

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Livelihoods in the Philippines: Impact evaluation of the project ‘Scaling up sustainable livelihoods in Mindanao’ (Effectiveness Review Series 2014/15)*

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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 ‘Scaling Up Sustainable Livelihoods in Mindanao’ project was selected for review in this way under the livelihoods thematic area.

The overall objective of the project was to widen livelihood options in small-scale agriculture for rural women and men in order to achieve food security and sustainable incomes. The project aimed to achieve three objectives: firstly, to increase income as well as assets for the project participants; secondly influencing local and national governance environment towards pro-poor economic development; finally increasing women’s leadership among the project participants, changing economic relationship between men and women, and increasing political participation of women.

The project was implemented from 2011 to 2013 in the three provinces of Surigao del Sur, Sultan Kudarat, and Agusan del Sur, by four different partner organizations: Paglilingkod Batas Pangkapatiran Foundation (PBPF), Kasanyangan Rural Development Foundation Inc. (KRDFI), Rural Development Institute of Sultan Kudarat (RDISK), and Integrated Conservation Solutions – Asia (ICS-Asia). The project was scaled up from a previous project which was implemented from 2007 to 2011 in the same provinces by a greater number of partner organizations. This evaluation will focus on the activities implemented by the four partner organizations involved in “Scaling Up Sustainable Livelihoods in Mindanao”, but it will use as baseline a period prior to 2007.

The effectiveness review took place in January and February 2015. It intended to evaluate the success of the three objectives of the ‘Scaling Up Sustainable Livelihoods in Mindanao’.

The review adopted a quasi-experimental impact evaluation design, which involved comparing women that had been supported by the project with women in neighbouring communities that had similar characteristics in 2007. A household survey was carried out with 300 project participants and 500 comparison farmers 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.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Summary of results for intervention households		
Outcome	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Income and wealth	No	The evaluation found on average higher levels of income and material wealth for project participants; however the difference with the comparison group was not statistically significant.
Revenues and production from agricultural products	Mixed	Intervention households were on average more likely to be selling their agricultural products compared with comparison group. They were also selling higher quantities as well as selling a greater variety. However this evaluation did not find evidence of higher revenues from agricultural sales between intervention and comparison households.
Women's empowerment	Mixed	The evaluation found some evidence of improved confidence in intervening in meetings and higher group participation; however there were some questions around the quality of the group engagement. Moreover there was no evidence in higher share of personal income or higher household decision making power which could be attributed to the project.
Governance (awareness)	Yes	The evaluation found evidence of higher awareness of and participation to community plans in project communities.

Recommendations

The programme team in particular were encouraged to consider the following:

- Improving targeting of project participants**

From the evaluation it emerged that the project engaged households with higher levels of material wealth, including higher levels of education, higher quantities of land cultivated, and lower probability of being employed as casual labourer compared with a random selection of people living in neighbouring villages. This did suggest that the project was not able to engage with the poorest and most vulnerable households in the area. While more attention should have been put in place when conducting targeting, the country team has also been encouraged to consider what type of interventions would be more effective in reaching and benefitting the most vulnerable and poor households in the project area.
- Explore reasons why income did not increase compared with comparison group**

The evaluation identified that the project increased the probability of farmers selling agricultural products in the markets, as well as improving the quantity and increasing the variety of crops sold. These changes, however, did not translate into higher revenues, income or wealth. The country team has been encouraged to explore the reasons behind this, and to consider possible alternative strategies.
- Consider scaling up women's empowerment components of the project defining how women should be involved in group activities**

The evaluation found that women's involved in project activities reported on average a greater number of groups where she belongs to. There was also evidence that the project was successful in improving women's confidence in intervening in meetings, but it would appear that the proportion of women who reported participating to a medium to large extent in group activities was lower in the intervention group compared with the comparison group. There also appeared to be no evidence of higher increase in the proportion of women's contribution to household income, as well as there being no evidence of change in women's decision making power within the household. The programme team has been encouraged to consider scaling up the women's empowerment components of this project, defining how change is expected to take place and identifying how women should be involved in group activities. Attending a greater number of groups is not necessarily a positive outcome if it is not accompanied by a greater decision making power within these groups. Moreover issues on time poverty and unpaid care should be considered, as well as defining what empowerment means in the context of the project and what power dynamics is desirable to change as a result.

- **Consider building a strong monitoring system and shaping evaluation questions during programme design**

The programme team has been encouraged to consider a monitoring system that collects real time data, which can be used for targeting, project implementation, reflection, and shaping or adapting intervention strategies and activities.

The project team has been also encouraged to define evaluation questions during the project design and develop a robust evaluation framework which will support mid-term course corrections and final evaluations of impact and effectiveness.

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

The review findings do concur with our own assessment of the project's effectiveness. It confirms the expectation of the project team that crop/income diversification is an effective strategy towards building resilient communities by reducing risk, an overarching objective of the Oxfam Mindanao Programme framework. But the diversification does not necessarily result to higher income in the short run, and to see if more stable sources of income are achieved in the long run still needs to be tested. As the data shows, the project contributed to the dispersion of risks providing target families with alternatives in times of stresses or shocks to livelihood. The project also increased awareness of the different risks and opportunities within communities, increasing the probability of future fact driven decisions on livelihoods.

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

The review established that there has been greater awareness of climate and disaster risks and the increase in the responsiveness of the local government through municipal level plans adaptation and risk reduction planning. The review also highlighted that there is a targeted use of municipal budgets which supported the livelihood resiliency goals of the community.

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

The result of the review showed that there was not an increase in wealth when comparing the targeted participants and a control group. This in part, relates to how project participants chose to spend their income, which was largely not in terms of re-investing in their livelihoods.

The reviewed showed that the monthly and annual expenditure of targeted participants was 49% higher than with the comparison group. It also showed that savings were used on the acquisition of entertainment equipment. There may have been nuances not captured, but the result is one that the project team accepts needs to be addressed by raising the level of awareness of the value of delayed gratification which would mean the prioritisation of the expansion of production over entertainment so as to gain benefits in income in the future.

More gains could have been made in supporting women, both in decision making at the household, particularly in the utilisation of their income/wealth.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The research design used in the review was robust good as it used rigid statistical methodology which addressed systematic bias in the treatment of data. It would have been highly desirable to share the results to the wider community of practice with the end view of enriching Oxfam's experiences on climate adaptation, livelihoods and governance programming. The Country Programme has undergone a change process since data gathering and Staff and Partners no longer connected with Oxfam in the Philippines may also have wanted to learn and appreciate the results. Three of the 4 Partners are no longer working on a project with Oxfam were contacted for comment/feedback but they may not have seen the relevance of being involved in the Effectiveness Review anymore.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

The main follow up actions involve sharing the results with partners, so that learning is captured by all and immediate steps are taken to improve three key areas: targeting; monitoring, and women's engagement.

Targeting choices will largely be improved with the onset of new projects, as changing targeted participants mid project for existing projects is likely to cause greater harm than benefit. The choices in terms of targeted participants needs to be reviewed by a higher level of management, above those responsible for direct delivery, hence ensuring this change is implemented will be the responsibility of the Economic Justice Programme Manager.

Monitoring needs to be modernised, utilising technology, so that data is collected real time, improving the opportunity for accountability and analysis that leads to learning. I-mel is to be introduced over the coming 6 months, and championing this process through is the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Coordinator.

Women's Engagement, particularly at the household decision making level, is a key cross cutting element of the new Oxfam Country Strategy. The country team has existing projects on care work and women's leadership. The learning from this needs to be captured, shared and support mechanisms put in place so that all project team and partners can make changes to their projects based on the learning. This needs to be driven by the Senior Manager for Programme Development and the Gender Advisor.

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?

A new structure has been put in place in the Philippines country programme, with greater connectivity within economic justice goals with the bringing together of campaigns and development project. There is also a dedicated programme development team that brings partnership, gender, MEAL and funding support under one line of management.

These changes will allow for learning to be more rapidly captured, and project changes are made. An I-MEL system is already being put in place to capture data (monitoring) in a real-time manner that will allow for better accountability and learning.

10. Additional reflections

None.