

10. Leveraging Evidence and Influence for Development: How Civil Society Works with and Through Government to Advance the SDGs

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INTRODUCTION

Civil society has a critical role to play in ensuring that no one is left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and partnerships between the State and civil society can help address capacity gaps and ensure that communities' needs are met. Dialogue between State and civil society can improve the institutionalization of evaluation, building demand for evidence to inform policy- and decision-making. Civil society can bolster social accountability and ensure that public policy is effectively targeted. And when State resources are constrained, civil society can help to bridge gaps in data and advocate for the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

We explore case studies from Oxfam staff and public-sector partners based in Mexico, Ethiopia and El Salvador. These partnerships have improved evaluation capacity and accountability in implementing protections against gender-based violence, supporting rural resilience and food security, and bolstering women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment. But what makes for effective partnerships between government and civil society? How can such partnerships be leveraged to elevate national evaluation capacities? What are the challenges that may emerge?

This session featured presentations from: Indrani Barrón and Alfredo González, Oxfam Mexico; Tilahun Gameda, Oxfam Ethiopia; and Iván Morales, Ana Liliana Vega and Ana Ella Gómez, Oxfam El Salvador (accompanied by two government representatives).

MEXICO: ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SDG 5)

How can civil society actors improve data quality for incidences of gender-based violence and support the implementation of legal frameworks that protect women and girls?

Mexico's normative framework developed to eliminate violence against women and girls is in accordance with international best practice, yet does not provide effective or efficient relief to women and girls in Mexico. According to the 2016 National Household Dynamics Survey, women in Mexico face high levels of violence. Of those women surveyed, 66 percent

have experienced physical, economic, emotional or sexual aggression at least one time in their lives. Furthermore, 43.9 percent report having experienced violence by their current or most recent partner, and 34.3 percent of woman experienced sexual violence in the form of intimidation, harassment, abuse or sexual violence.

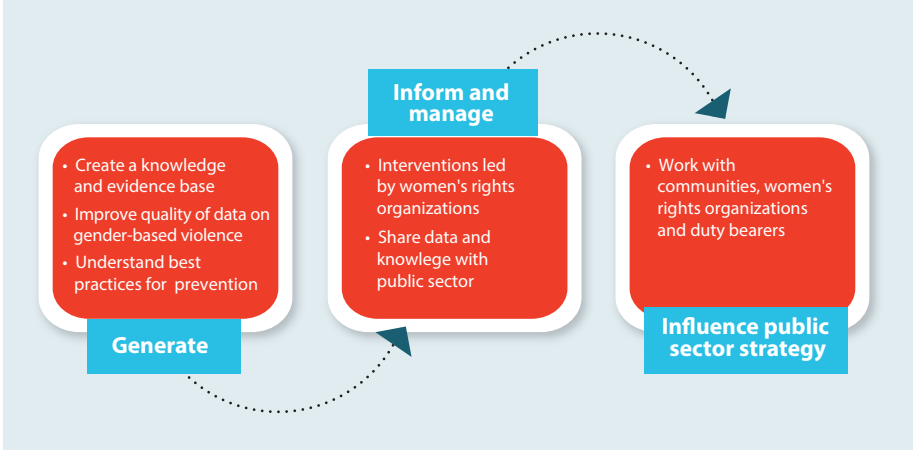
Mexican policymakers have acknowledged two critical gaps: data on gender-based violence, and appropriate mechanisms for dealing with incidences. Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, Mexican Minister of the Interior, stated earlier this year: “Sometimes a prosecutor that doesn’t know a thing about family violence, or doesn’t want to understand it, will say [in response to a domestic violence complaint]: ‘Come to an agreement with your husband, otherwise he will leave you. Come to an agreement and forgive him.’ You know what happens next? She’ll come back, but after she’s been abused a second time—or she’ll become a femicide statistic”.

From a rights-based perspective, the Mexican State is a duty bearer that ought to guarantee human dignity based on its constitutional principles. However, the State faces important challenges in implementing these protections. From public harassment to intimate partner violence, to workplace discrimination and to femicide, protocols have little effect in facilitating the reporting, processing and resolution of cases and therefore fail to meet their original purpose. Women and girls in Mexico are left with little access to justice. Cases that do receive attention from the State are those that are heavily and publicly advocated for by civil society, through mass media, social media or street protests.

The introduction of legislation is a key step in eliminating violence against women and girls, but laws on paper must be implemented in practice in order to address and prevent these failures against women’s rights. Recognizing that there is no standard approach for improving the implementation of such laws, Oxfam Canada has nonetheless identified seven key elements that impact effectiveness in implementation. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have important roles to play in service and information provision, education and training for implementing actors and inter-actor coordination, among other activities. CSOs can generate social accountability by providing information that can tackle the following gaps at the state level in implementation of laws aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls: weak institutional design; unclear mandate; lack of planning; soft power; lack of indicators; limited budgets; lack of human resources; and weak governance.

Oxfam Mexico recognizes this as a pressing need in eliminating violence against women and girls, but also as an opportunity to bolster democratic engagement, rights reclamation and dialogue between civil society and the public sector. The first step is identifying the processes in the Mexican system that need that most need data on gender-based violence, pursuing the strategy outlined in Figure 1. Oxfam Mexico has worked to bolster social accountability as a strategy and mechanism through which communities can achieve better gender outcomes in the elimination of violence against women and girls.

FIGURE 1. BRIDGING THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP BY BOLSTERING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS



ETHIOPIA: RURAL RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY (SDG 2)

How can civil society shape how the government understands, measures and addresses rural resilience?

The R4 Rural Resilience Initiative is strategic partnership initiative between Oxfam and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) which provides an integrated risk management tool to vulnerable, food- insecure farmers to build their resilience. The programme integrates four risk management strategies: improved management of natural resources and diversification of livelihoods (risk reduction); weather index insurance (risk transfer); microcredit (prudent risk taking); and savings (risk reserves). The programme seeks to improve the resilience of farmers to weather shocks, improve their livelihoods and enhance their food security.

Oxfam and the WFP have complemented R4 implementation work with policy and advocacy efforts designed to increase scale and impact. Partners recognized that the key to ensuring the sustainability of the R4 model was through the creation of an enabling policy and regulatory environment. Accordingly, Oxfam and the WFP, in direct partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, sought to:

- Mainstream the R4 model into existing government safety nets (the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)) to increase scale, to ensure programme sustainability and to make integrated financial and risk management solutions accessible to the chronically poor;
- Contribute to the creation of an effective and viable index insurance market;
- Demonstrate to relevant stakeholders, using evidence, the importance of cross-sectoral, integrated risk management approaches to build the resilience of vulnerable communities.

R4 has shaped the way the Ethiopian Government approaches risk management for smallholder farmers. Some examples of successes include:

Promoting integrated approaches to risk management through safety nets: In 2013, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector (DRMFSS) of the Ministry of Agriculture, WFP and Oxfam to explore the possibility of integrating R4 into the PSNP. As part of this effort, a steering committee has been established, represented by stakeholders from a range of organizations including Oxfam, WFP, International Labour Organization, Early Warning and Response Directorate, Relief Society of Tigray and Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara. This outcome is attributed to the R4 team's presence in key government committees, particularly the DRMFSS of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Influencing the design and implementation of pro-poor financial services: The success of the R4 initiative has attracted a range of local stakeholders including Ethiopia's private sector to the idea of insurance for work and weather index insurance. This represents a shift, as financial service providers and the private sector have historically resisted investing in micro-insurance projects due to perceived risk and failure to scale or demonstrate sustainability. In partnership with R4, major national and regional financial institutions in Ethiopia now offer weather index-insurance products through the PSNP, including Nyala Insurance, the Africa Insurance Company and Debit Credit and Savings Institution. Moreover, partners such as Japan International Cooperation Agency and CARE Ethiopia have reached out to the R4 team for programme design support and have since begun piloting their own weather-index projects for rural resilience modeled explicitly after R4.

Influencing the Disaster Risk Management Strategic Programme and Investment Framework: The R4 index insurance experience informed the design of the Government's Disaster Risk Management Strategic Programme and Investment Framework. The Horn of Africa Risk Transfer Adaptation pilot initiative was also featured as an example in the strategy document.

EL SALVADOR: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (SDG 5)

How can governments and civil society combine their expertise to provide financial inclusion services at scale?

Oxfam and the Government of El Salvador (Ciudad Mujer and the Agricultural Development Bank) have worked together to address women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion. To this partnership, each actor brings unique strengths. Ciudad Mujer, a public sector programme that seeks to improve women's living conditions through economic empowerment, borrowed Oxfam's savings group methodology to expand at scale. Oxfam turned the formation of new savings groups over to Ciudad Mujer. In addition, the Agricultural Development Bank and Oxfam joined forces to develop a financial product that was in line with the reality of the women of the savings groups.

Role of Oxfam: Oxfam has developed women's savings groups in El Salvador for more than a decade, with a tried-and-tested methodology. Given that the vast majority of rural women in El Salvador do not have access to financial services, Oxfam in El Salvador adapted

a savings group model already well-established by African Oxfam affiliates. The essential characteristic of savings groups is that the money saved and the credits they provide are the women's own resources, regulated, administered and managed by the women themselves. Savings groups hold regular meetings to save and lend and have a steering committee that leads and ensures compliance with the rules established by the group. The methodology in El Salvador was refined over time, in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank. Today, Oxfam continues to develop savings groups with an emphasis on young people, seeking to strengthen existing groups and fostering networks of savings groups for change, which allows them to have a greater impact on their communities and gain influence on public policies.

Role of Ciudad Mujer: Ciudad Mujer is a programme within the Secretariat of Social Inclusion that seeks to improve the living conditions of Salvadoran women in a dignified and equitable manner with full respect for their rights. The programme provides specialized services in sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, human rights literacy and economic empowerment. Ciudad Mujer designed a programme to strengthen and develop technical and business skills, aimed at promoting productive entrepreneurship. This programme allows women greater economic autonomy and income generation, resulting in a decrease in gender-based violence due to economic dependence.

Ciudad Mujer is currently developing community savings groups at its Morazán headquarters and it is expected to expand it to all the country headquarters. Similarly, the Agricultural Development Bank has savings and credit lines for the groups, initiated in the department of Morazán and under expansion to the departments of Chalatenango, La Libertad and elsewhere. Additionally, Ciudad Mujer, in alliance with other actors, designed a pilot project for financial inclusion, creating a line of credit adapted to the realities of rural women. This pilot experience is the basis for the design of a public policy that integrates an inclusive financial model for women in El Salvador.

Role of the Agricultural Development Bank of El Salvador: The Agricultural Development Bank is a State financial institution that provides access to financial services in several sectors and seeks to support food security and employment generation. The Bank grants agricultural and agro-industrial loans, as well as savings and credit lines for community savings groups, which mainly benefit women from vulnerable sectors of the country. Loans to savings groups required new internal protocols for the Bank, designed with the participation of savings group members.

This experience is an example of how the good work developed by CSOs can influence the public policies adopted by a State institution.

CONCLUSION

The discussion following the panelists' respective presentations illuminated the following key takeaways:

- Public—non-governmental organization (NGO)—people partnerships are essential to ensuring programme effectiveness, scale-up and sustainability.

- Evidence-based practice matters, and monitoring, evaluation and learning practitioners in NGOs and the public sector have a key role to play in ensuring that evidence informs design.
- Being responsive and adaptive is critical for programme quality, so that programme design meets the needs of the people we work with.

Given the ambitious development agenda set by the SDGs, partnerships are essential for filling gaps in data and capacity, generating an evidence base to inform policy and practice and holding duty bearers accountable.