



Evaluation of Regional Humanitarian Work in West Africa

Full Report

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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Acknowledgements

This is the final report of the evaluation of the West Africa regional humanitarian as defined by PIP00166, WAFA54.

The evaluator visited the West Africa Regional Management Centre in Dakar, Senegal for this review from 5 October to 2 November 2007. The evaluator compiled the report on the basis of information from a document review, face to face and telephone interviews.

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Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the evaluator.

Acronyms

Term	Explanation
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CPM	Country Programme Manager
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
HD	Humanitarian Department
HRRR	Humanitarian Rapid Deployment Register
IPC	Integrated Food security and Humanitarian Phase Classification
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OGB	Oxfam GB
OI	Oxfam International
OPAL	Oxfam Programme, Accountability and Learning
PH	Public Health
PHE	Public Health Engineering
PIP	Project Implementation Plan
RHC	Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
RHT	Regional Humanitarian Team
RMT	Regional Management Team
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
WARMC	West Africa Regional Management Centre

Executive Summary

Introduction

A regional humanitarian programme review was undertaken in the Oxfam GB (OGB) West Africa Regional Management Centre (WARMC) from 5 October to the 2 November 2007. The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) requested the review. This is part of an ongoing effort to improve programme quality through regular cycles of reviews and feeding into the next phase of strategy development. The aim is to improve the effectiveness and coherence West Africa regional humanitarian work.

Methodology

The current review employed a combination of methods for data triangulation. The methodology of the regional humanitarian strategy evaluation or review consisted of mainly a qualitative data analysis in the process utilising the following data collection methods: documents review and interviews (face to face and telephone interviews). To wrap up the review process, a debriefing session was held with some members of the WARMC RMT to review and present the main findings from the data analysis and recommendations for the future development of the regional humanitarian strategy.

Overview of Results

The regional humanitarian strategy implemented by the RHT is successful in many areas. A number of highlights among these successes were:

- As part of ongoing advisory support, there is high level and good quality support being provided to the country programmes.
- Appreciation amongst its constituency with respect to building of local capacity to respond to emergencies through the development of the humanitarian rapid deployment register.
- Good reputation in terms of technical coordination with regional stakeholders such as the UN agencies and donors this includes participation in technical working groups such as the food and nutrition group and the CAP process.

However, the successful implementation of the regional humanitarian strategy has faced some challenges which include among them:

- Limited in-country capacity to implement early warning systems despite several attempts to the implementation of these.
- Absence of regional PH capacity to sufficiently support in-country water and sanitation programming including technical representation of the organization in regional water and sanitation meetings.
- Slow progress on the contingency planning process despite the lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the OI contingency planning process.

Strong support was expressed amongst review respondents regarding the focus of the RHT in future in the following areas:

- Emphasis on the integration of crosscutting issues into humanitarian programmes.
- Emergency preparedness in terms of the contingency planning process and further strengthening the capacity of the countries to respond to emergencies.
- Leadership role in defining the critical importance of disaster risk reduction in both humanitarian and development contexts including the development of an all-inclusive regional disaster risk reduction strategy.

- PH support in line with OGB global organization priorities such as the public health growth initiative and the increase in funding from donors such as ECHO in long-term water and sanitation activities.

The West Africa RHT team should be commended for efforts made over the past 3 years to streamline, restructure and initiate activities aimed at delivering quality humanitarian programmes in the region. These efforts should be supported if the region is to achieve its 2010 vision, “By 2010 30% of country programmes will have significantly integrated Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into their programmes, we will be capable and able to scale up to and manage all category 2 crisis with regional resources alone, and regional, country and HD dialogue will promote timely and appropriate support to our all our programmes”¹. However, to play this broader strategic role, the RHT needs to continue engaging with the country teams in ongoing emergency preparedness efforts activities through the strengthening of the rapid deployment register and country contingency planning, building regional technical PH capacity including engaging with wider organisational initiatives.

¹ West Africa Humanitarian Team off-site, 24 – 26 July.

Introduction

Background

A regional humanitarian programme review was undertaken in the Oxfam GB West Africa Regional Management Centre (WARMC) from 5 October to the 2 November 2007 inclusive of ToR finalisation and the final report writing process. The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) requested the review. While being part of an ongoing effort to institutionalise regular cycles of reviews, the findings of the current review should contribute to the next phase of strategy development. The aim is to improve the effectiveness and coherence of regional humanitarian work.

Purpose, Objectives and Scope

The purpose of the regional humanitarian strategy review is to contribute to ongoing efforts of ensuring emergency preparedness, quality of humanitarian response and learning in the context of an independent evaluation. Its objective is to provide the Regional Management Centre (RMC) in particular the Regional Humanitarian Team (RHT) with an external review of progress towards expected results which may contribute to the improvement of the current humanitarian response programmes and help the RHT in making decisions about the strategy for the future. The evaluation sub-objectives include:

1. Comment on the readiness of Oxfam GB humanitarian team in the region in terms of structure, roles, systems, partnerships to support and implement quality humanitarian response within the region.
2. Identify steps already taken so that the region responds in a quality and effective manner to humanitarian emergencies in the region.
3. Assess internal coordination mechanisms between units including external coordination structures of West Africa RHT and other development actors like the UN and the donor community within the region.
4. Provide overall conclusions and recommendations that contribute to both the strategic and operational levels and assist the West Africa RHT in fulfilling its role of supporting the implementation of effective and quality humanitarian response in the region.

Recommendations will be made on how to improve current and potential future operations including the support provided to the country programmes by the RHT. Lessons learned will be disseminated to support improved quality humanitarian programming and wider organisational learning

The scope of the evaluation is WAF54 and its antecedents (WAR070, WARA31) which are all part of the regional humanitarian PIP (P00166). The main period of analysis will from 2004 to 2007. The review examined documentation pertinent to the predecessor projects as they affected or influenced the preparation of the current project.

Evaluation Methodology

In view of the limited amount of time and resources for a comprehensive review of the regional humanitarian PIP and the operational complexity within the different countries in the region, it was decided that the review only focuses on the support project which is run and managed by the regional humanitarian team (RHT) referred to as 'the regional humanitarian strategy' in this report.

The current review employed a combination of methods for data triangulation. The methodology of the regional humanitarian strategy evaluation or review consisted of the following:

- A review of the project documents including project proposals, work plans, activity reports and other relevant materials on OPAL and relevant country specific documentation.
- Discussions with internal project actors including – regional advisors, RMT, RHT and country programme staff.
- Discussions and personal interviews with external actors from the West Africa humanitarian and donor community with or in close proximity with the regional humanitarian strategy.
- Discussions with key informants outside the region but within the organisation who have relevant experience.
- Telephone and interviews with field staff from countries participating in the regional PIP and more specifically the humanitarian strategy project.
- Briefings and debriefings with key stakeholders on the main findings of the evaluation.

A total of 31 interviews were carried out with different stakeholders. Internally, 8 members of the RMT and 10 RMC Staff were interviewed in the regional management centre in Dakar. At the country level, 3 CPMs and 3-country programme staffs were interviewed. At the HD level 2 staff were interviewed over the phone. 1 Oxfam Novib staff member was interviewed on the phone. The evaluator also had an opportunity to interview external stakeholders. A joint discussion was held with 2 ECHO representatives. 3 people were interviewed in the UN, 1 with UNICEF and the other 2 with OCHA. It is clear from that a number of interest groups were not sufficiently represented in the review and where possible, follow-ups should be made to ensure that a representative analysis is obtained where possible. The list of those interviewed and interview protocol and with the specific questions is provided in appendix.

[Figure Removed]

Constraints

A number of limitations to the data collection approach encountered in this review are worth noting for future reviews.

1. The design of the review did not benefit from wider discussion and scoping of the evaluation Terms of Reference or Evaluation Matrix especially from the constituency of the RHT.
2. One evaluator did the current review. Reviews of this nature could benefit from a multi-disciplinary team to ensure the right balance of evaluator skills.
3. The small number of interviews in each constituency or interest group makes it difficult to generalize across region from the interview results, although some sort of a trend can clearly be established.
4. Targeted internal and external respondents were not always easy to get hold of on such a short notice, and the time taken to identify and set up interviews was longer than anticipated. As such preparation time for different stakeholder constituencies was limited due to opportunistic scheduling of interviews. Donor groups and other external stakeholders are clearly under-represented in data collection review and it is recommended that follow-up discussion with donors and other interest groups such as OI affiliates, CPMs, and implementing partners where possible.
5. The review could have benefited from field visits to country programmes. This was not possible due to time and resource constraints. The findings of this evaluation are therefore based on face-to-face interviews with staff in the RMC and telephone conversations with staff based in the country programmes in West Africa.

These limitations provide valuable lessons for the future development of regional review processes in Oxfam. Although OGB has shown an apparent interest in commitment to ongoing evaluations, the apparent lack of an evaluation policy makes it difficult to have appropriate organizational structures to support such initiatives (e.g. financial, human resources) including clear accountability and real allocation of time to engage in such evaluations.

Development/Humanitarian Context in West Africa²

Despite its huge potential, West Africa currently has some of the worst statistics in the world for hunger, education, gender inequality, infant and maternal mortality, and steady degradation of the natural environment. More than half of West African people live in grinding poverty (< US\$1 a day) and depend on a mix of small-scale farming, informal sector activities and remittances. This is the only region in the world where absolute poverty is increasing. Nigeria -with about 55% of the region's population- is not an exception to this.

However there is room for optimism. Peace, resettlement and rehabilitation are being achieved in countries where 2 million people had been displaced by armed conflict. Democracy is taking root. Most leaders in this region have now been “democratically” elected including the first woman president in Africa (Liberia).

West Africa's dependence on producing basic commodities exposes the region to the volatile international commodity markets. The region's share of world trade declined from around 4% in 1970 to less than 0.5% in recent years due to the lack of processing capacity, poor infrastructure, low education levels and graft – but also to unfair trade rules and practices including dumping. Years of conflict and under-investment have destroyed livelihoods and basic services, fuelled the spread of HIV and AIDS and undermined social stability. Yet the economies in the region continue to grow at an average of over 5% per year - albeit from a low base. The key is to ensure that this growth benefits the poor and not just the political elite.

Overview of the Regional Humanitarian Strategy

The regional humanitarian project aims to enhance OGB and partners capacities to identify and respond to humanitarian crises in a timely, proportionate and appropriate manner. It further aims at promoting best practice in preparedness, response and donorship of programmes throughout the wider humanitarian community. The project activities are described as the development of a functional humanitarian rapid deployment register comprising of existing OGB national staff in West Africa; review and development of contingency plans for countries which OGB is the OI humanitarian lead; financing of innovative research and pilot projects; and undertaking emergency preparedness and post emergency needs assessment.

² This section is based on the West Africa Regional Strategy

Review of the Design and Relevance of Strategy

A review of the objectives and contents of the current regional humanitarian strategy reveals that it is highly compatible with both Oxfam GB strategic change objectives³ and addressing the regional humanitarian needs for the region. The extent to which the objectives of the RHT's programmatic activities are consistent with the requirements and needs of its constituency are assessed. Overwhelmingly, responses suggest a strong and ongoing relevance of the West Africa RHT strategy with areas for further improvement being highlighted.

The current review focussed on emergency preparedness in order to get a picture of how well the region is prepared to respond to future emergencies. For the purpose of this review, emergency preparedness is defined as "all activities taken in anticipation of a crisis to expedite effective emergency response"⁴. This means measures taken to prepare and reduce the effects of humanitarian emergencies. The RHT set itself to develop a Humanitarian Rapid Response Register (HRRR), and support the development country contingency plans including the financing of innovative research and pilot projects as part of its emergency preparedness initiatives.

Humanitarian Rapid Response Register

The HRRR seeks to enhance OGB's capacity to respond rapidly and appropriately to humanitarian emergencies in the region. The 'register' is made up of national staff (both Anglophone and Francophone), reflecting the nature of the West African region and improving the skills already held by national staff in the region. The overall assessment is that the HRRR is a good initiative and cost-effective with its objective of creating a pool of humanitarian staff with an understanding of the region, its dynamics and languages. The strength of the register is that it aims capacity building of national staff with an understanding of the local context. In this regard the register is also viewed as an important career development tool and in line with the OGB 'grow our own policy'. The combination of theory and simulation practice in the training is highly appreciated by the training participants who were spoken to during the review. The theory part of the evaluation was regarded as being comprehensive and touched on the key aspects of humanitarian work which include the sphere minimum standards, security management, minimum logistics standards, and some of the key crosscutting issues such as protection and gender although these were reportedly inadequately covered.

Having said this, the register has not been properly tested and therefore one needs to be cautious on its ultimate relevance in terms of improving the capacity of the region to respond to emergencies. Staff turnover pose a big risk for the success of the register. The register also lost some staff that were on short-term contract whose contracts were not renewed when their projects were closed. Looking at the current register, 30 people were trained and only 18 are remaining. The cost of maintaining the register to acceptable levels needs to be carefully considered. Furthermore, there is a challenge of making the register more operational and making use of it if it is going to be sufficiently tried and tested. Many respondents highlighted that the register has not worked so far citing the recent floods in Ghana and Mauritania where the RHT did not make use of any staff on the register. However, indications from the humanitarian team are that register staff had been mobilised and ready to but the CPMs in the affected countries were not ready to take them on.

³ This is not to say that the current strategy is addressing all the change objectives but in part contributes to their achievement particularly under aim 3 – the right to life and security.

⁴ ODI paper on Contingency Planning in Humanitarian Emergencies.

Management of the Roster

Overall the following were identified by respondents as some of the key areas/priority areas for improvement to ensure the success of the HRRR.

Recruitment and Selection Process

The different internal stakeholders that were spoken to expressed awareness of the selection criteria for the roster. In the same many also highlighted the need to improve and make ***the selection process more systematic*** emphasising on quality rather than quantity of potential candidates. Similarly the involvement of direct line managers of potential staff for the register was also regarded as being key to the selection process. An all inclusive selection process will ensure that high quality staff are selected for the roster. In this regard, it was noted that there is need for formal support systems between HR and the RHT to facilitate quality recruitment and active deployment of roster staff.

Staff Secondments

Although most people were in agreement that the HRRR is the way to go in terms of building the capacity of the region to respond to emergencies, concerns were realised on how staff trained as part of the register were not actively being utilised. As one respondent put it, *“training is not enough, people trained need to get the opportunity to apply what they have learned”*. The need for exposure and experience for staff on the HRRR cannot be over-emphasised. Most of the staff on the register have no international experience outside their countries. The suggestion is that the RHT can use the ‘peace-time’ to facilitate secondments of register staff for them to gain exposure and experience in emergencies or development contexts outside their country.

It is however encouraging that the RHT is proactively seeking secondments for staff that are on the register. To date, three staff on the roster have gone on secondment i.e. three-week deployment in the WARMC with the RHT, an assessment in Southern Mali and, another one is currently in Uganda on a three-month secondment. Staff secondments can be costly and for this reason many respondents note that the RHT needs to think about the way these will be funded. The costs involved need to be carefully considered and the region needs to seek alternative funding to finance staff secondments including working with the HR department to ensure proper management of the secondments.

Technical and Management Skills

The humanitarian register is not quite well populated in terms of the technical and management capacity. Most people spoken to highlighted the need to have more technical capacity/specialists i.e. food security and water and sanitation including some project management/leadership capacity. Currently, the humanitarian register has 18 staff and only 28% (5) are technical staff. It appears that the current roster is particularly strong on the support functions such as human resources, finance and logistics hence the need to balance the different set of skills of people on the roster. This will entail an analysis of the skills/capacity at the country level capacity in the different programme units and try to match this with capacity building initiatives.

Management of the Register

A humanitarian register presents some management challenges. It runs the risk of getting ‘cold’ if not properly managed. The RHT is managing the West Africa humanitarian register. Internal stakeholders from the current review highlighted the need for proper management of the tool in terms of the time required to properly screen and clear potential candidates, ensuring that there is a right balance in the skills/experience required for the roster vis-à-vis the regional humanitarian priorities,

and proactively seeking secondments for people on the roster. This is particularly important when one considers the need to manage register staff expectations. The RHT is currently doing this by maintaining regular individual contact with staff on the register.

Contingency Planning

Within the framework of OI, OGB is the lead agency in 13 of the 22 countries in West Africa. The current system is such that the lead agency is responsible for the development of a country contingency plan. The current review found OGB is lagging behind in terms of the contingency planning process. This has led to other OI affiliates such as Oxfam Novib to question the commitment of OGB to the contingency planning process. In the countries where OGB is the lead agency the contingency planning process is at various stages development or has not started at all. The process has been reported to be very slow. Recent events in Ghana and Mauritania⁵ support the development of scenario based contingency plans, updated on a regular basis. Whether or not it was appropriate for OGB to respond for example in Ghana is another question, however, respondent comments seem to suggest that OGB lacked a humanitarian 'spectacle' hence we were slow to respond, when we decided to. In this case a contingency plan could have provided an operational strategy before flying in bodies. Similarly in Nigeria where OGB recently assumed the role of OI lead we are severely exposed in the absence of a country contingency plan.

The OI contingency planning process has been discredited for not being functional. It has been described as an extensive and time-consuming exercise based on scenarios that do not provide a framework for emergency response. The challenge is therefore to make contingency plans 'live' documents. The operational difference between OI affiliates has been cited as one the main constraint. Consequently country contingency plans tend to reflect the operational approach of the OI lead agency in a country. For example an Oxfam Novib led contingency plan is likely to reflect its approach of working with partners, whereas OGB contingency plans will reflect the direct implementation approach. In this regard some respondents pointed out the need for OI to review the how the OI lead system has worked or not worked in terms of, not only, the contingency planning process but also overall speed and timeliness of emergency responses.

Financing of innovative research and pilot projects

The financing of innovative research and pilot projects another of the RHT initiatives aimed at improving preparedness and quality of humanitarian response. The OPAL project description states that, "the precise nature of this activity will remain flexible in order to accommodate changing needs. Research and pilot projects reflecting the peculiarities of West African region will be developed and funded". The objectives of this activity include enhancing Oxfam's operations in unstable or war-tone countries and enhancing OGB's work in countries affected by recurrent drought, chronic poverty etc.

While this was largely viewed, as a good proposal by many internal stakeholders there is lack of clarity and awareness of this activity at the country level. This perhaps explains why things have not taken off the ground at this stage. Two concepts notes that have been developed focussing on economic strengthening and diversification in Sahelian West Africa and surface water harvesting in Sahelian West Africa. The RHT needs to do more to make the countries aware of this initiative and ensure that

⁵ Oxfam Intermon is the lead OI affiliate hence the role of OGB should be to support the process of contingency planning.

already proposed research and pilot projects are implemented if still relevant. Some respondents noted that this activity has potential for feeding into DRR strategy development and promotion of evidence-based programming.

Efficiency/Effectiveness of the Strategy

The evaluation of programme effectiveness requires examining results versus objectives whilst distinguishing between several results levels: impacts, outcomes and outputs of the activities. For the current review a comprehensive review of the different results levels was not possible mainly because the strategy activity are still at different stages of implementation. While these activities are still at different stages of implementation, not many of them have been tested. The process of contingency plan development has not been finalised while the rapid deployment register is an ongoing initiative. It is therefore difficult to judge whether these can be considered to be an effective activity. Comments provided regarding the relevance of the strategy or project activities could be used as a proxy indication of the potential effectiveness/efficiency of the current strategy. The general impression is that these activities have supported good quality, innovative thematic work for the past three years and have the potential to contribute to improving the quality of humanitarian response. What came out strongly is the continued need to support and capacity building and prepare countries to respond to future emergencies.

Role of the Regional Humanitarian Team

RHT Technical Capacity

Programmatically speaking the RHT team for West Africa presently has well-established technical expertise/capacity on the key issues that are affecting the region. The review noted that OGB staff and other stakeholders (donors and the UN) were appreciative of the participation and contribution of the RHT in technical meetings. Concerns were raised over the absence of PH Specialist capacity at the regional level in an organisation which widely known as, “the public health agency”. The need for regional PH capacity can be justified from the perspective of global OGB initiatives i.e. DRR and the public health growth initiative. It was noted and confirmed by that donors such as ECHO are increasingly funding long-term water and sanitation activities. Currently funding for long-term PH work is being provided in Liberia, Mauritania and Mali.

The absence of regional water and sanitation capacity has meant that our participation and ability to influence strategy of key stakeholders in water and sanitation working groups is severely limited. PH capacity would also ensure adequate participation in technical Watsan working groups at the regional level. Currently the region relies too much HD in terms of technical public health engineering and promotion support in the region for example, 70% of the PHE specialist advisory support has been spent in West Africa. When asked the nature of the skills set of this resource, mixed responses were given. While other preferred a humanitarian specialist, the majority impression is that someone with both humanitarian and development experience, with a little bit more capacity on the development side of PH would be better suited for this proposed role considering that more countries in West Africa are transitioning into longer-term development work.

RHT Advisory Support

The RHT is currently comprises of 4 staff, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, Regional Food Security Advisor, Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Advisor and Humanitarian Support Officer. In general, the current support being provided by the region to the country programmes was described as being adequate. In addition to field support visits from the RHT, there is ongoing remote support by participating

into ongoing proposal development and carrying out of needs assessments. Although support was described as being adequate it could be strengthened by increased coordination between the country teams and the RHT. This level of coordination is particularly important at the planning stage to ensure that an agreed plan of support is agreed at this stage. The current West Africa country strategy review process provides an opportunity for further strengthening coordination between the country and the RHT.

New Emerging Issues

In the interview, respondents were asked to identify emerging issues that they would require the region should support them with. It was suggested that work on DRR should continue to be strengthened.

Historically, OGB interventions have not included *disaster risk reduction (DRR)* until recently and this has been identified as one way of ensuring sustainability of our interventions. There is now a progressive and more explicit need and shift for work around DRR in West Africa. Both external stakeholders and OGB staff at the country and regional level highlighted this. At the regional level donors like ECHO and the UN have also started doing more work on focusing on DRR. The UN noted that there plans to set up a DRR working group in 2008, while ECHO mentioned that that DRR is one of the areas that they will be funding through the CAP which indicates some shift from a response mode to preparedness and early warning systems. The CPM group spoken to during the current evaluation confirmed their interest in working with the RHT and more specifically the role of Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Advisor to ensure the full integration of DRR type of activities into programming.

Apart from DRR, no real new emerging issues were identified. Rather interviewees commented that there is need to implement existing strategies. Examples that were given were simply a statement of the current regional humanitarian strategy. It was recommended that for the medium term the emphasis should be on making full the current strategies fully functional rather than taking on many new issues/initiatives.

Coordination

Coordination is linked to effectiveness. Greater combined efforts should improve effectiveness. For this evaluation, coordination is discussed in terms of two systems: coordination within the organisation and coordination with external stakeholders.

Coordination within the organisation

At the regional level programme staff have attempted to coordinate their activities internally but with little success. The absence of formalised linkages among advisors is defeating potential the potential benefits of working together among advisors. It was observed that current communication between the different advisors/programme staff is based on individual initiative. Most people that were spoken to indicate the need to formalise how advisors work together perhaps through weekly/bi-weekly meetings and possibly through joint advisory support visits to the country programme where necessary and appropriate. As one advisor put, "we do not have direct relationship with the RHT but try as an individual to make contact with them and appreciate what they are doing as this might impact on my work". The general consensus among staff in both the RHT and the advisory functions in the programme development team is that inter-departmental coordination and communication is erratic.

Coordination with external stakeholders

The review found that the RHT is engaged in a plethora of collaborative activities with regional stakeholders and with wider networks or organisations engaged in humanitarian action. External coordination for the purposes of this review has been viewed at two levels: at the technical and strategic level. The findings of the evaluation seem to suggest that coordination is very strong at the technical level. OGB is sufficiently represented in technical meetings such as the CAP process, and the Food and Nutrition working group. The stakeholders that were spoken to during the current review were unanimous that OGB is one of the most respected and leading INGO in humanitarian work in the region. This has been particularly important in influencing decisions by both the UN and donors who are based in the region. At the strategic level external stakeholders spoken to felt that we could do more to influence policy and strategic decisions as one of the leading NGOs working in this region. Both ECHO and the UN highlighted the need for OGB regional director to reach out to the humanitarian community.

Sustainability of the strategy and its activities

It was difficult to judge the probability of the project activities long-term sustainability and replication during a lifetime, considering that most of the activities have not reached been completed. As a result no commentary can be made on this in direct relation to the project activities of the regional humanitarian strategy. However, this can be inferred from other evidence. For the purpose of this review sustainability is therefore reviewed in the context of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) and the potential role of early warning systems.

Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)

Humanitarian aid experts have different views of the purpose of emergency assistance i.e. whether it is for relief only or should equally include rehabilitation and development actions. There was a reflection on this divergence of opinion among the different people that were spoken to during the evaluation process. There was an overwhelming indication for the need to pay attention to LRRD in West Africa – a region in transition and at the same time vulnerable to future emergencies. The review had unequivocal opinions from both internal and external stakeholders that we need to break the divide between humanitarian and development work. As one programme manager puts it, *“the difference between humanitarian and development should only be in the speed”*. However country teams mentioned that they are continuously faced with the challenge of getting funding for long-term development type of work hence the challenge of linking humanitarian and development work. A number of respondents emphasised to the evaluator that when there have been clear opportunities for shifting to longer-term development orientation, the necessary programmatic skills have, at times, been lacking in the constituent country programmes. ECHO were also concerned that some agencies were still asking for funds for humanitarian type of work in countries where programming is shifting to longer-term development.

The challenge for OGB GB is to ensure that staff have the right skills to switch between humanitarian and development when the need arises. None of the documents reviewed were explicit in describing criteria to signal a shift from relief to development. The ideal situation is that no boundaries should exist between relief, rehabilitation and development. The best place for administering such flexibility is integrated funding by donors or at least an increase in the usage of unrestricted funding at the regional level.

Early Warning Systems

As regards **early warning systems** being in place, it is apparent that there are various initiatives internationally but there has not been a systematic system used at the regional level. Although the review was unable to assess adequately regional and organisational capacity in early warning systems, both internal and external stakeholders were familiar with a number of early warning initiatives taking place in the region. Lack of government commitment, ownership and acceptance was highlighted as one of the impeding factors to the successful implementation of these systems. The OGB food security advisor did indicate that they are currently lobbying with FAO to adopt the IPC as an early warning tool for the region. It needs to be emphasised that this lobbying and advocacy needs to be extended to the governments at national level and needs to be extended to lobbying and advocating with governments at a national level of the importance of early warning systems.

At the organisational level, a majority of staff that were spoken to were also in agreement to the need for strengthening of early warning systems. In countries such like Niger for example, there is a certain level of data collection on food security early warning indicators although this is not being done on a systematic basis. Information gathered through telephone interviews with staff in country programmes shows that respondents considered their early warning capacity as being less than adequate especially data analysis and reporting. However, in the overall analysis, capacity in early warning did not surface as a gap significantly impeding humanitarian response. The challenge is that in the absence of early warning systems we cannot be better prepared to respond to emergencies or at least prevent the devastating impact of disasters.

Key Crosscutting issues

The TOR request that the key 'crosscutting' programme quality issues (gender, MEL, protection, HIV and AIDS) be examined in this evaluation. For the purpose of this evaluation, respondents were asked to give their perception on the extent to which these have been addressed in programme implementation. A thorough analysis of the crosscutting issues was not possible in the absence of a field visit. What is presented here is mainly a reflection/perception of the respondents that were spoken to.

In general terms, coverage of the crosscutting issues varies from country programme to another and also depends on the country specific priorities, approaches and capacity. Most of the countries have at least on paper explicit strategies on the programme quality issues, as this is an OPAL project description requirement. Ongoing support is provided by the regional advisors through proposal review to ensure that due consideration is given to the crosscutting issues. However, resourcing for the crosscutting issues have been poor with limited financial and human resources particularly at the country level. Indications are that work on the crosscutting issues is still minimal. Commonly cited examples of ongoing activities on the crosscutting issues include protection activities in Chad, the recent regional MEL workshop demonstrates some commitment in the region to take forward the MEL initiatives. The programme quality officer in Liberia indicated that they are initiatives aimed at increasing beneficiary accountability by involving beneficiaries in programme decision-making, including the setting up of participatory monitoring committees. In Gao, Northern Mali, the programme manager noted that there are some ongoing initiatives to data collection on food security early warning indicators although there is limited data analysis capacity. Gender has also suffered the same challenges of being poorly resourced. While the regional strategy indicates 7% of the regional budget will be allocated to gender activities an analysis by the gender advisor shows that only 4% has been budgeted for gender. However, it is encouraging to note that the regional country strategy review process puts women 'at

the heart of what we do. If this translates into practical action, it presents an opportunity for effective gender mainstreaming. HIV and AIDS seems not be an issue that is so much talked about in this region and definitely deserves its due consideration in the next phase of strategy development.

That said, the answer to the questions on the crosscutting issues from the TOR, has to be negative. Categorically respondents mentioned that we could be doing more on the crosscutting issues by clarifying more on where the region wants to take the crosscutting issues. Regional countries are all, collectively, away from systematically integrating the crosscutting issues into both humanitarian and development operations. This has resulted in significant lapses in the quality of our programmes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations are presented in this section. A number of issues and recommendations presented in the review of the evaluation criteria are reflected in the sections to be outlined below. Looking at the findings of the areas that have been discussed above, one can draw some indicative conclusions concerning the overall relevance and effectiveness of the West Africa regional humanitarian strategy for the past three years. The impression that the evaluator has been left with is a strategy of interventions that the RHT can feel broadly proud satisfied. As with any strategy of this sort and at this stage in the continuum, there are many refinements that can be made. The evaluator therefore proposes the following recommendations as critical to the future development and success of the regional humanitarian strategy. It needs to be recognized that these recommendations are not exhaustive considering the limited breath and scope of the review and only serve to complement other pieces of work that the RHT has been engaged with to facilitate the development of a future strategy.

Strategic Level

- 1. The RHT needs to develop a strategy for the next 3 – 5 years that addresses or gives appropriate ways to scale up the delivery of its commitments in the current strategy.***

To achieve this, the RHT should strengthen the strategic focus and longer-term vision in each of the broad thematic areas that they are currently engaged with much emphasis on the crosscutting issues that have not received greater consideration in the current phase of strategy implementation.

Humanitarian Rapid Deployment Register

- 2. The RHT to work closely with the human resources department as business partners to find ways to improve and strengthen the human resource management and organisational administration of the humanitarian rapid deployment register.***

Based on the discussions made around the register, it appears there is need for closer collaboration with the HR department to ensure the proper management of the register including ensuring that all decisions that are made are within the boundaries of organisational policies, systems and procedures. There is also a need to consider the possibility of having someone fulltime to manage the register on a to ensure that its growth is matched by strength.

- 3. There is need for the RHT to increase the pool register staff who are available for technical and leadership positions.***

The rapid deployment register as it stands has been criticized for being weak on technical and leadership capacity hence the need to increase the pool of

humanitarian workers who are available for leadership positions when called for duty including technical competencies such as food security and water and sanitation required for the changing environment.

Contingency Planning Process

- 4. *There is an apparent need for the RHT to engage more vigorously with the country teams in countries where OGB is the lead OI affiliate to ensure timely completion of the contingency planning process.***

Although many OGB staff spoken to did not believe in the OI contingency planning process there is an apparent need to ensure that in country where OGB is the lead affiliate has a 'live contingency plan'. In this regard scenario based contingency planning should be undertaken based on a strong context analysis. It needs to be recognized that contingency planning is one mechanism among several that OGB can use when emergencies arise. The recent emergencies in Ghana and Mauritania demonstrated how exposed we were in the absence of a contingency plan.

Disaster Risk Reduction

- 5. *There is a need for the region to move forward the work on DRR and work with the country programmes, HD DRR team and other external stakeholders through a consultative approach to develop a regional DRR strategy.***

This is in line with the OGB global initiative to integrate DRR into programming and increasing focus of key regional actors such as ECHO and the UN in working and supporting DRR type of activities.

RHT Technical Capacity

- 6. *The region should build its regional PH capacity.***

Feedback from both internal and external stakeholders indicates that they would like to see more involvement of OGB in technical water and sanitation discussions at the regional level and at the country level, countries would like to see more support being provided in watsan project. As alluded to earlier, this is in line with the global OGB PH growth initiative. Also, there is an increasing interest and need to implement long term watsan activities.

Internal External Coordination Systems

- 7. *The RHT and the region in general need to develop enhanced approaches to communication and joint planning among the advisors group or programme team.***

Responding to this recommendation should not focus solely on the hardware of communications (newsletters/team bulletins) or the responsibility of the communications teams. Rather improved communications should include a range of targeted strategies such as advisors meetings, joint planning and field support visits.

Crosscutting Issues

8. ***The RHT should proactively involve itself in the implementation and strengthening of country level capacity in integrating the crosscutting issues into programming with the objective of safeguarding the quality of programme delivery.***

The region in general with the participation of the RHT needs to develop a quality framework which defines what programme quality means for the region. It should out in place or adapt organization wide peer review processes so that the programme grows in terms of quality and that the reputation of the organization is maintained.

Annex 1:

Terms of Reference Evaluation of the West Africa Regional Humanitarian Strategy

Purpose, Objective and Scope

The purpose of the regional humanitarian strategy evaluation is to contribute to ongoing efforts of ensuring that emergency preparedness and quality of humanitarian response and learning in the context of an independent evaluation. Its objective is to provide the Regional Management Centre (RMC) in particular the Regional Humanitarian Team (RHT) with an external review of progress towards expected results which may contribute to the improvement of the current humanitarian response programmes and which should help the RHT in making decisions about the strategy for the future. The evaluation sub-objectives include:

5. Comment on the readiness of Oxfam GB humanitarian team in the region in terms of structure, roles, systems, partnerships to support and implement quality humanitarian response within the region.
6. Identify steps already taken so that the region responds in a quality and effective manner to humanitarian emergencies in the region.
7. Assess internal coordination mechanisms between units including external coordination structures of West Africa RHT and other development actors like the UN and the donor community within the region.
8. Provide overall conclusions and recommendations that contribute to both the strategic and operational levels and assist the West Africa RHT in fulfilling its role of supporting the implementation of effective and quality humanitarian response in the region.

As highlighted above, recommendations will be made on how to improve current and potential future operations including the support provided to the country programmes by the RHT. Lessons learnt will be disseminated to support improved quality humanitarian programming and wider organisational learning.

The scope of the evaluation is WAF54 and its antecedents (WAR070, WARA31) which are all part of the regional humanitarian PIP (P00166). The main period of analysis will from 2004 to 2007. The review will examine documentation pertinent to the predecessor projects as they affected or influenced the preparation of the current project.

The Evaluation's Basic Methodology and Criteria

The basic approach to the evaluation consists of three main phases (review of secondary data, primary data collection and analysis, and report writing) at the core of which is a set of evaluation questions/areas:

Methodology

The methodology of the regional humanitarian strategy evaluation or review will consist of the following:

- A review of the project documentation including project proposals, work plans, activity reports and other relevant materials on OPAL and relevant country specific documentation.
- Discussions with internal project actors including – regional advisors, RMT, RHT and country programme staff.
- Discussions and personal interviews with external actors from the West Africa humanitarian and donor community with or in close proximity with the regional humanitarian strategy.
- Discussions with key informants outside the region but within the organisation who have relevant experience.
- Telephone and/or email interviews with field staff from countries participating in the regional PIP and more specifically the humanitarian strategy project.
- Briefings and debriefings with key stakeholders on the main findings of the evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

In general, evaluation questions will be elaborated with reference to the following main areas:

- **Design and relevance of the strategy** – including its relevance to OGB strategic change objectives and more specifically to the regional humanitarian needs including the reversion of the PIP.
- **Efficiency/Effectiveness of the Humanitarian Strategy** – the extent to which the interventions are effective and/or an assessment of the strategy in terms of how time and resources have been spent, management and cost-effectiveness of the budget; an assessment of how far the project outputs and results are being achieved (including performance against project milestones).
- **Role of the Regional Humanitarian Team (RHT)** – the value of the RHT in supporting the response and delivery of quality humanitarian response in West Africa region.
- **Sustainability of the strategy and its activities component** – the extent to which the results and impact are being, or likely to be maintained over time.
- **Key crosscutting issues** – for example gender, HIV and AIDS, protection, security and accountability have been considered during the implementation of the project.

Timeframe

The intention is to have this piece of work completed by the end of October 2007 beginning 5 October 2007. It is envisaged that the evaluation will go through the following phases:

1. Desk Review of documentation and Finalisation of ToRs – 3 days
2. Internal and External Interviews – 7 days
3. Debriefing – 1 day
4. Final Report – 7 days

Expected Outputs

The expected evaluation **outputs** are:

- a. A draft evaluation report, which include annexes, an executive summary section and a section on findings and recommendations.
- b. An accompanying PowerPoint presentation of main findings and conclusions for de-briefing purposes.
- c. Full final report that incorporates corrections and inputs from the RMC, HD and country teams.

Annex 2: Regional Humanitarian Strategy Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria/Question: Design and Relevance of the Strategy	
Sub-question	Data information sources
1. What are the major humanitarian issues in the region affecting poor men, women and children to achieve a sustainable livelihood?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC Donors/external stakeholders Partners
2. What is the relevance of the regional humanitarian strategy against these issues or priorities?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC Partners
3. What is the rationale of the regional humanitarian strategy against these issues?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC

4. Is the regional humanitarian strategy addressing the right issues in the context of Oxfam GB's humanitarian strategy?	HD Staff Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
5. What new opportunities and/or areas of work that could be done that are not currently being considered in the current regional humanitarian strategy?	HD Staff Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
Evaluation Criteria/Question: Efficiency/Effectiveness of humanitarian strategy	
Sub-question	Data information sources
1. How did the West Africa Regional Humanitarian strategy evolve over the last three years (focus, outputs and outcomes)?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team
2. What are some of the specific outputs that the regional humanitarian strategy has been able to supply?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC

<p>3. Is Oxfam GB recognised as a leader in humanitarian assistance in the region?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC Donors/external stakeholders Partners</p>
<p>4. Is the delivery of outputs on time and in line with the budget?</p>	<p>RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team</p>
<p>5. Do staff have the right skills set and ability to learn from experience to take forward the implementation of the regional humanitarian strategy?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team</p>
<p>6. Does the regional strategy have a coherent set of project outputs throughout the region?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC</p>
<p>7. Given the above assessment, what recommendation can be made for future development of the regional humanitarian strategy work?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC</p>

Evaluation Criteria/Question: Role of the Regional Humanitarian Team (RHT)	
Sub-question	Data information sources
1. What type of support is provided by the different post in the RHT and is it relevant? (note emphasis should be on the role not the person).	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC
2. What type of support do you think will be required of the RHT in future?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC
3. On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate the relevance of the different posts/roles of the RHT?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC
4. Is the regional humanitarian team structure optimal?	
5. To what extent is the RHT appropriately and adequately resourced and supported by the organisation e.g. support from the HD, HDO etc?	
6. To what extent does the regional humanitarian team add value to the other units of the organisation and what sort of linkages exist?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC

7. What more should the RHT doing more of in order to ensure the quality of humanitarian response in the region? What should they do less of?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC
Evaluation Criteria/Question: Sustainability of the strategy and its components	
Sub-question	Data information sources
1. What are some of the sustainability issues/challenges facing the implementation of this strategy?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
2. To what extent does the work have a long-term vision? What informs your conclusions?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
3. To what extent is it relevant to the sustainability issues facing the region? What informs your conclusion?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC

4. Has the implementation of the regional strategy strengthened the capacity of the region and country programmes to respond to future emergencies? If so, what have been the most successful interventions/project activities?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
5. What recommendations do you have for the future to ensure the sustainability of the regional humanitarian strategy activities?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents RMC Management Team Regional Humanitarian Team CPM and HPC
Evaluation Criteria/Question: Key crosscutting issues	
Sub-question	Data information sources
1. What is the nature, pattern and scope of the prevailing crosscutting issues such as gender, protection, security etc?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents Regional Humanitarian Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC
2. To what extent are these crosscutting themes being addressed in the design and implementation of the regional humanitarian strategy?	Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents Regional Humanitarian Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC

<p>3. What actions are being taken within the context of regional humanitarian strategy to address some of the challenges related to the crosscutting themes?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents Regional Humanitarian Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC</p>
<p>4. Are there any suggestions for the future to ensure the full integration of the crosscutting themes?</p>	<p>Regional and Country Level Humanitarian Documents Regional Humanitarian Team Regional Advisors CPM and HPC</p>

Annex 3: Interview Guide for Donors and External Stakeholders

Interview with Donors

Purpose and scope of the interview

- Oxfam GB is currently undertaking a review of the RMC Humanitarian work as part of its ongoing efforts to improve the quality of humanitarian programming.
- The purpose is to provide the West Africa RHT with an external review of progress towards expected results which may contribute to the improvement of the current and subsequent humanitarian response programmes; and should help the RHT in making decisions about the strategy for the future.
- We are seeking the input to the review from partners, donors, UN agencies and internal Oxfam GB staff.
- As an important stakeholder your views are particularly important for the future development of strategy and we are grateful to you for taking time for this interview.

Confidentiality

- Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and only aggregated data from all interviews will be presented in the review report.

Duration

- I have 11 major questions to ask you, and I anticipate the interview to take around 45 minutes to complete depending on your familiarity and involvement with the Oxfam GB West Africa's humanitarian programme.

-
1. To what extent are you familiar with the activities of Oxfam GB West Africa Regional Management Centre in the region? What is your present level of funding to OGB West Africa RMC?
 2. Does your agency have specific expectations of the OGB Regional Management Centre? Are they being met?
 3. What value does the OGB RMC add to your agency's programme or work in the regions?
 4. To what extent does the OGB regional management centre address priority humanitarian and development issues for your organization in the region?
 5. To what extent does the OGB humanitarian programme address priority humanitarian and development needs of the West African region?
 6. Does the OGB West African regional management centre foster greater coordination and cooperation in the region? If so how? Do you have any specific examples?
 7. Are you getting good value for your financial support to the OGB regional humanitarian centre?
 8. Based on what you have seen so far, in terms of OGB programming and implementation would you continue to invest in the West Africa regional management centre?

9. What would you consider to be some of the major strengths of the OGB regional management centre? What are its weaknesses?
10. In your view what would you consider to be the three most important success factors for further strengthening of the OGB West Africa regional humanitarian centre?
11. Are there any additional comments on the OGB West African's regional management centre you would like to share with me?

-----*Thank you for your time*-----

Interview Schedule – external stakeholders

1. What are some of the major humanitarian issues in the region affecting men, women and children to attain a sustainable livelihood?
2. What are the current priorities and/or strategic steer of your organisation in the region?
3. Do you see any need of continuous investment in emergency preparedness and early warning systems in the region?
4. Are we doing enough as agencies to deliver and strike a balance or establish the link between relief and development?
5. What is your current involvement with Oxfam GB West Africa Humanitarian Team?
6. What is the role of Oxfam GB's contribution to regional humanitarian work in the region?
7. Do you think our contribution to regional humanitarian work in the region is in line with some of your priorities? How would you rate Oxfam GB's ability to respond to emergencies in a timely and speedy manner?
8. What do you consider to be some of Oxfam GB's strength based on your interactions with Oxfam GB?
9. And what do you consider to be some of the areas we need to improve as an organisation?
10. What is the contribution of Oxfam GB to coordination of regional humanitarian work in the region?

Annex 4: Persons Interviewed

[Table removed]

Annex 5: Documents Reviewed

1. West Africa Regional Emergency Preparedness and Quality of Humanitarian Response, Programme Implementation Plan: P00166
2. West Africa Emergency Preparedness and Quality of Humanitarian Response, WAF54.
3. Emergency Preparedness – West Africa Humanitarian Capacities and Learning, WAR070.
4. Emergency Preparedness and Quality of Humanitarian Response in West Africa, WAF31
5. Humanitarian Rapid Response Register, Training and Register Guidance Notes
6. Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Review, Oxfam GB West Africa, 2004-07
7. Working with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering: <i>putting women at the heart of what we do</i> , OGB West Africa Programme – Country Strategic Planning Process, Guidance notes – Final draft 0.5 for comments, June 2007.
8. Review of Advisory Support functions in East Asia: ways of working – Maximising the value and impact of programme support for OGB in East Asia, August 2007.
9. Economic Strengthening and Diversification in Sahelian West Africa, Draft Concept Note, Innovative projects, WAF54.
10. Surface Water Harvesting in Sahelian West Africa, Draft Concept Note, Innovative Projects, WAF54.
11. West Africa Humanitarian Team off-site, July 24-26 2007
12. Integrating Emergency Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods: Rationale for an Integrated Approach
13. West Africa PIP Evaluation Terms of Reference
14. West Africa Strategy Paper

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