



Evaluation of 'Integrated Action on Poverty and Early Marriage' Programme in Yemen

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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Executive summary

Background

The prevalence of early marriage in Yemen is the highest in the Middle East and North Africa region. Oxfam GB Yemen has been implementing a primarily Danida-funded project entitled 'Integrated Action on Poverty and Early Marriage' over the period 2005-2008. The project works towards reducing the practice of early marriage through campaign and advocacy and enhancing economic opportunities of women through advocacy, micro-leasing and business development services. The project also intends to strengthen the capacity building of core partners.

Methodology

The final evaluation focuses on assessing relevance to national policy directions, progress towards the achievement of objectives (effectiveness) and effects on target groups (impact). The team relied on extensive literature review of documents, semistructured interviews with key stakeholders and eleven focus group meetings.

Main findings

The project is generally **in line with national development policies** and directions. The challenge is how the project will interact and contribute to national priorities in practice.

Linkages between the early marriage and livelihood components were intended in the project design but not established in practice. The two components were run separately as sub-projects.

The campaign on early marriage was initiated in 2005 with the Shima network as core partner, an informal network of 17 organisations. The resistance met at the inception of the campaign has dampened overtime. Target groups seem to have increased their acceptance of and awareness about the safe age of marriage. Religious leaders were not directly targeted and remain the main opponents of the campaign. Change in attitude has been modestly taking place, though it not always translated into a change in practice. Some cases of delaying marriage to 18 years have taken place, where girls have the alternative of attending girl schools nearby.

Advocacy for a legal age of marriage (18 years) is still striving for the introduction of national legislation on marriage age in line with its objective. The resistance of parliamentarians continues. The absence of religious arguments and tailored messages in the campaign was mostly felt at the national level, where target groups were parliamentarians, many of who are religious leaders.

Advocacy on women's employment in the public and private sectors has been initiated less than a year ago and been progressing towards moderate changes in action in the public sector in line with the livelihood component objective. Advocacy directed towards the private sector remains weak.

The employment office and database has been effectively operating since end 2007. It facilitated the employment of a modest number of women. The office has also been serving men and risks being mistaken for the civil employment office.

Micro-leasing activities have been expanding since 2006 but have also funded household assets. Activities created opportunities for self-employment and enhanced the potentials

for improved income, contributing greatly to achieving the livelihood component objective.

The NGO Advisory Bureau, an informal network of NGOs, was established to provide business development services in end 2007. Activities have, however, been focused on business facilitation and awareness-raising on women's employment.

Capacity building activities started in 2005 and were mainly directed towards the Shima network, through training of members and payment of staff salaries and operating expenses. The effects on strengthened capacity are evasive.

Recommendations

Linkages between the core components should be reconsidered in the context of a scenario analysis that envisages maintaining the current project structure, altering some aspects to it or fully separating the components.

Project design should work towards establishing realistic objectives and targets and allow for a sufficient inception phase. Some concepts presented (e.g. capacity building) should be more clearly defined. More attention to monitoring and evaluation should be given, also during implementation.

The organisational/contractual set-up should be revisited in relation to working with informal networks. Contracting modalities should be carried out in a systematic manner, clarifying roles, responsibilities and deliverables of all partners including Oxfam.

The role of Oxfam as donor or implementer should be clarified. Modalities of engaging partners via yearly request for proposals should be reconsidered.

Well-researched and tailored strategies or procedures for component and subcomponents should be devised and adopted to guide activities and annual planning sessions throughout the life of the project. For the **early marriage component**, campaign and advocacy strategies that target agents of changes within families and in the local community are most relevant. For the **livelihood component**, an employment advocacy strategy targeting the private and public sectors is recommended. A market expansion strategy and risk management and monitoring procedures for micro-leasing are recommended.

Synergies and coordination with other ongoing advocacy or other Oxfam or YDPP projects should be identified and cultivated more systematically.

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