



Khayrun Begum (50) a village woman standing in the doorway of her house in Gosairhut union, Shariatpur, Central Bangladesh. Photo: Saikat Mojumder.

ASSESSING OXFAM'S APPROACHES TO CHANGES IN SOCIAL NORMS IN VAWG/GBV PROGRAMMING GLOBALLY

Executive Summary by Z. Douglas, R. Nitia, M.J.L. Pellecer, A. Pittman, and I. Sahoo

Background/Purpose

In its 2013-2019 Oxfam Strategic Plan, Oxfam states that women's rights and gender equality are fundamental in achieving sustainable development, human rights, and efforts to reduce poverty and attain justice. These principles are expressed in Change Goal 2- Advancing Gender Justice. In summer 2018, Oxfam hired a consultant team to carry out a final assessment, **Final Review and Sense-making Exercise for the Gender Justice Change Goal: Assessing Oxfam's Contribution to Changes in Social Norms in VAWG/GBV Programming Globally**, to examine the Oxfam confederation's progress towards Change Goal 2.

Given the broad nature of gender and gender justice, the team focused on one indicative outcome of interest to frame the final review and sense-making exercise: **changing social norms in relation to gender and gender-based violence**. The team strove to understand Oxfam's added value and its approaches by examining the following three questions: *What are the approaches/strategies/theories of change that are contributing to change in cultural norms and exclusionary practices surrounding violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender based violence (GBV)?; What are the key outcomes Oxfam has achieved in relation to changing social norms to end gender-based violence?; and In what ways is Oxfam supporting partners, including women's rights organizations (WROs), so that they can advance their work in changing cultural norms and exclusionary practices around the right of women and girls to live free from violence?* This assessment builds on lessons from the mid-term evaluation that was carried out in 2016.

Methodology

The assessment used a mixed methodology, including a meta-synthesis of evaluation reports and learning documents and interviews. In total, we analyzed 13 evaluations and 12 learning documents published between 2016 and 2018 to document progress made towards Change Goal 2, Gender Justice Goal. Twenty key informant interviews (KIIs) with 17 staff (1 being a 2-staff interview) and four partners were carried out to gain insight and better understanding of how Oxfam works, what works, and where things could improve. Additionally, the team focused on understanding how VAWG/GBV intersects and overlaps with other sectors such as education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and VAWG/GBV in emergencies. The assessment team used a combined inductive and deductive analytic approach that drew from the Oxfam Conceptual Framework - *Conceptual Framework on Oxfam's Approach to Changing Negative Attitudes, Social Norms and Behaviours to End Violence Against Women and Girls/Gender Based Violence* - alongside the previous coding framework established in the mid-term evaluation. The evaluations and learning documents and interviews were all analyzed using [ImpactMapper](#), an online mixed method software tool that allows one to track, analyze, and visualize outcomes, patterns, and trends in social change.

Overview of Reviewed Research Documents

Only one of the projects /programs evaluated was long-term in time-span, operating for 10+ years. The majority of the projects were defined as short-term (1–4 years), which is a relatively limited amount of time to expect change in social norms. The top three sectors that projects engaged in were community based (n=11/25), economic (n=9/25) and justice (n=5/25) interventions. With the exception of the presence of the economic sector, this finding concerning project sectors is similar to what was presented in the mid-term. Five projects had some activity at all four levels of the ecological framework - individual, household/relational, community, and societal. This time around, the assessment also included project/programs that targeted the relational level – compared to the mid-term when there were none. Lastly, 21 of the 25 reviewed documents addressed at least one of Oxfam’s Guiding Principles to ending VAWG/GBV. While the KIIs were conducted to complement the document review, fewer than half of the KIIs noted at least one Guiding Principle.

Key Findings

All 25 research documents were reviewed to examine what **theories of change** contributed to changing social norms in VAWG/GBV. Sixteen of the 25 research documents (13 evaluations and 3 learning documents) mentioned theories of change, and the most commonly used was the Empowerment theory (personal-political-societal), followed by the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) framework, and role model theory. The social movements’ theory of change was the least referenced, which is interesting given that this approach has been highlighted as successful in the literature for supporting work on ending VAWG from a policy perspective.

Among the key outcomes examined in this assessment are those related to negative attitudes around gender and negative attitudes related to VAWG/GBV. *Acceptance of gender hierarchal attitudes* and *acceptance of stereotypical gender roles* were the two most common negative attitudes found in documents reviewed. The two most common negative attitudes related to VAWG/GBV in research documents were *acceptance of partner, community and/or gang violence*, and *tolerance towards VAWG/GBV*. Negative norms related to VAWG/GBV and structural norms were also key norms-focused outcomes that were examined in this assessment. We found that the most common negative norms related to VAWG/GBV were *acceptance of physical/intimate partner violence* and *men’s right to discipline/control women’s behaviour* and *patriarchal norms that perpetuate violence*.

Fifteen out of the 25 reviewed documents discussed outcomes related to changing social norm change, specifically at the short-term and intermediate outcome levels. Similar to the mid-term meta-evaluation, the outcomes were mapped using **Gender@Work’s Integral Framework** to note primary progress areas. For gender transformative change to occur these shifts must be seen, at both the individual and societal levels and across all four of the framework’s quadrant areas. These quadrant areas are *consciousness raising*, *access to resources/services*, *institutional and*

policy change, and deep structure/culture. Seventy-three outcome areas - were identified after review, of which 28 were intermediate (n=28/73) and 45 being short-term (n=45/73) outcomes. The two short-term outcomes most frequently noted were increased *awareness* of what constitutes VAWG/GBV and increased *access to quality services*. *Increased empowerment/agency* and *communities no longer condoning VAWG/GBV* were the intermediate level outcomes most frequently noted. Further, this review found Oxfam contributed to 16 outcomes on social norms change underpinning VAWG/GBV, which is considerable progress from the mid-term review, which found *no* evidence of social norm change.

Unintended outcomes – unanticipated wins (positive unintended outcomes), negative unintended outcomes, and reversals or further worsening of the current situation as a result of programming, “backlash” – were also examined as part of the review. Only seven documents (5 out of 13 evaluations and 2 out of 12 learning documents) reported on unintended outcomes. Some change strategies that were put in place to end VAWG/GBV failed to address all forms of violence being experienced and instead focused attention on a limited form of violence and a unidimensional strategy for ending violence, which led to reinforcement of abuse. For example, mediation was used as the primary strategy to end interpersonal violence in Papua New Guinea to address physical violence at the hands of a spouse/partner. In turn, other forms of violence – e.g., emotional – and other underlying factors – such as power dynamics- remained unaddressed in this context- thus reinforcing harmful norms that support and sustain VAWG/GBV.

Nearly half of the documents (n=11/25) reviewed instances of resistance or backlash, which is an important finding that all Oxfam staff and partners must be aware of and account for in their programming. The reality in gender equality, rights and GBV work is that often when power begins to shift, significant backlash, threats, or outright violence can ensue against the women involved in the projects/programs or against women’s human rights defenders.

Quality of Research Documents

As part of this review, we analyzed a total of 55 documents (evaluations, final reports, key research pieces and learning documents). Of these 55 documents, only 25 were deemed to have met minimum quality requirements and thus, were included in the review. The documents were then ranked for quality, with rankings of Strong/Moderate/Weak. Only six included in the analyses were rated as being of “strong” quality, and the rest being “moderate”.

Conclusions

Oxfam has made progress in changing social norms related to gender and gender-based violence, but significant shifts have yet to be achieved. This final assessment noted that similar to the mid-term meta-evaluation, there was focus on awareness raising, in addition to access to services and resources. There were promising approaches – particularly those engaging in transformative leadership and some that utilized a

multitude of strategies to generate norms change. However, as noted in the mid-term meta-evaluation, short project lives, limited resources and lack of contextual analyses with a gender lens as well as room for improved MEL for learning and program design/implementation, contributed to more modest shifts in social norms related to VAWG/GBV.

In answer to the guiding question for this review - *What are the approaches/strategies/theories of change that are contributing to change in cultural norms and exclusionary practices surrounding violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender based violence (GBV)?* We found that Oxfam projects that demonstrated changes in social norms using multi-level approaches were more able to address the non-linear and complex pathways that lead to social norm change. Some of the more promising theories of change that emerged from the analysis were 'empowerment: personal-political-societal', 'role models' and 'knowledge-attitude-practice'. Of the social change strategies, consciousness (awareness) raising and leadership development appeared the most frequently used. It is important to emphasize that the programs that demonstrated changes in social norms were those that worked across different sectors and targeted not only women and girls, but men, boys and different groups of influencers such as traditional and religious leaders.

In order to make more substantive progress, Oxfam must make concerted efforts to ensure contextual analyses using a gender lens are undertaken so that project designs incorporate the intent to shift gender power, norms and behaviour. In addition to this, Oxfam must invest in designing and implementing MEL strategies using a feminist lens that have a clear and rigorous understanding of how to achieve, document, and measure that targeted social norm change. Oxfam's reliance on awareness raising, along with the short timelines for change to occur, and the modest pockets of funding allocated to that, seem inconsistent with the stated aim to achieve norm and behaviour change to prevent VAWG/GBV.

This final review and sense-making exercise also highlighted an envisioned role for Oxfam in the global space as a convener and connector. Oxfam is well positioned to play its part as connector – for instance between WROs and police, judiciary or connecting the judiciary with communities, or building platforms for WROs to connect nationally, regionally and/or internationally with each other. Brokering these relationships even if we are not fully part of them, is crucial in fighting negative social norms. Working with more women's rights organizations, youth organizations and movements and strengthening the existing movements in the sector is a crucial role which Oxfam should play.

Below we highlight a few recommendations:

Key insights from Staff of Oxfam

- Gender mainstreaming has not happened in all the change goals and themes. Oxfam is still struggling to find space to fully and meaningfully implement a transformative approach to gender in all change goals. Whatever sector, when engaging in program analysis or sector analysis, VAWG and/or gender equality will emerge as an important issue.
- Since GBV touches/intersects with all sectors, all Oxfam staff should build capacity in working on norms/GBV/VAWG – and not just through small workshops. It should be done using knowledge management processes – documenting, sharing lessons learned; also work through partners' agendas.
- There is a need for internal leadership to recognize that changes in social norms take time and that this requires more resources and investment.
- There is a need to capitalize on voices of youth to stop GBV.
- There is a need for more coherence and openness to listening to women's rights activists and movements, and more external evidence of successes to support greater investment in strengthening women's rights movements.
- Oxfam objectives should be developed in coordination, and not compete with women's and feminist organizations; we shouldn't have an Oxfam agenda, but rather a feminist agenda.
- More internal work on understanding gender and power is needed. The future depends on Oxfam's success in appropriately addressing and effectively working on these issues.

Select Program-Specific Recommendations

With Program Design

Engage in gender, risk and context/power analysis before program design. Any Oxfam program, gender-specific or not, should ensure the program analyzes and addresses gender and power imbalances adequately, mitigates against related risks and furthers Oxfam's gender justice agenda.

Promote staff and partners' use of deep contextual analysis in the design phase to greatly inform and shape implementation and foster program sustainability. Any program/planning design must engage partners from the scoping period onwards.

Develop further the men and boys advocate pillar with a focus on deconstructing masculinities and gender power. Gender norms inclusive of masculinities manifest and are reproduced across the social spectrum, so program interventions and coalitions, must seek changes at the interpersonal, institutional, and community levels as well as within the political and legal spheres. In order to truly address the roots of

discriminations, issues of power and masculinities should be explored along with a focus on creating equitable relationships of mutual respect.

With Implementation

Ensure support (safety plans, resources, connections to safe houses, shelters, etc.) is available to women experiencing backlash or who are at increased risk for violence due to Oxfam programming. The assessment found that many programs shared evidence of backlash; in many regions around the world violence against WHRDs is on the rise.

Engage in multi-faceted program interventions that target the roots of inequalities, not just the immediate problem. For example, WEE interventions need to include components beyond providing economic resources and technical skills training. They should provide awareness-raising activities focused on personal empowerment, gender power relations and VAW, communication, and how to address household conflicts.

Involve and engage the partners of women participants in awareness-raising components – either alone or together with women – in order to reduce the resistance and backlash that could result from participation. Working with men should focus on encouraging less biased gender attitudes, norms, and beliefs, promoting women's rights, facilitating mutual respect and open communication, and generating common understanding about the benefits of women's empowerment and the root cause of gender inequalities including VAWG/GBV.

Within Oxfam

Develop a long-term strategy and appropriate funding to shift norms related to VAWG/GBV, in alignment with a transformative approach. Acknowledge that change takes time and changing social norms around violence, rights, women's empowerment, and gender justice can be a slow process. Weave a gender transformative approach as the common thread throughout all programs that address VAWG, gender justice, and SRHR.

Strengthen data quality around program evaluation to ensure that more insights and lessons can be used for information sharing and to decide whether interventions should be scaled up or not.

Support internal reflection processes, and make it mandatory to address gender bias and stereotypes internally within Oxfam and its partners. Gender bias, stereotypes and limiting cultural norms exist within Oxfam and its partners' institutional structures and could be replicated within programming if they are not monitored and addressed. Every Oxfam country office and partner needs to ensure that their staff complete gender awareness training and gender biases and discriminations is monitored and addressed.

Provide sensitization and technical training for staff to support inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in VAWG/GBV programming. Operationalization of the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities into programming efforts will require staff who have solid

understanding of issues faced by these groups, including safe and effective engagement strategies, program design options specific to technical and thematic areas, as well as advocacy and monitoring and evaluation strategies.

With Partners

Provide sensitization and technical training related to inclusion of sexual and gender minorities to all partners, particularly organizations undertaking DRR and humanitarian response.

Support intersectional, and multi-level movement building and alliances. There is opportunity for Oxfam to leverage their perceived role as a convener to facilitate linkages between partners, movements, larger networks and major players such as government organizations and global alliances, and begin to mainstream gender justice and VAWG into various sectors.

Program Sustainability Recommendations

Ensure that projects have been developed by and with partners for greater cultural and programmatic relevance. Quality, not quantity, is what to aim for when establishing partnerships to ensure that programming is culturally appropriate and relevant.

Use community level approaches that aim to change norms. These cost-effective approaches may sit in informal environs such as affinity groups – groups that manifest because of some type of association/relationship – where individual behaviour, attitudinal change is targeted but the effects, benefits of intervention spill over as multiple individuals are experiencing some level of change.

Changing social norms takes time. Oxfam should carry out greater investment of resources and support of long-term strategies and interventions in order to end GBV.

MEL Recommendations

Work to build capacity not only in data monitoring and evaluation internally with staff and ensure external evaluators have a track record of rigorous analysis.

Facilitate, and when possible, directly support, more sharing of project lessons (results, outcomes).

Push for MEL systems that are attentive not only to tracking outcomes but also processes. MEL systems that allow for participatory data collection can better capture the dynamic processes that coincide with norms change.

Based on lessons learned, below are **recommendations for Oxfam over the next 3–5 years** to focus efforts in working to change social norms around VAWG/GBV:

Continue program expansion and greater funding to work with various populations on issues related to shifting norms around VAWG/GBV.

Promote a Walk the Walk, Talk the Talk approach with capacity building and empower staff to understand and operationalize gender norms programming. When promoting a rights-based approach, Oxfam needs to take the necessary steps to ground staff in the practice. It does not help to talk about and encourage good practices and then have staff members not apply this knowledge in programming or in their offices.

VAWG/GBV intersects with all sectors and this knowledge must be appropriately transferred and applied, especially at OI and Oxfam country offices and in all programs. There are successful approaches emerging in WEE/VAWG and TLWR/VAWG and promising practices in the area of Education/VAWG and SRHR/VAWG. In addition to this, there is an urgent need to also reflect and strategize around how VAWG/GBV work is addressed in Humanitarian programming.

Oxfam is a recognized convener across multiple sectors and settings and needs to act in this capacity at the highest levels. Oxfam appears to be well positioned in its networks and partnerships.

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