ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW IN HAITI

Small-scale urban farming in Port-au-Prince

Effectiveness Review Series 2013/14

WILLIAM GUSTAVE
OXFAM GB

Photo: William Gustave

www.oxfam.org.uk/effectiveness
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Accountability Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>COZPAM</td>
<td>Community’s Association Platform of the Metropolitan Area of Port-au-Prince</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNFP</td>
<td>Konsey Nasyonal Finansman Popilè (Haitan Creole)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEAL</td>
<td>Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning</td>
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<td>MEL</td>
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<td>OGB</td>
<td>Oxfam Great Britain</td>
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary table: Oxfam’s score for accountability to partners – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

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<th>(Average) Oxfam score</th>
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With regard to the summary of scores assessing Oxfam’s accountability to its partner, Community’s Association Platform of the Metropolitan Area of Port-au-Prince (COZPAM), Oxfam and COZPAM staff are closely in agreement. The evaluator’s score differs on transparency and partnership practices. The evaluator believes that the partner had sufficient information on the project to assume leadership in conducting the project for the beneficiaries on the ground. There were a number of exchanges between COZPAM and Oxfam that would have enabled the partner to avoid direct interventions by Oxfam. The senior management team’s justification for Oxfam’s direct actions is that there was a delay in COZPAM executing its activities and that the periodic reports were late arriving at Oxfam’s office.

The accountability of Oxfam and of its partner towards the community is summarised in the table below.

Summary: Oxfam and partner accountability to communities – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

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The score given by the community to Oxfam is higher than the score given by Oxfam and partners, as well as by the evaluator. The lowest score was given for transparency, since the community believes there was little pertinent information provided about the project, particularly with regard to finance. This created unfounded expectations in the population with regard to Oxfam’s actual capacity for intervention. The project faced constant demands that exceeded its actual scope. If the beneficiaries had been given details of what the project planned to do, it would have been easier for staff to manage these expectations.
The community has expressed its satisfaction with the project, saying the project met its needs. It has expressed its satisfaction in relation to food security. In fact, in light of the knowledge acquired about diet during the course of the project, the community believes that its diet has improved thanks to the consumption of the fresh vegetables produced as part of the project. The community’s satisfaction also relates to the beneficial effect on the mental health of people traumatised by the 2010 earthquake. Women who attended the meetings said that by giving them the opportunity to do some gardening, the project enabled them to occupy their minds with positive things.

One recommendation about accountability, in terms of both transparency and participation, concerns the way in which requests for change by the communities are handled. It is necessary to put in place a mechanism that is familiar to the parties to deal with how to implement changes to the project. The mechanism’s tools should consist of a communication plan and a flow diagram depicting the progression of requests for change and the role of the stakeholders in this mechanism, including the beneficiaries. The time it takes to pass from one stage to the next should be represented by a gap in the diagram.

In terms of methodology, it would be preferable to give priority among information sources to the collection of qualitative information that is as exhaustive as possible. The methodology provided by Oxfam should better reflect this. The time gained on quantitative research should be used to carry out a more in-depth analysis with interviewees.
2 INTRODUCTION

Oxfam GB (OGB) defines accountability as the process through which an organisation balances the needs of the stakeholders in its decision-making and activities, and how it operates on the basis of this commitment. It is understood that accountability should rest on the following four aspects: transparency, feedback mechanisms, participation, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

The accountability evaluation indicator chosen by Oxfam in its Accountability Reviews (ARs) is the degree to which its work responds to its own accountability standards. Oxfam is capable of doing this because it has clear standards that describe how a project/intervention/activity should be carried out by its staff and partners, and how it is experienced by those for whom Oxfam seeks change.

The ARs seek proof, perceptions and judgements about the degree to which an Oxfam project complies with accountability standards. They aim to examine the performance in the light of such standards. They were not conceived to evaluate accountability in itself or the impact resulting from good account rendering, both of which are aspects of research that Oxfam may choose to develop in the future.

ARs take place at the project level, within projects that are between a quarter and half way through their life cycle – enough time for relationships of trust to have been developed, but with sufficient time remaining to put into practice what has been learnt during the project’s life.

In the case of the ‘Jaden Lavil’ project in Carrefour Feuilles, the project has come to the end of its duration but Oxfam has decided to extend it by a year in order to put its exit strategy in place. There is sufficient reliable information to carry out an AR. The extension of the project involves supervising the beneficiaries in the implementation of the cooperative, which will make the project’s outputs last longer. During this extension, the results of the AR study can be of use in the new relations with partners and the community. Moreover, the other Oxfam programmes in Haiti will be able to use the example of the Carrefour Feuilles project to improve their own performance.
3 METHODOLOGY

This Accountability Review has been conducted by a professional external evaluator. The evaluator met with Oxfam personnel, the partner’s staff, management committees and the beneficiaries themselves, through focus groups and individual meetings, in order to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Two feedback sessions were held with Oxfam staff and the beneficiaries, in the partner’s presence. The activities carried out to obtain information have been set out by Oxfam with detailed guidelines that were followed by the evaluator and the project teams. The accountability evaluation indicator chosen by Oxfam in its ARs is the degree to which its work responds to its own accountability standards.

The main stages of this methodology are as follows:

• Evaluation of accountability administration/management at project level. This is undertaken by the evaluator based on existing documentation, evidence from office visits, behavioural observation, interviews, etc. with personnel from all levels of the country programme.

• Evaluation of OGB’s accountability to its partners.

• Evaluation of the accountability of OGB and its partners to the main stakeholders. Perceptions of evidence for accountability, under the guidance of the evaluator, based on: existing documentation, interviews with the personnel of OGB and its partner, observation, a practical office session, and target group discussions and interviews about key information with the communities and the main partners.

• Analysis by the evaluator of all the evidence gathered and the drawing up of a clear conclusion regarding to what extent Oxfam applies its own accountability standards.

• Workshop. This is an essential aspect of the AR process, providing a chance for executives, project personnel, partners and, ideally, the main stakeholders to see, discuss and debate the results of the evaluation. The workshop (and the management’s response to the AR report) is the basis on which the country and project teams plan future work with a view to improving accountability.

• Report. This is a high-level summary setting out conclusions and commitments to change.
4 SHORT PROJECT SUMMARY

In the past, Carrefour Feuilles, located on the hill overlooking the metropolitan area, was a forested area protected by the state. Under heavy migratory pressure from rural areas to Port-au-Prince, it became arbitrarily occupied by people seeking a place to build homes. It is currently inhabited by more than 300,000 people, making it one of the most populated parts of the municipality of Port-au-Prince. Carrefour Feuilles was most severely affected following the 2010 earthquake, which claimed many lives and destroyed the revenue sources of most of its inhabitants.

General objective of the project

To contribute to improving food security for vulnerable households in urban areas through the development of a small-scale urban farming system in three urban districts in Carrefour Feuilles.

Specific objectives:

1. To encourage poor households in Carrefour Feuilles to grow vegetables in the surrounding areas or on the roofs of their houses, in used tyres and other receptacles.
2. To improve access to food and to revenue-generating activities through the development of small-scale urban farming in Carrefour Feuilles.
3. To strengthen the role and the voice of the poor in their process of successfully adopting urban farming as a strategy for improving access to food through environmentally friendly urban gardening.

Expected results

1. Increased capacity in terms of beneficiaries’ knowledge of how to effectively practise small-scale urban farming in environmentally friendly conditions.
2. The reinforcement of a community dynamic by structuring the beneficiaries into groups (networks with a view to better managing the means of subsistence, particularly nurseries and water-storage systems).
3. Awareness-raising and advocacy among decision-makers for the adoption of a small-scale urban farming system as a successful strategy for increasing access to food for poor people in urban areas.
4. Creating a culture of exchange of goods and services among local people based on urban farming production.

Following a random selection process, this project was chosen to be the subject of a study on the effectiveness of Oxfam’s accountability to its partners and beneficiaries.
5  HOW ACCOUNTABLE IS OGB TO PARTNERS IN THIS PROJECT?

Oxfam’s accountability to partners – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability Indicator</th>
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5.1 TRANSPARENCY

Within the context of the Jaden Lavil project, Oxfam’s level of transparency towards its partner is 3 according to Oxfam staff and 2.5 according to the partner, while the evaluator rated it at 4. Oxfam’s explanation for this score is that its partners have been involved in the project at different times, and only in the parts that concern them. For example, only the parts of the budget relating to their activities have been shared. The handover from the first Oxfam team that led the project to the new team was not carried out in the usual way. Changes in the way of working on the ground were not well communicated or understood by the partner and the local committees.

The partners believe they do not have an overall view of the project. Although there have been meetings about the progress of the project and the procedures involved, they would have liked opportunities for formal discussion and an improvement in decision-making mechanisms, particularly with regard to decisions concerning the activities already underway.

The evaluator believes that the information provided to the partners was available in the agreement between the two parties for conducting the work on the ground. There have been a number of exchanges between Oxfam and the partners throughout the project, and changes have been made based on the discussions. The partner could ask to have more information if it was necessary during the launch phase of the project, and even during the project’s execution. The partner should have taken more of a lead on the matter of managing information with the community.

5.2 FEEDBACK

Oxfam staff score feedback at 2, due mainly to Oxfam directly making decisions within the project through the technician on the ground. There is a protocol with COZPAM, but certain
habits inherited from the previous phase of the project persist. The technician continues to report to Oxfam, even though, according to the hierarchy, they should report to COZPAM.

The partner’s justification for the score of 3 is that Oxfam always gives feedback on the documents submitted by COZPAM. However, it stressed the slowness with which certain decisions are implemented and the imperfections of the existing complaints system inherited from the previous phase of the project, which needs to be reformed. In order to improve the score of this indicator, the mechanism proposed in the recommendations in connection with requests for change needs to be implemented.

5.3 PARTICIPATION

Participation scores 3 according to Oxfam staff, the partner and the evaluator. The level of this score is above the minimum acceptable by Oxfam for accountability. The partners were consulted and dossiers were discussed jointly, but they did not always have all the strategic information that was available to Oxfam in order to make their final decisions. This missing information relates in particular to the levers available to Oxfam with which to provide additional programme resources to the project if need be. With regard to this indicator, an improvement in transparency will also have a beneficial impact on the partner’s involvement in decision-making concerning major changes to the project.
6 HOW ACCOUNTABLE ARE OGB AND PARTNERS TO COMMUNITIES IN THIS PROJECT?

This section will deal with the accountability of Oxfam and its partners to the project’s target communities. The scores of each community are presented below in separate tables and subsequently compiled in a single table to represent the final score given by the community with regard to the work of Oxfam and its partners.

Oxfam and partner’s accountability to communities – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

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<td>Staff attitudes</td>
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<tr>
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**6.1 TRANSPARENCY**

Within the context of the Jaden Lavil project, the level of transparency corresponds to level 2 in Oxfam’s accountability matrix. However, the Oxfam team makes an effort to share MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) reports with the partners and the community, and arrangements are made based on these reports. To reach level 3, it would be necessary to share the budget, discuss financial information and provide explanations to the communities about Oxfam’s asset acquisition procedures and the constraints imposed by financial backers, as well as provide updates on expenditure and budget availability. The senior management team (SMT) believes it is important not to underestimate issues related to the need of certain community leaders for power, which sometimes results in biased communications, creating tension in relations between Oxfam, the partner and the community.

When community feedback is provided, those present ask for greater transparency on the part of Oxfam and its partners in managing the project, particularly with regard to financial management. Within the context of this project, this information was not widely shared. The fact that the community did not have any knowledge of the financial part could explain the regular requests for additional funds for the project, for example to buy water. A discussion about financial resources would enable community members to better understand the choices made in managing the project and would improve their involvement in the activities.
6.2 FEEDBACK

According to the community, feedback scores 3. The level could have been improved if the decisions had been taken more quickly based on the discussions held between the community, Oxfam and the partner. Oxfam always tells the beneficiaries to report problems to the management committees, which pass them on to Oxfam. The feedback mechanism currently in place can be improved by involving the partners and the community in systematising it and regularly monitoring its functioning. Complaints, suggestions and requests for change will continue to be collected as and when they appear by the committees and project staff. Except in cases of emergency, each complaint or piece of feedback will be handled by following the hierarchical progression of the project. Upon receiving it, the committee will give its opinion and pass it on to the partner, which will add its recommendations before Oxfam does the same. At the monthly meeting of the project team, a decision will be taken based on the recommendations of all the entities. The improvement of this mechanism within the project will have a positive effect on the other accountability indicators. The implementation of a concerted feedback mechanism would make it possible to reduce tensions that harm the project’s development.

6.3 PARTICIPATION

The community’s score for participation is 3.5. The community feels very involved in the project activities and participates in several meetings, and its satisfaction with the project also influences the participation score. An improvement in transparency, particularly with regard to financial data, would enable vulnerable groups to participate more in the management committees’ decision-making. In order to improve decision-making by the communities themselves, it would be necessary to focus on the governance of community organisations, helping them to implement mechanisms for electing leaders using criteria based on committee members’ eligibility for leadership.
7 OVERALL MAIN STRENGTHS

In terms of accountability, this project demonstrates more strengths than weaknesses. From the community’s point of view, the project’s greatest strengths are that its results satisfied the community’s needs. Feedback and the level of participation are good and the staff had a positive attitude. The project met their need, since the issue of food security was important at the time. Community members have acquired new knowledge that will improve their family finances.²

Moreover, they said that Oxfam listened to them and changes were made to the project based on their requests. All letters addressed by the committee to Oxfam received a response. The committees said they were satisfied to see that the head of Oxfam in Haiti was present at a clarification meeting following a letter from the Ti Savann committee.

With regard to their participation in the project, the local committees participated in and negotiated the decisions taken. The project activities required a good level of community participation to be put in place, and the community mobilised around the committees in order to create the gardens. The professional attitude of the project staff was also appreciated. During the period of the project when Oxfam was operational, the constant presence of staff on the ground provided motivation for the community.

In terms of partnership practices, responsibilities were clearly defined and expectations were well managed, with any alterations being formal (contract, method of working, etc.). The project strengthened COZPAM’s position on the ground by broadening its remit. Moreover, COZPAM members benefited from various training sessions on disaster risk reduction (DRR), finance, etc. There was good mutual cooperation.
8  OVERALL MAIN WEAKNESSES

Some weaknesses were noted and can be corrected. They are as follows:

Transparency was a weak point in terms of how the project was conducted, particularly with regard to financial matters. If the project resources and expenses incurred had been presented, the community would have been more realistic in the demands it made of the project. Knowing that resources are not unlimited and that expenditure is progressing in line with the budget set out, would have reduced tensions in negotiations for changes within the project.

The partner, COZPAM, had access only to certain information about the project, meaning it did not participate in all the decisions made concerning the project. Documents were not sufficiently discussed with the partners, and there was not enough partner feedback on these documents. For example, Konsey Nasyonal Finansman Popilè (KNFP) was the partner chosen to create and implement the exit strategy for the project. Although there was some discussion between KNFP and COZPAM, the leaders of COZPAM were not sufficiently involved to be able to arrive at a joint strategy for raising awareness among the communities about the importance of implementing the cooperative. At the time of the study, the communities had not fully understood the exit strategy and the committees were reticent about communicating in depth about the future cooperative.

In terms of feedback, although there were always responses from Oxfam, decisions sometimes took a long time to come. Moreover, there is no guarantee that Oxfam is going to apply the requests for change made by the partner. The current feedback mechanism has no shared time schedule between Oxfam, the partners and the communities for obtaining responses to complaints and applying the decisions taken.
9 PROGRAMME LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

In terms of transparency, it is necessary to improve the project communication plan. It should include a presentation of the budget for the project activities on the ground, with an explanation of the choices made. In the presentation of MEAL reports, emphasis should be placed on the resources available for the continuation of the activities. An improvement in transparency on financial matters is extremely important in helping to manage beneficiaries’ expectations. By knowing in advance which activities will be carried out and what the associated costs will be, beneficiaries will be more aware of the need to take care of the materials provided to them. Extra-budgetary demands made when requesting changes will be reduced because the financial information will be known. The implications of changes on the project’s progress will also be known.

One recommendation about accountability, in terms of both transparency and participation, concerns the way in which requests for change by the communities are handled. It is necessary to put in place a mechanism that is familiar to the parties to deal with how to implement changes to the project. The mechanism’s tools will consist of a communication plan and a flow diagram depicting the progression of requests for change and the role of the stakeholders in this mechanism, including the beneficiaries. The time it takes to pass from one stage to the next will be represented by a gap in the diagram.

In terms of participation, it is necessary to ensure that community committee members are representative of the various vulnerable groups. Committees should have statutes with internal rules governing how they function. These rules should allow for the election of leaders in such a way that this representation is ensured. They should also allow for the making of changes where necessary. These committees play a key role in disseminating information, collecting feedback and complaints, and taking decisions within the project. The proper functioning of these committees will have a positive influence on how accountable Oxfam is to the communities.

In terms of the preparation of reports by the partner, Oxfam could support COZPAM from the outset by setting up a detailed project monitoring and evaluation plan. This plan should include:

- Indicators. These should be explained to COZPAM very early on in terms of outputs. Each indicator should have the information required and the sources of data defined in detail.
- Data collection and use protocols. The plan should set out which persons will be responsible for collecting data, how frequently data will be collected, and how the data collected will be used in the report.

In order to make the text more comprehensible, data could be presented as a graph. The text can then explain the graph highlighting any disparities noted. An analysis of the problems encountered during the execution of the project will aid understanding of the reasons for these disparities. It would be clearer for the beneficiaries if COZPAM presented activity reports to them using graphs and images, and this would aid the transparency of the project within the community.
10 COMMITMENTS FOR/TO CHANGE

1. The commitment to change in the context of Oxfam’s work in Haiti must focus on improving transparency. This commitment must encompass relations with both partners and communities. The target should be level 4, the highest possible. Partners should also be asked to aim for this level in their work. Based on the experience of this project, certain financial information should be disseminated and discussed with the partners and communities.

2. With regard to feedback, Oxfam programmes should achieve or maintain at least level 3. This level requires the existence of a mechanism for managing feedback and complaints. Stakeholders are encouraged to formulate such comments. They are then recorded and responses are subsequently generated. The quality of interventions improves when feedback and complaints are taken into account. Based on the experience of this project, a transparent mechanism for managing requests for change with which the stakeholders are familiar needs to be put in place. The project manager must evaluate all requests for change to assess whether they will have an impact on the project’s objectives. If he considers a request to be important, he must submit it to an approval mechanism and inform the partner and the community of the progress of their request. Once this system has been mastered by the partners and beneficiaries, they could attain level 4 by implementing a joint system and introducing training sessions on mastering this mechanism for the more capable organisations.

3. The community has said it is satisfied with the project. This project should therefore be used as an example to ensure that other Oxfam projects and programmes meet the needs of the beneficiary communities. Since the community’s satisfaction level is 4, this project can serve as a reference, and projects should attempt to maintain this level in future.

4. The community considers the attitude of the staff to be very good. Frequent field visits contribute greatly to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries, as well as being necessary to make any changes required. The community believes that the practical staff listen to them and are technically competent to carry out the work.

5. The Carrefour Feuilles feedback session was attended by more than 30 people who participated in the review. They were asked for their opinion on what Oxfam and partners accountability target scores should be for this project, the scores are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability Indicator</th>
<th>Oxfam and Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff attitudes</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11 EVALUATOR’S VIEW ON VALIDITY OF PROCESS, FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The organisation of this project mobilised considerable resources. This shows how much importance Oxfam attaches to the way in which the organisation works with others. For this project, the evaluator took opinions from more than 67 people, broken down as follows:

- Meeting with SMT (3 people)
- Workshop with Oxfam staff and partners (8)
- Six male/female focus groups in three communities (48)
- Individual meetings (8)

Another two feedback sessions were held, one with Oxfam staff and the other with 30 beneficiaries and partner staff. The evaluator also visited the project execution sites.

The responses reflect the reality of Oxfam’s work in Haiti as faithfully as possible. The focus groups in the communities were the most responsive. On each occasion, some 10 people contributed opinions, and the comments made by each person were compiled by the evaluator to provide a final note on the matter from the group. The fact that men and women were separated in the focus groups made it possible to obtain a rich variety of different opinions. For example, women mentioned the positive effect of gardening on their mental health, while men did not speak about this aspect.

The two feedback sessions were also an effective way to discuss the final result with the people who took part in the study. Comparing the overall view of the results with their own point of view made it possible to open up new, in-depth discussions about the end results.

The project had reached a level where all stakeholders had an in-depth knowledge of the field. Several reports have been published on the project and the beneficiaries have seen a video documentary. Therefore the people participating in the study have a good knowledge of the project and its achievements. This made it easier to find out their points of view and hold an in-depth debate on the issues.
12 EVALUATOR’S VIEW ON TOOL AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The methodology of this study has the advantage of presenting several stages, which increases the credibility of the results. It was possible to cross-check information and make comparisons in order to find out whether the people participating in the study have an accurate perception of the reality. The questions raised in the study are pertinent and have been useful in researching the reality on the ground. The interviewees were at ease with the questions, which directly addressed the themes of the study. An impressive amount of information was collected throughout these meetings and field visits.

It should be stressed, however, that this methodology attaches too much importance to the score. The fact that the respondents have to think about a score to give to an indicator has not contributed any additional knowledge within the research. More time should have been allowed for debates and justifying responses. The final score would then be produced by the study team from analysis of the discussions, anecdotal evidence and the interviewees’ perceptions and perspectives.

In meetings, people were interested in talking about their experience within the project, although the themes of the study are not generally a concern for individuals. The questionnaire did not leave much space for collecting information about individuals’ experiences. There should be questions that address the person’s experience within the project and show the development of their knowledge before and after the project, as well as the specific contribution the project has made to their life. A score linked to this individual experience unique to each person, would provide evidence of the extent to which the project’s results had been achieved.

The Excel spreadsheet provided as a model for the calculation of scores (015 score sheet, questionnaires matrix) contained errors in its formulae, which the evaluator corrected.
APPENDIX

Appendices 1 - 9 are available on request:

1 Terms of Reference
2 Itinerary and people met
3 009 Scoresheet – document review and evidence scoring sheet.xlsx
4 010 Questionnaire – staff interviews.docx – ALL
5 011 Questionnaire – Oxfam GB accountability to partners.docx – ALL
6 Focus group reports – from 013 Instructions – community visits – FGDs.docx – ALL
7 Key Informant Interview (KII) reports – from 014 Instructions – community visits – KII.docx – ALL
8 015 Results sheets.xlsx
9 Workshop presentation – from 016 Template ppt for workshop.pptx
NOTES

1 Four-month delays in the submission of reports have already been noted.

2 ‘We have been able to save money thanks to the vegetables produced in our garden, and the amount we saved has enabled us to buy things like soap, water, coal and even meat.’ Quote from a focus group with women from Campêche (Carrefour Feuilles).

3 KNFP stands for Konsey Nasyonal Finansman Poppile in Haitian Creole or ‘Conseil National de Financement Populaire’ in French.

4 It should be noted that written complaints from the committees are always dealt with by Oxfam. A letter of response is addressed to the author and meetings are organised to resolve disagreements.
Oxfam Effectiveness Reviews

For more information, or to comment on this report, email ppat@oxfam.org.uk

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Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

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