

# Women Empowerment Action (WE-Action)<sup>1</sup>

## Mid-Term Audit – Summary Report 2021/05/27

### 1. General information

#### 1.1 Organisation

Type	Mandates	Verified	
<input type="checkbox"/> International <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> Membership/Network <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Federated <input type="checkbox"/> With partners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Humanitarian <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Development <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Humanitarian <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Development <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	
<b>Head office location</b>	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia		
<b>Total number of projects</b>	9	<b>Total number of staff</b>	100

#### 1.2 Audit team

<b>Lead auditor</b>	Joanne O'Flanagan
<b>Second auditor</b>	N/A
<b>Third auditor</b>	N/A
<b>Observer</b>	N/A
<b>Expert</b>	N/A
<b>Witness / other</b>	N/A

#### 1.3 Scope of the audit

<b>CHS Verification Scheme</b>	Independent Verification
<b>Audit cycle</b>	First
<b>Phase of the audit</b>	Mid-Term
<b>Extraordinary or other type of audit</b>	N/A

#### 1.4 Sampling\*

Randomly sampled project sites	Included in final sample	Replaced by	Rationale for sampling and selection of sites	Onsite or remote
Breaking the Barriers - promoting women entrepreneurship in sustainable energy value chains through innovative approaches. SNNPR South Omo Zone (Debub Ari Woreda)	Yes		Breaking the Barriers was part of the random selection. This project is in one of the main geographical areas where WE-ACTION works, SNNPR, and reflects one of the core modalities of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that WE-ACTION employs in its work on women's social and economic empowerment.	Remote
Ethiopia Social Accountability Program – III (ESAP III). Amhara Region,	No	Climate Adaptation and Rural Development	Ethiopia Social Accountability Program – III was rejected as it was included in the Initial Audit. After discussion with WE-ACTION the CARD project was added to	Remote

<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as Women Support Association (WSA)

South Wollo zone (Argoba Woreda) & North Shoa zone (Efratana Gidim Woreda)		(CARD). Amhara Region, North Wollo Administrative Zone	provide an example of work in Amhara, the other main region where WE-ACTION works. The project represents a focus on gender justice and gendered food security impacts of climate change with a focus on improved food and nutrition security and increased adaptive capacities to climate change.	
<b>Any other sampling performed for this audit:</b> None				
<b>Sampling risk:</b> <p>COVID-19 travel restrictions meant that no onsite assessment could be carried out at Head Office (HO) or project sites (PS). The auditor had planned to interview community members remotely, however, this was not possible because of communications constraints that persisted throughout the duration of the audit process; this meant no community interviews, group consultations or other stakeholder interviews took place. A planned interview with a donor was cancelled as a result of COVID-19 impacts on the office of the donor.</p> <p>The timeframe for the conduct of the audit was disrupted due to COVID-19; the initial schedule from March to July 2020 was postponed, with plans to restart in September 2020. The revised schedule was further delayed for a several reasons including, WE-ACTION staff availability; problems with access to servers where audit information is stored and managed; in-country security disruptions; and general communications challenges. Interviews with staff at PS were re-scheduled three times due to the instability of communications technology. In the end, of four planned project site interviews, only one was successfully conducted verbally using one of several VoIP services tried, and the other three were conducted on the basis of written questionnaires.</p> <p>The risks to the audit are not true sampling risks insofar as the sampled sites are likely to be reasonably representative of WEA's work. However, two key challenges to the audit process are acknowledged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully remote process due to COVID-19 travel restrictions;</li> <li>• Limited number of verbal interviews with PS staff.</li> </ul> <p>In particular, the lack of onsite project visits or verbal interviews with all PS staff, means that evidence from the sampled sites presents a risk in terms of the robustness of some findings.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the challenges outlined, the auditor took account of all available evidence provided during the audit. Despite limitations outlined, the auditor is confident that the evidence obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for the conclusions presented in the report. Where evidence was deemed inadequate to draw conclusions with regard to the resolution of weaknesses and observations, or in relation to internal quality assurance and risk management, this is clearly noted in the report.</p> <p>Please also refer to Section 6 below for sampling recommendations for the next audit.</p>				

*\*It is important to note that the audit findings are based on a sample of an organisation's country programmes, its documentation and observation. Findings are analysed to determine an organisation's systematic approach and application of all aspects of the CHS across different contexts and ways of working.*

## 2. Activities undertaken by the audit team

### 2.1 Locations Assessed

Locations	Dates	Onsite or remote
Head Office – Addis Ababa	8-10 December 2020	Remote
Project site - SNNPR	9 March 2021	Remote

Project site - Amhara	9 March 2021	Remote
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## 2.2 Interviews

Position / level of interviewees	Number of interviewees		Onsite or remote
	Female	Male	
<b>Head Office</b>			
Management	1	3	Remote
Staff	2	2	Remote
<b>Project Office(s)</b>			
Management	0	2	Remote
Staff	1	1	Remote
Partner staff	0	0	
Others	0	0	
<b>Total number of interviewees</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	

## 2.3 Consultations with communities

Type of group and location	Number of participants		Onsite or remote
	Female	Male	
None – please refer to section 1.4 Sampling (above)	0	0	
<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>xx</b>	

## 2.4 Opening meeting

<b>Date</b>	2020/03/11
<b>Location</b>	Remote
<b>Number of participants</b>	1
<b>Any substantive issues arising</b>	None

## 2.5 Closing meeting

<b>Date</b>	2021/03/30
<b>Location</b>	Remote
<b>Number of participants</b>	3
<b>Any substantive issues arising</b>	The auditor noted that the process had been challenging from the start and a number of scheduling and communications and technology difficulties disrupted the conduct of the audit in accordance with the agreed schedule. Recognising a number of improvements since the IA, and the closure of all Major Weakness as well as the closure of a number of Minor Weaknesses, the

		auditor noted that WE-ACTION maintains a number of areas that require further strengthening, particularly in relation to risk management, quality assurance due to high staff turnover, complaint handling processes and learning and improvement.
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### 3. Background information on the organisation

#### 3.1 General information

Women Empowerment Action (WEA), formerly Women Support Association (WSA), is an indigenous, non-political, non-religious, women's right organisation that works primarily for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Ethiopia.

WE-ACTION was established in 1995 and is registered and licensed by Charities and Societies Agency (CSA) as an Ethiopian Residents Charity.

The organisation changed its name to WE-ACTION in 2019. A review of the organisation recognised that it does more than support women, but rather works with women to empower them and challenge gender inequality. The new name better represents the vision, mandate, and commitment of WEA. The organisation no longer focuses so much on the practical needs of women but rather on their strategic needs and the systemic challenges they face.

WEA's vision is to see Ethiopian women empowered and its mission is to create a conducive environment for women to realise and utilise their potential for sustained livelihoods.

The organisation's Theory of Change, as outlined in its *Strategic Plan*, considers women's disempowerment as a systemic social problem and a function of gender inequality. WE-ACTION addresses these issues at four levels:

1. Enhancing women's and girl's agency for their transformation – Individual level
2. Transforming root causes to prevent the disempowerment of women and girls - Household and community level
3. Ensuring coordinated efforts for the empowerment of women and girls – Societal level intervention
4. Developing contextual insight and learning in gender, and gender-based violence programming and accountability - Institutional level

WE-ACTION continues to work through the formation and management of Self-Help Groups (SHG), and the engagement of men and boys in project activities. It aims to create space for discussion among targeted women, their families, community representatives and stakeholders on socio-economic issues facing women in particular. WE-ACTION aims to bring influential stakeholders and concerned government authorities on board with its projects and activities.

The organisation has a Head Office in Addis Ababa and delivers projects in 2 regions of Ethiopia with 7 branch offices, 3 in Amhara National Regional State and 4 in Southern Nation and Nationalities Peoples' Region (SNNPR). The organisation has approximately 100 staff although the number changes according to funding and projects.

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WEA's income from donors for the financial year ending December 2020 was 45 million Ethiopian Birr (approximately 1.1 million USD). Direct programme-related expenditure was approximately 32 million Birr, while just over 7 million Birr was allocated to administrative expenditure, representing a split of around 82% programme and 18% administration expenditure.

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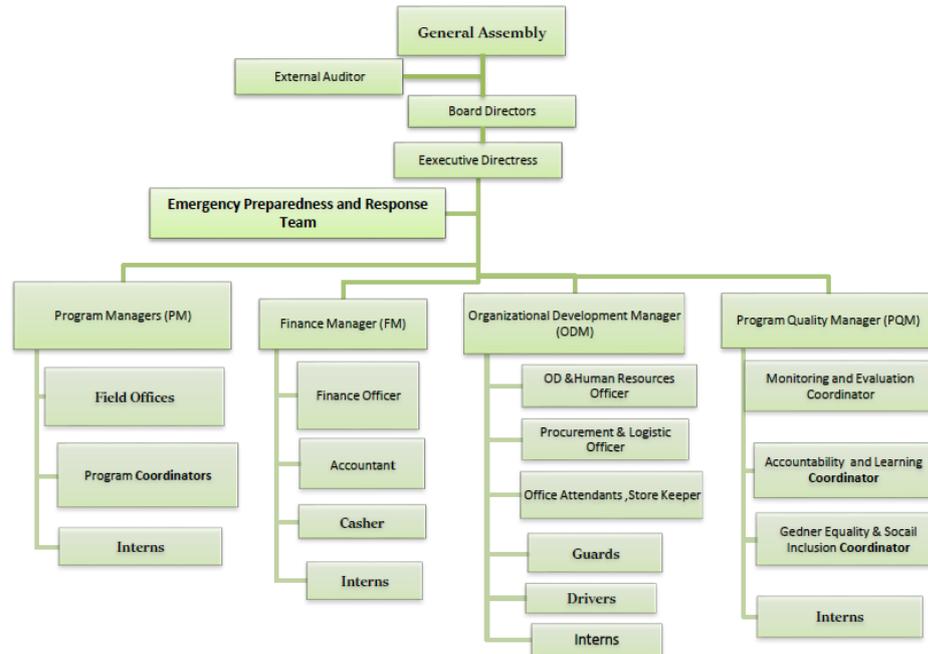
### **3.2 Governance and management structure**

The highest body of the organisation is the General Assembly (GA) which is the highest policy making and supervisory body comprised of volunteers from different professions. The GA designates a Board of Directors (BoD) made up of members of the GA, in charge of establishing the overall strategic direction and overseeing the performance of the organisation in accordance with the directives and policies approved by the GA. The BoD is constituted of nine members, five of which are women; it is responsible to the GA for the execution of its duties. The BoD appoints the Executive Directress or Director (ED) who is responsible for the day-by-day running of organisational activities, with the support of the Senior Management Team (SMT).

In 2018 WE-ACTION developed a *Board Code of Ethics and Succession Plan* to facilitate effective succession planning, and describing roles and responsibilities, recruitment and resignation processes. The document also sets out a code of ethics to support the BoD to achieve its governance responsibilities; enhance relationships and foster teamwork among BoD members and with staff; and to build respect, confidence, and credibility with the funding partners and stakeholders of WEA. Among the ethical standards, members are required to comply with organisational policies on gender, accountability and transparency; to recuse themselves when participation in a decision may result in even the appearance of a conflict of interest; and to refrain from abuse of authority by using their offices to obtain favourable treatment.

In 2019, partly informed by the findings of the Initial Audit (IA), WE-ACTION underwent an organisational restructuring process and introduced new grades and payment structure; this was partly designed to minimise costs associated with large numbers of employees and unnecessary positions and to address high staff turnover levels. The revised SMT under the leadership of the ED, consists of the Program Managers (x 2), Finance Manager, Organizational Development Manager and Program Quality Manager, who are collectively responsible for strategic and operational decision making. At the current time several of these positions are vacant and some staff are fulfilling dual responsibilities.

### Head Office Structure



### 3.3 Internal quality assurance mechanisms and risk management

In its *Strategic Plan*, WE-ACTION commits to full alignment with the highest accountability standards for the Core Humanitarian Standard. Based on the findings of the IA (2017), WE-ACTION recognised that a number of areas of internal quality assurance and risk management required greater strengthening. In response, the organisation developed an *Action Plan* to address key weaknesses and identify actions to be taken, with a focus on institutionalising policies across the organisation and improving the functionality of compliance systems. Job descriptions were revised to include specific responsibilities in relation to gender and accountability and a new performance management system was developed and rolled out to support better evaluation of staff performance. Organisational policies have been developed to address key areas including, information sharing; stakeholder engagement; resource mobilisation; programme sustainability and exit strategies; and branding.

Financial procedures have also been updated to ensure improved internal controls and more effective segregation of duties. WE-ACTION does not have an internal audit function but retains a policy for the outsourcing of the internal audit function if necessary. External audits are carried out annually in accordance with statutory requirements for the submission of audited financial statements to the relevant authority. Separate project audits may be conducted by an external auditor at the request of a donor and/or when the requirement of an external audit is indicated in a grant agreement.

WE-ACTION has not yet instituted formal risk management policies or procedures and the organisation does not have an organisational mechanism for the ongoing identification and management of risk. While risks are identified in the *Strategic Plan* in relation to the operational plan there are no attendant mitigation strategies. The ED and SMT acknowledge that risk management processes require further strengthening and this is considered a strategic priority.

Monitoring and evaluation are described in the *Monitoring and Evaluation Policy* and processes fall under the responsibility of the Program Quality Manager and Program

Managers who work with their respective teams to develop M&E frameworks for each project. *Terms of Reference* are set out for SMT and BoD members to undertake supportive monitoring visits to project sites to provide guidance and to assist participants (staff, communities and other stakeholders) to undertake effective monitoring for ongoing and consistent collection, analysis and communication of data/information about the performance of projects. Monitoring and evaluation guidelines are complemented by *Learning Review Guidelines* that set out a proposed system of learning for all projects to enable staff and other stakeholders to discuss issues in an open and transparent manner that will allow the honest reporting of changes, lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

### 3.4 Work with partner organisations

WE-ACTION works in collaboration with a range of actors at national and international levels, including international donors and the Ethiopian Government. The organisation implements projects directly and works closely with communities and in coordination with local authorities. This has not changed since the Initial Audit in 2017.

## 4. Overall performance of the organisation

### 4.1 Effectiveness of the governance, internal quality assurance and risk management of the organisation

WE-ACTION has been working towards strengthening its systems based on the findings of the IA. The organisation set out a series of prioritised actions to address the identified weaknesses. In particular, it has been successful in its introduction of improved induction and orientation procedures to familiarise staff with core policies and procedures particularly in relation to the Code of Conduct and other core policies, including on gender and safeguarding, as well as the revised *Human Resources Manual*.

Efforts to address staff retention include the introduction of salary and benefit package increases on an annual basis, and a formal performance management process. The organisation has also put a system of mentoring in place whereby staff who aspire to hold a higher position in the organisation are linked with a senior staff member for mentoring and support, and WE-ACTION staff express a general sense of feeling supported and enabled to fulfil their responsibilities and to learn and develop. Nonetheless, WE-ACTION continues to be challenged by high staff turnover levels at both HO and PS, and this impacts on its ability to ensure that quality assurance processes are carried out in a systematic way, particularly in relation to regular project monitoring and evaluation and mechanisms for learning and improvement in projects.

Risk management procedures are not clearly defined and while WE-ACTION will develop a risk matrix for projects, where this is required by donors, the organisation does not have clearly established processes for identification and mitigation of risk at all levels. In particular risks of unintended negative effects for people and communities are poorly described and are therefore not routinely identified or acted upon.

WE-ACTION has been successful in improving staff levels of understanding and awareness of the Code of Conduct and of the expected behaviours of staff, and staff are aware of and have an understanding of complaint handling processes. However, the WE-ACTION *Complaint Handling Policy* developed in 2013 is still in draft form and has not been finalised. WE-ACTION mechanisms for managing complaints require strengthening in relation to community level engagement with, and understanding of, complaint handling processes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lack of an onsite audit process, it was not possible to gather direct feedback from communities and all relevant project staff. This has had an impact on the capacity of the auditor to fully triangulate information on a number of indicators

where WE-ACTION showed weaker performance, particularly in relation to Commitments 5 and 7.

#### **4.2 Overall performance of how the organisation applies the CHS across its work**

WE-ACTION shows a strong commitment to the CHS and to continuous improvement in relation to its application of the standard. Staff at all levels are aware of the standard and it is clearly referenced in strategic and operational documents and guidance. WE-ACTION has made progress on a number of areas that required further strengthening to be fully in line with CHS requirements and developed an Action Plan to clearly define strategies and plans for improvement. WE-ACTION remains deeply committed to close engagement with communities and new standards for stakeholder engagement (2018) place target communities, particularly women and girls on low income as the primary stakeholder and sets out commitments and strategies for engagement across the project cycle.

WE-ACTION has made changes to the composition of community-level Complaint Handling Committees, to reduce the risk of conflict, of interest by removing its own staff representatives. However, WE-ACTION has not yet developed consistent complaint handling procedures at the project site level that conform to all the requirements of the standard. The recruitment of a Gender Equality & Social Inclusion Coordinator has helped to reinforce organisational capacities on its core area of strategic focus – gender equality and women’s empowerment - and to provide support to staff to ensure that all projects are reviewed through a gender lens.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes are reasonably well described in relevant organisational documents however, the application of MEL is undermined by high staff turnover at PS level and gaps in key positions at HO, including in the team under the responsibility of the Program Quality Manager. In particular WE-ACTION is not yet able to fully utilise information from feedback and complaint mechanisms to identify risk and to address areas for improvement and contribute to organisational learning.

Improvements in terms of financial controls including strengthened segregation of duties, contributes to more effective management of risks of fraud or corruption, however, the management of risks specifically related to corruption are not explicitly articulated in WE-ACTION procedures at all levels of the organisation’s activities.

#### **4.3 PSEA**

Overall WE-ACTION performs weakly on PSEA. Since the IA, WE-ACTION has improved staff induction and orientation on the *Code of Conduct* and *Complaint Handling Policy*; staff indicate their awareness of ethical and professional standards and understand the consequences of not adhering to them. The organisation has introduced a *Child Safeguarding Policy* (2019) as well as a *Program Participants Safeguarding Policy* (2019) which covers staff, partners, consultants and contractors. Staff indicate awareness of complaint mechanisms and some improvements have been made since the IA, however, they observe that complaint handling procedures are not fully functional or effective and it is not evident that WE-ACTION routinely consults communities on the design and implementation of these mechanisms. WE-ACTION does not routinely and effectively communicate its commitments on CoC and PSEA to people and communities or ensure that they are fully aware of the expected behaviour of staff. The lack of risk management policies and procedures is an important gap in terms of WEA’s overall performance on PSEA.

#### **4.4 Localisation**

WE-ACTION performs quite strongly on localisation. The organisation is committed to localisation, as outlined in its policies and processes for stakeholder engagement, Self Help Groups (SHG) and the asset-based community development approach (ABCD); strengthening local capacities remains a key dimension of WEA’s overall approach. Staff indicate clear awareness of relevant policies and a strong commitment to ensuring the safety

of project participants, with a particular focus on respect for local culture, and a sensitivity to the potential vulnerabilities of women who participate in projects. However, the lack of effective and routine risk identification and mitigation measures mean that WE-ACTION is not well positioned to identify and act upon potential negative effects to people and communities. WE-ACTION does not have specific guidance on the use of local and natural resources.

#### 4.5 Gender and diversity

WE-ACTION performs quite strongly on gender and diversity. Projects routinely build on the needs and capacities of different target groups with a particular concern for underserved and marginalised groups and with a focus on poverty reduction, challenging gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment. The SHG model provides women-only spaces where poor and marginalised women are supported to achieve greater social and economic empowerment and to actively participate in family, community and societal matters. The revised *Human Resource Policy and Procedure Manual* (2018) explicitly recognises the diversity and different needs and risks faced by project participants and employees are required to respect this. WE-ACTION has introduced women-only spaces for female staff to meet and share and to discuss and challenge if any policy gaps affect women specifically, e.g. women's reproductive role. However, risk and vulnerability assessment processes are not routinely carried out for different groups in all projects.

### 4.6 Organisational performance against each CHS Commitment

Commitment	Strong points and areas for improvement	Feedback from communities	Average score*
<b>Commitment 1:</b> Humanitarian assistance is appropriate and relevant	<p>WEA's assessment and monitoring processes prioritise community engagement strategies that align with community culture and activities. As an organisation committed to empowering women, this includes greater support for women in consideration of their ongoing marginalisation and discrimination.</p> <p>WE-ACTION has increased its training and orientation of staff on the organisation's <i>Gender Policy</i> (2015) and has placed particular emphasis on the collection of sex disaggregated data. The organisation has also started to increase its direct targeting of people living with disabilities (PLWD), people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), youth, older persons and other marginalised or excluded groups.</p> <p>However, assessment processes are not routinely applied across all projects, to identify and describe risks and vulnerabilities for different groups and WE-ACTION does not have clear processes in place for routine, ongoing analysis of the context.</p>	The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.	1.8
<b>Commitment 2:</b> Humanitarian response is effective and timely	WE-ACTION maintains a portfolio of projects focused on its core areas of competence, working for the improvement of the social, economic, and physical wellbeing of poverty-affected women in particular. The organisation's strategic plan sets out its commitments to the CHS and <i>Gender Policy</i> standards and WE-ACTION has rolled out trainings for staff on programme quality and accountability and	The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.	2

	<p>recruited a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Coordinator who provides training for staff and project participants on gender.</p> <p>However, retention of staff capacities remains a challenge for WE-ACTION and its ability to consistently fulfil project commitments. Further, WE-ACTION does not routinely consider constraints to ensure that proposed activities are safe and realistic for communities. While policies outline commitments to routine and ongoing M&amp;E, WE-ACTION does not have adequate processes in place to ensure monitoring is effectively conducted in all projects.</p>		
<p><b>Commitment 3:</b> Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects</p>	<p>Strengthening local capacities and establishing vibrant women-led institutions at community level are strategic objectives in WEA's overall approach and are reflected in the asset-based community development (ABCD) and Self-Help Group (SHG) approaches, which are well understood by staff. Although staff indicate good awareness and understanding of policies to ensure the safety of project participants, WE-ACTION does not have either practical guidance to prevent negative effects in project assessment and design processes, or adequate mechanisms to identify and act upon them.</p> <p>WE-ACTION has started the process of putting in place a framework for security and confidentiality in relation to sensitive organisational and personal information, but it does not yet have clear systems to safeguard personal information collected from communities. A lack of organisational policies or processes for risk management in projects means that WE-ACTION staff are not well positioned to routinely consider risks from the outset.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	2.3
<p><b>Commitment 4:</b> Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback</p>	<p>WE-ACTION is committed to information sharing and participation and provides information to communities and other local stakeholders about the organisation, its principles and project plans. However, information on the expected behaviour of staff is not consistently shared. WE-ACTION endeavours to tailor content for messaging to local languages and culture and uses local radio to disseminate information more broadly within local contexts. Staff at PS are recruited locally to ensure that they have a knowledge and understanding of local culture and language.</p> <p>WE-ACTION works in a collaborative way with communities and other stakeholders to gather feedback and input on project delivery. This is done through community meetings and focus group discussions, with separate discussions for different groups such as women, men, older persons, youth, SHGs etc. While WE-ACTION has endeavoured to be more systematic in its inclusion of communities, this is not always achieved in initial assessment and design stages of projects.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	2.4

	<p>WE-ACTION has a website which publishes information about the organisation, its mission and values and details of its projects and partners and WE-ACTION represents people and communities as dignified human beings.</p>		
<p><b>Commitment 5:</b> Complaints are welcomed and addressed</p>	<p>WEA's Complaint Handling Mechanisms (CHMs) are not yet fully functional. The organisation is committed to addressing and managing complaints however, it has not managed to institutionalise processes in a consistent and appropriate way. Staff are aware of the CHM policy and processes and the culture of WE-ACTION is shifting towards greater openness to welcoming and responding to complaints. However, communities are not routinely consulted on CHMs nor clearly informed of their scope, and the organisation does not yet manage complaints in a timely, fair and appropriate manner.</p> <p>The WE-ACTION website does not address the issue of how to make a complaint, and the <i>Complaint Handling Policy</i> is still in draft form and has not been finalised.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	1.3
<p><b>Commitment 6:</b> Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary</p>	<p>WE-ACTION is committed to coordination through networks and forums and to work in alliance with others on behalf of women and men from the communities where it works. The organisation works with a range of partners, including strategic and funding partners and relationships with partners including donors and authorities are governed by MoUs, contracts and partnership agreements. WE-ACTION also engages with different networks and coordinating bodies.</p> <p>WE-ACTION proactively engages with national and local authorities at all stages of project design and delivery, as well as with community-based organisations, volunteers and other NGOs. WEA's website provides information about the organisation and its work, its donors and partners and other activities, However, some information on WEA's website is not accurate or fully up to date.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	2.8
<p><b>Commitment 7:</b> Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve</p>	<p>While WE-ACTION has policies in place for learning and improvement, the team at HO with responsibility for learning is not fully staffed, and available resources to facilitate evaluation and learning are constrained.</p> <p>WE-ACTION mechanisms for recording knowledge and learning are mainly face to face and WE-ACTION creates in-person opportunities for learning and exchange with staff at different levels, however, opportunities for sharing learning, both internally and externally, with key stakeholders, including communities, are not routine. WE-ACTION does not systematically ensure that learning and innovation from projects is captured in monitoring activities.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	1.5

<p><b>Commitment 8:</b> Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably</p>	<p>WE-ACTION is committed to providing fair working conditions and opportunities for training and development for all staff. Job descriptions include specific responsibilities for all staff in relation to gender and accountability and a more formalised performance management system was introduced in 2020. WE-ACTION has significantly improved its induction and orientation procedures for new staff since the IA with a particular focus on ensuring awareness of the mandate and values of the organisation, its key policies and procedures.</p> <p>The CoC prohibits any form of discrimination and any form of misbehaviour including, but not limited to, committing any sexual abuse, gender stereotyping or sexual relations with project beneficiaries, staff and partners and staff indicate awareness of the provisions of the CoC, their responsibilities to uphold them and the consequences of not doing so.</p> <p>Although WE-ACTION has limited resources available to provide external training opportunities for staff, staff feel supported to learn and develop.</p> <p>However, persistent challenges with staff retention, particularly at the project level constrain WEA's capacity to deliver its projects consistently and strategies to achieve higher staff retention levels are not yet fully effective.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	<p>2.7</p>
<p><b>Commitment 9:</b> Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose</p>	<p>WE-ACTION has policies and guidelines governing the use and management of resources and safeguarding resources from misuse. However, guidelines do not take account of environmental resources. The staff CoC makes explicit WEA's commitment to making its financial information and governance structures accessible to public scrutiny and to informing the public about its work and the origin and use of resources; it also covers bribery and conflict of interest. BoD members are prohibited from soliciting or receiving gifts that may compromise or appear to compromise their independent judgment. WE-ACTION does not, however, have explicit guidance for the prevention of fraud and corruption.</p> <p>At strategic management level WE-ACTION endeavours to identify key risks in SMT discussions and at BoD level, however, risk management and mitigation measures are weak. While the <i>Strategic Plan</i> identifies risks to the achievement of strategic objectives, there is no formal policy or guidelines in place for risk identification, management and mitigation.</p> <p>WE-ACTION does not have guidance for project staff in the design of programmes that take account of the efficient use of resources.</p>	<p>The auditor was unable to conduct the site visit and gather the direct feedback from communities due to COVID-19 disruptions.</p>	<p>2.2</p>

\* *Note: Average scores are a sum of the scores per commitment divided by the number of indicators in each Commitment, except when one of the indicators of a commitment scores 0 or if several scores 1 on the indicators of a Commitment lead to the issuance of a major non-conformity/ weakness at the level of the Commitment. In these two cases the overall score for the Commitment is 0.*

## 5. Summary of weaknesses

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Resolution due date</b>
2017 – 1.6: There are no clear processes in place for routine, ongoing analysis of the context.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 2.1: Processes do not ensure that constraints are taken into account to design realistic proposed actions.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2021 – 2.5: WE-ACTION does not have adequate processes in place to ensure routine monitoring of projects at activity, output and outcome level to adapt programmes and to address poor performance.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 3.6: WE-ACTION systems do not allow identifying and acting upon potential or actual unintended negative programme effects.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 3.8: WE-ACTION does not have systems in place for safeguarding personal information collected from communities.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2021 – 4.1 WE-ACTION does not systematically share information on the expected behaviour of staff with communities.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 5.1: Communities and people affected by crisis were not consulted on the design of the complaints handling processes, and the organisation does not consult them on the monitoring of the processes.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2021 – 5.3: Complaints are not systematically managed in a timely, fair and appropriate manner that prioritises the safety of complainants.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 5.5: WE-ACTION Complaints Handling Mechanism is not understood by WSA staff in a consistent manner.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 5.6: Communities and people affected by crisis are not all aware of the expected behaviours of staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 5.7: WE-ACTION Complaint Handling Policy does not provide details on how complaints that are out of scope are referred to relevant third parties in a manner consistent with good practice.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 7.2: There is no management process that ensures lessons and corrective actions identified through M&E, feedbacks and complaints lead to change and/or innovations in practice.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 7.3: Learning and innovation are not consistently shared internally, with communities and other stakeholders.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2017 – 7.5: Processes to document and make accessible knowledge and experience within WSA are not functional.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
2021 – 8.4: Strategies to achieve higher staff retention levels to ensure adequate management and staff capacity and capability are not yet fully effective.	Minor Weakness	2023-04-01
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>15</b>	

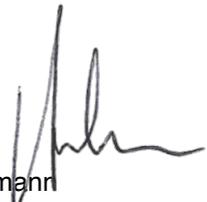
## 6. Sampling recommendation for next audit

<b>Sampling rate</b>	No specific recommendation. Sampling as per the scope of WEA's project portfolio at the time of the next audit.
<b>Specific recommendation for selection of sites</b>	<p>It is recommended to ensure that stakeholders from the sampled project sites include one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions with a cross-section of project participants, community representatives and local authority partners, with particular attention to women and girls.</p> <p>It is assumed that as the COVID 19 pandemic starts to come under control that an onsite visit to the sampled project site will be possible by the time of the Recertification Audit.</p>

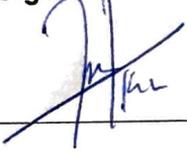
## 7. Lead auditor recommendation

In my opinion, WE-ACTION continues to demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and its inclusion in the Independent Verification scheme is justified.	
 Joanne O'Flaherty	<b>Date and place:</b> 2021-04-22 Belfast, Northern Ireland

## 8. HQAI decision

<b>Registration in the Independent Verification Scheme:</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maintained <input type="checkbox"/> Suspended	<input type="checkbox"/> Reinstated <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
<b>Next audit:</b> Reverification audit before 2022/04/13	
<b>Name and signature of HQAI Executive Director:</b>  Pierre Hauselmann	<b>Date and place:</b>  27th May 2021, Geneva

## 9. 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:  <i>If yes, please give details:</i>	<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:  <i>Martha Nemere</i> 	Date and place:  <i>19/8/2021</i>

## 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><b>Score 0:</b> 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"> <li>• <b>Independent verification:</b> major weakness;</li> <li>• <b>Certification:</b> major non-conformity, leading to a major corrective action request (CAR) – No certificate can be issue or immediate suspension of certificate.</li> </ul>
1	Your organisation is making efforts towards applying this requirement, but these are not systematic.	<p><b>Score 1:</b> 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"> <li>• <b>Independent verification:</b> minor weakness</li> <li>• <b>Certification:</b> minor non-conformity, leading to a minor corrective action request (CAR).</li> </ul>
2	Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying this requirement, but certain key points are still not addressed.	<p><b>Score 2:</b> 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"> <li>• <b>Independent verification and certification:</b> observation.</li> </ul>
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><b>Score 3:</b> indicates full conformity with the requirement. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Independent verification and certification:</b> conformity.</li> </ul>
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><b>Score 4:</b> indicates an exemplary performance in the application of the requirement.</p>

\* Scoring Scale from the CHSA Verification Scheme 2020