

Management Response Template

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Resilience in Zambia - Impact evaluation of Citizen Participation in Adaptation to Climate Change (Effectiveness Review Series 2016/17)*

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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.

As part of Oxfam Great Britain’s (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of mature projects are randomly selected each year and their effectiveness rigorously assessed. The Citizen Participation in Adaptation to Climate Change (CPACC) project was one of those selected for review in this way under the thematic area of resilience.

The CPACC project was the third in a sequence of projects that was launched in response to flooding across southern Africa in 2008 and 2009. Oxfam implemented this sequence of projects through partnership with three local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), namely the People’s Participation Service (PPS), the Program for Sustainable Rural Development (PSRD) and the Southern Partners Organisation (SPO). The project was designed to build the resilience of project participants to a number of different shocks and stresses.

The Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the project activities among the households whose members directly participated in the project activities. This involved comparing households that participated in the project to a group of comparison households who are thought to have had similar characteristics to the project participants before the project was carried out. Using this methodology, the Effectiveness Review is able to identify the household- and community-level effects of the project only. The impact of activities that

were intended to benefit people across the entire local area – including the radio broadcasts and capacity-building at the district level – cannot be assessed in this evaluation.

The Effectiveness Review was carried out in Mongu District, one of the three districts where the CPACC project was implemented. In Mongu District, the direct project activities (such as the provision of training and the distribution of seeds and other agricultural inputs) had been carried out in eight communities. Interviews were carried out with a random sample of the direct project participants in each of those eight communities. For comparison purposes, 12 communities were identified that were thought to have similar characteristics to the project communities, but where neither the CPACC project nor any similar projects had been implemented. Within the comparison communities, households were selected at random for interview. A total of 282 project participants and 545 comparison respondents were interviewed.

At the analysis stage, the statistical tools of propensity score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences between the households in the project and comparison communities, to increase confidence when making estimates of the project's impact.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Key findings of the Effectiveness Review

Outcome	Evidence of positive impact?	Comments
Involvement in community-level disaster planning	Yes	Awareness of and participation in the Satellite Disaster Management Committee (SDMCs) or similar committees were substantially higher in the project communities than the comparison communities. However, rates of participation in creating or updating community action plans were low.
Link to district-level processes	Yes	Respondents in project communities were more likely than those in comparison communities to agree that their community's needs are represented at the district level, and were more likely to have received early-warning information from district officials. However, they were no more likely to recognize the role of district officials in providing training.
Involvement in savings groups	No	Only 17 percent of project participant households were participating in a savings group, against 36 percent of comparison households.

Investment in crop production	Yes	Project participant households had increased the area of land under cultivation since 2009 by more than the comparison group, and were also farming a wider range of crops.
Practice of conservation farming	Yes	Project participant households adopted conservation farming practices – particularly the use of organic fertilizer and cover crops – at greater rates than comparison households. There is also some evidence that they had experienced less of a decrease in yields since 2009.
Improved access to markets	No	There were no clear differences between the project participants and comparison respondents in the proportions who sold crops or livestock, nor in the markets in which they made sales.
Increased involvement in non-agricultural income-generating activities	Not clear	There was no difference between the project participants and comparison households in the numbers running household businesses. Project participants were more likely to be engaged in casual labour, but this difference does not seem likely to be a result of the project.
Improved household welfare	No	There was no indication of any difference between the project participants and comparison households in the diversity of their diet, nor in indicators of wealth (housing conditions and ownership of assets).
Resilience	Yes	Households of project participants met the threshold to score positively in terms of 47 percent of the resilience indicators, against 42 percent among the comparison households. The effect of the project was concentrated in indicators of absorptive capacity and (to a less extent) of transformative capacity, but not in indicators of adaptive capacity.

Programme learning considerations

Continue to experiment with the community-led approach to project design, and investigate how to learn from communities with particularly positive experiences.

A central feature of the CPACC project was that the members of each community should define their priorities and the activities that would best meet their needs. Since a variety of different activities were carried out in different communities, comparing experiences between communities presents natural opportunities for learning about the effectiveness of the various interventions. A useful supplement to the quantitative results identified in this Effectiveness Review would be to explore qualitatively whether there are communities that have been particularly successful in building resilience (perhaps based on their experience during recent droughts and floods), and to identify the key processes or activities that led to those positive results.

It would also be of interest in future evaluations to assess whether the community-led approach leads to a greater sense of ownership and agency on the part of community members, including women and men. It may also be fruitful to experiment with the degree of involvement that Oxfam has in project implementation, in order to ensure that the organization's concept of resilience is fully reflected and operationalized in the project activities.

Identify opportunities to coordinate with and learn from the experience of other organizations working in the project area.

It is clear from the survey results that there are various NGOs actively implementing projects in Mongu District. Project managers should actively seek to coordinate with organizations that are working in the same local area, in order both to ensure that the activities being carried out are complementary and to find opportunities to learn from their experiences.

In particular, the greater rates of participation in savings groups in the comparison communities are thought to reflect the activities of other organizations to promote savings groups in Mongu District. The CPACC project provided participants with training and encouraged them to form savings groups, but other organizations are known to have provided more direct support to the formation of groups, particularly in the form of an initial capital injection. Allocating funds to make such grants may be a good method to encourage participation in savings groups in future projects. It may also be possible to learn from others' experiences about whether supporting the development of household businesses has stimulated demand for savings and credit facilities.

Consider how best to identify participants for new projects, particularly when attempting to target more vulnerable populations.

The direct participants in the CPACC project were selected as being 'vulnerable but viable', using similar criteria to those used by the Zambian Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP). On that basis, the project participants were thought to be generally poorer than their neighbours. In contrast, survey respondents in the comparison communities represented a random sample of all households in those communities. Assuming that the wealth distribution was similar in the project and comparison communities, we would therefore expect the project participant households generally to have been poorer than the comparison households before the project was carried out. In fact in the Effectiveness Review survey we find the opposite: the households of project participants were, on average, significantly wealthier than the average comparison household, based on the information on housing conditions and asset ownership recalled from 2009. This suggests that those selected for the CPACC project tended to be better off than their neighbours in 2009.

Careful consideration should be given in future projects to how to identify those who will participate or benefit directly in the activities. If the intention is to work specifically with a more vulnerable portion of the population, then

making this identification through discussion with key informants in the communities may not be adequate. Involving community members as a whole in a participatory wealth ranking may be a useful approach.

Invest in improved monitoring, evaluation and learning practices – including regular tracking of progress, ideally including a comparison group.

Resilience is a complex and dynamic concept. In order to gain a deeper understanding of a project's impact in this area, it is important to invest in robust systems to monitor progress.

One important factor that would improve the ability of programme managers to learn from monitoring and evaluation activities would be to establish a comparison group at baseline. The Effectiveness Review has attempted to assess the impact of the CPACC project as rigorously as possible within the constraint that the comparison group was identified after the project's implementation. However, confidence in the results of an evaluation such as this would be enhanced if the comparison group had been identified before the project: doing so would allow for baseline characteristics to be controlled for in making comparisons, and external influences on the project's outcomes to be tracked over the project's lifetime. Regular monitoring of the situation in both the project communities and the comparison communities would provide insight into how those within and outside the project are exposed to and respond to shocks, stresses and uncertainty.

Finally, an important component of the CPACC project was aimed at promoting wider changes, in market systems and in the policy and practice of government actors. The effectiveness of some of the local-level interventions – particularly relating to access to markets – was expected to be complemented and enhanced by these higher-level changes. Evaluating the impacts of a project at a systemic level is not possible through a quasi-experimental approach such as that used in this Effectiveness Review. However, it would be valuable to use alternative approaches to assess what systemic changes have taken place and to understand how best they can be reinforced in the future.

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 are generally in line with the findings of the final project evaluation conducted in June 2015, which among other things observed an overall positive impact on resilience in the participating communities. This was based on the examination of indicators under the following outputs:

1. Development of adaptation & risk reduction actions by participating communities;
2. Implementation of adaptation & risk reduction actions, e.g. increased crop & livestock diversification and application of conservation farming methods in the project areas;
3. Increased awareness on key subjects including climate change, adaptation and resilience, marketing and early warning systems.

It was interesting that utilising characteristics of the Resilience model, the review was able to extend outcome analysis to other household indicators and community variables which were not necessarily part of the project objectives – such as diversity of crop-growing sites, ownership of fungible livestock, access to drinking water and remittances or formal earnings – just to mention a few. However, the team agreed that these characteristics are necessary in understanding household welfare in a holistic sense.

The review indicates that the targeting of the beneficiaries does not reflect the poor category as much as the comparison group does. Although essential targeting criteria was co-developed by partners and communities, the team will increase focus on profiling of the target groups to ensure that future projects demonstrate that poorer households are engaged.

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

The review identified improvements in resilience characteristics among households in the communities where Oxfam and its partners had been implementing resilience-building interventions as compared to those communities where the project was not present.

The review recognised that a central feature of the CPACC project was that the members of each community defined their priorities and the activities that would best meet their needs. This meant that the project design followed a bottom-up approach and as a result had a wide, dynamic and varied range of interventions.

The review also found that participating households were engaged in a more diverse range of off-farm livelihoods activities than comparison households.

The impact of having multiple Oxfam projects in one area provided clear advantages. In this case the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project was being implemented in several of the CPACC project communities as well.

Respondents in project communities were more likely than those in comparison communities to agree that their community's needs are represented at the district level, and were more likely to have received early- warning information from district officials.

It was good to note that key areas noted as being weak in the review, such as lack of markets, were also identified by the Oxfam team and are being addressed in the new country strategy and agriculture programme designs.

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

The review indicated that there was little or no difference between the project participants and comparison respondents in the proportion of those who were participating in a farmer or producer organization. The lack of active farmer groups was identified as a weakness.

Furthermore, the availability of savings and savings groups was not clearly any higher among the project participants than the comparison households. Despite the importance, these two areas were omitted at the design stage and did not form part of the project's expected results.

The review seems to suggest that the project did not take a 'systems thinking' approach at design stage, judging by some indicators which were assessed even when they don't ordinarily seem closely linked to resilience.

The 'Three Resilience Capacities' model highlighted the fact that several indicators of resilience may have been overlooked at project design stage. At the time of design, CCPAC was based on past DRR projects, meaning that the resilience capabilities were a relatively new model that was not familiar to the team at the time.

6. Summary of review quality assessment, i.e. quality of the review is strong/mixed/poor and short assessment of the process

The review is considered as being 'mixed' strength as the team high lightened a number of short-comings including:

- The length of the review process from the field analyses to sign-off of the report was too long. This disadvantaged the programme, and made it difficult to internalise learning due to the loss of institutional memory. However, the level of detail in this analysis provides a solid basis for increased investment in project time and financial resources for MEAL.
- While essential, certain indicators were beyond the scope of the project such as access to clean water and children's school attendance. At design stage, the focus was on improved food security,

adaptation and disaster preparedness. Education and water were seen as falling into separate programmatic pillars hence their omission.

- The review could have been more useful if it had built in more investment in guided sense making of the results and synthesis of lessons learnt to broader programming strategies.
- Further reviews should consider measuring partner relations and performance.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

Oxfam in Zambia will ensure that the programme design process is strengthened. Beyond theories of change, a clear beneficiary matrix and narrative will be part of the design process in order to improve targeting in programming. We will review our evaluation processes to enrich them with robust methodological lessons derived from this quantitative process.

8. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon – and why

The reviewed occurred at the time we were putting our thoughts to the design of new programmes through which we will contribute to the delivery of the 2020 vision. As we are concluding the designs of our Humanitarian and Agriculture programmes, both of which contribute to the resilience goal, the findings of the review have been helpful in thinking about how the resilience ambition can be strengthened in our programmes. The ‘three resilience’ model has been particularly helpful to the team and has increased its understanding of resilience.

Although we have ensured adequate resource allocation towards monitoring, evaluation and learning, we will undertake to improve the quality of the procedures and enrich the methodologies. The process has also reinvigorated interest in learning among team members and we will strengthen this aspect of our work culture.

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?

The selection of a 'control community' should have been part of the baseline, mid-term reviews (project monitoring) and final evaluation processes. This omission meant that interventions by other organizations may have been missed out in the assessment process of the control. Future programme designs, particularly under the Agriculture & Resilience programme, will consider the inclusion of control communities where appropriate, as well as stakeholder consultations and baselines to inform design indicators and approaches. The theory of change in all future projects, including humanitarian projects, will need to be informed by consultation results. Further, the MEAL plan should have more indicators as those included in the reviews.

In the project under review, gender is merely implied; it was felt that all future projects should have at least one specific objective, indicators and budget lines focusing on gender.

There was very little reference to findings under 'early warning' – for instance the production of sector fact sheets and guides, indigenous knowledge and practice – in the review. These are often overlooked but are an essential component of early warning and adaptation. The project did make efforts to link participants to relevant information sources, depending on location and livelihood sector. Radio programmes and IEC material were produced in local languages on various early warning topics.

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

It is important that programme staff have a general understanding of the Global Performance Framework and more specific tools and models like the 'three resilience capacities' in the measurement of resilience. This is useful and valuable in the design of resilience/ livelihood related projects. All but one of the project partners have ceased operating and could not be included in this review.