



# THE INTERMEDIARY IMPACT STUDY CONFIRMS: CHS VERIFICATION DRIVES IMPROVEMENT - FEBRUARY 2024

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Verification Drives Improvement:** Audited organisations improve their CHS and accountability performance over time, indicating that successive audits act as a catalyst for improvement.
- **Commitment 6 Leads, Commitment 5 Lags:** Commitment 6 (Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary) has the highest average score for the three verification options. On the other hand, Commitment 5 (Complaints are welcomed and addressed) has the lowest average score.
- **Prioritising people-centred accountability:** Among the three verification options, internal accountability has the highest scores, but accountability to those directly affected is the lowest, highlighting the need for improvement in this area.
- **Equal Opportunities:** The Core Humanitarian Standard levels the playing field, providing equal opportunity for all organisations to make a positive difference for people affected by crises.



Scan QR Code  
for full report

## UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Since the accountability revolution of the 1990s, various initiatives have been launched to improve the accountability of aid actors, including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). One such initiative is the **Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)**, which provides three verification options: **self-assessment**, **independent verification**, and **certification**. As an increasing number of organisations opt to verify their adherence to the CHS Commitments, it becomes crucial to understand the effect of these verification options on **quality** and **accountability**.

Driven by this objective, HQAI and the CHS Alliance launched a joint study to test the hypothesis that CHS Verification processes lead to greater accountability, better quality, and, ultimately, benefit affected populations.

## METHODOLOGY: UNVEILING THE EVIDENCE

The study analysed data from **104 organisations' self-assessments** and **89 audit reports** from **26 certified** and **17 independently verified organisations between 2016 and 2023**.

The research methodology unfolded in **three key steps**:

1. Firstly, **variables were defined**, and a methodology was developed to measure accountability through CHS indicators.
2. Secondly, a **longitudinal analysis was conducted** to gauge the evolution of the CHS and accountability scores of organisations independently verified and certified over time, from one audit to the next.[1]
3. Thirdly, a **correlation analysis was performed** to discern the relationship between the three verification options and verified organisations' CHS and accountability scores.

## LIMITATIONS: RECOGNISING THE CHALLENGES

The study's results are promising, but limitations include challenges in comparing self-assessment, certification, and independent verification audit scores due to methodological differences.

Additionally, the comparison between certified and independently verified organisations' scores at renewal audits is limited due to a smaller sample size of independently verified organisations with renewal audits.

Similarly, the comparison between audited national and international organisations is challenged by the different sample sizes.

[1] The analysis of the evolution of the CHS and accountability scores was not possible for the self-assessment since, at the time of this report, there were not yet enough organisations that had carried out more than one self-assessment. This is because the self-assessment methodology has changed, and organisations have not yet had the time to conduct a second self-assessment.



Jordi Capdevila  
Head of Quality Assurance  
jcapdevila@chsalliance.org



Samanta Morais  
Quality Assurance Officer  
smorais@hqai.org

## DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY: A MULTIFACETED CONCEPT

The study delves into the multifaceted concept of accountability by drawing insights from the literature to understand the impact of three verification options on organisational accountability within the humanitarian and development sector.

**The CHS defines Accountability to Affected People as the process of using power responsibly. It involves taking account of, and being held accountable to those who are primarily affected by the exercise of such power. For this study, Accountability is also defined as the responsible exercise of power, including dimensions such as responsiveness, transparency, answerability, participation, and sanctions when actors fail to be accountable.**

This study aims to assess the impact of the CHS Verification options on **three forms** of accountability: **accountability to people affected by the crisis, internal accountability, and accountability to peers and partners within the sector.**

## KEY FINDINGS: PROMISING RESULTS

The study yielded some very encouraging findings, some of which are listed below:

- **Verification Drives Improvement:** Results show that audited organisations improve their CHS and accountability performance over time, from one audit to the next. This indicates that successive audits act as a catalyst for improvement. On average, certified organisations perform better at meeting the CHS Commitments, while organisations in the independent verification cycle demonstrate faster and greater improvement between audits.

- **Commitment 6 Leads, Commitment 5 Lags:** The CHS Commitment with the highest average score for the three verification options is Commitment 6—humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary. On the other hand, Commitment 5—complaints are welcomed and addressed—has the lowest average score. However, it is the commitment on which certified organisations have shown the most significant improvement over time.
- **Closing the gap: Prioritising people-centered accountability:** Internal Accountability has the highest performance scores across the three verification options, followed by accountability to partners & peers in the sector. Accountability to affected people has the lowest average scores, stressing the need to elevate accountability to put people and communities first.
- **Equal Opportunity for All:** The study revealed that an organisation's mandate (humanitarian and/or development), size, location, project implementation approach (direct or through partners), human or financial capacities, or national/international status do not significantly impact its CHS performance. This highlights the adaptability of the CHS framework and ensures a level playing field for all organisations to excel.

## LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUED COMMITMENT

HQAI and CHS Alliance are deeply committed to **demonstrating the impact of verification** and CHS implementation. In 2024, they will **refine their research** by triangulating existing data with **qualitative insights** gathered through a survey and semi-structured interviews with verified organisations. **A comprehensive final report** incorporating these findings will be published **later this year.**

The Accountability Scores Evolution

