

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women’s Empowerment in Uganda: Impact evaluation of the project ‘Piloting gender sensitive livelihoods in Karamoja’ (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 ‘Piloting Gender Sensitive Livelihoods in Karamoja’ project was selected for review in this way under the thematic area of Women’s Empowerment.

The Effectiveness Review took place in Kotido district, (Karamoja - Uganda) in August and September 2014. This impact evaluation study investigated the impact the two components of the project ‘*Piloting gender sensitive livelihoods in Karamoja*’ had on women’s empowerment. The project activities were implemented in Kotido district and Kaabong districts, in the Karamoja region between July 2011 and March 2014 by Oxfam and partner organisations.

The project intended to achieve two main objectives through the implementation of two distinct interventions.

The first objective was to improve the livelihoods of poor women through support to enterprises. In order to achieve this objective, the project worked in one sub-county in Kotido district (Kotido sub-county) implementing a Gender Action Learning System approach (GALS) with 10 women’s groups, consisting of 40 women per group. The GALS is a community-led empowerment methodology which aims to promote economic, social and political transformation to gender justice. The approach works with women and men jointly to develop achievable visions for change, including journeys and road maps. The project also provided training on how to run small enterprises and businesses; supported women’s groups access loans to start new businesses; and provided equipment and inputs needed to start up businesses. The set of activities which contributed to this objective will be referred as the project’s WEE activities.

The second objective was to reduce violence against women (VAW) by promoting awareness and influencing attitude and behavioural change. In order to achieve this goal the project implemented a variety of approaches and methods in a wider geographical area such as training duty bearers and community leaders and supporting them to implement positive actions addressing violence against women within their communities; and holding a number of awareness raising sessions on violence against women in schools through school drama clubs. The project also implemented a ‘change makers’ strategy, recruiting a number of participants within project communities, talking to them about gender equality and problems associated with domestic violence against women and, and supporting to reflect on and change their own attitudes and behaviours and then to encourage others to do the same. This expectation was that this strategy would improve levels of awareness and reduce violence against women more broadly within the project communities. These activities were conducted in four sub-counties in Kotido district and four sub-counties in Kaabong district. The set of activities which contributed to this objective will be referred to as the project’s VAW activities.

Oxfam recognises women’s empowerment to be a complex, multi-dimensional concept. While not arguing for a standard set of women’s empowerment characteristics that are applicable to all contexts, Oxfam has developed a multi-dimensional index to support measurement of this hard to measure area that sets out 5 dimensions of women’s empowerment that the organisation considers to be important in all contexts. Recognising the importance of context, however, each effectiveness review begins by identifying a set of characteristics under

these 5 dimensions that are considered to be important to the particular context of the project that has been selected. For this evaluation, these characteristics were identified through a workshop conducted with a range of project stakeholders including: Oxfam staff, partner organizations and local consultants considered experts in the local area. The aim was to obtain a holistic measure of women's empowerment in Karamoja, even if not all characteristics are directly linked to the project activities or intended outcomes. It is worth noting that the characteristics identified for use in this evaluation include a predominance of indicators associated with women's economic empowerment.

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 2010. A household survey was carried out with 185 women randomly selected from those who participated in the project's WEE activities, and 185 women who participated in the project's VAW activities but who had not been involved in GALS activities, selected from within the social network of the project's change makers. Finally 380 comparison women who had never been involved in any Oxfam project were also surveyed in order to enable comparisons with the two groups of women who had participated in project activities. For a more comprehensive description of the sampling and evaluation strategy please refer to chapter four in the main body of the report.

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

Key results of this Effectiveness Review					
Outcome area	WEE activities		VAW activities		Comments
	Linked to the project logic	Evidence of impact	Linked to the project logic	Evidence of impact	
Overall measure of women's empowerment	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Women involved in project's WEE activities present statistically significant higher levels of women's empowerment overall. On the other hand, women involved in project's VAW activities do not present higher levels of women's empowerment.
Self-perception, personal change and opinions	Yes	Yes	No	No	Women involved in WEE activities appear to have changed their opinions on women's economic role, gender rights, and property rights.
Personal freedom and violence	Yes	Not clear	Yes	Not clear	Results on attitudes to gender-based violence are unclear. The evaluation identified higher acceptability of gender-based violence among the group of women involved in VAW activities. However, the literature suggests that these estimates should be treated with caution as they may reflect instead a greater willingness to discuss the issue. Estimates suggest lower prevalence of violence among women who participated in WEE activities as well as among women who participated in VAW activities; however, these differences are not statistically significant.
Access and control over resources	Yes	Yes	No	No	Women involved in WEE activities reported higher levels of contribution of personal income to the household; however, this is not reflected in higher levels of asset ownership by the

				household. The evaluation also found evidence that women engaged in the project's WEE activities had higher levels of access to savings and credit.	
Decisions & influence	Yes	No	No	No	There is no evidence of improved decision-making power within the household for either group of project participants. Women involved in project's WEE activities report lower levels of household decision-making power than women in the comparison group.
Support from social network	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	The evaluation found higher levels of group participation associated with both groups of project participants, and higher levels of support from the different groups these women were involved with to pursue own initiative.
Care and unpaid work	Yes	No	No	No	Estimates suggest that women involved in project's WEE activities are associated with a smaller amount of time devoted to leisure, compared with women not involved into project activities.
Household wealth	Yes	Yes	No	No	There is evidence that women involved in the project's WEE activities appear to have greater levels of household wealth compared with similar women not involved into the project.
Involvement in business activities	Yes	Yes	No	No	Women involved in the project's WEE activities appear to be 17 percentage points more likely to be participating in business activities than similar women not involved in project activities.

Recommendations:

The Uganda country team and the project team in particular are encouraged to consider the following:

- **Considering scale up WEE activities**

This Effectiveness Review provides evidence that WEE activities are associated with positive impact on: household wealth, women's participation in businesses activities and overall women's empowerment. The country team is encouraged to exploring whether and how WEE activities could be scaled up in a sustainable way.

- **Consider integrating activities addressing power with the household**

This Effectiveness Review is showing that activities implemented on WEE had a positive impact on a number of women's empowerment indicators, including higher women's contribution to household income. However the evaluation did not find evidence of improved decision making power within the household and control over household assets.

Future projects are encouraged in working more explicitly around this area, creating space for sensitize both men and women around shared household decision making, as well as improving influencing skills and generating confidence in women.

- **Explore the reasons behind lack of impact among activities on violence against women**

This evaluation did not find evidence of improved women's empowerment linked with project's VAW activities. It was found a modest impact on knowledge on where to go in case of violence and higher levels of support from the group to pursue own initiative. On the other side estimates from the survey are suggesting that women involved in project's VAW activities are presenting higher levels of acceptability of violence against women. For future VAW projects, it is advisable to consider also holistic women's empowerment indicators when developing the project's theory of change.

The programme team is encouraged considering what are the mechanisms and dynamics behind the VAW component. Particular attention should be put in identifying the characteristics of the change makers that have been selected, and their motivations in the project.

- **Consider evaluation questions during programme design**

This evaluation identified a positive impact for activities conducted on WEE. In future projects if there is the interest in exploring impact questions, it is advisable considering including an impact evaluation frameworks since 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?

Yes, they do. Our own assessment also indicated positive results of the WEE activities in relation to the indicators assessed. We are delighted to see the results achieved in shifting norms and practices in a relatively short period of time. As for the VAW interventions, the results are also aligned with expectations, as the project's logic is generally not strongly linked to the indicators assessed.

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

Achievements of the WEE appear to be generally solid. As highlight, it is worth mentioning the results achieved in relation to changes in self-perception, an area that is often overlooked, yet it is critical for fostering empowerment ('power within').

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

Women's involvement in income generating initiatives is often assumed to cause economic empowerment. However, the findings show that this was not the case in this project. Indeed, interventions for WEE didn't consider proper mechanisms to support women to influence decision making and ownership of household assets.

Additionally, results are unclear in relation to personal freedom and violence, a finding that requires further reflection.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

First, for more coherent analysis, it would have been useful to consider the inclusion of the indicators assessed in the project design.

Secondly, the quantitative nature of the review could have been complemented by qualitative methods.

Finally, the set of indicators chosen for the review are clearly more relevant for WEE intervention than for the VAW one, which does not allow establishing a comparative analysis.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

- The GALS approach will be scaled-up during 2016-2017 in Uganda and other countries in the region, including DR Congo and Rwanda.
- A multi-country programme on WEE will be implemented in HECA, under the coordination of Oxfam Uganda. The findings of this review will inform the development of the Theory of Change, and the MEAL framework will consider the inclusion, as relevant, of the indicators used in this review. Programme design will be completed by February.
- A debriefing will be done in January 2016 with the Regional Gender Advisor to explore how learning generated by this review can be disseminated and inform programme design in other countries in HECA.

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? Please be as specific as possible and provide context where relevant, naming projects in full where learning from the review will be applied.

As stated in question 7, learning from the review will inform design of a multi-country programme on WEE. Based on positive findings, we are encouraged to scale up the GALS approach in Uganda and other countries in HECA.

Support from Regional Centre or Oxford may be useful especially in terms of i) transferring learning from other multi-country programmes outside HECA, and ii) facilitating reflection around the impact of interventions on Personal freedom and violence.

10. Additional reflections

None