

## Oxfam Management response to the final evaluation of the ‘My Rights My Voice’ programme

<b>Prepared by:</b>	Lien Van Mellaert (MEL Advisor)	
<b>Contributors:</b>	Sitan Cisse (Global Programme Coordinator) Imogen Davies (Programme and Communications Officer) Olloriak Sawade and Stephanie de Chassy (SC)	
<b>Signed off by:</b>	Olloriak Sawade (Oxfam Novib) and Stephanie de Chassy (Oxfam GB) for the My Rights My Voice (MRMV) Steering Committee (SC)	
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### A: Context, background and findings (*Based on the evaluation’s Terms of Reference*)

#### 1. The context and background of the evaluation, i.e. the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

The implementation phase of the MRMV programme ended on 31 March 2016 in the countries. At the time of this final evaluation, the current six My Rights, My Voice countries were wrapping up the implementation of activities for the fourth year. The main aim of the evaluation was to systematically analyse the actual outcomes of the programme and its underlying working mechanisms against the proposed outcomes and Theory of Change.

The object of the evaluation was the My Rights, My Voice programme as described in the approved My Rights, My Voice programme document and any changes to the programme in the course of its implementation (Year 4 proposal for extension, work plans 2015, strategies, adjusted Theory of Change etc.).

The main focus of the evaluation was on the outcome and processes rather than the impact level. Where available, impact level data from existing sources (incl. baseline studies) needed to inform the evaluation, yet it was not expected that additional data were collected at impact level. While the MRMV programme did achieve significant changes in policies, practices and beliefs, especially towards the end of the programme, it was felt that more time would have been needed for these achievements to translate into measurable effects in terms of the overall health and/or education situation of children and youth (= MRMV’s impact statement).

The purpose of this final evaluation was twofold:

- Building institutional knowledge: The evaluation will inform the development of current and future youth (and other multi-country) programmes and projects. To maximize learning for all those involved, the methodology for the final evaluation will ensure the active involvement from Oxfam staff, partners and youth.
- Accountability: The evaluation will allow us to be fully accountable to our different stakeholders. It will also indicate to what extent Oxfam has been able to change its ways of working in response to the recommendations of the Mid-Term Peer Review and Gender Review organised at the end of 2013.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- a. Stimulate reflection and learning among country offices, partners and youth groups, including learning from failures and challenges.
- b. Review and validate the achievements reached under each outcome as presented in the MRMV annual reports (and underlying documents like quarterly monitoring reports), Midterm Peer Review and Strategic Gender Review.
- c. Validation of the Theory of Change of this project and its underlying assumptions. This means describing the process of how the changes in policies, practices and beliefs have been achieved, and analysing this against the Theory of Change of the project, including the underlying assumptions.
- d. Developing concrete recommendations for future programme and project development on youth and for multi-country programmes in general.

Intended primary users of the evaluation results:

- *Oxfam staff (global + in-country) and partners involved in this programme:* The evaluation process and its results will allow them to gain a good understanding of the current achievements as well as areas for improvement, which will in turn inform the design and implementation of future projects and programmes under their responsibility.
- *Youth groups* established under the programme. Youth-led groups in the different countries will use the results to strengthen their organisations and to mobilize alternative funding sources.
- *Oxfam Youth and Active Citizens Working Groups:* A multi-affiliate learning community within Oxfam has taken on the task of consolidating Oxfam's existing experience and track record of working with youth. The results will be used by its different Working Groups to inform and influence the broader organisation.
- *SIDA.* SIDA may use the results as input for the final evaluation of the SIDA youth fund and for accountability towards the Swedish public.

Secondary users of the evaluation results will be the following:

- *Oxfam and affiliates* will use the results to further inform and build their work around youth and active citizenship. The evaluation will also contribute to building Oxfam's reputation as an effective, innovative and transparent learning organization, thereby improving our credibility with participants, stakeholders and within the development sector.
- *Oxfam Oxfam Strategic Plan evaluation team:* A number of questions in the evaluation will directly feed into the evaluation of the Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019.

In addition to the above, we plan to share the results with other organizations and donors that have recently published a youth strategy or have a strong focus on youth (DFID, Comic Relief, Deutsche Government, Restless Development, ActionAid, UNOY, CHOICE and others). The evaluation report will also be part of a document review commissioned by Plan UK.

## **2. Summary main findings and recommendations**

### ***Relevance***

The MRMV programme was well prepared with explicit measures to include key stakeholders in the process. As such, it is no surprise that the MRMV aims, and its choice of education and health as areas of intervention, design and approach, were largely adequate in view of the specific needs of young people and communities. Important elements in this regard include the principle that youth prefer to engage via their own forums and organisations. Some critical remarks with regard to the programme approach include the lack of a specific focus on and consideration for (the constraints of) *marginalised* youth; the lack of operationalisation of gender considerations (that were well analysed during preparation) in the programme approach; and the limited attention, at least in the early stages, to inclusion of duty-bearers and care-takers in the programme strategy and approach.

### ***Effectiveness***

In most countries, the programme had to invest in substantial initial efforts to overcome barriers in order to work directly with youth and achieve their effective participation, in particular that of girls. As such, the recognition of youth (boys and girls) as actors in their own right, with specific rights, needs, aspirations but also capabilities, is considered the first important achievement of the programme.

Most country programmes have clearly been successful in developing, at the level of youth, knowledge, awareness and capacity to articulate needs and aspirations along with the principles of a rights-based approach. In most cases however, they have also invested in obtaining *actual changes (in terms of changed behaviour and practices)* at the level of children, youth and their allies, in particular in the area of sexual and reproductive rights. In this regard, the emergence and consolidation of strong leadership (including boys and girls) and youth organisations have been considerable achievements, and often came as a surprise to other stakeholders. An important remark in this regard is that effectively including allies (in particular, parents) has been a challenge, and in some countries has even largely been ignored.

Achievements in terms of improved collective (organisational) skills and resources have been varied, which can to a significant extent be attributed to substantial differences among the countries *prior to the programme*. As such, in some countries the role of the programme has mainly been to create adequate frameworks and spaces for youth to undertake action, whereas in other countries, programme implementing partners (Oxfam itself and programme NGOs) have played a substantial role in encouraging youth programme ownership and setting up autonomous youth organisations.

The programme has succeeded in gaining the interest of government authorities (at the national and local level), informal leaders, journalists, religious scholars, and parliamentarians in specific programme issues, and getting them ready to

engage in dialogue and exchange and, in quite a number of cases, to openly endorse the advocacy and policy agenda of the youth. This has in some cases led to specific actions by duty-bearers to improve access to and quality of health and/or education services for boys and girls, young women and men. Overall, the effectiveness of these efforts were constrained by various factors, including severe resource limitations at the level of the authorities concerned and the relatively short duration of lobbying and advocacy efforts that, to be truly successful, might require continued efforts and engagement for a period longer than the programme duration.

The fourth programme objective – related to Oxfam’s strengthened capacity to work on youth agency in country programmes, and its global campaigning force to facilitate youth claiming and accessing better health and education – has remained largely unaddressed in an explicit way in day-to-day implementation of the programme; capacities to work on youth agency have, however, been strengthened considerably via work on the other objectives. However, the second component of this objective in particular might have been overly ambitious for an innovative programme, not least given that programme implementation coincided with the Oxfam’s internal reorganisation towards a Single Management Structure. Most importantly though, the fact that country programmes were focused on in-country dynamics perhaps meant it was not realistic to try to find common issues for joint campaigning in the North and the South and within the eight programme countries.

### ***Contributions to longer-term impacts***

While programme monitoring has been largely confined to the activity and output levels, there exists ample evidence that the MRMV strategy to focus on capacity building and awareness raising related to education and health rights has produced an influence *beyond* the youth included in the programme. Most country programmes record important changes in the views and attitude of parents, who, for instance, have become supportive and open to discussing SRHR issues with their children, and have allowed their daughters to participate in youth-led activities and liaised with authorities to protect the rights of their children.

At the level of communities, probably the most fundamental change, reported in various countries, is that youth are now considered as important change agents in their own right, able to play an active role in the decision-making process at the local level and ‘allowed’ to pursue change via their own organisations. Improvements at higher levels often are similar to those at the level of communities, in the sense that government authorities and other players at national level increasingly recognise the role of youth as change agents and actors to be involved in national decision-making processes. As such, youth leaders and their organisations have played a role in the formulation of strategies and policies that relate to youth needs and interests. Nevertheless, country programmes mostly have not succeeded in pursuing a lobbying and advocacy strategy on a *continued basis* and have not always been able to liaise strategically with key actors.

Linking the programme with the MDGs was an explicit aim during programme formulation. However, contributing to the achievement of the MDGs has not been a direct source of inspiration and motivation for programme implementation teams, partners and the youth themselves. In all countries, the programme has developed along its own dynamics, whereby a rights-based approach was the common denominator without there being a clear link, in the minds of the people involved, with the MDGs. However, it has been found that MRMV has made a direct contribution to several MDGs, related to access to education (MDG 2), gender equality and empowerment of girls and women (MDG 3), maternal health (MDG 5) and the fight against HIV/AIDs (MDG 6).

### ***Overall efficiency of programme implementation***

Programme efficiency should be assessed against the background of the highly complex programme set-up: the – innovative – MRMV programme has been run by two Oxfam entities during a period in which the Oxfam family initiated its internal process towards a Single Management Structure. The programme had activities in eight (culturally and economically rather diverse) countries spread over three continents; it was managed by a Global Coordination Team whose members were based in different locations, while at country level several institutional models and strategies were developed to respond to local circumstances. While to a major extent unavoidable, such high levels of complexity obviously challenged the efficiency of programme implementation.

The programme was equipped with a governance structure (Steering Committee, Advisory Committee, programme coordination) that can be considered as adequate in view of its innovative character. Members of these structures were also motivated and eager to provide the necessary support and steer. However, the complex programme set-up meant that the Steering Committee (SC) had to deal with highly operational issues, much more than it had intended. This was to some extent unavoidable (new initiative, pioneering role, challenges related to Oxfam’s internal reorganisation processes, etc.), but other factors such as turnover in SC membership added to the challenges. As such, the SC could not truly fulfil its initial (but maybe over-ambitious) expectations of providing strategic steering and guidance.

The programme coordination's effectiveness gained much from the fact that the Programme Coordinator had played a key role in the programme formulation and in the selection of the eight country proposals that were eventually included in MRMV. In addition, programme management was successful in the early stages in streamlining views and perceptions of the programme and getting these internalised at the level of country implementation teams. As such, MRMV can be considered a 'real' programme, despite its context-bound specific characteristics in each country. However, the MEL programme function has been inadequately addressed throughout programme implementation, so that weak monitoring – in particular, limited attention to outcome and impact – constitutes one of the major weaknesses of the programme. Indeed, the lack of incentives to monitor and report on *results*, combined with the lack of a good programme results-based framework, has been a major factor in some countries becoming overly operational without much concern about the eventual effects of the efforts undertaken.

Finally, discontinuities in the Programme Coordinator position (which remained unfilled for a few months) also led to a delay in starting the key processes related to ensuring benefit sustainability. This discontinuity also coincided with the extension of the programme by one year, which was administratively heavy and required much time and energy that should have been devoted to other activities.

The establishment of good cooperation structures and mechanisms with (often well-established) partner organisations has constituted a programme strength. Often cooperation with local organisations has existed for quite a long time, but only on a programme-by-programme basis. As such, these partnerships seem not to have become part of a longer-term strategy aimed at forging broad-based civil society coalitions.

### ***Quality involvement of youth***

All country programmes have undertaken attempts to ensure the involvement of children and youth, and for all of them active involvement of children and youth has been an important consideration in itself. Even so, different forms of participation of children and youth seem to have co-existed within the same country programmes. Various factors seem to have determined the quality of youth and children's participation and its development over the programme implementation period. In countries where youth organisations existed before the programme start, representatives of these organisations were involved from the design phase and consequently were continually consulted and engaged throughout programme implementation. However, also in these same countries, there have been instances where local partner NGOs have struggled to create frameworks and spaces to optimise youth participation and involvement, and have often continued to resort to rather traditional approaches whereby they remained in control of decision-making processes.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find countries where active youth citizenship was virtually non-existent prior to the programme. In these countries, at least in the initial stages of the programme, youth understandably could not be considered as equal partners. However, there are clear signs that the pattern of youth involvement has changed over time, at least partially, and that modes of improved involvement of youth were gradually developed, evolutions that have gone hand-in-hand with the creation and strengthening of youth groups and organisations.

To conclude, while progress in terms of youth involvement has been seen everywhere – often surprising local actors about the youth's capacities to mobilise themselves and implement their own activities – there have been few indications of a *structured and continuous* reflection about how to optimise youth involvement and to fully realise the ambition to develop a programme *by* youth. As such, in some countries, opportunities have been missed to more quickly shift to approaches that make better use of the existing potential of youth participation.

### ***Added value of MRMV being a multi-country programme***

MRMV was explicitly conceived as a multi-country programme and equipped with a coordinating structure, the Global Coordination Team (GCT), which had a mandate that clearly reached beyond routine programme administrative and financial management. As such, the programme has been part of Oxfam's global work on youth, one of Oxfam's major areas of intervention. Overall, it has been found that all country-level programmes were well aware of being part of a global programme, but that this did not really permeate the consciousness of programme staff and other actors, despite the programme's initiative to organise an annual international exchange and learning event, and other attempts to promote mutual exchange and learning. While participants evaluated these annual events in a positive way, the longer-term effects of the events seem to be limited. It appears that in most cases the learning cycle has not been fully concluded, in that 'learning' did not actually result in *changed behaviour and practices* at the individual level let alone at organisational level. Thus a well-structured approach to systematically identify and conceptualise individual learning, to analyse its applicability and need for contextualisation at organisational level, and to consequently translate it into new or enriched organisational approaches and activities, did not materialise.

### ***Influence of the recommendations of the Mid-term Review and the Strategic Gender Review***

Little evidence has been found of influence of the Mid-term Review (MTR) on MRMV in further programme implementation, although there are strong indications of *individuals* having learned a lot via the MTR peer evaluation

approach. A key explanation for this is that the MTR report failed to address key issues of the TOR, and failed to include the richness of the peer review approach and much of the advice brought in by peer evaluators. Furthermore, opportunities were missed to translate some of the MTR's key observations and reflections into *operational* recommendations. Lastly, the follow-up of the MTR coincided with the end of the first three-year programme period, and as such was compromised by the uncertainty surrounding the extension of the programme.

The Strategic Gender Review (SGR) was followed up by various activities, and as such seems to have produced some influence, in particular in countries with strong steering mechanisms or where the country gender advisor could be called in for the SGR follow-up. While the SGR seems to have produced positive changes in at least some countries, these should not be overestimated. Indeed, the activities undertaken in the 'better' countries as a consequence of the SGR barely addressed the key findings of the review, namely that youth and programme representatives do not really recognise or perceive gender dynamics and mechanisms of discrimination within their own groups and organisations, and that gender is not well mainstreamed in the key programme objectives and/or via a specific gender objective. It should be acknowledged that the SGR came too late in programme implementation to allow for such fundamental changes.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability considerations were well addressed in programme design, both at the global and country levels. A few strong key principles and strategic considerations were put forward that laid the foundations for developing a solid sustainability strategy, such as promoting ownership by youth and the comprehensive attention to capacity building. On the other hand, specific sustainability challenges related to working with children and youth were *not* addressed, such as the fact that children/youth do not remain young but eventually become adults and parents; and secondly, the fact that reliance on the motivation, skills and voluntary commitment of young people is key to programme success and ownership, but at the same time is limited in scope in view of the many other challenges young people face.

While sustainability considerations were present in the design phase, their relative importance and the quality of action to ensure benefit sustainability differed much among the countries during implementation. Overall, sustainability was not systematically built in as a continuous point of attention. Hence it was addressed as a key issue only late in programme implementation, via the organisation of workshops, the development of exit strategies, etc. In most cases however, these exit strategies and plans could not (or could not entirely) be implemented, due to lack of time and an underestimation of the complexity of implementing actions needed to sustain programme benefits, or because of other priorities, such as the demanding financial and administrative closure of programme activities.

The deficiencies related to sustaining programme benefits should, however, be put into perspective. Indeed, it is important to underline that not all results achieved by the programme required specific measures to ensure their sustainability. In particular, the changes in behaviour and attitudes of youth, duty-bearers and care-takers, and the acceptance, at the level of duty-bearers and care-takers, of the specific concerns and needs of youth, might eventually become embedded in wider society without much additional attention, simply as a result of favourable contextual evolutions. In other words: important programme achievements might prove to be sustainable.

On the other hand, other results do require accompanying measures (e.g. via exit strategies) to become sustainable. In most countries, the measures undertaken might prove insufficient to ensure benefit sustainability. The scope of these measures has generally been too narrow and, above all, their implementation period too short; in addition, in some cases the specificity of dealing with youth has not been incorporated in the sustainability strategies. The handing over of aspects of the programme to local institutions (government bodies, NGO partners) could prove to be an effective way of ensuring sustainability, provided that these organisations will safeguard the programme's unique philosophy and approach. However, while such strategies might be successful, the packages handed over to other institutions do not include all successful aspects of the programme such as innovative actions, ongoing lobbying and advocacy efforts, attempts to scale-up particularly interesting approaches, and – maybe most importantly – programme-level learning and exchange mechanisms.

### **Recommendations**

*Please refer to the evaluation report for more details*

1. Opt for an 'expanded' rights-based approach (Ox, CO & Partners)
2. Strive for clarity about the position of marginalised youth in the programme (Ox, CO & Partners)
3. Redesign the approach to mainstream gender in the programme (Ox, CO & Partners)
4. Reframe capacity building of youth organisations as part of a broader development agenda (Ox, CO & Partners)
5. Operationalise strategies and approaches towards genuine 'implementation by youth' (Ox, CO & Partners)
6. Continue with the development of multi-country programmes but be realistic about what they can achieve (Ox, CO & Partners)

7. Optimise the effects of capacity building and exchange by adopting a more structured and comprehensive approach to learning (Ox, CO & Partners)
8. Invest in the design and development of the programme's monitoring and evaluation (Ox, CO & Partners)
9. Simplify financial and administrative procedures (Ox)
10. Need for a longer programme duration (Donor, Ox, CO & Partners)
11. Considerer the modalities of using the e-learning platform on a broader scale (Ox, CO & Partners)

**B: Oxfam's response** to the validity and relevance of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. *Include*

**3. Summary of evaluation quality assessment**, i.e. quality of the evaluation is strong/mixed/poor and short assessment of the process (e.g. good, wordy report)

- The overall quality of the final evaluation report is good. The report provides useful insights for the development of future multi-country programmes, not only on youth-related topics but also in general.
- We recognize the complexity of analyzing a global programme that - despite strong common elements - looked quite different in each of the 8 countries. The overall analysis part comes forward very strongly in the final synthesis report. Nevertheless, we feel that the country-specific findings, especially from peer evaluators, could have gotten a more prominent place in the report.
- While the content of the final evaluation report is good, we do find it rather long. The language is at times technical and generally more targeted towards Oxfam and donors, which will make it resonate less with in-country stakeholders, especially young people. To stimulate learning and exchange at country level, we did make sure that each country organised a restitution session with all stakeholders. Also, a (shorter) background note was written to make the findings from field research more tangible for country staff, young people and partners. We also organized a webinar to disseminate the overall programme-level findings.
- The core evaluation team could only visit two countries in person. Due to visa issues and last-minute changes in the security situation, we had to work with national evaluators coached from a distance by the core evaluation team in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This worked reasonably well given the short preparation time, yet there were fewer opportunities for quality control (especially during the data collection process) than we had originally planned for. To some extent this may have affected the findings, with relatively more weight being given to countries that were visited by the core evaluation team.
- The methodology was mostly qualitative. Given the budget, timing (data collection during the closure phase and wrapping up of activities with partners) and the deliberate choice for a youth-focused, participatory methodology, it was not possible to add an additional quantitative component to reliably measure changes at impact level. This choice was also influenced by the lack of reliable and replicable baseline measurements (baselines carried out in the different countries used very different approaches and were of variable quality). We do acknowledge that a mixed design with additional quantitative evidence could have made some of the conclusions stronger.

**4. Main Oxfam follow-up actions** (detailed follow-up actions should be included in the table below)

The Programme Coordination Team, together with the Steering Group and the Youth Active Citizens group, will ensure the recommendations and areas for improvement pointed out by the evaluators are shared broadly with other relevant programme staff managing multi-country programmes and aiming to engage young people. We will also plan a presentation of the findings to senior management and will aim to put the findings on the agenda of Senior leadership and trustees/Board of Directors of both Oxfam affiliates implementing the programme. In addition, Oxfam will be sharing and discussing some evaluation findings during two symposiums with donors and peers in June (one in the Hague with the Netherlands ministry of foreign affairs and one with DFID, other UK based donors and peer agencies) –

Programme development teams in respective Oxfam affiliates that have managed MRMV and the YAC programme development teams will ensure that the constructive recommendations discussed with the evaluators are systematically considered for upcoming programmes and projects. The teams will also seek guidance from programme quality teams as well as the Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability team. There is a probability that MRMV is picked for an Effectiveness Review – randomly selected projects that go through rigorous internal evaluation process – which would solidify further evidence of impact and gaps in programme design and implementation. For more information: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/monitoring-evaluation/effectiveness-reviews>

**5. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon - and why** (*this reflection should consider the results of the evaluation quality assessment*)

1. The evaluation questions the effectiveness of a 'narrow' approach to RBA and mentions that this approach could become counterproductive in resource-constrained environments.

*Response: This is an important area of reflection and we appreciate that the evaluation team brought these programme dilemma into their analysis as it relates to a lot of debates in the development sector, between needs/rights based approaches and the right balance between the two, depending on the context. Oxfam has been an early adopter of a holistic Right Based Approach, based on principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination. In its latest Strategic Plan 'the Power of People Against Poverty', Oxfam stresses that for sustained changes to happen, fighting to uphold the rights of the most vulnerable people needs to be balanced with strong shift in power relations and the right environment for power holders to be held to account – necessitating some constructive engagement and the ability of duty bearers to respond to people's demands For the development of MRMV programme framework, Oxfam has operated in line with the governing Swedish CSO strategy from Sida, which states the following: "...a vibrant and pluralistic civil society in developing countries that efficiently and in a rights-based way contributes to reduced poverty in all its dimensions". The interpretation of the Human Rights based Approach (HRBA) used by Sida relates to the way in which the programme/project are operationalised. (Accountability, transparency, participation, non-discrimination and involvement of beneficiaries)*

*In MRMV, we adopted a Right Based Approach but also a strong governance and active citizenship approach, with an increasing realization over the course of the four years of the limitations of a 'demand' driven approach, that could raise false expectations of young people involved in our activities. While the balance between 'demand' and 'supply' activities may have varied in the different countries, some programme teams have built in social accountability approaches into their strategies, leading to young people and adults seeking solutions together, budgets being analysed and monitored, and policies being modified to improve the political ability of the government to fulfil its obligations; MRMV's experience of limited follow up by power holders on their promises and commitments has brought both political savviness and resilience of young people, who themselves understand that rights come with responsibilities and that government officials are sometimes them-selves helpless when the demand overcome the ability to supply services.*

*We however acknowledge that MRMV's objectives 1 and 2 and Theory of Change had a strong emphasis on 'raising awareness' and 'claiming rights', which, when aiming to work with marginalised young people, could lead to frustration or disappointment and not meet their basic needs, especially in extremely poor countries. Objectives 3 and 4 were designed to enhance the environment for constructive engagement and mutual accountability between right-holders and power-holders, which is core to our commitment to long term sustainable change – Based on country context and ability to reach out to different socio-cultural groups, different countries adapted their strategies and some catered more to needs at the onset of the programme (sometimes building on existing or legacy programmes). For instance in Mali, the young people initially reached (more educated and urban) realised them-selves the imperative to focus on awareness raising and understanding of rights of more vulnerable groups and tool initiatives in that sense, supported by the programme.*

2. The evaluation points out that there was not much tangible evidence that the Mid-Term Review resulted in learning beyond the individuals participating in it. The evaluators acknowledge that the Strategic Gender Review and consequent follow-up has had limited positive effects in some of the countries yet not in all.

*Response: We acknowledge that the level of ownership and use of both the SGR and MTR at the country level has been uneven, as country teams have been very focused on pursuing their action plans and may not have taken necessary time to reflect with partners and young people, half way through the programme. Also, as all country projects are to some extent different, some of the MTR recommendations were more relevant to some countries than others and could not always be systematically taken over. However the Programme Coordination Team has planned various webinars and one to one calls in support of collective and individual reflections and integration of the recommendations into further plans. We noticed that many of the staff who participated used the MTR as an opportunity and inspiration to re-think youth involvement in their own countries. For example, the Baraza model in Tanzania inspired student clubs in Vietnam, while the experience with rural fada groups in Niger inspired YAB members in Mali to go beyond schools and set up youth groups at counties level. This experience helped to reach out-of -school and more vulnerable youth, especially young girls. The MTR's peer evaluation methodology in it-self created a lot of changes in the way programme teams evaluating each other could share ideas and influence each other – which are hard to measure and can seem anecdotal – In terms of the SGR, again, changes in attitudes and practices are often long to witness as gender stereotypes and beliefs are often deeply personal and ingrained. Here again, the Global Coordination Team, supported by a Gender Advisor, conducted a number of webinars and follow-up calls. We believe that strong ownership and collective commitment is most important and cannot be forced artificially, which means that the journey to change is long and arduous. Oxfam's team*



learnt from this experience and mostly recognizes the need to include a strong gender analysis at the onset of the programme implementation, and specific measurements and 'markers' in the MEAL framework, which is now practiced widely throughout Oxfam. In terms of the MTR, again we acknowledge this as an area of improvement and Oxfam has strengthened its CAMSA process so that reflection and learning, including appropriate investment of money and time in evaluations, is even more strongly embedded into programme design and implementation. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/monitoring-evaluation>

3. The report says that MRMV "led to specific actions by duty-bearers to improve access to and quality of health and/or education services for boys and girls, young women and men. Overall, the effectiveness of these efforts were constrained by various factors, including severe resource limitations at the level of the authorities concerned and the relatively short duration of lobbying and advocacy efforts that, to be truly successful, might require continued efforts and engagement for a period longer than the programme duration."

*Response: Changes in policies, practices and beliefs are long term goals; most of them took place towards the end of the programme, meaning many of these achievements did not yet result in measurable, large-scale effects in terms of health and education by the time of the evaluation. The MRMV MEL framework did not include programme indicators at impact level so the quantitative evidence about changes at this level is limited. As mentioned above, Oxfam has improved and strengthened its MEAL practices since the start of this programme in 2011 and has meanwhile developed a more systematic approach to impact measurement. Even so, attribution still remains a challenge when measuring our contribution in terms of universal goals such as MDGs or SDGs. In addition, MRMV's work has built on existing programmes (this was a requirement) that didn't always necessarily match MDGs objectives.*

4. The report found that all country-level programmes were well aware of being part of a global programme, but that this did not really permeate the consciousness of programme staff and other actors, despite the programme's initiative to organise an annual international exchange and learning event, and other attempts to promote mutual exchange and learning.

*Response: The evaluator may have only had a partial impression on the strength of the identity and may have spoken to programme staff and participants that may not be the most representative. MRMV learning events and active social media platforms have enable very strong connections to the 'brand' and commitment to the common vision; at the end of the third year, MRMV had become a strong reference throughout Oxfam and outside – It has been mentioned in annual reports of OGB, ONL and Oxfam International, and used as example in a UNICEF social accountability high level event in 2013 as well as at a DFID led 'youth summit' in 2015, where the Coordinator was featured in a plenary panel. The majority of MRMV programme staff remained in place throughout the duration of the programme, and this low turnover is largely due to the strong connection with the programme identity. Young people have expressed their deep connection with the programme through many testimonials on social media and videos, expressing how belonging to MRMV has changed their lives. The MRMV approach has also been integrated in the strategy of many implementing partners, with partners in different countries now working more collaboratively with young people.*

5. The evaluation has found that including allies (in particular, parents) has been a challenge, and in some countries has even largely been ignored.

*Response: We feel that the observation from the peer evaluators in Mali about the need to include parents in our interventions has received too much weight here, this finding cannot be generalised across the whole programme. For example, in Vietnam, Pakistan and Afghanistan and Niger, we did successfully work with allies, often the ones considered the most challenging to engage as having tremendous power over young people (religious leaders, government officials, elders). Even in Mali, the inclusion of parents was not ignored. The focus of the programme was indeed on teachers and students, with the approaches and strategies and tools not directly targeting parents. However, the out-of-school activities undertaken by young people did reach out to out-of-school youth and their parents.*

6. The report states that exit strategies and plans could not (or could not entirely) be implemented, due to lack of time and an underestimation of the complexity of implementing actions needed to sustain programme benefits, or because of other priorities, such as the demanding financial and administrative closure of programme activities.

*Response: Exit strategies were conceptualised in the programme proposal and discussed at the onset. The year four activities and strategies focused on youth empowerment to further guarantee sustainability. However we acknowledge that the actual planning was weak and late in most countries. This was due to a number of factors: uncertainty for some*



time of whether the programme will end in year three or would be extended for a fourth year and expectation by programme staff (despite attempt of PCT to manage expectations) that MRMV may see a phase 2; programme staff, especially in countries where activities were delayed by difficult context or internal slow procedures of authorization at the beginning of year four, focused on completing activities and making up for delays with partners with little attention for planning exit strategy; in some countries, partners involved in MRMV have been long term partners, and indeed some were able to continue activities as part of another programme (ex early marriage in Mali and Niger, budget monitoring work in Vietnam and Sexual and Reproductive health programme in Pakistan). Some of the young people have committed to sustain their youth groups voluntarily, and in Mali the Youth Group formed by MRMV participants is already engaged in other Oxfam programmes. In Niger, young people have created income generating activities to sustain their youth center and cyber. The tools developed by the programme have been handed to the government officials in Afghanistan and Mali. However it is not the case everywhere, and sustainability may be challenged due to weak exit strategies in some of the countries – Oxfam will mitigate that risk by ensuring that YAC group sustains the momentum and seeks funding to continue working with partners, allies and young people involved in MRMV.

7. The consultants recommend Oxfam to ‘simplify financial and administrative procedures’.

Response: At the start of the programme, the financial manager and the whole team did invest a lot of effort in coming up with solid, clear administrative and financial procedures. As MRMV was one of the first large scale multi-affiliate, multi-country programmes, we did face some growing pains at the start to harmonise our different procedures. In countries where the leading affiliate (ONL) was different from the affiliate managing the MRMV budget (OGB), Oxfam Novib financial and administrative staff first checked the quarterly reports for financial and donor compliance before they could be sent to the Global Team. This step was necessary to ensure the quality of the information provided. In this respect we would like to point out that we have had three successful audits for the first three years of the programme. Nevertheless we understand that some country staff did perceive this as a rather heavy approval process. In Mali in particular, there were some issues with financial management in year four, with a failure of the corporate software approval system causing a delay in the approval of the year four extension. The other two Oxfam Novib countries did however not experience similar problems. Since Mali was visited by the lead evaluator, this fact may have influenced the evaluators’ overall perception about our overall financial systems. We do feel that the evaluators’ recommendation is valid for the Innovation Fund, where the principle of flexibility and trial and errors was jeopardized by cumbersome approval and financial systems – This learning is being carried forward in new innovation funds and approaches of Oxfam.

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/unlocking-innovation-enabling-and-blocking-factors-in-developing-innovative-pro-558453>

8. We would like to comment on the finding about Oxfam’s partnerships on pg. 40 of the evaluation report. The report mentions that at current this relationship is not sufficiently strategic and often boils down to requests to provide input “to provide inputs for campaigns designed in the North, without much added value for the Southern actors”.

Response: The evaluator has touched on an important constraint – admittedly common in the design of Global Campaigns – of having meaningful and bottom up inspiration of global campaigns claims and evidence that are owned at the grassroots level (in the south) and not extracted for northern agendas. While we feel this is a valid concern that the evaluator has also observed in other organisations, we are not certain that there has been enough discussions and evidence to sustain that general statement. MRMV has had very limited interactions with Oxfam’s global campaigns, except at the national level and only in a couple of countries – We therefore definitively take this concern seriously and are in the process of working closely with the Even It Up (inequality) campaign teams to strategize on joint campaigns strategies that would genuinely bring young people’s issues from the south at its heart, and led by southern voices. This is a broader Oxfam commitment in its global campaigns’ strategies.

9. The report concludes that “The fourth programme objective – related to Oxfam’s strengthened capacity to work on youth agency in country programmes, and its global campaigning force to facilitate youth claiming and accessing better health and education – has remained largely unaddressed in an explicit way in day-to-day implementation of the programme; capacities to work on youth agency have, however, been strengthened considerably via work on the other objectives.”

Response: We acknowledge that the global campaigning component has been less strong throughout MRMV, yet this does not mean that the whole objective four remained unaddressed. This finding is explained well in the body of the report yet does not come back sufficiently in the conclusions. The design team of MRMV assessed this fourth objective as the most challenging and ambitious, especially as the existing Essential Services Campaigns’ objectives were already set

*and campaigners had limited experience working with young people. We invested a lot of time and resources to develop country level advocacy and campaign strategies and conducted the successful Global Advocacy workshop with global campaigners in 2013. However we acknowledge that successes and levers were found more at the country level and less at the global level and we need to more closely integrate programmes and campaigns into a joint strategy. Many Oxfam affiliates are now aligning structures and ways of working in order to better leverage Oxfam's grassroots work in our powerful campaigning instruments, where Oxfam is well known.*

10. The evaluators indicate that the MEL programme function has been inadequately addressed throughout programme implementation, so that weak monitoring – in particular, limited attention to outcome and impact – constitutes one of the major weaknesses of the programme. They indicate that there has been a lack of incentives to “monitor and report on results, combined with the lack of a good programme results-based framework, has been a major factor in some countries becoming overly operational without much concern about the eventual effects of the efforts undertaken”.

*Response: Since the start of this programme in 2011, there has been a general trend within development organisations to pay more attention to effective, results-based monitoring and evaluation practices. Since then, we have improved our practices in this area by putting in place clear MEL processes and guidelines (as outlined in CAMSA, our Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability). There have indeed been some difficulties with the MEL function, particularly with regard to the definition and operationalisation of country-specific MEL frameworks. At the start of MRMV, an external consultant was hired to assist in the definition of MEL frameworks for each country, which turned out to be an unsatisfactory solution because of a lack of ownership by country teams, some of them not having appropriate skill sets. The MEAL advisor subsequently hired full time initially found difficult to assess specific and diverse needs of country teams and accommodate them, but mostly ensure appropriate implementation of the MEAL frameworks at the country level. While 5% of budget is a required minimum investment in Oxfam, the quality of the country level support varies and the MEAL advisor was more accustomed to light oversight of strong partners and focus on learning rather than managing complex result frameworks. Therefore we acknowledge the limits of the monitoring data as brought forward by the evaluators. We would like to point out that MRMV took different strategies in each country, meaning the aggregation of data to report on progress at global level was not an easy task. Also, the existing quarterly reports have been helpful to document MRMV's achievements in written. While rather heavy, the quarterly reporting format - combined with targeted follow-up by the Global Team - did trigger most countries to reflect about the overall progress against their country-specific objectives, risks etc.*

*There are two major things we have learnt from this experience for our future programming. The first point is that a very clear distribution of roles and responsibilities between the Global MEL function and the MEL focal points in country offices is crucial. Generally, programme and MEL staff in countries should not be expected to only provide raw data for aggregation by the global team. To increase the effectiveness of our MEL processes, we need to create space for in-country reflection and ensure that monitoring data can inform the actual decisions to be made by project teams. Secondly, we have learnt that such a more comprehensive and result-oriented approach to MEL requires sufficient, strong MEL capacity within countries. Under those circumstances, the global MEL function can take up a more complimentary role with a stronger focus on interpreting results at the overall programme level and on capacity building and support for country MEL staff.*

11. The report points out the need for a clearer strategy with regard to marginalised youth and their position in the programme.

*Response: The emphasis on marginalised groups informed the topics we have worked on in the different countries, with the underlying assumption that a lack of the realisation of SRH and access to health or education services right affect marginalised groups much more than other groups in society. It is true that the concept of marginalised young people has not been unambiguously defined at the start. This meant that the concept still left some room for interpretation within to fit a particular country context, with some countries taking the reflection on this topic further than others. Nevertheless, the programme did work with those groups of young people that are considered as marginalised within a specific country context, with a particular emphasis on young girls who are often affected even more than their male counterparts. For example, Vietnam worked with ethnic minorities in the poorest regions of the country. In Niger the programme was implemented in rural areas where child marriage and school dropping are among the highest in the world. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Niger are very conservative countries and talking publicly about SRH for young girls can be considered by Religious leaders and parents as offensive. Despite this all these seemingly deterring socio cultural norms, the programmes managed to break some of the taboos around SRHR, meaning SRH can now be addressed by young people with their care takers. However we also recognize that participants to learning events, trainings and interactions with programme staff outside of the respective programme countries were often young people with higher education,*

*freedom of movement and support from their families. These young people became stronger leaders and ambassadors of the programmes in their countries. Marginalisation and inclusion were issues raised in all events, often creating sensitive debates among programme staff and young people – Both learning and self-awareness were drawn from these sessions.*

**6. Additional reflections** that have emerged from the evaluation process but were not the subject of the evaluation.

- Some useful learning emerged from the evaluation that were not intended in relation of the importance of not under-estimating the length of time required to set up new programmes, extending programmes (the fourth year) and creating meaningful changes through thoughtful processes of reflection and iterative changes, while at the same time respecting work plans, systems requirements and financial accountability. A complex multi country programme such as MRMV accumulates all challenges and the evaluation is bringing much needed thinking on the advantages and constraints of this type of programmes for Oxfam versus large single country programmes. The trade-offs need to be carefully thought through and weighted out at the very beginning, and appropriate resources should be assessed. The evaluation made clear that different set of skills and experiences are necessary to manage such a complex and ambitious programme.
- Looking back, this evaluation was very much about reconciling the inclusion and active participation of young people in evaluation processes with our own information needs, internal procedures and requirements. Making Oxfam's evaluation processes truly youth-led and participatory would also mean accepting that the final product is not necessarily a traditional evaluation report that addresses all of the CAMSA evaluation requirements. Like the Mid Term Evaluation, the final evaluation was conceived in a less traditional way, with strong peer learning and participatory approaches as important as the actual outcome of the exercise. This ambitious approach took a lot more time and coordination than anticipated, especially as in four of the countries, surge of instability, security challenges and staff work over-load with bother programme and internal pressures, required constant adjustments. The evaluation process therefore illustrated well the complexity and ambiguity of working in fragile and conflict prone contexts.
- At the start, we debated whether this type of final evaluation exercise should be organized at country level or at global level. There are certainly arguments for both. Organizing the evaluation at global level has the advantage that the methodology is similar in the different countries; hence findings can be compared relatively easily across countries in order to come up with a number of overall conclusions. Enough flexibility was left to fine-tune the evaluation questions to the context of each country that was visited. To make a global evaluation exercise successful, very close collaboration with country offices and mutual clarity about the division of tasks and responsibilities are crucial.