

Oxfam Management response to the review of *Accountability Review in Georgia: Promoting children and youth as agents of change – My Rights My Voice (Effectiveness Review Series 2013/14)*

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1. The context and background of the review

As part of Oxfam Great Britain’s (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of mature projects are randomly selected each year. The levels to which Oxfam projects are meeting their accountability commitments to partners and communities are assessed. The accountability indicator that Oxfam has chosen to examine in its Accountability Reviews (ARs) is the degree to which its work meets its own standards for accountability. Oxfam is able to do this as it has clear standards that describe how a project/intervention/activity should be delivered by staff and partners and how it should be experienced by those for whom we are seeking change.

The ‘Promoting children and youth as agents of change – My Rights My Voice’ (MRMV) project was selected for review in this way.

Accountability is one of the eleven standards that Oxfam is expected to meet in its development work. It is the process through which an organisation balances the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making and activities, and delivers against this commitment. Accountability is based on four dimensions: transparency, participation, learning, and evaluation and feedback mechanisms that allow the organisation to give account to, take account of, and be held to account by stakeholders. Oxfam’s principle is: ‘We hold ourselves primarily accountable to people living in poverty, but we take our accountability to all stakeholders seriously, and continuously strive to balance their different needs. Increased accountability will be achieved and demonstrated through respectful and responsible attitudes, appropriate systems and strong leadership.’ This assignment assessed accountability in terms of transparency, feedback/listening and, participation - three key dimensions of Accountability for Oxfam. In addition it asked questions around partnership practices, staff attitudes, and satisfaction (how useful the project is to the people and how wisely the money on this project has been spent) where appropriate.

‘My Rights My Voice’ is a global project implemented in Georgia and seven other countries and focuses on child and youth rights to receive education and health care. The goal of the project implemented in Georgia is, ‘Improving the fulfilment of health rights of up to 20,000 IDP children and youths in two post-conflict regions of Georgia (Samegrelo and Shida Kartli)’. To achieve these objectives, the project adopts strategies to capacity building, research and monitoring, awareness raising and campaigning, and policy and advocacy work on specific issues where Oxfam GB and partners can support /promote health rights, and therefore bring about improvements in health outcomes for children and youths.

The project has been implemented in Georgia since 2011 by three partner organisations: the Public Defender’s Office (PDO) and Georgian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – Welfare Foundation and DEA,(the Association of Disabled Children and Mothers of Disabled Children) with the support of Oxfam. The purpose of the project is to promote child and youth health rights in two regions of Georgia – Samegrelo and Shida Kartli –

and directly benefits young people between 14 and 18 years, family doctors and local civil society organisations (CSOs).

The evaluation was carried out in May 2014 by two external evaluators. The standards, tools and guidance provided by Oxfam, via the Accountability Review Pack, were used to conduct the analysis. Data were collected via different focus groups and individual interviews; full documentation was also provided concerning the project, including reports and documents generated during the implementation process. Whilst Oxfam’s prescribed methodology was not followed in its entirety the assessment by the consultants was thorough.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Oxfam’s accountability to partners – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

Acct Indicator	Transparency	Feedback	Participation
Review Team Score	3.5	2.5	4

Transparency: Budgetary issues were reviewed thoroughly with partners’ participation. However, some have claimed that project activities and finances allowed for their implementation had not been discussed with them before the project started. From the evaluators’ view, the partner itself has not been sufficiently active to propose its ideas and suggestions in a due moment and an appropriate form. Thus, Oxfam should have given the possibility to all the partners to fully participate in the planning process.

Feedback: Oxfam and partners had regular contact during the implementation of the project, for instance before each activity, workshop, etc. new ideas, as well as shortcomings and risks, were discussed at monthly meetings. Therefore, all the existing concerns about the project seem to have been discussed. However, the formal feedback mechanism is not used often as and is not perceived as a healthy or constructive way to have a dialogue or report or resolve a problem. This seems to be a cultural issue; people communicate easily informally, but they usually prefer not to write a complaint.

Participation: The partners fully participated in the decision-making process, and presented their ideas and suggestions for project activities. During monthly meetings, the Project Governance Group, comprised of two Oxfam representatives and one representative from each of the partners, discussed overall project strategy, ways of improvement, and so forth.

Oxfam and partners’ accountability to communities – from 1 (low) to 4 (v high)

Acct Indicator	Transparency	Feedback	Participation
Review Team Score	3	2	4

Transparency: Oxfam and the partners have tried to present project information to the beneficiaries, they could not reach all the groups. Financial information has not been share or discussed at all with the beneficiaries. Despite this, all the representatives of the communities seem to be familiar with the partners’ work and have regular contact with them, the partners advising them in their everyday work. According to the children participating in the project activities, they were both implementing the project and benefiting from its outcomes at the same time. They are regularly consulted in order to determine their expectations and needs. They seem not to be involved in the budget planning process, but claim that all their ideas presented to the partners have been fully supported (e.g. theatre performances, flash mobs, etc.)



Feedback: A formal mechanism of complaints for the stakeholders has not been established. Unlike the case for the partners, it would be more appropriate in the case of the beneficiaries to establish a mechanism that would permit them to be more proactive.

Participation: Youth leaders have participated in the six-monthly reunions of the Project Governance Group and discussed strategic plans concerning the project with the representatives of Oxfam and the partners. The partners have communicated actively with the communities – doctors and youth, asking for their views on different activities and their future development. During the interviews, both doctors and youth leaders were able to give examples of activities implemented following their suggestions.

Recommendations:

- Oxfam staff shall become more active in spreading information about accountability, its mechanisms and positive sides, and will increase the involvement of different parties.
- Oxfam, with the support of its partners, shall organise periodic meetings about accountability with different segments of community.
- Oxfam can print visual aids and leaflets in order to spread information about the community's rights to be involved in the processes, transparency and feedback.
- (1) Ensure that a 'good' partnership conversation takes place and is documented; (2) ensure roles and responsibilities laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) are agreed and understood by Oxfam staff and partner staff alike; (3) ensure accountability mechanisms between Oxfam and partners are discussed, agreed and understood; (4) likewise for accountability mechanisms between Oxfam/partner and communities. These discussions and agreements must take in to account what should happen if things go wrong.
- Oxfam must define all the indirect beneficiaries who can support the activities and who influences the different sectors in the regions. Good relations and partnerships with such beneficiaries or different sectors of community can be valuable for the final results of the project.
- Oxfam must involve the communities and their representatives to a greater extent at the stage of project design, budgeting and activity planning. The regular process of evaluations must be carried out together with the communities.
- A discussion needs to take place between Oxfam and partners as to how feedback and complaints from community members are best handled.
- The contact details of the appropriate person must be made available to stakeholders.
- Improve and formalise the informal, simplified feedback mechanism with key representatives of the communities, in order to allow everyone, including the most vulnerable members of society, to participate in the process. Oxfam and its partners shall always keep an eye on the gender equality issue and ensure the balance of women to men representation (in this case, we mean to keep more men engaged, as it is at this stage).

3. Overall do the findings of the review concur with you own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness?

Both partners and communities provided positive feedback and gave high rates on Oxfam's transparency and participation dimensions, which is adequate and was pretty much expected; feedback and complaints mechanism presented and used with the partners and communities were the ones developed in Oxfam headquarters, which according to the response provided proved not to be sufficient. Indeed, it was good learning from the review in future to design a feedback mechanism together with project stakeholders, respecting local ways of giving feedback.

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

- Oxfam has very good partnership relations with its partners, so they are quite well involved in the process. They also are informed about the feedback mechanism, but it seems they do not use it often. The informal mechanism works quite well.
- Good image of Oxfam in the regions helps the organisation to implement different activities and get involved the communities. The representatives of the community (like family doctors, parents, etc.) work and support the organisation and every project realised by Oxfam.
- Oxfam's partners are motivated and equipped with skills and competences to always listen and try to find the solution of the problem (from the community).
- Information about the project, its values and benefits, is well distributed among the beneficiaries.
- Gender participation/equality is well ensured at all stages of project implementation.

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

- It seems that Oxfam does not involve either partners or the community in the project formulation stage; therefore some of them do not feel to be the partner, just the recipient. At the same time, their knowledge of local peculiarities would help the project and process.
- There is no involvement (or very little) of partners and community representatives in the budgeting process. If we want to make the project and its activities adequate for the expectations of local communities, we need to increase the involvement at the budgeting stage.
- A complaints mechanism is in place, but it is not often used by the partners and even less used by the community. It may also be because the community representatives do not really understand the result of complaints. There is a lack of publicly available information on how to write a complaint and what are the rules to discuss and/or to take the decision about.
- The voice of community representatives is not strongly heard. At the end of every training session, they have had opportunity to choose the topic of next session; nevertheless, it is not always a good way to hear their desires and take them into consideration.

6. Summary of review quality assessment

Mixed, because of two reasons: (a) consultants didn't consider differences between implementing partners, who had responsibilities to deliver agreed actions, and alliance partners, who in this particular case were targets for empowering, therefore their analysis and conclusions on partner's statements are not always accurate e.g. statement "It seems that Oxfam does not involve either partners or the community in the project formulation stage; therefore some of them do not feel to be the partner, just the recipient. At the same time, their knowledge of local peculiarities would help the project and process; (b) Oxfam's prescribed methodology was not fully followed by the consultants, argued that it doesn't suit to local context.

Oxfam methodology of **random** selection of the projects for accountability review (AR) needs to be relooked, because literally every year Georgia projects are randomly selected. The review process is time consuming, needs both senior manager and project manager's considerable amount of time. This year AR was particularly difficult because the project MRMV was ending in six month time, in parallel to AR we needed to deliver number of other key activities such as develop exit strategy and conduct final evaluation of the project together with partner's and beneficiaries. The ER process not only increased workload of Oxfam team but also there were intensive interaction with stakeholders on similar issues in short period of time.

7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

All recommendations introduced by the Accountability Review will be used for current and future country programmes, such as Economic Justice, Disaster Risk Reduction and Gender Justice programmes. In order for this to happen, the Accountability Review report will be shared and discussed by whole Oxfam Georgia Team. A seminar to familiarise Oxfam staff and partners on Accountability concepts, dimensions and best practice will also be requested.

For future programmes, a feedback and complaints mechanism suitable for the Georgia context and respecting local ways of giving feedback will be designed together with partners, community members and other stakeholders. Visual aids and leaflets will be designed and disseminated in all target communities on their rights to be involved in Oxfam's interventions, transparency, and feedback mechanism.

Oxfam Programme Managers for livelihoods, disaster risk reduction and gender justice programmes, together with selected implementing partner representatives will hold annual meetings with target communities on Accountability issues. Stakeholders such as community representatives and partners will also be invited to contribute in making key decisions about projects throughout the entire cycle, including planning and budgeting, and whilst project monitoring, evaluations and monitoring reviews, are conducted.

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

None



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 My Rights My Voice project ends in December 2014, at the same time we are exiting from the healthcare work, all recommendations introduced by the AR will be used for current and future country programs, such as Economic Justice, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Gender Justice programmes. The action plan is developed accordingly.

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

None