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# EFFECTIVE WAYS OF LINKING RELIEF AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Oxfam's experience of implementing programmes using EU  
Food Facility funds

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# WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

The increase in food prices from late 2007 through 2008 created many challenges for developing countries, particularly for net food-importing countries. The effects of food price rises on the poor in these countries threatened to reverse what progress had been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty worldwide. At the same time, higher food prices provided an opportunity to stimulate the agricultural sector in many developing countries. In December 2008, the European Parliament and the European Council adopted a regulation establishing a €1bn facility for access to agricultural inputs and services, and improvements in agricultural productive capacity. This would become known as the EU Food Facility (EUFF).<sup>1</sup>

On 2 December 2011, the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) put out a press release that stated: *'The EU Food Facility has been a tremendous success. It proves that linking relief, rehabilitation and development can have a concrete impact on people's food security'. It 'provided tangible evidence that investing in agriculture and nutrition improves global food security' and 'by linking farmers to markets and financial services, assisting in facilitating sustainable and profitable farming practices and creating new revenue streams, the effects of the EUFF will continue into their futures.'*<sup>2</sup>

According to the press release, *'lessons learned from the initiative underscore the importance of:*

- focusing on marginalized farmers with high production potential,*
- combining input distribution with extension services,*
- building capacities of smallholder farmers and their communities,*
- rehabilitating rural infrastructures, and*
- involving all actors of the value chain in local seed production.'*<sup>3</sup>

These are bold claims, with important implications for future policy on how to support smallholder farmers. How far are they justified? Oxfam was programme manager or implementer in several EUFF-funded programmes which ran from late 2009 or early 2010, and the evaluations which followed these very much bear out the statement made by WFP, FAO and IFAD.

In each country where Oxfam ran EUFF programmes the analysis from baseline surveys – and usually from lengthy experience in the areas proposed for intervention as well – concluded that farmers faced the same or very similar obstacles. They needed certain basic inputs, in particular seeds (better quality, timely and affordable) and irrigation water; they required both access to markets (roads and venues) and power in markets (organization and training, market information); they needed cash and/or credit (to tide them over lean times and/or as investments); and they needed services (such as agricultural advice and veterinary help). A baseline survey in Nepal was typical; it quantified low levels of food self-sufficiency by month, low consumption of various foodstuffs and various coping strategies, such as borrowing cash, and

concluded that these were ultimately due to ‘serious problems of persistent drought, poor agricultural practices, lack of access to credit, low soil fertility, low level of government intervention and lack of specific programmes for food security for local communities’. A baseline survey for the Pakistan programme showed how farmers were exploited by middlemen who would lend money for inputs at high rates of interest, which meant that farmers could end up paying them back with half or in some cases up to 70 per cent of their produce.

As a result of the baseline studies, the Oxfam programmes set out to tackle these issues, in line with EUFF strategy (see Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1 Oxfam EUFF programmes**

Country	Cost (total: EC funds-plus other in millions of Euros)	Number of beneficiaries	Dates
Nepal	1.608	46,000	12/2009 – 10/2011
Pakistan	2.290	35,000	01/2010 – 01/2012
Ethiopia	2.205	46,000	12/2009 – 12/2010
Eritrea	1.187	47,000	02/2010 – 12/2011
Tanzania	1.111	100,000	01/2011 – 10/2011
Mali	1.886	50,000	01/2010 – 01/2012
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.287</b>	<b>324,000</b>	

Our experience demonstrates that it is possible to design and run relief programmes that target the poorest producers affected by a sudden negative change in circumstances in ways that provide them with effective help and which leave them better off and better able to withstand future shocks.

‘After attending training on implementing farming systems...I gained confidence that I can grow vegetables and sustain my family. I called my husband back from India... we are now able to earn more from the vegetables than from the remittances sent by my husband. My husband can live with our family at home now.’

Sarumati (Dadeldhura, Nepal)

Moreover, our experience of the EUFF programme indicates that this is a valid approach to rural development more generally, in non-emergency situations. In ‘normal’ situations, the rural poor face regular uncertainty and recurrent shocks that leave people in a state of more or less chronic emergency. However, our experience in these programmes demonstrates the enormous potential that exists among some of the world’s most poor and marginalized smallholder farmers to rapidly generate large increases in both productivity and production, both of food crops and of income-raising products. But that is only possible if they get the right kinds of assistance to help them ‘take off’ and if, importantly, farmers themselves are leaders of the process.

**Table 2 EUFF programme intervention chain**

Social protection	Inputs	Organizational development	Power in markets	Convening and brokering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective cash-for-work for infrastructure (e.g. roads, dams, irrigation works, tree planting, re-greening, etc)</li> <li>• Unconditional cash transfers to meet food needs during the hungry season</li> <li>• Food vouchers and support to traders</li> <li>• Small livestock and veterinary services</li> <li>• Beneficiary involvement, agency accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeds, tools, feed, micro-irrigation, seed banks, grain stores</li> <li>• Training on improved agricultural practices (e.g. composting)</li> <li>• Land rights</li> <li>• Access to credit</li> <li>• Stoves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal creation of producer groups; also irrigation management groups, grain store groups, pasture management groups, etc</li> <li>• Capacity building for new and existing groups</li> <li>• Emphasis on women's groups and women's involvement</li> <li>• Farmer to farmer</li> <li>• Scaling up and broadening out organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business training</li> <li>• Value chain analysis, market information</li> <li>• Linkages with the private sector e.g. assistance in negotiations</li> <li>• Access to credit, bank loans, micro insurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linkages with state authorities and service providers at local, regional and national levels</li> <li>• Linkages with the private sector</li> <li>• Advocacy on budgets, policy changes, frameworks, etc, from local to national level</li> </ul>

## WHAT OXFAM DID

Oxfam managed (as lead agency) and implemented EUFF-funded programmes in several countries, as listed in Table 1.<sup>4</sup> In each case, Oxfam worked with and through local NGO partners.

The programmes were founded upon: targeting poor and marginal farmers, with a particular focus on women farmers; beneficiary involvement; organizational formation, development and capacity building; and training on improved practices. The actions taken fell into several categories and spanned, in each programme, a spectrum of interventions. The balance varied and interventions overlapped, but most of the programmes implemented some work in each of the following categories:

- Social protection, including: cash or food vouchers; the supply of key inputs, especially seeds, feed and tools; and cash-for-work for infrastructural development, such as micro-irrigation, roads, dykes or re-greening pastoral land;
- Producer organization, via the formation of and/or strengthening of community associations through capacity building;
- Creating access to markets for farmers and strengthening power in markets by bolstering producer organizations, convening and brokering partnerships, and co-operating with/linking to business and markets;

- Creating or strengthening new frameworks for rural development by linking together the various possible actors, including government, to bring in services, and by strengthening the capacity of organizations to undertake advocacy at various levels to improve policies.

## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

Not all programmes achieved the same results, or the same level of results, but the most successful reported impressive achievements. The following are examples from the evaluations.

In Nepal, the number of households facing acute food insecurity was reduced from 21 to 13 per cent over the 22 months that the programme ran; at least 1,603 of the most vulnerable families had access to sufficient food during the 2010 hungry seasons of February-March and July-August; and there was a significant increase of between 40 and 70 per cent (or more) in productivity per hectare of major cereals (wheat, maize and paddy) and vegetable crops by targeted smallholder farmers. The seasonal migration rate dropped from 6.7 to 3.9 per cent; selling productive resources dropped from 11 to 6.4 per cent; and borrowing cash at high interest rates dropped from 90 to 74 per cent. The programme supported 141 micro-irrigation systems benefitting 4,594 households. Irrigation alone increased productivity by 50 per cent. Prior to the programme only 16 per cent of farmers used improved seeds, but, by 2011, 100 per cent were using them. According to the evaluation: 'Every household is now engaged in kitchen gardening and 72 per cent of families have been eating vegetables five days a week as against the previous time when only 27 per cent of families could eat vegetables for only 2 days a week.' Many households cultivated high-value cash crops on the irrigated land and considerably increased their income.

In Ethiopia, 72 per cent of beneficiaries reported that their income increased by over 30 per cent; food aid beneficiaries decreased by 66 per cent; 90 per cent of households got adequate and timely access to agricultural inputs; 85 per cent of beneficiaries increased production by 50 per cent or more; and there were significant increases in cereals and vegetables on the market.

In Eritrea, 320 farmers in nine vegetable producer groups increased production by 200 per cent and income by 100 per cent from vegetable sales. Irrigation was a particular feature of the Eritrea programme – irrigation systems and the formation of irrigation management groups. It included building two micro-dams, one with half a million cubic metres capacity and another with 300,000 cubic metres capacity. The access to water and irrigable land has increased by 300 per cent and the income of the target beneficiaries also increased by 100 per cent; vegetable production has increased greatly and evaluators noted how, 'now every Saturday a bus/truck goes to Dengel to transport the people and vegetable production to the market. This is new development as the result of irrigation production increase.'

# WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHY?

Success was due first and foremost to the coincidence between the programming strategy of the EUFF and the way in which Oxfam has increasingly conceived of its programmes and practice. The EUFF-funded way of working was not new to Oxfam in some cases, but it enabled Oxfam to expand and strengthen its way of working.

Overall, the following key lessons from the Ethiopia programme would apply to all. These were that to succeed you need to:

- Collaborate with a (wide) variety of stakeholders, including the private sector;
- Design projects that are community-managed;
- Organize farmers into groups;
- Provide a cash transfer (in the form of cash-for-work or an unconditional grant or voucher), so people can withstand shocks, keep assets and develop infrastructure.

In short, the programmes provided the sort of three-fold support that has been identified by Wiggins and Leturque<sup>5</sup> and others as essential to effective aid that can liberate the potential of small farmers:

- Stability in the face of price volatility and incentives to earn more money from farming;
- Investment in public goods including roads, agricultural research and extension, water, education and energy;
- Strategies to overcome the problem of chronic failure in rural financial markets.

## **Farmer-led organization and power in markets**

The foundation of each programme was the formation or strengthening of farmer's groups – in Ethiopia this numbered 541 producer organizations, 50 market-oriented farmer organizations and 28 water and irrigation user groups (nearly 14,000 farmers in total).

In Pakistan, Oxfam and its local partners worked with 35,000 people in 180 villages. The foundation of the programme was the forming and intensive training of 180 farmer organizations – one per village – and then the creation of a second tier of 18 producer organizations charged with developing links to the private and public sectors to maximize profits for the farmer's organizations.

Tanzania particularly focused on training women in entrepreneurship and leadership skills. Thirty-four enterprise groups were formed. The programme focused especially on rice growing and marketing, and chicken production (something women do in particular). Another innovation was identifying and supporting farmer's own innovations, e.g. two women farmers independently devised a design for a new planting tool for rice that evenly spaces the seeds.

## Quick wins and social protection

'Quick wins' were important, usually in the form of food vouchers or cash-for-work in the hungry season in order to provide rapid relief and so that people did not have to eat into their assets. These interventions also provided entry points to build trust and goodwill and ways of working for longer term interventions. In Eritrea, good quality de-wormed small livestock were distributed to poor farmers identified by community members. Animal fairs were organized and beneficiaries were able to choose animals and purchase them with vouchers. (The Eritrea programme was also unusual in that it trained women to make 1,000 energy-saving cook stoves; monitoring indicated a 60 per cent reduction in firewood consumption and a 75 per cent reduction in the time taken by women to collect fuel as a result).

The Nepal evaluation reported:

'Involvement of CMCs[community management committees] and the target beneficiaries in issues such as the variety of food to be distributed, the required quantity and quality, availability of those food items in the local market, and contractual agreement with local traders, were some of the new approaches applied... The targeted beneficiaries did not feel that they were at the receiving end of the food distribution system but rather owned the system through their active participation in the entire process' ('Participatory Food Assistance Programme').

## Seeds and other inputs

Getting seeds to people was an absolutely crucial part of most programmes. In Pakistan, the seeds were combined with a package of fertilizer and tools, and this package was responsible for production increases of 29 per cent for wheat and 100 per cent for okra. Seed fairs were organized to bring together the farmers with seed companies, traders and officials from the seed certification department. Previously the companies, traders and officials had only really known about and supplied to large and corporate farmers. Provision of vegetable seeds brought particular benefits to many women by enabling them to start kitchen gardening, vegetable production and marketing their surplus produce at local markets. The opportunity to earn was noted to have increased women's confidence and increased their status in the family and community.

In Nepal, 14 seed banks were established and, at the time of the evaluation, most were operating well and had already started buying certified seeds from seed growers and selling these to the farmers in their respective villages. Again, farmers attributed production increases of between 40 and 100 per cent to having access to improved seeds. The baseline survey had shown that only 16 per cent of farmers were using improved seeds; by the project end, 100 per cent of the targeted households had access to them.

Grain banks were also set up in Pakistan, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone. In Pakistan, the community grain banks, set up in response to the food price emergency played a crucial role in another: during the floods in Sindh in 2010 (and again in one district in 2011) they formed an on-the-spot food reserve that was mobilized for relief. Indeed, they formed the primary source of food for the disaster survivors.

In Sierra Leone, people had been forced to eat their rice seeds during the hungry season. Receiving new seeds – for vegetables, cassava and groundnuts – meant that they did not need to take out seed loans from unscrupulous traders, which have often kept them in a cycle of exploitation and poverty, and meant that they could diversify their harvest. Evaluators said: ‘With all fields planted in 2011, beneficiaries are more able to secure their household food needs for the coming year, their seed rice for the next cropping season, and to avoid taking up credit.’

## **Collaborating with a wide variety of organizations**

The scale, ambition and multi-faceted nature of the programmes, and the imperative to relate to and involve numerous organizations across a whole spectrum of society, proved to be a challenge across all the programmes. In most cases it worked, but the strategy had to be thoroughly prepared, and the time, energy and resources required had to be anticipated and planned for from the start. This was generally possible because the Oxfam programmes concerned had a strong, long-term presence in the areas going back many years and had strategic partnerships with local bodies. Oxfam programmes had also been moving for some time in the direction of doing this kind of programme. For example, the Tanzania EUFF programme was built on numerous Oxfam studies in previous years and was incorporated with an existing 10-year programme of agricultural scale-up work which had begun in 2007. Rice producers in the EUFF programme formed stakeholder’s forums in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives. They are part of a region-wide East African Agricultural Productivity programme to improve the rice value chain to make sure smallholders benefit more from their crop than they have previously.

The Nepal programme was implemented in partnership with local NGOs under an ongoing Public Health and Basic Livelihoods Support programme in 75 communities across 14 Village Development Committees. It targeted 6,413 smallholder households, focusing on women-headed households, Dalits, ethnic groups, poor and landless families, and other disadvantaged communities. It was eventually able to target as many as 7,224 households, or more than 46,000 people.

## **Strengthening producer organization**

Forging successful collaboration is time-consuming and laborious; the number and variety of meetings that are required can almost make it sound like a parody of development work. In Ethiopia, Oxfam took on 45 staff and put a huge amount of time and effort into arranging and facilitating meetings between farmers, government at numerous levels,

and the private sector. There were familiarization workshops, consensus building training workshops, multi-stakeholder taskforces, thematic workshops, regional value chain development forums, taskforce forums, a national learning event and many more. It is crucial to recognize, however, that this networking was necessary and indeed key to the success of the programme, such as the creation or strengthening of 541 producer groups.

In Nepal, local partners took on 239 field staff, including social and community mobilizers and facilitators from the project areas, which proved to be an effective strategy for promoting and achieving greater community accountability, and for creating a sense of ownership and commitment. Recruitment was followed by intensive training (in book-keeping, vegetable marketing, seed bank management, participatory processes, business planning, co-operative management, and gender and social inclusion).

The result was the establishment of a regular mechanism for sharing and learning between the farmers involved and the Village Development Committees, District Development Committees, District Agricultural Development Officer, Ministry of Agricultural Development and Co-operatives, the Nepal Agriculture Research Council and state-owned companies. Farmers now have access to regular support in areas like training on improved farming systems (seed multiplication, post harvesting, composting, etc). At district level, the government set aside a budget for working with the project and has incorporated it into its annual plan and budget for the fiscal years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. At the national level, the Right to Food network is actively engaged in advocacy and networking on food security policy issues. The network currently includes 41 member organizations, primarily national NGOs and federations.

## **Using value chain analysis**

Value chain analysis was successfully used to understand how markets worked for different products and to identify opportunities and then to bring producers together with the private sector (as buyers and as providers of inputs). Strengthening producers in terms of assets and organization allowed them to wield greater power in markets, as well as more equitable access. In Ethiopia, nearly 14,000 farmers were organized into 619 market-oriented co-operatives and producer groups, and linked with service and input providers. Once farmers had the wherewithal, organization and confidence to grow more crops, like malt barley and potatoes, they were linked to and able to negotiate with potential buyers in the nearest town. Twenty-nine barley and malt producer organizations gained a contract to sell their barley to a brewery and malt factory at a rate 15 per cent higher than the local market price. Strengthening value chains was especially important in the seed sectors (through agreement on supply, quality assurance, set prices and product collaboration). The malt factory supported farmers by providing them with seeds for the selected malt barley varieties that met its specific requirements and followed this up with technical agronomic support. To boost farmer's role in the value chain Oxfam helped them handle all parts of the process of seed cleaning (using a new machine), seed bagging

(providing standard sacks) and marketing. Market information billboards were set up with price information for major crops on a weekly basis.

In Pakistan, the evaluation noted how farmers in Sindh were selling up to 22 per cent more wheat and had received better prices compared to the pre-project situation. More than 75 per cent of households were introduced to new buyers in the local market, around 80 per cent of target households received training in marketing, and 25 per cent of total target households in Sindh undertook market exchange visits. The programme there analyzed agricultural credit programmes to discover why they were failing smallholder farmers; it challenged rural banks to provide credit and experimented with crop insurance. These are longer-term and continuing initiatives.

The Tanzania programme created 'commodity forums' in chicken and rice value chains in order to develop links with sellers, suppliers and buyers, and to understand standards, credit, pricing, etc. It used 60 market price information boards and in each place a farmer was trained to get the price of commodities via mobile phone and post prices regularly.

In Nepal, the programme found that in some areas a number of households had started producing such a sizable volume of agriculture produce that it could not be sold in the market after meeting the household requirements. This kind of situation was not envisaged during the design phase of the project, and so the programme moved to organize and promote co-operatives at various levels.

## WHAT DIDN'T WORK AS WELL AND WHY?

It might be thought, given that the big global food price rise began in late 2007 and continued throughout 2008 and the EUFF programmes did not start until 2010-2011, that the programmes were late in responding. However, food prices had remained high. Furthermore, the food price rise was only the latest in a series of interlocking challenges facing smallholder farmers that had kept them in chronic poverty and made them vulnerable to a number of possible shocks.

The complexity and ambition of the programmes strained the capacity of several countries in terms of management and logistics. As a result, some interventions were late and, as they were often time-dependent on the stage of the agricultural cycle, they were less effective when they eventually happened. The Sierra Leone evaluation, for example, reported considerable achievements, but adds:

*'[H]owever, project planning was over optimistic for the time available and time lost in 2010 over seed procurement and partner operational agreement could not be recovered' and 'given the short embedding period, the gains of the [project] are potentially fragile and there is no guarantee that the groups will be able to sustain their present level of function after the project end.'*

Even though programmes ran over two years, delays and other problems in some cases meant that it was not possible to adequately monitor and evaluate the effectiveness or sustainability of interventions, particularly interventions that occurred close to the ending of the programme. In some of the country evaluations, sufficient hard data was unfortunately missing that would have substantiated qualitative surveys of success based on what farmers say they achieved.

## WHAT NEXT?

As this case study was going to press, the EU published its Final Evaluation of the EU Food Facility, and lessons learned from the full range of over 240 projects in 50 countries.

As WFP, FAO and IFAD say:

*‘As food prices are expected to remain high and volatile in the coming years, it is essential to maintain the momentum created by the EUFF in promoting agriculture as the most effective means of reducing global hunger and poverty... It is crucial to build on these lessons and step up efforts to enable the world’s most vulnerable people to withstand future shocks and produce the food they need to live active and healthy lives.’*

As the EU has concluded, it seems clear that this approach works and that more programmes of this type should be implemented on a regular basis and on longer time-scales. The EU Final Evaluation recommends that:

*‘The EU should consider converting the EU FF into a permanent “Stand-by” instrument, in order to respond rapidly to upcoming and sudden Food Price Crisis, and mitigate impacts on food insecurity situations.’<sup>6</sup>*

‘I had no income to support my eight family members. We were always dependent on loans from middleman to survive. We learnt the importance of a business organizations and how it can help farmers solve their agriculture related problems through collective thinking.’

Muhammad Azam (Hakeem village, Pakistan)

# EVALUATIONS/END OF PROGRAMME REPORTS

Nepal (2012) '*Improving Food Security in Communities Vulnerable to Food Price Volatility project*', Natural and Organizational Resource Management Services (NORMS)

Ethiopia (2011) 'Supporting production and market based solutions to soaring food prices in Ethiopia', Oxfam.

Pakistan (2012) 'Enhancing Food Security and Resilience of Small Farmers in Sindh and Baluchistan Provinces of Pakistan', Oxfam

Eritrea (2011) 'Final report: Improving Food Security, Debub, Eritrea', Oxfam

Mali (2012) 'Evaluation project filets sociaux du Nord au Sud du Mali',

Tanzania (2011) 'Final narrative report, Improving Incomes, Market Access and Disaster Preparedness: A rapid response to food insecurity in Shinyanga Tanzania', Oxfam

See also Liberia (2010) 'Promoting Food security in southeast Liberia through commercial rice value chain development', interim report, Oxfam

Also: Sierra Leone (2011) 'Report of the final evaluation of the enhancing productivity and resilience of households project under the European Commission Facility for rapid response to soaring food process in developing countries', Concern Worldwide (consortium lead)

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On 17th December 2012, as this case study was going to press, the EU released its final evaluation of the EUFF, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/ruraldev/food\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/ruraldev/food_intro_en.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Amir Abdulla, WFP Deputy Executive Director (2011) WFP, FAO, IFAD press release, <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/fao-ifad-and-wfp-reach-22-million-people-massive-eu-investment-agriculture>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the six listed Oxfam was also involved in an EUFF programme in Liberia (€1.436m) that focused specifically on a smaller group of rice farmers and is not considered here; and Oxfam was part of consortia which implemented EUFF programmes in Sierra Leone (led by Concern Worldwide) and Kenya (led by Save the Children).

<sup>5</sup> S. Wiggins and H. Leturque (2010) 'Helping Africa to Feed Itself: Promoting agriculture to address poverty and hunger', Development Policy Forum/Friends of Europe discussion paper, in association with the European Commission DG Development, and in co-operation with ODI and Future Agricultures. Available at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/6265.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> EU Food Facility Final Report, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/ruraldev/food\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/ruraldev/food_intro_en.htm)

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This case study was written by John Magrath. It is part of a series of papers and reports written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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## OXFAM

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