

Oxfam Management response to the review of Livelihoods in Somalia: Impact evaluation of the community-driven livelihood and food security initiatives in Lower and Middle Juba Regions project (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 ‘Community Driven Livelihood and Food Security Initiatives (CLFSI) in Lower and Middle Juba Regions of South Somalia’ project was selected for review in this way under the livelihoods thematic area.

The project’s overall objective was to contribute to improved income generation and food security of families in eleven regions in South Somalia. Project activities included cash grant for household businesses (IGA), provision of donkey carts for transport services, restocking of livestock herds, donation of agricultural equipments, donation of other agricultural inputs e.g. seeds, support in rehabilitation of irrigation system including donation of water pumps and provision of cash for work. It should be noted that agricultural activities including support in rehabilitation of irrigation systems was not given attention as was planned and so few of these activities were actually carried out.

The project activities were implemented by Oxfam GB in conjunction with a local partner organisation – Wajir South Development Association (WASDA). Phase 1 of the project started in 2010 and completed in March 2013. Data collection for the Effectiveness Review took place in October/November 2014. The baseline survey for the second phase of the project which intends to scale up the first phase was recently completed.

The review adopted a quasi-experimental impact evaluation design, which involved comparing households that had been supported by the project with households in neighbouring communities that had similar characteristics in 2009.

The Effectiveness Review was carried out in the regions where the project activities had been implemented since at least 2009. Within those regions, the households that had participated in the project during the period were selected at random to be interviewed. For comparison purposes, interviews were also carried out with households that had not participated in the project, but who were eligible and had expressed an interest in doing so. In total, 200 project participants and 434 non-participants were interviewed. 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 project and comparison areas, to provide confidence when making estimates of the project’s impact.

2. Summary of main findings and recommendations

Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome	Evidence of positive Impact	Comments
Increased livestock ownership by households	YES	On average, the numbers of goats increased by 2 in intervention households while the number of sheep increased by about 50% in households that participated in the project compared with households that did not.
Participation in community groups	YES	Participation of women and their household members increased by about 20 percentage points while participation of women alone in group meetings increased by about 12 percentage points in intervention areas compared with comparison areas.
Use of donkey carts for income generation	YES	On average there was a 5.9 percentage point increase in the number of participant households reporting use donkey carts for transport services thereby increasing their income compared with households in comparison communities.
Increased income from Milk sales	YES	On average, there was a 15.9 percentage point increase in the number of participant households reporting increased income from milk sales compared with non participants.
Community involvement in project management	YES	On average, there was a 14 percentage point significant difference between participant households and non participants with regard to asking questions on how new projects benefit them .This is important because by asking project benefits they can influence the kind of activities based on immediate needs of the community
Household Asset Wealth (Wealth Index)	YES	There is evidence to show that the Wealth index of households in intervention areas has steadily increased since 2009 where as that of the comparison has remained almost constant.
Increased income from household businesses	NO	Revenues obtained from household businesses were not significantly different between the participant households and non participants
Increase in overall household income (New Global Indicator)	NO	Household income among project participants (as measured by consumption and expenditure) was not significantly different between intervention and comparison households

Recommendations

Project committees should be strengthened to play a bigger role in planning, implementation and monitoring of community livelihoods programmes.

The critical role played by the committees formed to steer the project forward contributed to positive outcomes. The committees were responsible for the identification of activities to be carried out and selection of beneficiaries based on poverty and vulnerability. In addition, they took part in implementation, monitoring of the project and accountability issues. They undertook community mobilization for increased participation of community members in project activities. There is evidence from this effectiveness review showing that the Project Implementation,

Monitoring and Accountability Committees contributed to increased participation and involvement of community members especially women in project activities. This unique feature of the project should be encouraged in future implementation strategies of projects of this nature.

Consider incorporating training components into business models for income generating activities.

Capacity building of beneficiaries with regard to small household businesses should be a prerequisite before such activities are undertaken. One lesson that can be learnt from this effectiveness review is that for Income Generating Activities to succeed as a business model there should be a component of training on the range of businesses available to the recipients prior to the distribution of funds. In this project, no training on business skills was carried out with the beneficiaries before roll out of the activity. Indeed, there is evidence from this effectiveness review that household businesses did not have an impact on the beneficiaries even though it was the most important activity that accounted for a significant portion of the project budget. Future projects dealing with pastoralist communities should disburse funds to those already involved in household businesses and ensure training of beneficiaries.

Consider continuous monitoring systems to ensure detection of implementation challenges during the course of the project.

Monitoring is crucial for project implementation since it will provide program staff with an opportunity to know whether activities are being implemented as planned. Without monitoring, it is difficult to get an understanding of what happens during project implementation. It was revealed during discussions with project staff that beneficiaries of funds for household businesses were not monitored to ensure that they implemented the activities for which the funds were provided. A monitoring plan which provides a framework on what is to be monitored, the frequency of monitoring visits, and how monitoring should be done need to be developed at the outset for future implementation of such projects.

There is need to further investigate the effect of cultural dynamics for the success of livelihoods interventions in this community.

There is evidence from this effectiveness review that wealth status of beneficiaries, measured using household assets and livestock improved over the period of implementation. It is possible that the project participants acquired additional livestock with funds meant for household businesses since as pastoralists they are more inclined towards rearing animals than engaging in small businesses which was a focus of this project. A deeper understanding of culture and traditions can help program staff in guiding the community with regard to choice of activities to be implemented in similar projects in future.

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

Yes, we are in agreement that the review was very objective and brought out important issues that are not normally captured at evaluation level or monitoring. In particular the effectiveness review was able to bring out an important component of design of the project - the ability to use three different project committees to identify, design, implement and monitor project of their choice. The use of project committees is a key delivery model that was coined to help deliver a project in areas that are hard to reach by Oxfam due to prevailing insecurity.

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

The review identified several strong components of the project- among them is that the three project committees were very instrumental in ensuring success of the project as they ensured participation of members of community including women at different stages, as well as contributing to high level of accountability as communities were also involved in management

The review provided evidence that livestock ownership increased as a result of our intervention, and bearing in mind that most of the beneficiaries of the project are pastoralists, there is an opportunity for livestock ownership to increase further. Increase in livestock has direct bearing on increased milk production and consequently increase in income from milk as was identified in this review.

The review also noted there was an increase in household assets which is strongly linked to the intervention as well as increase in income as a result of the donkey carts that were issued.

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

Yes, the review also identified areas that were weak, among them the need to strengthen monitoring and cross follow up of the beneficiaries after they were issued with the project funds for household businesses. The other area that was identified was related to the need to improve the skills of the beneficiaries of the grant for establishing business and other income generating activities.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

Generally the effectiveness review process was quite unique compared to other reviews and evaluations the team have been involved in. It was very thorough, detailed right from the time of engaging the consultant, developing tools and field data collection where the country team was heavily engaged. There was over emphasising on data quality and management which was necessary to address the process in a very statistical way and clearly depict the levels of significance in the interventions. The case of Somalia is unique in that field data collection for Oxfam staff is challenged by limited access as a result of insecurity.

There was also a lot of engagement at report writing stages and final presentation of the results. At initial stages the team felt the report was very scientific and not very easily understood by the project staff. This was however sorted out and simplified.

What might need improvement is shortening the process of generating the final report, especially if the results are expected to improve on phase 2 of a similar project like the case of Somalia.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

This review came at the right time because there is a phase 2 of a similar project that is under implementation, and some of the recommendations are already incorporated.

All the four recommendations for learning will be incorporated in the 2 phase of the project as follows:

1. The training of the different project committees will be strengthened, though this is continuous. The team have developed training manuals for the committees and plan to conduct continuous refresher training to clearly define roles and responsibilities, and monitor committee engagement in project activities by March 2016.
2. The project team has developed a manual for training on business skills. Complete training will be carried out for all project participants before disbursement of funds.

3. Continuous monitoring has been incorporated in the project. Monitoring tools have been developed for use in different micro projects
4. During screening process, the project is making further analysis on culture dynamics to ensure project participants of the IGAs in particular have previous knowledge of business or are interested in undertaking business.

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

No

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?

All the four learnings outlined in question 7 will be incorporated in future projects. As mentioned earlier, we have a similar phase 2 project that is been implemented and we have agreed to incorporate some of the recommendations.

10. Additional reflections

None