

Oxfam Management response to the review of:

Governance in Myanmar: Evaluation of the ‘Building equitable and resilient livelihoods in the Dry Zone’ project (Effectiveness Review Series 2015/16)

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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 ‘Building equitable and resilient livelihoods in the Dry Zone’ project was selected for review in this way under the governance thematic area.

The Dry Zone project was selected in 2015 to be evaluated on the effectiveness and sustainability of its inclusive governance and voice model. The project aimed to build strong and viable Membership Organisations (MOs) capable of organising community members, lobbying township departments and parliament, establishing business relationships with traders and suppliers, and developing civil society networks with local NGOs and MOs of other villages, in order to create sustainable livelihood opportunities and build resilience against climate-related hazards (e.g. drought and flooding). The main proposition of the ‘Building equitable and resilient livelihoods in the Dry Zone’ project was that MOs could lay the foundation for developing more sustainable livelihoods and build resilience in the communities that struggle with extreme climate and environmental conditions. The underlying assumption was that, by building the capacity of these MOs, behavioural changes would be triggered in a set of key stakeholder relationships and mechanisms that would result in more sustainable livelihood opportunities and conditions. Successful MOs would then inspire and influence other communities to also develop MOs and motivate local governments to support them. The project was coordinated by Oxfam and implemented from May 2011 until end of May 2014 by the Network Activities Group (NAG) in Minbu and Oxfam in Thazi.

The focus of the review was on ‘governance/voice’ and MO effectiveness and sustainability **18–20 months after project completion**. Its objectives were as follows:

- Verify to what extent MOs still exist and function 18–20 months after project closure.
- Learn about the conditions that affect MO effectiveness and sustainability.
- Develop and employ a participatory approach to understand and support ‘governance and voice’ work and build local capacity in using this approach.

The project developed MOs in 64 villages, which is a medium-size population requiring a medium-n sample too large for in-depth within-case evaluation using methods such as process tracing. To meet the objectives of the review, PIALA (Participatory Impact Assessment and Learning Approach) was employed: an approach that permits rigorous participatory impact inquiry in medium- to large-n samples. PIALA draws on five key elements: a systemic Theory of Change (ToC) approach; multi-stage random sampling of/in ‘open systems’; participatory mixed-methods; participatory sense-making; and configurational counterfactual analysis. A few adjustments were made to these elements in order to meet the requirements of the Effectiveness Review – such as *purposive* (instead of *random*) proportional sampling

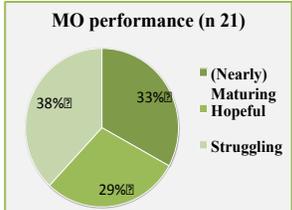
of MOs and the use of *combined* (instead of *mixed*) methods that are a better fit for investigating the MO governance model, and a scaling down of the sense-making because of resource and time constraints.

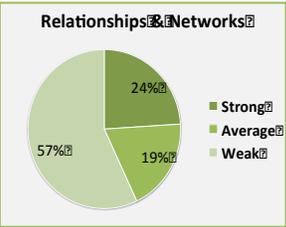
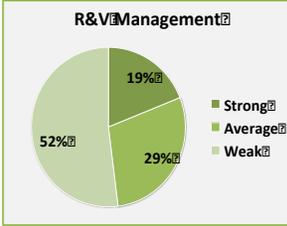
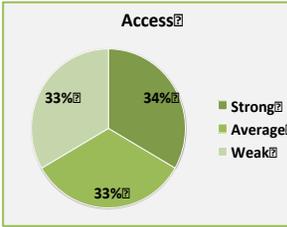
The sampling was done based on the results from a survey of all MOs on their effectiveness status with a **total of 413 respondents (36% women and 64% men)**. The survey made it possible to categorise the MOs and proportionally sample 21 MO villages (12 in Thazi and 9 in Minbu) across the different categories, covering the variability in MO performance and climate hazards and capturing the special combinations/cases of particular interest for learning. Data was then collected in these 21 villages using a standard set of participatory methods in gender-specific focus groups that engaged a **total of about 1,302 quasi-randomly selected people (44% women and 56% men)**.

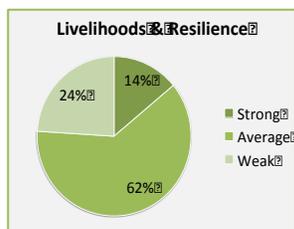
Based on the evidence produced by these methods, each of the causal links in the ToC was then rated for its relative strength and consistency in each researched village, and a **Total Average Contribution (TAC) score** for each outcome area was calculated for the entire sample. Apart from the contribution scoring, MOs were also scored on their performance, generating a total MO score for each village and a **Total Average MO (TAMO) score** for the entire sample. Based on their total MO score, MOs were classified as 'fully effective', 'maturing', 'hopeful', 'struggling' or 'dysfunctional'.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

| Township | Village | 4.a. SUSTAINED FUNCTIONAL MOs/MOCs | | | 4.b. SUSTAINED & STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS | | 3. IMPROVED VULNERABILITY & RISK (V&R) MANAGEMENT | | 2. INCREASED/ SUSTAINED AND SUFFICIENT ACCESS | | 1. IMPROVED/ SUSTAINED LIVELIHOODS & RESILIENCE | |
|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|----------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|
| | | Contribution score | Evidence score | MO score | Contribution score | Evidence score | Contribution score | Evidence score | Contribution score | Evidence score | Contribution score | Evidence score |
| Minbu | Pauk Pin Htwin | 5 | 4 | 4.41 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Minbu | Ma Gyi Pin | 5 | 5 | 4.67 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Thazi | Pauk Taw | 4 | 4 | 3.90 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Minbu | Thin Baw Kyun | 5 | 4 | 3.89 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Minbu | Pyi Thar Ywar Thit | 4 | 3 | 3.99 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| Thazi | Aung Thar | 4 | 4 | 3.70 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Kyar Pyit Kan | 3 | 4 | 3.04 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Nyan Kan | 2 | 3 | 2.96 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Gway Kone (East) | 3 | 3 | 2.96 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Thazi | Inn Ganat (South) | 3 | 4 | 2.61 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Ywar Kone Gyi | 4 | 3 | 2.99 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Inn | 4 | 4 | 3.00 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Inn Gone | 3 | 3 | 3.72 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Minbu | Te Kone Ywar Thit | 3 | 3 | 3.44 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Minbu | Kan Ni Ywar Thit | 3 | 4 | 2.45 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Minbu | Ywar Pale Kone Tan | 4 | 3 | 3.13 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Thazi | Bone Ta Loke | 1 | 2 | 2.72 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Thazi | Bo Kone | 2 | 3 | 2.73 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Thazi | Hta Naung Kone | 2 | 3 | 3.03 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Minbu | Saing Shin | 4 | 4 | 4.33 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Minbu | Kan Thar Yar | 2 | 4 | 2.99 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Minbu Average Contribution Score: | | 3.33 | 3.46 | 3.33 | 2.63 | 3.92 | 2.54 | 3.75 | 3.08 | 4.00 | 3.04 | 3.88 |
| Thazi Average Contribution Score: | | 3.28 | 3.50 | 3.17 | 2.39 | 4.22 | 2.50 | 4.00 | 2.78 | 3.78 | 2.83 | 4.17 |
| Total Average Contribution (TAC) and Total Average MO (TAMO) scores: | | 3.31 | 3.48 | 3.25 | 2.51 | 4.07 | 2.52 | 3.88 | 2.93 | 3.89 | 2.94 | 4.02 |

| Outcome | Commentary on Findings |
|---|--|
| <p>Effective/sustained MO functioning</p>  | <p>Important, but medium and insufficient contributions.</p> <p>Evidence from 33% of <i>nearly maturing</i> and <i>maturing</i> MOs confirms the proposition that MOs can function as an important local governance mechanism for improving livelihoods and building resilience, but by themselves are insufficient to guarantee sustainable improvements. Evidence from the 38% of struggling MOs provide a counterfactual showing that in the absence of such a governance mechanism, improvements are unlikely to occur. Capacity, ownership and transparency appear to be the essential factors for the mechanism to be successful. MOs in Minbu generally performed better than those in Thazi, which may be to do with more cooperative village leadership and/or a better way of working of NAG in Minbu.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Sustained/strengthened relationships</p>  <p>Improved risk & vulnerability (R&V) management</p>  | <p>Important, but medium and insufficient contributions</p> <p>Improvements in relationships and networks were found to be average in 19% and weak in 57% of the villages, while R&V management was found to be average in 29% and weak in 52% of the cases. Thus, only 24% of the villages showed strong performance in terms of relationships and 19% in R&V management. The evidence suggests that effective relationships mostly depend on MO performance in terms of coalition-building (in particular advocacy and networking), and on the responsiveness of township departments and private actors. Responsiveness of the departments responsible for water and livestock was reported as generally quite low.</p> <p>Indeed, the EvalC3 analysis proves that particularly strong MO coalition building and mandate is <i>sufficient</i> to generate improvements in relationships with township departments and NGOs/donors/MFIs and in community management of climate-related risks and vulnerabilities. Moreover, strong MO coalition building was found <i>necessary</i> (though <i>not sufficient</i>) for effective relationships to occur, with township departments responsible for developing and maintaining a productive water infrastructure (including the departments of water, irrigation and rural development). Strong MO leadership was found <i>necessary</i> (but <i>not sufficient</i>) for the improvement or sustainment of relationships with the livestock departments.</p> |
| <p>Increased/sustained access</p>  | <p>Important, but medium and insufficient contributions.</p> <p>Overall, some improvement in access to inputs, resources, services, markets and NGO/donor support was observed in all villages, yet in 66% of the cases this was found to be mediocre to weak and insufficient. Lack of access to water for production formed the main problem as it caused a decrease in farming that negatively affected relationships, this in its turn negatively affected access to agricultural inputs and services. The lack of access to water is partly attributable to inadequate drought management. Township authorities showed limited responsiveness and capacity for developing and maintaining appropriate productive water infrastructure and monitoring of water levels. The decrease in farming is further exaggerated by soil erosion caused by villagers' unsustainable agricultural practices. MO members have been trained in soil conservation. Reported changes in awareness and practice are attributable to the MO's key role in this, thus demonstrating its added value.</p> <p>'Access' appears highly correlated with MO performance. In 33% of the villages 'access' was found to be strong and sufficient, with strong MO performance in terms of coalition building (particularly networking and civil society building). In another 33% of the villages 'access' was found to be weak and insufficient, while MO functioning overall was weak and incapable of mitigating the problems arising from water depletion and soil erosion. Overall, strong MO coalition building seems to result in stronger capacity to address problems related to 'access' and also a stronger influence (and less dependency) on government responsiveness</p> |
| <p>Improved/sustained livelihoods and resilience</p> | <p>Important, but medium and insufficient contributions</p> <p>In 86% of the villages, improvements were made only with livestock, and in Thazi also with hair sorting for Chinese traders. Although very important to pay off debts and gain income, this proved insufficient to generate the amplifying effects observed in the 14% of villages that performed well as a result of the</p> |



successful combination of farming and livestock, creating more casual labour, small business and trading opportunities. In most of the villages, this success scenario did not take place because there was a lack of access to water for production. In many of these villages, people turn to migration to strengthen their livelihoods.

A strong correlation appeared between MO/MOC performance and livelihoods and resilience status, **confirming the hypothesis** that capable and well-functioning MOs can make a difference in livelihood conditions. Where improvements in livelihoods and resilience were found to be strong (14% of the villages), MO performance was strong and maturing towards fully effective. Where improvements in livelihoods and resilience were found to be weak (24%), MOs were generally weak and struggling (though mostly still hopeful). One case represented an exception, where the MO performed quite well, but the destructive impact of heavy rains and river flooding washed away all gains and possibilities to build resilience.

The EvalC3 analysis shows that particularly strong **MO mandate/membership** and strong **MO coalition building** are *necessary* (but *not sufficient*) to generate improvements in farming and livestock, creating new labour, business and trading opportunities. These two dimensions of MO performance were also found *sufficient* to generate improvements in relationships with township departments and NGOs/donors/MFIs, as well as the management of climate-related risks. **Weak MO operations**, on the other hand, appear *sufficient* to result in a deterioration of farming, while strong MO operations proved *sufficient* to generate improvements in livestock breeding.

Contribution scoring of outcome areas and intended contributions/causes

| Score | Outcome | Intended contribution/cause | Causal link |
|-------|---------|--|-------------------------|
| 5 | Large | Strong, necessary and sufficient | Strong & sufficient |
| 4 | Large | Medium and important, but insufficient • <i>there have been other contributions/causes</i> | Strong but insufficient |
| | Medium | Strong and necessary, but insufficient • <i>insufficient to cause sufficient outcome</i> • <i>other is needed to cause sufficient outcome</i> | |
| 3 | Medium | Medium and important, but insufficient • <i>there have been other contributions to the outcome</i> • <i>insufficient to cause sufficient outcome</i> • <i>other is needed to cause sufficient outcome</i> | Medium & insufficient |
| 2 | Medium | Weak and important, but largely insufficient • <i>there have been other contributions/causes</i> | Weak & insufficient |
| | Weak | Medium and important, but insufficient • <i>insufficient to cause sufficient outcome</i> • <i>other is needed to cause sufficient outcome</i> | |
| 1 | Weak | Weak and insufficient • <i>there have been other contributions to the outcome</i> • <i>insufficient to cause sufficient outcome</i> • <i>other is needed to cause sufficient outcome</i> | Very weak & unnecessary |

Recommendations

The MO model has proved to be a potentially powerful mechanism for building adaptive capacity and resilience at the community-level and developing local participatory democracy. No cost-benefit or value-for-money analysis can accurately calculate all the possible short- and long-term implications of NOT sufficiently investing in the sustainability and scaling-up of such a mechanism. As the architect of the MO, Oxfam and NAG essentially bear the responsibility for the implications of phasing out too early, before MOs could reach sufficient maturity and have the necessary conditions to let them grow and survive.

As part of a renewed strategy for further developing, strengthening, sustaining and aggregating the MO model, we recommend the following:

1. **Assist creating the conditions for MOs to succeed:**

In particular by **building the capacity of village leadership and township and regional government** to engage with the MOs and take up their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the communities in the Dry Zone to build their adaptive capacity and resilience. Important responsibilities of the township and regional government include: (a) the provision of appropriate and sustainable agricultural and veterinary extension services; and (b) the construction and maintenance of appropriate and sustainable productive water infrastructure and the monitoring of water levels.

Responsible local township departments need the support from the national government and international agencies to obtain **sufficient budget** and **access to climate funding** for delivering on these responsibilities and supporting the MO-led livelihood improvement and adaptation plans.

Arguably, Oxfam and NAG alone do not have sufficient influence and resources to make this happen. Yet, they do have the power and capacity to build coalitions and strategic partnerships with other international, national and local organisations to work on this together.

2. **Deliver a systemic learning approach that provides coaching and supervision to sufficiently strengthen MOC leadership and capacity**

This is to mobilise villagers and develop positive relationships with village administration and township officials, as well as other MOs. The EvalC3 analysis suggests that **MO coalition building** and **mandate/membership** are the two most important dimensions to work on in order to generate amplifying improvements in relationships, livelihoods and resilience, and the management of climate-related risks. Without strong MOC leadership, however, this is unlikely to happen. Hence the focus should be on developing second generation MOCs that can operate at a higher strategic and more independent level and is able to prepare the subsequent generation(s).

It is crucial to move beyond merely technical training towards a **systemic learning approach** that builds on:

- a) collaborative learning and movement building – e.g. by engaging all key stakeholders in regular impact reflections and sense-making; and
- b) ‘learning by teaching and doing’ – e.g. by developing methods and approaches for *collective* impact monitoring and creating spaces for MOCs to train each other (in place of individual ‘learning by being taught’).

3. Develop a diversified strategy that is adaptive to the different levels and conditions of MO performance to strengthen MOC leadership and capacity; sufficiently invest in maturing or nearly maturing MOs so they can grow and be sustainable

A diversified strategy for strengthening MOC leadership and capacity that is **adaptive to the different levels and conditions of MO performance** would help save valuable resources and make investments more focused and cost-effective. Helpful to this end would be to build a typology that links performance to, for instance, climate adaptation and resilience outcomes (as illustrated by Figure 4). Objectives and investments can then be tailored to the level of performance (e.g. from weak performance with 'no adaptation' up to hopefully functioning with 'increased resilience' and further up to maturing performance showing 'adaptation') and the context and conditions (e.g. local power structure and type of central village leadership, impact of climate hazards, hydro- and ecological conditions) of the different types or categories of MOs. Most important is to sufficiently invest in the 33% of MOs that were found maturing (14%) or nearly maturing (19%) and make them strong enough to **grow and become sustainable**.

4. Aim investment in the strongest MOs at building capacity to lead bigger networks, coordinate peer learning, and create greater visibility of successes; appoint a local support NGO to develop structure for collective impact M&E

Investment in the strongest MOs must aim at building capacity to **lead bigger networks, coordinate peer learning, and create greater visibility** of successes to inspire other communities and leverage more funding and support. An essential step forward for these MOs to become fully effective and gain influence might be official registration. According to the township officials, MOs can register if they have clear objectives and plans. It is unclear why well-performing MOs have not yet registered. This requires further investigation.

It is also important to appoint a local support NGO (for instance NAG) that has sufficient capacity to take a lead in developing the backbone structure for **collective impact M&E** and support its activities. A framework for this is best developed at the design stage and as an integral part of a renewed strategy.

5. Assist MOs to develop an environment to enable men and women to rethink role and responsibilities and engagement in the household, community activities, and local participatory governance

More and continuous work is needed to develop an environment that enables both men and women to rethink their respective roles and responsibilities and engage in local participatory governance. Women still face considerable challenges in gaining credibility and trust in their ability to take up leadership roles and balance these with household and social duties. The MO can offer the space for women and men to address these gender issues and learn about the advantages of greater **gender equality** in both household and community activities.

Strategically, the focus might best be on helping the maturing and nearly maturing MOs to develop a role model that demonstrates the benefits, and ways to achieve these benefits, to other MO villages. As part of the collective impact M&E and peer learning agenda, for instance, they could lead the piloting of a participatory gender and adaptation analysis approach.

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

Yes, the programme team finds the findings relevant and an accurate measure of the governance component of the Dry Zone project. The evaluation findings match the country team's assessment of both the potential for the model, as well as the need for additional investment in an enabling environment.

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

The review provided strong evidence showing that the approach of forming MOs had significant potential as a model for village governance.

It demonstrated that 18 – 20 months after project completion, approximately 33% of MOs were nearly maturing or maturing, demonstrating that the project worked with communities to develop a system of governance that was meaningful beyond the life of the project. The MOs have generally proven successful in creating new livelihood opportunities and enhancing women's positions and influence in village decision-making. Furthermore, the review found a connection between improved livelihoods, elements of resilience and MOs through a counterfactual, where both MO performance and livelihoods were weak.

The review confirmed the assumed correlation and interconnection between access, coalition building and MO performance, and thus the need for any project addressing village Governance to work address all these areas. In over half of MOs, there has been an increase in membership since project closure rather than stagnation or decrease, which suggests sustainability within the structures.

Township officials positively valued the MO model and found it successful in engaging communities in development efforts and fostering collaboration. Such wide participation, compared with other local development institutions, indicates the relevance and importance of MOs.

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

The review clearly demonstrated the need for longer project duration and further investment in coaching and supervision to sufficiently strengthen MO capacity and ensure sustainability. The phased approach to project implementation, meant that many of the weak MOs had insufficient time to establish and strengthen themselves.

Whilst measuring the contribution to livelihoods and income was not within the scope of this review, some livelihood activities were enough to halt migration but were insufficient to build resilience. Where MOs are not sufficiently increasing incomes, people turn to migration, which further undermines the MO functioning.

Overall a key project design weakness was having too narrow a focus on MOs and thus a lack of investment in the enabling environment. The review evidence shows that even particularly strong MOs, by themselves, cannot overcome barriers in relationships and extreme climate and environmental conditions. Additional support is required to building the capacity of village and township officials to engage with MOs and to take up their responsibilities.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The assessment was thorough, it was carried out rigorously, and people's participation and opinions were taken into account, in terms of both gathering and analysing information. The review efforts to look in detail at what specific factors contributed to successful or weak MOs was particularly useful to the country team.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

Considering the project has been closed for over 24 months, the most appropriate actions for Oxfam in Myanmar are:

1) To support implementing partner NAG to draw on the review findings for their ongoing implementation, and to enable them use the evaluation as part of their advocacy efforts to the government on the most recent updates to the agricultural policy.

2) Ensure recommendations are incorporated into upcoming project development by Oxfam Myanmar (as relevant), with particular focus on the design of an upcoming Agribusiness opportunity within the Dry Zone.

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

In general, all the recommendations are relevant and will be utilised for the development of future programmes. As this specific project has come to an end, not all recommendations can be directly applied to Oxfam's work. However, recommendations are still appropriate for future initiatives designed by Oxfam; for ongoing work of implementing partner NAG; and to inform agricultural policy influence.

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?

The validation of the MO model had helped inform the consideration of a recent agri-business opportunity within the dry zone. A key learning devised from this evaluation is the importance of the enabling environment. Village governance models on their own are not sufficient to build livelihoods and resilience without addressing constraints within relationships and climate and environmental conditions. These findings and recommendations have been central in informing how Oxfam addresses and designs this new project.

Other findings and recommendations that can be more widely applied, such as the need to have a more systematic approach to training/capacity building, will inform Oxfam's project design work more generally.

10. Additional reflections

None