Save the Children International

CHS Independent Verification

Mid-term Audit Report

STCI-MTA-2019

2019-09-15

1. General information

1.1 Organisation

Organisation	Save the Children International		
Type	☐ National ☒ International ☒ Membership/Network ☒ Federated ☒ Direct assistance ☒ Through partners		
Mandate	☒ Humanitarian	☒ Development	☒ Advocacy
Verified Mandate(s)	☒ Humanitarian	☐ Development	☐ Advocacy
Size (Total number of country programmes/ members/partners – Number of staff at HO level)	Around 24,000 employees; 120 programme sites.	Sampling Rate (Country programme sampled)	Field visits: Bangladesh, Uganda Remote: Indonesia, Mali, Yemen
Lead auditor	Belinda Lucas	Auditor	Susanne Neymeyer
		Others	Observer HQAI: Pierre Hauselmann

	Head Office	Country programme(s)
London	Remote, 5.06 – 11.07.2019	
Bangladesh		In-country 16 – 19 June 2019
Uganda		In-country 24 – 27 June 2019
Indonesia		Remote 22.07 – 09.08.2019
Mali		Remote 22.07 – 09.08.2019
Yemen		Remote 22.07 – 09.08.2019

1.2 Indicators verified at the Mid-Term Audit

CHS Commitment	Organisational Responsibilities	Key Actions
1		1.1 1.2 1.3
2		2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4 2.5
3	3.7 3.8	3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6
4	4.5 4.6 4.7	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4
5		5.1 5.2 5.3
6		6.1 6.2 6.3 6.4
7	7.4 7.5 7.6	7.1 7.2 7.3
8		8.1 8.2 8.3
9		9.1 9.2 9.3 9.4 9.5

2. Schedule summary

2.1 Verification Schedule

Name of Country programmes/members/partners verified	Location	Mandate (Humanitarian, Development, Advocacy)	Number of projects visited	Type of projects
SCI Bangladesh: Country office	Dhaka	Humanitarian Development	0	N/A
SCI Bangladesh: COX Bazar office	Cox's Bazar, (Ukhyia and Teknaf)	Humanitarian Development	2	Health, Nutrition, WASH, and Child Protection
Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)	Cox's Bazar, Ukhyia, Teknaf	Humanitarian Development	1	Education
SCI Uganda: Country office	Kampala	Humanitarian Development		
SCI Uganda: Kiryandongo office	Kiryandongo	Humanitarian Development	2	Education, Health, and Child Protection
Akaboxi (Partner)	Kampala, Kiryandongo	Humanitarian Development	1	Livelihoods

2.2 Opening and closing meetings

2.2.1 Remote visit of Head Office:

	Opening meeting	Closing meeting
Date	10.06.2019	21.06.2019
Location	Remote by Skype	Remote by Skype
Number of participants	7	
Any substantive issue arising	-	

2.2.2 On-site visits at Country programme(s):

	Opening meeting	Closing meeting
Date	16.06.2019	25.07.2019
Location	Dhaka	Remote by Skype
Number of participants	25	8
Any substantive issue arising	-	-

	Opening meeting	Closing meeting
Date	24.06.2019	27.06.2019

Location	Kampala	Kampala
Number of participants	10	9
Any substantive issue arising	-	-

3. Recommendation

In our opinion, Save the Children International has made good progress towards addressing the weaknesses and observations identified in the initial verification audit.

This includes:

- An environment policy was endorsed 16th May 2019 by the Senior Leadership Team (CHS 3.6 and 9.6)
- SCI's new Data Protection Policy (CHS 3.8) was globally rolled out in March 2018. Mandatory training is completed by all new staff and the process of integrating data protection into organizational culture is firmly underway.
- A full update to SCI's accountability to affected children and communities is now a Quality Framework Standard, with an associated accountability procedure and specific humanitarian adaptation.
- New Key Performance Indicators and MEAL benchmarks have been introduced, aiming to ensure community members have access to relevant information (CHS 4.2 and 4.3).
- Guidance on community participation on complaints handling has been developed (CHS 5.1).
- The introduction of SCI's Global Thematic Library and the SCI Workplace platform to improve global exchange of knowledge and skills among staff (CHS 7.1).
- The introduction of specific SCI MEAL procedures, guidelines and tools to ensure lessons identified and corrective actions lead to change in practice and to facilitate ongoing learning (CHS 7.2).

The auditors did not find any major weakness during the Mid-Term Audit. Detailed findings are laid out in the rest of this report.

Belinda Lucas   Sydney, Australia

                                                 15 September, 2019

4. HQAI Quality Control

First Draft	2019-09-16
Final Draft	2019-10-21

5. Background information on the organisation

5.1 Organisational structure and management system

Save the Children International (SCI) is a UK company limited by guarantee and a registered charity in England and Wales. Its sole member is Save the Children Association (SCA), a Swiss registered association which has 27 members and 2 associate members. Of the 27 members, 17 are international programming members and 10 are non-international programming members. SCI is responsible for delivering programmes internationally on behalf of the 17 Save the Children international programming members.

The most significant change since the initial audit in 2017 is the restructure of SCI's technical leadership into a broader Programme Quality and Impact function that sits in the SCI centre with all thematic and cross-cutting themes represented to deliver quality programming across contexts. Previously, thematic and cross-thematic leadership sat within SCA's members. An Evidence & Learning function has also been established to work across the organisation, to increase the focus on evidence-based programming.

5.2 Organisational quality assurance

Since the initial audit, SCI has developed a Global Results Framework, which provides a common platform to guide countries and members in developing their three-year workplans and establish harmonised targets. It has also rolled out new Operations Control Review (OCR) and Real Time Review (RTR) processes for all priority responses. This complements the existing global audit function, quality benchmarks, and common approaches that underpin SCI's approach to quality assurance.

5.3 Work with Partners

In 2018 SCI introduced a mandatory policy and procedures on partnerships, a Partnership in Humanitarian Response Toolkit, and two self-guided courses to improve its approaches to partnership in responses. Each region now has a regional partnership focal point and every country office has a partnership focal point. This global architecture has strengthened SCI's overall approach to partnerships and lays good foundations for SCI to deepen and extend its work with partners.

While noting the issues of low partner capacity and civil society constraints in many contexts, there is a general sentiment among SCI field staff that SCI needs to take a more proactive approach in engaging local partners and building their capacity. Partner mapping, partnership frameworks and partnership strategies have been developed in some countries, but in other countries the engagement of partners in humanitarian responses is very nascent. SCI has now rolled out its partner capacity assessment tool which includes mandatory capacity strengthening plans, but the approach to this is variable. SCI is yet to fully extend SCI training or other capacity development opportunities to partners which would help them implement the full range of the CHS requirements.

SCI is developing an understanding of how its partners approach the CHS through its new capacity assessment process, but this work is very emergent. In general, SCI does not systematically communicate its commitment to the CHS to it partners or assess the potential risks that its partners may not be able to meet the CHS requirements. There are, however, some aspects of the CHS – such as safeguarding and anti-corruption – that are communicated well and which are addressed in SCI training for partners.

5.4 Certification or verification history

Initial Audit	2017
Maintenance Audit	2018

6. Sampling

6.1 Rationale for sampling

In line with HQAI procedures, the auditors conducted a random sampling of all countries as presented by the organisation. The random sample identified the countries Guatemala, Japan, Mali, Syria, and Yemen. However, the auditors slightly modified this selection together with SCI to ensure that the country selection reflects properly SCI's work. Following liaison with SCI, there was consensus on the selection of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mali, and Yemen. Uganda was also added to the list in order to ensure geographic representation of SCI's work in East Africa. After reflections on security issues and language barriers, Bangladesh and Uganda were selected for onsite visits. For the remote assessments, the audit largely remained with the initial selection. SCI and the auditors agreed on the countries Mali, Indonesia and Yemen. At the request of the SCI steering Group, the audit team included Indonesia for remote assessment as the country was part of the initial audit in 2017. The final selection of countries covered a wider range of regions than the initial random sampling.

The audit team used purposive sampling to select projects in each country that represented different project types and sectors (see section 2.1).

Disclaimer:

It is important to note that the audit findings are based on the results of a sample of the organisation's documentation and systems as well as interviews and groups with a sample of staff, partners, communities and other relevant stakeholders. Findings are analysed to determine the organisation's systematic approach and application of all aspects of the CHS across its organisation and to its different contexts and ways of working.

6.2 Interviews:

6.2.1 Semi-structured interviews (individual interviews or with a small group <6

Position of interviewees	Number of interviewees
Head Office	
Staff	19
Country programme(s)	
Bangladesh	22
Uganda	18
Yemen	7
Mali	6
Indonesia	8
Total number of interviews	80

5.2.2 Group Discussions (interviews with a group >6)

Type of Group	Number of participants	
	Female	Male
Volunteers: Traditional Birth Attendants	4	-
Volunteers: Community mobilizers	6	-
Volunteers: WASH group	1	4
Community Based Child Protection Committee	2	8
Children from Child Friendly Space	4	4
Women attending health centre	16	-
Youth (learner)	5	6
Community Based School Committee	4	4
Refugees from South Sudan	12	-
Relocated Farmers	5	3
Volunteer Teachers	4	3
Total number of participants	**63**	**32**

7. Report

7.1 Overall organisational performance

SCI is clearly committed to the implementation of the CHS and this is evident at all levels of the organisation.

In general, SCI has strong systems and an extensive suite of resources available to the SCI network to implement quality programming consistent with the CHS. The CHS is used as SCI's guiding standard on emergency responses and all new humanitarian guidelines and tools include explicit references to relevant sections of the CHS.

Consistent with the findings in the initial audit, SCI is constantly striving to improve its own performance. It continues to adapt and strengthen its systems in response to internal reviews and audits and consistent with its overall strategy. As a result of the findings of the initial audit, SCI introduced a number of new guidelines and tools and initiated various actions to correct observed gaps and weaknesses. It has made particular investments in developing and revising its humanitarian framework, guidance and tools to better reflect the accountability dimensions of the CHS and to effect its global commitments to capacity building and localisation.

Some of SCI's recent initiatives have already produced positive results. For instance, the introduction of SCI's Global Thematic Library and SCI Workplace platform has signifcantly improved the global exchange of knowledge and skills among staff. Other previously identified weaknesses, such as the lack of attention to possible environmental effects, have

not yet been addressed. However, important steps have been taken to change this in the future. SCI is particularly strong in terms of coordinated and complimentary assistance (CHS 6). As regards CHS 8, there are some new observations regarding compliance with SCI regulations.This may be a consequence of the fact that many new guidelines have been added or amended in the last two years, but have not yet been fully absorbed by SCI staff.

SCI has embraced its commitment to localisation and the Grand Bargain and this is reflected in its Theory of Change, strategy documents and various policy documents. Its approach to implementing this commitment, however, is still evolving. This means that while SCI has strong foundations for partnerships, it does not yet have the practices in place to assess and ensure that its partners are able to meet the CHS requirements.

7.2 Summary of Weaknesses

Weaknesses	Type (Minor/Major)	Original deadline for resolution	Status of Weakness at MTA	Time for resolution
3.6 Programmes do not formally identify unintended negative effects on livelihoods, local economy and the environment.	Minor	2018-06-17	Closed as evidenced during 2019 MTA	
3.8 SCI does not have systems to safeguard personal information collected from communities and people affected by crisis	Minor	2018-06-17	Closed as evidenced during 2019 MTA	
5.1 SCI does not systematically consult with people affected by crisis and communities on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints handling processes.	Minor	2019-06-17	Closed as evidenced during 2019 MTA	
9.4 SCI does not systematically consider environmental impact when using local and natural resources	Minor	2018-06-17	In resolution	Extended to 2020-06-17

7.3 Strong points and areas for improvement:

Commitment 1: Humanitarian assistance is appropriate and relevant

Score: 2.8

The initial audit found that there was minimal input from significant local stakeholders into SCI's programme design; that needs assessments were not integrated; and that risk assessments principally focused on organisational risks and child safeguarding, and less on programmatic risks.

The MTA found that SCI's practice in these areas has improved. SCI programs are well integrated and coordinated between sectors, and carefully designed to mitigate risk and promote resilience of the local community. Humanitarian responses and strategies are based on a comprehensive assessment and analysis of context and needs and are informed by a wide range of data, including input from local stakeholders. While SCI undertakes rapid needs assessments at the onset of a crisis, more formal needs assessments should be undertaken as programmes develop to ensure a deeper understanding of needs and vulnerabilities.

People affected by crisis reported that the assistance provided was appropriate, relevant, and responsive to their needs. SCI's inclusive approach builds local capacity, eases pressure on host communities, and promotes social cohesion.

Commitment 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely

Score: 2.8

The initial audit found that timeliness was variable due to partners not being systematically consulted on preparedness plans or capacitated as first responders; and because slow onsets were not categorised in a timely way. The MTA found that SCI's practice in these areas has improved. However, SCI management and financial processes are not consistently adapted to accommodate rapid responses at the field level which constrains timeliness.

The initial audit also found that unmet needs were not systematically referred. The MTA found that SCI cross-refers between its own programmes but also refers to relevant organisations using established referral pathways and relationships.

People affected by crisis and communities generally expressed satisfaction with the timeliness of the response. They report that programmes are realistic and safe.

Commitment 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects

Score: 2.5

The initial audit found that SCI had limited guidance on analysing community capacities. The MTA found that SCI has significantly improved in this area. SCI consistently builds local capacities and resilience by coordinating with local government, working with community-based committees, engaging community volunteers, and employing local staff from affected communities and host populations.

SCI has also strengthened its focus on partnership, although it does not yet systematically capacitate partners as first responders.

The initial audit also found that programmes do not systematically identify unintended negative effects on livelihoods, the local economy and the environment. Although SCI has made some significant improvements in these areas, the MTA found that this is still the case in regard to environmental considerations in its programmes.

Finally, the initial audit found that neither SCI nor its partners had systems to safeguard personal information collected from people affected by crisis. The MTA found that SCI has largely addressed this weakness; SCI now has policy, systems and protocols to store, share, archive and destroy confidential personal information. However, staff do not always protect the privacy and security of beneficiaries, as personal information has sometimes been disclosed in social media.

Communities generally felt better able to withstand shocks and stresses because of SCI programmes and no negative effects were identified.

Commitment 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback

Score: 2.7

SCI continues to conform to the requirements of this Commitment as outlined in the Initial Audit Report from 2017. The organisation has relevant and appropriate policies, procedures and tools for engaging communities and people affected by crisis. Sharing of information with communities is planned as part of the programme interventions. As in 2017, beneficiaries of SCI are able to provide feedback on programme quality and effectiveness. In addition, SCI has introduced a number of new guidelines and procedures to better involve affected communities in decision-making throughout the programme cycle. However, as noted in the initial audit, SCI's practice of information sharing is not consistent at all locations. Some communities are not aware of SCI's organisational principles and values, expected staff behaviour or about SCI plans for the future. SCI's beneficiary involvement in project planning still tends to be consultative rather than participatory in decision making.

Communities interviewed stated that they understand the information provided by SCI. They feel safe and able to participate and to give feedback to SCI and its partner organisations.

Commitment 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed

Score: 2.4

SCI systematically seeks to make complaints mechanisms accessible to people affected by crisis. It uses a wide range of strategies and communication tools to promote complaints mechanisms in complex contexts. However, as identified in the initial audit, there is limited consultation with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.

Information on how to makes complaints is generally available and understood by people of concern. Communities expressed confidence in the appropriateness and accessibility of mechanisms that are available to them.

Commitment 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary

Score: 3.5

SCI still complies with CHS 6. The organisation demonstrates a very strong commitment to coordination. By co-leading the global education cluster with UNICEF and by leading

interagency working groups at many locations, SCI strengthens the UN cluster system at global, national and sub-national level. SCI not only participates in relevant coordination meetings, but also exchanges information and develops guidelines and tools with other organisations. Moreover, SCI identifies the roles, responsibilities, capacities and interests of the various stakeholders, thereby ensuring complementarity with national and local authorities and other stakeholders. With a view to achieving complementarity, SCI encourages partner organisations to participate in coordination meetings.

People of concern confirmed that SCI's response is complementary of other organisations.

Commitment 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve

Score: 2.5

SCI continues to meet CHS 7. The organisation is clearly committed to learning. Based on the findings of the initial audit specific SCI MEAL procedures, guidelines and tools have been introduced to ensure lessons identified and corrective actions lead to change in practice and to facilitate ongoing learning. Examples are the introduction of a quality control tool for evaluations or the launch of SCI's Global Thematic Library. SCI's new Global Thematic Library is highly appreciated and used by staff. The weakness with regard to evaluations or RTRs of poor quality was corrected. Moreover, the introduction of the SCI Workplace platform facilitates the worldwide exchange of information and the continuous learning among all staff. The inter-agency "Listening to Children" consultation and the creation of the Response Innovation Lab (RIL) are examples of how SCI contributes to peer learning and innovations in humanitarian aid. The launch of the Global Humanitarian Surge Platform (GHSP) earlier of this year harmonises capacity building and quality standards among seconded staff (HST) across SC member organisations. However, while new SCI procedures on learning specifically request the sharing of learning with communities and people affected by crisis, SCI does not yet do this systematically. Another gap that still exists is the non-systematic approach to integrating lessons learned into project design. The accessibility of SCI's internal platform OneNet has improved, but due to the large amount of information and documents available on the platform and its complex navigation, finding a specific document is not always easy. In some locations, access to documents at OneNet is difficult due to slow or no internet connections.

At some locations, the communities interviewed confirmed that learning wasn't shared with them.

Commitment 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably

Score: 2.8

SCI continues to conform to the requirements of this Commitment. As noted in the initial audit, staff understand SCI processes to develop their skills and feel enough supported. Moreover, SCI staff have good opportunities to access technical capacity building relating to their professional focus – both face-to-face and online. Country offices establish annual training calendars based on the performance evaluation of staff members. However, unlike in the initial audit, the MTA revealed that SCI's Code of Conduct is not known by volunteers at some locations.

The initial audit also found no evidence that staff were not complying with relevant policies. However, the MTA identified that staff do not always follow safety regulations, even though SCI regularly provides related training.

Communities interviewed are very pleased with the commitment and behaviour of the staff. They also described them as trustworthy and competent. No community reported a violation of the Code of Conduct.

Commitment 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose

Score: 2.7

SCI has well established financial policies, systems and procedures that ensure accountable financial management and manage the risk of corruption. Staff, communities and stakeholders reported that SCI uses its resources efficiently and appropriately for intended purposes. Staff and communities are acutely aware of SCI's zero tolerance approach to fraud and corruption.

The initial audit found that SCI was not sufficiently proactive in developing framework contracts with suppliers; that lack of sectoral integration negatively affected the efficiency of responses; and that potential economies of scale were sometimes negated by the geographic tendency for scale. The Mid Term Audit found that these observations have been addressed and are resolved.

The initial audit also found that SCI did not formally consider environmental impact when using local and natural resources. Since then, SCI has developed and approved an Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Policy. However, this is yet to be translated into humanitarian guidelines and tools, or operationalised in humanitarian responses.

8. Organisation's report approval

Acknowledgement and Acceptance of Findings

For Organisation representative – please cross where appropriate

I acknowledge and understand the findings of the audit	☒
I accept the findings of the audit	☒
I do not accept some/all of the findings of the audit	☐

Please list the requirements whose findings you do not accept

Name and Signature

Date and Place

Gabriella Waaijman
Global Humanitarian Director SCI

London, 04 November 2019

Date of document: 21st of October 2019

9. HQAI's decision

Independent Verification Decision	
Registration in the verification scheme:	
☒ Maintained ☐ Reinstated ☐ Suspended ☐ Withdrawn	
Next audits	
Renewal audit in 2021	
Pierre Hauselmann Executive Director Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative	Date: 2019-10-21

Appeal

In case of disagreement with the decision on certification, the organisation can appeal to HQAI within 14 days after being informed of the decision.

HQAI will investigate the content of the appeal and propose a solution within 10 days after receiving the appeal.

If the solution is deemed not to be satisfactory, the organisation can inform in writing HQAI within 30 days after being informed of the proposed solution of their intention to maintain the appeal.

HQAI will transmit the case to the Chair of the Advisory and Complaint Board who will constitute a panel made of at least two experts who have no conflict of interest in the case in question. These will strive to come to a decision within 30 days.

The details of the Appeals Procedure can be found in document PRO049 – Appeals Procedure.

Annex 1: Explanation of the scoring scale

0	**A score of 0 denotes a weakness that is so significant that it indicates that the organisation is unable to meet the required commitment. This is a major weakness to be corrected immediately.**
	EXAMPLES: Operational activities and actions contradict the intent of a CHS commitment. Policies and procedures contradict the intent of the CHS commitment. Absence of processes or policies necessary to ensure compliance at the level of the commitment. Recurrent failure to implement the necessary actions at operational level make it impossible for the organisation to ensure compliance at the level of the commitment. Failure to implement corrective actions to resolve minor non-conformities in the adequate timeframes (for certification only) More than half of the indicators of one commitment receive a score of 1 (minor non-conformity), making it impossible for the organisation to ensure compliance at the level of the commitment. (for independent verification or certification only)
1	**A score of 1 denotes a weakness that does not immediately compromise the integrity of the commitment but requires to be corrected to ensure the organisation can continuously deliver against the commitment.**
	EXAMPLES: There are a significant number of cases where the design and management of programmes and activities do not reflect the CHS requirement. Actions at the operational level are not systematically implemented in accordance with relevant policies and procedures. Relevant policies exist but are incomplete or do not cover all areas of the requirement/commitment. Existing policies are not accompanied with sufficient guidance to support a systematic and robust implementation by staff. A significant number of relevant staff at Head Office and/or field levels are not familiar with the policies and procedures. Absence of mechanisms to monitor the systematic application of relevant policies and procedures at the level of the requirement/commitment.
2	**A score of 2 denotes an issue that deserve attention but does not currently compromise the conformity with the requirement.. This is worth an observation and, if not addressed may turn into a significant weakness (score 1).**
	EXAMPLES: Implementation of the requirement varies from programme to programme and is driven by people rather than organisational culture. There are instances of actions at operational level where the design or management of programmes does not fully reflect relevant policies. Relevant policies exist but are incomplete or do not cover all areas of the requirement/commitment.
3	**The organisation conforms with this requirement, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time.**
	EXAMPLES: Relevant policies and procedures exist and are accompanied with guidance to support implementation by staff. Staff are familiar with relevant policies. They can provide several examples of consistent application in different activities, projects and programmes.

	The organisation monitors the implementation of its policies and supports the staff in doing so at operational level.
	Policy and practice are aligned.
4	**The organisation demonstrates innovation in the application of this requirement/commitment. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.**
	EXAMPLES:
	Field and programme staff act frequently in a way that goes beyond CHS requirement to which they are clearly committed.
	Relevant staff can explain in which way their activities are in line with the requirement and can provide several examples of implementation in different sites. They can relate the examples to improved quality of the projects and their deliveries.
	Communities and other external stakeholders are particularly satisfied with the work of the organisation in relation to the requirement.
	Policies and procedures go beyond the intent of the CHS requirement, are innovative and systematically implemented across the organisation.