

Management Response Template

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Resilience in Burkina Faso – Impact evaluation of the ‘Resilience, Food Security and Nutrition’ project (Effectiveness Review Series 2016/17)*

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Questions 1 – 10 will be published externally as a standalone document to accompany the evaluation in question. Please respond in full, without referring people to the detailed action plan (which will not be published).

Please remember that this part of the management response should be written in an accessible way for external audiences!

A: Context, background and findings

1. The context and background of the review, i.e. the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

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. During the 2016/17 financial year, one of the projects selected for an Effectiveness Review was the Resilience, Food Security and Nutrition Project (Projet de Résilience, Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle, PRSAN).

This project was carried out in the North and Centre-North regions of Burkina Faso between November 2013 and May 2017, by Oxfam and Christian Aid, together with two implementing partners, the Alliance Technique d’Assistance au Développement (ATAD) and the Office de Développement des Églises Evangéliques (ODE). This project aimed to have a positive impact on the resilience, food security and nutritional situation of particularly vulnerable households, by supporting them in crop production, market gardening, processing and household businesses, by providing awareness-raising on good nutritional practices, by carrying out community-level disaster assessments and establishing early-warning committees, and by distributing livestock and cash transfers.

The Effectiveness Review, for which the fieldwork was carried out in March 2017, was aimed at evaluating the success of this project in enabling participants to build their resilience to shocks, stresses and uncertainty.

The Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the PRSAN project among women and men that the project worked with, and among their households. This involved comparing the situation of households whose members had participated in the project to households from nearby communities who are thought to have had similar characteristics before the project was carried out. The project participants interviewed were a random sample of households that had been identified as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ during the project’s targeting phase. Project participants were sampled from among all the project communities, with the exception of five large settlements in the North Region that were excluded on the basis that there were no non-project communities that were suitable for comparison to them.

In total, 281 project participants and 519 comparison respondents were interviewed, split evenly between the North and Centre-North regions. The sample was designed to allow analysis by the respondent’s gender: 60 percent of respondents were women and 40 percent were men. All the respondents were either heads of household or their spouses. At the analysis stage, the statistical

tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences between the households in the project and comparison communities, to increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

The interview was divided into two sections. The first part of the interview was carried out using SenseMaker, a narrative-based method that is intended to provide an understanding of complex change. Respondents were first asked to share a story about a situation that negatively affected their well-being during 2016. Following this, they were asked a pre-defined series of questions relating to that story. Rather than the narrative being coded and interpreted by a researcher after the fact, this approach is designed to enable the interviewees to interpret and analyse their experience themselves.

The second part of the interview was a conventional household questionnaire, which included questions about the household's crop production and other productive activities, housing conditions, ownership of assets, diet, and other demographic characteristics. These data were used to evaluate the project's impact against the key outcome areas listed in the table below.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key findings from the household survey data		
Outcome	Evidence of positive impact?	Comments
Adoption of improved farming practices	Yes	Evidence that the project has led to greater adoption of soil conservation techniques, as well as on some other modern farming practices – including the use of rainfall information to make decisions on crop production.
Production of staple crops	No	Despite their greater use of improved seeds and other improved farming practices, project participants did not harvest greater volumes of the four main staple crops in 2016 than comparison households. However, rice production is considerably higher, among a subset of the project participants.
Engagement in market gardening	Yes	Twenty percent of households interviewed in the Centre-North and 47 percent in the North engage in market gardening, much higher proportions than among the comparison households. (This appears to be largely the result of ATAD's and ODE's previous projects, rather than being attributable to PRSAN.)
Engagement in processing and household businesses	No	The proportions of households engaging in processing or in running a household business are no different between the project participants and the comparison group.
Food security and dietary diversity	No	No evidence of a difference between project participants and comparison households in the number of meals eaten per day, nor in the diversity of food types consumed – except among woman-headed households.
Household wealth	No	The change in the index of wealth indicators over the project's lifetime was no higher among project participant households than among comparison households.
Resilience	Yes	Households of project participants met the threshold to score positively in terms of 33 percent of the resilience indicators, against 29 percent among the comparison

households. The effect of the project is concentrated on indicators of transformative capacity and adaptive capacity, rather than on indicators of absorptive capacity.

Programme learning considerations

Seek to understand the role that artisanal gold mining plays in the economy of households and communities in the Centre-North Region, in order to find approaches to minimize its negative effects on health, school attendance and the local environment.

The Effectiveness Review highlights that large numbers of households in the Centre-North Region engaged in artisanal gold mining during 2016, amounting to 33 percent of households in the comparison group. Surprisingly, the data show that engagement in artisanal mining was even higher in the PRSAN project communities, at 46 percent of intervention group households. At the same time, the respondents who mentioned gold mining during the SenseMaker interview clearly recognized that it is a risky activity, and that it is not reliable as a source of income.

The programme team and partners are encouraged to explore what role artisanal gold mining plays in livelihoods in the Centre-North Region. In particular, it is important to understand how the decision to engage in artisanal mining may be affected by crises and by the opportunities provided by projects such as PRSAN. Given the harmful effects of artisanal mining to those engaging in it directly and to the local environment, such an understanding may inform a strategy by which future projects can help to reduce this harm. This may involve providing alternative activities that can substitute for artisanal mining in household livelihoods, or may involve promoting the adoption of safer practices in artisanal mining. It should be recognized that this is a complex problem and that experience elsewhere has not led to clear or simple solutions, so it will be crucial to work with others who are also seeking to understand and address this issue. Given that these challenges with artisanal gold mining exist in several countries in West Africa, there may be potential for Oxfam programmes across the region to work together, to share experience and learning on this subject.

Explore the reasons why the greater adoption of improved agricultural practices did not have a positive impact on the production of cereal crops in the project communities.

One of the most challenging results presented by the Effectiveness Review is the lack of a difference between the project and comparison communities in their production of staple crops (other than rice). That finding applies at least to crop production in 2016, but there are also indications in the data that the volume of crop production in 2015 differed little between the project and comparison communities. This is in spite of the greater rates of adoption in the project communities of many improved farming practices, such as the use of improved seeds or soil conservation techniques. It is important to review, then, why these improved practices are apparently not leading to significant increases in yields. This may involve investigating, for example, whether participants do not have enough confidence in the improved practices to adopt them at the scale at which they could have greatest effect, whether they are experiencing barriers in applying these techniques according to best practice, or whether some of the practices require favourable weather conditions in order to have an effect. A good starting point for this research may be to identify some producers in each community who have been able to use the improved practices to significantly improve their yields: enquiries could then focus on what has prevented their neighbours from following their example.

Reinforce efforts to link the early-warning committees to the technical services that provide meteorological information, so that they are able to provide useful and timely forecasting information to community members.

One of the objectives of the PRSAN project was to promote the use of meteorological information in informing farming decisions. A key responsibility of the early-warning committees established under the project is to disseminate weather forecasting information throughout their communities. Unfortunately, the project's final evaluation has found that many of the early-warning committees are not linked effectively with state technical services at a commune and higher level, and so they have not been able to provide useful information to community members (Issifou and Aka, 2017). Consistent with this, in the Effectiveness Review survey, the majority of respondents in the project communities did not know of the existence of an early-warning committee in their community, and only small numbers (21 percent of farming households in project communities in the Centre-North and 15 percent in the North) reported that they were making use of weather forecasting information in their farming decisions. However, while these figures are low, it is clear that at least *some* of the committees have enabled a larger share of farmers to access and act on meteorological information. These additional users of meteorological information tend to have lower education and literacy levels than those who have typically been able to make use of this information in the past (as witnessed by the situation in the comparison communities). This suggests that increased efforts to improve the functioning of the early-warning committees could play a valuable role in disseminating meteorological information to those who have not previously made use of it.

Assess how best to identify participants for community-level projects such as this, balancing participation and accountability in the targeting process with the need to accurately identify the most vulnerable.

The participants in the PRSAN project were identified through carrying out a participatory wealth ranking exercise, based on the Household Economy Approach (HEA). Community members were asked to specify criteria that characterize 'very poor', 'poor', 'middle-income', and 'better-off' households in their community, and then to categorize each household according to those definitions. Most of the criteria cited by community members related to ownership of livestock, land or other assets, or to household size. All the households identified as 'poor' and 'very poor' in each of the project communities were selected for participation in the activities of the PRSAN project; these households comprise the intervention group for this Effectiveness Review.

The comparison group was selected at random from across the population of the comparison communities, so it includes households from across the whole range of the four wealth categories as defined through the HEA. Since the comparison group includes 'middle-income' and 'better-off' households, we would expect the comparison households on average to have been wealthier before the project was launched (in 2013) than the intervention group households. However, the Effectiveness Review data provide only limited evidence for this pattern among households interviewed in the Centre-North, and no evidence for this pattern in the North Region. To some extent this may be because 'poor' and 'very poor' households in the PRSAN project communities had already benefited from the earlier interventions carried out by ODE and ATAD, and so were not clearly distinguishable from their (previously wealthier) neighbours. Perhaps of more concern is that there is little difference in the data between the 'poor' and 'very poor' households, in terms of their pre-project wealth levels, the productive activities they were engaged in in 2013, or their demographic characteristics.

It may appear from this that community members were taking considerations other than material poverty into account when identifying 'poor' and 'very poor' households at the start of the PRSAN project. It is possible that community members are using a more nuanced understanding of poverty than can be observed in our data – perhaps, for example, by considering factors such as recent illnesses or bereavements. It would be valuable to explore more closely when carrying out future participatory targeting exercises what factors are being taken into account in these

processes. This knowledge may help to improve measurement approaches so that they better reflect participants' conceptions of wellbeing and poverty. On the other hand, it may be that this will highlight a need to change the balance between participation, transparency and objectivity in these selection processes.

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?

The findings of the review show that the project had a positive effect on the resilience of the beneficiary households as 33 percent of the resilience indicators have been obtained compared with 28 percent among the comparison households.

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

The key areas of the project are:

- Strengthening market gardening production. Thanks to this project opportunity particularly, women have gained a degree of control over decision-making concerning agricultural production.
- Knowledge and use of agricultural meteorological information via the early-warning committees and other sources of communication such as radios.
- The project led to an increase in the participation of these households in various local groups. This could constitute an opportunity for them for community participation and integration into the productive and social fabric, even though that was not directly measured by the review and the review does not show a significant effect on market access (proportion of households having sold part of the crops they produced).
- An increase in dietary diversity in households headed by women.

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

It does raise questions about certain findings of the review and requires more information from the stakeholders in order to set up improvement actions, particularly regarding:

- Agricultural production. Insofar as the project aims to increase agricultural production via the distribution of improved seeds and restoration of degraded soils, we note almost identical, or even worse, results than for the comparison households.
- Animal production, with an increase in livestock numbers expected in the project, although we note similar results as for the comparison households.
- The targeting. The results obtained and the comparison with the comparison households reveal the need to thoroughly review the beneficiary household selection process

6. Summary of review quality assessment, i.e. quality of the review is strong/mixed/poor and short assessment of the process

The quality of the assessment is quite good. The sample is fairly representative, even though it did not take into account the households not initially identified as poor or very poor which were then included in project activities as there were not enough households in that category that were able

or wished to participate (that was particularly the case for the seed replication activity). However, it seems that those cases were relatively few and far between. No middle-income household members were interviewed for this effectiveness review. The first part of the interview was carried out using SenseMaker, a narrative-based method, to provide an explanation of complex changes.

7. **Main Oxfam follow-up actions** (This should be a summary of the detailed action plan, focussing on the key actions and timeframes, stated in table B. Information on actions should be specific and timebound. The detailed action plan is for internal use only and will not be published, so please do not “refer to the detailed action plan” in your response)

Three areas of action should be addressed:

1. Improve the targeting process with the integration of a weighting score.
2. Better define the targets for support for improvement of the production bases (agricultural production and livestock production) in particular.
3. Understand the role of gold mining, especially its impact on children’s education in terms of school non-attendance.
4. Strengthen the link between the community early-warning unit and the state technical services, especially as these units are integrated into the community.

8. **Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon** - and why (*this reflection should consider the results of the review quality assessment*)

The recommendations made in the review are pertinent and topical. Neither Oxfam in Burkina Faso nor the programme in question disagrees with any of the recommendations made. The programme considers that these recommendations constitute an action plan for future actions to take to build resilient development.

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?** Please be as specific as possible and provide context where relevant, naming projects in full where learning from the review will be applied.

One lesson that we will take away is the need to refine the targeting process. This work is already underway within the programme to integrate a weighting score to facilitate the targeting of beneficiaries.

For Oxfam, the gold mining issue will not only be addressed from the perspective of access to or improvement of income, but also from the perspective of children’s school non-attendance. We intend to develop a project with the objective of making children the gold of Burkina Faso, to draw the attention of the public authorities, parents and donors to the need to regulate this sector of traditional gold mining.

Finally, support for development of the production bases (agricultural production, livestock production, etc.) should be provided by drawing lessons from the results of the PRSAN project, although the results are fairly limited considering the investment made. In future projects, this point will be addressed and support from the regional centre or Oxford should not be ruled out, as the investment in this action is considerable and the expected results should reflect this investment.

10. Additional reflections that have emerged from the review process but were not the subject of the evaluation.

- Climate information is actually collected, processed and disseminated in the same way in both regions. A better understanding of this climate information should be pursued for improved decision-making.
- When livestock breeding is successful, it drives the economy quite rapidly. Moreover, the fact of having animals gives the owner esteem and respect in the community. Appropriate technical supervision needs to be strengthened in order to have a greater impact.
- In future, measures could be taken to filter or chlorinate wells to provide potable water.
- In Africa, and more particularly in these intervention zones, tacit social support networks exist. The way they function and the volume of assistance are at the discretion of the participants.
- Market gardening produces conclusive results in terms of nutrition, with a varied diet and fresh vegetables in all seasons. However, not everyone engages in this activity.
- Livelihoods have been slightly diversified as a result of the project. In the project intervention zone, the majority of people are crop farmers, and some also have livestock; others engage in market gardening, poultry farming, rice production, small-scale trade, construction, repairs or transportation. Some even join the rural exodus.
- Runoff water collection basins introduced by the State can be cited as other innovative practices outside of the PRSAN project, although they have not been widely publicised.
- Regarding literacy/schooling, future actions could be tied in with an intervention in this area, even if in a consortium.
- The communities in the intervention zone only save minimum sums. The precarious nature of their situation, their ad hoc calculations and the sensitivity of this issue mean that they do not give it much importance.
- Access to credit is behind the take-off of entrepreneurial activities among many poor and very poor households. However, those who do not feel capable of making the borrowed amount grow think that it is pointless getting into debt.
- Even the middle-income and better-off households that have had access to credit have been able to boost their economic activities.
- In my opinion, the construction of improved houses will take place once all the other criteria have been met.