

Oxfam GB Project Effectiveness Review Management Response

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Name of Response reviewed: 2012 South Sudan Humanitarian Response

Date: 16/07/2013

Summary of Results

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Level of achievement</i>	<i>Rating</i>
1. Rapid appraisal of facts within 24 hours of pre-defined trigger, plans in place and scale-up or start-up commenced within three days	<i>Partially met</i>	2/6
2. Coverage uses 10% of affected population as a planned figure with clear justification for final count	<i>Partially met</i>	2/6
3. Technical aspects of programme measured against Sphere standards	<i>Almost met</i>	4/6
4. MEAL strategy and plan in place and being implemented using appropriate indicators	<i>Met</i>	3/3
5. Feedback/complaints system for affected population in place and functioning and documented evidence of information sharing, consultation and participation leading to a programme relevant to context and needs	<i>Almost met</i>	2/3
6. Partner relationships defined, capacity assessed and partners fully engaged in all stages of programme cycle	-	-

7. Programme is considered a safe programme: action taken to avoid harm and programme considered conflict sensitive	<i>Almost met</i>	2/3
8. Programme (including advocacy) addresses gender equity and specific concerns and needs of women, girls, men and boys and vulnerable groups ¹	<i>Almost met</i>	2/3
9. Evidence that preparedness measures were in place and effectively auctioned	<i>Partially met</i>	1/3
10. Programme has an advocacy/campaigns strategy and has incorporated advocacy into programme plans based on evidence from the field	<i>Partially met</i>	1/3
11. Country programme has an integrated approach including reducing and managing risk though existing longer-term development programmes and building resilience for the future	<i>Partially met</i>	1/3
12. Evidence of appropriate staff capacity to ensure quality programming	<i>Partially met</i>	1/3
Final rating Equivalent to 45%		21/42

1. Did the HIT identify areas that were particularly strong overall in the Region or in a particular country? (i.e. standards fully met)?

The HIT identified that standards were fully met for “MEAL strategy and plan in place and being implemented using appropriate indicators”, with data being collected and reports regularly produced throughout the programme. This is likely due to an emphasis being placed on the importance of monitoring, and working towards Sphere standards, from the outset of the programme, and the deployment of a MEAL HSP to set up systems during the emergency phase. However, monitoring was not consistent, and there are gaps in the data; therefore improvement does need to be made. There was also a problematic hand-over between the MEAL HSP and the MEAL Coordinator (Juba position) and Officer who were subsequently recruited thus highlighting the need for a good hand-over and clear longer-term systems.

“Technical aspects of the programme as measured against Sphere standards” were also determined to be relatively strong as compared with other areas. This is evident at strategic level (funding proposals, Oxfam strategic documents) and in programme delivery (awareness of field staff of relevant standards, programme design and documented attempts to attain Sphere standards) and monitoring (sitreps, regular technical reports) – this being true

¹ Elderly, disabled, HIV positive, single women, female-headed households are examples

for both PHE and PHP. However, monitoring was at times ad-hoc, and comparison between indicators and achievements was not consistent in sitreps, therefore leaving room for further improvement.

Sphere standards were taken into account consistently and aspired to by Oxfam teams despite the extremely challenging working environment, and numerous external constraints. This is commendable considering the urgency, and constantly changing nature of the situation, which could otherwise have detracted from an emphasis on attaining prescribed standards. This is likely due to Oxfam's strong competency in WASH, with Sphere standards being an integral part of WASH programming.

2. Did the HIT identify areas that were weak or very weak in the Region or a particular country (e.g. standards partly or not met)?

The HIT identified many areas where Oxfam's response was weak. The report notes that the Upper Nile Response was managed, to a large extent, as a separate entity to the country programme, and these weaknesses can be assigned to both the wider South Sudan country programme (strategic leadership, fundraising capacity, HR/recruitment) and the Upper Nile refugee response (availability of staff, technical leadership, extremely difficult operating environment).

The areas of particular weakness highlighted are:

Rapid appraisal of facts within 24 hours of pre-defined trigger, plans in place and scale-up or start-up commenced within three days

Oxfam was slow to respond to the Maban refugee crisis, both in the early stages, and during further refugee influxes when Oxfam's capacity to respond did not keep pace with rising needs. This was partly due to a slow deployment of human and material resources, partly due to lack of available funding, and partly due to the extreme difficulty of the context. In summary, Oxfam was not prepared to respond to such a large scale emergency, thus highlighting the need for clearer strategy and contingency planning, and a greater emphasis on preparedness measures.

Coverage uses 10% of affected population as a planned figure with clear justification for final count

Given the nature of the Category 2 classification, and level of humanitarian need in South Sudan (1.86M people in November 2011, increasing to 4.6M in November 2012 (*UNOCHA 2013 planning figures and 2012 CAP*)), Oxfam did not assist the number of beneficiaries which would be expected (averaging less than 8% of the population). This may appear to be a strategic error, with the Cat 2 response concentrating almost entirely on Upper Nile State, and especially the Maban refugee response, with relatively little programme implementation to deal with food insecurity or other crises elsewhere in the country. However, it should be noted that the high cost and complexity of the Maban refugee response, coupled with lack of available funding, and the fact that being present in Maban before the arrival of refugees gave Oxfam a certain obligation to respond, probably made this inevitable (although it may have been mitigated had Oxfam been better prepared (human and material resources available for deployment), had better fundraising capacity at country level, and clearer strategic management).

Evidence that preparedness measures were in place and effectively actioned

Despite the existence of an OI contingency plan, which included a section on potential large-scale refugee response in Upper Nile, Oxfam was not ready to respond in practice to such a scale-up, lacking sufficient staff and resources available for rapid deployment. The EP&R team were able to respond well initially and deliver life-saving assistance, and support was sought from the existing Upper Nile long-term development programme (albeit in an ad-hoc manner). However, it is clear that stand-by capacity was not fit-for-purpose (poor state of drilling rigs and other equipment) nor ready for rapid deployment (staffing and other NFIs). Again, this was most likely due to a lack of preparedness and contingency planning at country level, as well as a lack of funding.

Programme has an advocacy/campaigns strategy and has incorporated advocacy into programme plans based on evidence from the field

Whilst Oxfam was well engaged in advocacy from programme to country, and even international level, and an advocacy plan was produced, there was no monitoring of the impact of this advocacy so it is not possible to make an accurate assessment of its effectiveness. There also appears to have been a lack of coherence between different sections of Oxfam. This can be attributed partly to a lack of strategic direction at country level, partly to a lack of coherence in approach between Oxford, the region and the country programme, and partly to the sheer scale and urgency of the refugee response which detracted from wider strategic and advocacy issues.

Although not mentioned in the HIT, field staff present at the time also noted a strong disconnect between the field teams and country level management in terms of advocacy strategy and its relation to programme implementation, which was counter-productive in Oxfam's relations with other agencies. This is likely due to the step-aside process, and the Upper Nile programme having been managed largely as a separate entity to the wider country programme at that time.

Country programme has an integrated approach including reducing and managing risk through existing longer-term development programmes and building resilience for the future

There was a disconnect between Oxfam's long-term development and resilience building programmes, and the humanitarian response in South Sudan, which has been further exacerbated by the high investment of resources into the Upper Nile response, and resultant reduction in capacity elsewhere. The Upper Nile programme was managed at times quite separately from the rest of the South Sudan country programme (due to various reasons, including a step-aside process of the Country Director, and the sheer scale and complexity of the response). Whilst support was sought from the host community programme in Jamam, and has been very helpful to the refugee response, this was opportunistic, rather than forming part of any planned strategy to integrate the two programmes.

The EP&R team were key in responding quickly in the early days of the crisis, and indeed meant that Oxfam was one of the first agencies to react on the ground. However, with EP&R forming part of the humanitarian programme, this is still not evidence of effective links being made between humanitarian and longer-term development/resilience programming.

This can only be due to lack of a clear longer-term strategy linking these different sectors of the organisation, or this strategy not having been followed, perhaps coupled with a lack of available funding and resources.

Evidence of appropriate staff capacity to ensure quality programming

Given the difficult working and living environment in Upper Nile State, recruitment and retention of staff (particularly international) is very difficult. Gaps in staffing, as well as frequent turn-over, have had a strong negative impact on the programme. Poor HR systems also hampered improvement in this regard. There was, however, a gradual improvement over time, with more senior and PHE positions filled, and better staff retention.

The high staff turn-over is largely due to the difficult conditions, and is an issue which has been faced by many NGOs. However, uncertainty over Oxfam's exit strategy, coupled with lack of funding, and a resulting lack of investment in basic staff welfare and conditions, as well as 3 separate bases having been opened due to relocation of refugees, has exacerbated this problem, leaving Oxfam with probably the worst living conditions of any INGO in Maban county.

Inefficient HR systems, and a lack of capacity in-country for certain positions, can also be said to have contributed to slow recruitment of some national posts, which has hampered programme delivery. However, the fact that many national staff have stayed with the programme long-term, and understand very well the context, is a strong positive, and has helped enable an improved programme.

3. What actions are being planned in response to the unmet or partially met benchmarks identified?

Rapid appraisal of facts within 24 hours of pre-defined trigger, plans in place and scale-up or start-up commenced within three days

A new South Sudan contingency plan is under development, which will include preparedness measures, and an analysis of likely crises, thus enabling for a quicker initial appraisal once a pre-defined trigger is identified, and a faster subsequent deployment of human and material resources. Training and capacity building of national staff (who are more likely to remain longer-term) and a more stable country management structure should also allow for better preparedness and a faster, more effective humanitarian response.

Coverage uses 10% of affected population as a planned figure with clear justification for final count

Given the scale and cost of the Upper Nile response for a relatively modest number of beneficiaries, and the huge affected population falling under the Category 2 emergency, not achieving 10% cannot be fairly deemed a failure. The lesson learnt should be in the appropriate categorisation of emergencies, which a clearer country strategy and contingency planning should allow for.

Evidence that preparedness measures were in place and effectively actioned

The contingency plan which is being developed, and the re-establishment of Oxfam's EP&R team (currently integrated into the Upper Nile team) will ensure better preparedness measures are in place, and can be actioned effectively. Ongoing capacity building of longer-term national staff, and a more stable country management structure should also help in this regard. The re-deployment of HSPs and contract staff with previous experience in Upper Nile, or elsewhere in South Sudan, to new crises may also allow for faster and more effective responses.

Programme has an advocacy/campaigns strategy and has incorporated advocacy into programme plans based on evidence from the field

The facts that the step-aside process is over, a more stable country management structure in place, and an experienced national advocacy manager has been appointed, will enable Oxfam to develop a clearer and more consistent advocacy strategy for South Sudan.

Country programme has an integrated approach including reducing and managing risk through existing longer-term development programmes and building resilience for the future

The more stable management structure which is now being put in place at country level, will allow for clearer strategy and a better integration of longer-term development/resilience programming with humanitarian programming.

Evidence of appropriate staff capacity to ensure quality programming

A “South Sudan Development Fund” was released by Headquarters in late 2012, which is funding many national staff through training programmes ranging from English lessons for drivers and cleaners to short humanitarian courses to University degrees. This will therefore increase the capacity of national staff in many sectors and help ensure quality programming in the longer-term.

The contingency plan under development, and re-establishment of the EP&R team, will help to predict and prepare for crises, therefore enabling a more timely deployment of appropriate staff.

More efficient HR systems need to be put in place to enable faster recruitment of appropriate candidates (both national and international), and reduce delays, which have a serious impact on field programmes.

So far as possible, a clear plan should be put in place at the start of a new crisis, estimating the likely length of time which Oxfam will remain, and deciding upon an appropriate level of investment in staff welfare and conditions. Efforts should be made to at least attain basic standards as soon as possible (including considering this when submitting funding bids) in order to retain senior staff over longer periods of time. The procurement and pre-positioning of emergency base set-up equipment (e.g. safari tents, flat-pack office furniture, first aid kits) funded under EP&R or similar would also be advisable.

4. Are there HIT findings that you would recommend for action by the Humanitarian Department? And how can HD support the Region’s response to the HITs?

HD could support and guide the country programme to ensure better resilience and preparedness at strategic/country level so as to facilitate a faster deployment of staff and resources for future crises. This should include ensuring sufficient in-country human resources to allow for rapid needs assessments and the availability of well maintained equipment and materials (e.g. drilling rigs, SWAT units and other PHE equipment, NFIs, logistics materials, e.g. vehicles). The availability of contingency materials at regional level (especially NFIs and emergency WASH equipment) may also be helpful, and reduce transport and procurement times when materials need to be procured from Oxfam’s UK warehouse.

HD could facilitate a faster deployment of appropriately qualified and experienced HSPs, and roster staff, especially those with previous experience in South Sudan and therefore a greater understanding of the context and ways of working. Re-deploying staff who were involved in the early stages of the Upper Nile crisis in subsequent crises in South Sudan will mean that lessons learnt can be more easily applied.

Ensuring continued capacity building and training of South Sudanese national staff, including in strategic/advisory roles, to allow for a faster initial response and better early planning, would be helpful and the continuation of the South Sudanese Development Fund is therefore highly desirable. Also, retaining electro-mechanical and other maintenance staff to allow for good and regular maintenance of equipment, including vehicles, and capacity building national staff in this area, would help to avoid the same problems with poorly maintained equipment which hampered the effectiveness of the Maban response.

A greater emphasis on investing in compound development and staff welfare (perhaps via a central HD fund) would encourage better retention of senior staff.