

# Feedback from the Independent Review Panel

## Review Round March 2016

14 April 2016

Dear Winnie Byanyima,

Many thanks for submitting your INGO Accountability Charter report. In times of conflict and climate change, when civil society organisations (CSOs) have an increasingly important role to play, the space for civil society is shrinking in many parts of the world. Strong accountability and the demonstration that we “walk our talk” have never been more important. It is also against this background that the Charter has initiated an alliance with seven national CSO accountability frameworks to strengthen our collective voice as we devise a shared [Global Standard for CSO Accountability](#).

Before providing you with an individual assessment of your report, there were some issues that arose in all or many reports that the Independent Review Panel wants to share with you:

### Getting fit for the digital age

Digitisation allows for unprecedented connectivity. At a time when citizens have increased levels of agency and literacy this is a game changer in the way CSOs work. Mobilisation and relationship building with large numbers of people to *co-create* the change they want to see is at the heart of most new CSO strategies – particularly in campaigning. Working *with*, not *for* stakeholders, is not just seen as the right thing to do, but also as the most impactful.

Important in this evolution is moving ICSOs from transparency to actively sharing information, from consultation to joint decision making and from taking responsibility for others to sharing mutually defined responsibilities.

The Charter has initiated the [Digital Accountability project](#) and Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Transparency International and others are already intensively involved in this project. We look forward to more cooperation with and among Member organisations on this particular issue and for these issues to be addressed more in future reports.

### Globalisation / National level accountability

Decentralisation processes usually place more responsibility and capacity at the national level. To ensure an ICSO presents a unified, coherent voice and can protect its brand, a strong and globally shared understanding of mutual accountability is key. Thus, decentralisation often goes hand in hand with a stronger mandate for the ICSOs’ global accountability mechanisms. These should help national entities build capacity in the accountability practice, and also demand stronger delivery on global commitments. Charter Members are encouraged to ensure that all their entities adhere at least to the following minimum standards: transparency, effective and independent oversight, involving people we serve, coordination with partners, sound financial management and impact focus.

### Inclusion and diversity

Many Charter Members still focus mainly on gender when demonstrating their accountability in terms of diversity. This is a lost opportunity. As we all know, there is also discrimination on the basis of disability, age, ethnicity, etc. Actively reaching out to these constituencies will strengthen their rights and their participation. For example, positive action can increase the

employment of those with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups. Such inclusion is central to a human rights based approach, but may also improve results by tapping into a wider base of experience. For further advice, click [here](#) on the outcome of a Charter webinar on inclusion or [here](#) to look at some good practice examples of Charter Members.

Please ensure that all points listed above are taken into consideration when further developing your accountability practices in the coming months and collecting data for the next INGO Accountability Charter report.

### Organisation-specific feedback to Oxfam International

[Oxfam International's eighth accountability report](#) to the INGO Accountability Charter is a concise interim report based on [last year's Improvement Analysis](#), which came along with the [Independent Review Panel's feedback letter](#).

Strong **institutional commitment** is highlighted in the Executive Director's opening statement demonstrating how the current Oxfam 2020 developments shape the organisation's downward and upward accountability. It is appreciated that Oxfam proudly presents Charter membership on their website (see [here](#)). This visualisation clearly strengthens their public commitment to accountability – also for stakeholders to hold them directly accountable towards the commitments made. The Charter will only be seen as a strong collective agreement of the entire sector to accountability if Members actively and proudly support communication around it.

Some issues raised in the recent Improvement Analysis are not covered in sufficient detail: Diversity of governance and workforce, reasons for increased complaints received in 2013/2014, or tracking incidents of corruption. The Panel thus recommends to critically reflect upon these for the next full report. On the other hand, information provided on Oxfam's Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability (CAMSA) is highly commendable and the Panel would be interested to learn more about the concrete minimum requirements and progress to achieve full compliance by 2019. Some progress is identified in this report: Integrating a broader diversity approach into Oxfam's programmes; producing a new common Oxfam Open Information Policy, Complaints Policy and Stakeholder Policy; and developing a reporting template to cover progress across all activities and affiliates. It seems that only about half the affiliates have provided the information and statistics required for the OI report to cover the whole federation; is there progress towards 100% feedback? Given the plan is to expand the number of affiliates, especially with the incorporation of Southern affiliates, will reporting on the Charter principles be an important commitment expected of new affiliates?

Overall, it is clear that Oxfam takes the Panel feedback seriously and tries to incorporate it into ongoing or new initiatives or reviews. The Panel looks forward to intended further improvements in the identified areas and to reviewing the next full report incorporating all affiliates.

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 our [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 amendments [by 15 May 2016](#).

If you have any other feedback or comments on our work, please share them with us by sending them to the Charter Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,



Louise James



Michael Röskau



Jane Kiragu



Rhonda Chapman



John Clark



Saroeun Soeung

# Oxfam International

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Cover Note on Interim Accountability Report 2014/2015  
(Based on the Improvement Analysis for the 2013/2014 Report)

<b>PROFILE DISCLOSURES</b>	
<b>I. Strategy and Analysis</b>	
1.1	<p><b>Statement from the most senior decision-maker</b> <i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, provides again a very strong institutional and strategic commitment towards accountability. She demonstrates how the confederation’s transformation “away from being Northern-led to a truly global organisation”, i.e. Oxfam 2020, has implications on Oxfam’s downwards and upwards accountability. Oxfam affiliates, more of them to be located in the Global South, will be responsible for their own governance, management and operations so that decision-making lies with those whom Oxfam is ultimately accountable. A simplification of country level structures will provide better opportunities for transparent and efficient stakeholder engagement. Eventually, the Oxfam International Secretariat will be moved to Nairobi which is supported by the Panel.</p> <p>All these large-scale changes have great implications for the speed to progress in individual improvement areas highlighted by the Panel. Winnie Byanyima is, however, convinced that Oxfam 2020 will overall strengthen these particular areas as well.</p>
<b>Consolidated Accountability Reporting throughout the Federation</b>	
<p><i>Addressed</i></p> <p>Oxfam’s 2013/2014 already marked an important step regarding providing a common accountability approach amongst the independent Oxfam affiliates – with seven affiliates providing thorough and statistical information for the report. For the next full report, it is envisaged to use a new reporting template across all activities for 2015/2016; thus, providing an overview of <i>all</i> affiliates and Country and Regional offices.</p> <p>The Panel very much appreciates this effort and looks forward to a truly comprehensive accountability report – also representing Southern affiliates. It would then also welcome more detailed information on how Oxfam’s reporting approach contributed to ensure central guidance on the policy framework and adherence to minimum standards amongst the confederation of Oxfam affiliates. How has the Charter framework supported linking Oxfam’s global decentralised structure more closely?</p> <p>The Charter’s Annual Members’ Workshop in September 2016 (more information <a href="#">here</a>) will focus exactly on the issue how the Charter can be used to strengthen ongoing decentralisation processes of Members’ governance. Oxfam’s active input in this regard would be highly appreciated.</p>	

<b>PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</b>	
NGO2	<p><b><i>Mechanisms for feedback and complaints</i></b> <i>Addressed</i></p> <p>The Panel acknowledges that Oxfam’s cross-affiliate Accountability Working Group produced an overall Accountability Framework as well as a new common Open Information Policy, Complaints Policy, and Stakeholder Engagement Policy in 2015. It would be helpful to have direct links to these documents. The Panel expects first aggregated data in this regard from March 2016 onwards. It is hoped that the 70% of programmes lacking a formal mechanism for feedback and complaints in 2014/2015 will then comply with the common policies.</p> <p>Finally, the Panel would also be interested in a critical reflection upon the increased number of complaints received (see 2013/2014 report). This was asked in the recent Improvement Analysis but is not taken up in the interim report</p>
NGO3 & LA13	<p><b><i>Gender and diversity</i></b> <i>Addressed</i></p> <p>It is appreciated that Oxfam’s Even it Up campaign has triggered developments regarding programme needs of particular marginalised groups beyond gender, i.e. disability or sexual orientation.</p> <p>Information is missing in terms of an overview of the diversity of Oxfam’s governance body and workforce as well as on the confederation’s common approach to inclusion beyond gender. The Panel would be interested to know if Oxfam has taken any steps for improvement in this area or if it has set any targets for the future.</p>
SO3	<p><b><i>Anti-corruption</i></b> <i>Addressed</i></p> <p>The Panel positively notes that work is underway to create a shared Internal Audit service, while anti-corruption policies and training will remain the responsibility of Oxfam affiliates. The mentioned Ethical Framework from Oxfam Intermon sounds like a commendable practice and the Panel suggests extending this towards all affiliates for use.</p> <p>Are regional training sessions successful? Is this applied to all staff? How are incidents of corruption tracked (both at affiliate level and at OI level) and are there further improvement targets set?</p>
<b>Other examples of good practice in the rolling-out of Oxfam’s accountability guidance across the confederation</b>	
NGO3	<p><b><i>Oxfam’s Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability (CAMSA)</i></b> <i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>The report announces that Oxfam’s Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability (CAMSA) sets minimum requirements to be met in each phase of the project and programme management cycle. Full compliance is to be achieved by 2019 and the roll-out is supported by regional workshops and CAMSA ambassadors. The Panel looks forward to learning more on the implementation process, monitoring strategy, and how improvement plans will feed into annual country planning and reporting. Moreover, Oxfam is asked to clarify in the next report what they understand by <i>social accountability</i>. The common approach across the whole federation is overall seen as a commendable method.</p>