

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Resilience in Nepal: Evaluation of mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and enhancing response capability (Effectiveness Review Series 2013/14)*

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1. The context and background of the review

As part of Oxfam Great Britain’s (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of mature projects are randomly selected each year and their effectiveness rigorously assessed. The ‘Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and enhancing response capability’ project was selected for review in this way under the resilience thematic area.

The project’s overall objective is to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability in local communities and institutions through support to strategies that enable them to better prepare for, mitigate and respond to natural disasters. The community-level activities carried out included the formation of community disaster-management committees, small-scale disaster mitigation activities, community training on hazards, first-aid and search and rescue, and the establishment of a flood early-warning system. These project activities were implemented in 10 communities, located in Alital and Jogbudha village development committee (VDC) areas in western Nepal. These communities are spread across three river basins – the Rangun, Puntara and Sadani – and are particularly vulnerable to flash flooding. The project was implemented between 2010 and 2013 with Oxfam in partnership with Integrated Development Society (IDeS), a local organisation.

The Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the project activities in August and September 2013. A survey was carried out with households in the ten communities supported by the project, as well as with households in ten nearby communities that were not included in the project, for comparison purposes. In all, 610 households were interviewed. At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences between project participant households and comparison households, to increase confidence when making assessments of the project’s impact.

The primary aim of the Effectiveness Review was to assess the project’s impact on building the resilience of people within the project communities to shocks and stresses. This was assessed by identifying 27 characteristics that are thought to be associated with resilience at an individual, household or community level, and for which data could be collected in the household survey. Some of these indicators were directly related to the project activities; others were unlikely to have been affected by the project, but were included to provide an overall view of households’ resilience.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome area	Evidence of positive impact?	Comments
Livelihood viability	Yes	Evidence of substantial positive impact on the receipt of early-warning information, and some impact also on livelihood diversification and dietary diversity.
Innovation potential	Yes	Evidence of increased awareness of climate change and adoption of innovative practices among households in project communities (though apparently also less access to credit).
Access to contingency resources and support	Yes	Evidence of greater participation in community groups, higher savings, and more positive perceptions of social networks and local government to support in times of crisis.
Integrity of the natural and built environment	No	Households in project communities reported taking more action to protect crops and assets from flood in September 2012, but also reported greater losses at that time, as well as worse soil quality.
Social and institutional capability	Yes	Large positive impacts across a range of indicators of awareness of and participation in disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities.
Increase in asset ownership and material wellbeing	No	No indication of a difference between project and comparison sites in the loss of assets during the flood of September 2012, nor in indicators of household wealth overall.

Results apply to the population of the 10 communities where the activities of components 1 and 2 of the project were implemented. No evaluation was made of components 3 and 4 of the project.

Recommendations:

Continue to strengthen and build on the advocacy successes of the project.

One of the clear successes of the project has been in starting the process of involving project participants in the district-level disaster planning activities. There is also evidence of strong confidence in local government support mechanisms in the event of disaster. This strong foundation should be utilised in advancing advocacy efforts to influence the district (and beyond) disaster planning process. Anecdotally, there was significant mention of the wider impact of deforestation activities in the watershed, and clearly such activity is likely to have significant impact on projects of this type which are seeking to mitigate the risk of disasters. It is recommended that project leadership builds on the successes of the project to try and influence against such practices in the wider interest of reducing disaster risk across the district.

Consider further research to investigate why there was no difference in asset/crop loss.

As mentioned above, the results show clear evidence of success in the implementation of the early-warning system and preparedness activities; however, there was no evidence of reduced crop or asset loss due to the flash-flood in September 2012. Further follow-up is advised to determine why this was the case. Perhaps there is scope to particularly strengthen the household-level mitigation measures - such as encouraging take-up of early-maturing paddy varieties – alongside the community-level preparedness activities.



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3. Overall do the findings of the review concur with you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness?

Nepal team reviewed the draft report and in a teleconference with David Bishop of Effectiveness Review team discussed the report's findings and clarified several questions in March 2014. The review report had previously been shared with other programme colleagues, the consultant and our partner organisation for this project. The feedback and clarification aspects from this discussion have been incorporated in the report. Nepal team consider it a good opportunity to build on successes of this project in our future programming, considering it was our first intervention in Dadeldhura district, Far Western region. Future replication of success model highlighted in this review and to address identified areas will guide Nepal future programme, though it was a surprise that no difference was found in increase in asset ownership and material wellbeing.

The draft report was discussed by the Nepal DRR team in March 2014 and again for the final review. We will share the action plan with partners and also discuss in our planning workshop for the next financial year. The learning can be incorporated into ongoing/new 5 years programme design (5 years programme agreement with government). After Oxford posts it on the Policy & Practice website we will include a link on the Nepal page to it. We will also share the summary with district level government partners, other NGOs, the UN and relevant donors (DipECHO and DFID) in our country.

4. Did the review identify areas that were particularly strong in the project?

The report summary stated "that out of the 27 characteristics, statistically significant differences in favour of the intervention population were identified for 18 of them. The table also displays which of the characteristics were directly targeted by the project and those related to their intervention logic, as presented in Section 2. Out of the 14 characteristics directly targeted by the project, there is evidence that the projects successfully affected 12 of them. And, out of the 21 characteristics connected to the project's intervention logic, there is evidence that 16 were positively affected. In this light, the findings of the Effectiveness Review are considerably positive. Within the social and institutional capability, the project had a positive effect and highly regards to local government officials. The review reflected the high impact of early warning to save lives. There is good evidence of attitudinal shifts in terms of awareness of climate change, and in household's confidence in local leadership and government support in times of crisis, as well as levels of social connectedness. We felt these review findings were in alignment with our expectations regarding the project's effectiveness. The report found no evidence of impact on the 'Integrity of the Natural and Built Environment' dimension. We found this conclusion puzzling as community reports indicated a number of livestock and other assets were saved due to effective functioning of the EWS. The mass simulation & clear Wall painting in Schools also benefited the indirect beneficiaries.

5. Did the review identify areas that were particularly weak in the project?

While there is anecdotal evidence that the EWS did result in Protection of some assets the project's physical works were not effective in protecting farmers' land and crops. We are quite surprised to find that there was no evidence on Integrity of the natural and built Environment as Oxfam's regular livelihood project and WASH interventions integrated in the project areas, enforces the awareness on the natural resource protections. The community members were not able to plant in the flood affected areas as most of the land and soil is of very poor quality.

Yes there is some positive impact on livelihood diversification but we need to strengthen the impact on livelihood diversification and dietary diversity in upcoming projects.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The process was quite rigorous among the Oxford and Nepal team on evaluation process. We have reviewed the survey questionnaire jointly and try to make it very effective. This Project was reviewed on the basis of five dimensions of resilience which was a very useful tool to do the review. We shared with Partners, and also an orientation to the enumerators with field test to assure the quality data. Looking at the standard of the questionnaire & to get the quality data we selected the enumerators at least 10+ grade and had some good experience. Some stakeholders were also interviewed. All the work had been done as team where partners as well as Oxfam staff and some key stakeholders were engaged in the whole review process.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

This project has been completed but as a follow up and continue similar interventions, DiPECHO funded project is going on. This project was designed a full year before the ER so learning from the ER was not incorporated in its design. But since Nepal Programme is in the process of developing Oxfam Country Strategy (OCS) and designing next 5 Years New programme, design phase (agreement with Nepal Government), therefore the recommendation from this ER will be considered and incorporated in next Oxfam country strategy.

Programme Learning Considerations:

The report also recommends follow up actions - continue to strengthen and build on the advocacy success of the project and consider further research to investigate why there is no significant difference in assets/crop loss - are well acknowledged by Oxfam's team in Nepal.

Continue to strengthen and build on the advocacy successes of the project

Oxfam will also continue to invest in, and provide leadership to, developing strong sustainable networks such as the Network of Community Disaster Management Committee (NCDMC) at national level, and the 30 established district-level networks that make up the NCDMC. Key outcomes include NCDMC's effective advocacy role in pressing for government budgetary investment and ensuring better disaster preparations as well as quality services for IDPs in the wake of a major earthquake. Oxfam will work closely with Ministry of Local Development, Association of International NGOS in implementing the Local Disaster Risk Management Planning Guideline (LDRMP) in Community Based DRM programmes.

As per recommendation from the report the team will also explore possible interventions on deforestation activities. This would be through ongoing food security projects which are developing District Level food security strategies that incorporate land use as a major element affecting food production.

Consider further research to investigate why there was no difference in asset/crop loss

We will explore the possibility of strengthening mitigation measures - such as encouraging take-up of early-maturing paddy varieties – alongside community-level preparedness and mitigation activities. We will also try to develop a better understanding of how to protect assets. As the ER points out, there may be no alternative to growing crops in flood prone areas as there is no other suitable crop land in many communities. Some mitigation works (river diversion) were installed by the government and the project. The government installed section was washed away. This may simply be due to the fact that it was placed in the most vulnerable section. In other instances new crop varieties have been introduced which are more drought resistant or quicker maturing and this can be explored further.

8. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon

We took this as one of the best opportunities to work with Oxford Effectiveness Review team. We do not have any disagreement with the process and report.

9. What learning from the review will you apply to relevant or new projects in the future? How can the regional centre/Oxford support these plans?

We would like to suggest Effectiveness Review team to strengthen the review process by assessing the reasons for achievements, under achievements and failure in the project. This will be highly beneficial for the project team to learn, design and strategise from the detail assessments.

While designing new projects, outcomes & indicators, we will adopt the resilience framework which will support us to do effective monitoring and evaluation. The project review process will be more comprehensive and in line with our monitoring reports. We will do our best to apply control experimental group method while doing the baseline and evaluating the assessments.

This year we are continuing DiPECHO project as a Consortium with Mercy Crops & Practical Actions. The Consortium needs to be strategic and continue for longer term rather than phasing out with the project. We can share learning to make the better impact from project in the life of Nepalese people.

Nepal country team strongly believe that the dissemination of project review and its findings are beneficial not only for Nepal but to other countries and Oxfam as a whole in designing and implementing disaster risk management projects and programs.

10. Additional reflections

The data analysis had been done in Oxford ER team, request to deliver the skill to the country team. Normally projects depend upon specific results but when the ER is done from the five dimensions of resilience we definitely got the point that we need to improve our project designs.