

Oxfam International

Maintenance Audit 1 – Report – 2023/01/04

1. General information and audit activities

Role / name of auditor(s)	Lead Auditor, Claire Goudsmit	
Audit cycle	Second cycle	
Opening Meeting	Date / number of participants	Any substantive issues raised
	07.11.2023 / 66 participants	No
Closing Meeting	27.11.2023 / 39 participants	No
Sampling from country offices	Bangladesh, Turkiye, Honduras, Uganda	
Interviews	Position / level of interviewees	Number of interviewees
	GHT, OI, EA directors, leads, advisors, managers	8
	Country level directors, and leads	4

2. Actions and progress of the organisation

2.1 Significant change or improvements since previous audit

Since the previous audit (Renewal, 2022), Oxfam has progressed against the identified areas of weakness and taken action to address the open CARs. Oxfam has prioritised CHS Certification in one of its 10 Global Projects and systematised audit findings into various strategies and actions across the confederation. Oxfam's Global Risk Report highlights the Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) and its main risk areas. These are monitored and managed by assigned members across the confederation-wide humanitarian team, and quarterly reporting and regular leadership reviews are taking place to maintain follow-up and progress. Oxfam is reviewing the structure and ToRs of its humanitarian strategic leadership model and groups to improve timely and efficient decision-making and ensure strong alignment with its humanitarian mandate, Global Strategic Framework, 2021-2023 Humanitarian Horizon Plan, 24-27 Horizon thinking, and other international commitments made by Oxfam.

Oxfam is looking comprehensively at how it can address challenges and concerns raised internally and through external reviews regarding over-stretched humanitarian capacities. Oxfam undertook an extensive confederation-wide analysis, and has finalised a Humanitarian Capacity Analysis Report, which identifies significant risks related to its lack of humanitarian capacity and gives clear recommendations and opportunities for change. Oxfam's staff 2023 pulse survey showed a lower percentage of staff reporting a good work-life balance than in the previous two surveys (2021 and 2022). Oxfam recognises how the safeguarding and the global financial crises have impacted the organisation's resources and capacity (e.g. reduction of Humanitarian Support Personnel (HSP) from 100 to 70), and the intense pressure that this has placed on its global humanitarian staff. Oxfam recognises the dedication and commitment of its humanitarian staff and the Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) are prioritising measures to reduce the burden on staff and promote well-being. The Culture Working Group (CWG) continues to progress its plan to build a healthy humanitarian working environment, and has led confederation-wide conversations to discuss and unpack pressure points and to identify existing and emerging issues and find collective approaches for change. There is a strong commitment from all levels of the confederation to promote staff wellbeing and support the Oxfam Action Plans based on the Pulse Survey results (updated Action Plan based on 2023 survey is expected to be in place at the beginning of 2024).

OI has established an Environmental Sustainability department with two new full-time positions, a Senior Environmental Sustainability Lead and Carbon Accounting Analyst. This team is supported by the work of Oxfam's Global Green Team. The department will work to improve cross-confederation members' approach to the environment, by establishing an organisational vision for environmental sustainability with strategic objectives for minimising footprint and a 2030 emission reduction target, a decarbonisation roadmap and directives for policies, procedures and ways of working. In January 2023 Oxfam approved a confederation wide Responsible Flying Policy.

Oxfam is in the final phase of its environmental sustainability strategy development process, with the final strategy to be in place by the end of the 2023/24 financial year. The process has reviewed what Oxfam is already doing, or developing, to avoid duplication and capitalise on existing solutions and initiatives and is aligning with Oxfam's Climate Justice and Advocacy Campaigns for coherence. As part of this process Oxfam has conducted a confederation wide carbon accounting exercise to analyse the current carbon footprint of the organisation and its operations. This information will feed into finalising Oxfam's global Decarbonisation Roadmap, to be developed by the end of the first quarter of 2024.

2.2 Summary of corrective actions

Corrective Action Requests (CAR)	Type and resolution due date	Progress made to address the CAR and in response to the findings of the indicator	Evidence (doc no. KII)
2022-8.4: Oxfam does not ensure it has sufficient staff capacity to deliver programmes	Minor 2025/11/16	<p>Issues around insufficient humanitarian response capacity and workload burden are identified as a high-risk area in Oxfam's global risk register and are being taken seriously. The RA (2022) found that staff from all levels of the organisation, and particularly at Country Office level, experienced excessive workload that was having a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and that they had limited time to undertake professional development.</p> <p>Findings from the CHS RA are mirrored in results and recommendations made in Oxfam's global annual staff survey, Real Time Reviews (RTRs) of humanitarian responses, Meta-analysis and Humanitarian Capacity Analysis. Combined, these results illustrate the urgent need for Oxfam to make significant investment to address the issues highlighted. In response, Oxfam has put in place comprehensive confederation-wide action plans aimed at working more efficiently and reducing work overload.</p> <p>Oxfam is increasing investment to implement structural changes to reinforce efficiency at all levels of the confederation, from Oxfam International (OI) secretariat, regional and country offices, the Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) and Executive Affiliates (EA), especially for funding streams and decision-making, and streamlined business support functions, HR automation processes and response capacities. Staff interviewed from GHT, EA and regional levels report that the potential efficiencies of these processes will have a positive impact on how Oxfam can respond in a more aligned and collaborative manner and will reduce workload burden along the entire decision-making chain.</p> <p>Oxfam is also reviewing its geographical and in-country presence and resource allocation to consider how it can best position resources and capacity and/or phase out in some instances. Ensuring preparedness planning at organisational, regional and country level to enhance response capacity and quality of response, especially in contexts where Oxfam does not have a presence, is a key next step.</p> <p>The GHT have progressed its work to establish a structured induction for all staff, new hires and humanitarian support personnel (HSP) to ensure they are equipped to implement their tasks effectively and have up to date information about Oxfam and are trained on key topics, such as fraud and aid diversion, safeguarding policies, safeguarding and code of conduct. A comprehensive GHT Induction Process Manual for line managers has been in place since July 2023. A GHT Register Project is also underway aimed at ensuring strong humanitarian preparedness plans are established to ensure scalable human resource surge capacity to respond effectively and quickly in the event of disasters. To address current inefficiencies, steps to harmonise</p>	<p>Org4 Org5 Org8 Org17 Org20 Org22 Org26 Org27 Org28 Org29 Org30 Org36 Org45 Org46 BD HN TUR UG</p> <p>Interviews with staff</p>


		<p>and integrate humanitarian rosters/registers across the confederation, through the One Oxfam System, are underway. This aims to create standardised internal processes and procedures for provision of humanitarian assistance that meets Oxfam minimum HR requirements and humanitarian (including CHS) commitments.</p> <p>Staff express feeling supported, and recognise efforts being made at all levels of the organisation to address workload and increase wellbeing. Notwithstanding some feedback from staff that workloads have been overly pressured at times, all staff interviewed express that Oxfam have worked hard to provide timely, necessary and relevant support where needed. A range of examples were reported and evidenced of the measures taken and initiatives being implemented, including to systematically: review team structures, re-prioritise, re-size, increase resources where needed; include workload and wellbeing in performance review processes; train managers on managing workload and wellbeing; attract talent and retain staff; empower women in leadership positions; provide child care for staff working in emergency response situations; make psychological and coaching support accessible; increase capacity to deploy and relocate staff within regions.</p> <p>Staff interviewed at the country level experienced excellent support from the GHT and HSP's, although not without challenges. These include having different conditions for HSP and national staff, which can result in issues in-country when comparisons are made or when working alongside national staff who are on significantly different frameworks e.g. time, pay scale, which staff noted as causing tensions. Issues were also raised by staff around GHT needing to better contextualise its response, and HSP assignments, especially in the first phase, in order that it works in more collaborative ways with national staff and alongside local expertise. These inefficiencies were reported to increase pressure and workload, in already highly pressured environments. The ability for Oxfam to review, reflect and adapt, in real-time during a response, and build-in longer term capacity strengthening, is highly supported and respected by regional and country teams.</p>	
2022-9.4: Oxfam does not systematically consider the impact of its operations and programmes on the environment.	Minor 2025/11/16	<p>At the time of the previous audit (RA 2022) Oxfam was introducing several global initiatives to mainstream consideration of the environment across its work. The RA found that many of these initiatives were not yet embedded in practice and that Oxfam did not yet systematically take action to limit the environmental impact of both its operations and programmes.</p> <p>A comprehensive planning process has started to develop a global environmental sustainability strategy and common vision for a green Oxfam, linked with Oxfam's decolonisation approach. Oxfam has conducted a global carbon accounting exercise which involved all offices to calculate carbon footprint. A reporting template and guidance was rolled out for teams, which were completed for all offices. Staff interviewed report that this exercise has significantly raised the profile of environmental sustainability and has prompted in depth analysis within country teams of how they can reduce carbon emissions and embed environmental protection into operations. Oxfam is finalising the global carbon footprint analysis report, which is expected in quarter one 2024. Country offices have taken steps to decarbonise and be greener, for example efficient fleet management, installation of solar and rain water harvesting in offices, car-pooling schemes, plants in the offices, painting roofs to reflect heat, using energy efficient light bulbs, etc.</p>	<p>Org6 Org7 Org8 Org9 Org10 Org11 Org12 Org13 Org23 Org24 Org35 Org36 Org37 Org38 Org42 Org43</p> <p>BD HN TUR UG</p> <p>Interviews with staff</p>

		<p>Since the adoption of the global Responsible Flying Policy, information and sensitisation sessions at country and affiliate levels have been conducted. The policy decision tree will support staff to make right ethical choices when balancing financial, time and emissions costs. The Sustainable Procurement Guidelines for country offices is drafted by the Supply and Logistics Group. Further tools are being developed to systematise and contextualise support for waste, fleet, emergency response and procurement.</p> <p>Oxfam have shared tools for environmental assessment and screening (e.g. The Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+), Caritas Internationalis Environmental Stewardship Tool) to support COs to evaluate the environmental impacts of their operations and programmes. A pilot study of the NEAT was conducted in 2021-2022, with specific in-depth case studies in five COs. Trainings on using the tool have been conducted by the GHT and it has since been implemented in many countries, mostly those that applied to ECHO HIP 2023 and 2024.</p> <p>The Environmental Strategy team will continue to map out what is most workable and continue to consult with country offices to develop contextualised guidance and tools for environmental screening and sustainability of its actions. Strengthening resilience of local disaster risk management capacities through training and enhancement activities is taking place in countries where risks to natural disasters are prevalent. Other specific activities to increase environmental protection and promote balanced use of natural resources are being implemented.</p>	
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3. Summary of non-conformities

Corrective Action Requests (CAR)	Type	Resolution timeframe	Status	New resolution timeframe (if applicable)
2022-8.4: Oxfam does not ensure it has sufficient staff capacity to deliver programmes	Minor	By the 2025 Renewal Audit	Open	
2022-9.4: Oxfam does not systematically consider the impact of its operations and programmes on the environment.	Minor	By the 2025 Renewal Audit	Open	
Total Number of open CARs	2			


4. Lead auditor recommendation

<p>In our opinion, Oxfam has demonstrated that it is taking necessary steps to address the CARs identified in the previous audit and continues to conform with the requirements of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.</p> <p>We recommend maintenance of certification.</p>	
Name and signature of lead auditor:  Claire Goudsmit	Date and place: 15/12//2023 Falmouth, UK

5. HQAI decision

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Certificate maintained <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate suspended	<input type="checkbox"/> Certificate reinstated <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate withdrawn
Surveillance audit before: 2025/01/04	
Name and signature of HQAI Executive Director: Désirée Walter 	Date and place: Geneva, 04 January 2024

6. Acknowledgement of the report by the organisation

Space reserved for the organisation	
Any reservations regarding the audit findings and/or any remarks regarding the behaviour of the HQAI audit team: If yes, please give details:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Acknowledgement and Acceptance of Findings: I acknowledge and understand the findings of the audit I accept the findings of the audit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Name and signature of the organisation's representative: Marta Valdés García, Oxfam Humanitarian Director 	Date and place: 10th January 2024

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 HQAI in writing 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 – Appeal Procedure.

Annex 1: Explanation of the scoring scale*

Scores	Meaning: for all verification scheme options	Technical meaning for all independent verification and certification audits
0	Your organisation does not work towards applying the CHS commitment.	<p>Score 0: indicates a weakness that is so significant that the organisation is unable to meet the commitment. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Independent verification: major weakness. <input type="checkbox"/> Certification: major non-conformity, leading to a major corrective action request (CAR) – No certificate can be issued or immediate suspension of certificate.
1	Your organisation is making efforts towards applying this requirement, but these are not systematic.	<p>Score 1: indicates 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 it. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Independent verification: minor weakness. <input type="checkbox"/> Certification: minor non-conformity, leading to a minor corrective action request (CAR).
2	Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying this requirement, but certain key points are still not addressed.	<p>Score 2: indicates an issue that deserves attention but does not currently compromise the conformity with the requirement. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Independent verification and certification: observation.
3	Your organisation conforms to this requirement, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time – the requirement is fulfilled.	<p>Score 3: indicates full conformity with the requirement. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Independent verification and certification: conformity.
4	Your organisation's work goes beyond the intent of this requirement and demonstrates innovation. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.	<p>Score 4: indicates an exemplary performance in the application of the requirement.</p>

* Scoring Scale from the CHSA Verification Scheme 2020