ANNEX 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

FEMINIST AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

This research project mainly employed qualitative methods and used feminist and participatory action research as its core framework and approach; this builds upon the ethics and practices of participatory action research, but combines it with a commitment to keep gender central to the research process.[1] This gave the research project the potential to increase participants' awareness of and support for issues surrounding feminism and a feminist approach.[2]

The **feminist element** aimed to ensure the use of feminist principles[3] at all stages of the research cycle. Feminist principles are understood as seeking to explicitly overcome gender biases and inequalities while putting the experiences of women and marginalized groups at the centre of the research. Putting feminist and gender in research[4] principles into practice in both the planning and approach was a specific goal of the research.

The **participatory element** (a key element of feminist research) aimed to make the research deliberately participant-driven, i.e. ensuring that the knowledge was produced and owned by participants. A participatory approach is about making sure the research engages with and builds the competence, confidence and ownership of key stakeholders within the Oxfam Confederation at field, sub-national, national and international levels. At global level, a multisectoral team was developed to support the implementation of the research and achievement of its objectives. Designated Oxfam staff and partners in the selected programmes in Myanmar and Bangladesh played a vital role in research planning, implementation and follow-up.

The **action element** aimed to inspire participants to collectively propose solutions and organize actions. It involved collecting evidence, learning, critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – initiating changes in practice by testing and reiterating the learning process. In the second phase of the research, this was reflected in discussion groups and (in Myanmar) an Action Planning workshop, where women, men, Oxfam staff, partners and women's organizations reflected on existing programme strategies and possible improvements. Research findings were discussed for the development of Action Plans in both countries, and insights were incorporated in the practical guidance, 'Transforming Gender Inequalities'.[5]

The research used **collaborative learning processes** – an element of feminist research principles – at different levels: from the development of detailed research techniques and tools by in-country Oxfam staff and partners, to the technical assistance provided by a multisectoral team of Oxfam experts (part of the Resilience Knowledge Hub), under the overall supervision of a Research Steering Group. All served as catalysts of institutional change in their own areas. As indicated in the First Phase Synthesis Report,[6] engaging with relevant collaborators across the Oxfam Confederation and strategic themes throughout the process is vital to overcome 'silo' thinking and working, and to bring the kind of innovation that can help overcome the fatigue generated by existing tools and approaches.

While application of the feminist and participatory action research approach varied across the different contexts and partners, the above-mentioned principles were adhered to throughout the process in both countries.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Following the principles outlined above, we tried to make the process as participatory, democratic and inclusive as possible. The research was coordinated by the Resilience Knowledge Hub and carried out by two external consultants, with the support of Oxfam staff and implementing partners in Bangladesh and Myanmar, including women's rights organizations and affected women and men. The process was as follows:

A **multisectoral team** was set up as a temporary platform for discussion and exchange among key gender and resilience experts working for Oxfam across different affiliates and themes. This team of 12 people contributed to synergies between different sectors and frameworks that facilitate gender transformation across the Oxfam Confederation; the team also provided technical assistance and input to the goals and implementation of the research. The multisectoral team members met with the research team (i.e. the consultants and key in-country Oxfam and partner staff) remotely on a number of occasions to: i) seek information on their work relevant to gender transformation in resilience-oriented programmes, in order to capture trends and lessons, and ii) provide detailed content and give feedback on the development of the practical guidance, 'Transforming Gender Inequalities', and a knowledge repository.

Two in-country learning journeys were carried out to provide insights on how to ensure that resilient development programming is gender transformative: one focusing on the Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership and Learning (REECALL) programme in Bangladesh, and the other on the Durable Peace Programme (DPP) in Myanmar. Most data collection took place between October 2018 and March 2019. The learning journey entails a series of participatory exercises, which are outlined below. The first three steps of this journey have been completed in both countries; the Action Planning workshop has taken place in Myanmar and is planned to take place in Bangladesh at the end of 2020.

a) **Selection of focus area within the programme.** In-country inception workshops were prepared with remote support from consultants, and implemented by country focal points with the involvement of country directors and programme directors/managers. During this first phase, country staff chose a specific area within the country programme for this research to focus on. While each country team was allowed to contextualize the research topic and questions according to their chosen focus area, we decided to retain common research questions that were discussed during this first meeting with programme staff.

b) **Gender context analysis.** Oxfam staff and partners did a desk review of available country material and reached out to people that Oxfam works with – including representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs), women's rights organizations, NGOS and local government representatives – to complete a gender content analysis.

c) **Analysis of how the programme contributes to gender transformation.** The two country programmes' approaches to gender transformation and strategies were explored in discussions with Oxfam staff and partners, and by reviewing project/programme documents (proposals, evaluations, monitoring reports, etc.). To identify each programme's progress towards gender transformation, the data analysis focused on drawing linkages between context analysis results and approaches already taken, validating a combination of change pathways, social change processes and building blocks, and identifying actions to stimulate gender-transformative programming. This formed the basis for the next step – the Action Planning workshop.

d) **Action Planning workshop.** Action Plans and ways to track their results are developed collaboratively with country teams in an Action Planning workshop. Oxfam staff, partners and women's rights organizations gather to share their findings and preliminary analysis, and to discuss possible strategies, actions and initiatives that could be proposed for the programme design.

e) **Reflection and learning**. Learning events and discussions online or face-to-face are supported by monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) staff and, if possible, with the involvement of women's rights organizations.

During the process, the two external consultants and Resilience Knowledge Hub staff created a **repository of relevant literature, tools and frameworks** as well as the **practical guidance, 'Transforming Gender Inequalities'**, drawing on Oxfam's documents, practices and different areas of work across the Confederation, as well as from other think tanks and international NGOs.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the research can be summarized as follows:

- The research questions were broad. This report is a result of the outcomes so far; the research is not yet complete. Answering the questions fully would necessitate much lengthier and more in-depth interaction with the respective projects.

- Given the life cycle of the two selected programmes, it was not possible to fully assess the potential and actual impacts of gender transformation.

- Despite the considerable goodwill and enthusiasm of all those involved in the in-country journeys and beyond, it was difficult to negotiate and then add new activities (related to the research) to the existing project plans and activities, which were well underway, and to engage people who already had considerable work burdens. This was particularly difficult because exploration of the relationship between transformative gender justice and resilience (whether explicit, as in Bangladesh, or implicit, as in Myanmar) was new to both countries and projects.

- Both countries are large and geographically complex, hence requiring time and complex logistics for communication, meetings, field research, etc. The conflict and resulting insecurity in Myanmar rendered those challenges particularly acute.

- The research involved operating in a number of languages in each country, creating additional time demands but also the potential for misunderstandings and confusing interpretations of both the concepts and the findings.

In both countries, when the challenges could be overcome or their impact mitigated, this was thanks to the dedication, flexibility and creativity of Oxfam staff and partners and members of the local communities.

A FEMINIST APPROACH

Oxfam's approach to gender justice is built upon feminist theory and practice, and based on the feminist principles to which the Oxfam International (OI) Executive Board committed in 2018.

Attempts to give a feminist foundation to gender equality work within the Oxfam Confederation go back a number of years.[7] Since the beginning of this research, Oxfam's momentum in promoting the adoption of feminist thinking and principles across its organizational structures and programmatic approaches has become much more explicit and robust.[8] This offered this phase of the research the opportunity and obligation to clarify the use of key terms and concepts.

In this context, a 'feminist approach':

- **Seeks transformative change**. A feminist approach means working to change the **systems and structures** that contribute to marginalization and oppression.

- **Relates to the process, not just the outcome**. A feminist approach calls for radical change in gender power relations and means committing to gender-transformative change both as an **outcome** (the advancement of the rights of women and girls and gender justice) but also as the **process** by which we change discriminatory practices, policies and behaviour. This means that explicit feminist principles are embedded in our ways of working, programme design and implementation, policy and campaigning, budgets, human resources plans, the way in which we carry out research and the values which underpin our decisions as staff and directors leading this work.[9]

- **Embeds an intersectional lens.** It assumes that to end poverty and achieve equality for the world's most disadvantaged groups, we need to **focus our attention on women and girls and gender non-conforming people, and to consider power and intersectionality** in everything that we do.[10]

- **Brings a feminist analysis to the context**, highlighting the need for context-specific strategies when working on gender equality and women's rights.

- **Puts strong partnerships with women's rights activists, organizations and networks** at its heart.

- **Does no harm.** The pledge to 'do no harm' means that we adhere to ethical practice and standards of implementation, evaluation and research, at all times taking into consideration how gender norms create inequalities of power that disadvantage women and girls.

- Understands that **the personal is political**: *'We recognize that challenging patriarchy, white supremacy, racism, neo-liberalism and colonialism in its various expressions of power abuse, exclusion and oppression, begins with questioning and changing ourselves. We are all inherently part of these larger systems and our beliefs, actions, attitudes and behaviours can either strengthen injustice or advance equality. Individual, institutional and social transformation are interconnected. We acknowledge that there are no private issues.'*[11]

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Use of the Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights (TLWR) framework (see Box 1) can help us to embed feminist principles in the Theory of Change (ToC) guiding our programmes. We therefore chose to use the TLWR framework to develop the gender-transformative ToC for the research,[12] and research in the two countries was conceptualized and analysed using this framework.


Box 1: Using the TLWR framework in resilience-oriented programming

Oxfam uses the TLWR framework to direct planning for gender-transformative change. The framework can be used to do a gender power analysis of the context in which the programme or project is being developed and can be helpful for planning interventions and developing a ToC. The TLWR framework can be used to ensure that the change envisaged by the ToC is gender-transformative, i.e. it is both:

i) **An outcome** – the advancement of the rights of women and girls and gender justice by strengthening absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities, which form the foundations upon which resilient development is built.

ii)   **A process** – transforming deeply held views and practices that preserve gender inequality, increase women's vulnerabilities and harm their wellbeing in private as well as public spheres.

This complex, system-wide change requires a holistic view and simultaneous action on four change areas related to gender justice:
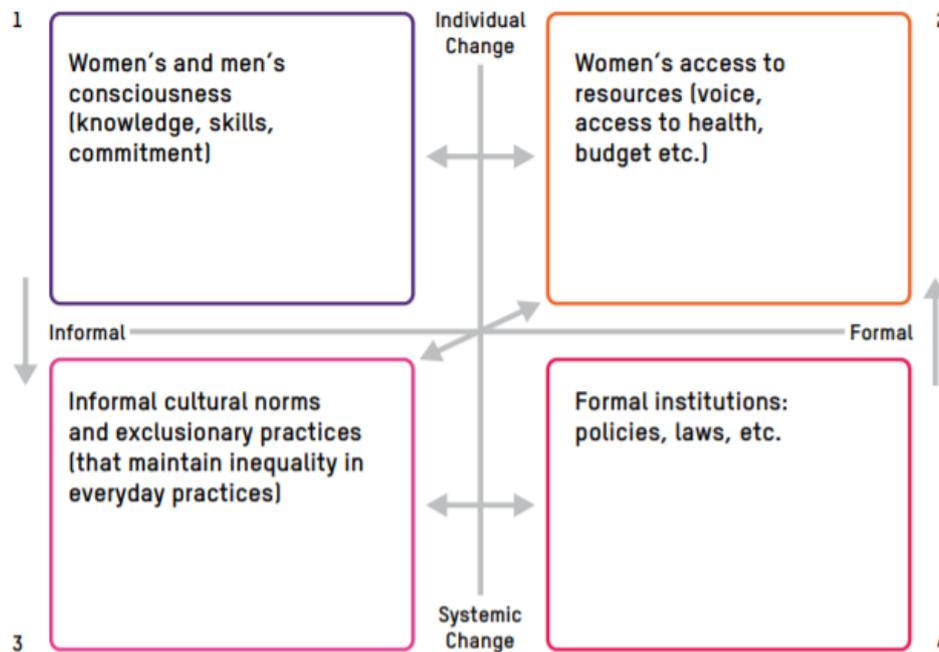
1. **Individual informal area**: Encompasses individual women's and men's knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes and consciousness of their own and others' rights, behaviour in intimate relationships and control over their own body.

2. **Individual formal area**: Relates to access to tangible and intangible resources, such as possessing an ID card, the right to vote, land entitlements and access to finance or basic services.

3. **Systemic informal area**: This is characterized by cultural/social/ideological norms (both restrictive and enabling), as well as the relationships and informal groups that create and sustain them.

4. **Systemic formal area**: Refers to laws, policies and institutions.

NOTES

1 C. Reid and W. Frisby. (2008). Continuing the journey: articulating dimensions of feminist participatory action research (FPAR). In: P. Reason and H. Bradbury, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. London: SAGE Publications, pp.93–106; P. Maguire. (1987). Doing participatory research: a feminist approach. [Online]. Participatory Research & Practice.

2 C. Cahill. (2007). The Personal is Political: Developing new subjectivities through participatory action research. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 14(3), pp.267–292; C. Cahill. (2004). Defying gravity? Raising consciousness through collective research. *Children's Geographies*, 2(2), pp.273–286.

3 Oxfam Canada. (2018). Feminist Principles: What they are and how they serve as a guidepost for our work. Produced collaboratively by Oxfam Canada staff. https://42kgab3z3i7s3rm1xf48rq44-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Feminist-Principles-Oxfam-Canada.pdf

4 Oxfam. (2019). Integrating gender in research planning. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/integrating-gender-in-research-planning-620621

5 Oxfam. (2021). Transforming Gender Inequalities: Practical guidance for achieving gender transformation in resilient development. Zorica Skakun, Ines Smyth and Valerie Minne

6 Internal Oxfam Research report

7 In this research, we make use of a number of the documents in which these efforts are reflected: Oxfam Canada. (2018). Feminist Principles. Op. cit.

8 Confederation wider feminist principles has been developed and endorsed.

9 Feminist Principles as outlined at the Oxfam Gender Justice Platform in 2019.

10 Oxfam Canada. (2018). Feminist Principles. Op. cit.

11 Ibid.

12 Oxfam. (2014). *Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights: An Oxfam guide*. J. Kloosterman with C. Safier. https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/transformative-leadership-womens-rights-oxfam-guide