

Independent CHS quality assurance has a demonstrated positive impact on organisations' accountability.

Preliminary results of HQAI's impact study confirm: independently audited organisations improve their performance on the CHS and enhance their accountability towards people affected by crisis, towards their own staff and towards peers and partners within the sector.

Background and objectives of the study

The humanitarian and development sectors have long since reflected on ways to improve the management and delivery of quality and accountability. And while HQAI claims: "When we measure, organisations improve," the time has come to prove this statement beyond anecdotal evidence.

HQAI has launched a research project to develop and implement a robust methodology to systematically measure the impact of certification and independent verification on the CHS scores and, most importantly, on a set of wider forms of accountability, namely: accountability to people affected by crisis (PAC), accountability to peers and partners within the sector, and internal accountability towards staff.

This study goes beyond the CHS as a standard. **The purpose is to test the hypothesis that an independent audit process leads to greater accountability and better quality.** The respective impacts of the two processes (certification and independent verification) shall be assessed and compared over time.

Research methodology

To achieve the research objectives, a three-stage methodology has been developed.

The first consists of the conceptualisation of two sets of variables: one set of indicators to measure the **impact of audit methodologies** as well as the organisations' engagement in the process. For the second set of indicators, accountability is broken down into five key constituent dimensions (transparency, answerability, participation, responsiveness, and sanctions) which were mapped to CHS indicators.

The second (and current) phase presents a longitudinal analysis. It demonstrates **how CHS scores and forms of accountability evolve over time for independent verification and certification.**

The last stage will test the correlation between the HQAI audit process, CHS scores and accountability indicators. This final stage will allow to **measure the extent to which independent CHS quality assurance contributes to quality and accountability.**

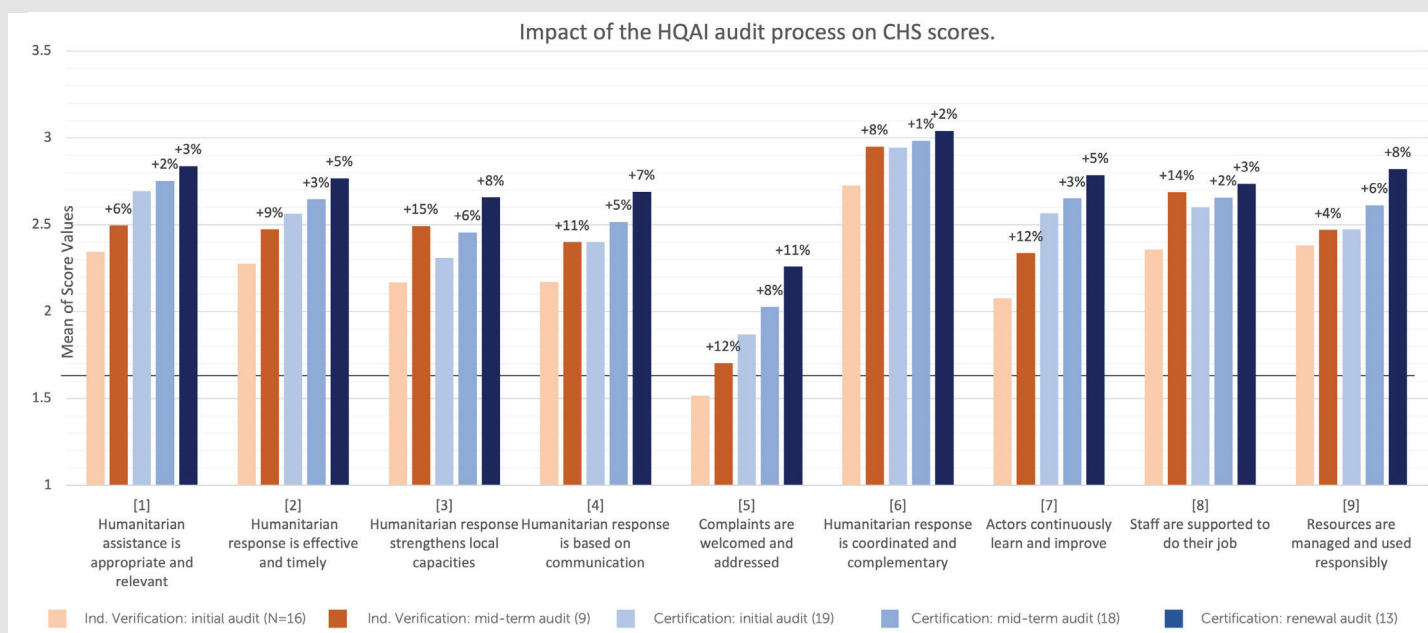


Diagram 1: evolution of average scores for the 9 CHS Commitments per audit scheme and type of audit. At this stage of the study, scores for renewal audits are only available for certified organisations. Explanation of the CHS scoring: Scores 0 and 1 stand for major and minor non-conformities (or weaknesses), scores 2 and 3 mean conformity with the requirements (with an observation if score 2), score 4 represents exemplary performance in the application of the commitment.

Preliminary results confirm: audited NGOs improve their performance on the CHS.

Average scores on all CHS Commitments improve over time for independent verification and certification audits (see diagram 1). As also reported by the Humanitarian Accountability Report 2022, this study confirms that the highest performance is found for C6 "Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary" and the lowest average score on C5 "Complaints are welcomed and addressed".

The data indicates that, on average, certified organisations (NGOs) perform better than independently verified ones, but independently verified organisations improve faster from the initial to the mid-term audit. The underlying reasons for these differences are to be further explored. Hypotheses include that in the average calculations, score 0 is present for independently verified NGOs, but not for certified ones (since a score of 0 prohibits certification status); that NGOs signing up for certification might already have stronger quality & accountability systems in place or have previously gone through independent verification or CHS self assessment; that certified NGOs have significant performance incentives (non-delivery of certification, suspension, withdrawal etc.); that NGOs starting from lower scores have greater room for improvement.

Preliminary results confirm: audited NGOs improve their accountability.

In addition to the evolution of CHS scores, this study aims at understanding how independent CHS quality assurance impacts three forms of accountability – to people affected by crisis (PAC), to peers and partners within the sector, and internally towards staff.

The findings demonstrate that the performance of organisations per accountability form increases over time (see diagram 2). As of mid-term audits, independently verified and certified NGOs have scores above 2, meaning there is compliance for all forms of accountability tested.

The diagram indicates that accountability scores are higher for certification than for independent verification, which is compatible with the findings on the CHS scores evolution (diagram 1). Overall, independently verified organisations improve faster than certified ones.

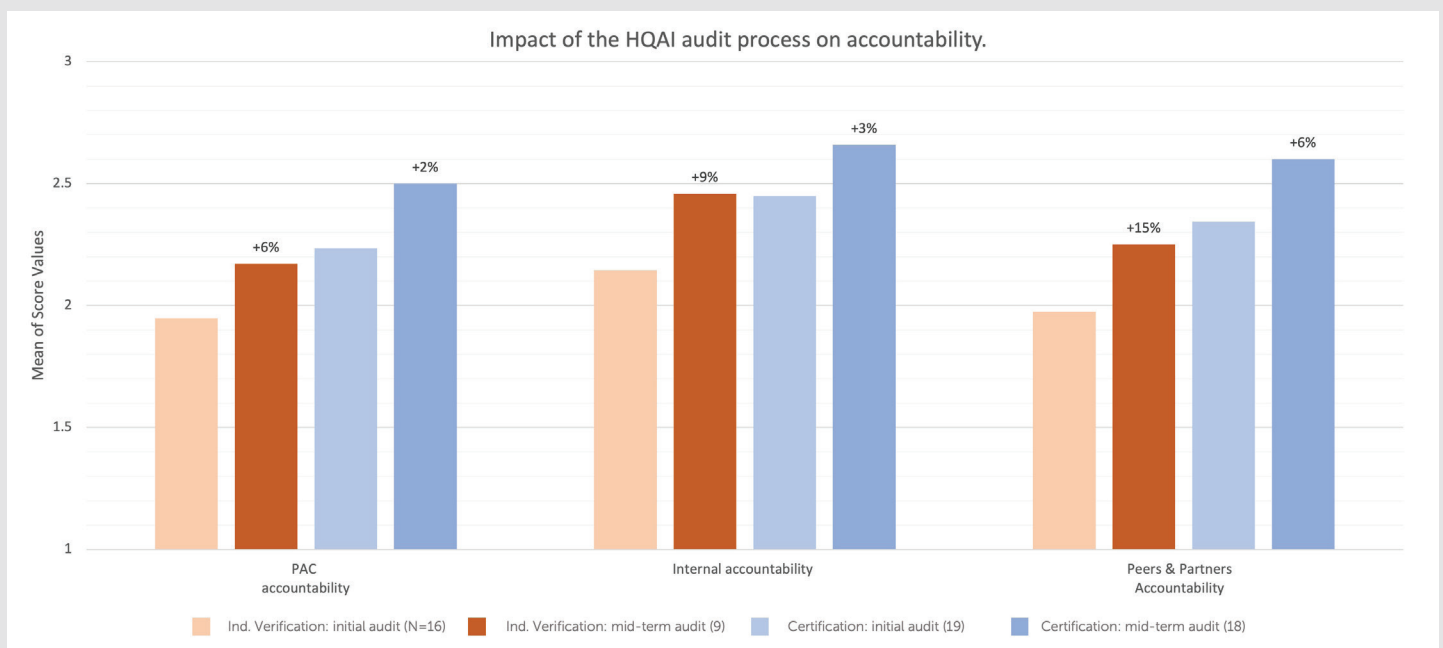


Diagram 2: evolution of average scores of three forms of accountability per audit scheme and type of audit. Data from certification renewal audits was not included, as not yet statistically significant enough to explain evolutions on accountability.

What's next?

This phase of the study has shown promising preliminary results. We now enter the third project phase (correlation between the HQAI audit process, CHS scores and accountability indicators).

Finally, the analysis and measurement of the impact of independent CHS quality assurance on accountability will be systematised and automatised. This will provide a means to measure and communicate the impact of our work.