Implementing Oxfam’s policy on engagement in refugee & IDP Camps – August 2013

Large-scale camps and settlements in Kenya, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Chad, DRC, Darfur, Liberia and Syria have seen hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people flee areas of insecurity and instability to reside in temporary settlements which in some cases have lasted for decades.

Oxfam has a long history of designing and implementing services for people living in camps and therefore expectations will be high from governments and the international community that we will be in a position to respond.

Oxfam has recently agreed global guidelines for its engagement in camps, this paper builds upon that to incorporate lessons learned from camp settings (particularly in the HECA region) and to give practical guidance on what is likely to be continued engagement in camp settings, particularly around entry and exit criteria, strategic aspects of implementation, and funding issues.

The objective of this “practical” paper is to aid rapid decision-making on the following:

- When/if to enter into a camp setting,
- Clear criteria which is to be met in order to responsibly exit from a camp;

And

- to provide an overview on challenges and lessons on funding for camps.

Entry Criteria – the key point in this section is that we make decisions according to need and we expect to be there – we are not just a gap filler! We should not make the decisions based on whether or not UNHCR have asked us to do something but whether there is a need we can meet.

Where Oxfam is in a position to respond to people in need of humanitarian assistance in camps, then our humanitarian commitment means that we do so. Criteria for defining the “need for humanitarian assistance in camps” does, however, require further clarification.

- The decision to enter into a camp as a humanitarian agency must be taken rapidly. The decisions should be based on:
  - Number of displaced people;
  - Basic data on the condition of people in the camp.
  - The circumstances in which people are living and what facilities they already have access to.
  - How we can best work with other actors in the area to ensure that minimum standards are met.

- Oxfam’s reputation as a leading WASH agency in camp settings puts us in a unique position to influence UNHCR site planning and camp setup. In order to do this, however, a decision on working in the camp should if at all possible be made during the camp setup phase. Influencing camp site selection and setup can result in decreased public health and protection risks, as well as a more efficient and cost-effective response.

- Oxfam sometimes considers the secondment of technical staff to these organizations with clear ToRs to work with them to increase their capacity to meet relevant standards in the camp (as was done in the Rwanda refugee transit camp in 2012);
Implementation

- Oxfam holds £1.2 million of WASH stock in Oxford which is mostly designed for use in setting up camps, which is available for rapid deployment to any country in the world;
- Oxfam will only maintain our role as a leading WASH actor if we are actively engaged in humanitarian programming therefore we expect to be part of all major responses where our expertise is relevant.
- As an internationally recognized leader in WASH camp response, Oxfam is in a unique position to use its camp experience and expertise to influence camp setup and planning. Oxfam shall advocate and influence camp setup based on the following factors:
  - Location of camp with respect to water availability/security;
  - Topography (particularly with respect to potential flooding);
  - Sanitation possibilities (no flooding, good drainage, soil type allows digging, etc.);
  - Location of camp markets;
  - Adequate spacing for WASH facilities (water taps, pipelines, pump houses, water storage tanks, sanitation corridors, washing & bathing areas, access for water trucks & de-sludging vehicles, etc.);
  - Location of schools, hospitals/clinics, and agency compounds in order to fully integrate WASH into site planning.
- It is important to plan and budget beyond the set up phase as soon as possible after the start of the work, to enable a more cost effective and sustainable response. It will also mean that Oxfam can plan what dedicated staff are needed for the camp programme to take pressure of existing long term staff after the initial set up phase. Initial planning and budgeting shall take into account:
  - First phase rapid response;
  - Transition to medium-term infrastructure and activities;
  - Implementation of services and infrastructure with increased sustainability (where camps are expected to remain for more than 1 year); in particular, the implementation of systems which will reduce running costs and environmental degradation;
  - Contingency planning for potential scale-ups (influx of new arrivals, disease outbreak, etc.).
- Host community activities need to be included in all planning & budgeting considerations from the start of the intervention.
- All staff involved in the response need to understand the UNHCR guidelines and standards. This will help us negotiate better with UNHCR and manage the risks of camp programming.
- The costs of maintaining a camp WASH system after set up should be significantly less than in the initial set up phase; however, this may not always be the case due to factors beyond our control.
- Camps set up from the outset should consider sustainability if there is any indication that it will become a long term camp (more than one year). This is both in terms of technologies/system chosen but also in identifying a local group that could take over. Camps which are estimated to be in existence for more than 2 years, Oxfam shall undertake a sustainability audit/review (as was carried out in South Sudan refugee camps in Upper Nile State - 2013) in order to assess the sustainability of technical options against the following criteria:
  - Cost analysis of various technical options;
  - Spare parts & consumables supply chain;
  - Involvement of communities, with specific reference to their current ability to operate and maintain the systems;
- Environmental impact of the proposed technical options (particularly with regards to the use/consumption of local materials like trees, etc.)

This review shall also make recommendations on an exit strategy for the camp, in terms of the handover of WASH facilities, public health activities and M&E (and host community activities, if applicable). It shall also give options for a responsible handover to stakeholders and how this can practically be done.

- Disaster Risk Reduction considerations need to be taken into account if the site is flood prone or affected by cyclones etc – (building raised latrines, contingency stocks for surface water treatment, etc.).

Since camps are typically located near borders or in remote areas (with limited markets), it is a struggle to set up cost-effective bases, and we often end up constructing our own office, accommodation, etc. A clear strategy and timeline for response implementation will allow us to plan early on what investments shall be needed for base setup (including technical resources for design, construction management, etc).

**Exit Criteria**

In order for Oxfam to consider exit from a camp, SPHERE standards (in IDP camps) or UNHCR standards (in refugee camps) must have been reached with regards to water, sanitation and public health activities, unless there is a clear justification as to why these standards cannot be reached;

- Morbidity/mortality rates are under emergency thresholds;
- No major influx of people is ongoing or expected within the next 3 months; In the case of refugees, there is relative political stability in the region that refugees have arrived from or are likely to arrive from;
- Oxfam must feel confident that coverage levels will not fall below SPHERE or UNHCR standards or that the health situation will deteriorate upon exit from the camp.

In the event that Oxfam exits from a camp while refugees/IDPs are still present, we are committed to performing a responsible and sustainable handover of all camp facilities and services to a qualified organization. Wherever possible this should be a local organisation as this will ensure greater sustainability and support the growth of civil society. This also draws on Oxfam’s competence in long term development work and should be where we are at our best. Criteria to assess whether another organisation is able to maintain services in the camp include:-

- Do they have the technical capacity to maintain and, if necessary, replace services that are already in place?
- Do they have access to funding to meet the costs of maintaining the services?
- Do they have a good relationship with the camp and host community or are they committed to developing one?
- What time commitment are they able to make and how does this match the plans and expectations of the displaced population?

In the event that the organization targeted for handover does not possess the technical capacity to immediately assume responsibility for camp activities, Oxfam will assess the feasibility of the following options to ensure a smooth handover:
• secondment of technical staff to the handover organization for a limited time, in order to support staff on operation and maintenance of the infrastructure and services;
• If Oxfam has a long-term programme and operational base in the area, technical staff from the long-term programme can provide targeted support to the handover organization for a specified period of time;
• In Chad, a mobile team was set up as a mobile unit that was able to intervene across the multiple refugee camps and IDP sites on an as-needed basis, as well as provide tactical support for specific complex tasks such as borehole drilling or expansion of camps. Training workshops were also conducted on a wide range of WaSH subjects to the NGOs that Oxfam had handed over to for doing WaSH O&M in the camps.

An exit strategy should be established as early as possible in the response. A well-defined exit strategy early on will not only aid us in the setup of sustainable WASH systems, but will also aid in assessing the potential and appropriateness of EFSL or livelihoods programming with both the refugee/IDP population as well as the host community.

**Funding**

Sustainable and reliable funding sources for Oxfam’s work in camps have been a major challenge in the recent past:

• UNHCR and UNICEF are increasingly not able to meet funding needs; Oxfam should not expect 100% funding from UNHCR or UNICEF and should always supplement it with money from alternative donors;
• While ECHO has funded several camp interventions, they usually do not fund “sustainable” or longer-term infrastructure within camps (e.g. solar powered water pumping systems, hand pumps);
• If there is no Oxfam/DEC appeal, then country teams are increasingly under pressure to fundraise for a quality well designed programme (particularly one which we are able to put some kind of sustainable structure in place).
• A camp-specific funding strategy is needed in order to pro-actively seek out alternative funding possibilities (BPRM/OFDA, SIDA rapid response mechanism), particularly to find donors who will fund longer-term, sustainable options in camp settings.
• National or even global framework agreements (the SIDA RRM being an ideal case) for standardized camp responses would avoid the time lag of raising funds in a timely fashion and decrease the pressure on using the CatFund for first response, since the first weeks are typically the most expensive in terms of expenditure.