# Debriefing Notes: Why have standards?

* **Coordination**: Different people and organisations using the same set of standards share a common language and common goals.

Many sets of standards exist, most of which are stricter than Sphere’s “minimum” standards. However, even if they have their own standards, governments and other agencies refer to Sphere because it is what their partners are using, and because Sphere standards may be more realistically achievable than their own immediately following a disaster or in times of severe crisis.

* **Assessment**, **monitoring** and **evaluation:** The Sphere Handbook (notably the key indicators and checklists) can be used to inform various kinds of assessment and M&E activities. Refer to the  
  [Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning](https://spherestandards.org/resources/sphere-in-context-and-for-assessment-monitoring-evaluation-and-learning/) unpacked guide for more information.
* **Quality** of assistance provided. Standards help to define quality. Standards define the minimum conditions for life with dignity, and therefore the minimum desired outcomes of humanitarian response. The CHS can be used to measure the quality and accountability of a humanitarian organisation and their programmes.
* **Effectiveness** (one aspect of quality): Sphere standards are agreed in advance and concise. **Planning** programmes without standards would be very time consuming because the information captured in the Handbook is synthesised from hundreds of other resources.
* **Professionalization** of the sector: Professional bodies have standards. In the 80s and 90s – even before the JEEAR (Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda) identified a lack of professionalism – humanitarian actors had identified the need for a set of humanitarian standards. Regularly updated standards capture knowledge and experience which allows the sector as a whole to **learn**.

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* **Advocacy:** “Our role in providing assistance reflects the reality that those with primary responsibility are not always fully able to perform this role themselves, or may be unwilling to do so.” (from [Humanitarian Charter, paragraph 3](https://handbook.hspstandards.org/en/sphere/#ch003_001_002)). Primary responsibility generally falls to the government, but failing that, whoever is in charge: a local authority, a community leader, an armed group or even the mafia.

A key role of humanitarian actors is to advocate on behalf of affected populations; to encourage those in power to fulfil their responsibilities. While some organisations specialise in advocacy, all humanitarian actors do it.

Standards state what conditions the persons in charge should be meeting – as a minimum – and can therefore be used to quantify the gap between what is and what should be. This works even better if the government recognises Sphere, which several do.

Advocating for use of Sphere standards is a key activity of Sphere focal points. Find information here: <https://spherestandards.org/resources/?category=ndmas>

Anyone can advocate for increased use of Sphere standards among their partners. The  
*How to be a Sphere Champion* eCourse explains how: <https://learning.spherestandards.org/>

* **Predictability** and **consistency**: An organisation that is adhering to Sphere principles and standards should behave consistently and predictably, making them easier to work with.
* **Accountability** for resources and to people. This is highly important, and “accountability” should have been defined carefully in another activity (e.g., *activity 2.3: Can you define key terms that are central to Sphere philosophy?*)
* **Transparency** is one aspect of accountability which is closely related to behaving predictably and consistently: standards provide a reference point to explain the actions you take.