

# ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW IN YEMEN

Humanitarian assistance and resilience building

Effectiveness Review Series 2014/15



Photo: Anwar Hajeb/Oxfam. A head of household after receiving money as an unconditional cash transfer in Al Kadaha, Hays District, Hodediada governorate, April 2015

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# ACRONYMS

AR	Accountability Review
CFW	Cash for Work
CHVs	Community Health Volunteers
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EFSVL	Emergency Food Security and Vulnerable Livelihoods
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
OGB	Oxfam Great Britain
PCVA	Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment
PDM	Post-distribution Monitoring
SWF	Social Welfare Fund
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
VDCs	Village Development Committees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WUC	Water User Committee

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of Oxfam Great Britain's (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of projects a quarter to a half way through their lifetime are randomly selected each year in order to review the levels of accountability they are achieving. The accountability indicator that Oxfam has chosen to examine in its Accountability Reviews (ARs) is the degree to which its work meets its own standards for accountability. Oxfam is able to do this as it has clear standards that describe how a project/intervention/activity should be delivered by staff and partners and how it should be experienced by those for whom we are seeking change.

Accountability is one of the 11 Programme Standards that Oxfam is expected to meet in its development work. It is the process through which an organization balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision making and activities, and delivers against this commitment. Accountability is based on four dimensions: transparency, participation, learning, and evaluation and feedback mechanisms that allow the organization to give account to, take account of, and be held to account by stakeholders. Oxfam's principle is: 'We hold ourselves primarily accountable to people living in poverty, but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously, and continuously strive to balance their different needs. Increased accountability will be achieved and demonstrated through respectful and responsible attitudes, appropriate systems and strong leadership.' This review assessed accountability in terms of transparency, feedback/listening and, participation – three key dimensions of Accountability for Oxfam. In addition it asked questions around partnership practices, staff attitudes, and satisfaction (how useful the project is to people and how wisely the money on this project has been spent) where appropriate.

The 'Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Building' project in Yemen is one of three randomly selected Oxfam projects for an Accountability Review (AR) in the year 2014/15. A participatory approach with triangulation analysis was employed in the study to assess and explain the level of accountability of Oxfam GB (OGB) to its partners, and of OGB and its partners to communities.

## Results

*Table 1.1: Scores for Oxfam's accountability to partners – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)*

Accountability Indicator	(Average) Oxfam score	(Average) Partner score	Review Team score
Transparency	3	1.5	2
Feedback	3	2.5	3
Participation	2.5	2	3
<b>Average Total:</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gave OGB a Transparency score of 2 (medium) as the clarity of the official agreement between Oxfam and its partners about their respective responsibilities did not translate well on the ground with both sides requiring more explanation and clarification. There was a poor flow of information due to the absence of appropriate communication channels.

The review team scored OGB 3 (high) for Feedback because although a feedback and complaints mechanism for partners is not available, if partners had a complaint regarding a member of Oxfam staff, they could approach another Oxfam staff member with their grievance.

The review team gave OGB a Participation score of 3 (high), although it was noticed that the relationship between Oxfam staff and seconded partner staff was weak. Partner staff did not participate in all project activities, and perceived that they were not fully integrated into Oxfam's office.

*Table 1.2: Oxfam and partners' accountability to communities – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)*

<b>Accountability Indicator</b>	<b>(Average) Oxfam/Partner score</b>	<b>(Average) Community score</b>	<b>Review Team score</b>
<b>Transparency</b>	3.5	2.5	<b>2</b>
<b>Feedback</b>	3.5	3.3	<b>3</b>
<b>Participation</b>	3	3.4	<b>3</b>
<b>Average Total:</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Again using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide the review team gave the project a Transparency score of 2 (medium). Oxfam staff shared some project information with the community, particularly at the beginning of the project and sometimes during the cash distribution, training, hygiene awareness and community meetings. Community members did not always know who the Oxfam partners were.

The project was given a Feedback score of 3 (high) by the review team. Several methods of feedback were in place and there was a dedicated person within Oxfam to deal with feedback and complaints. The majority of project participants knew how to make complaints as the hotline number and related information had been distributed to them. Oxfam staff did their best to solve community problems and would always call back in response to missed hotline calls or SMS messages. Finally, Oxfam staff use a Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) tool to collect additional feedback/complaints on the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) and cash for work (CFW), and assess people's level of awareness and usage of the complaints/feedback handling mechanisms in place.

The review team gave the project a Participation score of 3 (high). Oxfam staff regularly met with VDCs to discuss intervention plans on UCT and CFW components, Water User Committees (WUCs), and community health volunteers (CHVs). VDCs then delivered information to help implement project activities. Due to cultural conventions there was limited women's participation and decision-making except in women-only project interventions.

The review team recommends that Oxfam and partners improve and strengthen relations between themselves and that Oxfam sets up a workable feedback mechanism to deal with partners' complaints. Access to information for partners should be improved, for instance by providing computers to partner staff seconded to Oxfam and by giving access to policies, budget and other related documents. Oxfam should share appropriate financial information with partners and organise for the partnership officer to spend time in each partner office. Oxfam should also consider seeking new partners. In addition Oxfam should involve partners and communities at the earliest concept stage of the project and Oxfam and partners should share relevant information with communities at all stages. Finally, an exit plan should be discussed between Oxfam, partners and communities.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Oxfam has been working in Yemen for over 30 years and is currently implementing programmes in women's rights and gender justice, humanitarian response, resilience building, and strengthening civil society, as well as changes through policy influence. The programmes and associated projects contribute to addressing the problems arising from the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen in areas traditionally affected by chronic poverty and food insecurity. These problems are due to economic difficulties caused by the country's political crisis as well as increased global food and fuel prices (CFSS survey WFP, 2012). The Yemeni context is characterised by fragility, a challenging political transition process, a protracted humanitarian crisis affecting over half the population, a growing number of internal conflicts, and the continued disenfranchisement of women in public and political life. In light of these challenges, Oxfam's programmes in Yemen seek to address the underlying causes of poverty, and strive to establish greater gender equity and stronger governance structures, as well as meeting the humanitarian needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Oxfam is strongly committed to being accountable to a wide range of stakeholders and to improving its understanding and communication of its effectiveness within the scale, breadth and complexity of its work worldwide. Accountability is a core Oxfam value (alongside inclusivity and empowerment). This commitment means that *how* Oxfam does the work it does is as important to Oxfam as what is done. Oxfam has a responsibility to be accountable to the partners with whom it works, and Oxfam's accountability to people living in poverty is the joint responsibility of Oxfam and its partners.

Oxfam defines accountability as 'the process through which an organisation balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making and activities, and delivers against this commitment'. Accountability is based on four dimensions – transparency, feedback mechanisms, participation and learning and evaluation – that allow organisations to give account to, take account of, and be held to account by stakeholders. The accountability indicator that Oxfam has chosen to examine in its Accountability Reviews (ARs) is ***the degree to which its work meets its own standards for accountability***.<sup>1</sup> Oxfam is able to do this as it has clear standards that describe *how* a project/intervention/activity should be delivered by staff and partners and experienced by those for whom change is being sought. The purpose of ARs is to examine performance against standards. ARs are not designed to measure accountability *per se* or impact as a result of good accountability. ARs will seek evidence for, perceptions of, and make judgements about the degree to which any given project meets Oxfam's standards for accountability with regard to both:

- Oxfam GB's mutual accountability in its partnerships, and
- Oxfam GB and partners' shared accountability to those on whose behalf it works.

ARs take place at project level, in randomly selected projects that are approximately a quarter to a half way through their cycle – enough time for accountable relationships to have been developed and with enough time remaining to put learning into practice during the lifetime of the project.

# 3 METHODOLOGY, APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES

The field data collection for this review was conducted from December 10–25, 2014 and consisted of the following exercises:

- **Assessment of leadership/management of project-level accountability:** Undertaken by the consultant through the study of existing documentation, evidence from office visits, observation of behaviour, interviews conducted with country office staff at field office level (Al-Hodeidah).
- **Assessment of Oxfam’s accountability to partners:** Perceptions of and evidence for – produced by the consultant through existing documentation, interviews with Oxfam staff and partner staff, administering questionnaires to Oxfam and partner staff, observation, and facilitated discussions. A judgement with a score was made by the consultant based on evidence for and perceptions of Oxfam’s accountability to partners.
- **Assessment of Oxfam and partners’ accountability to beneficiaries/community members:** Perceptions of and evidence for – led by the consultant – through existing documentation, interviews with Oxfam and partner staff, observation, and an office-based exercise, plus focus group discussions (FGDs) and Key Individual Interviews (KIIs) with communities.
- **Project site field visits:** These utilised a combination of 13 KIIs and FGDs with 30 women and 34 men in four villages. A judgement with a score was made by the consultant based on evidence for and perceptions of Oxfam and partners’ joint accountability to beneficiaries/community members.
- **Data analysis and assessment:** The consultant analysed the evidence collected throughout the activities to draw their own evidenced conclusion as to the degree to which Oxfam has met its own standards for accountability. Judgements with scores were made by the consultant and the review team based on evidence for and perceptions of (a) Oxfam’s accountability to partners and (b) Oxfam and partners’ joint accountability to communities. Supporting research documents and data are available upon request.
- **Workshops:** On December 22, the consultant presented the review findings to Oxfam project staff and partners in Al-Hodeidah project to see, discuss, debate, and gain understanding and ownership of the review conclusion. Moreover, participants in the Al-Hodeidah findings workshop showed their commitment to the actions that will improve Oxfam and partners’ accountability to each other and to the communities they work with. The second workshop took place on December 25. The consultant presented the review findings to staff at the Oxfam office in Sana’a. This final report incorporates their feedback and insights on the Accountability Review.
- **Examining accountability:** The findings and results of this review incorporated an approach examining Oxfam’s accountability focusing on ‘the degree to which its work meets its own standards for accountability’. The dimensions examined in this review were:
  - Being transparent in our relationships
  - Ensuring that feedback mechanisms exist and are effective
  - Undertaking projects in a participatory manner.

- **Examining partnership practices:** In addition to the above-mentioned accountability 'dimensions' the review also examined Oxfam's partnership practices, staff attitudes and overall satisfaction with the project.

**Report:** A draft report was prepared and translated into Arabic and shared with a wider audience within both Oxfam and the partners, who gave their feedback. This feedback was considered and incorporated into this final report.

## 4 SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

Yemen is located on the south-western end of the Arabian Peninsula. It is one of the poorest countries in the Arab region, with a per capita GDP of US\$1,473 in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Over half of the population of 25 million lives below the poverty line of US\$2 a day. Many of the Yemeni people are still struggling to get access to the basic necessities for life. Poverty had been rising even before the 2011 crisis, from 42 per cent of the population in 2009, to 54.5 per cent in 2012. Unemployment rates have risen to 40 per cent in general, and stand at over 60 per cent among the youth.

## 5 GENDER IN YEMEN

The situation of women in Yemen is unique with the complete separation of men and women in public and private life. This separation is only dispensed with within the protected framework of the core family. In general, the core family is the only place where women and men meet, where men can see women unveiled, and where they can talk freely.

In Al-Hodeidah, as in other governorates, Yemeni tribal traditions and status inequalities provide an essential background to understanding the current situation of Yemeni women. Traditionally, men and women have very clear roles: Men are responsible for external relations, decision-making and the economic viability of a household, whereas women are responsible for raising children, domestic affairs and for some decisions and tasks related to agricultural activities, such as raising livestock. While there are traditions that value women and their role, there are others that lead to a number of disadvantages

In the agricultural sector it is estimated that more than 70 per cent of work is done by female farmers. Women's agricultural tasks vary slightly from region to region, but women are mainly in charge of the labour-intensive rain-fed agriculture and production of basic food crops for family consumption. Animal husbandry is also usually under the responsibility of women, as is hand grinding grain; hauling water; collecting firewood; and storing, preserving and processing dairy and food products. Men are responsible for irrigated agriculture and the production of cash crops.

Gender issues in the legal sphere include gender gaps in access to courts, discrepancies between traditional and legal women's rights, and the application and enforcement of laws, as well as the existence of laws, that disadvantage women (e.g. laws of inheritance and divorce). Though it is evident that there are many discrepancies between men's and women's roles in politics and public life in Yemen, it has to be said that women in Yemen have had the right to vote for two decades and were the first women on the Arabian Peninsula to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Gender in this particular project ('Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Building in Western Yemen') was partially covered under this study, and it has been noticed that the work of project male staff in general was with community men and very limited with community women. This

may be because of the community culture and traditions or due to the nature of the project – there was only one occasion for the project male staff to work with community women and that was during the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) process

The structure of the team often reinforces the power inequalities within it because in this project managerial positions (project and components managers) are mostly male. For a future gender-sensitive approach, the project needs to include gender training and issues concerning Oxfam's internal gender relations and how to deal with them. Moreover, male project staff must get basic gender training to be able to discuss comfortably with community men about women's empowerment and gender issues. Male project staff need to be involved in some women's activities or training, such as veterinary services, bee keeping, etc.

## 6 PROJECT SUMMARY

The project 'Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Building in Western Yemen' is a two-year project supporting vulnerable communities in Al-Hodeidah and Hajjah governorates. Oxfam and its partners aim to build resilience and provide humanitarian assistance to men, women and children, contributing to reducing the impact of chronic poverty, natural hazards and conflict by the following means:

1. Working to increase the capacity and equality of both men's and women's access to resources that will help them cope with shocks and stresses.
2. Improving community-based disaster preparedness that is supported by responsive governance and civil society.
3. Improving the management and sustainable use of scarce water resources.
4. Increased and equitable access to basic services.
5. Supporting targeted communities, humanitarian stakeholders and national and local decision makers to increase their knowledge and coordination of how to develop effective and gender-sensitive programmes addressing disaster response, mitigation and resilience.

The project is working in 42 selected villages in Al-Hodeidah and Hajjah governorates with integrated water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities, unconditional cash transfers (UCTs), cash for work (CFW), food security and livelihoods interventions, and disaster risk reduction (DRR), leading to integrated development and a more focused and sustainable impact. Oxfam and its partners work directly with the beneficiary communities throughout the project cycle. The project involves close coordination with the rural water authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAI), Social Welfare Fund (SWF), Social Fund for Development (SFD) and other relevant stakeholders. To ensure a community-driven process the project is seeking to establish or strengthen existing water management committees and agricultural and livelihoods groups.

Unconditional cash transfer (UCT) assistance is provided to the most vulnerable and marginalised households to allow them access to food and other essential items. The targeted communities are supported in the identification of risks and hazards and setting up plans for future mitigation at the community level and as part of a strategy to strengthen the capacity of institutions and civil society. Natural resource management and agricultural support through community infrastructure creation, training, and collective action has also been considered to allow beneficiaries to better utilise scarce resources, while diversifying sources of income and economic opportunities including cash for work (CFW) and cooperatives. Improved access to basic services is critical to community resilience. Therefore, an integrated package of water, hygiene, and sanitation interventions to reduce health risks, and actions that contribute to reducing the risk of malnutrition and reduce time and resources invested in getting drinking

water is conducted. Learning and advocacy is undertaken at the local and national level and the project seeks to build further links between local and national stakeholders to support stronger policy creation and implementation. To contribute to the reduction of gender disparities, the project supports the empowerment of women through collective action and capacity building, and provides opportunities for women to engage in economic activities and participate in decision-making.<sup>4</sup>

This Accountability Review comes approximately half way through the project implementation period, and focuses on the project in Hodeidah governorate (YEMA67).

## 7 OXFAM GB ACCOUNTABILITY TO PARTNERS

This exercise was conducted on the first day of fieldwork in Al-Hodeidah. The participants represented Oxfam staff and partners, such as Yemen Women Union (YWU) and Al Mustakbal Association. The exercise was about the participants' views (and evidence for those views) on Oxfam's accountability in the partnership. The aim of the exercise was to find out to what extent Oxfam was accountable to its partners. Participants' feedback was used to generate learning considerations for Oxfam.

### Ratings on Oxfam's accountability to partners

**Table 7.1: Scores for Oxfam's accountability to partners – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)**

Accountability Indicator	(Average) Oxfam score	(Average) Partner score	Review Team score
Transparency	3	1.5	2
Feedback	3	2.5	3
Participation	2.5	2	3
<b>Average Total:</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Partnership practices</b>	3	2	3

Oxfam staff from the Al-Hodeidah office rated Transparency as 3 as they believed that project information has been fully provided to partners, except for financial information. Partners rated Transparency as 1.5. They regarded the provision of overall information as helpful. They did, however, note that the sharing of progress reports and MEAL findings was weak. Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Transparency score of 2 because there is a poor flow of information due to the absence of appropriate ways of providing and receiving information.

Oxfam staff from Al-Hodeidah office rated Feedback as 3, citing the many ways they provided feedback to partners, supported by regular meetings and workshops. With regard to complaints, Oxfam staff admitted that there was a delay in response, particularly on complaints related to administrative issues. Partners rated Feedback as 2.5 taking into account the absence of appropriate mechanisms related to the reporting and handling of feedback and complaints.

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Feedback score of 3, since a formal feedback and complaints mechanism for partners is not available. However, if there was a complaint from partners against any Oxfam staff, they would talk to another member of Oxfam staff to find a solution.

Oxfam staff from Al-Hodeidah office rated Participation as 2.5 as participation with partners occurred only during field surveys. Partners' level of contribution to decision-making was low. Moreover, Oxfam staff said they do not involve partners in the development of project concepts/proposals. Partners rated Participation as 2 as they realised that although several meetings were conducted between them and Oxfam, they were not an integral part of all planning and organising of the project. In fact, the partners felt that Oxfam usually ignored their participation in making decisions about project planning; the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) process; or implementing Oxfam policies or evaluations. For example, during the baseline and midline surveys, Oxfam's project team in Al-Hodeidah contacted a partner's staff without informing the partner office or sending any official letter to inform partners about the planned survey processes.

The following quotes express some of the partners' views about participation between Oxfam and partners:

- A female partner said, 'During discussion with Oxfam Al-Hodeidah staff and upon the agreement on specific issues, we were surprised they did not consider the issues that we agreed on, so what's aim of our agreement?'<sup>5</sup>
- One of the partner executive members said, 'There's irregular communications and meetings.'<sup>6</sup>
- A seconded member of partner staff (contracted by Oxfam) said, 'They (Oxfam Al-Hodeidah staff) didn't ask us to contribute to any key decision related to project planning or any activities.'<sup>7</sup>

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Participation score of 3, though it was also noticed that the relationship between Oxfam staff and seconded partner staff is weak as they did not participate in all project activities, and perceived that they were not fully integrated into Oxfam's office (e.g. usage of certain equipment).

## 7.1 PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

Oxfam staff from Al-Hodeidah office rated Partnership Practices as 3. They opined that partnership roles were clearly set out in the partnership agreement, but on the whole the practice is weak, and the need for institutional strengthening is vital. Partners rated Partnership Practices as 2 as meetings were held irregularly, Oxfam did not consult partners on many issues and there was no exit plan. The partner said that they have shown an interest in talking about some of the challenges that they faced while dealing with Oxfam staff, but at the same time partners got the feeling that they have to follow what Oxfam says without Oxfam considering their point of view. One respondent observed, 'Partner ruled by Oxfam staff.'<sup>8</sup>

The review team gives OGB a score of 2 for Partnership Practices, as the responsibility of both Oxfam and partners was clearly explained in the official agreement, but on the ground it was unclear to both sides and needed more explanation and clarification. There is no joint plan for future work, coordination or expectations. Oxfam must pay more attention to organisational development and institutional strengthening. Partnership policy and other Oxfam policies should be translated into Arabic and distributed to partners. In conclusion, Oxfam has a good way of working with partners on paper – a complete package of the roles and responsibilities of Oxfam and partners, such as meetings, reporting, field visits and budgeting.<sup>9</sup> However, these ways of working were not put into practice in this project.

# 8 OXFAM GB AND PARTNERS JOINT ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES

The aim of this exercise was to examine the levels of accountability that Oxfam staff and partners had towards the beneficiary communities. Oxfam and partner staff were asked to rate how things might look from a community perspective and then communities were asked to reflect on their experience of the project.

## Oxfam and partner accountability to communities

Scores for perceived accountability ranged from 1 (low), to 2 (medium), 3 (high) and 4 (very high).

**Table 8.1: Oxfam and partners' accountability to communities – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)**

Accountability Indicator	(Average) Oxfam/Partner score	(Average) Community score	Review Team score
Transparency	3.5	2.5	2
Feedback	3.5	3.3	3
Participation	3	3.4	3
Average Total:	3.3	3.1	2.7
Staff attitudes	n/a	3.8	3
Satisfaction	n/a	3.3	3

Oxfam and partners rated their Transparency to communities as 3.5 as they perceived that there were many community meetings and awareness sessions with beneficiaries on issues such as beneficiary identification (where some minutes of meetings are available), consultation on project activities, and meetings with various committees (Water Users Committees (WUCs), VDC, DRR committees, etc). The existence of the feedback mechanisms (hotline, complaints box and complaints desk) provided channels for people's concerns. Moreover, project publications (which contained brief project information), such as posters, brochures and banners, had been shared with beneficiaries. Lists of beneficiaries were posted in public places in participant villages for community review and feedback.

Community members rated Transparency as 2.5 because although Oxfam shared basic project information with them, the community received the information informally, and they had no idea about the project budget or how the budget was being spent.

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Transparency score of 2. Oxfam staff shared partial project information with the community, particularly at the beginning of the project and sometimes during the cash distribution, training, hygiene awareness and community meetings. Community members did not know Oxfam partners; for example in Al-Sukhna district the majority of beneficiaries have no idea about Yemen Women Union (YWU) which is an Oxfam partner in Al-Sukhna district. This demonstrates the low profile of YWU and how they did not use the chance to introduce themselves to the targeted community or to mobilise local women to be members of their union. In Hays district some of the village development committee (VDC) members knew the local Oxfam partner because Oxfam project staff were operating from the partner's office, but the majority of the beneficiaries did not know the local Oxfam partner. Communities have no idea about the Oxfam project budget or the project spending mechanism.

Oxfam and partners scored Feedback as 3.5 because of the different methods beneficiaries could use, such as a hotline, a complaints box, a complaints desk, and direct complaints. Additionally, there was a dedicated focal Oxfam staff member who received, dealt with, and responded to community complaints. The community rated Feedback as 3.3, acknowledging the ongoing communication with Oxfam staff or the focal complaints person, whether by phone (hotline for complaints) or field visits by Oxfam staff to solve project problems. This has led to satisfaction among the majority of beneficiaries.

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Feedback score of 3. Project participants were informed on how to provide feedback about the projects or staff or the VDC. The majority of project participants know how to make complaints. Moreover, project participants know that if they have a missed call or send an SMS the focal person will call them back. The hotline number and related information has been distributed to most project beneficiaries in the form of a hotline information sheet. Beneficiaries informed the review team that Oxfam staff did their best to solve community problems. Finally, Oxfam staff use a Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) tool to collect additional feedback/complaints on the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) and cash for work (CFW), and assess people's level of awareness and usage of the complaints/feedback handling mechanisms in place.

During one of the FGDs with community members, there was a malpractice allegation against a member of a VDC with regard to the UCT. Some VDC members had a conflict of interest where beneficiaries were also their family members. This was shared with Oxfam staff for follow-up.

Oxfam and partners rated Participation as 3, as the VDC selected the beneficiaries in accordance to the selection criteria that indicated community needs. They held meetings and planned with the VDCs and the local council, and held FGDs with both women and men for more participation practices with the community. Furthermore, problems and priorities related to project interventions were identified through processes including participatory capacity and vulnerability assessment (PCVA). Some details of cash for work (CFW) activities were identified and implemented by the beneficiaries themselves. The community rated Participation as 3.4, as beneficiaries' views concerning CFW project interventions to be implemented in their community had been taken into account, though they had not been involved in the work planning process of CFW. Additionally, women's participation is very limited and subject to their parents'/husbands' consent.

Using the OGB Programme Standards as a guide, the review team gives OGB a Participation score of 3, as Oxfam staff regularly meet with the VDC to discuss intervention plans on UCT and CFW components, Water User Committees (WUCs), and community health volunteers (CHVs). VDCs deliver information that helps in implementing the project activities. Gender segregation in their practice prevents women from participating in the VDC as active members,

and women's participation in the CFW project activities can be seen only in clearing trees from villages. At the same time, some women have a part in decision-making in the project interventions related to women. For example, women decided to have sewing machines and to make *bakhor* (traditional incense) as their income generating activities, which were then included as project training topics.

## 8.1 PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

Staff Attitudes scored 3.8 from the community. In general, beneficiaries feel comfortable when discussing their issues with Oxfam staff. The review team gave a score of 3 for Staff Attitudes. Beneficiaries agreed on the positive role of Oxfam staff in response to their needs and staff's quick reaction in taking care of beneficiaries' concerns. For example, project staff involved beneficiaries in the needs-assessment concerning livestock, focusing on sheep, poultry and goat production and have supported livestock production for consumption and marketing.<sup>10</sup>

Beneficiaries' quotes show their appreciation of the attitude of Oxfam staff:

- 'I remember, when the agricultural land was damaged by floods, we informed Oxfam staff who responded and action was taken immediately.'<sup>11</sup>
- 'Oxfam staff always encouraged our efforts and they do their best to clarify any confusion, one of the beneficiaries was annoyed as they took his name out of Cash for Work (CFW) list. Then Oxfam staff explained the reason as his wife is already on the list of Cash for Work (CFW) too, and it's not allowed for couple to be in the same list.'<sup>12</sup>

With regard to the question 'How useful is the project to people?' the community awarded a score of 3.3, as the project has benefited a large group from the community.

- 'Everybody benefited from the project.'<sup>13</sup>
- One woman said, 'Our village becomes clean because of cutting the prickly trees. Our houses as well because of health sessions. Oxfam generate income for poor people.'<sup>14</sup>
- A man who benefited from a mobile phone training said, 'I got vocational training in mobile phone maintenance, people from my village and the neighbours come to my house to fix their mobiles.'<sup>15</sup>

Some beneficiaries expressed their concerns over the sustainability of running of the CFW, UCT and Emergency Food Security and Vulnerable Livelihoods (EFSVL) interventions, which they hope can be extended.

The review team gave a score of 3 for Satisfaction, as beneficiaries are happy with the long-term and short-term components of the project interventions, but they hope the support will be extended.

## 9 MAIN STRENGTHS IN ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICE

- Oxfam's work is professionally documented and Oxfam staff have access to read and review any document related to Oxfam's work.
- A feedback/complaints mechanism was communicated to beneficiaries, and appreciated by them as appropriate and useful.
- Tools to measure how Oxfam has mainstreamed accountability in the post distribution monitoring (PDM) measurement have been incorporated, as well as tools to assess awareness, level of participation and perceived usefulness of the complaints/feedback handling mechanisms.
- Community members were involved in a broad range of activities, including the planning processes.
- Oxfam's clarity in undertaking the work.
- Solving problem of groups through communication and discussion enables the exchange of views between Village Development Committees (VDCs) and beneficiaries.
- Oxfam staff act impartially in a fragile and complicated context.
- Oxfam staff frequently solved community problems, always looking for quick and effective solutions to ensure the success of the project implementation plan.
- Communities appreciate staff attitudes and participation levels in this project.

## 10 MAIN WEAKNESSES IN ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICE

- Project staff's understanding of Oxfam accountability and partnership practice is not sufficient. Oxfam's focus on accountability was mostly related to ensuring a functioning complaints mechanism for beneficiaries. They should devote further effort to transparency, feedback and participation measures in dealing with management, partners and communities.
- Appropriate financial information is not adequately shared with community and partners.
- While partnership agreements were drawn up between Oxfam and partners stipulating the roles and responsibilities of the partners for this project, it seems partners' roles and responsibilities were not clearly communicated, or their expectations fully discussed. This led to the sharing of detailed project discussions or feedback to staff and partners as being perceived as not sufficient and a lack of clarity on how decisions were taken and shared with partners. Partners did not feel they could participate equally in making key project decisions on aspects such as planning, budgeting, implementation, and MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning).
- Most activities are technically and financially planned, implemented and managed by Oxfam and this results in a poor transparency to partners. Involvement of partners' staff (who are seconded to Oxfam) is not sufficient.
- There is no exit plan in place, which is a source of concern to partners.

# 11 PROGRAMME LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS ON ACCOUNTABILITY

- Oxfam project team and partners should work on ways of improving and strengthening relations among themselves.
- The Oxfam project team should coordinate and promote dialogue between Oxfam and partners, partners and communities, and develop coordinating mechanisms among the various levels.
- Oxfam project team should involve partners and communities during the project concept phase to build and strengthen partnership and project foundations.
- Oxfam project team should facilitate partner's access to information and the use of related equipment, such as provision of individual computers for staff seconded to Oxfam offices for information access, follow-up on project activities, track impact of projects, and preparation of reports.
- Oxfam project team should share information with partners that is relevant to the project. This should include Oxfam policies, project documents, budget, related MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) and progress reports, and plan for regular meetings for information sharing.
- Oxfam project team and partners should consider how they will share relevant information with project participants, including budget/financial information.
- Oxfam project team should encourage and empower partners to seek and obtain information, rather than waiting for Oxfam to provide it.
- Oxfam project team should discuss and decide on the level of financial information that should be shared with partners to ensure the smooth functioning of the project.
- A feedback mechanism should be set up by the Oxfam project team in regards to complaint/feedback between Oxfam and partner so as to deal with partners complaints, with a committed response system and clear ways to follow up in case of delayed responses.
- Oxfam project team, partners and communities should discuss and decide on an exit plan. Oxfam project team should consider how to improve partnership practice. For the improvement of partnership practices; partners suggested that Oxfam partnership officer (in Al-Hodeidah office) should spend some time (such as 5 days or a week every month) in each partner office. Oxfam project team should expand partnerships and seek new partners.

# 12 COMMITMENTS FOR/TO CHANGE

In view of the findings and recommendations, the Oxfam team has indicated a follow-up action plan. To further enhance transparency/feedback and reduce the risks of malpractice of community VDCs, we should have more FGDs and household visits, along with post-distribution monitoring to actively capture more detailed views and feedback, and identify any specific issues directly from the beneficiaries. It is planned to put more effort into raising beneficiaries' awareness of their rights and entitlements by improving involvement of community leaders and beneficiaries' representatives to disseminate information regarding the beneficiaries' own criteria for the success of the project, and how much money they will receive. Beneficiary communities will be empowered to raise their voice when they bring up any allegation during beneficiary registration or on the distribution process. Building local capacity is also very important. VDCs need to be involved in programme planning in order to engage ownership of the programme implementation, particularly involving more women as VDC team members in ways they feel comfortable. Regular meetings of Oxfam and VDCs will be arranged to discuss progress, challenges, feedback, and an action plan.

In terms of transparency, Oxfam shall explore more ways and means, such as community meetings, to communicate project plans and progress to communities.

On partnership, it is essential to plan with partners in the initial phase of a new project on the mode of partnership (with details such as level of involvement in various stages), the rationale, and the capacity-building plan that may lead to another level of partnership when appropriate. Such agreement shall then be documented and implemented and monitored throughout the process. Feedback mechanisms for partners, including regular meetings to share mutual feedback, shall be arranged.

# 13 EVALUATOR'S VIEW ON VALIDITY OF PROCESS, FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The review team explained the Accountability Review tools in a very clear way, repeating and explaining the questions more than once due to various factors, such as community culture, illiteracy, and low female participation as women felt embarrassed to talk to strangers. Moreover, during the FGDs some men tried to control the dialogue or prevent other men from sharing their opinions, which was noted by the facilitation team and they did their best to ensure participation by all members. On one occasion they took aside a person for a KII.

During KIIs, which were mostly conducted separately, but in a common place or under a tree, it was noticed that other people tried to get close to listen to the dialogue. The interviewer, very politely informed them that this was an individual interview.

Despite the minor challenges experienced above, the process of the review was able to generate findings that were valid and represented the views of the people involved and the practices of partners and beneficiaries.

# NOTES

- 1 That meeting our own accountability standards equates to good enough accountability in the delivery of the work we do is an untested assumption. Testing this assumption is an extremely demanding piece of work – really unpicking, examining and having confidence in a causal link between meeting our accountability standards and having truly accountable relationships will be challenging for many reasons. Testing this assumption is not part of the AERs, but will be treated as a separate research topic based on learning from these AERs.
- 2 Worldbank, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>
- 3 Source: Marta Colburn 'Gender and Development in Yemen'. Bonn, 2002
- 4 Revised Oxfam project proposal. July 2013
- 5 Male partner
- 6 Male partner
- 7 Partners – Oxfam accountability to partners questionnaire workshop
- 8 Male partner
- 9 Oxfam ways of working with partners, 2014
- 10 DFID baseline report, 2014
- 11 KIIs – Male interview
- 12 FGDs – Male group
- 13 KIIs – Female interview
- 14 FGDs – Female groups
- 15 KII – Male interview

## Oxfam Effectiveness Reviews

For more information, or to comment on this report, email [opalenquiries@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:opalenquiries@oxfam.org.uk)

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