

Sahana Code of Conduct

Though Sahana is a Free and Open Source Software project, we firmly operate in the area of humanitarian response and thus it is important that we adhere to established ethical principles in this domain as we develop, deploy, support and provide help with the Sahana system.

The code of conduct only appends to the well established Red-Cross code of conduct (RCCC) (<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57JMNB#a3>), which is accepted by many NGOs. By aligning our practices, this not only will allow us to work seamlessly with NGOs, Gov response and other relief organizations in service to disaster victims/beneficiaries, but also safeguard us from being targeted politically or otherwise if we follow these simple rules.

1. The Humanitarian imperative comes first

RCCC: “The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognize our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. Hence the need for unimpeded access to affected populations, is of fundamental importance in exercising that responsibility. The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such.”

- Sahana's primary goal (<http://www.sahana.lk/overview>) is to help alleviate human suffering and help save lives through the efficient use of IT during a disaster
- Sahana is made available freely for anyone to download and we should strive to deploy Sahana in a neutral holistic way encompassing all parties in need of humanitarian assistance in a disaster.

2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone

RCCC: “Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs. Within the entirety of our programmes, we will reflect considerations of proportionality. Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate. In implementing this approach, we recognize the crucial role played by women in disaster-prone communities and will ensure that this role is supported, not diminished, by our aid programmes. The implementation of such a universal, impartial and independent policy, can only be effective if we and our partners have access to the necessary resources to provide for such equitable relief, and have equal access to all disaster victims.”

- Sahana should be used only if it serves the need and is feasible based on the situation, environment and preference of aid workers/beneficiaries. If it is not feasible it is better not to use it that to cause additional bottlenecks and issues that could impede the delivery of aid. Do not use Sahana like a hammer trying to make everything a nail.

3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint

RCCC: “Humanitarian aid will be given according to the need of individuals, families and communities. Notwithstanding the right of NGHAs to espouse particular political or religious opinions, we affirm that assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of the recipients to those opinions. We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.”

4. We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy

RCCC: “NGHAs are agencies which act independently from governments. We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of any government, except in so far as it coincides with our own independent policy. We will never knowingly - or through negligence - allow ourselves, or our employees, to be used to gather information of a political, military or economically sensitive nature for governments or other bodies that may serve purposes other than those which are strictly humanitarian, nor will we act as instruments of foreign policy of donor governments. We will use the assistance we receive to respond to needs and this assistance should not be driven by the need to dispose of donor commodity surpluses, nor by the political interest of any particular donor. We value and promote the voluntary giving of labour and finances by concerned individuals to support our work and recognize the independence of action promoted by such voluntary motivation. In order to protect our independence we will seek to avoid dependence upon a single funding source.”

- Sahana is a free and open source project making it a global public good by license and by nature it as a product it cannot be controlled by any particular government agenda.
- Because the code is available for inspection it also make the product transparent and thus more trustworthy of any malicious intent of foreign policy. This is not the same for data, which need to be protected from abuse.
- In certain instances we will be supporting Sahana for governments and it will be hard to know or control how Sahana gets used. The data gathered in Sahana is indeed sensitive and can be abused and thus we should do our best to configure the system in a way that data is protected. Be watchful and ensure that at least you protect yourself from being affiliated to a particular political agenda. But in most instances Sahana has been successfully deployed in support of Government relief efforts.

5. We shall respect culture and custom

RCCC: “We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.”

- Sahana as a system permits anyone to front-end the system. In most instances where Sahana has been successful it has been front-ended by local groups/orgs who have a tacit knowledge of culture, structures and customs of the region in partnership with the Sahana community.

6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities

RCCC: “All people and communities - even in disaster - possess capacities as well as vulnerabilities. Where possible, we will strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. Where possible, we will work through local NGHAs as partners in planning and implementation, and co-operate with local government structures where appropriate. We will place a high priority on the proper co-ordination of our emergency responses. This is best done

within the countries concerned by those most directly involved in the relief operations, and should include representatives of the relevant UN bodies.”

- It is easy for us to leave the Sahana technology behind and help people support themselves by building local capacity. With FOSS at least cost and replication is not a problem, but good training and mentoring is needed to help local folk use, maintain and manage the system.

7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid

RCCC: “Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.”

- Sahana strives to be a system that empowers the disaster victims/beneficiaries with the information they need to act and especially help themselves. The system should not be configured to be an imposition on beneficiaries or should improve significantly upon existing manual mechanisms from the beneficiaries point of view.

8. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs

RCCC: “All relief actions affect the prospects for long term development, either in a positive or a negative fashion. Recognizing this, we will strive to implement relief programmes which actively reduce the beneficiaries' vulnerability to future disasters and help create sustainable lifestyles. We will pay particular attention to environmental concerns in the design and management of relief programmes. We will also endeavour to minimize the negative impact of humanitarian assistance, seeking to avoid long-term beneficiary dependence upon external aid.”

9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources

RCCC: “We often act as an institutional link in the partnership between those who wish to assist and those who need assistance during disasters. We therefore hold ourselves accountable to both constituencies. All our dealings with donors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and transparency. We recognize the need to report on our activities, both from a financial perspective and the perspective of effectiveness. We recognize the obligation to ensure appropriate monitoring of aid distributions and to carry out regular assessments of the impact of disaster assistance. We will also seek to report, in an open fashion, upon the impact of our work, and the factors limiting or enhancing that impact. Our programmes will be based upon high standards of professionalism and expertise in order to minimize the wasting of valuable resources.”

- When taking responsibility to support a Sahana deployment it is important (even though you might be volunteering) that a comprehensive job is done to make sure Sahana serves the need. We need to be accountable for the performance of the system and it matching to the actual requirements.

10. In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects

RCCC: “Respect for the disaster victim as an equal partner in action should never be lost. In our public information we shall portray an objective image of the disaster situation where the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears. While we will cooperate with the media in order to enhance public response, we will not allow external or internal demands for publicity to take precedence over the principle of maximizing overall relief assistance. We will avoid competing with other disaster response agencies for media coverage in situations where such coverage may be to the detriment of the service provided to the beneficiaries or to the security of our staff or the beneficiaries.”

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