A: Context, background and findings

1. The context and background of the evaluation, i.e. the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

In April 2015 Oxfam launched the 3-year renewal of Global Leaders Empowered to Alleviate Poverty (LEAP), a complex international multi-sectoral funding platform with three strands of work aimed at (1) defending and improving aid of traditional aid donors, (2) influencing the development cooperation strategies of certain emerging economies, and (3) increasing the availability and improving the use of agricultural budgets for small-holder farmers.

The focus of the mid-term review was on Oxfam’s Global LEAP work in 2015 and 2016, specifically the purpose was two-fold: (1) to identify lessons on which strategies and tactics have been effective in achieving our objectives in various contexts; and (2) to demonstrate the level and type of influence Oxfam (with allies) has had (if any) on key development effectiveness policies and practices.

The scope of the review included an overall assessment of the progress made and key lessons by strand. In addition, five case studies were conducted to provide a deeper review of progress and learning in particular countries and areas of work.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

In all three strands Oxfam contributed to a wider awareness and better understanding among citizens and decision makers of policy issues and other aspects related to the aid and development agenda. Oxfam’s contributions to creating enabling environments (in numerous policy influencing settings and domains) were tangible and widely appreciated by allies and partners. Emphasis in LEAP was mostly on policy influencing and evidence-based advising of influential actors and policy makers e.g. through policy briefings. Policy makers that were interviewed indicated that they particularly value Oxfam’s non-confrontational and well-informed advocacy approach and are more willing to listen to and consider civil society demands if forwarded in this manner. The appreciation of research and intelligence gathering stems from a widely-shared understanding that for policy influencing to be effective it needs to be based on robust evidence. Hence the importance that Oxfam attributed within the different strands to research, policy analysis and formulation of alternatives, which constitute building blocks of an evidence-based approach to influencing.

Recommendations

1. More comprehensive Theories of Change (ToC) are developed and proactively used for strategic decision making.

2. The way forward in having a stronger southern lead and participation in agenda setting, planning and implementation is to actively promote co-creation in planning, sharing of responsibilities, and ensure that allocation of resources is primarily guided by strategic priorities.

3. Oxfam themes such as on women smallholders, land or climate adaptation can be more systematically linked to or aligned with LEAP’s advocacy goals and demands.

4. At least maintain, but where possible intensify, efforts to seek and establish collaborative action and actively support coalition building within civil society across the globe and across the various sectors addressed in LEAP. Links with grass root level organisations and social movements may be established more systematically and consciously.

5. More considerations can be given to the (often considerable) role of major donor agencies and private sector agents in (context-specific) policy making at country level in the south and on how civil society can (indirectly via public policies) influence these processes and actors (working with ‘champions’, working groups, engagement of national spaces, et cetera).
6. Research planning and agenda should be part and parcel of regular strategic revision at Strand level. It is suggested to engage more in collaborative action research.

7. Carry out a systematic assessment of what competencies, collective capabilities (teams) and capacities (organisations) are required in LEAP. Subsequently capacity strengthening programmes can be organised which are practice-based and in which staff participate as equal partners and ‘teach’ and ‘learn’ from each other.

8. Identify and exploit opportunities of value-adding domain- or subject-specific collaboration between (sub-)teams.

9. Strategic decision making about the desired relative weight and priority of different interventions in specific settings should be based on a ToC-like consideration and analysis of desired change and possible areas of control and influence.

10. Strengthen downward and horizontal accountability and continue seeking more diverse spaces for learning from practice. Pay attention to identifying tacit issues (beyond the assumed intervention logic) and to double-loop learning. Take stock of embedded knowledge and best practices in selected areas related to LEAP.

11. Strategically reflect on what constitute good and appropriate (public) policies on the roles and modalities for private sector engagement in development.

12. Form a working group of staff from different LEAP teams to (1) assess needs and gaps in gender focused policy influencing, (2) take stock and assess internally embedded knowledge and expertise, (3) identify best practices and valuable expertise among external allies, and (4) draw up a plan to address the gaps and challenges.

13. Focus more on other financial flows such as remittances, DPP, Blended Finance, Domestic Resource Mobilisation et cetera. Alternative strategies, approaches, methods and tools need to be developed that surpass the philosophy, boundaries and operational orientation of the (OECD-DAC) framework.

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

3. Summary of evaluation quality assessment, i.e. quality of the evaluation is strong/mixed/poor and short assessment of the process (e.g. good, wordy report)

The quality of the evaluation was mixed. The review identified a number of relevant issues – strategic and internal process – to address in order to improve the effectiveness of LEAP teams. Some sections of the report and case studies were helpful in demonstrating Oxfam’s contribution and/or added-value in specific advocacy efforts, such as the case study on agricultural budget monitoring and advocacy in Ghana. There were a number of findings that while not surprising to the teams, were helpful to have validated from an external perspective. The process of the review, including the review of recommendations and development of this response, created a space for teams to discuss key issues and how to address them, which was very useful.

In spite of this, there were some weaknesses of the review. Most notable was the disproportionate focus on internal process rather than findings and recommendations related to advocacy strategy and tactics, which was meant to be the primary focus of the review. While we had hoped to glean from the review findings that could be applied by teams for planning in the final year of the grant, many of the findings were too broad for teams to apply to adjust their strategy or tactics, or not practical in terms of being outside of the scope of the LEAP initiative. There was little analysis about what would not have happened without the LEAP investment, or the extent to which internal issues compromised progress on external progress. In some areas of the report there was a mistaken equivalency of Global LEAP with Oxfam, while in reality this review only covered a very small part of Oxfam’s work. Finally, the findings/recommendations and the report itself, would have been greatly strengthened by a stronger presentation of the evidence base (quotes, references to key themes in the interviews).

4. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

**Strategy & Tactics**

The teams are currently in the process of reviewing their existing strategies and beginning the planning process for the next phase of the three key areas of work covered in the review, which will begin in April 2018. Our ability to implement a number of the recommendations in the Mid-Term Review is constrained due to limited time and resources, but is useful to consider for the grant renewal.
A. Strengthen Theories of Change and update Power Analyses: At the time of the mid-term review, the Aid and Agriculture teams were in the process of updating their theories of change, as part of a broader strategy review, which we expect to be completed by October 2017. As part of this process, and in relation to the recommendation related to advocacy targets the power analyses and mapping for each team will be reviewed and updated. The BRICSAMIT team will also revisit their theory of change and power analysis by the end of 2017. The recommendations in the review will be taken into account as part of these processes.

B. Update and strengthen strategies related to role of the Private Sector: While advocacy related to the role of Private Sector in development more broadly goes beyond the remit of this group (see section 5), the teams agree that the private sector is a key advocacy target for each of the areas of work covered by the review and as we are updating our strategies special attention will be given to expanding and improving our existing work in relation to the private sector. In order to do this the teams will build on work that has already been done in collaboration with Oxfam’s Private Sector teams, such as the development of a confederation framework and strategy related to donor private partnerships, to develop our strategy for the next phase of work. The agriculture advocacy team is exploring how to better address the interface between private sector and public policy and is considering how to better incorporate this aspect of work – potentially including private sector advocacy – into its work.

C. Improve existing strategies to more fully integrate gender justice: Each of the teams has recognized gender justice as an area of their work that needs to be strengthened; both in terms of increasing the capacity of team members and also in improving our strategies to more fully mainstream gender justice and, where appropriate, develop gender justice-focused areas of work. We agree and will take forward the very practical recommendation of first looking within Oxfam at the resources and experience available to us, then reaching out to partners and allies and then identifying where gaps exist. Within Oxfam we have a wealth of knowledge & expertise that we can learn from and perhaps draw upon, including a Women’s Economic Empowerment and Agriculture Knowledge Hub and colleagues in Oxfam Canada. There are also a number of analysis tools available for teams to use in reviewing their strategies.

D. Review and update our research agenda for the next phase of LEAP: Research remains a key component of Oxfam’s advocacy strategies, ensuring that all of our work is supported by a strong, credible evidence base. The review provides a number of recommendations for additional research, which will be taken into consideration for the next phase of the grant or which is already on the agenda. For example, the Aid and Development team plans to conduct case studies on blended finance projects to support the technical research reports, as is suggested in the report; this is in the pipeline to be completed at a later stage.

E. Expand advocacy related to aid and other sources of development finance. While sustaining and increasing pro-poor aid flows is critical and our main task, we acknowledge the increasing relevance of other sources of development finance and the role that aid can and must play in leveraging those. We are planning expanded research and advocacy work on aid for DRM in a set of countries/donors to ensure that reforms increase revenues in developing countries that are invested in the delivery of essential services like health, education and small scale agriculture.

Internal Processes and Ways of Working

F. Increase “Southern Leadership” in Global LEAP: In addition to our external advocacy for more country ownership and leadership in development, Oxfam is committed to also shifting the North-South balance of power within our organization and we share the consultants’ assessment that there are opportunities for increased southern leadership within Global LEAP teams. This includes increasing opportunities for staff working in Oxfam offices or affiliates in emerging donor countries and developing countries to fill leadership roles in teams and joint projects, as well as ensuring there is equal space for co-creation of strategies and plans. The review provided us with some concrete recommendations for how to do this, and through this process we have opened up dialogue within our teams and will continue to discuss how to take these recommendations forward over the coming months. In the meantime, team leads will take these recommendations into consideration not only for the strategic content, resourcing and leadership of the next phase of work, but also in the process itself of designing the work (e.g. ensuring co-creation). In addition, the Aid & Development Finance team is working together with Oxfam’s Pan Africa team to develop and deliver a strategy to ensure that there is a stronger Southern voice and leadership in the international debates around the future of development cooperation, aid effectiveness and in promoting pro-poor DRM. The teams hope to expand this work through additional resources in the next phase of the grant.
G. Increase intra and inter-Strand learning opportunities: We share the consultants’ assessment that there has been a disproportionate focus on upward accountability and increased attention should be given to learning and downward or horizontal accountability. Over the past year we have been making intentional efforts to create more spaces for learning and will continue to build and expand these efforts.

H. Increase alignment with existing campaigns/programmes and linkages between teams: This is an area that we have been working to improve in the current phase of the grant (building on our learning from the first phase); therefore, we appreciate the specific suggestions that were provided from the consultants. We will continue to build on strong working relationships between the Aid and BRICSAMIT teams, and the Aid team is looking at opportunities to benefit from the learning and relevant research examining two core areas of Oxfam advocacy - agriculture and climate finance - that has been done in the Agriculture team. In addition, we will continue to strengthen linkages with the broader Oxfam confederation campaigns and programmatic work in relevant countries to improve synergies but within existing responsibilities to the back donor and available resources and ensure that we are intentional and explicit on how the work fits together in the next phase of the grant.

I. Develop a plan to strengthen capacities of team members: We acknowledge the importance of and agree with the suggestion to map internal influencing capacity and resources (our short-term ability to do this will be limited due to current resources), and develop a plan to address gaps and create opportunities for staff to share their experience and knowledge with one another. For example, we have been holding learning webinars since late 2016 where staff can share experiences, practices, and reflections about implementation of Global LEAP across country teams and partners. We are trying to obtain more resources in the next phase of the grant for capacity building, as there are limits to what we are able to do with the current resources.

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

A. Generally speaking, some conclusions are misleading because there was a mistaken equivalency of Global LEAP with Oxfam, and the consultants addressed issues that were broader than the work covered by the Global LEAP grant, or they fell outside of the remit of the teams under review. One example of this is Oxfam’s work in relation to Private Sector; the recommendations refer to Oxfam’s overall strategy and position on the private sector while the review was limited to only Oxfam’s aid and agriculture related advocacy with donors engaging with the private sector on development. As a result, the consultants did not have access to all of the information that would have been necessary for a review of Oxfam’s Private sector engagement strategy. That said, as noted above, we agree generally with the recommendations related to expanding Oxfam’s work in relation to the role of the private sector in development.

B. Some findings and recommendations relate to work we are not currently fully funded to do in this phase of the grant; therefore we are not currently in a position to take the recommendations forward now but plan to in the next phase if we are able to secure resources.

C. While we agree with the current and growing importance of other financial flows, aid continues to be a very important development flow for many developing countries and is important for fighting inequality and eradicating poverty. Furthermore, in recent years, aid has been diverted toward refugee costs in donor countries, which creates significant pressure on bona fide aid for developing countries. We intend to continue our work on aid quality and quantity, along with allies, while also expanding our work on aid used to catalyze other flows, primarily private investment and DRM.

D. The case study on Oxfam’s work with the Network of Southern Think Tanks provides a number of helpful insights; however, we don’t feel the analysis captures the full depth of the issues, particularly in explaining important background details on how Oxfam and allies came to key decisions to develop the South-South Cooperation Monitoring Framework and to do it in the way it was done.

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

In the future, we will reconsider plans to do overall grant reviews and evaluations like this one, and instead will focus on individual team strategies or projects or countries within them as the unit of analysis. This will enable us to focus the evaluation on learning questions relevant to teams and to get more depth on specific areas. Because LEAP comprises different and distinct strands of work, all of which involve significant complexities, different country contexts and policy areas, evaluations will be more effective if they are by strand. In addition, we will ensure that the Scope of Work for future evaluations is more focused and clear about the evaluation objectives.
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| Date:     | August 28, 2017 | Country/Region/Campaign: Multi-country; Global LEAP Grant; Aid & Dev't Finance/Even it Up, Agric Investment/GROW, BRICSAMIT |