

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Women’s Empowerment in South Africa: Evaluation of the Raising Her Voice 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 Raising Her Voice project in South Africa was selected for review in this way under the Women’s Empowerment thematic area.

The global Raising Her Voice (RHV) programme aims to promote the rights and capacity of women to engage effectively in governance at all levels through increased voice and influence, and greater institutional accountability. Comprising 17 different country-specific programmes, RHV is an ambitious attempt to advance Oxfam’s work on good governance and gender equality.

The RHV-SA project has been part of the global RHV portfolio since 2008 and has gone through two distinct phases of implementation: phase one (2008–13); and phase two (2013–present). The project operates in three municipalities, including the City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni district and Sebokeng district.

Oxfam GB (OGB)’s country office in South Africa, selected one of its long-standing partners to implement the project as an opportunity to build on their work and partnership. People Opposing Women’s Abuse (POWA) has been the main implementing partner for the project since its inception in 2008.

POWA designed the RHV-SA project to address specific challenges related to women’s rights and participation in governance processes in South Africa. At the same time, the project aimed to contribute to a regional initiative to support the Pan-African Solidarity for African Women’s Rights coalition (SOAWR) in its work to ensure the implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the Maputo Protocol.

POWA identified the need to work at the intersection of gender-based violence (GBV), HIV and AIDS, and poverty. Despite progressive national laws, South African society remains deeply patriarchal, with very high levels of violence against women, including rapes that, for the most part, go unreported (POWA 2011). There is still to this day a high level of gender-based inequality between men and women, with women often being economically marginalised (unemployment rates for women in South Africa are much higher than for men). Together, these two factors – GBV and economic marginalisation – increase women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in particular; and contracting HIV in turn exacerbates marginalisation and social exclusion.

At the country level, RHV-SA has aimed to tackle this vicious circle, which, fuelled by abuse, has created multiple layers of violations and disempowerment that make it nearly impossible for affected women to actively participate in society. And at the continental level, the project has allowed POWA and OGB’s

South Africa country office to contribute to the work of the SOAWR coalition. Supporting the effective implementation of the Maputo Protocol was deemed necessary in order to strengthen the normative framework for the protection of women's rights, to facilitate the use of the Protocol's provisions by civil society, and to ensure that government bodies in South Africa worked to apply the Protocol to South Africa's particular issues.

Over the project's lifetime a range of activities have been implemented, such as a rapid assessment study; a baseline study; development of a conceptual framework; adaptation of a radio drama series; establishment of community action groups; workshops and training programmes.

Usually, evaluations under Oxfam's Women's Empowerment thematic area are evaluated using quasi-experimental impact evaluation techniques. In this case, given the characteristics of the project, a different impact evaluation technique has been applied called process tracing. Where interventions have small sample sizes for evaluators to draw from (referred to as small 'n' evaluations), this can make it difficult to adopt traditional counterfactual approaches to establishing causality for a range of technical and practical reasons. This is a situation typically faced in projects under Oxfam's Good Governance outcome area (previously known as Citizen Voice and Policy Influencing). Evaluations of interventions under this outcome area are concerned with establishing whether or not they contributed to an observed change; in other words, they are concerned with assessing a causal claim. To make this type of assessment possible, Oxfam developed a pre-qualified protocol based on process tracing.

The evaluation aimed to assess confidence in the project's claim that its training and support to marginalised women contributed to their newly engaging in local governance processes (the 'contribution claim'). This aspect of the project was felt to be the best focus for the evaluation given outcome realisation and the availability of data, including access to relevant project stakeholders.

An application of process tracing, adapted from Oxfam's process-tracing protocol, was used to assess the project's contribution claim. This involved elaborating a hypothesised causal mechanism, which detailed exactly how the project intended to contribute to the outcome, and thereafter sought to identify what evidence would be necessary to strengthen confidence in the contribution claim. To test that the hypothesised causal mechanism existed, two types of process-tracing tests were applied in sequence beginning with the Hoop Test, which has the power to disconfirm contribution claims; followed by the Smoking Gun Test, which has the power to confirm contribution claims. Taken together, these two tests offer a rigorous means by which to establish confidence in contribution claims. To further strengthen the findings, an application of Bayesian updating (probability) was applied to quantify confidence in the project's contribution claim, using an established method.

In assessing confidence in the project's contribution at the outcome level, a number of evidence tests were designed on the principle that if the project's contribution claim is valid, such evidence would be easy to find (i.e. the probability of finding it is high). By implication, finding this evidence would strengthen confidence in the contribution claim, while not finding it would weaken confidence in the contribution claim.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Summary of key results:			
Outcome	Rating / Quantitative Score of Confidence	Qualitative Rubric	Short Commentary
Final outcome (CMA-7): More women and women's groups newly engaging in local governance processes.	0.63	More Confident than not	Whilst the evidence found is limited, there is more confidence than not that the project has influenced more women and women's groups to newly engage in local governance processes.
Intermediate Outcome (CMA-1): The RHV training actually took place.	0.96	Reasonable Certainty	Whilst monitoring logs are patchy, there is reasonable certainty that project participants did receive training.
Intermediate Outcome (CMA-2): The RHV training had sufficient reach e.g. a reasonable number of marginalised women attended the training.	0.60	More Confident than not	The available evidence did not give confidence that the training had reached sufficient numbers of women as records did not adequately capture the training events because records were often incomplete.
Intermediate Outcome (CMA-3): POWA/RHV is seen as a credible organisation/project by local partners and women engaging in the project.	0.62	More Confident than not	The available evidence gives more confidence than not, that the project implementing partner, and by extension, the project, is viewed as credible by project participants and external partners.
Intermediate Outcome (CMA-4): RHV project staff believe the training to be relevant and of good quality.	0.83	Cautious Confidence	Based on the evidence found, there is some confidence that project staff believe the training they provided to be relevant to project participants.
Intermediate Outcome (CMA-5): Women who participated in the training found it to be relevant and that it increased their knowledge of their rights and how to claim them.	0.92	High Confidence	Based on the evidence, there is confidence that project participants did indeed find the training they received to be relevant and that it increased their knowledge of their human rights and how to claim them. This is a clear success of the project.
Intermediate Outcome	0.98	Reasonable Certainty	Based on the evidence observed, there is reasonable certainty that project

(CMA-6): An increase in women’s collective action to share and disseminate knowledge following the training.

participants have increased collective action to share and disseminate knowledge. The evidence found, such as formation of the community action groups and the action plans they have developed, when taken together, have increased confidence in this component of the mechanism.

Scoring key: Specific contribution of intervention

Quantitative Score of Confidence	Qualitative Rubric
0.99+	Practical Certainty
0.95 – 0.99	Reasonable Certainty
0.85 – 0.95	High Confidence
0.70 – 0.85	Cautious Confidence
0.50 – 0.70	More Confident than not
0.50	No Information

Recommendations:

The evaluation has found a number of learning points for OGB decision makers to consider that will improve future planning, monitoring and evaluation of Oxfam’s programmes.

- 1) Theory of change is a process that engages key stakeholders to articulate the various assumptions they may make about how change happens in a particular context. This is an incredibly important process in strategy development, but also for purposes of monitoring and evaluation. The various components of a theory of change can be used to inform monitoring and evaluation plans, helping projects to know which intermediate outcomes, assumptions and risks to monitor, for example. Having a well-articulated theory of change is crucial for any theory-based evaluation, including for process tracing, as it forms the backbone of the approach. While a theory of change was developed for the global RHV programme during the mid-term evaluation of the RHV portfolio, no theory of change process was undertaken in the RHV-SA project. A comprehensive process to develop a conceptual framework was done by the project, and project staff are to be praised for its focus on including women activists from grassroots level and its feminist approach. However, this did not equate to the detail generated by a theory of change process. As a consequence, the various intermediate outcomes the project hoped to produce were never articulated and the related risks and assumptions were not stated or monitored, nor was a mitigation plan developed. Greater promotion of theory of change as a planning, monitoring and evaluation tool is required, especially in projects and programmes concerned with good governance work.
- 2) Ensuring adequate lead time (e.g. at least two months) prior to a process-tracing evaluation will support staff and stakeholders’ understanding of how Oxfam’s process-tracing protocol will be

applied and facilitate engagement in the protocol's key steps where staff and stakeholder engagement are crucial (e.g. articulating contribution claims for assessment). Adopting such an approach will support ownership of the evaluation process.

- 3) The project does not appear to have had a monitoring and evaluation plan. Gaining access to project documentation was not easy. No systematic way of capturing women's stories of change appears to have been in place. Perhaps a greater level of scrutiny and support by OGB would have been beneficial in this case to ensure evidence of impact was not lost over the years as project staff and participants came and went.
- 4) Plans for sustainability are not clear. The project appears to have started with some gusto at inception and throughout phase one many activities took place. Given that the funding appears to have been scaled back for phase two of the project and the project worker only spends 50 per cent of her time on the project, the great momentum generated in phase one is in danger of slipping away. CAG members are dropping out, often taking their considerable knowledge with them; training is not being provided in an ongoing way and motivation is waning as action plans go without funding to support their implementation. The project should consider how best to leverage the support of its partners and other actors, to put in place sustainability measures to ensure women are trained in an ongoing way and encouraged to continue with the implementation of their action plans.

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

The findings do represent our expectations, especially the recognition that the project has influenced more women and women's groups to newly engage in local governance processes. Without a doubt, the project would have been more effective and much more could have been achieved had there been an adequately designed monitoring and evaluation system utilised from inception and on an ongoing basis. Additionally, we agree that a theory of change would also have assisted project staff and partners to navigate. The findings do reflect that more women are being accepted to participate in political decision making processes.

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

Yes. The establishment, training and engagement of community action groups as part of mobilization of dissemination of knowledge came out as an effective approach during the phase of project implementation. The rapid assessment exercise enabled the project to identify policies and national laws needing advocacy attention and to zone in on areas of priority.

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

Yes. The lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework contributed to the challenges of ascertaining project effectiveness and impact. Although the project developed a data framework and data indicators this was not consolidated into a framework where this could be analysed and the performance of the project measured. Another key weakness identified was the lack of a sustainability or exit plan.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

Due to the Oxfam contextual climate in South Africa and the challenges emanating as a result of, such as the non availability of data and the timing of the evaluation, in our view the quality of the review is quite a mixed assessment. The tension between the evaluator and project manager due to the extenuating circumstances further contributed to the difficulties in accessing information and data. The South Africa Country Programme senior management had to intervene and manage the process. In hindsight, the review should have happened much earlier than being carried out during the challenging period of operational closure of OGB in SA. This being said, the assessment does give confidence that women's empowerment did occur at a national and personal level, leading to notable changes in women's participation in local governance issues.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

- The report has been shared with the project implementing partner, POWA, for their follow up action, as relevant.
- The report has been shared with new affiliate, OZA, for purposes of future related programming and lessons learnt.
- The report has also been shared with former partner project staff for learning purposes.

Due to the closure of the OGB South Africa Country Programme, not much more can be done to act on some of the recommendations.

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

Oxfam does agree with the conclusions and recommendations however due to the closure of Oxfam GB in South Africa, not all the recommendations can be acted upon.

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?

In the country context, OGB will not be able to directly apply its learning. However, these learning will definitely be shared within the new OGB programmatic structures within the region to ensure an improvement in programme delivery and efficiency e.g. a key learning is that future programme designs will be done qualitatively, with a well developed and designed monitoring and evaluation framework that has a set of success indicators focused on the change as well as a results tracker. Another important learning is ensuring that all projects develop sustainability and exit plans. We also recognise that entering contractual agreements with partners on an annual basis does create instability and uncertainty for partners and thus would recommend that future projects of this design have a much longer term plan for predictability.

10. Additional reflections

Conducting effective reviews at a time of change and transition does have the potential to hugely impact and influence the outcome of the review. External factors do play an important role. We would strongly recommend against a “silo’d one dimensional approach” in planning reviews during transition, but rather a strong multi stakeholder engagement take place with the country management team well in advance so that all potential challenges and hurdles can be addressed and mitigated.