



Oxfam Canada Management response to the evaluation of:

## **The Creating Spaces to Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls Project**

### **A: Context, background and findings**

#### **1. The context and background of the evaluation**

The Creating Spaces to Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls (“Creating Spaces”) project is a five-year (2016-2021) initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Oxfam. Its aim is to reduce violence against women and girls, including child and early forced marriage, by shifting local norms and changing laws, by responding to violence by providing women and girl survivors with services and economic opportunities, and by building the capacity of organizations and movements. Creating Spaces is implemented in six countries – Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Philippines – with 25 local organizations, including women’s rights organizations.

In October 2018, Oxfam hired an external consultant team to conduct a review of Creating Spaces. The purpose of this review was to (a) assess the performance of the project to date and (b) identify key learning and provide recommendations to improve implementation and enable the project to achieve optimal results.

Specifically, the review included the following major elements:

- an assessment of project performance as it relates to the achievement of results, effectiveness, women’s rights and innovation and learning – drawing on select project documents and a synthesis and analysis of data generated by each of the countries;
- identification of lessons, promising practices, and innovations;
- development of specific recommendations related to project design and implementation to improve performance.

The full review includes six country specific reports and the Canadian consultants’ consolidated report. In-country methodologies included a qualitative peer-to-peer learning exercise (PLE) conducted by project partners and a quantitative household survey (HHS), which provided outcome level data.

The consolidated report from the Canadian consultants also included an assessment of the performance of Oxfam Canada (OCA) as a Lead Affiliate on the project, the quality of the partnerships / relationships between it and the six country teams. A separate detailed action plan on key recommendations from this component of the review is provided for the Creating Spaces Coordinating Committee.

#### **2. Summary main findings and recommendations**

The findings and recommendations below are organized around three main learning questions set out for the review. The recommendations provided in this summary are top-level. Please refer to the full MTLR (or the Executive Summary / Recommendations synopsis) for more details related to specific implementation of each of these recommendations).



The learning questions used in this report reflect the project's three "pillars":

- strengthened engagement of key actors and youth;
- increased access to support services and economic opportunities; and
- increased use of innovative knowledge, including best and emerging practice and accountability systems.

**Learning Question 1: Has the engagement of actors and youth in advancing women's leadership, women's rights and in reducing violence against women and girls been strengthened?**

The review finds evidence of the following:

- increased capacity among influencers to enact, change and implement laws, and some examples of policy advances on VAWG and CEFM;
- positive change in attitudes and behaviours, and examples of positive role modelling, among influencers (in particular youth influencers); and,
- increased awareness and understanding of women's rights among influencers

However, the review also finds that progress is uneven across countries, and in some cases within countries, between key target groups, and that the above positive trends have yet to translate in full into sustained change and action.

**Related recommendations:**

- Target key influencers more strategically
- Update and adapt training provided under the project to address intersectionality
- Encourage a larger discussion amongst Oxfam country teams and partners around framing CEFM
- Expand support for youth (particularly girl's) leadership
- Continue to strengthen partner and community mobilizers capacity in addressing deep-rooted gendered prejudices

**Learning Question 2: Has access to support services and economic opportunities for women and girls affected by violence and early and forced child marriage improved?**

The review finds that the project has contributed to the following:

- a modest, yet important, increase in access to support services for women and girls, notably in India and Bangladesh;
- a shift towards improved quality of services through training for service providers (on gender sensitivity and psycho-social support) and learning exchanges;
- some improvements in the economic skills and knowledge of women, and the creation of an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs.

However, the review finds that only modest progress has been made in promoting women's economic empowerment, and it identifies weaknesses in the project's strategy / approach to this



issue. These include a too narrow focus on business training, which fails to address women's economic rights; a reliance on external stakeholders to support women's economic initiatives; and insufficient resources allocated to this project component.

**Related recommendations:**

- Clarify the project's economic engagement approach
- Prioritize women's rights and gender justice in economic programming
- Address and track resistance from family members around women's economic engagement
- Address women's care burden
- Build community groups' capacity in promoting service provision and accountability

**Learning Question3: *Has there been an increased use of innovative knowledge, including best and emerging practice and accountability systems, to end violence against women and girls?***

Finally, the review finds that activities related to increasing use of innovative knowledge are in early stages, and therefore results under this project component are limited. It notes the following:

- Facilitating linkages and alliances and building capacity of organizations have been successful in generating knowledge;
- The collective power of alliances and networks was effective in influencing and campaigning has led to valuable change in local and government policy and legislation;
- The organizational capacity self-assessment tool (Capacity Assessment Tool for ending VAWG or CAT4EVAWG) has been useful in facilitating reflection, identifying gaps in organizational programming and tailoring capacity building for partners.

It further notes that country teams and partners are creating valuable and important training modules and knowledge products, and there are opportunities to further package and share learnings both within and across country teams and partners.

**Relevant Recommendations:**

- Expand knowledge sharing between different Oxfam teams
- Expand knowledge sharing at the country level
- Roll-out the feminist MEAL strategy

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

**3. Summary of evaluation quality assessment**

Overall, Oxfam Canada's assessment of the review is mixed.

The report is comprehensive; it identifies key learning from the project and provides a wide breadth of recommendations – both of which are useful in making immediate adjustments to the project, and as points of reference for the design of future similar initiatives.



However, the report is long, and at times dense – limiting its accessibility, particularly for local partners. In addition, Oxfam Canada believes that the report – in some areas – lacks the expected depth of analysis, and provides findings that are not sufficiently precise, limiting the usefulness of the report in triangulating information from project our ongoing monitoring.

As noted above, the review included multiple components, and employed a mix of methods. This was in recognition of the complex nature of the project, as well as an attempt to adopt a feminist approach to the review, and balance learning and evaluative objectives. The deficiencies in the report noted above are – in part – rooted in this design choice; the complexity of the review led to problems related to timelines, capacity and level of support and guidance.

The full review included six country-specific learning and review processes and reports, as well as an overarching review and report – itself in two parts – led by consultants in Canada. The country-specific reviews included a qualitative, peer-to-peer learning exercise (PLE) led by project partners and a quantitative household survey (HHS), to provide outcome level data. The consultants in Canada, in turn, reviewed the six country reports, and conducted an online survey and focus group discussions with country teams. Their work was intended to draw overarching conclusions across the project.

However, delays in receiving reports and data from country teams, as well as the uneven quality of the reports, proved a challenge for the Canadian evaluators and meant that their consolidated report tends to highlight some countries over others. These delays had a knock-on effect and have meant that country teams and partners have not been able to validate findings and recommendations at key times as originally planned.

On reflection, we recognize that we underestimate the time required to complete a peer-to-peer review process, and that our expectations of the review (as a combined capacity building, data collection, and learning exercise) were likely too high given the existing capacity and implementation responsibilities of country teams.

#### **4. Main Oxfam follow-up actions**

Oxfam Canada will follow two parallel paths in responding to the review recommendations:

- Supporting Oxfam country teams to operationalize recommendations primarily related to Pillar 1 and Pillar 2; and
- Making adjustments linked to our role as Lead Affiliate and recommendations related to Pillar 3, focusing on recommendations related to project management, learning, and sustainability.

As related to supporting country teams, the Oxfam Canada team will take the following steps:

- Share the final reports, draft Management Response, and Executive Summary and Recommendations with Creating Spaces country teams and senior management at the six country offices (second week August 2019).
- Host a webinar with Creating Spaces country teams and senior management at the six country offices to share key findings and recommendations and discuss next steps (end of August / early September).
- Request each Oxfam country team submit a 2-page Learning Review Action Plan, which will clearly indicate which recommendations the relevant country team plans to bring forward (as part of the Semi-Annual Operational Report).



- Request revised Annual Work Plans (as part of the Semi-Annual Reporting process), ensuring that these include adjustments related to the review recommendations (November 2019), and support Oxfam country teams to implement any adjustments in Year 4 and 5.

As related to management adjustments as Lead Affiliate, we will take the following steps:

- Review the project Theory of Change and its assumptions, including holding an internal session with the Oxfam Canada project team (October), and – separately – a session with Oxfam country teams and select partners at the Year 4 Learning Event (March 2020). A particular focus will be on Pillar 2, and assumptions and strategies related to women's economic empowerment.
- Coordinate learning and sharing initiatives between Oxfam country teams, including exchange visits supported through the Innovation Fund, and hosting a quarterly learning call and developing opportunities for country teams to host learning webinars.
- Explore the idea of hosting in-country learning events that engage external allies and stakeholders (in Year 5).
- Update and revise the Innovation Fund, and adopt an approach that is simple, pragmatic and to supporting new and unanticipated activities (already under way in Year 4).
- Review OCA's reporting template to include clearer instructions, relevant examples, and steps for staff reflection on lessons learned.
- Ensure regular monitoring visits to Creating Spaces countries to build relationships and to provide capacity building training.

**5. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon - and why**

Oxfam Canada takes note of the findings and recommendations of the review, and welcomes the opportunity to review and make adjustments to the project to improve its impact.

These include mainly recommendations related to Pillar 2, and women's economic empowerment. We are aware that some of the assumptions related to Pillar 2 in our Theory of Change did not hold, and that the demand for activities under this pillar did not match the scope or scale that we have envisioned. While the recommendations are useful, we would note that many recommendations are quite broad in scope and more relevant to the design of future, similar initiatives – that is, they are not actionable in full given the limited time and resources remaining in this project.

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

Following the completion of the review, the Oxfam Canada team met to reflect on the overall process and identify lessons. These included the following:

- Be realistic regarding timelines and how they interplay with pre-existing in-country implementation responsibilities
- Have Oxfam Canada staff in-country during kick-off meetings to provide face-to-face support
-



- Emphasize data analysis as well as data collection when planning for partner capacity building
- Work more closely with teams that have lower MEL capacity or resources
- Carefully plan how different evaluation methodologies will result in data that can tell an integrated story
- Be careful not to attempt to do too much with one exercise (i.e., consider de-linking formative evaluation from learning or capacity building)
- If learning / capacity building is emphasized, plan for explicitly documenting learning that was part of the process itself
- Reflect on pre-existing relationships between Oxfam and partners and consider how these relationships may affect the quality of a peer-to-peer learning process