



CAT Evaluation – Management Response

Prepared by Deborah Simpson, Manager – Program Impact

December 18th 2020

A: Context, background and findings

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

Background on the CAT

Since 2009, Oxfam Canada (OCA) has used a suite of Capacity Assessment Tools (CAT) in its projects aiming at strengthening civil society and women’s rights organizations (CSOs/WROs) as gender just organizations. The “tool” in capacity assessment tool refers to workshop manuals OCA-funded projects use to guide project partner CSOs/WROs through self-assessments of their organizational capacities and prioritization of action steps for capacity strengthening. The capacities that organizations assess while working through the CAT manuals are ones that OCA has “identified as central to building strong, effective organizations with the capacity to advance women’s rights and gender justice.” Diverse staff of an organization, and occasionally volunteers and Board members, participate in the 2-3 day workshop. Facilitators may be Oxfam staff or contracted for the task and have a role to be “critical friends” in the workshop to help partners reflect on their own capacities and behaviours.

Based on the results of the participatory discussion, partners identify priorities for capacity strengthening. Following the workshops, partners are meant to plan and carry out capacity strengthening activities tailored to the needs and strengths they identified. OCA projects plan for partners to carry out three such facilitated workshops, at the beginning, midline and endline of a project, to help partners monitor progress and adjust their capacity strengthening plans. In between, manuals suggest partners do annual, lighter self-assessments and that Oxfam project staff monitor partners’ progress against capacity plans. Beyond that rule of thumb, resources and approaches for supporting CAT workshops and related capacity strengthening activities has varied considerably in practice depending on project context.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The overall objective of the evaluation was to help OCA determine whether the CAT has worked in achieving its original goal of organizational strengthening of partner organizations to become more gender just. More specifically,

- 1) Has the CAT supported organizational capacity strengthening of partner organizations, particularly in relation to gender justice?
- 2) If so, should OCA continue to use the CAT as a key programming tool in our projects and programs? What modifications could OCA make to strengthen the CAT tools and process?
- 3) Is there value in re-branding and/or marketing the CAT as a tool for a wider development audience?



Between May-September 2020, a team of three independent consultants conducted a feminist, participatory, and utilization-focused evaluation of the CAT process commissioned by OCA's Program Impact Unit (PIU). The evaluation aimed to understand Oxfam's CSO and WRO partners' perceptions of the CAT process and how it could improve. While OCA partners across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia have used the CAT, it was only possible to interview partners from one region given the limited time and funding available for the evaluation. As such, we elected to focus the evaluation on our partners in Asia, specifically in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Pakistan. OCA has partners working on different projects in each of these countries which enabled the evaluation to consider different versions of the CAT currently in use.

The team conducted 20 semi-structured key informant interviews with CSO/WRO representatives, consulted with 27 Oxfam and CSO/WRO staff, and conducted a series of focus groups with OCA staff. All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted online given the evaluation was taking place during the global COVID 19 pandemic. In addition, the team conducted extensive desk review including to benchmark OCA's approaches to comparative self-assessment and capacity strengthening models. In keeping with feminist principles and core concerns behind the evaluation, data collection and analysis centred the perspective of OCA's local partner CSOs/WROs and to some extent the perspectives of Oxfam country teams familiar with the CAT process.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

Findings from the evaluation suggest that partners have generally positive views of the CAT self-assessment workshop and the potential for the process to positively affect their organizations in a sustainable way. Partners found value in the workshop itself and in the values clarification discussions in some versions of the CAT. They were engaging in capacity strengthening activities with their own resources in the absence of or while waiting for OCA support to be available. Trainings that Oxfam provided to cohorts of partners in response to common capacity strengthening needs did not leave an impression.

Among informants who used or were familiar with other self-assessment methods, most preferred the CAT workshop or saw it as complementary to tools in use at their organizations. Still others noted that organizational self-assessments are a common approach on which they were happy to be getting experience for the first time. These positive reactions centred mostly on the self-assessment methodology, holistic organizational focus, and/or action learning orientation of the CAT. Four informants familiar with other capacity self-assessment tools cited the overall gender justice focus and/or the specific technical content (for example in the CAT4EVAWG or CAT4SRHR) as unique.

The evaluation identified a number of ways in which the CAT process was or was not meeting partners' needs related to the CAT manuals, workshop plans, workshop facilitation, the online data visualization/storage tool, planning and budgeting following a self-assessment, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and support systems for the CAT process. Partners valued the participatory method and way in which it brought individuals from different functions in the organization together to discuss capacity priorities. One particular concern was ownership of the process. Partners felt they did not have a choice to participate and had diverse needs and preferences for the content of the tool and workshop plans that were not being fully met.



Informants were positive about workshop facilitation particularly when facilitators knew the organization and the CAT material well. Possession of regional language skills was important for some facilitators as well as workshop documenters. Findings support training CAT workshop facilitators, as well as workshops documenters. The online tool was not working well, including because it focused on numerical scores rather than full process documentation which informants felt was more important.

Despite positive workshop experiences, findings suggest room for improvement in Oxfam's follow up from the self-assessment workshops. OCA communications to country teams and to partners about the process and plans post-workshop happened in a piecemeal way, if at all. Informants including Oxfam country staff were unclear about what should be taking place outside the initial self-assessment workshop, why, and how best to support it. Negative consequences due to the lack of clarity and communication ranged from delays and frustrations in finalizing capacity strengthening plans to damaging partners' trust in Oxfam's responsiveness to partners' priorities. Partners were not aware of expectations to conduct regular self-monitoring of capacity strengthening progress.

Overall, the evaluation recommends OCA continue to use the CAT in its projects. Based on the findings, feedback from informants, OCA FGDs, and benchmarking, the evaluation discussed 39 recommendations OCA should consider implementing to enhance its capacity strengthening approach overall, of which the CAT is a part. These relate to institutional knowledge and leadership, foundations of OCA's capacity strengthening approaches, ongoing learning, partner ownership, managing the donor funding context, accessibility to participants, gender justice content, facilitation, workshop documentation, strategy & planning, capacity strengthening resources and approaches, and monitoring and evaluation. As detailed in an annex providing action planning guidance, 31 of the 39 recommendations on modifications require low levels of effort by OCA and associated costs are project recoverable. The remaining recommended modifications require varying levels of effort, though only three to five of them may require use of unrestricted funds.

While there is work for OCA to do in order to align with general good practices in capacity strengthening, the benchmarking process also showed that capacity strengthening guided by feminist values is not common. This is particularly true within an international donor-funded context. This suggests that OCA has potentially valuable contributions to make from continuing to pursue and refine its capacity strengthening approaches. Before marketing the CAT, OCA should complete prerequisites suggested by OCA staff that overlap with recommended modifications. The evaluation also recommends forming a learning community within Oxfam and/or with like-minded organizations on feminist capacity strengthening over marketing at this stage.

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 strong, both in terms of the conduct of the evaluation and the resulting report (including findings and recommendations). The evaluation drew on three main



methods, all of which were virtual due to COVID 19: desk review of existing documentation on the CAT, key informant interviews with project partners and Oxfam Canada staff, and focus group discussions with Oxfam Canada staff. As such, the evaluation provided a great deal of useful information on how to use and modify the CAT going forward and most importantly the first finding that though partners value the CAT as a capacity strengthening tool, Oxfam Canada can do more to accompany its partners in their capacity strengthening journey. This opens up an important discussion for Oxfam Canada about how it wishes to accompany its project partners in their goal of capacity strengthening. This has the potential to create further work in capacity strengthening beyond that which Oxfam Canada is already engaged. Further resources, both human and financial, will likely be needed in order to implement all of the recommendations relating to capacity strengthening.

The evaluation report outlined 42 recommendations and included an Annex prioritizing and indicating possible methods for implementing the recommendations which has been extremely helpful in drafting the Action Plan. The report was written clearly and concisely and structured so as to be beneficial to those tasked with implementing its recommendations.

4. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

The first step taken in response to the evaluation was to assess the findings and recommendations outlined in the evaluation. A detailed action Plan was developed in which the recommendations were grouped by theme and in terms of whether they were short, medium, or long term recommendations. The Program Impact Unit decided that hiring a consultant in organizational capacity strengthening would be a strong initial follow-up action which would help to guide further work in the area of capacity strengthening. This consultant will be engaged in:

- (a) Updating and clarifying the internal rationale, principles, and process for engaging in capacity strengthening and the role of the CAT within that framework.
- (b) Developing and sharing relevant guidance, procedures and recommendations for Oxfam Canada relating to capacity strengthening based on international good practices that could be adapted to multiple projects, but keeping the focus on a feminist approach.

The Program Impact Unit also held a workshop on December 2nd 2020 with IPD colleagues to share the findings and recommendations of the CAT Evaluation and to have a discussion about the proposal to engage in further capacity strengthening support with project partners. Each Unit is providing detailed feedback on the Action Plan which was circulated in order to ensure support for that action plan amongst the IPD as a whole.

Early in 2021, we will be organizing a consultation with Country Teams and Project Partners to share the findings and recommendations of the CAT Evaluation and to engage in a conversation similar to that of the IPD conversation aimed at gaining support for this enhanced work on capacity strengthening.

5. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon - and why *(this reflection should consider the results of the evaluation quality assessment)*



Though we see the value in hiring a Capacity Strengthening/Organizational Development specialist, this is something which will be a goal going forward rather than something we can initiate immediately. In the meantime, we will be using the Organizational Capacity Strengthening consultancy to explore possibilities related to enhancing Oxfam Canada's foundations in capacity strengthening and the internal knowledge of Oxfam Canada staff in organizational capacity strengthening.

Recommendation 4: Ensure country office program teams possess or have access to advisers with locally-specific knowledge of capacity strengthening and civil society. This is beyond the scope of our work as responsibility lies with the Country Teams.

Recommendation 12: Give partners the option not to use a self-assessment, to use another tool, or to use the CAT in a semi-autonomous unit within the organization/network. Given that we build the CAT into our funding proposals with GAC (and potentially other donors) it would be difficult to make the CAT optional.

Recommendation 15: If resources are not available from OCA projects or partners themselves for capacity strengthening activities, do not ask partners to carry out a self-assessment. Given that the CAT is included in our project proposals to GAC (and potentially other donors), we are not in a position to waive the need for partners to carry out a self-assessment. However, we can work to ensure sufficient funding for capacity strengthening activities. We also received valuable insights about the ability to re-prioritize actions within additional funding.

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

The evaluation process was a useful exercise in terms of learning how to conduct evaluations remotely due to COVID 19. Flexibility in the use of online platforms (e.g. Skype, Zoom) and reverting to telephone interviews when needed allowed the consultants to gather the required information from Country Teams and project partners. Similarly, online focus group discussions played a valuable role in triangulating the information gathered through interviews. The success of this remote evaluation suggests that in future it may not be necessary to have consultants travel to interview Country Teams, Project Partners, and Oxfam Canada staff.

We saw a marked difference in feedback given to the evaluators versus that shared by the Oxfam project staff. This is worthy of follow-up, potentially including re-deploying a social accountability exercise with our partners.