

Oxfam Novib Management Response to the Mid Term Review of Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security (SD=HS)

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Introduction

Between May and December 2021, Leitmotiv Social Consultants conducted the Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security programme (SD=HS). SD=HS is part of the Sida-funded SeedsGROW programme. The aim of the MTR was to determine the extent to which the different activities have contributed towards the overall objectives and outcomes of the programme, to identify the lessons that can be drawn at this point of implementation, and to provide all stakeholders with the necessary information to take timely and informed decisions about further programme activities and about the future of SD=HS.

The MTR Steering Committee, consisting of Oxfam Novib, Oxfam country offices and partner representatives, guided the process, commented on the draft MTR report and approved the final version (attached), to which a management response is now being provided. Representatives of both Oxfam country offices and partner organizations provided comments on the preliminary version of the report and provided inputs for this management response during online meetings held in December 2021.

Scope and appreciation

The Mid Term Review assessed the results of the SD=HS programme in the eight focus countries *and* at a global level in the period running between the 1st of January 2019 and the 1st of May 2021 (29 months). Oxfam Novib highly appreciates the innovative methodology used in the MTR. Besides the extensive review of documents and interviews, Leitmotiv collected and systematized 342 stories of change told by farmers, community members, facilitators and others, ensuring a strong representation of women, youth and indigenous peoples in the process. Moreover, Leitmotiv involved 15 key stakeholders to develop alternative (ParEvo) story lines about the future of the programme.

The extensive use of stories has contributed to a rich report that adds to the learning process based on field experiences, and to many discussions focusing on the future of SD=HS. They highlight the unique position of the SD=HS programme and indicate how its impact could increase in the future.

The current grant between Oxfam Novib and Sida lasts until the end of December 2022, whereas the contract expires end of December 2024. Anticipating these dates, Oxfam Novib has presented some elements for a transition to a new phase of the SD=HS project. In this context, the management response will distinguish – where relevant – which follow-up measures it plans to take in the short term (basically in the remainder of 2022), and which options will be considered in the development of a new SD=HS phase.

The following pages include some general reflections, followed by specific responses to the conclusions and recommendations of the MTR report.

Responses to the Mid Term Review conclusions

Contribution to change

In its general summary (p. 3), the MTR concludes that "despite the challenges posed by the current COVID-19 pandemic, the SD=HS programme has achieved positive results to date and is clearly responding to the needs and rights of indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, women and youth. SD=HS is also contributing to global efforts to rebalance power relations by bringing the interests of smallholder farmers to the international arena".

Oxfam Novib is pleased with the positive assessment of the SD=HS programme. Oxfam Novib wishes to highlight that these results were achieved in a relatively short period of time, under extreme circumstances. During most of the period under review stakeholders had to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, showing strong resilience and still remarkable high levels of achieving results It is also important to note that the MTR reviewed a period of 29 months only, of which the first six were dedicated to the inception of the project. Also considering the fact that most countries and partners were new to the programme, only early results could be expected.

The long-term character of SD=HS' theory of change

The MTR concludes that the logic of the Theory of Change of SD=HS is "impeccable" (p. 10, p.58), yet that the proposed ToC is a long term one (p. 44) and to achieve and sustain the changes will require the commitment and capacity of the different stakeholders to maintain their involvement over time. In recent discussions Oxfam Novib's Board of Directors (BoD) has expressed its long-term commitment to SD=HS as part of the organization's strategy on Climate Resilient Communities. In the BoD's view, SD=HS is providing important alternative farmer-centered avenues to change within the context of climate change, biodiversity depletion and corporate capture of public institutions.

Oxfam Novib's long-term commitment also means it aims to continue to work with current partners and countries, and build on the progress made so far. Oxfam Novib will also seek the continued involvement and support of development agencies, and particularly Sida, not only as a donor, but also as a strategic partner.

Relevance

The MTR report concludes that the SD=HS programme is responding to the needs and rights of indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, women and youth, and that it is equally relevant at a global level. It states that this relevance is closely related to the demonstrative value of its approach. Oxfam Novib agrees with this conclusion, but wishes to stress that the relevance of the programme is not only about the demonstrative value that the approach works, as it also resides in the concrete changes seen in the lives of the close to 700,000 beneficiaries in the countries where it is implemented.

Oxfam Novib particularly wants to reconfirm its long-term commitment and that of the Oxfam Country offices with SD=HS as part of their ambitions on climate resilience.

Coherence

The evaluators also describe a strong and well-articulated logic that is widely shared by all stakeholders, and mention that one of the key strengths of the SD=HS programme is the wealth of synergies built.

This strong ownership of the Theory of Change is the result of the co-creation process that started during the eight-months preparatory phase of SD=HS in 2018, with stakeholders from all eight countries shaping the pathways and strategies to follow. This co-creation process is expected to continue in the future development of the programme.

At the same time, the evaluators mention a diversion of efforts to expanding scope and focus, largely as a result of the programme's commitment to the communities and its longstanding partners. Oxfam Novib wants to stress that it has kept a strong focus on the access and use of agrobiodiversity (plant genetic resources for food and agriculture), acknowledging that it is necessary to work on systemic changes at different levels (rural communities, markets, policies). This strong focus can create a tension with the need to address other key issues, like land rights or income generation activities (particularly relevant to youth and women).

Efficiency

Efficient coordination and management steps have led to positive results, despite various challenges. The report shows that SD=HS has achieved an overall delivery rate of 89%. Oxfam Novib believes that this efficient performance results from the close collaboration with knowledgeable and well rooted partner organizations. The open communication channels established with Sida and its flexibility have been instrumental, helping make the necessary adjustments according to the changing context and needs of the programme.

The general coordination efforts are described as effective and fluid, but the report also mentions that the distribution of the financial resources raises questions in terms of the decision-making processes, participation and accountability. Oxfam believes that a strong coordination was required to ensure consistency and the quality of our work, especially at the beginning of the programme when 5 new countries and 12 new partner organizations were involved. Oxfam Novib agrees that the internal distribution of financial resources should change, increasing the allocation of budgets to implementing countries.

Effectiveness

The MTR report highlights that the SD=HS programme has achieved many positive results under all four pillars and across the eight countries, but that implementation of the four pillars has advanced at different rhythms. This is true and has even been exacerbated by COVID-19, with a different effect on the different pathways (pillars) and particularly delaying the work at the policy level. The MTR rightfully concludes that it takes more time for linkages between the development of new varieties, regulation and markets to fully materialize. However, it also illustrates that in countries like Laos, where new varieties are registered, the impact of the programme increases dramatically.

Oxfam Novib agrees that more emphasis should be placed on policy and institutional change issues so as to reach its full potential. National partner organizations should be better supported to lead national advocacy work, linked to Oxfam's ongoing or planned campaigns (on, for example, climate justice).

With regards to participation and transformative change, Oxfam Novib is particularly pleased with the conclusion – particularly through participants' own stories – that SD=HS contributes to transformative change and to the empowerment of smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples, specifically women and youth. It is their empowerment and leadership that fuels SD=SH's investments in long-term changes in research, policies and markets. The MTR provides the reader with a rich overview of the multiple ways in which SD=HS is contributing to such empowerment.

At the same time SD=HS will seek ways to better address persisting inequalities and lack of participation. As women participation is strong on all levels, Oxfam Novib will focus more on women's transformative leadership on the level of decision-making. Together with its partners it will renew its strategic efforts to bring more young people into the programme.

Sustainability

Oxfam Novib agrees with the evaluation team's conclusions that the sustainability of the results will require the long-term commitment of all stakeholders, but that it is highly likely that the implementing partners will continue being engaged. The MTR demonstrates the important efforts made to institutionalize the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, with positive advances to date, and that these efforts require greater programmatic weight. Oxfam Novib will work on a long-term strategy linked to the policy and advocacy initiatives of its partners.

Learning

Last, in terms of learning, the MTR report shows that SD=HS is uniquely placed to play a knowledge brokering role in the sector, but that it needs to maximize the opportunities available to share the wealth of knowledge generated by the programme. Oxfam Novib acknowledges that, until now, the MEAL system has mainly delivered quantitative information allowing the management of the project and reporting to Sida. There has been insufficient time to provide answers to the SD=HS learning questions that cover more qualitative aspects of the programme. We agree with the need to strengthen the knowledge brokering role, addressing the different knowledge needs of different audiences and stakeholders and to provide answers to the learning questions.

Responses to the MTR recommendations

MTR Recommendation	Oxfam Novib Response	Proposed follow-up
1 Strengthen coordination and integration among pillars.	Oxfam Novib appreciates the recommendation to strengthen the coherence and coordination of the work in the four pillars by	Short term: For the remainder of this phase, we plan to carefully finetune the implementation of FFSs on farmer seed production and marketing and create

MTR Recommendation	Oxfam Novib Response	Proposed follow-up
It is recommended to strengthen coordination among the first three pillars so that all programme activities are clearly connected to the FFSs. In the case of Pillar 2, this means clearly addressing how the subsidisation and marketing of PPB varieties emerging from FFSs would be integrated into their business plans. In the case of Pillar 3, it would mean lowering expectations about the results in drought-prone areas. In the case of Pillar 4, the objective would be to clearly connect the policy asks that emerge from the work in the first three pillars to inform the advocacy work, especially at the local and national level.	acknowledging the central role of FFSs in the programme's approach. We agree that the policy work needs to be field-driven. We also agree that the work on seed markets needs to focus on FFSs dedicated to farmer seed production and marketing. We do question the part of the recommendation regarding lowering our expectations on the role of local food plants in drought-prone areas. According to partners and Oxfam, local food plants can play a key role in addressing food insecurity, also in drought prone areas.	more opportunities for the uptake of materials developed in the FFSs on Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) in Pillar 2, acknowledging that this will need time to fully develop. Furthermore, we plan to adjust our website and communication outputs in general to better show how various activities across pillars and countries are interdependent and how these make a coherent work package. Long term: SD=HS will further develop a agro-ecosystems and biodiversity approach that will strengthen pillar integration, including a stronger integration of the different methodological tools, and eventually a reorganisation of the programme organization, staff and budget. SD=HS will strengthen the role of national and regional organizations in the coordination of the work, creating more opportunities for synergies to emerge between workstreams (if the context allows) and for regional linking and learning.
2 Strengthen the programme's policy practice influencing component. Efforts to influence policy practice need to be more clearly articulated and properly resourced.	Oxfam Novib welcomes the reviewers' recognition of the programme's work on policy practice. Actually, these steps can be considered a good example of pillar integration. We agree that this work can be articulated more clearly, and that the national policy influencing initiatives have generally been underfunded and must be strengthened.	Short term: For the remainder of this programme phase, we continue committed to strengthening the programme's institutionalisation and will prioritize this in the allocation of (underspend) resources. With regard to national policy work, we have planned various workshops to take stock of the policy needs and opportunities in relation to the other 3 pillars. Long term: We aim to thoroughly reflect on the possible future structure and organisation of the programme's policy work. Together with the different Oxfam offices, SD=HS will strengthen its support to policy reform and to the steps to strengthen the policy-practice (institutionalization) linkages led by national partners, including a higher budget allocation.

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3 Join the (glocal) dots. More programmatic attention needs to be paid to how the different components (pillars) of SD=HS interconnect as a whole. In addition to interlinking all pillars around FFSs at the national level, this approach also requires better planning and a better comprehension of the interconnections between the macro and the micro levels.	The MTR recognize the programme's local to global advocacy work, which brings Indigenous People and Small Holder Farmers (IPSHF's) needs and experiences to the attention of global policy makers. Oxfam Novib has consciously invested less in raising awareness about international treaties as they have little direct impact on the day-to-day lives of farmers. Where such treaties do, the programme invests in awareness raising, also involving IPSHFs to change them. SD=HS has invested in awareness raising initiatives on Farmers' Rights.	SD=HS is focusing on local-to-global linkages and will continue to do so in 2022. The way back (trickling down) takes much more time and effort. However, SD=HS will do so in specific cases, where this provides opportunities, e.g. in using the FAO guidelines on national seed policies for the development of Laos' new seed policy, and in promoting the implementation of Article 9 of the ITPGRFA on Farmers' Rights.
4 Maximise the demonstrative value. The project should focus on gathering sufficient and solid evidence to demonstrate that the approaches employed in SD=HS distinctly benefit Explicit strategies should be devised to ensure that this evidence informs relevant audiences	Oxfam Novib stands behind the need to strengthen the demonstrative value of the programme. However, it also believes it has a role to play in making real changes on the lives of smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples in the eight countries who participate and /or may benefit directly from the programme's activities.	Short term and long term: Oxfam Novib will continue to collect information to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of its farmer-centered approach. It will review its communications strategy and invest in publications and storytelling efforts in the different countries, explicitly demonstrating the impact of its work.
S Be more inclusive. As the SD=HS approach is a long-distance race, it would be wise to redouble efforts to get young people more involved. The project should devise specific strategies with partners, FFSs and FSEs to explore possible avenues adapted to different contexts where SD=HS operates. In any case, it would be interesting to explore strategies where the economic prospects provide young people with sufficient incentives to be involved.	Gender equality is an integral part of the SD=HS work and we are pleased to notice that the participation level of women is high. However, the number of women in leadership positions is still insufficient and needs to be addressed. We fully agree that numeric representation should be complemented by a more qualitative approach. Youth: SD=HS prioritized the involvement of youth from the start. However, it was a conscious decision to not talk about youth, but talk with youth, and instead of developing a global strategy, to delegate the responsibility to	Short term: SD=HS developed and tested the Gender Journey tool. For the coming year we will roll it out in 4-5 partner countries in order to increase the level of women in key positions (e.g. as master trainers). SD=HS will strengthen the analysis, involvement and leadership of women in specific work areas (FSEs and policy work). To expand youth engagement, SD=HS will take stock of existing experiences in countries. It will organize reflection sessions with young men and women who have been successfully engaged with the project. SD=HS will look at the possibilities to better address the

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The engagement of women in SD=HS requires more attention, especially their integration into FSEs and advocacy work at all levels. For this to happen in a systematic way, it would be necessary for the programme to have a full-time gender mainstreaming expert.	countries to develop specific strategies in dialogue with youth (organizations). This led to a wide diversity of approaches on youth participation, with interesting results. We recognize the need to take stock of these experiences and draw general recommendations or guidelines for working with youth.	interests of youth where these differ from those of the older generations. Long term: The current focus on field crops limits the participation of men and women without land or not directly involved in agricultural production. Oxfam Novib plans to adopt an (agro)ecosystems or landscape approach that provides more space for specific groups on rural communities. A pilot in Nepal in 2022 will generate key lessons, showing how to adopt such an approach in the future.
6. Embrace the concept that "time is money". In managing the program's resources, it is essential that the time invested by the various stakeholders is made visible and valued. This is important at all levels of the program, but especially in the case of facilitators and master facilitators. SD=HS must ensure that all are adequately resourced to manage the demands on their time effectively. It is equally essential that demands for time are made from a gender perspective and that emphasis continues to be placed on making it easier for women to find work/life balance.	Time is money, but visibility and appreciation are equally important for facilitators to be motivated. We realize that we have given insufficient attention to this. To avoid perverse incentives and ensure learning remains the main motivation, SD=HS follows the principle, also adhered to by the global FFS community, that facilitators and master trainers receive remuneration only for time spent outside their own communities. This can be financial, to compensate for time not spent working in one's own farm, or of in-kind nature (fuel, bicycles). Providing motorbikes is generally not a realistic option. Agreements are made per country. SD=HS observes that this has created confusion for some partner organizations.	We will discuss with partners how to better appreciate and (non-financially) reward the time invested by facilitators and master trainers. Offering clear future perspectives is an important part of this approach and the 'learning itineraries' referred to in the MTR report (which could also take the form of career planning), is an interesting example to explore. We will provide a clear overview of acceptable ways to resource and remunerate facilitators and master trainers, based on country experiences thus far. We will ensure all countries (are able to) provide childcare or other necessary support measures to enable women to assume the role of facilitators or master trainers (some countries do this, others not).
7. Re-balance the power. At the heart of all SD=HS is the goal of changing the balance of power in favour of those who do not normally have it. To shift power among SD=HS stakeholders, it is essential to balance budget allocations managed by The Hague and by the countries	Oxfam Novib agrees with the need to decentralize the programme, particularly now that the Oxfam Country offices and national partners have gained more experience with the SD=HS approach. Oxfam Novib has gradually allocated more programme resources to countries. In 2020, 62% was spent	Short term: Oxfam Novib will continue to prioritize national activities in the use of underspend resources, focusing in particular on the work on policy and institutionalization. It will take into account the absorption capacity of individual countries. Long term: In the future SD=HS aims to further decentralize the project management structure and the technical

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so that financial control is more decentralized. It is also important to rethink how financial resources are distributed and particularly to increase resources for the advocacy component. It would be advisable for national counterparts rather than Oxfam offices to manage the resources earmarked for this purpose.	at the country level (close to the proposed 30/70 division proposed in MTR). The possibilities to increase allocation to the national level in the short term has limitations, illustrated by the annual underspending of budgets.	support roles, aiming at stronger country programmes and regional hubs. This will result in a budget allocation that goes beyond the 30/70 distribution proposed by Leitmotiv, benefitting national partners and also the regional linking and learning processes.
8. Be more transparent. It is advisable to design more transparent communication and information systems to resolve conflicts and manage change.	Oxfam Novib is not aware of fundamental problems nor received complaints regarding the programme's transparency. Budget decisions, planning and reporting processes are clarified in relevant manuals and emails that are sent to country offices and partners. Country offices and partners are also represented in the SD=HS Steering Committee.	Oxfam Novib will ask partners in the follow up on this MTR about suggestions to improve transparency in the program.
9. Generate information depending on the uses. The MEAL system needs to be further refined, starting with defining the users and uses of the information generated. The type of information that each audience requires should be decided with each audience. Negotiate with the donor what information they need to justify their investment in the programme, etc. The aim should be to simplify systems and in no case to collect information that will not be used.	Oxfam Novib welcomes this recommendation and will take this up as a priority for the year to come.	Short term: Review and adjust the Participatory Knowledge Management and learning strategy. For 2022 Oxfam Novib will prioritize the increased access to and relevance of information for small-holder farmers and communities and the publication of experiences to policy makers. Oxfam Novib will ask Sida to give feedback on the information they have received from the SD=HS programme so far.
10. Participatory Knowledge Management and Learning The Participatory Knowledge Management and Learning Strategy should be	SD=HS acknowledges the importance of a strong PKML strategy, as one that leads to the dissemination and exchange of data, information, opinions,	Short term: Oxfam Novib is investing in "putting the different pieces together". It will work to articulate the ongoing efforts to collect information (e.g. Kobo) and to

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strengthened by developing country-based components that make the strategy more relevant and effective at the country-level,, and promoting "learning spaces" at the national level. The strategy should also be more conducive to generating cross-country learning and could include other initiatives such as an annual conference and cross-country exchanges. ONL should consider the possibility of playing a more central role in the sector as knowledge broker, through a platform or hub Under this component, ONL should also consider strengthening its knowledge and understanding of gender issues	lessons and recommendations at different levels. With a few exceptions (e.g. when the report says that there is no adequate MEAL methodology for P3) we agree with the observations made. We believe that the PKML strategy needs to be simple and efficient, and that it needs to consider different levels (and engage partners and teams in different countries, as well as other institutions).	document and share it (e.g. social media; the programme website). Oxfam Novib has developed a learning agenda for 2022 that links the training efforts in the different pillars and maximizes the exchange of information between countries. It will also explore other options to enhance peer—to—peer exchanges. Long term: With the restructuring and decentralization of the programme, Oxfam Novib will also review its PKML strategy. This will require a 'leaner' centralized monitoring framework, with more space for specificities on local level. In this strategy Oxfam Novib will invest more in regional linking and learning initiatives. Oxfam Novib will plan a strategy to follow the 2021 global workshop, where Oxfam was praised for the role it played in bringing together farmers, researchers, donors and policy makers to reflect about farmer-centered approaches to research. Discussions on the possible creation of a platform are underway.
At this stage of the programme, it is essential that Oxfam Novib works with partners to design possible future scenarios, including exit strategies. These scenarios must take into account internal elements of the SD=HS approach such as the time it takes to demonstrate its value, but also external elements such as Oxfam's reorganization process, or how new technologies may affect FFSs.	Oxfam Novib fully agrees with the need to define future scenarios. It has outlined four possible scenarios to Sida (ranging from full stop in 2022 to a new Phase of SD=HS). Sida's interest in SD=HS will be key in further developing these future scenarios. Meanwhile Oxfam Novib has engaged with a number of other stakeholders to discuss future collaboration options, including CIRAD, CCRP, IFOAM and others.	Short term: Oxfam Novib is already organising a number of strategy sessions to define future scenarios, engaging the team, programme partners and also external organizations. It will also engage with Sida to discuss the outcomes of the MTR and future of SD=HS. Long term: Oxfam Novib's intention is to continue with a new phase of the SD=HS programme as part of its work on GREEN / Climate Resilient communities. In this new phase it will seek to work with a coalition of like-minded organizations, pooling of knowledge and resources.
12. On types of seeds Promote seed multiplication for established enterprises (such as in Guatemala or	Oxfam Novib has already adopted the approach to work with existing seed enterprises instead of new ones.	Short term: Oxfam Novib will continue to prioritize its collaboration efforts with the FSEs it has been working with. It will also seek to improve the support provided to

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Nepal) and in environments that are not too climatically risky.		FSEs by collaborating with other specialized institutions and experts.
13 Insurable risk. In some countries, index insurance (based on weather indices and not on damage assessments) already exists that could insure a decrease in turnover and non-recovery of input credits.	Oxfam Novib has done a lot of work on agricultural or weather insurance, but with mixed results. Small-holder farming tends to be high risk and therefore insurance tends to be expensive. In this context it makes more sense to invest in risk reduction by developing better adapted seeds or improved practices.	Oxfam Novib will look at the possibilities of working on risk reduction and risk transfer (insurance), particularly in those countries with agricultural insurance opportunities.
14 On Neglected Underutilized Species (NUS). It would be desirable to collect more evidence on the impact of NUS on nutrition, based on medical and laboratory analysis, and ideally with a baseline if data exists in nearby clinics.	Oxfam Novib agrees about the importance of the collecting evidence about the impact of local food plants (particularly NUS). This is already foreseen in the PKML strategy.	Short term: Baseline studies on local food plants have taken place in 2019 and 2020, and we expect to finish the collection of evidence of the impact of the work on local food plants towards the end of 2022.

Final words

As mentioned above, Oxfam Novib is pleased with the results of the SD=HS Mid Term Review. The innovative approach followed by Leitmotiv helped partners and country office representatives share their opinions and ideas, in many cases communicating between themselves. The process also led to a large set of stories which will help Oxfam show its work to a broader audience.

Most important, the process led to a series of observations, lessons and recommendations that are valuable and most welcome. As outlined in the original TORs for the MTR process, the objective was to provide a series of lessons and recommendations on how SD=HS can be most efficient and effective and achieve its objectives. Oxfam Novib feels that the main objectives of the MTR were achieved.

The key observations and recommendations come at a crucial moment. Oxfam Novib will organize a number of discussions with the team, Oxfam Country offices and partners, including Sida, based on the findings of the MTR to further detail future scenarios to renew and extend our work on agrobiodiversity in the context of climate change.