

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women's Empowerment in Rwanda: Evaluation of women's economic leadership through horticulture planting-material business* (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 'Women's Economic Leadership through Horticulture Planting-Material Business' project was selected for review in this way under the women's empowerment thematic area.

The project under review was implemented in four districts of Rwanda (Muhanga, Nyagatare, Musanze and Nyamagabe), between August 2011 and March 2014, by Oxfam in conjunction with Duterimbere, a local NGO. The project aimed to strengthen women's capacity for engaging in the production of pineapple planting material, and thereby to enhance women's socio-economic status at household and community level. Another important dimension of the project was to strengthen the capacity of the microfinance division of Duterimbere to provide finance and business services to women in the planting-material business.

This Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the project activities approximately three years after implementation started. The review was restricted to the two districts where the project had been implemented since the first year, Muhanga and Nyagatare, where it was thought that sufficient time had elapsed to allow the project's effects to have become clear.

The review sought to evaluate the project's impact among the women who directly participated in the training provided under this project. All 216 women from Muhanga and Nyagatare districts who had attended at least one training session were targeted for interview; 188 were actually located and interviewed. For comparison purposes, 415 women were selected at random from nearby *cells* (village clusters) where the project had not been implemented. At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for demographic and baseline differences between the households surveyed in the project and comparison areas, to provide additional 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
	Muhanga	Nyagatare	
Engagement in pineapple planting-material business	Yes	Yes	Most of the project participants were engaged in production of pineapple planting-material, and were generating significant revenue from sales.
Sales of agricultural products	Yes	Yes	Strong evidence that the project has enabled project participants to generate more revenue from sales of agricultural products, particularly in Nyagatare District.
Improvement in indicators of material wealth	No	No	Most project participants reported that their income has increased since 2010, but this is not clearly reflected in wealth indicators, such as asset ownership and housing conditions.
Improvement in women's access to credit	No	Yes	Respondents in Nyagatare were more likely to say that they could access a loan from a formal source if necessary – but those in Muhanga were not. Actual borrowing was no more common among project participants than among comparison households in either district.
Increase in women's saving	No	Yes	Respondents in both districts were more likely to have a personal bank account, but only in Nyagatare were they more likely to have made savings during the past month.
Women's empowerment	Yes	Yes	Evidence of positive impact in terms of various characteristics of women's involvement. Project participants scored positively in 55 per cent of the characteristics on average, compared to 48 per cent among comparison respondents.
Results apply among the 188 women who participated in at least one training session provided by the project in Muhanga and Nyagatare districts, and who were available and willing to be interviewed at the time of the survey.			
Recommendations:			
Ensure that monitoring and evaluation of projects take account of the effects of interventions on overall household livelihoods.			
<p>The results of this Effectiveness Review demonstrate that project interventions can sometimes have unexpected indirect effects – either positive (for example, the apparent increase in sales of communally-produced agricultural products other than pineapple planting-material, and the reported increase in income from non-agricultural sources in Nyagatare District) or negative (such as the corresponding reported decrease in income from non-agricultural sources in Muhanga). Examining indicators of production or sales of pineapple planting-materials alone would have provided only a partial understanding of the overall effects of this project. This reinforces the necessity of monitoring and evaluation work to consider the impact of interventions on the household economy as a whole. Although measuring a household's net income from all income sources is a very complicated undertaking, measures of household consumption, asset ownership, or even subjective reports of changes, can instead be used to give an indication of overall material wellbeing.</p>			

Continue to track changes in food security, consumption or wealth indicators among the project participants, to understand the longer-term impacts of the project.

Given that much of the training provided under the project had been carried out only a year or two prior to the survey, it is natural to assume that the changes in outcomes found in this Effectiveness Review provide only an interim assessment of the project's impact. It would be interesting at least to continue monitoring changes among the project participants over the next two or three years to see how the apparent increases in revenue from agricultural sales generated by the project translates into changes in food security or overall household income. It may even be useful in the future to carry out a follow-up survey with the same respondents as this Effectiveness Review, in order to provide a more detailed understanding of the project's long-term effect.

Consider how to increase the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming, and how to track progress.

The Effectiveness Review has found evidence that the women's economic leadership approach applied in this project has had some positive effects on various aspects of women's empowerment – including those both directly and indirectly related to the project's interventions. Consideration should now be given to how to strengthen these results, and to whether further positive effects could be achieved through having a more active approach to promoting women's empowerment, beyond simply facilitating women's engagement in income generation. It may also be useful to identify some indicators of empowerment that can be tracked over time, to provide some insight into whether and how the project is affecting women's positions in their homes and communities.

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

Yes, the report captures the most relevant aspects effectively. The draft findings were exhaustively discussed with the Sustainable Livelihood team and inputs provided and have been incorporated into the final report.

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

Yes. The report captures evidence of positive impact of the project. A very high percentage of women that participated in the project exhibited greater levels of confidence as well as effective application of the skills acquired, which led to increases in income.

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

Yes, two areas can be highlighted: i) Designing and implementing better MEAL systems and consistent monitoring, and ii) inclusion and strengthening of specific gender indicators.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

We are satisfied with the quality of the assessment. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been very effective and useful. The Oxfam team had the opportunity to discuss the draft findings with the evaluation team.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

1. Recruiting of a Gender Justice Lead by March 2015. The lead will work with other Programme Leads to improve our capacity to 'put women at the heart of everything we do'.
2. Gender becomes a key pillar in our Country Strategy by March 2015, which will provide greater strategic importance to Women's Rights.
3. All staff to be trained in Gender in 2015.
4. A new MEAL Lead will be hired and the CD will make efforts to foster collaboration so that we can improve our current capacity to design and implement effective MEAL systems.

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?

We are committed to incorporate these recommendations in our current and future programming. As stated in question 7 above, we need to develop greater capacity in the team on both Women's Rights and MEAL.

This should help us make progress in our capacity to:

- Undertake more robust gender analysis when designing the project.
- Define clearer gender indicators that will help us assess progress and results.
- Establish a clear project baseline.
- Implement the adequate monitoring systems throughout the intervention.
- Define clear initiatives to identify and capture learning.

10. Additional reflections

The need to expand our monitoring scope to integrate tracking of food security in household level and outcomes on wealth in general.