

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Governance in Tajikistan: Evaluation of the women smallholder farmer advocacy campaign (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 GROW campaign in Tajikistan was selected for review in this way under the Governance thematic area.

In an effort to complement agricultural value chain programming implemented by a variety of organisations in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan, Oxfam GB (OGB) integrated aspects of its global advocacy campaign, GROW. The GROW campaign takes a multi-pronged approach to the multi-faceted issue of global food insecurity by focusing on a diversity of causes, including climate change, land reform issues, industrial farming, and private sector policies. In Tajikistan, the campaign team selected contextually relevant key issues to guide its advocacy activities, including climate change, land reform, and water availability with a focus on women smallholder farmers as the key agricultural producers. OGB did this through trainings, workshops, round tables, and highly visual events integrated with previous and currently existing programming.

In Tajikistan, the GROW Campaign was implemented in a distinctive way by leveraging synergies between previous, existing, and future programming both directly and tangentially related to the main themes of the campaign. Rather than serving as a standalone campaign, GROW served as a platform from which to promote, influence, and advocate on issues through related projects being implemented on the ground.

This evaluation uses a research protocol based on process tracing, a qualitative research approach used by case study researchers to investigate causal inference. The evaluator seeks evidence of the extent to which the intervention's key targeted outcomes have materialized; investigates the causal mechanisms responsible, i.e. how the observed outcome change came about; and, in light of an evidenced understanding of competing explanations, draws conclusions about the significance, if any, of the intervention's contribution. This evaluation uses secondary sources, key informant interviews, and community focus group discussions as sources of evidence.

This evaluation focused specifically on two of the four intermediate outcomes outlined in the theory of change and identified by the evaluator and OGB team members as key policy-level outcomes of the campaign and the most significant for the evaluation to focus on. These include:

Outcome 1: Increased awareness/knowledge of policy makers, civil society, and general public about link between women smallholder farmers, resilience from climate change-induced shocks, and national food security.

Outcome 2: Political will at the national, regional, and local levels to increase support for women smallholder farmers and take a gendered approach to climate change resilience.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

The GROW Campaign made an important contribution to increasing awareness and knowledge by engaging affinity networks associated with issues related to rural communities and women smallholder farmers and empowering women at the community level. This contribution was particularly apparent among regional government officials where awareness was quite low before the campaign. The campaign also made some contribution to increasing political will among regional and local government officials through the networks with which OGB engaged and the explicit linkages with CBOs that encouraged greater interactions between communities and local officials. By raising awareness of the active role that women could play in economic development, local officials were more willing to engage with them. This change in political will, however, was limited to engagement. The extent to which government officials at the regional and local levels were proactive in advancing the issues discussed during these meetings and other forums was, and continues to be, inconsistent and personality-based.

Summary of Key Findings:

Outcome	Contribution scores	Short commentary
1. Increased awareness/knowledge of policy makers, civil society, and general public about link between women smallholder farmers, resilience from climate change-induced shocks, and national food security.	3	The GROW Campaign and integrated OGB programming made an important contribution to the increased awareness and knowledge among local and regional policymakers by going beyond the common training and workshop paradigm and providing regular opportunities for interaction between government officials and groups of women. However, this contribution was moderate when put into the context of all of the other related efforts by organizations active in Tajikistan.
2. Political will at the national, regional, and local levels to increase support for women smallholder farmers and take a gendered approach to climate change resilience.	2 <i>(regional & local level)</i>	The GROW Campaign made some contribution to increasing political will at the regional and local government levels by engaging through networks. However, there was no measurable change due to the campaign at the national level. The level to which the campaign contributed to a greater gendered approach is inconclusive.

Scoring key: Specific contribution of intervention

5	Outcome realised in full Evidence that intervention made a crucial contribution
4	Outcome realised in part & evidence that intervention made a crucial contribution Outcome realised in full & evidence that intervention made an important contribution
3	Outcome realised in part & evidence that intervention made an important contribution
2	Outcome realised in part & evidence that intervention made some contribution Outcome realised to a small degree & evidence that intervention made an important contribution
1	Outcome realised, to any degree, but no evidence that the intervention made any contribution



Recommendations:

The following recommendations are based on a synthesis of key informant interviews and the evaluator's own observations.

- 1. Continue to consider the most effective approach to influence policy when a stand alone campaign would have limited effect:** The concept of a campaign as framed in the global GROW Campaign is very much a foreign concept in much of Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan. Tajik society is very community-oriented and family-focused, limiting the effectiveness of activities that may be more common in advocacy campaigns across Europe, North America, and Latin America. A standalone campaign such as that conceived in the global campaign would have limited effect in Tajikistan. Thus, the country team worked to integrate the concepts central to the campaign into the related programmatic work and vice versa. This approach proved to be successful, even if this approach came late in the campaign timeline. The “convening and brokering” approach seems to be the most effective method by which organisations such as Oxfam can influence policy in Tajikistan. Indeed, this evaluation shows that the most salient mechanism for change was the development, engagement, and influencing of stakeholder networks for advocacy at various levels of Tajik government.
- 2. Consider how to invest in developing relationships and raising the profile of Oxfam in Tajikistan to increase the effect of advocacy work:** Influencing in Tajikistan is predicated on a system that is very personality- and reputation-based. Much of the most effective advocacy work happens on a personal level outside the meeting or conference room. The most influential individuals are those that have lived and worked in Tajikistan for a long time (or their entire lives) and are trusted by officials and stakeholders alike. It is the task of an organisation like Oxfam to leverage its local relationships, invest time to develop these relationships, and raise its own visibility. With the high turnover of high-level Oxfam representatives in-country, this must be central to any future advocacy efforts.
- 3. Continue to focus future advocacy programming on communities and officials at local and regional levels:** The largest gaps in awareness, knowledge, and practice are evident at the regional and local levels. This campaign saw the greatest gains at this level, which is testament to both the effective targeting of the country team as well as the initial low level of awareness and knowledge at this level. For future advocacy programming, Oxfam should continue to focus on communities and officials at the local and regional levels.
- 4. Consider how to balance programmatic focus between “active” women in communities and with more marginalized women or those not yet “active”:** A common practice among organisations in Tajikistan when working with women and women's groups is to identify the most “active” or outspoken women with which to work or lead groups of women. While the logic of this practice makes sense – the more active or outspoken women will be motivated to engage with the organisation and its programming and perhaps motivate other women – it misses a great opportunity to empower women that are not yet able to advocate for themselves. It is common to speak with an “active” woman in a community in Tajikistan who is working with numerous organisations in her community. This woman is arguable receiving the greatest benefit from the programming when greater gains may be seen by focusing on other women in the community. Many stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation indicated that organisations need to shift their programmatic focus toward more marginalized women or those not yet “active”.



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

Yes. We mostly agree with the findings of the evaluation. Both findings and scoring are in line with our expectations. Effectiveness review process - communication, questions, information gathering tools, calibre and relevance of people interviewed and language it is narrated fully satisfied us.

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

Yes it did. The GROW Campaign's contribution to the increased awareness and knowledge of communities, particularly women, as well as local and regional policymakers by using diverse methods and community networks is highlighted as positive

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

Yes. The review highlighted low degree contribution of the GROW Campaign at national level and applying functional mechanisms for measuring those changes; challenges in empowering "silent women"

6. Summary of review quality assessment

Strong. The review highlights key strong and weak areas of the project implemented for three years (2012-2015). It's detailed; provides clear evidences for strength and weaknesses; uses plain language; gives actionable recommendations.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

Based on the Effectiveness Review report findings, recommendation and learning, we planned a set of actions which will enhance our understanding, knowledge and skills on developing relevant to context theories of change; bring clarity to "women empowerment" terminology in Tajikistan context; diversify stakeholders and partner focussing primarily on their influencing capabilities.

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

The recommendation No. 3 says "For future advocacy programming, Oxfam should continue to focus on communities and officials at the local and regional levels" We think that, national level advocacy is (was) more important. Most decision making actions are made at national level rather than at local or regional levels which have nearly no decision-making power. National level officials/ institutions' power is strong and may lead to sustainable change.

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?

Learning 1: Theory of change: Effectiveness review reiterated that we need to improve theory of change for programmes and be much clearer on how change happens in context. In future we need to understand, analyse and build programme interventions, particularly campaigning activities based on cultural patterns such as people's affiliation more to families and communities. Though it's still arguable and needs more exploration - we also need to consider and incorporate into programmes the real drivers for change in Tajikistan context who sometimes may not necessarily be marginalised people themselves but those civil society organisations and initiative group that are able truly represent them. Regional centre can prioritise building capacity and skills of country teams and partners in theory of change.

Learning 2: Empowering women: The Effectiveness revealed again that we need to bring clarity into our understanding of 'women's empowerment'. We aim to empower "genetically silent" women into leadership therefore in most cases, simply fail. This statement is still arguable, however: a. we need much better narrate 'women empowerment'; b. meaningfully take consideration of the local context (tradition, culture and opportunities for sustainable change) and perhaps, lower our expectations; c. find alternative ways for raising silent women's voices. Regional Centre can help with narrating 'women empowerment' and adapt current standard gender training in light of this narrative (description of what women empowerment stands for).

Learning 3: Diversifying stakeholders: The Effectiveness review analyses the reasons for low level changes as the result of policy advocacy at local and regional levels. It's true, because our influencing targets at local and regional levels do not hold significant political and decision-making power to change policies and practices. Knowing that Tajik society (as many others in ex-soviet nations) canonize celebrities, we need to use this opportunity by looking beyond current stakeholders mapping practice and engaging celebrities (writers, composers, movie stars, scientists, etc) in policy advocacy and awareness raising campaign in future.

Learning 4: Diversifying portfolio of partners and networks: Needless to say that partners' role is crucial in policy advocacy. Skills of partners in influencing at national level is still a concern. With this in mind, we need to diversify partners portfolio. Investing in partner organisations and building their influencing skills takes extremely long time. Instead, we may combine partner selection by recruiting along with local organisations, also high-profile national organisation, research institutions, and even explore partnering with government institutions.

Tajikistan has Economic Justice programme (TJKA88-Gendered Enterprise and Markets in Tajikistan, TJKA86- Development of technical assistance groups and machinery services in khatlon region, TJKB01- Enhancing Water & NRM & Protection in upper catchments of Zarafshon Watershed-EJ. These learning will be used during regular Monitoring Reviews as well as annual Programme quality review events to review our approaches, indicators, tools we use and evidences we collect

10. Additional reflections

It would be great if the effectiveness review looked at the project exit strategy too and made some recommendations.