

Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework case study

HIAS Africa

Coaching and mentoring for a high performing team

Background

[HIAS Africa](#) was established in 2002 as a partnership between local NGOs and HIAS. HIAS Africa operates both as a humanitarian service provider and an advocacy voice. Its main goal is to address the assistance, protection and durable solutions needs for refugees at heightened risk in Africa, through the provision of direct psychosocial, social and resettlement services (Kenya and Uganda), as well as through community outreach and capacity building for partners.

The [core humanitarian competencies framework](#) was first developed in 2011 by representatives from a cross-section of humanitarian organisations under the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (now the [Start Network](#)) led by ActionAid and facilitated by People In Aid (now the [CHS Alliance](#)). The competencies framework recommends a set of core competencies that organisations could adopt to systematically build the skills of their employees and thereby improve their efforts to assist people adversely affected by crisis throughout the world.

Process

Between 2015 and 2018, over 1000 national humanitarian staff and leaders will participate in a coaching programme in Kenya, Ethiopia, Jordan, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as part of the Start Network [Talent Development Programme](#). An important emphasis of the coaching programme is competency development based on the competencies framework. Both the coaches and the organisations they represent will benefit from the coaching experience which is designed to create a pool of in-house coaches. Since March 2015, the CHS Alliance, working with a team of global coaching experts, has trained nearly 70 in-house coaches and more than 30 independent coaches in Kenya, Jordan, DRC and Bangladesh.

Lucy Kiama, Country Director of [HIAS](#), is one of the in-house coaches who has benefitted from this coaching programme. She was introduced to the core humanitarian competencies framework when she attended the Management and Leadership Skills Development Programme which is a nine-month, inter-agency programme providing continuous professional development training on management and leadership in emergency situations for national agency management staff. The programme is part of the [CONTEXT Humanitarian Staff Development Project](#) led by Oxfam GB that aims to develop core humanitarian expertise, as well as leadership and management skills for existing personnel at the national level. In Kenya, the programme is delivered by the [RedR UK Sub-Saharan Africa](#) regional office team.

Impact

The Director of HIAS found all the competencies in the competencies framework very relevant to the sector. She also found the stress on understanding the humanitarian context to be crucial as limited systematic training on understanding the context leads to poor coordination of emergency response. The wider CONTEXT programme and orientation on the competencies framework allow for a common understanding of the humanitarian context that enables more and more aid workers to adopt a shared language and shared goal. Based on her experience and in being part of the coaching

network, Lucy is convinced that the competencies framework is an important resource and tool for coaching and mentoring as well as an effective method to empower and build a performing team.

HIAS has recently incorporated elements of the competencies framework into its three-year strategic plan. Competencies-based job profiles have been integrated into key areas of HIAS's work. George W. Onyore, HIAS's Resettlement Manager, describes how he has benefited from the emphasis on competencies in his organisation: "For example, apart from the technical know-how to carry out resettlement work, I am also conscious of the paramount need to push for developing competencies in integrity and accountability."

The crucial role of an organisation's leadership in developing the desired competencies described in the competencies framework to fulfil organisation's vision and mission cannot be understated. Leaders and senior managers who lead through example, clearly acting in accordance with principles and standards, will generate support and respect. In HIAS there is an emphasis on focusing on building leadership competencies. George, for example, is expected to mentor his team members, and give due importance to aspects related to staff motivation.

HIAS's experience in working with refugees shows that understanding the humanitarian context and the specific needs of refugees remains a continuing challenge. Engaging local communities in meaningful participation is still an area that needs attention. In addition to that, aid workers also need to further develop the ability to manage in a pressured environment. All these gaps are core competencies highlighted in the competencies framework.

Additional information

As part of continuing efforts to strengthen the competencies of employees, the **CHS Alliance is undertaking a review of the competencies framework as part of the [Start Network Talent Development project](#)**. The review will engage as wide a cross-section of organisations and individuals as practically possible to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in implementing the framework. The review process has involved an online survey as well as focus group discussions in Asia, Australia, Africa, and the United Kingdom with participation from aid and development organisations as well as affected communities. The conclusions from the review process will be shared later in 2016.