



Evaluation of 'Stories of Change' Goat and Irrigation Projects in Malawi

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2.0 INTRODUCTION.....	9
2.1 BACKGROUND – STORIES OF CHANGE.....	9
2.2 CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED INTERVENTIONS.....	10
2.2.1 CONTEXT OF INTERVENTIONS	10
2.2.2 DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTIONS.....	12
2.2.3 INTERVENTION LOGIC MODELS	15
2.3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	18
2.3.1 OVERVIEW	18
2.3.2 METHODS	20
2.3.3 LIMITATIONS.....	22
3.0 KEY FINDINGS	22
3.1 GOAT INTERVENTION OUTCOMES	22
3.1.1 INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, THROUGH MANURE USE.....	22
3.1.2 INCREASED HOUSEHOLD INCOME FROM GOAT SALE.....	26
3.1.3 INCREASED USE OF GOATS AS HUNGRY-MONTH COPING STRATEGY.....	32
3.2 IRRIGATION INTERVENTION OUTCOMES	36
3.2.1 INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION	36
3.2.2 INCREASED ACCESS TO ADMARC MAIZE/INPUTS, THROUGH ADVOCACY	41
3.2.3 INCREASED ACCESS TO MORE PROFITABLE MARKETS	45
4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	52
4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS – GOAT INTERVENTION.....	54
4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS - IRRIGATION INTERVENTION.....	55
5.0 APPENDIX: TOOLS AND RESOURCES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.0 REFERENCES	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the globe, Oxfam has a long tradition of creating sustainable impact in the communities it serves. However, time and resource constraints often mean that programme results are not fully assessed, documented and shared with staff or the general public. Recognising the power of good data dissemination, Oxfam embarked on a new initiative in early 2009: called “Stories of Change”, this effort aims to combine quantitative results and ‘first-person’ narratives to develop strong communications materials that are backed up rigorous programme data. Overall, “Stories of Change” profile project achievements and challenges in four key country sites: Malawi, Haiti, India, and Sri Lanka. This particular document focuses on Oxfam’s work in Malawi, and specifically on its livelihood rehabilitation programme, which includes a goat distribution scheme (operational between 2005-2006 in the Thyolo district), and two irrigation schemes (constructed between 2005- 2007 in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts). Both of these interventions were designed and implemented with the intention of re-building more resilient livelihoods for local community members, following an acute food crisis in 2005.

In Thyolo Oxfam has distributed female goats to eligible local households as a low-cost, high-return strategy for giving recipients a versatile asset that can produce offspring for sale/food consumption and manure for sale/farming use. Since the intervention’s start in 2005, Oxfam has worked in partnership with District Government staff and local community-based organisation (CBO) partners to reach more than 2,798 beneficiaries in Thyolo through a simple process. First, Oxfam and partners raised local awareness about the project and set up Village Livestock Committees (or VLCs) to choose eligible goat recipients (who were typically persons living with HIV/AIDS, child heads of households, or other vulnerable community members). Once chosen, these beneficiaries each received one Oxfam-purchased female goat from the VLCs, with the distribution process supported by the CBOs. Male goats (bucks) were kept by the village head and were free for programme recipients to use in breeding). Beneficiaries then raised their goats, bred them with local bucks, and passed on the first born female kid to other identified beneficiaries. All subsequent offspring remained the property of the beneficiary for sale/home use/additional breeding. Oxfam also funded training for beneficiaries (delivered by government extension workers) on animal husbandry and housing, animal health, manure use, and other key topics. In addition, Oxfam-trained local livestock technicians delivered follow-up veterinary care and animal medicines.

By the end of the project’s lifespan, Oxfam and local partners aimed to achieve the following food/income security-related outcomes among beneficiaries: A 50% increase in beneficiaries’ annual agricultural production, through the use of goat manure to enrich soil, a 50% increase in beneficiaries’ annual household income, through the sale of kids bred from project does, and 80% of households using goats as a primary resilience/coping strategy during hungry months (by selling kids for cash and/or by consuming meat as part of the household diet).

Meanwhile, in Thyolo and neighbouring Mulanje, another intervention focused on improving crop cultivation through irrigation, with 997 local farmers (combined) benefiting as a result. The irrigation intervention’s process is also straightforward, working to mitigate poor/unreliable rainfall and improve crop yields through several steps. First, government extension workers helped communities identify locations for irrigation scheme construction (usually on land already being leveraged by local beneficiaries, but without formal irrigation canals). Oxfam and district extension workers then raised local awareness about the project and set up a local irrigation committee to manage the scheme.

Oxfam proceeded to build a network of cement irrigation canals which channeled water from a nearby natural source to arable land tracts (in both schemes, the tracts are privately-owned parcels whose owners have consented to lend their land for scheme use). After construction was completed, local committee members were trained to operate and maintain the canals. In parallel, local irrigation committees registered area farmers for tracts of irrigated land. Here, the sole determinant of eligibility was participants' capacity to pay an initial membership fee and an annual land rental fee. After registering, each producer got seasonal access to a farming plot until all plots were allocated (at which point no further applicants were accepted). During the rainy season, which typically lasts from (approximately) December to April, beneficiaries used their own household plots for subsistence cropping while irrigation scheme land owners farmed irrigation plots. In the dry season, scheme land owners gave the plots over to beneficiaries, who could then grow between one and three cycles of 'off-season' maize and vegetables.

To promote higher-yield harvests, Oxfam also provided local beneficiaries with "starter packs" of inputs at the onset of the project (including seeds and fertiliser/manure). On an ongoing basis, Oxfam-supported extension workers visited the community to advise beneficiaries on new farming techniques; Oxfam and partners also raised beneficiaries' awareness about state-sponsored coupons for subsidised fertiliser, and about inputs available from nearby depots run by ADMARC, the parastatal Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation whose functions include the provision of low-cost inputs and hungry-month maize supplies for area farmers. To promote better market access for scheme-grown crops, Oxfam-supported community committees identified market opportunities and in some cases concluded agreements with local buyers. Concurrent with these field-based efforts, Oxfam also funded and mentored local NGOs to lobby government officials--with the aim of influencing policy-making on ADMARC to ensure that its social roles are maintained, despite recent calls for its privatisation.

By the end of the irrigation intervention's lifespan, Oxfam and local partners aimed to achieve the following food/income security-related outcomes among beneficiaries: 70% of beneficiary households with greater annual production levels of maize/other crops, 70% of beneficiary households with access to ADMARC inputs (like fertilizer and seeds) and/or maize, and 70% of beneficiary households with access to markets that offer a profit margin of 30% or greater for the sale of maize and other scheme crops. While not explicitly stated as outcomes, improving gender equality and opportunities for/attitudes toward persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH/A) in local communities were key cross-cutting themes for both interventions—and a specific impact goal for the goat intervention, which aimed to achieve better health/care for chronically ill people/PLWH/A as a result of project activities.

In February 2009, Oxfam carried out an evaluation of both interventions' progress to date, with the aims of learning about *ex post* results and assess sustainability after project close-out, exploring the potential for possible future scale-up, and supporting the multi-country "Stories of Change" campaign to document and promote results more effectively. A mixed team of Oxfam and external evaluators aimed to determine whether the goat and irrigation schemes have in fact been moving toward the successful achievement of anticipated outcomes/impact in beneficiary communities; the team also wished to ascertain which, if any, of the interventions' accomplishments might be attributable to Oxfam support. While the very recent completion of both projects suggests that it may still be early to gauge the effects (if any) of Oxfam contributions, evaluators nonetheless felt the

longer-term outcome goals described above could serve as useful ‘yardsticks’ to measure progress to date toward longer-term project success.

To carry out its evaluation, the Oxfam team targeted samples of each intervention’s beneficiary population and compared these cohorts against non-beneficiary samples located in the same communities and with largely similar characteristics. Evaluators sought to determine whether clear differences existed between the two groups in the project areas described above—and if so, whether these differences may be attributable to Oxfam activities. The team used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, including—for the goat intervention only—a quantitative household survey administered to 80 beneficiary households and 80 non-beneficiary households, and for both interventions qualitative focus group discussions/semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders. These methods are described in detail in the full-length report that follows.

While the evaluation team was, in general, able to carry out a meaningful assessment of the goat and irrigation interventions, some limitations affected the quality and rigour of data collected. A lack of quantitative background data for the evaluation sites made comparative analysis difficult: for both projects, a shortage of good baseline data for the locations visited forced evaluators to rely on respondents’ *ex post* recollections of their prior livelihood status—a somewhat unreliable process—rather than simply comparing new reported responses with previously documented *ex ante* results. The timing of the evaluation also coincided with the peak of the annual ‘hungry season’; as a result, evaluators were concerned that respondents’ adverse circumstances might bias their responses toward the negative.

Yet despite these challenges, evaluators found promising results which suggest that both projects are, in many respects, making good progress toward its stated aims. For the **goat intervention**, in the outcome area of **increased production through manure use**, the team observed that 72% of beneficiaries who use goat manure cited production increases since joining the goat project (compared with only 32% of non-beneficiaries who used manure, most of which came from non-goat sources like chickens or cows). Beneficiaries reported that goat manure has helped boost crop yields by enriching soil quality and reducing the need for fertilizer, which was expensive and only improved yields in the short term (rather than contributing to long-term soil quality). In contrast, many non-beneficiaries cited their lack of good goat manure as a barrier to production growth. Evaluators also found that some female beneficiaries have become more empowered now that newly-available manure has catalysed the growth of household vegetable gardening. The growth of this activity, and women’s involvement in it, has provided female beneficiaries with a valued additional income source that they can manage independently of men in their communities. However, some challenges were also observed: in some communities, beneficiaries mentioned that other inputs that are key to production increases (eg. fertilizer, seeds, etc.) have been hard to obtain, impeding overall output growth.

In the outcome area of **increased household income through goat sale**, the team found that since the start of the project, beneficiary incomes have risen by an average of 70% (although more males than females feel that their incomes have risen since receiving a goat), and beneficiaries have earned between US\$10 and US\$50 for each full-grown goat kid sold. Many beneficiaries believed their ability to use goats as a ‘long-term livelihood asset’ was a key advantage of goat ownership: kids could be kept until shocks necessitated a sale; manure could be used year-round. The team also noted that goats can be key income generators for PLWH/A: they require little investment of labour

or time, and husbandry is not physically demanding. Finally, while income from goat/goat product sales has been used to pay for school fees, medication for household members with chronic illness, and other key expenditures—a key impact-level benefit—evaluators did note that most beneficiaries still rely on agriculture as their main income source at present; only 37% of beneficiaries have actually produced goat offspring for sale.

Where the **use of goats as hungry month coping strategy** is concerned, evaluators discovered that 80% of beneficiaries believe that goat ownership has helped them cope better in times of hunger, and that 64% of polled beneficiaries report an increase in overall food security since the start of the project (compared with only 22% of non-beneficiaries). Some beneficiaries have been able to reduce their hunger period from 8 months to 4 months through the sale of goats and use of goat products, which has replaced the need to sell maize—enabling the crop to be kept at home for consumption. However, most beneficiaries affirmed that ADMARC has not helped them reduce their hungry months/ combat food insecurity, as ADMARC depots are far from their communities and often poorly stocked. A majority also noted that they still presently rely on *ganyu* (or piecework) as their main coping strategy during hungry months—and that the use of goats/goat products to offset food shortages is still an emerging practice.

Moving to the **irrigation intervention**, evaluators also found promising results. In the outcome area of **increased agricultural production**, beneficiaries reported an average 114% rise in annual maize yields since joining the irrigation project (compared to a 77% mean increase among non-beneficiary farmers). Some beneficiaries were able to triple their annual harvests from 3 bags of maize to 12 bags in a single year, after using project “starter kits” of fertiliser and seed and accessing irrigated plots. Project-supported production growth may have also led to a rise in local women’s empowerment: beneficiaries noted that more women are leading farming activities since the start of the project. In the impact-level area of food security, 71% of beneficiaries reported feeling more food secure since joining the irrigation scheme (compared with only 25% of non-beneficiaries); since the start of the project, some beneficiaries have been able to reduce their annual hunger period from 8 months to naught. However, some beneficiaries raised concerns about the sustainability of project support. Key inputs like fertiliser are only provided free of charge at the start of the project; after that time, beneficiaries must purchase these items at prices that are usually very high.

On a related note, in the outcome area of **increased access to ADMARC inputs/maize, through better Oxfam-supported advocacy**, evaluators noted that government officials have recently decided to keep ADMARC’s social function of maize and input provision intact, reversing earlier plans to privatise the organisation. This outcome may be partly due to Oxfam support for ADMARC lobbying efforts: members of Parliament and ministerial staff noted that Oxfam-funded local advocacy groups provided key information about ADMARC and agricultural issues, and that parliamentarians often consulted these resources during their policy planning. Meanwhile, at the grassroots level some beneficiaries have used ADMARC coupons to purchase subsidised fertiliser, which in some cases has contributed to a doubling of annual crop yields. However, it appears that few beneficiaries rely on ADMARC for maize in hungry months—as ADMARC maize depots are too far, too crowded, or understocked during these times.

Finally, with regard to the outcome of **increased access to more profitable markets**, evaluators found that 45% of beneficiaries feel “better off” in the area of market access since joining the project

(compared with only 20% of non-beneficiaries). After project efforts to increase access, many beneficiaries have been able to sell new crops like wheat and tomatoes for the first time, with average profit margins for tomato sales exceeding 40 percent. Better market access has also likely translated into higher incomes: 72% of beneficiaries felt “better off” in the area of income generation since joining the project (compared with only 38% of non-beneficiaries). Some beneficiaries have used surplus scheme income to fund large-scale household activities like the construction of new dwellings, or the addition of tin roofing. However, evaluators noted that logistical challenges including a lack of transport and poor pricing coordination have impeded market access for some producers. In addition, programme activities do not appear to have focused on organising producers to enhance their bargaining power, nor have strong efforts been made to identify profitable markets for producers to access.

To help overcome these and other challenges, and to better inform future intervention planning, evaluators have made several **recommendations**. **Overall**, the team suggests that Oxfam and partner NGO staff may wish to carry out **more regular project monitoring and evaluation (M&E)**. Current data collection is somewhat sporadic, and data is often not fed back into project planning processes. Stronger M&E will help staff identify project strengths/weaknesses and enhance future planning. **For the goat project**, proactive **provision of non-manure farming inputs** (specifically fertiliser) may help beneficiaries overcome production challenges and boost their agricultural output (despite some risk of encouraging a longer-term reliance on project support). Closer **monitoring of the goat pass-on process** and more support for goat housing and veterinary care may improve overall animal health and encourage more beneficiaries to leverage goats as a key income generator and/or hungry-month coping mechanism. **For the irrigation project**, longer-term **provision of farming inputs**—beyond the current “starter packs”—could help beneficiaries grow their production more sustainably, improving longer term food security (although here too, the risk of dependency on project support also exists). **Enhanced advocacy efforts** (which could include more frequent training of local partners) may be a lower-risk way to help ensure that ADMARC inputs and maize are available in more communities across the programme coverage area, and in greater amounts. Finally, **increased producer capacity-building** and proactive efforts to **improve market opportunity identification, transport and storage** may help beneficiaries enhance their market access, income levels, and income security. If some or all of these suggestions are implemented in order to address key challenges, and if future project efforts build on both interventions’ current successes, then the goat and irrigation schemes have strong prospects for growth and scale-up.

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