

Management Response

Oxfam Management response to the review of Livelihoods in Za’atari – Impact Evaluation of Oxfam’s Cash For Work (CFW) activities in the Za’atari camp (Jordan)

(Effectiveness Review Series 2017/18)

Prepared by:	Isa Miah – Head of Programmes, Oxfam in Jordan		
Contributors:	Siobhán McGrath - WASH Programme Manager, Nour Ali – MEAL Officer, Ahmad Al Khalwaldeh – Cash for Work Senior Officer, Ahmad Al Shdifat – Cash for Work Officer, Ala Adas – SWM Project Manager, Mohannad Abu Siam – Community Mobilisation Officer, Noel Biadnes – Recycling Project Manager, Teshome Mekonen – MEAL Coordinator.		
Signed off by:	Nickie Monga – Country Director, Oxfam in Jordan		
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What is the purpose of an evaluation management response (MR)?

A management response enables us to document the key learning generated from the project evaluations whilst also ensuring that the report is given careful consideration by relevant stakeholders.

The management response should:

- 1) Include a summary of the reflections of your team and program/project stakeholders in relation to the evaluation’s findings, conclusions and recommendations;
- 2) Detail actions that will be taken to respond to the evaluation findings;
- 3) Offer an opportunity for all relevant project stakeholder to comment on the utility of the evaluation process and final report.

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 enhance learning across the organization. Under this Framework, a small number of completed or mature projects are selected each year for an evaluation of their impact, known as an Effectiveness Review. The project ‘Za’atari recycling and livelihood’, subsequently extended to all Cash For Work (CFW) activities conducted by Oxfam in the Za’atari camp, was one of those project selected for the Effectiveness Review in 2017/18.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Za’atari Camp was opened in 2012 by the UNHCR and the Jordanian Government in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and it is currently hosting over 78,000 refugees. Cash for work (CFW) activities implemented by Oxfam in the Za’atari camp started in 2014. CFW is defined as ‘Cash payments provided on the condition of undertaking designated work. This is generally paid according to time worked (e.g. number of days, daily rate). In any given week, Oxfam employs about 509 workers for CFW activities with the main purpose to provide income-generating opportunities to as many refugees as possible.

CFW workers can be categorised depending on the type of skills required for various jobs:

- Semi-skilled workers, paid at 1 JD (USD 1.5) per hour.
- Skilled, highly skilled and technical workers, paid at JD 1.5, JD 2, or JD 2.5 per hour respectively.

In a given week, almost 60% of the positions are for semi-skilled workers. These activities include trolley workers, street sweepers, litter pickers, water focal points, and security guards. The total number of people engaged with this type of work is even higher than in skilled, highly skilled and technical roles, as they are subject to higher rotation. There are no selecting criteria required for engaging in these activities. All eligible applicants are registered in a list compiled by UNHCR and supplied to all aid agencies, and they engage on a rotation base, depending on demand.

On the other side, skilled, highly skilled and technical workers represent the remaining 40% of weekly positions for engaging refugees in CFW activities. They are engaged for longer periods (every 6 months or one year), and are paid JD 1.5, JD 2, or JD 2.5 per hour. These workers include separation workers, office workers, team leaders, community mobiliser, welders, and plumbers among others. These workers are selected from a recruitment process, where most qualified candidates get the job. Their engagement is also typically longer than for semi-skilled workers, arriving up to one-year contracts.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

This evaluation has found evidence that CFW activities conducted in the Za'atari camp had a positive and significant impact on household wealth, based on a composite index measuring asset ownership and housing conditions. Moreover, households with at least one member engaged in CFW in the previous 12 months, reported on average 23% of self-reported income higher than comparable households in the camp.

Given the significant difference in terms of pay, employment, and recruitment process, it is worth exploring the results making explicit the findings for the overall CFW workers including semi-skilled, skilled, highly skilled and technical workers, with the findings from the group of semi-skilled workers only. In fact, when analysing semi-skilled workers only, the analysis still finds positive and significant results on household wealth but does not find evidence of positive and significant results on self-reported income.

The evaluation investigated household engagement in 15 different employment opportunities and sources of income, including among others CFW, agricultural work inside and outside the camp, sales, business shops and street vending. Households engaged in CFW activities are 12 percentage points more likely to have at least one household member engaged in at last one of these 15 sources of income, and 19 percentage points less likely to engage in income opportunities different that CFW. It is clear that CFW is one of the many income sources refugees can engage with.

Overall, opinions towards CFW are generally high among refugees, with on average more positive opinions expressed by individuals directly involved in the programme. On average 49% of the respondents in the intervention group agreed with the statement that agencies operate fair and accessible CFW programmes. Nearly all respondents agreed with the statement that agencies treat CFW workers with respect and dignity, and provide refugees with a safe environment, and give women equal access.

There is evidence that CFW activities have improved skills for semi-skilled workers. The analysis for semi-skilled workers reveals that respondents engaged in CFW activities are 12 percentage points more likely to report increased technical skills since the beginning of the project. However, there is no evidence that refugees recruited for skilled, highly skilled and technical jobs have improved their skills. This may come as a surprise, but a possible explanation might be found in the different recruitment process for semi-skilled posts compared with skilled, highly-skilled and technical posts. As skilled positions were filled with workers who already had the skills for conducting the job, it might leave smaller opportunities for improving skills, compared with a recruitment process which is not requiring the post holder to already have such skills.

Similarly, the evaluation finds positive and significant results on indicators investigating self-esteem for semi-skilled workers, however estimates on the entire sample (including skilled, highly skilled and technical workers) provide limited evidence on such indicators.

The evaluation also provided evidence that households involved in CFW have a higher proportion of women engaged in income economic activities (21% in the intervention group against 10% in the comparison group). For the group of semi-skilled workers only, CFW exposure seems to have a positive and significant effect on opinions towards women's economic role. However, for the entire sample the evaluation found that respondents involved in CFW activities are 8 percentage points less likely to report that men should support with care work at home than respondents from households not involved in CFW activities.

Finally, the evaluation investigated some of the narratives from refugees in explaining the motivations, challenges and satisfaction in pursuing paid work opportunities. 71% of the stories from the intervention group were related to CFW activities. The main motivation for seeking a job among refugees is access to material resources. Respondents in the intervention group are more likely to report achieving their goals and recommend their experience to a friend compared with respondents in the comparison group.

PROGRAMME CONSIDERATIONS

Reconsider the targeting process:

Project participants had two different recruitment processes based on whether they were recruited as semi-skilled workers or skilled, highly skilled, and technical workers. While semi-skilled workers are recruited on a rotation base, skilled, highly skilled, and technical workers are recruited based on merits. The consequence is that skilled workers enrolled in cash for work tend to be mainly male, educated, and originally from urban areas. If the labour conditions allow refugees to engage in other income-generating activities outside the camp, it is useful to consider whether resources can be targeted towards most marginalised groups which have smaller possibilities to engage outside the camp.

The analysis provides evidence that workers enrolled in CFW as semi-skilled workers experience positive and significant results on self-esteem, greater technical skills, and opinions on gender equality which are not present when considering skilled, highly skilled and technical workers. This seems to reinforce the argument in favour of providing greater emphasis towards most vulnerable individuals and households as there is potential for greater impact.

Revisit the gender component for the project:

While the project had a gender component aimed at increasing women's empowerment, the results on opinions toward gender equality are very limited. The project team is advised to reconsider how to best engage and enroll women, as well as how to support gender equality in the context of the project.

Reflect on self-esteem results:

Recognising the challenging environment in which the project operates, it may be worth reflecting on the results on self-esteem indicators. The country team is encouraged to discuss why the group of semi-skilled workers presents positive and significant results on self-esteem indicators, while the entire sample including skilled, highly skilled and technical workers do not.

Improve opinions on about CFW activities:

While general opinions toward CFW activities is overall positive (with most respondents agreeing that CFW programmes treat with respect dignity and provide safe environments), there still seems to be 51% and 73% of the respondents that did not agree with the statement that agencies operate fair and accessible CFW programmes. The country team is advised to consider how to support perceptions towards fairness and accessibility among refugees if this has not been done yet.

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

3. Overall, do the findings of the review meet with your own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness? Was anything identified which was surprising?

The beneficiaries assessed for this review are people who took part in cash for work programmes with Oxfam in 2016-2017, considering the programme at that time, the project implementation team agreed with the assessment. Oxfam in Jordan was made aware of many of these findings through other community feedback mechanisms from 2016 as well as through receiving the Effectiveness Review report (mid-2019). We have already begun to take actions to act, to improve the project. Where these changes have already been made, they are mentioned in our response.

The team is not surprised that involvement in cash for work has a positive impact on household wealth, and that households where someone participates in CfW have higher levels of income than those who don't. This is in line with our own analysis of the effectiveness of Cash for Work initiatives and the systemic thinking on cash-based programming.

One thing that was surprising was the inclusion of the assessment of 'self-esteem' by the reviewer, as this is not a factor that had been considered by the project implementation team before which in hindsight was rather unfortunate. Factoring in non-material impact of the C4W is as important as the material aspect to better understand how one intervention can address different elements of impact. Despite this not having been considered before, it was welcome that the review found either a positive, or neutral, impact on the beneficiaries.

It is also surprising to note that all respondents reported that all aid agencies give equal access to women to gain C4W jobs when we see that not to be the case. Much of it has to do with the nature of cash for work programming which is often public works wherein socio-cultural norms inhibit women's participation. Another important element is of course the fact that aid agencies need to go an extra mile to make working conditions more acceptable to the community that then 'allows' women to work, such as ensuring segregated spaces and timings. But as Oxfam is finding out, the above is not always true as we have women working in our recycling facility for the very first time with male cash for work workers.

4. Any conclusions/recommendations which the country team does not agree with or will not act upon and why

None.

5. Main follow-up actions

1. Review vulnerability and targeting and agree on a common standard operating procedure for participant selection in our work in Za'atari camp in coordination with UNHCR which is the lead in such matters.
2. Review the selection process for skilled, highly skilled and technical roles, so that those who already have experience with other NGOs are not prioritised. The short list should be compared to UNHCR vulnerability list, to ensure that the most vulnerable are prioritized.
3. Establish a system of building capacity in some semi-skilled workers to transition into skilled, highly skilled to technical roles.

4. Review options for inclusion of activities to change the social norms around gender, including women and work, in the community and increase the number of women enrolled in our CfW programming to at least 40% of participants.
5. Develop and implement a community engagement plan to increase transparency of recruitment criteria for cash-for-work roles.
6. Regularly evaluate if there are improvements in the community's perception of fairness in cash for work recruitment.

6. How do you plan to use the evidence which is generated from this review? Please be as specific as possible.

The review has been used to verify the findings of the 'Post Distribution Monitoring' assessment carried out in Za'atari camp (Oct 2018).

Oxfam in Jordan was made aware of many of these findings through other community feedback mechanisms and acted upon them between the time that the interviewed beneficiaries took part in the cash for work programme (2016-2017), and the time that the Effectiveness Review report was shared with Oxfam in Jordan (mid-2019). For example, the feedback from the community that the selection process for cash for work beneficiaries was perceived to be unfair, has been addressed by Oxfam. The project team revised the way that people are selected and informed about semi-skilled roles, and how people who turn down the opportunity are replaced. The system is now much more transparent, and everyone on the list is aware of their place on the list by being given a numbered ticket.

The report was used by the project team to reflect on the fairness of the targeting approach for skilled, highly skilled and technical cash for work roles. It was noted, that as beneficiaries are selected based on their existing skills and work experience (for example working in a similar role for another NGO), it may appear to the community that these workers are favoured by the NGOs, and receiving the roles based on favouritism, rather than the fact that taking one role makes them more competitive for a similar role with another organisation. The team have decided to reassess the selection criteria for these roles, to select those with the necessary skills, but who have less experience with similar cash for work roles in the camp.

The gender component was acted on and continues to be acted on in several ways. In October 2018 research was carried out by a consultancy on how to engage more women in cash for work opportunities. The recommendations of this report have been or are currently being implemented. Since the completion of this report, women are now active in cash for work activities in the recycling centres. The recommendations are also considered in the design of new projects by Oxfam in Zaatari camp. Oxfam is also increasing the number of staff in Zaatari camp with technical skills in gender, building capacity in staff on gender, and aims to strengthen Safe Programming using available guidelines and tools.

Oxfam in Jordan will produce a policy briefing combining this effectiveness review and the wider programme learning exercise to be shared with key stakeholders. We will also share this effectiveness review in relevant sectoral groups and with peers to further disseminate learning.

- 7. How do you plan to apply the learning from this review to relevant or new projects in the future?**
Please be as specific as possible and provide context where relevant, naming projects in full where learning from the review will be applied.

The project reviewed is currently ongoing and the major assumptions and realities of the context remain the same. The learning and reflections from this review already informed changes to the ongoing project implementation, as discussed in question 5 and also informs changes to design of this project in the next phase to be funded by EU Madad through GiZ from April 2020 for 3 years. In the early stages of design for the next phase, we have developed a much stronger set of community mobilisation activities to help address issues of targeting of cash for work opportunities, tackling social norms around gender and women at work as well as the issue of transparency in recruitment of cash for work opportunities. Furthermore, Oxfam in Jordan has included budget to increase its staff and organisation capacity to lead on gender and protection and adhere to Safer programming principles.

- 8. Is there any support your team would require in order to maximise the use of the evidence generated from this review?**

The review report has been presented in the style of an academic paper, which is overwhelming for those of us more used to designing and implementing projects. A version of the Executive Summary accompanied by visual representations of the data (bar charts, pie charts, etc) would make the results easier to understand and analyse by project teams. The results should also be disaggregated by gender, to allow further analysis of the results by technical teams.

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

Reflection on the amount of time and effort required by Oxfam, both in Oxford and Jordan, to carry out reviews such as this, and the actual benefit received by teams in the field.