

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Resilience in Ethiopia and Somaliland - Impact evaluation of the Reconstruction Project: Development of enabling conditions for pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities (Effectiveness Review Series 2015/16)*

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Signed off by:			
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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 reconstruction project 'Contributing to the Development of Enabling Conditions for Human Security for Vulnerable Pastoralist and Agro-Pastoralist Communities' was selected for review in this way under the thematic area of resilience.

Oxfam carried out this project in partnership with several organisations, including Ogden Welfare and Development Association (OWDA), Community Development Service Association (CDSA), Somaliland Pastoral Forum (SOLPAF), Candlelight, Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA), and The Horn of Africa Voluntary Youth Committee (HAVOYOCO). The project activities, which began in July 2012 and finished in June 2016, were focused in the Somali region of Ethiopia and the Galbeed and Togdheer regions of Somaliland. The Effectiveness Review took place in November 2015 and was designed to evaluate the project's impact on building resilience – households' ability to improve their well-being and realise their rights in spite of shocks, stresses, and uncertainty.

This Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the activities among the households whose members directly participated in women's savings and credit groups that were formed by the project and through which many of the project activities were channelled. This involved comparing those households that participated in the project to a group of comparison households that were similar to the project participants. To this end, a household survey was carried out with 221 households that were participating in the project (households that contained members of the women's savings and credit groups) and 439 households that had not been involved in the project.

The Effectiveness Review can only fully identify household-level effects of the project. Community-level effects are partially identified in the evaluation, but given the potential spillovers of the community-level activities into the comparison group, it is impossible to capture their full impacts. Activities operating at a higher level, including the project's advocacy work in key decision-making forums, are not included in this evaluation.

At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for demographic and baseline differences between the project and comparison households areas to provide additional confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

Some qualitative information was also collected during the fieldwork to inform the design of the measurement tools for resilience and help with the interpretation of the quantitative data. The qualitative work consisted of field-based focus group discussions, conducted in project areas that were *not* subsequently included in the final sample for the household survey.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Summary results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome area	Connected to project logic?	Evidence of positive impact?	Comments
Livelihood viability		Yes	Most significant effects arose in terms of livelihood diversification, livestock herd sizes, and the ability to sell milk during the dry season. No effect on project households' access to CAHWs, despite its direct link to the project activities.
Innovation potential		Yes	There was a positive effect on access to credit in-line with the project logic. There were also higher levels of adoption of innovative practices and access to markets among project households.
<i>Resilience</i>	See Table 1 in report	Yes	Many indicators around awareness of disaster plans and group participation were higher in project households, given their direct connection to the project activities. However, project households were also more likely to receive remittances/formal earnings.
Access to contingency resources and support access		Yes	
Integrity of natural and built environment		Yes	Project households report having better access to water and grazing land. They are also more likely to use separate water sources for human and animal consumption.
Social and institutional capability		Mixed	Positive effects reserved for indicators directly linked to the Project Logic around early-warning systems, local leaders, and adaptation support. No evidence of impact on the voice of women and youth.
<i>Wealth</i>	No	Yes	Wealth was higher for the project households by approximately 0.6 of a standard deviation. Wealth was measured using information about ownership of various assets (including livestock, productive equipment and household goods), as well as about housing conditions.
<i>Livestock</i>	Yes	Yes	Herd sizes were higher in project households, especially for sheep/goats and cows. These effects were mainly reserved for Somaliland. More of these animals were vaccinated, and women had more responsibility for these herds.
<i>Crops</i>	Yes	Yes	Project households had a more diversified crop portfolio, but women's responsibility for crops was apparently unaffected.
<i>Non-farm livelihoods</i>	Yes	Yes	There were strong positive results suggesting that project households were more likely to engage in non-farm household businesses and to prepare a formal business plan.
<i>Responses to drought</i>	No	Not clear	Project households responded to drought in some positive ways, but they also deployed coping strategies (such as feeding animals on weeds), which were more ambiguous.

Programme learning considerations:

Some important lessons that can be applied to other projects of this type in Ethiopia, Somaliland, and elsewhere have emerged from this evaluation. The Ethiopia and Somaliland country teams and the programme team in particular, are encouraged to consider the following:

Focus more on building the voice of women and youth at the household level, as well as at community, regional and national forums.

In spite of the project's apparent success in building resilience across a number of dimensions, the Effectiveness Review did not find strong evidence that women's voice and representation was positively affected. In part, this demonstrates the limitations of the evaluation approach, which was unable to estimate the effects of the project at the regional and national level. However, project households were no more likely than non-project households to report that women as well as men made important decisions for the household – such as around livelihood pursuits – nor did they demonstrate greater confidence that women in the community influenced disaster management plans. This lack of attitudinal change comes despite clear positive effects on women's involvement in off-farm livelihood activities and on their responsibility for livestock. This may be because attitudinal change is a slow and gradual process, whereas the Reconstruction Project was designed to last only four years. Nonetheless, it seems that future projects could investigate whether particular barriers to women's empowerment could be reduced in the project context and consider diverting more resources towards making the jump from increasing women's role in income generation to boosting women's empowerment defined more broadly.

Conduct further research to consider why the profound and robust changes to wealth were achieved.

The Effectiveness Review presents clear and robust evidence that the project increased household wealth. This may partially reflect the fact that the Logic Model held true, that resilience was built, and that project households were faring better during the 2015/16 drought (during which the survey work was carried out). However, given the magnitude of the wealth effects – approximately 0.6 of a standard deviation – it seems that more work is required to fully understand what made project households richer.

Assess the opportunities for scaling up the project's work on non-farm livelihood activities.

Another major success of the project, for which the results were especially clear and robust, was around engaging in off-farm livelihood activities. Project households were nearly three times more likely to have off-farm businesses than the non-project households in the sample. This presents a key supplementary question around whether scaling up the activities of the Reconstruction Project could achieve similarly positive results in other communities. It may be that the existing predominant livelihood activities in other villages do not permit households to engage in non-farm work in the same way. Moreover, if other households in other villages set up off-farm businesses, this will increase the supply of the goods and services these businesses provide, driving down their prices and hence the returns to doing this kind of work. Assessing the importance of these types of issues will be vital for ascertaining whether the project activities could generate similar uptake of non-farm livelihoods if scaled up.

Consider different approaches to monitoring to ensure beneficiary lists are well-maintained and up-to-date.

Although the project households clearly participated more in women's credit and savings groups, the overall proportion of the intervention households participating in these groups was still just 54 percent. This is in spite of the fact that the sample of intervention households was created directly from the most up-to-date lists of women in the credit and savings groups that were available from the project partner organisations. It would be useful to know why these households did not identify themselves as participating in the women's savings and credit groups, despite being on the beneficiary lists. If this is because the lists are out-of-date, then improved monitoring of who is participating in the community groups that were set-up and supported by the project would be useful, as well as recording why households stop participating.

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

The review has revealed the fact that there is improvement in the resilience of targeted community to shocks and stresses. It was also identified through the review that there is an increase of wealth among the project participants and diversification of crop cultivation was promoted. Livelihoods diversification through the engagement of project participants in non-farm income generating activities is another good result area. All said achievements are in line with our expectations and assessment of the project's effectiveness.

However, the gaps identified around women's voice and representation, and weaknesses of women credit groups should be analyzed further.

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

As it is mentioned in the above description the project contribution in terms of improving the resilience (wealth and livelihood diversification plus the attitudinal change) of the target community is something that we consider strong evidence to build best practices on. Women's control over livestock resources, apart from the increase in the herd size, is another strong contribution of the project identified by the review.

As a testimony to this, communities have made tremendous effort to keep their livelihood intact in spite of the drought that struck the whole ecological intervention area.

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

As per the review findings the areas that were weak and needs further improvement and/or attention are:

- Women's control over and responsibility for the crop portfolio, either at the cultivation or the marketing stage;
- Lack of evidence showing improvement in women's voice and representation;
- The proportion of women who participate in women saving and credit groups was lower than expected.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

We think that the quality of the design and methodology was strong and the actual process was conducted in an appropriate manner and in consultation with the team on the ground and the management at country level.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

1. Integrating women empowerment activities in all activities in order to mitigate the impact of harmful traditional practices and negative cultural influences who limit women's agency in the Somali region
2. Strengthen internal gender mainstreaming in order to equip our team to better respond to said challenges coupled with ad-hoc training for implementing partners on GiE and GEM
3. Conduct research on Oxfam resilience programme in Somali region to better understand the impact of our intervention

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

Because of the deeply rooted traditional patriarchal culture existing in most parts of the country and particularly in the project area and due to the limited duration of the project, Oxfam believes that it is very difficult to observe significant change in improving women's agency (voice and their active participation at community level as well as household level). However, Oxfam needs to adjust its approach and invest more resources (human and financial) towards the promotion of women's rights and to advance women empowerment, especially in the Somali Region.

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?

- Frequent monitoring and follow-ups are of a paramount importance and we need to do more in this regard (improve MEAL plans and promote an internal learning culture)
- Setting up well functioning beneficiary recording and updating said system regularly (improve data collection and knowledge management)
- Long-term women empowerment strategies (social as well economic) in order to address critical blockages to the effective realization of women's rights that go beyond the specific project's intervention and duration. The activities planned in any project must contribute to such strategies and cannot alone be expected to bring about the desired change.

10. Additional reflections

None.