# The Sphere Project

## Background Information

The Sphere Project is a significant process - it has entailed an extensive and broad-based consultation in the humanitarian community. The people who participated in writing the first edition of the Sphere handbook, and in its revision for 2004, came from national and international NGOs, UN agencies, and academic institutions. Thousands of individuals from over 400 organisations representing 80 countries have participated in various aspects of the Sphere Project, from developing the handbook through to piloting and training. The Sphere process has endeavoured to be inclusive, transparent, and globally representative.

The initiative was launched in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, who framed a Humanitarian Charter and identified Minimum Standards to be attained in disaster assistance in each of five key sectors (water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and health services). Taken together, the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards contributed to an operational framework for accountability in disaster assistance efforts. This process led to the publication of the first Sphere Handbook in 2000, containing the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response.

The 2004 edition of the Handbook was significantly revised, taking into account new technical developments and feedback from agencies already using Sphere in the field. In particular, a sixth key sector, food security, was added and integrated with those of nutrition and food aid. Another new chapter detailed a number of process standards common to all sectors, including participation, assessment, response, targeting, monitoring, evaluation, and staff competencies and management. In addition, seven cross-cutting issues (children, older people, disabled people, gender, protection, HIV/AIDS and the environment) with relevance to all sectors were taken into account.

**From April 2005**, the Sphere Project has taken a new form. This is based on decisions taken by the Sphere Management Committee which were informed by the Consultations on the future of Sphere carried out in 2004. The Management Committee has become the Sphere Board, including some new members. The Board has committed to maintaining a minimum Sphere office (the Project Manager and an office based at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) through Board member contributions. This means that the project is no longer dependent for a minimum existence on phases determined by external donor funding. Three further positions (Knowledge and Information Management, Materials and Training Support, and a Senior Assistant) and project activities are funded by external donors for 2005-6 and onwards. The focus of the Project during this period is to find out more about where and how Sphere is being used around the world, as the basis for better assessing the impact of the Project on the quality and accountability of humanitarian response. This is done by developing a database of information and learning on Sphere activities, including training, materials and its use

in emergency situations available online through the Sphere website. The project is continuing also to deliver Trainings of Trainers courses around the world.

Details of the earlier phases of the Project are given below.

**An Extension to Phase III (2003-2004)** was agreed to enable the project to build on the achievements of the first three phases and pave the way for the future. During the Extension the external evaluation of the Project was completed. This was complemented by a consultation on the Future of Sphere which laid the basis for the current form of the Project.

The Handbook was translated by the Project into Arabic and Russian and the promotion of all Sphere materials, particularly those produced during Phase III, continued. Work on Sphere in Practice at country level continued in many countries, and a meeting at the end of 2004 brought together representatives to share and document their experiences. Two Training of Trainers (ToT) courses were held in English, an evaluation of Sphere ToTs was carried out and Sphere ToT facilitators produced a document recording lessons learned from the development of Sphere ToTs.

**Phase III (2000 – 2003)** continued the dissemination efforts and focused on learning from the piloting programme and sharing these lessons across the humanitarian system. The training program grew from general interagency 3-day workshops into sophisticated 8-day training of trainers. A broadly consultative revision process led to the publication of the second edition of the handbook and a useful 50-minute orientation video for new humanitarian workers was produced. An external evaluation was begun, conducted by Columbia University in partnership with the Institute of Public Health at Makere University in Uganda.

**In Phase II (1998-2000)** activities were focused on making the commitment to quality and accountability in humanitarian practice a reality through dissemination, debate and implementation. Phase II of the Sphere Project employed the same collaborative and inclusive approach of Phase I.

**Phase II** included two formal reviews of the preliminary handbook and new text regarding gender and protection issues was incorporated into the final first edition that was subsequently published in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian.

A website was launched, a training program begun and 20 agencies committed to piloting the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.

**During Phase I (1997-1998)** a preliminary edition of a Sphere handbook was developed, including the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for the care sectors of water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site management, and health services. Many humanitarian actors have recognized Phase I of the Sphere Project for the unique interagency co-operative process that developed a framework for, and commitment to, quality and accountability in humanitarian practice.

# Sphere in Brief

## What is Sphere?

Sphere is based on two core beliefs: first, that all possible steps should be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of calamity and conflict, and second, that those affected by disaster have a right to life with dignity and therefore a right to assistance. Sphere is three things; a handbook, a broad process of collaboration, and an expression of commitment to quality and accountability.

## Aim of Sphere

To improve the quality of assistance to people affected by disaster and improve the accountability of states and humanitarian agencies to their constituents, donors and the affected populations.

## Identity of Sphere

Sphere represents a unique voluntary initiative, and reflects the collective will and shared experience of a broad array of humanitarian actors. The community of these actors includes international and national non-governmental (NGO) organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, United Nations agencies, donor agencies, host governments, and representatives from affected populations. Since its inception the Sphere process has endeavoured to be inclusive, transparent, and globally representative.

Under the direction of a Board comprised of NGO representatives, a small project team helps to ensure that Sphere support services, materials, and training opportunities are made available to all interested parties. Funding to support the work of the project team is made available by Board member organisations and donor agencies.

## Guiding values and principles for the Sphere Project

The Sphere Project is based on:
• International Humanitarian, Human Rights, and Refugee law
• The Code of Conduct: Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes

## Strategic objectives

1. To improve the commitment to and effective use of Sphere by all actors involved in humanitarian action.

2. To strengthen the diversity and regional balance of organisations in the governance and implementation of Sphere.

3. To develop and nurture a cadre of people who are able to use Sphere effectively.

4. To coordinate and interact with other humanitarian initiatives, and work together when that complements Sphere's aim.

5. To understand and increase the impact of Sphere.