

20 December 2013

## **Independent Review Panel – Virtual Meeting 28-29 November Letter to the Members in this Review Round**

Dear Winnie Byanyima,

Thank you for submitting your accountability report to the Charter's Independent Review Panel for assessment. As in previous years we found that the quality of reports is generally improving, demonstrating greater institutional commitment and more evidence that mechanisms are working in practice. Before providing individual feedback on your organisation's report, allow us however to highlight three areas of general concern:

### **1.) *Embedding the Charter as a tool for organisational development (3.5)***

The disclosure profile 3.5 looks like a rather technical question on how the report is compiled and organisations tend to report accordingly. But it really asks for a process that is at the heart of what the Charter wishes to achieve: using the report as an opportunity for a cross functional systematic and critical reflection on how accountability is best implemented underpins the legitimacy and quality of your organisation's work. Accountability is all too often perceived as a defensive tool, when it is really a mechanism to pro-actively support organisational development. Please describe under 3.5 how you use the reporting process to embed accountability into your organisation. Against this background Members are also strongly encouraged to place the Charter logo prominently on their website and to further link to the Charter website, so that stakeholders know what to hold you accountable against.

### **2.) *Complaints Handling Mechanisms (NGO2)***

Having a fully functioning complaints handling mechanism in place is the only Minimum Standard for Charter Members so far. The Panel is very concerned about rather slow progress by many Charter Members to comply with this. We have therefore decided to ask the Charter Board to look into implementing a timeline and sanctions policy for compliance. In our view the leeway should be no longer than two to maximum three years after a Minimum Standard has been adopted. You find examples of well-functioning complaints handling mechanisms in the Good Practice document on the Charter website, capturing good examples from this and previous reporting rounds.

### **3.) *Succinctness and communication quality***

There is a danger that accountability standards develop a life of their own and become increasingly complex and detached. We have noted that Charter reports tend to get longer without necessarily providing more relevant information. It is important however to use these reports to actively communicate internally and externally how accountability is part of the DNA of your organisation and strengthens the quality of your work. In order for these reports to be read, we suggest that they should have a maximum of 40 pages. For each GRI indicator it is sufficient to report three things:

- a) Do you have policies and processes in place to address the issue?
- b) Do you have evidence that it is embedded in systematic practice?
- c) Is there evidence to show that this has led to improved quality of work?

Sometimes the Panel asks for more information. We are trying to do so only where it is necessary, and we encourage you to be as succinct as possible, and take the above three parameters as guidance. Also try to avoid repetition and where illustrations are given, please keep these brief. Organisations who wish to merge their accountability report with the annual report are encouraged to additionally provide a separate and more reflective addendum relating to the Charter if the annual reports do not embrace that due to a desire to be more promotional.

Organisation-specific feedback to Oxfam International:

The organisation's sixth report is very good and Oxfam International clearly links the GRI accountability indicators to the normative commitments made in the Charter Principles. As in the previous report, the organisation has again integrated its Accountability Report into its annual report, thereby visually and strategically strengthening accountability throughout its work. Going back and forth between the table and the different sections in the report is however challenging for the reader, who wants to focus on the accountability issues. There is also the danger that an annual report will focus on a marketing aspect rather than critical reflection about the quality assurance systems in the organisation. The Panel therefore encourages Oxfam to additionally provide a separate and more reflective addendum relating to the Charter if the organisation's next annual report does not highlight in a systematic way how to continuously improve accountability. Fulfilling commitments made in previous reports, shows strong commitment of Oxfam International to accountability (see Gap Analysis Table). Furthermore, one of the organisation's operational goals is on accountability which is seen as very good practice. The report provides much evidence and many areas (stakeholder involvement, programme monitoring, environmental indicators and the training and composition of its workforce) can be seen as **good practice** examples for other organisations. However, please provide links to policies in the next report. There are still some areas which could be further developed, self-critically analysed or addressed (e.g. strong mechanisms to identify greater leverage through systematic alignment with the optimal partners; and systematic performance reviews or anti-corruption training for staff members). Oxfam International is strongly encouraged to gather systematic information from its affiliates against key reporting parameters and aggregate that into one report, rather than handing in individual reports from some affiliates and not from others. As Oxfam International is undergoing substantial restructuring, shifting resources to the Global South it would be interesting to get some information on how this affects the organisation's accountability. The Panel acknowledges that the organisation already includes seven additional profile disclosures and four additional performance indicators which will only be mandatory starting 2014.

Our intention is that this letter, and any response you may wish to provide, is made publicly available on the Charter website, along with your report. You can find the reports that were previously reviewed on the Charter website. However, should there be errors of fact in the feedback above or in the note below we would of course wish to correct these before publication. Please share these comments or corrections by 20 January 2014.

If you have any other feedback or comments on our work, please share with us by sending them to the Charter Secretariat. We would very much like to hear your views.

Yours sincerely,



Janet Hunt · Wambui Kimathi · Tony Tujan · Richard Manning · Louise James · Brendan Gormley

**Review Round October 2013  
Cover Note on Accountability Report  
Oxfam International**

Reporting period: 01 April 2012 – 31 March 2013

<b>PROFILE DISCLOSURES</b>	
<b>Profile</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Strategy and Analysis</b>	
1.1	<i>Fully addressed</i> The CEO's statement provides information on strong strategic goals. The pre-section "About this Report" and the bracketed references to the Charter throughout the report can be seen as a strong commitment to accountability as a guiding principle for the organisation. However, some more evidence provided on how strong accountability mechanisms de facto improved the quality of Oxfam International's work would be welcome in the next report.
<b>Organisational Profile</b>	
2.1 – 2.7	<i>Fully addressed</i>
2.8	<i>Fully addressed</i> Oxfam International is commended for its detailed and thoroughly broken down reporting on the organisation's scale. This can be seen as <b>good practice</b> for other organisations.
2.9	<i>Fully addressed</i> Oxfam has been implementing fundamental organisational changes at all levels throughout the last year aiming at an increase of programme effectiveness. Evidence how these changes (in particular where related to accountability) have led to effective improvements will be welcome in the next report.
2.10	<i>Fully addressed</i>
<b>Report Parameters</b>	
3.1 – 3.4	<i>Fully addressed</i>
3.5	<i>Fully addressed</i> The report includes relevant information on the process for defining the report's content and the identification of the audience. Oxfam is however encouraged to report more on how this process was used to better embed the Charter as a quality assurance tool within all functions of the organisation.
3.6	<i>Fully addressed</i> Concerning the boundary of the report, the answer says that the report focuses on the activities of the Confederation unless otherwise stated.
3.7	<i>Fully addressed</i> As a specific limitation on the scope or boundary of the report, the organisation states that it does not produce a single set of financial accounts for the Confederation.
3.8	<i>Fully addressed</i> Concerning the basis for reporting on joint ventures etc., it is to be noted that full accountability for the adherence of all Oxfam affiliates would be better achieved if they reported in one consolidated report or at least if all 16 members reported which is currently not the case.
3.10 – 3.13	<i>Fully addressed</i>
<b>Governance, Commitments, and Engagement</b>	
4.1 – 4.3	<i>Fully addressed</i>

4.4	<i>Fully addressed</i> Information about mechanisms for internal stakeholders to provide recommendations is given. Oxfam is encouraged to provide evidence that these mechanisms work well in practice and give examples where they have resulted in positive management response.
4.5 – 4.6	<i>Fully addressed</i> The answer provides relevant information about remuneration and conflicts of interest for governing bodies.
4.9 - 4.10, 4.12, 4.14 – 4.15	<i>Fully addressed</i>
4.16	<i>Fully addressed</i> Information on how Oxfam ensures that this communication with stakeholders is really meaningful is appreciated in the next report.
4.17	<i>Fully addressed</i>

<b>PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</b>
<b>Program Effectiveness</b>
<b>NGO1 – Stakeholder involvement</b> <i>Fully addressed</i> The answer reflects a differentiated and committed approach to meaningful stakeholder involvement. Introducing an operational goal on accountability is a strong evidence of a systematic approach to enhancing the organisational accountability. This can be seen as <b>good practice</b> for larger organisations. A link to written guidelines would however be welcome.
<b>NGO2 – Mechanisms for feedback and complaints</b> <i>Fully addressed</i> The answer reveals several evidence examples and an active culture of inviting feedback and complaints. A link in the report to the complaints mechanism policy would have been welcome. More information on how an effective <i>feedback</i> and complaints handling practice has led to positive management response and what types of complaints were resolved or not resolved is also welcome in the next report.
<b>NGO3 – Programme monitoring, evaluation and learning</b> <i>Fully addressed</i> The organisation has established a clear and succinct monitoring and evaluation framework: the Programme Standards Self-Assessment helps Oxfam to critically assess its programme practice against the organisation’s standards and strategies. A link in the report would however be welcome. It would also be interesting to know how this system has led to corrective actions and to learn more on how the organisation shares its learning with the rest of the sector.
<b>NGO4 – Gender and diversity</b> <i>Partially addressed</i> Good information is provided on Oxfam addressing and embedding gender goals within the organisation and workforce. Oxfam is commended for carrying out a Learning Review on what makes a gender-just organisation. A link to the results could have been useful in the report. No information is however given on how Oxfam mainstreams broader diversity issues into its work programmes and projects, how successful this has been in the past and if targets for improvement have been set for the future.
<b>NGO5 – Advocacy positions and public awareness campaigns</b>

<p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>The report reflects a differentiated and committed approach to meaningfully account for advocacy work and provides evidence examples for Oxfam's achievements in this field. More information on the stakeholders' satisfaction with the organisation's work and related corrective actions taken are however welcome in the next report.</p>
<p><b>NGO6 – Coordination with other actors</b></p> <p><i>Partially addressed</i></p> <p>The report provides relevant examples of Oxfam's successful cooperation work. However, concrete criteria and internal requirements to avoid duplication and to identify greater leverage through systematic alignment with the optimal partners are missing. There are furthermore no formal processes in place to promote learning for the sector.</p>
<p><b>Economic</b></p>
<p><b>NGO7 – Resource allocation</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Information on how the use of resources is tracked is provided. However, a link to the mentioned minimum standards would be welcome in the next report. Not much information is given on <i>how</i> strategic priorities are optimally aligned to resources allocation and monitoring thereof and how this has improved the effectiveness and quality of Oxfam's work.</p>
<p><b>NGO8 – Sources of funding</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p>
<p><b>EC7 – Local hiring</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>It is understood that the organisation's Secretariat does not develop local resources as it is not directly operational in programme countries.</p>
<p><b>Environmental</b></p>
<p><b>EN16 – Greenhouse gas emission by weight</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Oxfam International has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 8.52% within the last three reporting cycles. This improvement and the detailed overview of its emissions can be seen as <b>good practice</b>.</p>
<p><b>EN18 – Initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emission</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>The information provided is complete and clear and gives many very good examples of CO<sub>2</sub>-reducing measures. In particular Oxfam is commended its Travel Policy.</p>
<p><b>EN26 – Initiatives to mitigate environmental impacts of products and services</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Oxfam identifies air travel as the main contributor to its total emissions. Developing tools like distance calculators to find optimal meeting locations for minimal travel are appreciated by the Panel.</p>
<p><b>EN29 – Environmental impacts of transporting members of the workforce</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Further innovations for reducing staff travel and paper production are being developed.</p>
<p><b>Labour</b></p>
<p><b>LA1 – Total workforce</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p>
<p><b>NGO9 – Mechanisms for workforce feedback and complaints</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Oxfam has got substantial mechanisms for workforce feedback in place. Evidence how these feedback mechanisms have improved the quality of Oxfam's work would be welcome in the next report.</p>
<p><b>LA10 – Workforce training</b></p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p>

<p>A good overview is provided on Oxfam’s culture of learning and on the average hours of training that staff members receive. Oxfam International is commended for its trainings on how to exit campaigns. More information on how training needs are systematically identified and how the effectiveness of trainings is evaluated is welcome.</p>
<p><b>LA12 – Performance and career development reviews</b>  <i>Partially addressed</i>          Oxfam does offer appraisal reviews but the report does not provide information on the percentage of total employees who received a formal performance appraisal. More information is also welcome on how the organisation’s performance reviews are effectively linked to the attainment of Oxfam’s overall strategic goals – how this helps to assess global talent needs and support its development.</p>
<p><b>LA13 – Composition of workforce and governance bodies</b>  <i>Fully addressed</i>          The detailed breakdown of staff per category according to gender, age group, minority group and other indicators of diversity can be seen as <b>good practice</b>. The same approach of inclusion could be applied to implementing diversity into programme design (NGO4).</p>
<p><b>Society</b></p>
<p><b>SO1 – Impact of operations on communities</b>  <i>Fully addressed</i>          Comprehensive information is given on how Oxfam assesses the intended and unintended consequences its interventions have on communities and on if the organisation modifies or discontinues a programme after this assessment.</p>
<p><b>SO3 – Anti-corruption training</b>  <i>Partially addressed</i>          Oxfam has a policy of “Whistle-blowing and Complaints” in place and encourages its staff to read anti-corruption practices. It should however be noted that the percentage of staff receiving anti-corruption training is missing.</p>
<p><b>SO4 – Actions taken in response to corruption</b>  <i>Fully addressed</i>          It is positively noted that the organisation already reports against this performance indicator although this is only mandatory as of next year and that the answer provides clear and comprehensive information.</p>
<p><b>Product Responsibility</b></p>
<p><b>PR6 – Ethical fundraising and marketing communications</b>  <i>Fully addressed</i>          Oxfam can be commended on its high ethical fundraising standards.</p>

## Oxfam International Gap Analysis Table – Areas of Commitments and Progress achieved

Accountability is a process of continuous improvement. Each year Charter Members in their accountability reports identify and prioritise areas for improvement and corrective actions they plan to take. As of reports submitted in 2014, Members are asked to capture these commitments in this Gap Analysis Table. The Independent Review Panel may suggest the Member to add further issues when reviewing the Member's report. Each year following, the table shall be submitted along with the accountability report and will then be used as a basis to demonstrate progress. The table will be published on the website along with the accountability report and the feedback from the Panel. Please note that the rows where commitments cannot be identified can be deleted from the table.

GRI – Performance Indicators	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Program Effectiveness</b>				
NGO1: Processes for involvement of affected stakeholder groups.	<b>In report covering 2010/2011:</b> <i>“At the end of 2011 we will begin a review of our Strategic Plan (...). As part of this process, we plan to conduct a series of consultative forums with our key stakeholders.”</i>	<b>In report covering 2011/2012:</b> No progress reported.	<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“(...) we undertook an external consultation around the world with sector specialists, staff and a selection of allies (...) on the proposed areas for Oxfam to focus on in the next Plan period.”</i>	
NGO4: Measures to integrate gender and diversity into program.		<b>In report covering 2011/2012:</b> <i>“In the coming years, we will expand our work to strengthen women’s rights organizations (...) that enable women to influence the decisions and structures that impact their lives.”</i> The work group on diversity <i>“will present its recommendations to affiliates who will be required to address these by March 2013.”</i>	<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“Our new Strategic Plan outlines key objectives to guide our work on gender justice through to 2019.”</i>  No progress reported regarding the working group on diversity.	
NGO5: Advocacy positions and public awareness			<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“Looking forward, a new consolidated partnership policy will support our</i>	

campaigns			<i>internal and external assessments.”</i>	
NGO6: Coordination with other actors			<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“Oxfam is conducting research and protection surveys, and building the capacity of our partners in country to press for better governance, accountability and security sector reform.”</i>	
<b>Economic</b>				
-				
<b>Environmental</b>				
EN16: Total direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by weight.	<b>In report covering 2010/2011:</b> <i>“At the time this report was produced, we were not measuring gas usage for heating, but have since started recording this information”</i>	<b>In report covering 2011/2012:</b> The report now provides information on gas usage for heating.	<b>In report 2012/2013:</b> <i>“We intend to fully implement the new recording methodology in the 2013-2014 reporting year.”</i>	
EN18: Initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions			<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“We are committed to improving our knowledge and reporting methodology in the succeeding years (...) and develop strategies in reducing our carbon emissions.”</i>	
<b>Labor</b>				
NGO9: Mechanisms for workforce feedback and their complaints			<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“A Confederation-wide staff survey has been agreed by HR Directors to run in 2014, for which a core set of questions and indicators will be established.”</i>	
<b>Society</b>				
SO1: Nature, scope, and effectiveness of any programs	<b>In report covering 2010/2011:</b> <i>“Going forward we will monitor and review adherence to these guidelines. This learning, in addition to feedback from the communities</i>		<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> Feedback from local communities is used to modify Oxfam’s programmes and strategies.	

	<i>where we work, will be used to inform our strategies going forward.”</i>			
SO3: Percentage of employees trained in organization’s anti-corruption policies and procedures.		<b>In report covering 2011/2012:</b> <i>“The Secretariat plans to raise further awareness of anti-corruption issues through its quarterly learning event.”</i>	<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> No progress reported.	
<b>Product Responsibility</b>				
PR6: Ethical fundraising			<b>In report covering 2012/2013:</b> <i>“We will enforce (...) a coordinated best practice approach to humanitarian fundraising (...).”</i>	