Evaluation of Oxfam Women in Leadership (WIL) Project in Sierra Leone

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT COMPONENT 1: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING WITH WOMEN'S NETWORK ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Assessment of partner selection process

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The selection process Oxfam used to identify its partner organisations for institutional strengthening was thorough and time consuming in marked contrast to its selection of 50/50 as the sole implementing partner for project component 2.

2. Oxfam belief that institutional strengthening could add significant value to the work of the women's networks selected and that the combination of partners would yield beneficial impact and learning has been partially realised. It would have been greater still had the two project components been better integrated.

3. In reaching different constituencies of women the participating organisations have significant combined out-reach capacity potential.

4. The Oxfam PACER project planned in partnership with 50/50 seeks to expand and develop project component 2. Oxfam is currently exiting from project component 1 and its formal partnerships with WF, FOMWASL and KTWN.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Given their combined outreach potential and emphasis on women's inclusion in decision-making it is recommended that Oxfam continues to work in partnership with all four women's network organisations supported under the WIL project. Considerable value added could be gained for PACER by maximising on their combined strengths; and a broader based project partnership would spread the risks Oxfam might otherwise incur through investing heavily in any one organisation.

3.2 Assessment: Types of capacity building provided

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The participating organisations have developed strategic plans. Their capacities to design and implement practical strategies to achieve objectives; demonstrate impact; and critically assess organisational strengths and weaknesses are weaker. Plan implementation is hindered by lack of funding.

2. With advisory support the networks have convened AGMs, established Governing Bodies and revised their Governing Documents which has promoted more democratic, transparent and accountable practice. The separation of roles and responsibilities for governance and operations are blurred and current arrangements are costly to maintain.

3. A marked disconnect exists between women leaders and women living in poverty at village level and although the responsiveness of the national leaders to the

needs of their constituent women's groups has increased there are still issues, including local expectations of funding that need to be resolved through improved and more regular communication.

4. Training in financial management has not been prioritised by the participating organisations even though Oxfam views this as a priority. Mechanisms to improve financial transparency are needed, as is greater organisational awareness of the appropriate balance between recurrent costs and programme delivery expenditure.

5. Of the training Oxfam has provided, most enthusiasm is expressed about the women's leadership training.

6. Given the short life span of the WIL project and its emphasis on physical outputs there has been little investment in coalition building across women's networks or more broadly within civil society.

7. Short training events can yield a number of direct and less direct benefits. However, deficits in skills and awareness are not the only root cause of poor organisational performance.

8. Capacity building without supportive funding makes high impact programme delivery difficult and limits the benefits to be won from the links between learning and practice.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Organisations implementing capacity building programmes are advised to consider:

1. Creating a small 'strategic programme initiatives grants fund' through which funds are allocated for specific programme activities with a built in allowance for directly associated recurrent costs. This can strengthen the interface between learning and doing and also encourage the growth of an organisational culture in which recurrent costs are carefully measured against costs which are essential for the achievement of programme impact.

2. The optimal balance of activities/inputs to up-grade specific skills through short training and strategies to strengthen issue based networking and coalition building; and to encourage learning and best practice exchange.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Oxfam's work with the KTWN in Kailahun, particularly the women's leadership programme is eminently replicable. It is recommended that it considers how best this might be up-scaled and further developed for expanded coverage in collaboration with other agencies working at village level.

3.3 Assessment: Appropriateness of strategies adopted

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Four defining features of project strategy are apparent: an emphasis on institutional strengthening as an end in itself; a focus on women's networks; an emphasis on strengthening individual institutional capacities; and the adoption of

different approaches for the two project components.

2. The approach to component 1 has centred on the development of stronger institutions rather than orientating capacity building inputs towards specific programme aims.

3. Lack of cohesion and joined up working across the women's networks detract from their current impact and future development.

4. Women's leaders and others emphasise the need to include and engage men in the development of new approaches towards more inclusive decision-making roles.

5. The project focus on women's networks has not encouraged the mainstreaming of gender issues into broader civil society initiatives and platforms. Stakeholders point to the lack of engagement women's networks have with others in wider civil society.

6. Scope exists for broadening the concept of civil society out from the individual organisations comprising it towards more issue based coalitions for joint action.

7. The interface between the women's networks and decentralised institutions is weak. Experiences from elsewhere suggest that elected representatives can play key roles in advancing women's interests in the twin process of decentralisation and PRS delivery and monitoring.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The findings of this review suggest that there is a need to design and implement a more comprehensive strategy to build the capacities of the women's networks and other civil society actors. Particular attention is warranted as regards the following:
   a) Building the capacity of women's network to work more coherently together and within broader civil society;
   b) Securing the engagement of men in initiatives to promote more inclusive decision making processes in which women play lead roles;
   c) Encouraging civil society to mainstream gender into their on-going programmes and actions;
   d) Building broader, issue based coalitions; and
   e) Strengthening the interface between women's networks and decentralised institutions especially on processes of governance reform and PRS delivery.

PROJECT COMPONENT 2: INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION ON LOCAL COUNCILS

4.2 Assessment of project component 2 achievements

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Full achievement of project component 1's objectives to meet the numerical targets set was constrained by a number of factors including: 50/50's decision to decentralise its coordination structures before commencing the short training courses; the delivery of TOT training immediately prior to the start of

campaigning; the selection of women on a district rather than a ward basis; inclusion of women who were not aspirant local councillors in the training; the lack of time to incorporate awareness raising around the decentralisation process and the roles and responsibilities of a local councillor in the adapted Training Manual; inadequate time to prepare women's campaigning messages; and lower levels of nomination than had been anticipated.

2. The constraints are partly explained by the lack of time for advance planning and preparation. However, their impact might have been reduced through the more systematic prioritisation of activities.

3. Closer collaboration with other women's networks, supported under component 2 of the WIL project, would almost certainly have made achievement of some targets easier.

4. Omission of training material to explain the decentralisation process and what the role of local councillor involves may have meant that some unsuitable candidates stood for election, were nominated and elected.

5. Feed back suggests that participants were satisfied with the quality of the training provided to TOTs and aspirant women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Timely advance planning, preparation and prioritisation in collaboration with other key civil society actors will be essential as will capturing relevant learning from the design and implementation of initiatives orientated to the 2007 Parliamentary elections.

2. Carefully designed and targeted training of aspirant women may be useful in building confidence and leadership skills (see assessment of project component 2) but should not be invested in at the expense of other priorities to reduce the structural constraints to women's full and equal participation (see below).

3. The relative costs and benefits of designing, delivering and implementing separate short courses for women aspirants as against the mainstreaming of gender sensitive training materials and messages into broader based programmes (such as the civic education and sensitisation work planned by the NEW Coalition) warrant further consideration. The NEW Coalition member organisations have significant outreach potential which if harnessed to that demonstrated by the four WIL participating organisations would enable far greater coverage than any one network operating in isolation could offer.

4. If a TOT method is to be used it is advised that training materials and methods developed in other African countries (e.g. South Africa) where achievements have been won for women's representation, participation and leadership on decentralised bodies. The creation by organisations funding/supporting TOT programmes of a small grant fund for use by accredited TOTs to enable them to conduct further training is also recommended.

5. Sensitisation and civic education programmes to enhance understanding of the following will be important::
   a) The meaning of decentralisation processes, particularly for people living in poverty, in the context of PRS delivery and monitoring;
   b) The roles of 'elected representative of decentralised bodies at different levels'

entails; and

c) What women as citizens can realistically expect from their elected representatives.

6. Learning components and delivery methods from the WIL Project (including the draft training manual) could be further assessed for possible adaptation and incorporation into future strategies designed to increase women's electoral participation and effectiveness.

4.3 Structural constraints to women's participation in the 2004 local council elections

KEY FINDINGS:

1. A significant number of structural constraints impacted negatively on women's participation as candidates and voters in the 2004 local council elections including the following:

    a) Most significant in terms of women's participation as voters was the lack of broad based civic education.

    b) Constraints on women's participation as candidates included: NEC capacity weaknesses, the gender insensitivity and approach of some NEC officials; political party reluctance to give women candidates symbols; lack of clarity about the status of independent candidates; misconceptions about what 50/50 was trying to achieve; question marks about the impartiality and neutrality of 50/50 selection processes; women's lack of access to campaign funds; and their low levels of confidence, literacy and education, especially in the north.

    c) Additional constraints concerned inequitable gender relations, men's attitudes towards women, and women's attitudes towards other women at individual and organisational levels. Men's hostility towards the idea of women in politics and women in leadership roles manifested itself in domestic violence. Male intimidation and threatening behaviour included penultimate threats about taking aspirant women to 'male secret societies'.

    d) Many stakeholders consulted believe that a priority is to design new strategies that will help to secure the engagement rather than opposition of men.

    e) A disconnect exists between women leaders and the majority of women at village level and is expressed in worries about the constituency system.

    f) A priority finding is to enhance the voice of women living in poverty through working from the bottom up so that they can assume positions of leadership and challenge unrepresentative and unresponsive organisations and leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Since women's electoral participation was blocked by structural constraints these will need to be considered fully in the design and implementation of future strategies.

2. Advocacy priorities will need to be clearly identified for the design and implementation of a shared civil society strategy to remove some of the identified structural constraints identified by the review. Mainstreaming these into on-going initiatives is an option that warrants further exploration.

3. The design and delivery of gender sensitive civic education and sensitisation campaigns will be needed to encourage the engagement of men and challenge misconceptions about women's leadership roles and capabilities.

4.5 Support to elected women representatives on decentralised bodies

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Both male and female councillors are reported to be underperforming in their new roles.

2. Women's participation and leadership on local councils is complicated and coloured by gender relations and a range of constraints that are gender specific.

3. Women's multiple and conflicting responsibilities make it difficult for them to attend council meetings regularly.

4. Training provided to all women councillors by Oxfam and 50/50 on the Local Government Act Made Simple was found to be extremely useful.

5. On local councils where meetings are conducted in English, the participation of women councillors is particularly constrained. Many women councillors lack confidence due to their lower levels of literacy and education relative to men.

6. Male councillors are keen to confine women to follower-ship roles. Women tend to tow the male line. To date there is not a single discussion on women's issues recorded in local council minutes.

7. The constraints to women's full and effective participation on ward and village development committees are atypically acute. Participation on these bodies would significantly increase women's participation in decisions affecting their lives; and might encourage and qualify a number to stand for higher office.

8. There is also a pressing need to build women's capacities to facilitate their active participation in decision making around decentralisation and poverty reduction strategy processes at village and ward levels.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continuing and on-going support to women councillors (and other elected representatives of decentralised bodies) is extremely important in order for them to perform effectively. Moreover, these women serve as a role model or mirror to potential aspirants.

2. Learning from the WIL project suggests that Oxfam is well placed to play a lead role in sensitisation campaigns around the LGA given that it has already developed and used a 'Local Government Act made Simple' sensitisation package. [1]

3. Provided civic education and sensitisation programmes are designed well enough in advance they could realistically incorporate gender sensitive, rapid skills upgrading, 'literacy for adults' components. In addition, English for Adults learning components could be incorporated into women's leadership training programmes for use at Village, Ward and possibly district level

[1] There are obvious advantages to be won by incorporating information about the role of Village and Ward Development Committees into this. Inclusion of related information on PRS delivery might also be included.

RECOMMENDATION TO DFID:

1. Additional inputs to the Decentralisation Secretariat to ensure that the identification of capacity gaps and the design and implementation of the five year capacity building strategy are gender sensitive would be helpful. A priority is to mainstream gender into on-going planning, implementation and monitoring systems and processes so that they are not marginalised within wider change processes. It will be important to establish on-going monitoring mechanisms in this regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OXFAM:

1. The specific constraints women councillors face warrant further consideration. Oxfam could undertake a case study of women elected to Kalahun local councils and then pilot various capacity building approaches and methods at district level. The results of on-going monitoring could usefully be fed into the Decentralisation Secretariat's capacity building programme.

2. In addition to the initiatives outlined in the PACER project proposal it is recommended that the following are considered:
   a) The design, implementation and monitoring of a pilot project in collaboration with the KTWN to build the leadership capacities necessary for women to assume proactive roles on Ward and Village Development Committees.
   b) Further exploration of local level initiatives to promote women's engagement with decentralised institutions on PRS delivery and monitoring.
   c) Collaboration with other INGOs working at district and village levels in different parts of Sierra Leone to achieve expanded coverage through joint-programming.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

Some clear gains have been won through the twin efforts of the WIL Project to increase the number of women elected as local councillors; and to strengthen the institutional capacities of local NGO networks representing women.

5.1 The key challenge

The key challenge: The underlying rationale that drove the OGB WIL Project, namely that: '***women and girls are over-represented among the poor and under-represented in decision- making*'** remains valid.

The findings of the review suggest that simply increasing women's numerical representation on national and decentralised decision making bodies will not, taken alone, be sufficient. A majority of women in Sierra Leone are confined to a life of poverty; marginalised within the chiefdom system of governance; and at risk of continuing exclusion from decision-making within newly decentralising institutions as well as from full and equal participation in developing, democratic electoral processes and the still emergent civil society. In addition, male resistance to women's increased public participation at all levels and to tackling the issues they prioritise is entrenched.

5.2 A four pronged approach

A four pronged **approach** is recommended that is designed to:

1. **REDUCE** and **REMOVE:** the structural constraints that lie at the root of women's continuing lack of engagement with and representation, participation and leadership on public decision making bodies.
2. **PROMOTE:** women's decision-making roles by providing them with the support they need to take full advantage of new opportunities as they arise.
3. **MAINSTREAM:** initiatives to remove structural constraints and to promote women's decision making roles into on-going institutional and policy reform processes and civil society initiatives to influence these so that they are integral to the bigger picture rather than being confined to the margin.
4. **BUILD:** the capacities of institutions and specific groups to ensure realisation of the above**.**

5.3 Demand driven initiatives: Potential for integrated programme development

KEY FINDINGS:

1. To date the bulk of international aid and development cooperation has targeted supply driven initiatives to challenge the root causes of Sierra Leone's conflict ridden heritage. However, brief consideration of three existing programme initiatives (the proposed Oxfam PACER Project; New Coalition work on electoral reform and the forthcoming 2007/8 elections; and emergent ENCISS priorities around decentralisation, governance reform and PRS delivery and monitoring) suggest that a good base starting point exists for the development of a larger, more holistic programme to enhance women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership in public decision making with a focus on good governance and poverty reduction.

2. There are a significant number of INGOs working at village, ward and district levels in different parts of the country. A number of them have worked, or are working, together, on initiatives around the PRS and governance reform processes. This suggests that there is potential for more joined up working on initiatives to encourage women's engagement with decentralised institutions and promote their representation, participation and leadership on these.

3. The above mentioned examples of demand driven initiatives could, if refined and joined up more, impact positively on women's roles in decision making around PRS delivery and governance reform particularly at local levels. To have maximum impact and in order to draw in other relevant initiatives, however, leadership would be needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. It is strongly recommended that Oxfam broadens the remit of its Phase II project, the PACER, towards a broader based approach that addresses the structural constraints to women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership on these; and actively promotes their

increased decision-making roles particularly at village and ward levels with a focus on PRS delivery and monitoring.

2. Currently most INGOs with a long term presence in the country are re-defining their country programmes in the transition from what were largely humanitarian initiatives to longer term development programming. Whilst their collective potential for joint programming around a demand driven initiative of the type recommended in this review may currently be constrained by internal change such transition demands, there is considerable scope for Oxfam to explore such future joint programming further.

3. There are various options that warrant further consideration in terms of identifying a possible lead organisation for the development of a more holistic and integrated programme.

5.4 Mainstreaming gender issues into supply driven reform initiatives

KEY FINDING:

1. On-going supply led initiatives to build institutional capacities for democratic, electoral processes; accountable, decentralised institutions and reform of the chiefdom governance system; and maximisation of PRS 'drivers for change' are essential to the promotion of women's roles in decision-making.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

1. To realise significant impact it is recommended that women's priorities and interests are mainstreamed more centrally and visibly into the components of supply led initiatives around decentralisation and good governance; electoral reform; and PRS delivery and monitoring.

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