Oxfam Management response to the review of *Livelihoods in Colombia: Evaluation of market access and food security in the central region* (Effectiveness Review Series 2013/14)

Prepared by: Adriana Rodríguez Castillo
Contributors: Paola Castilla, Andrés Mendoza, Raúl Bernal, Comité de Interlocución Campesino y Comunal (CICC) y la Alianza Campesina y Comunal (AL CAMPO).
Signed off by: Aída Pesquera
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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 ‘Market Access and Food Security in the Central Region of Colombia’ project was selected for review in this way under the livelihoods thematic area.

The project under review is part of an initiative supported by Oxfam since 2003 to increase market access and income among smallholder producers in the Central Region of Colombia. Oxfam has worked with the Comité de Interlocución Campesino y Comunal (CICC), the Alianza Campesina y Comunal (AL CAMPO), the Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativos (ILSA) and the National University of Colombia to establish, support and document learning about alternative marketing channels – especially farmers’ markets (*mercados campesinos*) in the capital city of Bogotá, and in other towns in the region. The aim is to provide rural producers with a forum to sell directly to consumers, so as to support producers’ livelihoods by increasing their power in markets while also building understanding and awareness among urban consumers about the issues facing rural producers. This Effectiveness Review attempted to evaluate the initiative’s impact only in terms of changes in the market access and livelihoods of producers themselves.

This Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the farmers’ markets initiative on the lives and livelihoods of rural producers. The Effectiveness Review was carried out on a random sample of the municipalities where the project activities had been implemented since at least 2009 and where at least 20 producer households were participating. Within those municipalities, the households that had participated in the farmers’ markets during 2013 were selected at random to be interviewed. For comparison purposes, interviews were also carried out with producer households that had not participated in the farmers’ markets, but who were eligible and had expressed an interest in doing so. In total, 157 project participants and 330 non-participants were interviewed. To increase confidence when making estimates of the project’s effects the statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used at the analysis stage to control for apparent baseline differences between the participant and non-participant households.

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### 2. Summary main findings and recommendations

#### Key results of this Effectiveness Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome area</th>
<th>Evidence of positive impact</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group participation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Most project participants confirmed that they are members of a local producers’ group, and expressed positive views about accountability and decision-making in those groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of new production and marketing practices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The majority of project participants have adopted most of the production and marketing practices encouraged under the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to new marketing channels</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Project participants are selling through a wider range of channels than non-participants, with a much smaller proportion depending on intermediaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in prices obtained for sales of products</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Suggestive evidence that project participants are receiving higher prices is obtained directly from the agricultural sales data. This is reinforced by the apparent increase in household income brought about by the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in overall household income</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Household income among project participants (as measured by consumption) is estimated to be 15 to 20 per cent higher than it would have been without the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involvement in advocacy activities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>More project participants have an understanding of political issues and have participated in advocacy activities than the non-participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception and recognition of women’s roles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Project participants were more likely than non-participants to express positive opinions on gender roles.</td>
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Results apply to all producer households who participated in farmers’ markets organised under this project at least once during 2013, and who are based in municipalities that have been involved in the initiative since at least 2009 and where there are more than 20 active participants. The project’s impact on producers in the city of Bogotá was not evaluated. The project’s impacts on food security among consumers and on attitudes towards rural producers among consumers in the city were also not assessed in this Effectiveness Review.

#### Recommendations:

The results of this Effectiveness Review add to the proof that farmers’ markets have a positive impact in terms of increasing income. Concrete quantitative proof is also being gathered for the first time about their impact on marketing capacities, organisational aspects, and advocacy and civil activism.

This Effectiveness Review provides clear evidence that the new marketing channels, which cut out intermediaries, and the related support provided to producers under this project have led to a significant improvement in household income. This evidence can be used to strengthen the case both for scaling up the farmers’ markets in Bogotá and the Central Region and for encouraging adoption in other cities. To the extent that political support for farmers’ markets depends on an analysis of how public funds can most effectively be used to support rural producers, this evaluation provides a basis against which the effectiveness of alternative interventions can be assessed.
3. **Overall do the findings of the review concur with you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness?**

   Yes, they tally with previous measurements and with the expectations of the different actors.

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

   Yes, especially the following areas: Association (participation in groups); Adoption of new production and marketing practices; Access to new marketing channels; Increase in prices obtained for the sale of produce; Increase in total household income; and Participation in advocacy activities.

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

   Yes, the area of valuing and acknowledging the role of women. Though the project made some progress in economically empowering women and broadening their participation in different spaces, there is still a lot to do in terms of recognising their work and the contribution made to society by members of the household, communities and citizens in general.

6. **Summary of review quality assessment**

   Good. Because of its strict use of statistics, because it was participatory, flexible and adapted to the conditions of the project and because it helped the team members to learn.

7. **Main Oxfam follow-up actions**

   Incorporate the results of the evaluation into the final report of the Research project. Carry out advocacy activities by holding a discussion with public actors in the rural and food supply sector in the central region and disseminating publications that detail the results and set out the structure of the project phases to a wide audience. These activities are scheduled to be carried out between 2014 and the first quarter of 2015.

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

   None
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?**

It is very useful to include a control group in measurements of the baselines and impact of projects, since it increases the precision and strength of the results in terms of quantifying the impacts of the interventions. To be able to incorporate this methodology, we need to have sufficient resources and a statistics support team.

10. **Additional reflections**

None.