

Evaluation of Oxfam Disaster Preparedness and Contingency Planning Project in Uganda

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The international community sees Uganda as a development success story. However Uganda faces a number of humanitarian challenges, both natural and conflict related. The 20-year conflict in the north of the country has resulted in the long-term displacement of up to 2 million people. Drought and unrest plagues the north-eastern Karamoja region, major flooding has affected up to 300,000 people in 2007 and the country plays frequent host to refugees from neighbours DRC, Sudan and Kenya.

In order to improve preparedness and response to these eventualities, Oxfam¹ in Uganda (Oxfam GB as the implementing affiliate, with Oxfam NOVIB and Oxfam Ireland) has developed a Disaster Preparedness and Contingency Planning (DPCP) project. Through this project, Oxfam aimed to improve the preparedness and increase effective and accountable humanitarian response by Oxfam and stakeholders. Thus, by doing so reduce the impact of natural and conflict related disasters in Uganda. The underlying principle being that good disaster preparedness lies in communication, consultation and coordination.

Recognising the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of this initiative, Oxfam built into the project a final review to assess the project achievements against expected results and advise the Oxfam International (OI) country team on an eventual follow-up phase.

One of the main overall finding was that from being initially focused on building the capacity of Oxfam as an organisation, the project ended up being much more outward looking than originally envisaged. According to Oxfam GB's Humanitarian Programme Coordinator this shift was deliberate and decided after the hazard, vulnerability and risk assessment conducted at the onset of the project revealed that one of the weakest element of the disaster preparedness and response mechanisms in place in Uganda were the District Disaster Management Committees. The second trigger for the shift was willingness and need for Oxfam to engage closely with the Office of the Prime Minister on developing a National Policy and strengthening existing systems in order to have a national-level impact.

The second positive overall point to note was that the project was widened during the course of its implementation to include more elements of Disaster risk Reduction (DRR) than just preparedness and contingency planning. Even though noted as a positive development by the review team, additional resources, particularly human resources, should have accompanied this shift as it diverted the attention of the Project Officer away from internal preparedness. As a result this aspect still requires significant investment, which will not be delivered as part of this project.

Overall the review team found that the project had delivered most of the results expected as per the project proposal approved by all affiliates. Some areas were more successful than others as detailed in the section on key findings per results mainly as a consequence of the two shifts mentioned above.

A significant achievement of this project was to widen the understanding of the hazards, risks and vulnerabilities affecting Uganda. The hazard, risk and vulnerability assessment conducted was found to be a good document, key to defining the focus Oxfam should have in terms of DRR programming and the review team found that the project had been well focused to address the key issues identified by the assessment. The assessment had however some key gaps, like for example not identifying flooding as a hazard, which the team found could have been avoided by getting feedback on the report from a wider range of actors than was done.

The project has been particularly successful in raising awareness with Oxfam GB in Uganda of disaster preparedness, of the importance of building effective response capacity² and more importantly of the need to integrate DRR within our programming. It was clear from the review that there was recognition that this is 'everyone's business'. Tangible steps towards better preparedness have however been limited. The contingency planning was not finalised at the time of the review and key activities to be implemented before the end of the project have been identified by the review team. There has however

¹ The group of affiliates working on this joint Oxfam programme will be referred to as Oxfam throughout this document.

² The fact that Oxfam GB has implemented a sizable humanitarian response during the implementation of this project also contributed to the increased awareness

been substantial progress made from the contingency plan that was in place before the start of the project.

The project has also been very successful at establishing Oxfam as a key interlocutor on issues of DRR in Uganda. This was achieved thanks to substantial time spent by the Project Officer in networking and investing in building capacity of national and district level government structures. Training sessions at District level have been very well received by most participants, enlisting the participation of the OPM in the DDMC sensitisation sessions was a very good decision that reinforced the linkages between the national and district level structures in place. The review team found that they had a significant impact on the functionality of the DDMCs in the two regions where Oxfam has a long-term presence, denoting the need for regular follow-up, which wasn't undertaken in the Elgon region where Oxfam does not work continuously.

These district-level activities also allowed Oxfam to establish key linkages with local organisations that could be instrumental in future humanitarian responses and in reducing disaster risks in their areas of operation. This is particularly important for regions where Oxfam doesn't have long-term programmes.

The main challenges identified through this review are:

- Long-term engagement with existing Oxfam counterparts proved difficult as not all existing partners were humanitarian actors or interested in the project.
- Limited follow-up actions taken after the capacity building sessions resulting in a risk that the learning be lost because of this lack of momentum
- Limited Oxfam affiliates and Oxfam GB Uganda field offices engagement with contingency planning delayed the process and means that in the last weeks of implementation the Project Officer will need to dedicate time to generating comments and embedding the plan.
- Limited skill development internally as a result of a wider external focus
- Limited leverage on government policies: the latest shift away from DRR in the policy developed by the OPM revealed the limitations in Oxfam and other actors' influence on policy making and the need for more aggressive and regular advocacy
- Project staffing vs. activities to be implemented

Finally the review team recommends that Oxfam in Uganda follow up on this project with a second phase. The momentum of the DPCP project should be capitalised upon from an internal and external perspective. The project provides an excellent launching pad for the full integration of DRR within Oxfam programming at a strategic and operational level. The second phase will need to be inclusive of all aspects of DRR, from community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives to a strong advocacy component to influence policy making and implementation at national level. External funding will probably be needed for a successful second phase as the scope will need to be considerable widened with the related effect of staffing and therefore funding necessary for a successful project.

The support and commitment of Oxfam GB Uganda senior management and the OI country team, together with the allocation of a dedicated officer, alongside the investment in his skills and competences development, have been instrumental in the success of this project and are probably the greatest assets for a successful second phase of DRR programming.

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