

# Why Do Data Standards Matter?

How can we teach and build a common language around standards and why they matter? The goal of the exercise is to understand and discuss terms and needs surrounding quality, standardisation, and measurement. Consider your audience and share the example narrative and any relevant materials after the exercise. This topic may cause semantic debate with some audiences. If it does, redirect the conversation, ask them to do the exercise first and then discuss the topic.

- **People:** 6 to 20 people
- **Time:** 30 Minutes
- **Difficulty:** Easy
- **Materials:** Aqua-tabs (50 per box) or the equivalent useful/available. e.g. band-aids (Each group should get between 30 - 50 items.)  
Flipcharts, coloured markers, and sticky notes.



## THE EXERCISE

Instructions for participants:

1. In the small groups, give the boxes of items:
  - a. How would you distribute the items?
  - b. What do you need to keep track of? What do you need to measure?
  - c. What information will you gather as you distribute?
2. After 10 minutes, have each group share their answers.
3. In Plenary, ask - Is everyone measuring the same thing?
  - a. Outcome 1 - People are not measuring the same thing. Ask: Why is that problematic?
  - b. Outcome 2 - People are measuring the same thing - move on to the scenarios
4. Share real world experience with Aquatabs and Guidance on how this gets solved at the Secretariat Level (provide any handouts/resources they may use in the future to help people learn.)
5. In their groups, ask: Do they have any similar examples from their sector related to 'Standards'?

Extra Credit:

- Read: [Sphere Handbook, Code Standard 2: Coordination and Collaboration](#)
- Review the [Humanitarian Exchange Language \(HXL\) standard](#).

CREDIT

Mununuri Musori, Senior Officer, Information Management, Planning and Reporting, IFRC provided the scenario and co-created the exercise with Heather Leson and Dirk Slater.

**Example Narrative:**

There are 10 Partner National Societies in post-cyclone situation. These National Societies and other stakeholders (IFRC, other humanitarian organizations, and governments) are using multiple tools to collect damage assessment and other humanitarian response information. Decision-makers need a global picture - an aggregation of assessment and initial response information. Everyone in this emergency does their own response based on their own assessments. For this operation, they started with less coordinate data flows, but made the decision to coordinate differently for the response. They simply could not get a global picture of what was happening as the groups could not aggregate content from multiple tools for the assessment.

There was a collective decision by the government in the affected area to require one tool to aggregate all the humanitarian workflows. As the National Society is an auxiliary of the government, this worked well for the coordinated response. This type of standardization enables the ability to obtain one global picture what happened, what worked, and what needs work. Standards can help support community feedback loops, recovery planning, and obtaining/measuring a global impact potential results.