

Management Response

Women’s Empowerment in the Philippines Impact evaluation of the ‘BASIC START’ project

Effectiveness Review Series 2018/19

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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’.

During the 2018/19 financial year, one of the projects selected for an Effectiveness Review was ‘Building Autonomous and Stable Institutions and Communities through Socially Cohesive, Transparent, Accountable and Responsive Transition in the Bangsamoro (BASIC START)’. This project was carried out in the then Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the Philippines between April 2015 and August 2017 by Oxfam, together with four implementing partners – Al Mujadillah Development Foundation (AMDF), United Youth of the Philippines – Women (UnYPhil-Women), Tarbilang Foundation, and Women Engaged in Action on 1325 (WE Act 1325).

The project was designed to promote women’s empowerment and peacebuilding in the region. Project activities focused on ensuring young people recognize the identity, diversity, and unique needs and aspirations of the Bangsamoro, working with local leaders and citizens to develop and implement inclusive development plans and achieve greater social accountability, and prioritizing and resourcing essential services that support human development and gender equity to benefit women in the Bangsamoro.

The Effectiveness Review, for which data collection was carried out in February 2019, aims to evaluate the success of this project in increasing women's empowerment at the individual level, using Oxfam's Women's Empowerment (WE) index. It also seeks to further understand impacts on women's political participation in the peace process, whether women's economic participation in livelihood activities has reduced conflict, social norms, and exposure to violence.

The evaluation was carried out in three provinces in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) – Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and Tawi-Tawi. The comparison group consists of 18 barangays across the three provinces, which were selected in consultation with project staff based on their knowledge of NGO, CSO, and government activities in their provinces, and to minimize the risk of spillovers. Survey respondents in the intervention group were identified using project participant lists provided by the implementing partners. In the comparison areas, no similar project lists existed. Instead, in each barangay in the comparison group, we sought out local leaders and used a random walk method to select community members to invite for interviews. A total of 1,256 interviews were completed – 537 in the intervention group, and 719 in the comparison group. During analysis, propensity score matching (PSM) and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences (using recalled baseline data) between the groups.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Overall, the project had a positive impact on Women's Empowerment (0.03, $p < 0.10$), particularly in the **Relational level** (0.04, $p < 0.01$), where the indicators for *Participation and influence in community affairs* and *Equal say in household decision-making regarding unpaid care work* are both significant. We also see a significant positive impact for the *Enabling social norms* indicator in the **Environmental level**.

We also looked for differential impacts for subgroups – by province, respondent type, and age.

- **By province**, significant differences include: (1) in Lanao del Sur, a positive impact for the *Equal say in household decision-making regarding unpaid care work* indicator and a negative impact for the *Control over her own body including SRH and GBV* indicator, which means that women in the project sites were more likely to report having experienced psychological forms of violence; (2) in Tawi-Tawi, a positive impact in the **Relational level** including *Participation and influence in community affairs* and *Control over her own body including SRH and GBV*; and (3) in Tawi-Tawi, a positive impact for the *Enabling social norms* indicator and a negative impact for the *Participation and influence in political affairs and peace process* indicator, indicating that in project areas in Tawi-Tawi, only a few women were members of at least one political party, or involved in organizing, managing or taking important decisions in political or public events.
- **By respondent type**, we find a significant positive impact in the **Personal level** for civil society members, which we do not see overall (if the sample also includes elected, appointed, religious, and traditional leaders), with two indicators showing significance as well – *Personal autonomy* and *Recognizes women's political role*. In the **Environmental level**, we also see positive impacts for the subgroup of civil society members for two indicators (but not overall) – *Supportive laws and policies* and *Enabling social norms*.
- **By age**, we see that younger women (less than 40 years old) experience a significantly larger impact for the Women's Empowerment index, compared with the overall impact (if the sample also includes those aged 40 years and older). This trend persists across all three levels, although the differential

impact is only significant for the **Relational level**. Indicators showing significant differential impacts for the younger women include *Recognizes women's political role* in the **Personal level** and *Supportive laws and policies* in the **Environmental level**.

Beyond the index, we review the following four topics in more depth:

- **Political participation in the peace process:** We see higher levels of political participation in the intervention group; but this was already the case before project implementation. As also indicated through the index, the project did increase recognition of women's political role, having established that women have the right to participate in civil society and have a role in peacebuilding and reconciliation.
- **Economic participation in livelihood activities:** Overall, the only significant finding is negative – women in the intervention group are less likely to report a decrease in conflict despite increased economic participation, which could indicate that, on their own, livelihood opportunities for women may not suffice to reduce conflict in the community. By province, we see two significant impacts in individual provinces – a positive impact on starting a business in the last three years in Lanao del Sur, and a negative impact on continuing new businesses in Tawi-Tawi, indicating that only a few women in the project areas sustained their business or livelihood activities.
- **Social norms:** Reviewing descriptive statistics in more depth shows that the areas of social norms with the lowest levels of agreement are: (1) Men should not get priority over women in accessing jobs, (2) Women's salaries should be the same as men's salaries, and (3) Women can mediate between conflicting groups and warring clans. The levels of agreement are lowest for the first two statements in Lanao del Sur, and for the third statement in Maguindanao. However, compared with the control group, only a few women in the project areas believe that men should be prioritized for work or salaried jobs. On the other hand, more women in the comparison group agreed with the second statement than women in the project areas. More women in the project intervention areas believe in women's mediation role between conflicting groups and warring clans.
- **Exposure to violence:** Overall, women in the intervention group report experiencing violence at a higher rate than those in the comparison group, and report knowing another woman who has experienced violence at a higher rate, although these differences are not statistically significant. In Lanao del Sur, there is a significant increase in women reporting exposure to psychological violence themselves; no significant impacts were seen in Maguindanao and Tawi-Tawi.

Programme Learning Considerations

1. **Find ways to recruit project participants who are not currently involved in community groups, political affairs, and public events.** Project participants were recruited through already existing women's rights networks and community groups. Therefore, we find that women who participated in the project were already relatively active in community and political affairs prior to the project itself. It would be worthwhile to understand how to better engage with those who may not yet be active citizens to achieve broader impacts.
2. **Develop strategies for working with specific subgroups, such as civil society members and younger women.** The results indicate more and larger impacts for civil society members (rather than elected, appointed, religious, and traditional leaders) as well as for younger women (in comparison to women over 40 years old, which is roughly the median respondent age in this evaluation). On many of the indicators, these subgroups have lower averages, meaning lower women's empowerment overall and perhaps more progress to be made.

3. **Consider mitigation activities for unintended effects, such as gender-based violence.** The ER noted an increase in self-reporting or reporting knowledge of another woman experiencing violence. All future projects working with women's empowerment are advised to closely and carefully, monitor gender-based violence and take additional measures to support survivors.

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 you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness? Was anything identified which was surprising?**

Overall, the implementing partners agreed with most of the review findings, but also raised concern over how the responses of the review participants, particularly those in Lanao del Sur province, may have been affected by the crisis spawned by the Marawi Siege in May 2017, and the effects of the crisis that continued until data collection in February 2019.

On the following specific findings:

1. Political Participation in the Peace Process

- There were *higher levels of participation in the intervention group across most of the political entities and public events but do not indicate significant impact because the women the project worked with were already more politically active than similar women in the comparison group before the project started.* Given the local context and social norms in the project areas, partners argued that it was a conscious effort to involve women who were politically active because they were those who have already negotiated with their family members spaces for participation in community activities. Nevertheless, it still requires a lot of social preparation, awareness-raising, and shifting social norms for women to be "allowed" by their families, and for society to accept that they participate in the governance and peace process. Basic Start Project was also a continuing engagement of one of the implementing partners (WEACT) with other women's/civil society organizations both at the local and national levels.

2. Economic Participation in Livelihood Activities.

- *"Women in the intervention community started cooperative and family businesses more often and private/individual businesses less often."* Implementing partners shared that a collective nature of business activities which promote co-ownership is more common particularly in Lanao because the Muslim culture does not favour challenging colleagues in the business. This may have also likely influenced the findings that *"women were less likely to report a decrease or increase in conflict related to their business activity (i.e., more likely to say there was no change)."* This is an interesting finding. However, Oxfam and partners think this may need further unpacking to explain the results. It would have been better as well if the ER had specifically captured how the respondents define conflict and its type, especially after the Marawi Siege happened.
- Furthermore, partners raised that it may also be important to understand economic support and services, particularly access to credit or finance in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao provinces. This financial service is not readily available for women because credit, specifically high interest, is forbidden in Islamic law and culture. ER findings show negative impact on access to economic support services, which means less women in project areas have access to credit sources namely cooperative, group or association, informal money lender, and bank or formal institution.
- ER findings also noted that the project has not created changes in terms of recognition of women's economic role and increased awareness of women's economic rights. In fact, Basic Start project provided little support for livelihoods. Project activities focused on political rights and participation, with minimal intervention on raising awareness on women's economic rights

and ensuring economic support for women. Where there was some support around economic activities, this was disrupted due to the Marawi Siege, particularly in Lanao del Sur. Partner communities in Lanao del Sur were significantly affected by the Siege – they were either host communities of displaced populations, or experienced direct damages and impacts. This could be a factor for the Basic Start’s livelihood component being perceived as not delivering impacts on women’s economic rights.

3. Social Norms

- The ER used descriptive statistics, which represent women’s responses to questions related to social norms. Out of seven (7) statements, results showed Lanao del Sur having lowest levels of agreement on: (1) Men should not get priority over women in accessing jobs, (2) Women salaries should be the same as men’s salaries. This may relate to the local context in Lanao del Sur, where there is high salaried employment among women (especially in government offices), as compared to men who, e.g. work as construction workers.
- Also, the broader issue of scarcity of job opportunities for both men and women affects how the statements are perceived.

4. Exposure to Violence

- *“Women in the intervention group were more likely to be against child marriage”*, significantly counters the general observation and perception that women have limited say in other household decision, particularly on decision to marry. This ER finding is also in agreement with the midline data for another project (Creating Spaces), which revealed that 62% of 186 project participants versus 40% of 152 non-project participants did not approve of early marriage for girls.
- *“Women who participated in the project were more likely to report having experienced psychological forms of violence (e.g., humiliation, threats). In Lanao del Sur, there is significant increase in women reporting exposure to physical violence themselves.”* Oxfam and partners noted that this may mean a positive development as this indicates more women able to recognize such type of violence, thus breaking the culture of silence around gender-based violence (GBV) in the communities (i.e., being able to report on their experience, even in the context of a survey). This could have been possible due to the community mechanisms facilitated through other Oxfam-supported projects like Creating Spaces ¹and ARCHES².

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

Overall, the country team will take into consideration the conclusions and recommendations of the Effectiveness Review in program planning, particularly in designing the Conflict Transformation and Women’s Economic Empowerment portfolios.

R#1 to “recruit project participants who are not active citizens”, and R#2 to “develop strategies for working with specific subgroups, such as civil society members and younger women”, are already addressed under the project intervention and strategies of the project Women’s Empowerment for Leadership in Development and Peace in Bangsamoro Area (WELD Peace), a successor project of the Basic Start. For instance, project participants have expanded to include the widows of the Bangsamoro leaders who were involved during consultations towards engagement with the new Bangsamoro government. The sectoral agenda building in Lanao del Sur and BASULTA areas also

¹ Creating Spaces To Take Action on Violence against Women and Girls funded by Global Affairs Canada

² Improving Availability of Reproductive Health Services in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARCHES) supported by European Union.

included more women, persons with disability and internally displaced who were not engaged in earlier project activities.

R#3 to “monitor gender-based violence and take additional measures to support victims” is an on-going complementary initiative of the WELD Peace and Creating Spaces project, particularly in Datu Saudi Ampatuan (DS), Maguindanao. With the creation of the municipal core group, issues and concerns affecting women, including GBV, are discussed among key municipal officials and sector representatives in their regular meetings. This resulted to the increase in the reporting of GBV cases, and a decrease in the incidence of child, early and forced marriage - based on the observation of the municipal administrator, although the municipal LGU has yet to collect quantitative data to prove this claim. Human trafficking, which targets young women is also being monitored by the local government.

- 5. Main 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)

Starting July 2019 until March 2020, key activities under the successor project (WELD Peace project) consider addressing the recommendations 1-3, particularly on the inclusion of non-active participants and younger women groups. In the provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi, topics on GBV will be incorporated in capacity-building sessions for women to raise individual and household awareness on GBV. Setting up of referral pathways and mechanisms as mentioned in #4 is on-going as a complementary initiative of WELD and Creating Spaces projects. However, given the local cultural context and the remaining period for implementation of the WELD Peace project, partners’ engagement with Local Government Units and the BARRM authorities could have limited effect in terms of addressing GBV. However, this recommendation will be passed on/shared with other Oxfam-supported projects on sexual and reproductive health and rights, Early Child Marriage and Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) in pushing the recommendations on additional measures to support survivors.

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

The evidence generated will be used to inform Oxfam Philippines’ Conflict Transformation programming, by linking and integrating project interventions towards achieving Women’s Economic Empowerment in conflict-affected areas.

- 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 WELD Peace project builds on the relationships established with Local Government Units, particularly the Gender and Development focal persons and other national government agencies in accessing support for livelihood activities and services for women’s groups who have managed and sustained their initiatives because of the capacities developed through various training undertaken even during the Basic Start Project. This addresses the gap in the Basic Start project in ensuring economic support for women and increasing awareness on economic rights. Beyond WELD Peace, we will consider a Women’s Economic Empowerment program in the Bangsamoro.

The campaigning led by WE Act 1325 on the Bangsamoro Basic Law within the Basic Start project paved the way for increasing awareness in the National Capital Region (NCR) regarding the Bangsamoro and Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Campaigning and advocacy carried on into

WELD Peace project interventions on the passage of the BOL, and supporting the peaceful transition of the BARMM, and creating more spaces for women to engage and participate in the transition process.

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

The following support will be necessary:

- (a) Translating the findings into a simple and easily understandable document, which can be shared with partners and stakeholders in the Bangsamoro region
- (b) Designing the project evaluation of the WELD Peace project using the Women Empowerment Index.

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

Realizing the close link between economic and political empowerment, all partners concur on the need to provide support for women's livelihood, as done in the BASIC Start project. At the same time, there should be sensitivity to issues that may arise, such as additional burden on women, especially in the context of women's unpaid care work.