

OXFAM'S IMPACT: A DECADE OF INSIGHT



OXFAM

WE
WON'T
LIVE
WITH
POVERTY

CONTENTS

Front cover image: Quigona Farmers in the Philippines transplant seedlings into small paper cups with cocopeat. The vegetable nursery is part of Oxfam and Rice Watch Action Network for their Typhoon Rolly (Goni) Recovery Program. Photo: Natheer Halawani

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FOREWORD

Oxfam's new strategy sets out our vision for a radically better world in which everyone has the power to thrive, not just survive.

For 80 years, we have stayed true to Oxfam's founding principles of challenging the underlying causes of poverty while also supporting people to cope when disaster strikes. But we've also continually learnt along the way, about what worked well, and what didn't. We've used this learning to evolve, and to respond to a changing world.

Part of this learning came from over 100 impact evaluations, conducted between 2011 and 2021. This report draws on these rigorous assessments of randomly selected projects, and their findings have informed how we are now working in our three key areas— tackling extreme vulnerability, valuing women's work, and boosting resilience to a changing climate.

These insights help chart a course for our future, showing us where Oxfam's resources can have the greatest impact in transforming lives for the long-term. They show a need for holistic approaches that seek to shift entrenched gender norms, the power of nurturing networks and coalitions to advocate for change at a local and national level, and a reminder that improvements take time – investing in longer-term partnerships with local organisations and communities will be more effective in driving systemic change.

This report also sets out our new values-based approach to measuring and understanding our impact. Our Learning and Accountability Framework prioritises the perspectives of civil society partners and others that we work with, who set the evaluation agenda on what is measured, why and how, incorporating indigenous perspectives and definitions of success. Together, we will continue to review and adapt our approach, building on what works and learning about what could be better.

We hope that these insights are useful to all those working for a radically better future and we welcome you to join us on this journey.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sriskandarajah'.

Danny Sriskandarajah
Chief Executive,
Oxfam GB



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aleema Shivji'.

Aleema Shivji
Chief Impact Officer,
Oxfam GB

In 2011, Oxfam began conducting rigorous impact evaluations known as Effectiveness Reviews on a random sample of our longer-term projects. We assess rapid humanitarian responses using different approaches. At the time of their launch, the evaluations themselves, and the transparency of publishing all results, were seen as novel in the sector.

This report is based on a systematic review of over 100 of these impact evaluations. When taken together these results show that 82% of these projects have had a sustained positive impact in the lives of all (56%) or some (26%) of the people the project was aiming to support¹. Whilst there are no sector wide benchmarks on what is 'good', these results help to better understand our impact.

Where projects did not achieve the intended impact, we learnt from this and improved or changed our approach. This report details some of these insights. In some cases, our evaluations highlighted examples where positive outcomes were initially achieved, only to be undone, for example due to conflict.

As Oxfam we are proud of our commitment to learning and continual improvement. Publishing these findings is part of our accountability to our supporters and the people we work with around the world, but we also hope these lessons will be of benefit to the wider aid sector.

¹ 26% of projects led to partially positive impact. This means that impact was achieved for some but not all geographical areas or social groups, or that some of a project's intended impacts were achieved but not all.



Hera, Timor-Leste: Milena Sarmiento from Youth Empowerment for Future (YEFF), who are advocating for a more diversified economy and specific budgetary support for agriculture in Timor-Leste, at their farm in Hera, outside Dili. Photo: Keith Parsons/Oxfam

82%

of projects led to an overall positive or partially positive impact.

100%

of urban projects resulted in overall positive or partially positive impact.

75%

of rural projects resulted in overall positive or partially positive impact.

LOOKING BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Oxfam Great Britain's¹ new strategy focuses on systemic change for a kinder and radically better world. It tackles Extreme vulnerability for people living in the most fragile places in the world and addresses two global inequalities: Valuing women's work and Climate justice. In order to work as effectively as possible towards these goals, we are using the lessons from evaluations from the previous decade, whilst fundamentally rethinking how we understand impact.

Since 2011, Oxfam has been conducting rigorous impact evaluations known as Effectiveness Reviews on a randomly selected sample of our projects around the world. Randomly selecting projects ensures an unbiased view of our work, and these evaluations help us identify and understand evidence of change, and to continuously improve. Because evaluations were carried out on closed projects or those nearing completion, they help us understand not just immediate impact but how sustainable these changes have been for the communities we worked with.



Members of a women's group, in Nepal, celebrate the success of their garlic project. Oxfam and partner NEEDS provided technical assistance for the project, and supported the women's group with trainings. The women have led efforts to reduce disaster risks and bring essential services to their community. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam

The evaluations look for evidence of cause and effect between the activities of Oxfam and our partners, and any changes for the communities where we worked. These evaluations are largely quasi-experimental, which means they compare the situation of participating communities with similar communities that were not part of the project. These evaluations are one important part of how Oxfam monitors and evaluates our work, especially for longer term development projects. They are complemented by a range of other approaches.²

This report highlights findings from an independent review of evaluations from Oxfam projects over the past 10 years. These projects addressed a variety of topics. Here, we share lessons from 67 evaluations which were most relevant to our new strategic areas. Whilst we have seen significant success, we have also learnt along the way. Continuous reflection has helped evolve our programming approaches, meaning that some findings relate to approaches we no longer use.

¹Oxfam Great Britain is part of a global confederation. The impact evaluations are an Oxfam Great Britain initiative, but they evaluate work delivered by Oxfam all over the globe. Oxfam is used throughout.

²Humanitarian response projects, for example, require a different approach and therefore are not represented within this report.

TACKLING EXTREME VULNERABILITY



BACKGROUND

By 2030, an estimated 86% of people facing extreme poverty will live in the most fragile places on earth,¹ where the threat of conflict and violence are high, and there is limited access to clean water and sanitation, healthcare, economic opportunities and social protection.

These challenging conditions are often the result of historic and current political decisions and misuse of power. Conflict drives 80% of all humanitarian needs globally². Conflict and fragility leave communities highly vulnerable to threats including extreme weather, disease, hunger and displacement. In these contexts, women and girls face additional challenges that undermine their ability to achieve their ambitions and claim their rights.

Oxfam Great Britain's new strategy focuses on working in greater depth in fewer countries, and prioritises fragile contexts. We will work in solidarity with communities and partner organisations, standing with them as they claim their rights, rebuild with peace and resilience, and lead on life-saving responses to crises.

¹ OECD (2022), States of Fragility 2022, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en>.

² World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>



Anhad is a mother of 10 from Khnor Omerah. She works on a fishing boat catching fish to sell to support her family. She received a cash grant from Oxfam to buy her own boat and equipment but unfortunately she later lost the boat in a storm. Photo: VFX Aden / Oxfam

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of people facing extreme poverty will live in the most fragile places on earth.

WHAT WE DID

Oxfam evaluated 13 projects in conflict-affected and fragile contexts across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East¹. These projects addressed long-term needs for people living in extreme vulnerability, such as strengthening

resilience, safeguarding rights, increasing income and wealth, building social cohesion, and supporting communities to find sustainable solutions for people who are displaced.

¹Afghanistan, Colombia, DRC, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Jordan, Mali, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Chad, Niger and Pakistan

We did this through:

- Increasing agricultural sustainability and productivity;
- Improving livelihood practices and market systems;
- Building, rehabilitating and managing infrastructure (such as water access points or land);
- Distributing cash or food/hygiene items;
- Advocating to protect human rights in times of crisis, both nationally and internationally.

A group of people during an information session on the community hygiene and recycling committee. In the village of Al-Musimir, Oxfam has installed three water supply systems powered by solar panels. Photo: Pablo Tosco



OUR IMPACT

The evaluations found that the majority of projects had a sustained positive impact despite the fragile context in which they were implemented. 65% of projects were successful at increasing household income and wealth.

Surprisingly, this is significantly higher than projects seeking the same result in less fragile contexts. 70% of projects working towards community resilience led to positive impact.

70%

of projects working towards community resilience led to positive impact.



A group of people during an information session on the community hygiene and recycling committee. In the village of Al-Musimir, Oxfam has installed three water supply systems powered by solar panels. It has also supported an emergency committee led by the community at the school and a project to collect and recycle rubbish, to tackle a very visible problem in the communities that affects much of the country. Photo: Pablo Tosco

WHAT WE LEARNT

One approach to strengthening resilience is to bring people together to take action collectively. When projects supported community groups, they were more likely to achieve their intended impact. Community groups worked together on a range of topics, such as savings and loans, legal protection, business, water and sanitation and disaster risk management. Direct distributions of items such as seeds, tools, livestock or maintenance kits proved to be an important addition when strengthening resilience and livelihoods. Where distributions were included as part of an integrated approach, we found greater impact for the communities we work with.

Projects often included work to strengthen and improve skills or raise awareness. Generally, we found this led to improved earning potential, for example, by training people to manufacture improved stoves, or raising awareness about more efficient agricultural practices. However, we found this was not enough on its own. Where projects focused solely on building skills or creating awareness, they did not consistently lead to a positive impact on people's livelihoods or their resilience. This may reflect the environment in which extreme vulnerability occurs, with shocks often linked to political histories and repeated conflict inhibiting people's ability to make changes, rather than a lack of



knowledge or skills. This highlights the need to work on addressing longer-term, structural and political causes of instability. In order to safeguard rights, some of our work focused on influencing people in positions of power. In these projects, bringing together coalitions or alliances between civil society organisations and other stakeholders was found to be a successful way to drive change at a national or international level.

Community groups where people worked together, were more likely to achieve impact.

Iffat Tahmid Fatema (Senior Innovation Officer in Public Health Promotion & Community Engagement) talks to the Oxfam team about community consultation tools for WASH infrastructure. Photo: Salahuddin Ahmed

In many contexts, it is difficult for projects to directly engage decision-makers on upholding individual and community rights, however where engagement was possible it was found to be especially successful in achieving a project's intended impact.

As well as asking which of our approaches led to greatest impact, we sought to understand what changes were occurring for certain marginalised groups.

The evaluations showed that our work does not always result in the same impacts for women as for men. Whilst all projects included women, often through specifically tailored activities, project activities were not always sufficient to overcome patriarchal barriers or address women's specific needs. This key finding suggests a need to better understand and address gendered social norms within each specific context we work in.

Finally, a key characteristic of working in fragile countries is uncertainty. Our evaluations highlighted examples where positive outcomes were achieved, only to be undone by re-emergent conflict, climatic disasters, community evictions or displacement. Whilst we need to continue providing immediate and tangible assistance in humanitarian crises, sustainable positive outcomes require integrating longer term strategies, bringing people together collectively, and working on root causes.



Rachma Rahim, monitoring and evaluation officer for Oxfam, discusses the Bena village risk map. Photo: ©Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Our new strategy for tackling extreme vulnerability does just this by focusing on complementary approaches that meet immediate humanitarian needs whilst also working towards locally-led solutions that confront the root causes of conflict and extreme vulnerability.

Building on where we are seeing impact, we will continue to harness the power of bringing people together, supporting communities to prepare for and survive shocks and disasters, in order to enhance their resilience and ability to thrive.

To improve our impact for women and the most marginalised members of a community, Oxfam will partner with a diverse range of grassroots organisations, who better understand contextual nuances and hold the knowledge and expertise to lead the way.

Learning from these insights we will increase our work with coalitions for social justice, strengthening the ability of civil society groups to stand up for people's rights in times of crisis, both nationally and internationally. We believe that taking this holistic approach within complex crisis situations will deliver impact beyond that of any single approach.

To improve our impact for women and the most marginalised members of a community, Oxfam will partner with a diverse range of grassroots organisations...



Razia Sultana (right) listens to a woman at the RWWS women's centre in the host community. Sultana is an international human-rights activist, lawyer, teacher, researcher and activist; she leads the organization RWWS, which has founded two women's centres in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Oxfam has invested in RWWS. Photo: Fabeha Monir/Oxfam

VALUING WOMEN'S WORK



BACKGROUND

The unpaid and informal work of millions of women is largely unobserved and hugely undervalued. This injustice keeps women at the margins of economies and societies.

Women are three times more likely to be engaged in unpaid care work than men.¹ Although this work is crucial to communities and prosperous economies, governments and businesses largely devalue and exploit the time and energy spent looking after children, people with disabilities and elderly relatives, collecting water, cooking, and cleaning.

Most women from low-income countries in paid work have informal jobs such as house cleaners, farm workers, and street vendors.² All over the world, women in informal work are left unprotected and unrecognised by the economy. Their hard work is unnoticed, and they face problems like low pay, no job security or sick leave, and the threat of abuse. Women who face other inequalities – due to their race, sexuality, class or migration status – are often the most undervalued and suffer from the lowest rates of pay and highest levels of insecurity.



In the past, many of Oxfam's projects related to women's empowerment focused solely on improving household income and wealth. Our new strategy takes a more holistic view of women's work that not only increases women's ability to earn paid income, but also addresses structural barriers that prevent women's work being valued and invested in, and keep women at the margins of economies.

It is an injustice that women's paid and unpaid work is habitually undervalued.

¹ L. Addati, U. Cattaneo, V. Esquivel and I. Valarino (2018). *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*.

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>

Care champions Abigail (L) and Shylet (R) share a walk in their neighborhood in Hatcliffe to educate community members about unpaid care work and gender. Photo: Cynthia Matonhodze/Oxfam

WHAT WE DID

We evaluated 36 projects that were tackling issues related to women's work with communities in Africa and Asia. These projects sought one of two main outcomes: (1) increasing women's economic status – specifically to increase household income and wealth; or (2) increasing various other dimensions of women's empowerment.

These dimensions include personal (own attitudes, confidence), relational (household decision making, access and control over resources, unpaid care, community organising) and environmental (political engagements, safety). Some projects sought primarily to influence government policies on women's empowerment.

We did this through:

- strengthening the skills and capacities of women in the areas of agriculture, business skills and gender issues;
- bringing women together in groups;
- improving women's market access;
- increasing access to credit;
- supporting women's leadership for change
- raising awareness on women's rights, social norms, family planning, early marriage and preventing gender-based violence.



Johnny and Juanita Paz shares work such as tending their home garden in Datu Abdullah Sangki, Maguindanao. Photo: Princess Taroza/Oxfam

OUR IMPACT

80% of projects pursuing broader dimensions of women's empowerment were found to have a lasting positive impact after project completion. When looking at projects focusing solely on women's economic status, we were less successful (only 45% of projects increased household income).

The impact of these projects was often determined by whether women's economic status had increased – measured by increases in household income, household wealth, and bargaining power. While the economic status of women is an important metric, the opportunity was missed to engage with wider social and economic factors affecting women's economic empowerment.

80%

of women's empowerment projects were found to have a lasting positive impact.

Bringing women together was the most successful strategy for achieving consistent positive impacts on women's economic empowerment.

Women celebrate the success of their garlic farming project. Oxfam and partner NEEDS provided technical assistance for the project, and supported the women's group with trainings. The women have led efforts to reduce disaster risks and bring essential services to their community. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam



WHAT WE LEARNT

Our evidence demonstrates that women involved in Oxfam projects developed skills (such as agricultural or business know-how) to support their earning capacity. In most projects, these skills enabled greater production, an increase in paid work, and access to markets and credit. However, frequently this did not result in increased household income as we expected.

Community attitudes and narratives about women's roles, along with government or customary policies, were cited as key reasons why we did not see the intended impact. These societal barriers affect all aspects of women's work, including the crops they grow, the industries in which they work, their hours of work, their profits, and how dignified, sustainable and reliable their employment is.

Addressing these systemic societal barriers that devalue women's economic contributions are areas in which we are seeing strong success, with over two-thirds of the projects tackling such barriers showing positive impacts on women's empowerment. We see particularly strong changes around women's own beliefs and attitudes, for example in joining community groups, taking leadership positions, and raising community awareness about care work or their rights around land ownership.

Working with coalitions of women and supporting women's collective action were found to be successful approaches. Where we incorporated influencing components, we also saw positive impact. However, we also learnt that much of our work focused on women themselves (for awareness raising or skills building) rather than considering and challenging the beliefs of, and narratives perpetuated by, those who had power over key decisions affecting women's lives.

Finally, we learnt that we have not always been successful at supporting all women. When diverse groups of women are present in the community we are working with, some can be overlooked due to inequalities in voice and agency. This means that women who are more marginalized, or from minority backgrounds may be missing out.

This has triggered us to question our approach to women's economic empowerment and supports our new strategy on valuing women's work.

Yati produces many kinds of snacks with her group in her village. After a change of leadership in the group, Yati was appointed Treasurer. Oxfam local partner Adara guided them to start a new production using local resources. Photo: M. Nugie and Andito Wasi/Oxfam



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Going forward our focus has shifted - as well as supporting women into fair and sustainable paid work, if that's what they choose, we are working to change the broader system, targeting attitudes and narratives about women's economic value, and at how governments value and measure unpaid care in their economies. We will intentionally focus on those in the most precarious situations, such as migrant workers and women in the informal economy. Learning from our past, our new approach includes engaging more broadly to ensure that families, community members, and leaders understand and value women's paid and unpaid work.

Oxfam will work with communities that are already driving change on women's work by supporting them to access the resources they need to claim their right to be fairly valued. We will work with coalitions of activists and other stakeholders to co-create a global economy that is defined by and works for all women from all backgrounds. We will work in some of the most vulnerable places in the world, and will push governments and corporations to actively recognise, value and invest in all work carried out by women.

Oxfam will work with coalitions to co-create a global economy that is defined by and works for all women.



Within the Syrian refugee community in Tripoli, northern Lebanon, women groups play a vital role in supporting other women against gender based-violence. They are equipped with skills that allow them to refer cases to women rights organizations and appropriate authorities of gender based violence, to listen, and provide a safe space for women seeking refuge. Photo: Natheer Halawani

CLIMATE JUSTICE



Photo: Andy Aitchison/Oxfam

BACKGROUND

Extreme weather is wrecking lives, homes and livelihoods, and pushing people deeper into poverty. The number of climate-related disasters (such as floods, droughts, wildfires, and hurricanes) has risen five-fold in 50 years.¹

Despite having done the least to contribute to the current crisis, marginalised communities most affected by poverty and vulnerability are bearing the brunt of the most severe impacts. Many rural communities around the world rely heavily on natural resources which are hit by the rapidly changing climate – crops aren't growing, and rain isn't falling. There's often little recognition or support for these communities by the authorities.

At Oxfam, we recognise this injustice and believe it can and must be stopped.

Over the past decade, our climate-related work focused on supporting communities in Africa and Asia to become more resilient in the face of weather extremes and longer-term climate change. Under our new strategy, we are prioritising Climate Justice as a key area where we will focus our efforts. We will push governments and corporations in the Global North to alter their policies and take responsibility, whilst ensuring marginalised communities in climate-vulnerable regions lead in the development of just and transformative climate resilience solutions.

Marginalised communities most affected by poverty and vulnerability bear the brunt of the most severe climate-related impacts, despite having done the least to contribute to the climate crisis.

¹WMO (2021) *WMO Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes (1970-2019)*, accessed on 2nd November 2021 from https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10989, p.16

Faraj, 56, a farmer from rural Aleppo who lost his land due to drought. he had to abandon farming and find a job as a daily worker to survive with his family. Photo: Islam Mardini



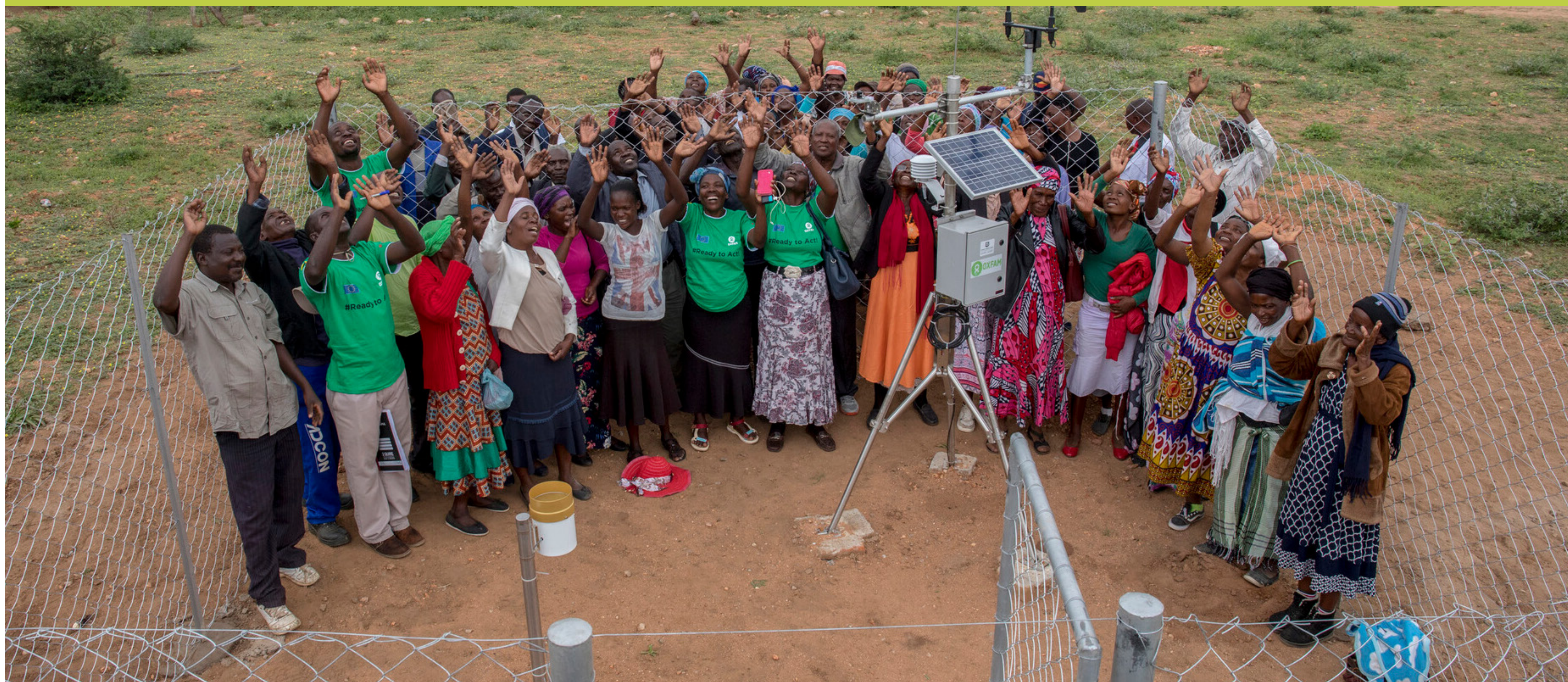
WHAT WE DID

Our climate justice work so far has focused on building individual and community resilience. We evaluated 28 of these projects, most of which were in rural settings in Africa and Asia. Many of these projects worked to enhance communities' ability to prepare for and reduce the impacts of climate-related disasters. Others focused on ways to build alternative sustainable household climate crisis. Our work also included influencing national and international climate policies.

The evaluations revealed that Oxfam's climate-related work has evolved over the past decade. We have moved away from focusing on diversifying livelihoods, and towards strategies that focus on bringing community members together in groups to engage in collective action and push for change to climate policies and financing.

We did this through:

- Strengthening and diversifying agricultural practices so they can be sustained in the face of climate shocks;
- awareness-raising and taking action on climate change adaptation;
- developing and raising awareness of community-based early warning systems;
- bringing community members together for collective action;
- influencing policymakers



Community members in Matobo pose for a photo at an Oxfam supported weather station in the community. The weather station, which is automated, helps community members receive text messages of weather updates such as early warning of floods. This in turn helps farmers make decisions about their crops. Photo: Cynthia Matonhodze/Oxfam

OUR IMPACT

We found that projects related to Climate Justice achieved mixed results, depending on each project's main objectives. All projects that focused on achieving climate policy change had a positive impact. Our work which sought to build community or individual resilience

was also successful – with 85% of projects leading to people being better able to cope with climate shocks and stresses. However, projects that sought to increase household income or wealth remained a challenge, with only 30% of these projects having long term impact.

85%

of projects led to people being better able to cope with climate shocks and stresses.



In Koutiala, San and Tominian, (Mali) the Regreening Africa project is working to reverse land degradation by encouraging smallholders to grow trees on their farms and revive existing ones. Photo: Diafara Traoré/Oxfam

WHAT WE LEARNT

The evaluations found that Oxfam had a positive impact on the capabilities of those we worked with – our work successfully raised people’s capabilities and skills in agricultural practices, livestock rearing, water management and collective organisation. These skills were important in leading to communities becoming more resilient but were less successful in increasing household incomes.

One approach to climate justice is to support sustainable and climate-resilient livelihoods. We worked with people to improve skills, alter practices, access credit or diversify crops. However, similarly to the findings under Valuing Women’s Work, we found that whilst this led to increased skills, and in half of the projects led to diversified incomes or greater production, it was insufficient to consistently increase household income. This suggests that, overall, focusing efforts on community resilience had a greater impact than a focus on individual households.

We found different results when it came to awareness raising. We have in the past decade worked with both communities and policymakers to raise awareness on climate change, adaptation strategies and early warning systems. Projects that aimed to raise awareness were successful when targeting policymakers, but we

saw less change in communities – possibly as many communities are already very conscious of these changes and have often already developed their own adaptation strategies. This insight has led to a greater focus on building on existing community capacities, knowledge and assets. It also highlights that we should continue seeking changes in national and international policy – where we were seeing positive impacts.

Work supporting coalitions, networks and alliances to influence national governments was largely successful. Many project teams noted that providing support to these networks made the most significant contribution towards achieving project objectives.

Most projects had a duration of between three and five years, yet many evaluations highlight that to achieve resilience and change climate policy, longer timespans are necessary. We are therefore working with others to advocate for and pilot longer-term funding approaches to confront climate-related issues, ensuring that we can tackle deep-rooted inequalities and bring about sustainable change more effectively.

In London activists gathered in Westminster outside the Houses of Parliament to protest against climate change on Friday, September 20. Photo: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Under our new strategy, Oxfam will focus on connecting policymakers with activists, community leaders and those that are most affected by the climate crisis – and to make sure that polluters take responsibility for their actions, that climate financing is available and that the people most impacted lead the development of just and transformative solutions.

Building on these evaluation findings we will no longer focus on increasing incomes at a household level, but instead focus on working with partners and communities on systemic solutions. The systems that govern people's land, agriculture, food, and energy are all integral to how communities adapt – we will work with leaders from the Global South to influence these systems to become more equitable for all.

Oxfam's climate-related work has evolved – moving from agricultural support to community action and challenging climate policies and financing to achieve change.



Women from two self-help groups in San Isidro have opened small shops with their pooled savings. ©Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam

**CASE STUDY:
WOMEN'S ACCESS
TO PAID WORK
IN CONFLICT-
AFFECTED AREAS
OF IRAQ**

Our evaluations have provided insights and the opportunity to refine our approach to initiatives in several areas. Our work in conflict-affected regions in Iraq is a valuable example that speaks both to our Valuing Women's Work and Extreme Vulnerability themes.

The project to improve "Safe Access to Resilient Livelihood Opportunities for Vulnerable Conflict-Affected Women in Kirkuk" was funded by UN Women and implemented jointly by Oxfam in Iraq and the Kirkuk office of the Iraqi Al Amal Association. We aimed to support women who had been displaced by conflict in their efforts to find paid work. The project also aimed to use grants and technical training to help women-owned businesses become more sustainable.

The evaluation found that while many women were engaged in livelihood activities during the project, these activities were not consistently sustained after project funding ended. This was due to a resurgence of armed conflict in rural areas and COVID-19 restrictions. Safety concerns and restrictions on movement meant that women's businesses established during the project were not able to continue in some areas. In urban areas, which did not see renewed conflict and where movement was safer and easier, the evaluation found that there was a more sustained impact, as more time could be allocated for follow-up activities.

In addition, the pandemic also led to a deterioration in the health of women and their family members, resulting in women's care work increasing and the hours they had available for income generating work decreasing.

This was found to have contributed to bringing the decline of economic activities.

The evaluation revealed that while grants and technical training were successful in supporting women-owned businesses, a more holistic approach to women's access to paid work was needed to achieve larger scale and longer-lasting results. It is important that grants and technical training are accompanied with strategies that aim to shift gender norms, consider childcare needs, and improve healthcare systems. Based on the evaluation, we also determined that longer-term projects would allow us to build stronger community relationships that we believe will lead to a more sustainable impact.

The results of this evaluation support Oxfam's new strategy to build resilience in conflict-affected areas by addressing root causes of poverty and conflict, and tackling the undervaluing of women's work. The Kirkuk case study demonstrates that:

- Approaches must be holistic: existing unpaid care expectations and gender norms must be acknowledged and challenged if we are to achieve our goals in valuing women's work and improving women's economic empowerment;
- Context matters: more sustained impact was achieved in urban areas compared with rural areas because of resurgent conflict in rural areas;
- Change takes time: Oxfam is moving towards longer-term projects that will establish more fruitful partnerships with local organisations and communities to effect systemic change.



Oxfam Emergency Response to Mosul Flooding. Photo: Oxfam

HOW WE WILL LEARN FROM IMPACT

Oxfam has consistently innovated and piloted new approaches in evaluation, learning and accountability practice. Today we are again evolving our approach, putting more focus on learning and how we use our knowledge to improve what we do.

Every year, we reported on how many people we reached through our programmes globally and evaluated the impact that certain projects - selected at random - had achieved. The rigorous evaluations that form the basis of this report allowed us to look 'beyond the numbers' and see the extent of our impact, understand what is and is not working, and what to do better. Together, these two processes enabled us to understand our scale and whether the work has led to positive changes in the lives of the people we work with.

But this is no longer enough.

Two fundamental changes in our understanding of impact have led us to again evolve, and create a new Learning and Accountability Framework. These are:

1. Who defines what should be measured?

Oxfam has been reflecting on the power dynamics that influence how impact is understood and measured. Defining success and measuring impact has historically been controlled by organisations based in the Global North, rather than by those who experience the changes we are seeking. By focusing on Western understandings of outcomes and ways of knowing, we have not adequately centred communities or in-country partners to decide what changes are meaningful to measure. Nor have we done enough to ensure that this learning is owned and used by the people closest to the changes.

2. Addressing root causes by working on systems change.

Sustained change is complex, occurring through the interactions of many actors. Assessing the impact of individual projects fails to capture systemic changes. At Oxfam, we are investing in impact through broad, dynamic portfolios of national and global initiatives. Our approach to learning is therefore moving from examining standalone projects, to one that looks for signs that systems are changing.

“These evaluations clearly show Oxfam’s commitment to accountability, measuring impact and learning. Tackling structural power imbalances in their new strategy encourages and challenges us, and the sector as a whole, to reflect on what needs to change in order to shift power and make the world fair and safe for everyone.”

Laura Chow, Head of Charities,
People’s Postcode Lottery.

Our new approach to learning about our impact is values-driven and intentionally focused on elevating the voices of civil society partners and people who we work with to shape what is measured, why and how. While Oxfam Great Britain will continue to undertake rigorous impact evaluations, they will look different under our new framework.

We will no longer randomly select projects for in-depth scrutiny. Instead, we will prioritise assessing innovative or strategic areas of work and contexts where there is an appetite for learning. Evaluations will be mainly led by regional and country teams, along with our partners. They will set the evaluation agenda, incorporating indigenous perspectives and definitions of success.

This new framework will focus on if and how systems have changed, led by curiosity and questions about impact. Doing so will help us check our assumptions about how change happens and make corrections along the way. We will review data across a wider portfolio of programmes and campaigns to identify trends and better understand how structural barriers are being dismantled.

This approach will include seeking regular feedback about how our programmes are experienced by those working in Oxfam country offices, and by our partners and communities. This feedback will inform how we can more effectively work with others to amplify our shared impact. This shift in approach will enable us to reflect, learn and adjust our work at a strategic level on a more regular basis, while working with in-country partners to strengthen their own learning and assess impact.

“In this new approach to Impact evaluation, we are offering space for diverse partners, such as women’s rights organizations, academia, private sectors, and grassroots partners, to be in the driver’s seat on the development of evaluation questions, determining how best to undertake the exercise, and work together collaboratively to make sense of the findings.”

Sumaiya Ferdous, Head of Programme Quality and Knowledge Management, Oxfam Bangladesh.



Mama Nora has always been interested in arts, she handmakes earrings, bags, clothes, and necklaces using tenun. After retirement she moved back to Kupang (she was working in Bali), and was invited to join the women’s community in her village. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Photo: M. Nugie and Andito Wasi/Oxfam

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The world has not stopped changing. Neither will we.

Oxfam led the way when we started our impact evaluations 10 years ago, but the world has not stopped changing. Neither will we. We will continue to rigorously assess the impact of Oxfam's work, listen to those we work with and our partners, and adapt to improve. We know that transforming in close collaboration with partners and communities builds the trust and clarity of ambition that is essential for positive impact.

As we learn from our past experiences and deepen our collaboration, we encourage you to follow our journey. We are confident that continual learning will keep us accountable to our commitments, our strategy - and to you and the communities we work with.

With your support, we will tackle extreme vulnerability, ensure women's work is properly valued, and enhance resilience to prevent the worst effects of the climate crisis.

Together we can create a radically better world where all people have the power and respect they need to thrive, not just survive.

See our website's Policy and Practice section for more information on our impact evaluations and insights.

<https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/>

Firefighter, Faith Bacela, 25yrs (right) stands for a portrait at the Working On Fire (WOF) headquarters in Mitchells Plain, South Africa. The need for firefighters has increased in the Western Cape in recent years as a result of increased wild fires caused by warmer temperatures and climate change. This project is funded by the European Union
Photo: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam



THANK YOU

Knowledge is power. When we have knowledge, we are entrusted by those we work with to use it, to learn, and ultimately to improve.

Dili, Timor-Leste: a member of ADTL (Association for the Disabled of Timor-Leste/Asosiasaun Defisiensiia Timor-Leste). ADTL are key partners in Oxfam's Open the Books program which focuses on increasing the capacity and confidence of the Timor-Leste disability movement to influence the state budget and government projects and policies, so they better meet the needs of persons with disabilities and uphold disability rights. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Photo: Keith Parsons/Oxfam



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WITH
POVERTY