

**Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women’s empowerment in Pakistan: Impact evaluation of the empowering small scale producers in the dairy sector project* (Effectiveness Review Series 2014/15)**

<b>Prepared by:</b>	Sammiya Tur Rauf - Program Manager Food security		
<b>Contributors:</b>	Irrum Malik - MEL Manager, Sohial Aziz - Program Officer		
<b>Signed off by:</b>	Arif Jababr – Country Director		
<b>Date:</b>	Date MR signed off	<b>Country/Region/Campaign:</b>	Pakistan

## 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 ‘Empowering small producers especially women in the dairy sector’ project was selected for review in this way under the women’s empowerment thematic area.

The project’s overall objective is to improve livelihoods opportunities increasing income and employment, as well as improving women’s empowerment by improving their economic leadership in the dairy sector. The project activities were implemented by Oxfam GB in conjunction with Doaba Foundation, a local partner organisation. The project started in 2011, supporting four cooperatives in four tehsils in Muzaffargah district. In 2012 the project was interrupted until January 2013 when it then continued with only one of the four original cooperatives. This study will focus only on the impact on project participants involved from 2011 to 2014.

Project activities included the formation of one enterprise in the dairy sector, and the establishment of ten collection centres where farmers could sell their milk production. The expectation was that the enterprise would buy milk from local farmers at higher prices than other competitors in the area, and still generate profits for the enterprise. The project activities also included the formation of ten community groups which provided training on milk production, animal health and dairy market in order to improve the quality and quantity of the milk produced by the farmers.

The Effectiveness Review took place in December 2014 in Muzaffargarh district, south Punjab – Pakistan. It intended to evaluate the success of ‘*Empowering small producers especially women in the dairy sector*’ project in achieving its objectives: increasing income and employment among members of milk cooperative groups, and promoting women empowerment.

The review adopted a quasi-experimental impact evaluation design combined with a qualitative component. The quantitative impact evaluation aimed measuring change which is causally attributable and representative of the project intervention. It involved comparing women that had been supported by the project with women in neighbouring communities that had similar characteristics in 2010. A household survey was carried out with 300 women participating into the project, and 500 comparison women never involved in any Oxfam project. 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 survey in project and comparison areas, to provide additional confidence when making estimates of the project’s impact. The qualitative component informed decisions taken when developing the quantitative survey instrument and in data analysis. Qualitative work consisted of: a literature review and field-based focus group discussions and individual interviews. Conducted in the project intervention area, these served to gather additional information, understanding and learning of the project implementation as well as trying to answer the question of what women’s empowerment means in South Punjab. In order to measure women’s empowerment this evaluation identified 18 indicators associated with empowerment in women’s in the dairy sector in South Punjab and employs a multidimensional measure aggregating them in one composite index.

## 2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Summary results of this Effectiveness Review			
Outcome	Linked to project logic	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Improved knowledge on milk production	Yes	Yes	The evaluation found evidence that the project lead to higher levels of knowledge related to dairy market, milk production and improved adoption of animal techniques such as vaccination and de-worming.
Improved quality and quantity of milk produced	Yes	No	The evaluation did not find evidence of increased quantity or quality of milk produced which is attributable to the project.
Improved market conditions in dairy sector	Yes	No	The evaluation finds that the median price paid by the enterprise is in line with the median price paid by other channels. However the average price per litre paid to project participants is lower than the average price paid to comparison group. The evaluation also identified problems around the reliability of the project enterprise on regularly collecting milk and ensuring payments to the farmer; particularly when compared with other competitors operating in the same area.
Improved income and wealth	Yes	No	The evaluation fails to find evidence of higher income or wealth attributable to the project intervention.
Women's Empowerment	Yes	Yes	There is evidence of that the project lead to an increase in the overall women's empowerment index. There is evidence of improved empowerment indicators on: self-confidence, personal autonomy, group participation, independent income, power in markets, control over time, and safety of movements outside the house. However there is no evidence of change in: opinions on women's economic role, acceptability towards violence against women, household decision making power and control of assets within the households.

**Recommendations**

Some important lessons that can be applied to other projects of this type in Pakistan and elsewhere have emerged from this evaluation. The Pakistan country team, and the programme team in particular, are encouraged to consider the following:

- **Improve project targeting and delivery quality**

The evaluation found that the project was implemented in an area where a number of other actors, both multilateral agencies and private sector companies, were already operating and working in similar thematic areas. Moreover, qualitative data suggested that some project participants perceived the enterprise as not being professionally run when compared with other businesses operating in the same market. Focus group discussions identified concerns and issues raised by project participants concerning the management of the enterprise, lamenting problems with collection of the milk, and having the milk spoiled as a consequence. Project participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the timing of the payments made by the enterprise, compared with other actors in the area.

This raised some questions around the value added of projects establishing a private enterprise in a context where there are already other private companies equipped with better skills and business

means, although not necessarily committed to pay better prices for milk. A more careful targeting process of the intervention area should be put in place when selecting the market and location for project implementation.

- **Increase clarity over women's empowerment outcomes and pathways to change**

The evaluation identified no impact on income and wealth, but it did identify a positive impact attributable to the project on women's empowerment.

Survey results, as well as qualitative data, suggest that activity engagement with women at community level had a positive impact on a number of women's empowerment indicators. This, however, was achieved with a theory of change that lacked a clear definition of women's empowerment outcomes or pathways of change.

The project assumed that a higher contribution to household income and improved leadership for four women in the enterprise board would be the main levers for strengthening women's empowerment. The evaluation identified that the project had a positive impact on increasing the proportion of household income earned independently from other household members, but not on attitudes and beliefs about women's economic role, household decision-making, and control over assets.

The programme team has been encouraged to consider scaling up the women's empowerment components of this project, defining if an increase in household income is sufficient for women's empowerment or if other issues should be explicitly targeted and addressed as well. What the project means by empowerment and how change is expected to take place, including an explicit theory of change that differentiates between how change happens for women involved in the project and for women whose husbands participate, should be clearly defined.

- **Define what constraints are facing small milk-producer farmers other than knowledge**

One of the assumptions of the project was that providing training and increasing knowledge would also increase the quality and quantity of milk production. The evaluation identified that project activities had a positive impact on improving knowledge of milk quality and improved vaccination practices. However, there was no evidence of a higher quantity or quality of milk being produced as a consequence of the project.

The programme team has been encouraged to explore if there are other constraints that milk-farm producers are facing, other than limited knowledge.

- **Consider evaluation questions during programme design**

In future projects, it has been advised to consider including an evaluation framework in the project design.

Evaluation is a key tool for learning, to help projects and programmes succeed and generate evidence of success. When designing a project, the programme team is encouraged to consider and define key evaluative questions that they would like addressed; which components and characteristics of the intervention that should be evaluated; and finally, what are the reasons for conducting the evaluation (e.g. influencing, accountability, learning), and plan sufficient budget, time and resources. Different evaluation designs and methodologies provide different types of evidence, with different levels of confidence. For large-scale development interventions, a counterfactual evaluation design will allow the team to consider whether changes can be attributed to the project intervention.

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

The programme team agree with most of the results; however there are some reservations on the results concerning income. There are some indications coming from the partner organisations which suggest increased income, quality and quantity of milk of small scale women farmers in the project area, but this is not reflected in the report findings. The conclusion of the report are made on the basis of comparisons between intervention and control group, with similar characteristics; but there are concerns on the validity of the comparison group selected given the recurring natural shocks which are not enough considered/or documented. The programme team believes that the evaluation did not take into enough consideration the geographical diversity of remote villages where there are no other competitors collecting milk directly from the women, except the middlemen. The programme team also believe the project contributed in raising the milk price paid by middlemen as there has been a substantial increase of prices since the beginning of the project (as also indicated by the study itself). Finally, the evaluation only focuses on the impact of direct beneficiaries and did not consider the sustainability of the enterprise which appears to be running sustainably, six months (September 2015) after completion of the project and providing milk market to women at door steps on a sustainable basis.

A better evaluation approach would have been to conduct a longitudinal study, including a baseline for both the intervention and comparison group, which it would have ensured that the selection of the comparison group is more robust and showed changes overtime compared with project participants and non project participants. However we understand this was not possible in this evaluation as there was no baseline with such characteristics available for this project.

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

Women's inclusiveness at community level for collective decisions was one the major objective of the project and it has been well captured and presented in the effectiveness review. The project focus was more at the enterprise level rather on the household level. Space was successfully created space for women dairy farmers to have their representation in markets, access to collective assets and to have decision making power in the cooperative. The report has captured this well. The women's empowerment indicators set in review will be used for future programming. There is strong evidence of behaviour change in term of high level self confidence, personal autonomy and perception of safety of movement of women outside the house. The project participants were able to influence market to get higher prices for their milk and milk products. These are some successes to be replicated.

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

The results indicate the project could not make substantial difference in income of the project participants. However the programme team believe the choice of the comparison group was not sufficiently taking into account the recurrence of shocks and natural disasters; therefore we are questioning the estimates related to income. Despite using qualitative methods to triangulate the survey results, the team would have wanted to see more explanation on why the project was not able to achieve its objectives in terms of income.

The study suggested there were no improvement in market conditions, but the programme team argue that there was no market for milk collection directly from women in this remote area, except for the middlemen who were paying less. The team argue that the market has improved substantially, due to cooperative enterprise, and the assertive behaviours of women farmers, who area able to negotiate milk prices (substantial evidence is available).

## 6. Summary of review quality assessment

Generally the methodology is fine, and Oxfam has an excellent experience in conducting effectiveness reviews and this is acknowledged. As expressed in earlier sections, there are some reservations on the methodology since the conclusions have been made on the basis of matching the intervention with comparison group using baseline recall information. It is felt that longitudinal studies which capture data over time (during seasonal changes and the period of shocks) for both the intervention and comparison groups would be better approach for such studies. There was additional analysis through focus group discussions that was great.

## 7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

This effectiveness review took place before the exit of the project which has given time to team to better plan exit from the project and ensure sustainability.

Some of the key actions with clear time lines are as follows:

No	Action	Time and responsibility
1.	Ensure that project baselines designed as part of a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) framework, carried out and documented. For development projects that are aiming to demonstrate impact these will also have an impact evaluation framework which includes baselines with intervention and comparison group.	Program Manager is responsible (included MEAL frameworks of existing and new project designs)
2.	Refine Exit plan with team ensuring the gaps identified in process of review (some were evident at the time of data collection of this effectiveness review)	March 2015 (done) – PM and team together with partner organization
3.	Ensuring functional literacy for the women (specifically for projects working with similar profiles) to be able to keep their record of business	Throughout the life of Program. Program Manager is responsible.
4.	Supporting women to transform their milk management knowledge into practice.	The support is continued through another project of OXFAM till March 2016 – for leveraging and creating synergies - Partner and project team is responsible
5.	Ensuring possibilities of income enhancement for women dairy farmers in the project by diversification and better market linkages	Through support of other project of OXFAM till March 2016. Partner and project team is responsible

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

The programme team agree with most of the results; however there are some reservations on the results concerning income. Some of the findings of the effectiveness review were not giving the complete reasoning and picture of factors effecting the outcome such as income measurement for a project which was implemented with breaks (as it originally started in 2011 - 2012 than with revised strategy in mid 2013 till Dec 2014) and also with annually displaced communities as being in flood prone area. Tangible asset building or visible changes in such cases may become bleak. Other external factors were overall change in with increased market prices due to deeper interventions of private sector processors, large scale middlemen and local market buyers also has given a unclear picture on contributions of project in terms of support of income enhancement. In such stances program suggests to measure change through longitudinal studies instead of one time review in order to have clear understanding on outcomes.

**9. What learning from the review will you apply to relevant or new projects in the future?**

1. Women can be empowered when their will be specific demand driven trainings designed to build their capacities to address the challenges related to societal and business barriers in context to their gender.
2. Having knowledge is not enough. Specific interventions of behaviour change are important to help people to transform themselves for progress through adoption of new ways.
3. In context of Pakistan, people generally don't feel comfortable in sharing their incomes rather they suspect such queries. This can only be measured and seen through proper baselines, knowledge management and mostly importantly by building the trust of impact groups otherwise the outcome will always remain contradictory.
4. Strong contextual understanding is integral to any program design which remained a limitation of this project. In this context regional and global team should ensure that design addresses to the contextual needs first. Moreover, they should ensure strong monitoring, evaluation and learning at all levels.

**10. Additional reflections**

Such reviews are always helpful for learning and we consider this as a useful exercise.