organizations and methods and conditions for cooperation and coordination are established.) there were no interviewed staff responding that these applied.

Table 4 Assessing organizational achievement using questions for monitoring basic behaviors and organizational responsibilities.

Commitment 1：Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4	Organization 5	Organization 6
6	5	2	2	6	3

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Commitment 2: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3
2	2	1

Commitment３：Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4	Organization 5	Organization 6
0	1	3	0	2	4

Commitment ４：Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4
2	2	1	2

Commitment ５：Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4	Organization 5
1	1	3	0	2

Commitment６：Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4
2	0	2	2

Commitment７：Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organizations learn from experience and reflection.

Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4
4	1	4	4

Commitment８：Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.

Org. 1	Org. 2	Org. 3	Org. 4	Org. 5	Org. 6	Org. 7	Org. 8	Org. 9	Org. 10	Org. 11	Org. 12
0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1

Commitment ９：Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organizations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

Organization 1	Organization 2
2	1

Note: Numbers in the upper row are the numbers for the question items, numbers in the lower row are the number of respondents who answered that this is applicable (n=6).
Blue: 5-6, Green: 3-4, Orange: 1-2, Red: 0

With regard to Commitment 7, 'Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organizations learn from experience and reflection', the following was mentioned with regard to ongoing attempts to share information.

> For example, all the information we have gleaned, we leave with the local municipalities.

We don't act alone when it comes to issuing a questionnaire for grasping information on residents and get the authorities onboard and make it together along with other local supporters. We return all of this data to the authorities and also make sure to share with the CSQ that we worked with to ensure that it all results in improvements.

But it's not the case that we manage to share everything with residents. It's all about timing. For example, if the aggregation of data finishes at the time when the evacuation shelter closes and our connection with the evacuees is over, we don't have access to the residents beyond that point so can't physically share data (with them.) We do put it up on our blog, mind you. Because we publicize our survey data. (People who have internet access and can access the blog) may be able to do so, but for those who are in shelters or temporary accommodation, it is (difficult) unless information is specifically shared with them by the authorities. or the CSW.

With the questionnaires too, we need to tell them where the information will be available, in order to get their consent in the first place. The whole process I just mentioned is not common in most places (aid organizations) and is often disregarded. In terms of whether it has become the standard, there are some places that have it in place and some that don't. Rather than within the organization, it depends very much on the counterparty. The attitude of the authorities has a huge bearing on the extent to (which the information is shared or not.)

Although Commitment 8 was rated as the least tackled, it was also reported that as much as possible, the partner organizations do exhort their staff to attend Psychological First Aid training, training related to this Sphere Standard and other related training, etc. as an organization. It was also mentioned that there is an environment in which staff who are also psychologists and external resources that provide support to helpers can be consulted.

Food for thought

This study revealed that aid workers who had received training in relation to the Sphere Standards were constantly aware of them. This suggests that the results of the training project are instrumental in assuring quality in humanitarian aid in Japan. However, a challenge that emerged was the lack of awareness of the existence and utilization of the Sphere Standards by those with primary responsibility for disaster aid, such as local government officials and staff of social welfare councils. In particular, it was identified that there is a lack of awareness of disaster relief as humanitarian aid, and that few people use the handbook that has the potential to meet the standards. A further issue

highlighted was that the content of the Sphere Standards handbook is not tailored to the Japanese way of life and culture. To address this, it is necessary to familiarize more people with the Sphere Standards, for example by producing more user-friendly materials. Furthermore, it is considered necessary to incorporate the minimum standards, basic behaviors and basic indicators within the Sphere Handbook into disaster response plans, such as evacuation shelter operation manuals.

It was found when it comes to the essential criteria in humanitarian aid, the degree of individual and organizational commitment is not always correspondingly high. However, through the process of this interview survey, the interviewed staff were able to reflect anew on their own and their organization's efforts and visualize the commitments that need to be improved. Also, with regard to commitment 8 that confirms the competence of the support person, the creation of an evaluation index using the Sphere Criteria could help in order to self-evaluate more objectively. This initiative in itself can be evaluated as a systematic approach to Commitment 7.

Factors that have prevented the Sphere standards from gaining traction in Japan included the limited number of career paths for people who make their living providing disaster aid, and the inability of the grant system to account for personnel costs. The Japan Platform (JPF) mandated aid based on the Sphere criteria when applying for grants, which led to a certain increase in awareness and utilization of the Sphere criteria in aid work. However, the fact that organizations that provide large grants for disaster relief in Japan are not systematically required to provide aid based on the Sphere Standards, as is the case with the JPF, and that different grant-making programs have different policies regarding personnel and other administrative costs, are also considered to be influencing factors.

In addition, the organizations that cooperated in this survey have the organizational clout to send a large group of around 15 people to the field for an extended period of time. The median number of staff in NGO/NPOs in Japan is 3 for certified corporations and 6 for certified and specially accredited corporations (the average is 8 and 15 respectively), which is a small number of staff compared to NGO/NPOs in Europe and the USA. The role of NPOs providing disaster relief is expected to increase in the future, as Japan is projected to experience more disaster events in the future due to climate change and other factors. Aid workers pointed to the need to establish careers specializing in disaster relief in domestic NPOs and to review the funding system in order to overcome these challenges.

In Closing

This study is the first to examine how NPOs involved in disaster relief in Japan have reflected the Sphere Standards in their aid after learning about them. All interviewed staff concurred that the Sphere Standards could become a lingua franca for disaster response in Japan. It was also evident that handbooks are used in the field of assistance to ensure that disaster responses undertaken by numerous allied organizations are more complementary, and that the right to a dignified life of those impacted by disasters is upheld. On the other hand, it

was also clear that there is a low level of awareness in government and elsewhere. We believe that addressing the issues identified in this study will lead to further quality assurance and accountability practices in humanitarian aid in Japan in the future.