

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Livelihoods in Zimbabwe: Evaluation of food security and strengthening livelihood options (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 Food Security and Livelihood Programme in Zimbabwe project was selected for review in this way under the livelihoods thematic area.

The project's overall objective was to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger amongst the poor and vulnerable in Midlands and Masvingo provinces of Zimbabwe. It aimed to do this by enhancing livelihood options for households from selected communities in 15 wards across three districts in these provinces. The project aimed to directly benefit up to 24,500 people across the three target districts through three key interventions:

- Summer agricultural inputs together with conservation agriculture training
- Small livestock support
- Development of communal market garden linkages.

The project activities were implemented from 2010 to 2014 by Oxfam in conjunction with two local partner organisations – Batanai HIV & AIDS Service Organisation (BHASO) and Midlands Aids Caring Organisation (MACO).

The Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the project activities in November and December 2013, shortly before the project's end. A household survey was carried out with 494 of the households directly supported by the project, and with 536 households from nearby communities where the project had not been interviewed, for comparison purposes. 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.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome area	Overall	Inputs and conservation agriculture group	Small livestock group	Communal market-garden linkages group
Adoption of improved agricultural practices	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Increase in number of crops cultivated	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Increase in cereal crop production	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Increase in vegetable production	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Increase in livelihood activities	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Increased household income	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Improvement in wealth indicators	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Increased food security and dietary diversity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Recommendations:

Continue to strengthen and build on the success of the project in delivering a ‘basket’ of interventions

This Effectiveness Review offered an opportunity to not just examine the effectiveness of the project overall, but also the difference in project impact across three interventions. As such, the review has highlighted greatest project impact among those participants who received agricultural inputs and conservation agriculture, *as well as* livestock or communal gardening support. The programme and country team should give this due consideration ahead of future project activity, and seek to roll out, where appropriate, a ‘basket’ of evidence-based interventions among supported households.

Strengthen the market-linkage work among the communal garden project participants

While there is strong evidence of project impact among the market-garden participants, it was interesting to note that only 10 per cent of these producers reported selling their produce to a cooperative. This seems to highlight an opportunity to strengthen this aspect of the project. The programme and country team should consider how this can be improved among the project participants, as well as for future market-development projects.

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

The findings of the effectiveness review do concur with the expectations of the project team in terms of the results achieved and perceived impact of the project. The effectiveness review was done as a follow up to the mid-term evaluation and before the end of the project evaluation exercise. The findings of all the 3 review exercises are very much complimentary to each other and provide a longitudinal impact assessment in a progressive way.

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

Yes. The review indicates greatest project impact in terms of delivering a basket of interventions that promotes improved agricultural production systems in view of supporting food security for rural communities. The report notes there is greater impact among the beneficiaries who received agricultural inputs and conservation agriculture, as well as livestock and communal gardening support.

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

Yes. The report notes that there is need to strengthen the market-linkage work among the communal garden project participants.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The quality of the review is fair as it tends to be based on quantitative analysis though it misses out on added value that qualitative data brings in assessing the livelihoods aspects. Consideration should be made to have a balanced survey that is able to pick both qualitative and quantitative aspects of livelihoods programming so as to provide a robust analysis that can provide insights into future project concepts and programming.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

The follow up actions noted are to:

- Strengthen the agriculture production systems for smallholder farmers through policy engagement and capacity building of local institutions around extension service delivery.
- Engage technical experts at regional and global level around the development of context specific market linkages work in future programming

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

The review indicates that there was less evidence among beneficiary groups of an improvement in food security, and no indication of a change in terms of wealth indicators (asset ownership and housing conditions). While this statement is partly true from a quantitative perspective given the scope of the review, there is however ample evidence from the project mid-term evaluation and end of project evaluation which demonstrates that agriculture production has improved from improved access to agricultural inputs, adopting conservation agriculture techniques, *as well as* improved access to small livestock and soil fertility trenching around communal gardening. All the improved agricultural practices have proved to contribute towards food security and household income in the long run.

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?

The current project reviewed has ended and consideration has been made to take the recommendations into consideration for new projects being developed. Support from the regional centre and Oxford will be required in terms of developing the theory of change for smallholder farmers in enterprise development as well as influencing for policy change.

10. Additional reflections

The timing of the review process was not very strategic in terms of affording the project team the opportunity to adopt any recommendations emerging as well as capture the project impact emerging from the delivered project results as the project was coming to its end. A consideration in future should be made to merge the review with the project mid-term evaluation to ensure that there is less duplication of activities and facilitate for the project team to incorporate the recommendations emerging from the review before the project ends.