

Management Response Template

Oxfam Management response to the review of *LIVELIHOODS IN NIGER*:

Impact evaluation of the 'Community based integrated water resource management' project

Prepared by:	Mahaboubou Ibrahim, Saving Lives Programme Manager		
Contributors:	Alhousseini Issaka, WASH Project Officer		
Signed off by:	Assalama Sidi Dawalack		
Date:	17 October 2018	Country/Region/Campaign:	Niger/Africa

A: Context, background and findings

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

Oxfam GB's Global Performance Framework is part of the organization's effort to better understand and communicate its effectiveness, as well as to enhance learning for staff and partners. Under this Framework, a small number of completed or mature projects are selected at random each year for an evaluation of their impact; this exercise is known as an 'Effectiveness Review'. One key focus is on the extent to which the projects have promoted change in relation to relevant Oxfam GB global outcome indicators. The global outcome indicator for the livelihoods thematic area is defined as 'total household consumption per adult equivalent per day'. This indicator is explained in more detail in section 5 of this report.

Niger's 'Community-Based Integrated Water Resource Management' project was one of those selected for an Effectiveness Review in the 2016/17 financial year. The project activities were implemented by Oxfam GB in conjunction with the partner organization Karkara and the Department of Agriculture of the Republic of Niger. The project was started in April 2013 and was completed in March 2015. It was evaluated one year after closure.

The project was implemented in the two villages of Banibangou and Soumatt in Banibangou commune. The project's overall objective was to increase agricultural production and income for farmers – in particular, women farmers - through integrated water resource management. The crops targeted for improvements in agricultural production included cabbages, tomatoes, onions, carrots, potatoes and sweet peppers. The choice of these particular interventions was derived in response to specific problems experienced by farmers in the two villages. The area has very low levels of rainfall, and local farmers reported low capacity in producing crops and were lacking the necessary inputs.

The partner organization played a key role in trying to solve these issues – particularly in the development of irrigation structures to allow for the cultivation of local vegetable crops. With funding support from Oxfam and its donor, wells and boreholes were dug, while water tanks were bought and installed with solar pumps. In addition, pipelines were connected to water basins in order to improve irrigation opportunities in the community. In the area of crop production, farmers were provided with inputs, including seeds and agricultural tools.

The partner also carried out capacity-building trainings in improved agronomic practices in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture. Exchange visits were organized and farmers were encouraged to organize themselves into groups in order to have better bargaining power in local markets. Oxfam provided the funds for project implementation and was in charge of the coordination of project activities. Regular monitoring visits were also carried out by Oxfam to ensure smooth implementation.

The project was intended to benefit up to 1,200 households in Banibangou and Soumatt through these interventions. With support from the programme, the beneficiaries were expected to increase their agricultural output, produce higher-value goods and reach more markets for their produce.

EVALUATION APPROACH

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, but which had similar livelihoods characteristics in 2012 before the project was implemented.

The Effectiveness Review was carried out in four villages (two project villages and two comparison villages) in the commune 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 carried out with farmer households from the two villages that had not participated in the project, but who had been eligible and had expressed an interest in doing so. These villages did not participate because the project did not have enough funds to cover all villages.

The comparison 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 were conducted. In total, 300 project participants and 404 non-participants were interviewed. At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity score matching (PSM) and multivariate regression were used to control for demographic and baseline differences between the households surveyed in the project and comparison areas, in order to increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

RESULTS

The data suggest that the project interventions made a positive contribution to the livelihoods of the target population.

One of the key questions for this review was to determine whether the project had an impact on household income and food security. In this study, 'total household consumption per adult equivalent per day' has been used as a proxy measure of net household income. Project participants had a higher overall household income compared with the matched comparison group, and this difference was statistically significant. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the project had a positive effect on food security, with project beneficiaries spending more on food (food consumption per adult equivalent per day) compared with the comparison households.

In contrast with the results for food consumption and household income, there was no evidence to suggest that the project had a significant effect on household wealth (measured by normalized wealth index). It could be reasoned from the food consumption data that the project beneficiaries spent some of their increased income on purchasing food, rather than investing in assets. It is also possible that the project participants were investing in inputs for their vegetable business, and hence the increased income did not translate into assets. While interpreting the results, it should also be kept in mind that savings and subsequent asset creation can also depend on cultural, social and political contexts. Changes in wealth status may require a much higher income or longer time horizon in this particular context to become apparent.

Another key aspect of this Effectiveness Review was to determine whether the project had any effect on production, sales or revenue from the key vegetable crops it targeted. While there is evidence to show that project households produced more vegetables than their comparators, the review team was limited in the analysis and conclusions it could draw regarding sales and revenue by some shortcomings in the data collected.

An important finding was that, of the households who sold any produce, almost all reported selling some of it to local markets or middlemen. Among project households, none reported selling their produce through farmers' associations or cooperatives. This suggests that there are some questions regarding the effectiveness of the associations – at least in regards to collective marketing and selling.

The review also considered whether farmers adopted improved agricultural practices acquired through the capacity-building training offered by the project. These agricultural practices included seed nurseries, production of organic compost, organic farming, use of improved certified seeds/seedlings, integrated diversified farming systems and farm planning based on weather forecasts (e.g. rain gauges). The results indicated that almost all project households had implemented at least one of the improved practices in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with 32 percent of comparison households. Indeed, project households implemented on average more than three of the six practices considered in the survey, compared with an average of less than one practice implemented by comparison households.

Although this Effectiveness Review was focused on livelihoods, it included some indicators to evaluate the project's impact on women's participation in group activities and their influence in household decision making. While there was no apparent evidence of the project positively affecting group participation, there was evidence of it effecting a positive change in women's influence in the household decision-making process.

The key results of the Effectiveness Review are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Key results of the Effectiveness Review

Outcome	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Adoption of improved agricultural practices and technology	Yes	On average, farmers in the project areas adopted more improved agricultural practices/technologies compared with non-project areas.
Increased access to markets	Unclear	As so few comparison households sold the targeted crops, there are no reliable comparison data to draw robust conclusions. However, the data for the project households show no households selling their crops through farmer associations or cooperatives.
Households engaging in vegetable production	Yes	There is evidence that farmers in the project areas cultivated more of the vegetable crops targeted by the project.
Increased production of vegetables	Yes	There is evidence that project households harvested a significantly greater amount of vegetable crops than their comparators.
Increased revenue from vegetables	Unclear	As so few comparison households sold the targeted crops, there are no reliable comparison data to draw robust conclusions.
Overall crop diversity	Unclear	While project households were more likely to cultivate a greater number of vegetable crops, due to the limitations of the data collected (no information collected on crops not targeted by the project) it is not possible to draw conclusions as to the overall effect this had on crop portfolios among the project households.
Wealth index	No	No evidence of impact was found for changes in wealth status among project households.
Women's empowerment	Mixed	There is mixed evidence of the project having a positive effect on participation in groups, but there is stronger evidence that the project effected a positive change in women's influence in the household decision-making process.
Overall household income (global indicator)	Yes	The Effectiveness Review measured income indirectly through total household consumption per adult equivalent per day expressed as a logarithm of the local currency (CFA franc in this case). Households in project areas had an overall household income that was approximately 22 percent higher compared with households in the comparison communities.

Continue to work on efforts to improve collaboration of production and marketing of vegetables in and around the project areas

While the review indicates success in encouraging households to diversify into cultivating a range of vegetables, it is also apparent that the majority of project households sell their goods to middlemen or local markets. The project team should consider whether there is opportunity for farmers to better collaborate on production of certain cash crops, and in turn explore options for marketing these goods in a coordinated way to achieve better returns for the farmers. Part of the strategy could include strengthening the organisation of local farmer groups and encouraging local leadership to represent their groups in potential markets.

Evaluate options for how to add value in the value chains targeted by the project

Clearly the project has been successful in encouraging greater production in the value chain targeted by the project, i.e. vegetable production. This should offer a key opportunity for the project team to consider how to maximise this increase in production by evaluating options for adding value to the produce. This may include improving opportunities for farmers to better preserve their crops, whether to take advantage of market fluctuations, or in producing dried end product, for example, dried tomatoes. There may also be opportunities to further process some of the crops produced to add value. An example given by the team was the production of onion jam, but there are likely other options, and as farmers organise collectively there may be options to invest in appropriate value-addition machines.

Review the key successes of the project and explore opportunities to replicate elements

The results from the review indicate the project has been largely successful in its key objectives of encouraging implementation of better vegetable production with the aim of increasing income among the target households. The steps taken to train farmers and implement irrigation and other initiatives to improve water availability seem to have borne good results. One of the more striking results from the review is how women from project households exhibit greater decision-making power at a household level. The project targeted women from the outset, including them in decisions in how the project should operate and which crops should be targeted. In the local culture, women often have the main responsibility for garden/vegetable production, and by purposely targeting such crops the project appears to have brought benefits to the women participants beyond improvements to household income and food security. There seems to be opportunity then here to review and further understand the reasons for this indicator of success in women's empowerment, and evaluate whether there are opportunities to replicate the success of this elsewhere.

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?

It has satisfied our expectation of the project's effectiveness. Indeed, the method of comparison of villages (beneficiaries and not beneficiaries) that has been used has allowed us to see the real impacts of this project which appear clearly in this study.

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

Yes, the review has identified strong areas, which were being pulled out of this project. One can quote: the adoption of improved agricultural practices and technology by households, more commitment of households in vegetable production, positive change in women's influence in the household decision-making process...etc.

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

Yes, the review has pulled out of this project weak areas, which can be quote as follows: none of the households couldn't sell their crops through farmers associations or cooperatives, lack of effectiveness of farmers associations, lack of positive effects on participation in groups in terms of women's empowerment ...etc.

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

The review quality assessment is effective (strong) in this document as long as the assigned objectives have been correctly set out and informed.

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)

Development of new initiatives for fundraising and using the result of the review.

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*)

Since the review quality assessment was effective, Oxfam-Niger agree with all conclusions/recommendations of this document.

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.

Key lessons learned include:

Increased access to markets: To reframe and train farmers associations or cooperatives, Equip the farmers associations or cooperatives with the necessary infrastructures and equipment.

Women's empowerment: Provide women with the opportunity to acquire their own cultivated land, Strengthen women's capacity in agro-food processing techniques and the sale of the value chains they develop at the local level.

Regional centre/Oxford can support these plans by providing the necessary funding and technical support.

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

None.