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# OXFAM - SUPPORTED NETWORKS IN VANUATU

## Review Report

Monitoring the progress and value of the Disability,  
Youth Livelihoods and Program Quality Networks



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# SUMMARY

In 2013, as part of its Governance, Leadership and Accountability (GLA) program, Oxfam began facilitating three networks – Disability, Youth Livelihoods and Program Quality. The overall goal was to improve collaboration between civil society actors so that they could then advocate more effectively to decision makers and contribute to greater change for their constituents.

Formal, sector-based civil society networks are relatively new in Vanuatu, especially those with a focus on disability, youth livelihoods and program quality. This review helps to determine the value of these networks to support civil society, what outcomes are possible through collective action, Oxfam’s contribution as facilitator and what is required to ensure the networks are effective.

The review found that, despite the early stage of the networks, they are working well to improve collaboration and joint action between members. Some tangible changes for network members include:

- new technical and administrative skills to strengthen their work and leadership abilities
- greater understanding of each other’s work, as well as external stakeholders’ activities and requirements
- collaboration on joint activities and strategies to address common issues
- improved relationships with each other and external bodies such as government and donors
- collective contribution to government policies and plans.

The review found that decision-makers such as Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and various Vanuatu government departments are seeking input from the networks, listening to their ideas and taking action to better include the networks’ constituents in their programs. Oxfam’s contribution to the networks has been to initiate and convene them, play administrative roles of communication and coordinating members to come together and technical roles of facilitating strategy and action planning as well as external relationships. While there are various challenges in convening the networks—largely due to limited resources—the main benefit of this role is Oxfam’s ability to contribute to advocacy and strengthening civil society in Vanuatu in an effective, locally-appropriate way.

To ensure the networks continue to function well and contribute to greater changes, it is recommended that each network: review its purpose, strategy, membership and network activities; develop a greater understanding of advocacy and sector contexts; improve internal and external communication and ensure more regular and comprehensive monitoring. Acknowledging the value of Oxfam’s facilitation role, Oxfam should: continue and improve on its current role, increase capacity building opportunities for member organisations, identify and link with external opportunities and clarify their future role and transition strategy.

The networks are playing a valuable role in supporting civil society in Vanuatu so far, and with continued focus on their strategies to engage both their constituents and decision-makers, they have the potential for even greater impact in future.

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# PROJECT BACKGROUND

Oxfam in Vanuatu has been implementing the Governance, Leadership and Accountability (GLA) Program since July 2013. A major component of this program is the initiation and support of civil society organisation (CSO) coalitions. Specifically this involves three CSO networks: Disability, Youth Livelihoods and Program Quality. Following consultations with a range of civil society groups in early 2013, the networks were initiated by Oxfam in August/September 2013 and have been supported by Oxfam since then.

## Network profiles

### **Vanuatu Disability Network**

*Meeting since:* 6 September 2013

*Member organisations:* Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (DPA), Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) and Sanma Disability Officer, Vanuatu Society for Disabled People(VSDP), Vanuatu Paralympic Committee (VPC), Save the Children, Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector Strengthening Program, Pikinini Play Time, Rainbow Disability Theatre, CARE International, Malvatumauri, Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), independent consultants.

*Number of meetings held:* 8

### **Vanuatu Youth Livelihoods Network**

*Meeting since:* 29 August 2013

*Member organisations:* Farm Support Association (FSA), Save the Children, Vanuatu National Youth Council (VNYC), Youth Challenge Vanuatu (YCV), Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), Vanuatu Rural Development Training Centres Association (VRDTCA), Vanuatu Education Policy Advocacy Coalition (VEPAC), Australia Pacific Training College (APTC), Leadership Vanuatu (LV).

*Number of meetings held:* 6

### **Vanuatu Program Quality Network**

*Meeting since:* 23 August 2013

*Member organisations:* Vanuatu Church Partnership Program (VCP), Red Cross Volunteer program, CARE International, World Vision International, Program Management Unit/Vanuatu Meteorological and Geo-Hazards Department (PMU), Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), Save the Children, FSA, Ministry of Justice, Vanuatu Law and Justice Program, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Prime Minister's Office, Vanuatu Netball Association, independent consultants.

*Number of meetings held:* 6

# SCOPE OF REVIEW

## Purpose and use of review

After one year of network operation, Oxfam commissioned this review of the networks to:

- investigate and provide evidence of the effectiveness of Oxfam's brokering/ facilitation role with CSO networks
- understand network members' experiences within the network and their perception of Oxfam's role and value
- investigate both the process (way of working) and outcomes (changes) associated with the networks
- better understand how the networks are contributing to outcomes/ changes so as to refine program logic and M&E to reflect this.

The review will be used primarily by Oxfam in Vanuatu to influence the development and/or revision of the country strategy, program planning and for learning that can be applied to the other networks Oxfam in Vanuatu facilitates. It is also intended for use by Oxfam Australia to provide evidence of program effectiveness and feed into discussions on regional practice. Secondary users, including network members, Oxfam partner organisations, Oxfam New Zealand, donors, civil society and government in Vanuatu, can use the review to determine the value of coalitions and CSO collaboration in Vanuatu and the potential to work together in future.

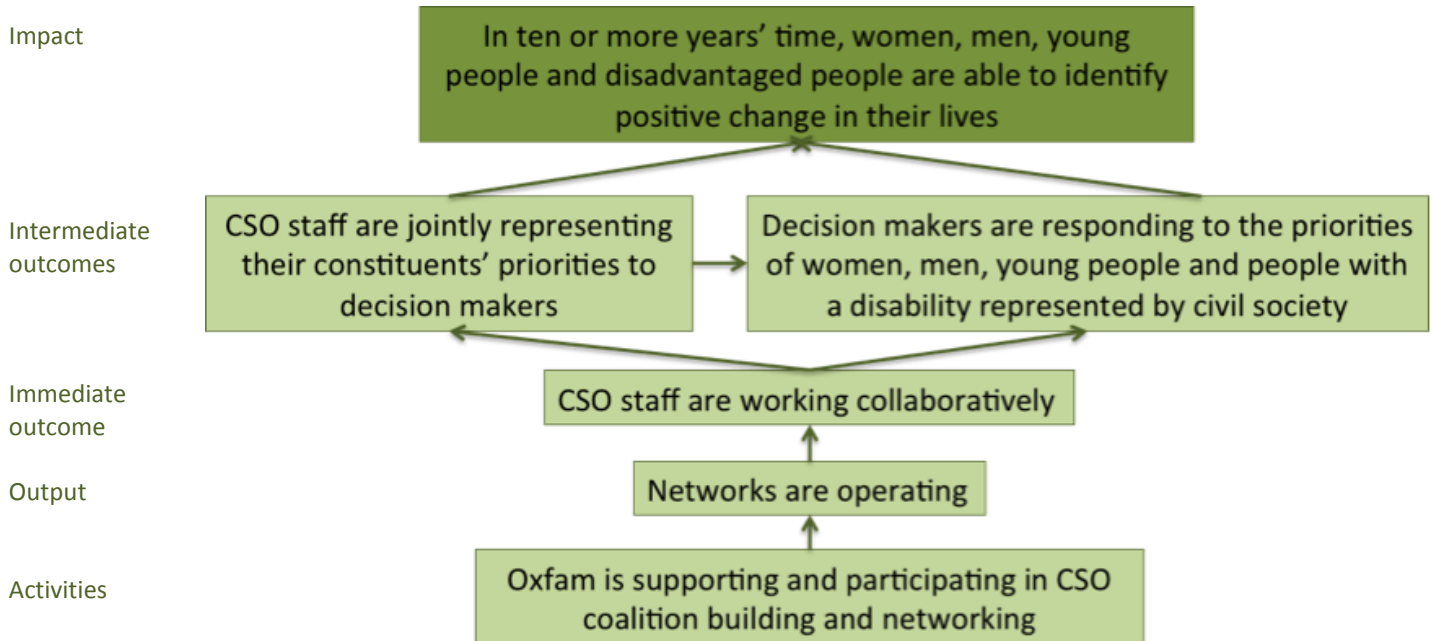
## Methodology

The review was conducted by an external consultant, working in close collaboration with Oxfam staff in Vanuatu. It was intended to be a 'light' review, yet still included: a full document review including member monitoring surveys, key informant interviews with 15 network members, three Oxfam staff and two DFAT staff and a reflection workshop with Oxfam staff. The following key evaluation questions guided the review:

- How well are the networks functioning?
- What are the networks achieving?
- How is Oxfam contributing to the function and outcomes of networks?
- How appropriate are networks for achieving change for civil society?
- How well have we been measuring the 'success' of networks?

# Program Logic

The program logic relating to the network component of the GLA program describes the following impact, intermediate and immediate outcomes, output and activities:



The networks are intended to work together with other program interventions such as direct organisational and funding support to local CSOs to contribute to these long-term outcomes. At this early stage in the program, this review will determine if network activities have had any influence on or laid the foundations for these longer-term changes.

# FINDINGS

## 1. Network effectiveness: Activities and immediate outcomes within the network

This section will look at the collective and individual activities of each network, and the immediate outcomes or changes that members have experienced during their involvement.

### i. Network operation

All networks were started in August/September 2013, and have each conducted six-eight meetings in that time. Meetings were held either at the Oxfam office or hosted by a network member. Meetings were seen by members as structured and regular ways to interact, and all networks displayed high attendance rates of at least eight - 14 members attending each meeting. Members of the Disability network were seen to have the most consistent membership, while Youth Livelihoods often experienced changes in staff representing member organisations.

### ii. General activities in all networks

All network meetings use an agenda developed (through member discussion) and circulated beforehand. In the Disability and Youth Livelihoods Networks, meetings are chaired on a rotating basis by one female and one male network member, while the Program Quality Network meetings are facilitated by network members in a shared schedule. All network meetings include general sharing of relevant organisational and sector information, knowledge and expertise. They are seen by members as a respectful environment to exchange ideas. The first few meetings of each network were dedicated to defining members' expectations, developing a purpose statement and Terms of Reference. These, along with each network's particular characteristics, influenced their specific activities and outcomes over the review period.

### iii. Network-specific activities, characteristics and outcomes

#### *Disability Network*

Overall, the Disability Network appears to be fulfilling its purpose of creating a forum for sharing ideas and strategies, learning together, supporting each other and working together to address key issues. It developed a strategy and action plan based around two prioritised goals of Accessibility (to roads and buildings) and Access to Education. Members committed to carrying out various activities in the action plan, which they then reported on in subsequent meetings. They also received presentations relevant to this strategy by a range of external parties including Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities and the Port Vila Urban Development project. When asked to participate in the planning process for the Vanuatu National

Sustainable Development Plan, network members contributed ideas which were then presented by one member representative.

#### Key Characteristics of Disability Network

- Committed members, many of whom are decision-makers
- Consistent participation
- Clear, common purpose
- Identified priorities and strategy for action
- Advocate on same issue at same time
- Shared responsibilities for action among members
- Members support each other in their work

Members report now having stronger relationships with other network members and are talking and collaborating more outside of network meetings. For example, various network members worked together to conduct a survey of people with disabilities for the Port Vila Urban Development Project. Relationships were built faster between DFAT project staff and members as the network was seen as a 'communication focal point'. Through their collective input into government plans and policies, members improved their advocacy skills and saw the value of a united voice listened to by government. Members also reported increased credibility and legitimacy in the disability sector in Vanuatu through their involvement in the network; for example, one member was invited to join a government disability committee to which they would not normally have had access.

#### *Youth Livelihoods Network*

This network is still working towards its purpose of creating impact and helping young women and men, sharing and maximizing resources, becoming a united voice and supporting existing youth networks. Most progress has been made so far toward supporting existing youth networks. While it was broadly agreed that the network would support the existing Vanuatu National Youth Council, a clear purpose, strategy and action plan has not been developed yet.

Meetings are focused more on information sharing and working together on specific activities as they arise. For example, members organised to jointly input into the government Basic Education Policy. Through new relationships formed in the network, two members are now working more closely on an upcoming Youth Livelihoods event to ensure more youth have the opportunity to participate. The development and sharing of organisational profiles is aiding collaboration by identifying potential areas for members to work together in future.



### *Program Quality Network*

This network was set up as a community of practice and is mainly fulfilling its purpose of creating a forum to discuss, share, learn and work together, and has had less emphasis on collective action. Most meetings have involved network members presenting a topic relating to program design and/or monitoring and evaluation (M&E). While meetings have been less frequent than the Disability Network, members report having new skills and ideas they have shared with their organisations. For example, following a session about a program design approach, one member reported sharing the information with colleagues who were writing a new project proposal and encouraged them to incorporate elements of the approach. Members have also experienced new and better relationships with peers during meetings, including NGO-government ties, but there has been little formal collaboration seen outside of meetings. There has also been little change in members' relationships with donor agencies as yet, although a staff member from DFAT is on the network email list.

### **iv. Overall immediate outcomes**

In all networks, members' regular attendance and participation during the year indicate that members see value in the network. Members reported that meeting, getting to know and communicating more easily and regularly with counterparts in other organisations is a change that is contributing to greater collaboration between members. For many members, their relationship with Oxfam has also improved. The networks foster an atmosphere of working together and helping each other; with the Disability Network taking this collaboration beyond network meetings. Improved relationships and increased communication have led to members having a greater understanding of other organisations' activities, things happening in the sector, donor requirements, along with other stakeholders' activities and needs.

#### **KEY IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES**

Network members are:

Learning new skills and gaining knowledge

Increasing understanding (of each other, sector, external stakeholders)

Strengthening relationships and communication

Beginning to collaborate on joint projects

Gaining confidence in leadership roles

Increasing their credibility

Through member sharing, technical input from Oxfam and external presentations, members are learning new skills they can implement in their work. New skills and opportunities for women and men to lead are gained through the process of rotating chairs (Disability and Youth Livelihoods) and leading sessions (Program Quality). These new skills, ability to share in a respectful environment and strong female role models in the networks are also contributing to growing confidence in the female CSO staff attending.

According to the GLA Program Logic, the key immediate outcome identified for longer-term change was that 'CSO are working collaboratively'. At this stage, the foundations have been laid for this to occur through improved relationships, communication, skills and information sharing. The Disability Network has seen strong collaboration within and outside of the network. The Youth Livelihoods Network has also seen collaboration on some projects and the commitment of the Program Quality Network members to share their knowledge and experience in a collaborative way also contributes to the outcome.

## **v. Gaps and challenges**

The challenge of developing a clear vision and strategy for the Youth Livelihoods Network has impacted on the activities and immediate outcomes of the network. It has been influenced by (and likely influences) inconsistent membership and network members' ability to make decisions on behalf of their organisations. The Disability Network strategy, while more action-oriented, is ambitious, with a lot of action required outside network time. Such an extensive action plan has led to lengthy meetings and unwieldy minutes that attempt to capture all ongoing activities. The burden of extra work has resulted in some actions not undertaken and some members' frustration that they are 'doing more than others'. The focus on external advocacy, has resulted in missed opportunities to ensure all members first have a common internal understanding of the key issues and are 'speaking the same language'.

The Program Quality Network, while having the potential for members to work together more in future, has not purposefully encouraged members to collaborate on any joint projects or activities. There has also been little emphasis on translating learning into action, with no ongoing monitoring of how members are using the new knowledge or skills they have gained. Similarly, communication and follow-up between meetings by Oxfam is often delayed or limited, which has impacted how much information and knowledge shared in meetings is put into practice.

For all networks, the timing, format and length of meetings are important factors in influencing how network members participate. Some members have felt meetings are too long, or spend too much time talking rather than 'doing', and some have found it challenging to attend due to busy schedules. This is particularly true if organisation leaders are members. Some members also remarked that they were not told meeting dates well enough in advance and thus missed meetings due to schedule clashes. The challenge is to find the right balance of meeting frequency – regular enough to keep

momentum and avoid lengthy discussions on past actions, while not so frequent that it becomes a burden on members' time.



## 2. Network value: Civil society outcomes to which the networks are contributing

This section examines the longer-term changes and impact for civil society to which the networks are contributing so far.

### i. Network outcomes

#### *Disability Network*

The Disability Network has contributed to longer-term outcomes of CSO representation, decision maker response and impact on disadvantaged groups in Vanuatu. Members reported improvements to their own practice working with people with disabilities: the network has given one Santo-based member the opportunity to learn new skills to improve program activities as well as communicate government policies to people with disabilities – opportunities that are otherwise difficult to find in a provincial location.

Network members' combined input into government plans and policies such as the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan was also seen as a positive early sign of CSO representation to decision makers. According to one member, recommendations to government in response to the Universal Periodic Review for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were accepted more readily due to multiple network members contributing.

#### **Increased inclusion for people with disabilities**

The network's cooperation with DFAT-funded projects (Port Vila Urban Development Project (PVUDP) and Roads for Development program) has resulted in people with disabilities being included in project development and implementation.

Following discussions between the PVUDP and the network, a network organisation member was subcontracted by the managing contractor to conduct a survey of people with disabilities in the target area to capture their voices in the development of local water and sanitation facilities. Multiple network members contributed or suggested staff to conduct the survey so that it was done effectively and efficiently, using a balanced number of female and male surveyors. The data that was collected was representative of gender and disability and will allow the project to design appropriate facilities for women and men with disabilities and involve people with disabilities in the formation of Sanitation Committees and in the Sanitation and Hygiene training program.

#### *Youth Livelihoods Network*

The Youth Livelihoods Network has also been linking with government to advocate for youth issues through its support of the quasi-government body, the Vanuatu National Youth Council. While there have been no practical activities happening yet, the outcomes from the engagement to this point are that members are committed to working with the Council to ensure a more comprehensive government approach to youth livelihood issues is developed. Results from the network member's

combined feedback to the Vanuatu Basic Education Policy are yet to be seen but gave network members the experience of advocating through policy dialogue.

## KEY INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Network members are:

Improving their own practice

Linking with government to advocate/ represent

Contributing to government plans and policies

Being heard with a united voice

Ensuring people with disabilities are included in government projects

### *Program Quality Network*

As predominantly a community of practice, the Program Quality Network has not as yet directly contributed to any of the longer-term outcomes of CSO engagement with decision-makers. However, members are beginning to incorporate network learning into their project design and M&E, and there is future potential to influence member organisation practices in community engagement and reporting through its learning agenda.

## ii. Overall outcomes

Despite the early stage of the networks, they can be seen to be contributing already to the desired outcomes outlined in the Governance, Leadership and Accountability Program's program logic. Through network members' input into government plans and policies, CSO staff are representing their constituents' priorities, which, in some cases, are already being taken into account by decision-makers (i.e. Port Vila Urban Development Project). That decision-makers such as DFAT and various government departments (Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Training and Ministry of Education, Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities) have listened to the network and asked for input into their plans and policies indicates that CSOs, through the network, will have more opportunities to represent their constituents in future.

## 3. Oxfam's approach: Contribution to activities and outcomes

### i. Role for all networks

Oxfam's role in the networks is recognised primarily as convener and coordinator. Oxfam initiated the networks after consultation with CSOs and provided the structure and space for CSOs to come together. As one member commented, Oxfam "provides the scaffolding without which the network wouldn't exist". They play an important administrative role: communicating with members, writing and distributing minutes and the agenda, organizing logistics, providing a venue (where required) and providing catering. Members see these administrative roles as essential to the running of the network, as many would not have the human or financial resources to take on those responsibilities.

Oxfam coordinates members to come together in meetings, as well as to work on specific activities such as the Youth Livelihoods Network inputting into the Basic Education Policy. They facilitated early discussions on network purpose, expectations and plans, and facilitate decision-making in networks. In delegating responsibilities such as chairing meetings to members, then providing them with support to carry out the role, they model participatory approaches to the rest of the network. Oxfam's perceived impartial facilitation and 'leading from behind' approach is seen by many members as important to ensure everyone has a voice, that internal political agendas are not pushed and that members are developing the capacity to lead the network.



## ii. Network-specific roles

### *Disability Network*

Oxfam has been most active in facilitating strategy development and implementation of actions in this network due to the clear common purpose and motivation displayed by members, as well as the higher frequency of meetings (every six weeks). It has facilitated connections between consultants, DFAT and network members as they are seen externally as the focal point for communication. In some cases, they provide technical support for activities, such as giving advice to a member on gender balance when conducting a survey. When needed, they share relevant information (such as funding opportunities) with members between meetings. They fund transport for all members, which is particularly important for three provincially-based members in the Disability Network. They no longer host the meetings at the Oxfam office due to ongoing disability accessibility issues and the desire to share the responsibility with members.

### OXFAM'S PRIMARY ROLES

Impartial facilitator

Convener

Initiation/ foundation/ structure

Administration

Communication and relationship management

Fund operations/ logistics

Coordination of members and activities

Support members to work together and have a common voice

Delegation of responsibilities

Model participatory approaches

Link with external parties

Provide opportunities

### *Youth Livelihoods Network*

While Oxfam's role is the same as for the Disability Network, a variety of factors (as discussed above) have made it more difficult to facilitate strategy development with this network. Oxfam's main focus thus far has been to bring people together, to share information and to facilitate discussions about potential collaboration and the members' desire to assist the Vanuatu National Youth Council. Following the active commitment of the VNYC to participate in the network, Oxfam also provided external support to them directly for an activity they were planning.

### *Program Quality Network*

Oxfam's role within this network differs considerably in terms of facilitation to the other networks. They lead discussions between members to identify priority learning agendas and members who will facilitate that learning. They then coordinate with those members before meetings to ensure they are prepared to lead the session. While they are responsible for sharing minutes and resources between meetings, this has happened less consistently than in other networks.

## **iii. Changes to which Oxfam has contributed**

Through its role as coordinator of the networks, Oxfam has contributed to many of the changes described above. Most significantly, they have helped members to build a united voice when advocating to government, particularly for the Disability and Youth Livelihoods Networks. Using their connections and reputation, they have supported members to represent their ideas to government, and helped to get support for networks' activities from donors and government. This was demonstrated when Oxfam invited DFAT-funded projects to connect with network members, and then coordinated input from members into those projects.

## **iv. Gender inclusion**

Oxfam's role to promote gender equity in the content of network activities and in member composition has been subtle. While gender inclusion has not been openly and specifically discussed in meetings, it is included generally in conversations using intentional language. Examples where gender language is explicitly used is in Program Quality Network's definition of Program Quality, where gender and disadvantage are both mentioned and in the purpose statement of the Youth Livelihoods Network where the target group is clearly defined as young women and young men.

The majority of network members are women and in the Youth Livelihoods and Disability Networks, network members decided together that there should be one female and one male chair in each meeting. Changes so far for women include: new skills development in technical areas such as project design (Program Quality) or administrative skills such as chairing a meeting and taking minutes (Disability and Youth Livelihoods) and increasing confidence due to the new opportunity to lead or chair meetings and contribute ideas in a respectful environment. Oxfam also contributed to increasing the role of women in the Port Vila Urban Development survey through feedback to the network member who was contracted to conduct it. As a result, more women surveyors conducted the survey

which allowed greater access to women with disabilities in the community, ensured their voice was heard and consequently that the project includes them in future.

## **v. Contribution to sustainability**

Oxfam and/or network members have not yet discussed and articulated sustainability for the networks as the first year was designed to establish the networks and ascertain their value and benefits to members. It will be for network members to decide whether and how to continue in the long-term. As it is, ongoing collaboration of members working together now is laying the foundations for future cooperation and therefore sustainability. Ownership is an important element of sustainability, and while there are some steps towards this (sharing responsibilities and venues), some members and external parties see the networks still as Oxfam's. If networks wish to transition to local ownership in future, the funding role Oxfam plays could be difficult to maintain by a local organisation. Identifying ongoing funding will be part of a sustainability strategy developed by Oxfam with the networks in future.

## **vi. Benefits of role**

The benefits of Oxfam playing a coordinator role include Oxfam's adherence to its values of supporting CSOs to achieve their own goals. At the same time, the networks provide Oxfam with a mechanism to contribute to advocacy in a more effective, locally-appropriate way than if they were conducting the activities directly. Through the networks, Oxfam knows more organisations they could support in future, while existing Oxfam funded partners now have access to collaboration opportunities with other organisations. The networks provide opportunities to link with other Oxfam program activities such as organisational capacity building to increase impact with more organisations. Relationships between network members with government departments have also been initiated and/or strengthened due to network activities.

## **vii. Challenges of role**

Coordinating three networks is a full-time role, for which Oxfam does not currently have the resources to allocate. Lack of time and human resources has meant that communication and follow-up between meetings has not always been consistent. Certain opportunities (such as training or funding) have been missed for networks to be involved in because Oxfam has been too busy to look for them or to follow up with members. Networks have been struggling to decide whether to include government representatives within the networks as the Western democratic concept of civil society is relatively new to Vanuatu which favours a more collaborative nature of decision making. Oxfam's challenge has been to facilitate this membership discussion without overly influencing the discussion but at the same time provide awareness on traditional role of the civil society in democratic governance systems.

Other challenges include the lack of clarity some have about Oxfam's involvement: one member reported that some external parties see Oxfam as an 'outsider INGO', believe they should not be playing the convener role, and that it should sit with a local organisation or government. Most members acknowledge however that local ownership is difficult in the short-term as local NGOs and

government have few resources to coordinate such networks. At the same time, there are some who expect or would like Oxfam to play a project funding role, not merely a coordination role.

## 4. Appropriateness and relevance of network approach

### i. Benefits of network to members and civil society

The networks' appropriateness and relevance lies partly in the benefits members and civil society see through the use of this mechanism. Along with the outcomes described above, these networks have provided the first opportunity for CSOs working in disability and youth livelihoods to come together in a structured sharing environment, which is helping to improve organisational practice through best practice learning and sharing. This assists organisations to avoid duplication of activities, and creates a united voice (seen especially in the Disability Network). The networks also provide a structure that is more easily accessible and seen as the first port of call for external/ government stakeholders wanting to engage with civil society organisations in the sector. Members must continue to see personal, organisational and societal benefits from the networks to keep them viable.

### ii. Membership

In order for networks to have local ownership and fulfil their individual purposes, membership needs to reflect the way change happens in Vanuatu. While membership is quite representative of civil society groups, there is an expressed desire by some members to include government representatives more actively, particularly in the Disability Network<sup>1</sup> who often rely on government support for projects. For many network members, the government is their primary donor and if the government feels excluded and takes offence, it may affect their funding relationship and how they work together in future. Some feel the government is a key player, so they need to be included in order for them to accept the network's actions. At the same time, some members expressed the need to include more member constituents/ CBO representatives such as people with disability and youth in the network to ensure that activities are most relevant and needed.

## 5. Network monitoring and evaluation

### i. Monitoring tools

A baseline survey for network members was conducted at the beginning of each network's operation. As this gathered information primarily on members' existing networks, information sources and information sharing practices, it was not so useful to gauge specific changes in members' experience with the new Oxfam-supported networks. It can only be inferred that because most members indicated no or little information sharing before, that there has been an improvement in this area now. In early network meetings, members developed their own indicators which were then measured

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<sup>1</sup> As a Community of Practice, the Program Quality Network regularly engages three government staff members in meetings

once (for Program Quality and Youth Livelihoods Networks) and twice (Disability Network) during the course of the year through member surveys. While this was a great process to have members take ownership, because they were developed before a clear plan was defined, the indicators provided only limited information on the effectiveness of the network when completed. Some indicators were also unclear and the scoring somewhat ambiguous.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations combine feedback from selected network members, Oxfam staff, external stakeholders and the consultant's professional opinion. It is recommended that they be discussed in detail during network meetings and further refined by all members.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS for networks

Review network activities  
and format

Gain consensus on common  
purpose and strategy

Review membership

Develop greater  
understanding of advocacy  
and sector contexts

Improve internal and  
external communication

Ensure more regular and  
comprehensive network  
monitoring

## 1. All networks

### *Network activities*

Oxfam and members should review the frequency, length and format of meetings to ensure that time is spent effectively and that members see meetings are action-oriented rather than talking-oriented. Similarly, so that members experience personal benefits and value, networks should ensure that members learn something new and relevant each meeting. Networks should harness collective energy to work on a common project and/or address common needs for each sector: this should be something that benefits all members and their constituents and that they can only do as a group e.g. developing common messaging or agreeing on common language to discuss advocacy issues. If the primary focus of two networks is advocacy, Oxfam could provide more technical support on advocacy methods. Oxfam could also share more examples of other successful networks so that members have a better idea of what is possible.

Networks could be used to identify common training needs and coordinate training that would benefit all members. For example, Oxfam could coordinate sign language training for all Disability Network members, or project design training for all Program Quality members. Relevant external people (from government, NGO and private sector) should continue to be invited to meetings to share expertise and information to members as a way of increasing knowledge and learning about new opportunities.

### *Membership*

All members agree that current membership should be reviewed to ensure existing members are still appropriate and contributing and to identify new members who could add value to the network. This includes discussions about government involvement, as well as greater participation of constituents such as people with disabilities and youth. While not all stakeholders may need to be full members, methods for including them and disseminating information to them need to be more clearly articulated. Members could be encouraged to take on more responsibilities with Oxfam, and take on more active ownership of the network in future. At the same time, members' skills and experience should be better utilised to the benefit of all members: for example, one member in the Disability Network has experience with national level advocacy in Australia that could be more widely shared with members

### *Context and external environment*

A deep understanding of both the advocacy context (how change happens), and who the key actors are, is critical for Oxfam to know how best to facilitate change with network members. It is recommended that the networks undertake a detailed stakeholder/power analysis at the same time as creating and/or updating organisational profiles and mapping out their role in the sector. This can be linked with a greater sector discussion about how network members can better work with each other and external stakeholders. All network agendas should also ensure there is space (quarterly/ bi-annually) for organisations to share current and upcoming activities. This has happened in two of the three networks but should happen in all three. These activities will assist in the development and/or refinement of the networks' strategies, ensure that organisations are not duplicating work, and identify more opportunities to work together.

### *Communication*

To encourage cross-network collaboration, Oxfam should continue to make links between network members and encourage cross-network sharing. This could be through various communication tools, and/or all-network forums. Clear communication tools such as a newsletter, website or regular emails should be developed to ensure members are kept up-to-date with network activities and achievements and to share these with external stakeholders. Increasing publicity for the networks may help to strengthen the credibility of network members individual and collective activities, increase opportunities for external stakeholder engagement, as well as gain the confidence of external parties who currently may not know of or see the value of the networks.

### *Monitoring and evaluation*

Oxfam and network members need to review how networks are being monitored and evaluated. There should be more ongoing monitoring of network members' activities outside the network meetings to determine what impact the network is having on themselves, their organisation and their constituents. This could include a simple report-back at the beginning of each session, or an email survey every 2-3 meetings. Network indicators developed early on should be reviewed in light of members' and staff ideas about 'successful networks' to ensure that networks are being measured on

realistic expectations. Some suggestions from members and staff are included in Appendix 1. Oxfam should also investigate specific methods to monitor networks, such as social network analysis.

## 2. Network specific

### *Disability Network*

While the network has been working steadily on its action plan thus far, it has sometimes become bigger than all network members have the time to implement. Thus network members should review their strategy and action plan and develop a new one that is easy to follow and achievable for members who are busy with existing project work. Efforts should be made to include more island-based disability CBOs, either through membership, special visits or regular communication, as these are the constituents the network needs to represent. Oxfam could also play a greater role in helping these organisations, many of which are small and chronically under-resourced, find project funding.

### *Youth Livelihoods Network*

To address the apparent lack of clarity in this network, network members and Oxfam should review and clarify the Terms of Reference, along with the network's purpose and strategy. Network planning should be more action-oriented, with members committed to taking on responsibilities. Ideally, organisation leaders/ decision-makers should be members so that more decisive action can be taken during meetings. Membership criteria should be reviewed with discussion about how to best include more youth representatives from local youth groups.

### *Program Quality Network*

The network should create a safe space to encourage people to share challenges and failures, not just success. This could be assisted by a greater focus on peer learning between members, facilitated by Oxfam. There should be more focus on practical application of learning, with more regular monitoring of who is applying new skills and how. The network is also encouraged to develop a clearer purpose, strategy and milestones to ensure members and organisations are seeing the changes and benefits they desire.

## 3. Oxfam

### *Current role*

All people interviewed suggested that Oxfam continue to play its current 'silent partner' role in the short-medium term, providing essential administrative and logistics support. There is room to play this role more effectively: communication with members and external stakeholders could improve, they could spend more time on strategy and looking for opportunities for members (e.g. funding, training) and they could work more closely with the Youth Livelihoods Network which is taking longer to develop. With additional time and/or human resources, Oxfam could be more responsive to the issues that arise. At the same time, Oxfam needs to clarify internally its network engagement strategy so that all staff and members are clear about the extent of influence Oxfam should have and how it should use it.

### *Capacity building*

Network members have requested more capacity building opportunities so Oxfam could provide more technical skills on strategy development and advocacy, as well as management capacity building to network members. This could be done collectively by identifying common needs, and/or by working with individual members.

### *External opportunities*

Oxfam could use its external networks to identify opportunities (such as funding, training, networking, representation) for members that they would otherwise not be aware of. They could also take a more regional perspective and link with regional bodies and likeminded organisations that can share their experiences with network members. For small and often isolated local CSOs in Vanuatu, this exposure could provide invaluable new ideas and learning that could be applied in network members' own work. Oxfam could also look into facilitating network members to represent the networks at regional networks such as the Small Islands Developing States Network (SIDS). This has been seen to be an effective strategy of another Oxfam-facilitated network, the Vanuatu Climate Action Network, which has represented the voice of Vanuatu CSOs in regional forums including SIDS.

### *Funding*

Depending on the availability and flexibility of funding, Oxfam could consider funding different activities within the network and/or individual members. For example, money allocated for research should be used to conduct research projects that have value for all network members. At the same time, for organisations with limited funds to carry out project work (such as disability organisations) Oxfam could consider offering small grants, or fund common training. This is in recognition of the fact that if organisations have limited funding to conduct their own work, they may be less able to contribute to joint network activities as well. In any case, Oxfam should clarify its position on funding and clearly communicate this to members and external stakeholders to ensure expectations are managed.

### *Future role*

While it is recommended that Oxfam continue its current role for the moment, there should be discussions about a long-term transition strategy within the next year. This should be done internally and with network members to ensure they have full ownership of the process.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS for Oxfam**

Continue and improve on current role

Increase capacity building opportunities

Identify and link with external opportunities

Investigate options for funding network and/or partner activities

Clarify future role and transition strategy

# CONCLUSION

Oxfam in Vanuatu has been fulfilling its role as an active coordinator of the Disability, Youth Livelihoods and Program Quality Networks, ensuring that civil society organisations have the opportunity to come together to share ideas and experience. Since their inception, all networks have seen good attendance and participation by network members, with all members reporting that they have been sharing and learning from each other. There are signs of CSO collaboration with members understanding more about each other's work and either working together on common activities now and/or identifying areas for potential collaboration in future. There have been positive outcomes as a result of Network collaboration: members have represented their constituents through inputs to government policies, plans and projects, and decision-makers in government projects have sought and taken on input from members which has influenced their practices.

Oxfam's role as coordinator and facilitator of the networks is largely welcomed by network members and external stakeholders, while at the same time there is an underlying desire from some for greater local ownership in future. It is acknowledged that the networks need to be stronger first and that a clear strategy for transition and strengthening of local organisations is in place for this happen. There is also the potential for Oxfam to maximise the impact of its current role by focusing more on capacity building of network members as well as taking advantage of more external opportunities.

These three CSO networks offer an important contribution to strengthening both the civil society sector in Vanuatu and their work in Ni-Vanuatu communities. With a renewed focus on developing a common purpose and strategy, ensuring the networks are representative, more action-oriented and work within the Vanuatu context, they have clear potential for positively impacting on the lives of women, men, young people and disadvantaged people in the country.

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## Network members

### Vanuatu Disability Network

- Vanuatu Society for Disabled People
- Sanma Frangipani Association and Sanma Disability Officer
- Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association
- Vanuatu TVET Program
- Save the Children
- Malvatumauri

### Vanuatu Youth Livelihoods Network

- APTC
- Wan Smolbag Theatre
- Save the Children

### Vanuatu Program Quality Network

- Save the Children
- World Vision International

## External stakeholders

- DFAT

## Oxfam staff

- Megan Williams
- Elizabeth Faerua
- Danielle Roubin

# APPENDIX 1: Indicators of a ‘successful’ network

Defined by selected network members and Oxfam staff:

- Learning
  - Learning something new
  - Members’ skills increase
  - Learning is being applied
  - Training conducted
  - Practical follow-up
  - Putting skills into practice
  - Learning from each other, sharing ideas
  - Learning other ways of implementing own activities/ projects
- Cooperation and collaboration
  - Interagency collaboration
  - Cooperation between network members (not competition)
  - Robust and respectful discussion
  - Coordination and allocation of resources to projects
  - Regular communication
  - Members have social contact outside network
- Mutual understanding
  - Members know what each other is doing
  - Common understanding of issues/ common language
- Member buy-in and commitment
  - Heads of organisations are informed and talking about the value of networks
  - People come on time
  - Regular attendance
  - Ownership
  - Organisation leaders are members
  - Member constituents (people with disabilities, youth) are being included in projects outside of network
  - Members see benefit of collective action
  - Benefits for collective and individual organisations
- Advocacy
  - influence decision-making
  - Input into government / public projects and policies
  - Policies and decision-making practices are being followed through
- Relationships
  - Good relationships between members and external stakeholders

- Action-oriented
  - Common focus/ theme/ purpose
  - Progress toward goals – translate discussions into action
  - Accountability for actions
  - Members taking action between meetings
  - Have strategies for change
  - See results (changes) of collective action
  - Networks achieving own goals
- Leadership
  - Shared leadership roles
  - Humble facilitator/ convener
- Celebrate achievements
  - Practical change is happening
- Link with external stakeholders
  - Act as focal point for external stakeholders (e.g. donors, consultants)
  - External stakeholders come to meetings/ want to engage with members
  - Network linking with external opportunities
- Common purpose and goals
  - No personal agendas or internal politics
- Good structure
- Addressing equity issues
- Ongoing, meaningful M&E

# APPENDIX 2: Key Evaluation Questions/ focus of review

## **Network members' experience: How well are the networks functioning?**

- What has each network been doing since its inception?
- How have network operations (meeting times, frequency, content and way of working) influenced outcomes achieved?
- How effective is each network (in pursuing purpose and goals, meeting expectations etc)?
- How engaged are network members?
- How could the network operate more effectively?

## **Network value: What are the networks achieving?**

- What changes have occurred for network members and their constituents due to their involvement in the network?
- How are members benefiting from their participation in the network?
- What evidence is there that we are achieving or contributing to our desired outcomes (as set out in the program logic)?
- How have relationships changed between members and with external bodies?
- How are the networks impacting on women's leadership?

## **Oxfam's role: How is Oxfam contributing to the function and outcomes of networks?**

- What support is Oxfam providing to the networks and how useful is it?
- How is Oxfam contributing to and influencing change through their involvement in the networks?
- How has gender inclusion in networks been influenced by Oxfam?
- How is Oxfam's approach contributing to the sustainability of network activities and/or outcomes?

## **Network approach: How appropriate are networks for achieving change for civil society?**

- How appropriate are networks as a mechanism for change in civil society?
- How relevant are the networks' activities and outcomes for civil society?
- Is the current network membership appropriate for their purposes?

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

- How are we measuring the 'success' of networks?

# APPENDIX 3: Key Informant Interview questions

## Network members

1. What is the most valuable thing about the network?
2. What benefits have you personally, and your organisation experienced since you have been a member of the network?
  - a. What has the network done working together that would have been more difficult working separately?
  - b. What impact has being part of the network had on your organisation's work?
3. How have your relationships with other members changed since being involved in the network?
4. Have there been any changes in how you include or interact with female members of your organisation or program? Why/ why not?
5. How did Oxfam contribute to any of these activities or outcomes?
6. What role do you think Oxfam should play in the network?
7. What role do you think members should play in the network?
8. What do you think of the current membership? Is it representative and appropriate for the network's purpose?
9. What do you think are the indicators of a successful network?
10. How do you think the network could be strengthened or improved?
  - a. What would you like to see the network doing in future?
  - b. What can members do?
  - c. What can Oxfam do?

## External groups

1. What has been your experience of/ what do you know about the network?
2. What activities or outcomes have the network been involved in?
3. Have you noticed any changes in the relationship or links between network members and your organisation/agency since the network began? If yes, what?
4. What is the value of a network like this for civil society in Vanuatu? What evidence have you seen of this so far with this network?
5. What do you see is Oxfam's role in the networks?
  - a. Is it effective currently?
  - b. What should it be in future?
6. What would you see as a 'successful' network? What would it be doing?
7. How do you think the network could work more effectively with your organisation/ agency in future?

## Oxfam staff

1. What are the major outcomes or changes you have seen in each network?
2. How well do you think the networks are contributing to the outcomes set out in the program logic?
  - a. Where are the gaps so far?

3. What do you think has contributed to those changes?
4. What changes have you seen in regards to gender awareness and inclusion in the networks, and in network members' programs?
5. Which network is operating most effectively so far?
  - a. What makes it more effective?
6. What is Oxfam's role in the networks?
  - a. Does it differ between networks?
7. What are the benefits and disadvantages of Oxfam's brokering/ facilitation role?
8. How is Oxfam able to influence the networks when they have their own agendas?
9. What is the most important support that Oxfam provides to the networks?
  - a. How well do you feel Oxfam is supporting the networks?
10. How would you define sustainability for the networks?
11. How is Oxfam contributing to this network sustainability?
12. What would you see as a 'successful' network?
  - a. What would it be doing/ what are the indicators of success?
13. How do you think the networks could work more effectively?