

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Resilience in Niger: Evaluation of improving livelihoods through integrated water resource management (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 'Improving Livelihoods through Integrated Water Resource Management' in Niger project was selected for review in this way under the resilience thematic area.

The Effectiveness Review which took place in western Niger in March 2014 was aimed at evaluating the success of the project 'Improving Livelihoods through Integrated Water Resource Management' in enabling participants to strengthen their livelihoods and to minimize risk from shocks and adapt to emerging trends and uncertainty. This project was carried out in four communities in the commune of Banibangou between 2008 and 2013 by Oxfam and Karkara, a Nigerien non-governmental organisation. The specific objectives of the project were to:

- Improve the management of surface and sub-soil water resources.
- Increase and diversify crop production
- Support livestock production through better management of pasture land and water resources.

The Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the activities among the population of the two communities where the project had been implemented through its whole duration: Banibangou town and Soumatt. A random sample of 179 households living in the two communities were interviewed, as well as 70 women who had been specifically supported by the project in kitchen gardening. For comparison purposes, 450 households were interviewed from three communities in the neighbouring commune of Tondikwindi. At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences between the households in the project and comparison communities, to increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome area	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Access to and use of information on water management	Yes	A significantly higher proportion of residents in the project communities said that they had used information from the local water committee in taking a decision to reduce water consumption.
Access to improved water sources	Yes	Large proportions in the project communities have access to improved sources of water for household consumption, for livestock, and for agriculture.
Engagement in kitchen gardening	Yes	A larger proportion of households in the project communities are engaged in kitchen gardening, and using a much larger area of land than those in the comparison communities.
Increased sales of agricultural products	Yes	Households in the project communities sold products worth more than twice as much on average as those in the comparison communities during the 12 months prior to the survey.
Livestock ownership	No	No indication of an effect from the project on livestock ownership, sales or milk production.
Improved food security	Not clear	Some evidence that fewer food security problems were experienced in project communities, although the average value of food consumption was higher in the comparison communities.
Indicators of resilience	Yes	There is evidence of an impact from the project on several of the specific indicators of resilience (full list available in the report). However, the impact on the overall index of resilience is small.

Results apply across all households residing in Banibangou town and Soumatt. The impacts of the project across the population of the commune as a whole were not assessed, nor were the impacts in Tiloa, the third community where activities were implemented directly.

Recommendations

Ensure that systems to monitor the impact of interventions on the livelihoods and risk-management behaviour of participants are integrated into project design.

While this Effectiveness Review provides a snapshot of the situation of those in the communities served by the project, it does not substitute for an understanding of the dynamics of change that they have experienced. Particularly in an area with livelihoods so vulnerable to seasonal weather patterns, a deep understanding of people's resilience could only be gained by regularly monitoring the actions they take to manage risk and respond to crises. This could be done by means of periodic visits to a panel of households across the intervention area, and could involve data collection on standard quantitative indicators as well as (perhaps more importantly) qualitative interviews to understand the reasons for changes they have experienced and how they see the project activities as having affected their decisions. A clear and robust assessment of the extent to which a project has been responsible for any such changes would still depend on some sort of comparison between communities, as in this Effectiveness Review. However, strengthening and increasing the frequency of monitoring work would probably generate useful understanding and learning even when carried out only in the project communities.

In particular, seek to monitor changes in the food security situation, as well as indicators of nutrition and health more broadly.

The survey data provided some evidence that households in the project communities were experiencing fewer food security difficulties than those in the comparison communities, according to the standard indicators employed (including missed meals, going to sleep hungry, and spending a whole day and night without eating). On the other hand, there was no indication of a difference in the diversity of food types eaten (despite the greater adoption of kitchen gardening in the project communities), and the total *value* of food consumed was greater in the comparison communities. More frequent monitoring may help to clarify these results and the reasons for the apparent contradiction. For understanding the long-term impact of any change in diet – particularly if there has been greater consumption of vegetables – it would also be important to track indicators of health and nutrition at a community level.

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

Overall the findings concur to our expectations.

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

Water monitoring and management by communities.

Food diversification could be a source of better nutritional status, but was not monitored in the project as indicator.

Income generated from market gardening contributes to the support of children education.

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

.The overall monitoring system was weak:

- Indicators are not fixed to be followed up with specific tools and periodically.
- Community resilience indicators in the context of Niger are so dependant to the weather patterns and could not be captured using punctual evaluation;

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The review quality assessment was moderate.

Despite the lack of a well set M&E, the consultant used a comparative approach that permits to evaluate the achievement. The limit of such approach could be the intrinsic differences between the two communities, or the level of their exposure to shocks, or the opportunities that exist in their environment.

One important thing raised by the study is the weakness of monitoring system to address the thematic of resilience of community.

Due to the place occupied by market gardening in this project, it appears interesting to incorporate income indicators and nutrition indicators in the monitoring system.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

- Conduct a workshop session to re-afresh the overall monitoring system. The objective of this workshop is to make a review of the monitoring system, analyse impact indicators of a resilience project and determine mandatory and optional indicators that could be used for such project. Program and MEAL staff will be involved in this workshop that is expected to take place towards the end of march 2015;
- By April 30th, elaborate and/or review tools for data collection for each defined indicator;
- Conduct a meeting that involves resilience and MEAL actors to elaborate and adopt a performance management plan for the project. The performance frame will define the understanding on each indicator, the tool for data collection that should be used, how data will be treated, who collect data, frequency of data collection, etc.; this activity will be run in May 2015.
- Select in June 2015 voluntary households (in the intervention zone) on which the selected resilience indicators will be monitored for at least one year.

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?

Set up of a relevant and detailed monitoring system for each project.

10. Additional reflections

None