

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Livelihoods in Democratic Republic of Congo: Impact evaluation of the Purchase for Progress (P4P) Project (Effectiveness Review Series 2015/16)*

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A: Context, background and findings

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 'Purchase for Progress in DRC' project was selected for review in this way under the livelihoods thematic area.

The project activities were implemented by Oxfam GB in conjunction with partners Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), Centre Régional d'Appui et de Formation pour le Développement (CRAFOD) and the Equateur province Department of Agriculture. The project was started in April 2012 and was completed in October 2014. The project's overall objective was to contribute to improving production, sales and revenues from maize, rice, groundnuts and beans, by providing the necessary inputs and technical advice on modern methods of farming, and forming marketing groups for these commodities for increased sales. The project covered two municipalities of Bikoro and Ingende of Equateur province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Maize, rice, groundnuts and beans were grown mainly for sale to wholesalers and local traders while the surplus was bought by the World Food Programme. The WFP bought some of the produce from farmers, which was later taken to refugee camps in areas afflicted by conflict.

There were particular problems experienced by farmers in the two municipalities that led to the choice of interventions. The farmers had poor access to markets, had low capacity in producing the crops, and lacked the necessary inputs. In addition, there was a poor transport network so farmers had challenges transporting their produce to local markets.

The partners played a key role in trying to solve these problems. For example, FAO and CRAFOD were involved in capacity building and in construction of warehouses for storage of farm produce. They also constructed a few kilometres of roads to open up the area for trade. They provided seeds, empty sacks, agricultural tools and equipment, bicycles, wheelbarrows and carts to the project participants to ease the problem of transportation. The Equateur province Department of Agriculture educated farmers on modern methods of crop production. The WFP bought the surplus produce from the farmers. Oxfam provided the funds for project implementation and was in charge of coordination of project activities.

The project was intended to benefit up to 3,000 households in Bikoro and 4,000 in Ingende municipalities through increased agricultural productivity, increased value addition and increased sales and revenues. With support from the programme, these beneficiaries were expected to increase their output, produce higher-value goods, and reach more markets. In general, the Purchase for Progress project aimed mainly at ensuring improved quality and quantity of produce, improving the condition of transport and storage,

and promoting women's participation through the development of sustainable livelihoods opportunities and increased household income.

The review adopted a quasi-experimental impact evaluation design, which involved comparing households that had been supported by the project with households in neighbouring communities that had not been supported by the project, but had similar livelihood characteristics in 2011, before the project was implemented.

The Effectiveness Review was carried out in 15 villages in the two districts where the project activities had been implemented. Households that had participated in the project were selected at random to be interviewed. For comparison purposes, interviews were also carried out with farmer households from four villages that had not participated in the project, but who were eligible and had expressed an interest in doing so.

These villages were selected purposively because they were deemed to have had similar characteristics to the implementation villages at baseline. Households in these villages were randomly selected and interviews conducted. In total, 285 project participants and 380 non-participants were interviewed. 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 households surveyed in project and comparison areas, to increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Adoption of agricultural practices and technology	YES	On average, farmers in project areas adopted 3 agricultural practices compared with 2 practices adopted by farmers in non-project areas. Participant households also adopted 3 agricultural technologies on average, compared with non-participants who adopted 2.
Increased access to markets	YES	On average, there was a 17 percentage point difference in the number of participant households selling to community associations, cooperatives, buying stations and/or WFP.
Increased value addition	YES	On average, participant households processed 2 products compared with non-participants who processed 1 product.
Crop diversity	YES	Intervention households produced 3 crops, on average, compared with the matched comparison households that produced 2 crops.
Increased cultivation of maize, rice and groundnuts	YES	Significantly more households in the intervention group farmed maize, rice and groundnuts in the year prior to the survey than did households in the

		comparison group – though there was no clear effect on the cultivation of beans.
Increased revenue from the sale of maize, rice and groundnuts	YES	On average, intervention households generated between two and four times as much revenue from sales of maize, rice, groundnuts and beans than did comparison households.
Increased total revenue from crop sales	Not clear	The data do not provide clear evidence on whether or not overall revenue from crop sales was any higher among the intervention group than among the comparison group.
Wealth index	YES	There is evidence to show that the wealth index of households in intervention areas has increased. Wealth has increased for the project households by approximately 0.09 of a standard deviation.
Overall household income (Global Indicator)	NO	This indicator represents the Oxfam GB Global Indicator for livelihoods and was not significantly different between the two groups.

Recommendations:

Consider involving partners with different expertise in the value chain for maximum benefits.

There is evidence from this Effectiveness Review that farmers in project areas adopted more agricultural practices than the non-project participants. It is important to note that the partners involved in this project identified specific roles where they had a comparative advantage in terms of expertise and resource endowment. The capacity-building component was done by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, together with the staff from the Equateur Province Department of Agriculture who had local knowledge of the area. It appears, therefore, that the roles of the partners were clearly defined. This strategy, where partners take up specific roles based on expertise and local knowledge, may be replicated in other contexts where similar projects are implemented.

Consider allocating more resources to the production of groundnuts in this community.

This Effectiveness Review shows a considerable average positive difference in income from the sale of groundnuts between the two groups and has therefore presented a positive impact of this intervention. This crop could be promoted on a large scale since it has the potential of changing the fortunes of farmers in this region. It is the single most important crop where a substantial amount of funding should be channelled. The reasons are that groundnuts mature fast and are not normally affected by entomological and pathological agents and so the cost of production can be much lower. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is the fact that this crop generates considerable revenue that may have the potential of increasing household incomes and getting communities out of poverty in the long run.

Consider partnering with the relevant government ministries, especially the Ministry of Roads, in order to open up the area for transportation of agricultural goods.

Transport is a major challenge in this community and opening the area by building roads requires huge capital outlay, which short-term projects cannot accomplish. Involvement and advocacy with the relevant government departments may reduce the burden on scarce resources being used for road construction instead of agricultural production, as was witnessed in this project. Infrastructural development is indeed a public sector function that projects may not efficiently and effectively engage in. Despite the efforts by the project to put some resources into road construction, it is evident from this Effectiveness Review that no significant difference was realised in terms of the reduction of transport costs between the two groups. Hence the need to consider formulating transportation strategies by developing a vibrant advocacy at the

provincial and national level to establish adequate transport means connecting the producers, consumers and wholesalers in this region.

Consider building a strong monitoring system and Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) during programme design.

The programme team is encouraged to consider a monitoring system that collects real time data, which can be used for targeting, project implementation, reflection and shaping or informing implementation strategies and activities. The project team is also encouraged to develop a performance-monitoring plan containing all the key indicators of project performance. These indicators should be monitored on a quarterly basis to check for deviations against set targets and corrective measures taken whenever there are negative deviations.

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

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

We agree with the findings from the effectiveness review process, and they reflect our own assessment of the project. Regarding the recommendation on allocating more resources to groundnuts production, although we were aware of this during the implementation, during the implementation we decided to focus more on rice, maize and cassava, as the project prioritized covering food subsistence over generating income through groundnuts that are not part of local people's diet.

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

Yes, the review has identified areas that were strong in the project such as increased selected crops production, increased market access through improved farming practices and methods, and increased household's revenues and opportunities on selected crops.

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

Yes, globally the monitoring system that collects real time data has been an ongoing challenge throughout the project implementation process. This concerns cultivated lands, crops consumed by households vs crops sold as well as revenues that the review didn't mention.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

The effectiveness review is strong and of high quality and does give valuable input in order to reflect on programme quality and include changes in the next phase.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

The following main actions will be undertaken to ensure high quality programming:

- A real-time partnership evaluation will be organised to capture strength and weaknesses, and will be used to adapt the programming.
- Work with targeted communities in developing groundnuts culture as the main crop for income generation.

- Continue the advocacy process with provincial and national authorities to build and maintain rural roads for transportation of crops.
- Continue the advocacy/lobbying meetings with traders including boat and truck traders for effective presence and facilitate crops transportation.
- Ensure real time data collection and analysis and results dissemination to all relevant stakeholders.

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

We agree with the recommendation regarding the advocacy strategy towards authorities, in order to improve infrastructure for access to markets, and will include it in the next phase. Nevertheless, given the DRC context and challenges regarding commitment of authorities, not improving local infrastructure within the project might have a negative impact in results regarding access to markets for selling the crops produced within the programme.

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?

- Capturing the overall household incomes through reliable indicators. We want to generate data that allows us to measure household savings and development of expenditures, during the programme cycle.
- Encouraging participating households to keep ongoing other main livelihoods activities while they focus on the project's farming activity as we recognize that these do contribute as well to their incomes.
- Developing and implementing a monitoring system and performance-monitoring plan that allows the collection of relevant real time data and the use of key indicators, which can be then used to frame the expected change we look to see and inform the programme implementation and development strategies.

Currently the programme is pursuing new opportunities for funding and expects, therefore, to apply the above learning within future projects.

In this process, the regional centre/Oxford should support the country programme in developing:

- Appropriate tools for relevant data collection related to capturing and measuring household incomes;
- A monitoring system linked to a high performance-monitoring plan;
- Relevant global programme indicators that meet Oxfam's global livelihood strategy;
- Provide regular on ground monitoring visits and support.

10. Additional reflections

N/A