Management Response

Oxfam Management response to the Impact Evaluation of the 'Governance and Accountability through Digitalization' project

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A: Context, background and findings

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

Oxfam in Tanzania launched the 'Governance and Accountability through Digitalization' project in 2017, aimed at improving community-driven governance and accountability through the use of digital technology. The project built on the traditional animation approach developed through Oxfam's former project '*Chukua Hatua*': community animators are village level organizers or facilitators who mobilize or 'animate' communities around a common advocacy agenda. The project enhanced it by integrating the use of digital tools into the animation approach. It is a collaboration between Oxfam in Tanzania, Oxfam-Solidarité (Belgium) and the Pastoral Livelihood Support and Empowerment Programme (PALISEP) in Arusha, Capacity Building Initiatives for Poverty Alleviation (CABUIPA) in Geita, and Mtwara Society Against Poverty (MSOAPO) in Mtwara. It took place in rural areas in Arusha, Mtwara, Kigoma and Geita in Tanzania, and in the Nduta refugee camp in Kigoma, which hosts refugees from Burundi.

The project was implemented between February 2017 and March 2019. Despite continued concerns by media and human rights report on Tanzania regarding shrinking and shifting civic space, freedom of expression, association and assembly, this project was successfully implemented, largely due to collaboration and involvement of key government authorities.

An impact evaluation has been embedded into the project design to assess the value added of digital technologies to promote human rights, compared to traditional approaches to animation. The project and its impact evaluation were funded by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

Evaluation Approach

The impact evaluation analyses the added-value of the digitalization component, compared to a traditional animation approach, between September 2017 and February 2019. The quantitative quasi-experimental design explored the impact at scale among citizens, and to a lesser extent, among animators. It is complemented by four qualitative case studies, which explore how relationships between the key actors have evolved with the introduction of the digitalization component, among four successful cases of mobilization which led to observed changes. The data generated on Twitter by animators and other stakeholders was also collected and helped to build a broader picture of the project. The three components together contribute to understanding the mechanisms that enabled the changes observed at scale.

At baseline, a comparison group of villages in which animators were active, but not part of the current project, were identified to enable the assessment of the added-value of the digitalization component. The comparison group was formed from villages in which *Chukua Hatua* or another governance project relying on traditional animation approaches (Lindi rural) was implemented. In addition, only villages in which a 2G or 3G connection was available were included, and where animators were still active, could read and write, were not political or government leaders, and still resident in the village. Within sampled villages, animators were randomly sampled from the list of animators provided by partners and Oxfam.

Among the project villages, random sampling of villages, stratified by region, was carried out, as was random sampling of animators when there was a large number of animators in the village. At citizen level, a random sample of households was drawn in each village; within households, the gender of the respondent was randomly determined to create a representative and balanced sample of women and men citizens. Animators and citizens were surveyed at baseline in September and October 2017, and at endline in February 2019, to form a panel.

The quantitative impact analysis is carried out using difference-in-differences, propensity-score matching or multivariate regressions depending on the outcomes and sample considered. At citizen level. the average impact on citizens is estimated, as well as differential impacts for men and women citizens. This is because we expect men and women to engage in different ways with civic activities (animator-supported ones or regular ones) due to different constraints (domestic and work time commitment, access to information, and social norms around women's public participation). Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were carried out in April 2019 among four successful cases of mobilization which led to observed changes. Each case was described in detail and emerging themes were analysed across the cases. Data was gathered from the Twitter platform in December 2018 and May 2019, and analysed using descriptive statistics and multivariate regressions.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Results

As a result of the project, and compared to animators relying on traditional approaches to animation, we observed a change in online practices among the project animators: higher usage of social media overall and for animation-related activities. Significantly more animators use WhatsApp and Facebook groups on local issues as a result of the project, and use social media to be part of conversations with leaders. This is confirmed by the Twitter data analysis, which shows an increasing trend of tweets among animators after the project started, and following key activities of the project, while also showing regional variation on the matter. Different online platforms were indeed used for different purposes, depending on the regional context: which leaders or officials use a given platform on the one hand, and the perceived sensitivity to call-out leaders publicly in a setting of shrinking civic spaces on the other. The project had a significant impact on animators' connection with other animators within the village and outside. As a result of the project, animators also appeared to be more engaged with citizens than in the comparison group, but as likely to participate in village meetings.

Among a representative sample of citizens, we observed that women and men citizens in the project villages are more likely to know the village animators because of the project, compared to women and men citizens in villages where animators rely only on a traditional animation approach. However, their offline engagement with animators or with civic activities (through discussion or meetings with animators, meetings among citizens, meetings with leaders or reporting of issues to officials) is not significantly impacted by the project. The project does have an impact on the topics of the issues discussed in community dialogues, as well as the one reported directly to the authorities. As a result of the project, women citizens in particular are more likely to report issues related to violence to the leaders, while men are more likely to report issues related to access to water. Note that these mechanisms led to different topics being discussed overall, and by women and men citizens as community dialogues are open and public spaces, while reporting is a private mechanism.

Citizens' access to and use of online platforms is very low – even lower for women compared to men – and not impacted by the project. The main limitation identified by citizens is the lack of access to devices. The qualitative case studies highlight that there is interest, particularly among youth. Through the quantitative data, age is indeed identified as a key characteristic of citizens using social media.

The project contributed to building citizens' sense of 'power to', through the development of individuals' ability to decide for themselves about their participation in community activities, or travelling outside of the community, and their attitude to public forums. We do not measure an impact on citizens' sense of 'power within', nor on active citizenship, as defined in the setting of the project.

As a result of the project, and compared to villages in which traditional animation is ongoing at baseline, leaders and officials at different levels (village, ward, district) were more likely to open spaces to animators 18 months after the project started. The qualitative case studies show that the relationship between animators and leaders has not been an easy one from the start. There have been conflicts between animators and leaders or officials, and a lot of efforts made to build relationships, including through mitigation by the project's team. This seems to be particularly strong in areas in which supported animation practices did not exist before the project under review.

There is evidence that some aspects of governance at village level have improved (village meetings more frequent), but citizens also report that leaders are less likely to address the individual issues they report. At ward or district level, leaders are perceived as more available and transparent by citizens.

As a result of the project, animators are more likely to share stories of mobilization, to share stories in which social media was involved and to assess that the mobilization had a more positive outcome, than animators in the comparison group. On the other hand, citizens in the project villages are as likely as citizens in the comparison group to share such a story, and the content of the story is not different (their own involvement, involvement of social media, outcome of the mobilization). It is important to highlight that overall, citizens are less likely to be involved than animators in the story they shared. The qualitative case studies present in detail four cases of mobilization, which involved the use of smartphones and social media, and which led to actual changes in the village. These are related to school facilities, school staff and land use by a company in two villages in Arusha and one village in Kigoma. In the refugee camp, the qualitative case study describes mobilization supported by the use of smartphones related to water and sanitation infrastructure maintenance, domestic physical violence and sexual violence against women. As this theme emerged from the case studies, we reclassified the stories shared by the animators and found that animators in the project areas are significantly more likely to share stories of mobilization about discrimination or violence against women than ones in the comparison areas.

At scale, there is evidence that the project has resulted in some change in social services with more areas of social services in which renovation, improvement or building have been undertaken than in the comparison group (although the total number of renovations or improvements is not statistically significantly different between the two groups), and more plans seem to have been initiated for future building or improvement. More households have received compensation from a company using their land (small effect size, but significant at 5 percent). The project did not affect awareness of citizens or prevalence of cases of land-rights violation. However, the project resulted in significantly more awareness of unequal inheritance practices for women, and of marriage of girls under 18 among men and women citizens.

When looking at the assumptions behind the introduction of the ICT component, and what this component was aimed to enable, the data gathered by the different sources help invalidate some assumptions and identify the strongest ones. First, as mentioned above, a very small share of citizens engages with online platforms – and an even smaller share of women – making the online platforms a tool mainly for interaction between animators and leaders, although the case studies show that there is interest, in particular among the youngest citizens. The ICT component enables animators to access new spaces, which are perceived to have less direct control (WhatsApp groups in particular), and to

coordinate among themselves, as well as to improve their connectedness and strengthen the network of animators. Animators can search information thanks to the smartphones and the internet, and subsequently share it among themselves. Access to Twitter and WhatsApp in particular has enabled animators to access new spaces to call-out leaders. Both platforms are used for different purposes, however, depending on who has to be reached, who will listen and the context specific to each region. The qualitative case studies indeed show that ward or village leaders do not necessarily have access to the technology themselves, which could be a source of tension. In addition, depending on the region, district or regional leaders or officials may be part of WhatsApp groups with animators and citizens, but may not be on Twitter. Overall, Twitter has been used to reach national level leaders or stakeholders. The analysis of the data gathered from animators and influencers of the project also shows that engagement was built over time and that the use of the #*chukuahatua* was critical for tweets to get traction.

While the impact evaluation is looking at the impact after 18 months of activities, which is a very short timeframe, a key question is about the sustainability of the approach. The evidence gathered shows that in February 2019, animators were willing to keep carrying on animation activities (more so than in the comparison group), and they are still tweeting at the time of writing of the report (two months after the end of the direct project's support). Both the Twitter data analysis and the qualitative case studies highlight that a few animators had become as active as the social media influencers by the end of the project. However, drawing from the comparison group trend of changes in behaviour over time, there may be a risk of disengagement. Drawing from baseline targeting process and quantitative survey experience and the qualitative case studies, there also seems to be a trend for animators to become involved in politics after their being involved in such a project.

At citizen level, the sustainability of the project will also depend on leaders' responsiveness over time at different government levels. If renovation plans are not implemented or individual issues reported more rarely addressed, there will be a risk of disappointment and further disengagement.

Programme learning considerations

Identify the current barriers for citizens, and women citizens in particular, to engage with animators and civic activities

Citizens who are the most likely to know the animators are more likely to be men than women, more likely to already be involved in the decision making of community groups than not, and to be in Mtwara and Kigoma, compared to the other regions. Moving forward, understanding the specific barriers that citizens of Arusha and Geita face in engaging with animators on the one hand, and the barriers for men who are not already involved in the decision making of community groups overall on the other hand, will be critical. Similarly, what are the factors that explain the fact that women are significantly less likely to know the animators on the one hand, and to engage with online platforms and offline civic activities on the other hand? Understanding specific barriers that women face and reasons they put forward for not engaging online or offline will be critical to defining appropriate strategies. In addition, not all women will face the same barriers (the situation in Arusha and Geita may be different from Mtwara and Kigoma, as mentioned above for example, but also within each village). This will require consulting women and men citizens, and particularly the ones that are not already close to Oxfam, partners, animators or village institutions.

Consider supporting citizens' organizing among themselves

In the project areas in September 2017 15 percent of citizens participated in meetings among themselves and 16 percent participated in meeting with animators without officials. This has not been significantly impacted by the project. This is an overall low share of citizens while *Chukua Hatua*'s first

pilot identified 'the lack of spaces and forums for citizens to discuss their accountability issues among themselves' as a struggle to be tackled (Oxfam's Rights to be heard framework, Hopkins et al., 2014). In the absence of widely owned informal closed spaces for citizens, and given that online spaces, such as WhatsApp groups, are not available to most citizens but are to animators, there is a risk of the animation approach becoming very centralized and somehow disconnected from the citizens. Moving forward, it will be key to identify how to strengthen the link between animators and citizens, and make sure that animators open up safe spaces – which they are part of or not – for women and men citizens to organize and contribute to setting up their reform agenda.

Strengthen the project's strategies to support relationship-building between animators and leaders, at village level in particular, and to mitigate risks for animators

While animators are accessing technology through the project, village- and ward-level leaders (and sometimes higher level as well) do not have access to such technology, and this was sometimes perceived as threatening. The project worked with leaders at the inception phase and has developed strategies throughout the project to mitigate risks for animators, to diffuse tensions between leaders and animators and to strengthen their collaboration. This component has been key and will have to be strengthened, particularly in areas where *Chukua Hatua* was not pre-existing. Similarly, during the project lifespan, questions over shrinking civic spaces in Tanzania continued to occupy several media and human rights reports, and control over online spaces has been strong, according to analysts and researchers. Risk mitigation, offline and online, is a critical component to carry forward.

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?**

Yes, the findings bring out clear areas of learning that will make value addition to the country programme.

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

Yes, in summary:

Animation Practices

An increase of interactions between animators and leaders or officials, the interactions are reported to be both offline activities and using social media platforms (Face book, WhatsApp groups and Twitter). These spaces have been used by animators to advocate and hold leaders accountable, and different spaces used to reach different leaders depending on leaders' online access and presence on the one hand and the perceived sensitivity to call-out leaders publicly in a setting of shrinking civic spaces on the other hand. The project enabled more animators to educate and share their skills and experiences with others, energise people to act with them and join action. Animators have initiated offline activities within their communities without officials or leaders. The project enabled more animators to educate and share their skills and experiences with others, energise people to act with them and join action.

Significantly more animators are connected with fellow animators, compared to those in the comparison group who discussed issues related to rights or access to services with other animator(s) within the village in the last 12 months.

> **Citizen's engagement and participation**
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> There is observed change in citizen's ability to decide for themselves about their participation in community activities, or travelling outside of the community, and their attitude to public forums. The project has significantly impacted topics discussed in community dialogues whereby citizens would more likely used the spaces to discuss issues related to their welfare like health, water, sanitation and education. Because of the project, citizens are more likely to report issues related to access to water, compared to citizens reporting issues to leaders in the comparison areas.
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> **Interaction with and perception of local government**
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> Through the qualitative case studies, the animation approach requires to build the relationship between animators and local leaders, an increase in the share of animators being invited to participate in meetings with government authorities (hamlet/village and district leaders)

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

> The review has identified three programme learning considerations (highlighted in page 4 above), these will be used to inform future programme design, furthermore the learning will be incorporated in the ongoing Oxfam Country Strategy (2015-2019) review and will inform our digital agenda during the development of a new country strategy.

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 review process was good and was done in a participatory manner in close collaboration with the Oxfam country staff and implementing partners, the work was conducted by the OGB Global Impact Evaluation Team under the leadership of Impact Evaluation Adviser, the same team was involved in the baseline survey.
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> As per its design the impact evaluation involved two teams of external consultants who undertook qualitative survey (focusing on designing appropriate frameworks and data collection approaches, data collection and compilation of case studies) and quantitative survey (1) assist with finalizing survey tools, (2) recruit, train, supervise and mentor a team of enumerators to carry out the questionnaires and complete any data entry that is required.

7. **Main Oxfam follow-up actions**

> A validation session for staff and partners on evaluation findings and recommendations will be organized by the Programme Quality team to discuss the key recommendations and agree how they will be incorporated in ongoing programming, design and country strategy review and development of new strategy.

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)

> N/A

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.

> Three learning considerations have been proposed; 1. Identify the current barriers for citizens and women citizens in particular, to engage with animators and civic activities. 2. Consider supporting citizens' organising among themselves. 3. Strengthen the project strategies to support relationship-building between animators and leaders at village level in particular and mitigate risks for animators.
>
> These will be used to inform future programme design, furthermore the learning will be incorporated in the ongoing Oxfam Country Strategy (2015-2019) review and will inform our digital agenda during the development of a new country strategy.

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

> N/A