HOW DOES NETWORKED CIVIL SOCIETY BRING CHANGE?

A meta analysis of
Oxfam Australia projects and practices,
June 2017

Cover photo: Crimson Tula (Banks Islands), Arthur (Port Vila), Jimmy Violet (Tanna Island) talk with Nelly Caleb between Disability Network meetings in Port Vila. Nelly Caleb is the head of Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (DPA). She is the leading activist for women with disabilities in the country and is a member of Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, which is supported by Oxfam. Vanuatu, 4th Sept 2015.

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1. Introduction

1.1 About this report

'There is a strong underlying assumption … that with a strong civil society will come the capacity and capability to contribute to positive development within a country context.' (Kelly and Roche 2014)

Linked to NGO accountability for sustained shifts towards an inclusive, pro-poor society, there is a keen interest among international development practitioners to understand more about how networked change happens, and to generate sufficient evidence to suggest principles and guidance. The focus for many studies and reflective exercises has been on components (eg. Oxfam 2014): what do effective coalitions, networks and alliances look like? This paper shifts the question slightly to ask: what does *change* look like, when it is delivered by a coalition, network or alliance (or indeed, forum, movement, council, consortium or any manner of other titles chosen to bring likeminded entities under one banner)? Do the attributes of social change brought through collective group actions justify the decision to work in these groups? Connected to these questions is a more practical consideration; when is collective action the appropriate strategy and when is it not?

To this end, the paper presents a meta analysis of commonalities and differences of 17 coalitions, networks or alliances across sectors and regions. All have been successful to some degree against their goals. The analysis aims to build causal theories associated with jointly led change, as a starting point for decisions on how, when and why to approach influencing work with joint, coordinated action. Commissioned by Oxfam Australia, the paper uses only Oxfam examples, allowing an opportunity to test assumptions in context of organisational strategy. This makes the review of particular relevance to Oxfam, with results intended to be used in practical ways when planning and supporting joint initiatives. It is also assumed that the results will be of interest to Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and to aid and development partners who implement or observe coalitions and networked approaches.

Notes on terminology

Coalition, alliance or network?
Civil society groups tend to generate their own names and brand. Common among Oxfam partners are the descriptors 'coalition', 'network' and 'alliance', but there are many more also in use. For the purposes of this review, the term 'network' seems the most inclusive of other terms used, and so it is used as the noun to describe civil society groups in general. 'Working in coalition' is also used throughout this report to describe a coordinated process between network members. It should not be taken as describing only organisations that identify as coalitions.

Advocacy or influence?
While advocacy is a broad term, in the NGO sector it is usually applied to advocates working on government policy and implementation. The term 'influencing' has greater flexibility for Oxfam because of its applicability over the full range of power structures, both formal and informal, at multiple levels. Influencers may be working with corporations or local leaders, or to change the beliefs of their own communities. Oxfam's Worldwide Influencing Network (WIN) is clear that Oxfam's influencing approach should aim for systemic and structural change at scale. At times this change lies

outside written government policy. The focus is on enabling communities with and through their civil society organisations to influence decisions that affect them

> "… advocacy's goal might extend to achieving social justice—that is, fair treatment for all members of society—but socially just results may or may not include changes in public policy.' (Weiss 2007)

1.2 Social change, assumptions and Oxfam's role

> *"Development is about power and its progressive redistribution from the haves to the have-nots".*
> *Winnie Byanyima, Oxfam International Executive Director*

The goal of Oxfam's social change agenda at its highest level is to mobilise 'the power of people against poverty.[1]' Inherent in this is the need to shift power to sit more equably in the hands of people most affected by inadequate social policy. Goals of empowerment, capacity building, networking, inclusion (particularly gender inclusion) and political voice are intended to support this power shift.

While shifting power is a fundamental theory for change used widely in the NGO sector, **its path is dependent on several logical assumptions.** It is assumed that empowerment – a more active civil role played by traditionally disadvantaged or marginalised people and communities - will open doors for greater participation and insight across the full spectrum of society. In theory, this participation will create pro-poor social policy gains, beginning with political commitment and ending with policy-based implementation to match political intent. This has two dependencies: firstly, that empowered communities will somehow understand how decisions are made and therefore who, when and how they must influence; secondly, that policy influence from these communities will reflect representative, not personal, interests, and that resulting policy will be 'good'. The final destination, social change, not only assumes all of the previous logic leaps but also that the change itself will be a positive outcome for society in line with human rights principles and sustainable development goals.

This change may be many years in the making, posing challenges for a sector with pressure to show immediate results of programmes and initiatives (ActionAid 2005; Weiss 2007). In the meantime, social change is vulnerable to the sustainability of all previous stages of advancement: pro-poor advocates are needed at each stage and every level.

Recognising this, Oxfam's Worldwide Influencing Network Strategy (Oxfam 2013) is driving a greater organisational focus on establishing partnerships and networks that can remain engaged with the details and levels of social change as it evolves. The strategy states:

> *"Oxfam believes that it is only through the collective effort of many actors (civil society, women's rights organisations, government, trade unions, religious institutions, private sector, and others) that our goals can be achieved. Each of these actors has a role to play in accordance with its responsibility, legitimacy, capacity, and strengths."*

Fundamental to Oxfam's global Worldwide Influencing Network (WIN) is the desire to see power placed more equitably, by restructuring social paradigms of how decisions are taken, who they

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[1] Oxfam's Strategic Plan 2013 – 2019, available at:
https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/story/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019_0.pdf

include and who they benefit. Beyond this, it falls to civil society to take up the challenge to deliver strengthened policy, accountable implementation and subsequent social change. This project after-life is assumed, and often valid, but, as it falls outside usual monitoring and evaluation frameworks for project cycles, not always measured.

The Worldwide Influencing Network does not explicitly suggest that partnerships should take the form of multi-agency groups. Wherever possible and practical, projects are working with local partners as implementers and influencers. Oxfam acts as an enabler and at times coordinator, with an emphasis on improving the participation and capacity of pro-poor civil society. However, not all projects are working on this goal in a networked approach. The decision to work through networks is not automatic; it needs to be taken in context of need, opportunity and practicality. The networks profiled in this report are all supported by Oxfam projects under the Worldwide Influencing Network approach.

1.3 Strengthening civil society through networks: coalition and partnering theory

A commonly used reference for social change theory is *Pathways for Change: 10 theories to inform advocacy and policy change efforts* (Stachowiak 2013). It is worth starting the discussion on this reference with a reminder that humanitarian advocacy and activism from the NGO sector is an ongoing responsibility It balances the hefty weight of power structures that prioritise non-humanitarian goals. Stachowiak's 10 theories apply to all social change, not only that which we consider 'good'. Social change is not only about poverty goals, and it need not be positive; much of it continues to bypass true participation from the poor and marginalised; full social inclusion and consultation in policy decisions is an ongoing and constantly renewing battle.

Stachowiak suggests that there are only two ways to win this battle in the long term:

- Shifts in belief, where the people in charge shift their outlook to align with what is being asked, or;
- Shifts in power, where the people in charge are removed because they cannot shift their outlook to align with what is being asked.

Of the 10 theories in *Pathways for Change*, five are described as global and five as tactical, with the global pathways summing up a broader social framework for change than the single approach of the tactical pathways. All of them describe a lead up to a tipping point, and from the tipping point very little varies, a cascade of momentum in more or less the same chronological order, namely:

Strengthened Alliances
    → *Strengthened Social Norms[2]*
        → *Strengthened Support Base.*
            → *Improved Policies*
                → *Impact*

Though the causal assumptions in the cascade remain theoretical, and every context is different, Stachowiak's evidence base is sufficiently broad that trust in the theory is reasonable. The crucial components for designing an influence strategy lie in the leadup to this momentum. For Stachowiak's

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[2] Regime theory does not require social norms to change in order to bring desired effect.

five global theories, the leadup differs greatly in terms of actors, actions, cause and effect; in summary:

1. "Large Leaps" or Punctuated Equilibrium theory: sees a groundswell of popular demand that brings sweeping, people-led political reform
2. "Policy Windows" or Agenda-Setting theory: sees insider expertise (sole/joint) applied to accountable policy process, sometimes alongside popular demand to 'open the window'
3. "Coalition" theory or Advocacy Coalition Framework: sees coordinated activity drive a strengthened support base in government and civil society
4. "Power Politics" or Power Elites theory: sees individuals within power structures personally negotiating for change
5. "Regime" theory: sees individuals or groups form rival power structures which meet or exceed those existing.

Playing a role within these theories are three types of agents:
- Public (citizens mobilising their inherent power as a constituency)
- Insider (individuals or groups acting as sole influencers, using relationships and resources over which they have direct control.)
- Joint (coordinated agencies with strategically pooled and multiplied resources over which they share control)

Pathways for Change proposes that these theories do not stand in isolation, either of each other or of other social forces that are less focused on a specific agenda. A 'tipping point' power shift is likely to result from pressure by all three, in each case a different and unique balance depending on context, actors and their relative strengths. Thus, networked action may be happening somewhere in all five of Stachowiak's global theories, not only in coalition theory. The key difference is that in coalition theory, coming together is a foundational decision; it occurs first, in the belief that it is the best way to trigger other elements such as power politics or 'large leaps' delivered through a coordinated strategy.
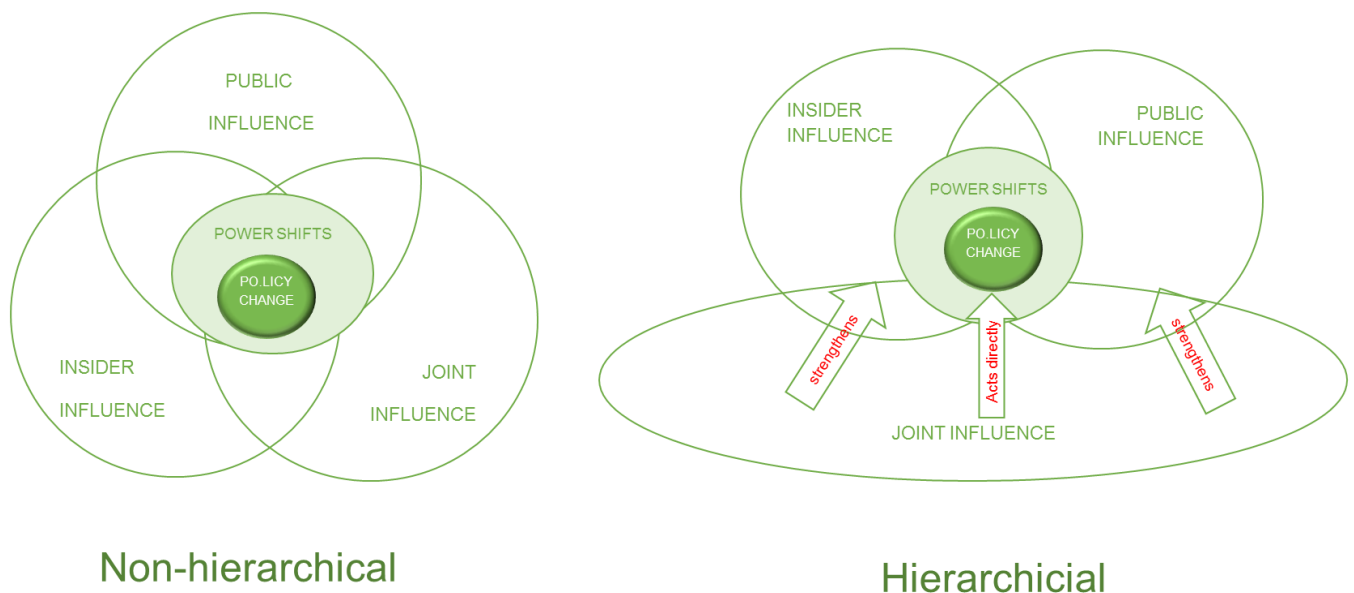
Figure 1: Influence flow from three main sources; comparison of non-hierarchical (formative) with hierarchical (deliberate and foundational) joint influence.

Figure 1 (consultant's own) shows interconnections between the three agents: public, insider and joint, set out in two ways. In the first, non-hierarchical model, joint influence through networks may be happening, but, depending on the strengths of public and insider influence, may also be unnecessary.

In the second, hierarchical, joint influence is foundationally necessary as a driver, coordinator and supporter of change.

Figure 2 below, reproduced from project documentation from Oxfam's Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (see p.15), is a practical example of the hierarchical theory of change. In this example, the foundation is Oxfam's support to CSO networking, which then leads to collaboration and coordination across CSOs to instigate a shared policy agenda. The change assumption sits at the intermediate outcome level, where this policy agenda leads to positive response from decision makers. From here, the cascade of momentum triggers: civil society and government are aligned; this influences how people with disabilities interact in society and decisions; strengthened support from decision makers is evident; policies are consultatively drafted; personal, positive change occurs as a result of that policy.
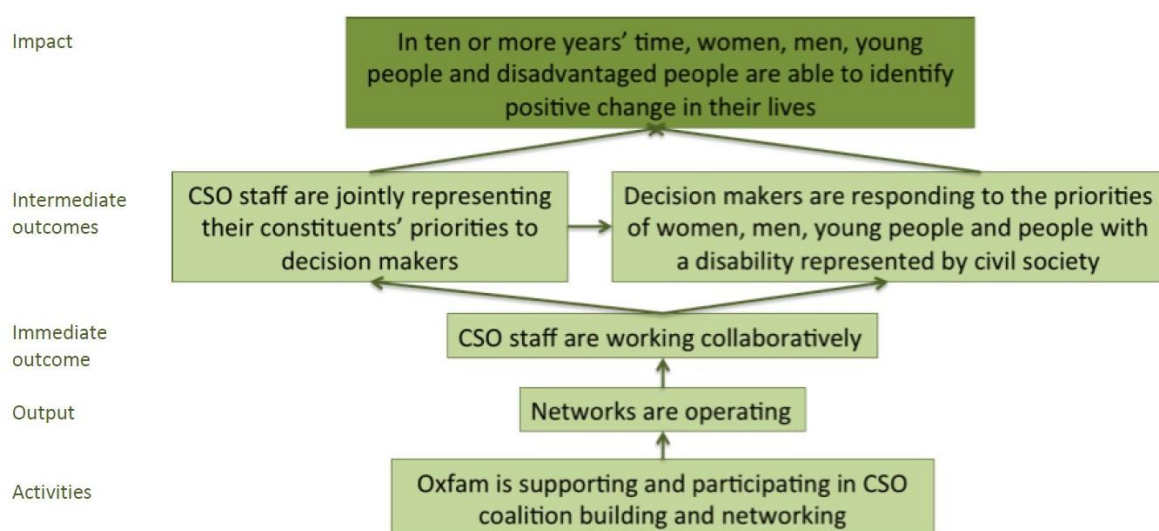
Figure 2: Theory of Change showing foundational network building, from Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network

The Pathways to Change paper assumes an interest in policy and social change, but there are also some valued models of networking that are not directly working towards a policy outcome. An alternative source for describing network models is a report on partnerships commissioned by the Australian Council For International Development (Kelly and Roche/ACFID 2014)[3], which suggests the following five types of partnership:

1. Partnerships for more effective development at the local level: building capacity for leadership and effectiveness of partner organisations, not always requiring networked action or collaboration (though also not ruling it out as a tactic to underpin knowledge and professional mentorship)
2. Partnerships to support civil society development: 'making a contribution to the development of a broad set of actors within another country assuming that they, in turn, will promote (lead) development and change in that context.'

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[3] Note that Kelly and Roche's summary list is for all partnerships, and applies equally to one-to-one relationships as to multi-group relationships.

3. Partnerships which leverage a more effective response to complex change situations: purposively selecting network members because of their existing capacity, reach and influence, in order to meet a complex problem with multiple tactics at multiple levels.
4. Partnerships which add quality to the work of all partners: with the focus on sharing knowledge and practice that can help across the sector or industry.
5. Partnerships and alliances for social change: connecting to global level tenets of rights and empowerment (Kelly and Roche give the example of the women's movement) with the desire to contribute to significant long-term paradigm shifts.

All of these partnership types are represented in the Oxfam sample for this review; thus, all descriptions can apply equally to one-on-one or to multi-agency partnerships. It is important to include this alternative filter in the mix because it shows that, while all partnerships work under a broad goal for social change to benefit the poor and vulnerable, some may not identify as policy-oriented. It also raises a question: is there a difference between a multi-agency partnership and a network? When does the transformation take place, from a group of partners meeting regularly to work on lobby strategy, research or collaborative communication, to a network with a shared agenda, pooled resources and long-term vision? There is no neat answer to this, but external literature can help to some degree with definitions and descriptions of attributes common to networks that may not exist in shorter term partnerships.

1.4 Literature conclusions: advantage and purpose

As a partner piece to this meta review, Oxfam commissioned a short literature review of NGO sector literature about networks, coalitions and alliances (Stuart-Watt 2017). The review found consistent reference to the benefits of a networked approach whenever a broader set of skills and resources was required than any one organisation could provide. Benefits included:

- A louder, more credible voice
- Expanded access to decision makers
- Mutual organisational advantage through skill sharing and broadened exposure to each others' practices
- Lessened risk through unity of voice, rather than advocacy from a lone organisation

The advantages for international NGOs in working with and through networks are in seeing these changes take place, often closely aligned with project or organisational objectives for civil society strengthening. By partnering with local and national networks, international NGOs can 'help empower communities to address an area of concern without necessarily setting the agenda' (Rabinowitz 2016, in Stuart-Watt 2017). Assumptions beyond this outcome, that a ripple effect into civil society strengthening and upwards into pro-poor policy are rarely followed in the literature.

The review also analysed feedback on elements that contributed to success for networks, alliances and coalitions, identifying two areas that were commonly cited:

- Local ownership, both conceptual in terms of agenda setting and practical in terms of financial contribution and shared responsibility for governance, strategy and coordination. While an externally brokered network could be successful, it took more time than an organic local network to build trust and collaborative coordination, often at the expense of responsive action.

- Tangible (or 'narrow') goals, which allowed action plans, milestones and tracking of results in a different way from networks without clear outcomes in reach; as they improved in identifying and reaching these goals, networks were able to settle into a pattern of planning, implementing and rebriefing for long-term action.

The review states (Stuart-Watt 2017, p.22):

> "The most notable gap in the literature is the lack of discussion around why partnering with a coalition or network is the best approach to effecting social change. Many reports provide advice and strategies for working with or brokering coalitions and networks. However, there is little discussion about why NGOs decide to work with coalitions and networks in the first place and what problems coalitions and networks are best suited to solve. This makes it difficult to know when they are the best option to address an issue. This misses a fundamental step in that INGOs may assume coalitions and networks are always positive and do not question whether or why a coalition or network is the most effective tool to address a problem before setting out to broker one."

This implies that purpose is the starting point for planning a networked approach – not merely the purpose of a project, but the purpose of the coalition working to achieve project outcomes. This purpose is not only policy influence, as noted in the previous section on Kelly and Roche's partnership types. Where a network is not chained to policy, the most usual alternative is that of strengthening members for the long-term goal of civil society inclusion and pro-poor decisions, again looping back to the assumption that networks will invest in civil society at some stage in their evolution. More simply, some networks follow a path all the way to policy change while others focus on enabling the best conditions for that change to occur.

Exactly where a network's purpose sits in the interlinked causal theory of coalition building for change (see Stachowiak discussion at 1.3, p.6), and its decisions and actions as a result of where it sits, is pivotal to the analysis of Oxfam examples in this review. The networks selected exhibit different structural and strategic characteristics depending on what their members believed to be the best way to fit context and purpose. A key enquiry in understanding networked contribution to change is to consider these characteristics: which have actual relevance to results and which are incidental decisions?

1.5 Choosing the sample; criteria and focus

Oxfam Australia started the review process by identifying a set of projects from the last five years known to be implementing a significant proportion of activities through civil society networks, and with sufficient documentation of design and results to avoid lengthy field-based discussions. The networks needed to demonstrate member interaction and collaboration, as opposed to partners working on their own element of a project coordinated by Oxfam. The search for such projects was not exhaustive, but based on recommendations of Oxfam Australia's country programme and MEAL

teams. In total, 15 projects were selected. A further two from Oxfam's case study series 'Partnering for Impact' were added on the suggestion of the consultant, because they had clear case studies available including lessons, and also to give a slightly more satisfying number for proportional trend analysis. The final two were not Australian-funded.

The decision to present the results as a combination of case study and meta review was based on recognition of diversity in context and function among the sample. The best way to illustrate how change happened seemed to be to describe it, as it was different in each instance. Six of the projects in the sample were selected for closer inspection in the body of this report (Part 3). This selection aimed to balance representation of regions, sectors, model and purpose; it also favoured projects with evidence of power shift outcomes.

The final list of projects included in the study is

Project	Country	Region	Project current / complete	Funding
Close the Gap Campaign	Australia	Pacific	Current	Oxfam Australia
Standing Together Against Violence (STAV)	Solomon Islands	Pacific	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Let's Make Our Family Safe Consortium	Solomon Islands	Pacific	Current	Oxfam Australia
Land and Inclusive Development project	Timor-Leste	Pacific	Current	Oxfam Australia
Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN)	Vanuatu	Pacific	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Vanuatu NGO Climate Action Network	Vanuatu	Pacific	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Forum Peduli Pembangunan Responsif Gender	Indonesia	East Asia	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Mekong Water Governance Network	Multiple	East Asia	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Coalition Support Program	Vietnam	East Asia	Complete	Oxfam Australia
REE-CALL Food Security Resilience and Adaptation	Bangladesh	South Asia	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Urban Resilience Committee	Bangladesh	South Asia	Current	Oxfam Australia
India Responsible Business Forum	India	South Asia	Current	Oxfam Australia
LISTEN network	Pakistan	South Asia	Current	Oxfam Australia
People's Alliance for Rights to Land (PARL)	Sri Lanka	South Asia	Complete	Oxfam Australia
Zambia Extractives (various networks)	Zambia	Africa	Current	Oxfam Australia
BRICSAM (global)		Global	Complete	Oxfam other
TajWSS (WASH)	Tajikistan	Middle East/CIS	Complete	Oxfam other

2. Methodology

2.1 Rationale

This is a light qualitative review using context-mechanism-outcome enquiry (see box, right) to pinpoint differences as well as commonalities in networks, coalitions and alliances with whom Oxfam Australia is working to achieve agreed outcomes. Broadly, it aims to answer:

- How do coalitions, alliances, and networks that partner with Oxfam participate in political process to achieve policy and practice that benefits people?
- What does **change** look like, when it is delivered by a coalition, network or alliance?

A framework that stimulated analysis rather than simply summarising elements was key. To build this, the consultant called on three main literature sources - Oxfam's Worldwide Influencing Network strategy (Oxfam 2013), Pathways to Change (Stachowiak 2014) and Oxfam's companion literature review (Stuart-Watts 2017) - to identify assumptions about the benefits of working in multi-stakeholder partnership. As analysis of different structures and tactics used by Oxfam networks took place, particular attention was paid as to whether, and how, they supported the existence and the validity of these assumptions.

A primary assumption appeared to be:

> *That joint influence, through coalitions, networks and alliances, is fundamental to results and to Oxfam's strategic goals, particularly the right to be heard.*

Under this, further assumptions of change theory are:

1. *That the forming of networks, coalitions, alliances is an appropriate foundational step for bringing about strengthened civil society participation (Figure 1, p.6).*
2. *That networks will build social capital; that networked civil society participation will lead to pro-poor policy outcomes; that pro-poor policy will lead to desired social change (the assumptions described in 1.2, p.5)*

> ### About Context-Mechanism-Outcome theory
>
> Traditional experimental and quasi-experimental research methodology from the science sector is based on expectation that given the same treatment, agents will respond in the same way. To prove that the treatment is responsible for the response, this type of research usually requires a control data set. As such, it is unsuited practically and at times ethically to researching social change – behaviour, normatives, structures and rules of societies.
>
> A response to this is context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) theory-based research (Pawson and Tilley 1997, Befani 2012). Using the underlying premise that no social setting is ever the same, CMO argues that change must also be understood on a case-by-case basis; unlike a chemical experiment, it cannot be replicated with 100% confidence. CMO examines a landscape at two points: context, or starting point, and outcome, or end/current state. If it differs, then a map of causal mechanisms is built to explain how and why differences have occurred. Pivotal to this theory is that the same map, applied in a different context, will have a different outcome. This adds unpredictability to even the most tested and reliable social change models, but is also at the basis of innovation and learning in the social change sector.

An assumption from the Worldwide Influencing Network strategy that does not appear in other literature refers to vertical networking:

3. *That linking different levels of civil society participation through to national (and at times, regional or global) will lead to large-scale change.*

It should be noted that the expectation of Oxfam and consultant was that these assumptions would be evident; we are not questioning their fundamental theoretical validity, but looking for correlations between the assumptions and the changes observed in Oxfam's projects. However, in line with the

CMO premise (see box above), differing results and pathways within different contexts were expected.

2.2 Data sources

Specifically, the data collection and analysis consisted of:

- Short external literature review with a focus on social change theory (8 main documents, listed at Annex 1)
- Adoption of findings from a partner research project comparing attributes and process of NGO/CSO networks, alliances and coalitions outside Oxfam (Stuart-Watts 2017)
- Review of around 30 project monitoring, learning, reflection and evaluation documents describing a sample of 17 Oxfam projects where building networks was a tactic or goal
- Mapping nuances of commonalities and differences in seven thematic areas, as described in 2.3
- Filtering data for trends and patterns, with a particular interest in context, tactics and results (in line with CMO)
- Selection of a smaller sample of projects for narrative explanation through simple case study, emphasising how change happened in context; as part of this, interviews with project teams for additional background and reflection on 'cause and effect' results

2.3 Meta analysis filters

A sample of 17 projects is too low in number for quantitative analysis (see limitations section below). Instead, the consultant has used simple criteria to group and analyse nuances of context, mechanisms and outcomes, as shown in the table below:

Context	Mechanisms	Outcomes
The country where the network is located, and its: • Economic status (World Bank economic strata) • Civil society status (Transparency International Index, World Press Freedom Index, Gender) • Advantages of networks in context (clear, unclear/case-by-case)	Of the **network**, including: • Purpose (to strengthen civil society, or to drive change) • Network building approach (tactic or outcome in Oxfam's project design) • Network history (strengthening previous network, or start up of new? • Agenda setting and policy goals – before or after formation • Network membership size • Structure (formalised with ToR or informal) • Coordination and funding – Oxfam or shared Of **tactics and approaches,** grouped into five categories[4] of: • Mobilisation • Media • Research, evidence and expertise • Insider advocacy influence • Empowering civil society	Change achieved, grouped by: • Inclusion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds (in civil society and policy making) • Gender advances • Policy change – local • Policy change - national

[4] For detailed definition of these five categories, see table p.34

2.4 Case study analysis

The purpose of case study inclusion in this report was to bring depth of meaning to the meta analysis, and to provide specific information on how networks were used in context to bring change. In line with the meta analysis headings, case study information was also arranged into context-mechanism-outcome discussion. Data for the case studies was sourced from project documentation as well as key informant interviews with project staff.

2.5 Ethics

The emphasis on existing documentation for this light review places the study at low risk in terms of ethical consultation. A small number of skype and telephone interviews took place with Oxfam staff in six countries; but these were low risk for respondents because:

- Questions did not explore areas that placed individuals at risk through their responses.
- Respondents are associated directly and positively with the project.
- Respondents received both written and verbal briefing on the purpose of the research, guaranteed confidentiality unless the respondent specifically desired to have quotes attributed, and the right to withdraw confidential feedback now or in the future.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to review case studies about their project and agreed to these studies being made available outside Oxfam.

The files containing notes from interviews will be stored securely on the Oxfam server in accordance with the organisation's data protection protocols.

2.6 Limitations

The primary limitation for this desk review is in the sample chosen. While the projects in the review may be representative of how Oxfam works, this is not guaranteed, for the following reasons:

- As described in the literature and context-mechanism-outcome rationale, no two projects start with the same scenario, and therefore they cannot be directly comparable.
- The low number in the sample (17) precludes meaningful statistical analysis, while the qualitative nature of inputs and outcomes also challenges all projects to demonstrate quantitative results. No project can be said to be 'more successful' than another.
- The nominated networks are recognised for their good practice and successes; no poor quality or failed networks are included in the mix. While this strengths-based approach is appropriate for contextual learning, it limits the ability to comment on what does **not** work.
- The majority of the sample is taking place as part of a project, with implications of timebound funding and specific outcome goals. It is likely however that most Oxfam offices are involved in ongoing networks at national level as part of core business, and that these networks operate differently (including with less emphasis on Oxfam's coordination and funding).
- All networks are current or have recently concluded, which limits the opportunity to examine the final phase of social change; to answer the question 'what does **change** look like when delivered by a network', more time, and different evaluation methodologies, are required.

Acknowledging these limitations is important to understanding the results, particularly for meta analysis which does not present its conclusions as 'truth' or 'proof' but as a starting point for further reflection.

Part 3: Case studies, networks in action

The case studies in this section showcase six networks within Oxfam Australia's portfolio of projects, with a particular emphasis on why the projects selected a network approach, and how that decision contributed to results. Information for the case studies was drawn from project documentation and project staff interviews. Case information is presented under headings consistent with the subsequent meta analysis, as described in the methodology section. For 'Standout Characteristics' and 'Standout Lesson', the consultant has chosen what to highlight; choice was based on consideration of unique components in comparison to other case studies, so may not necessarily reflect the highlights as seen by project staff.

3.1 Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (Governance, Leadership and Accountability (GLA) Project, 2013 - 2014)

One of three projects supported through GLA, a project to enhance networked civil society in Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network focused on increased representation of disability issues in different levels of government decision making. To do so, the project strengthened disability organisations and fostered inclusion of people with disability in other-sector civil society organisations. Key to this was building the confidence of different organisations and the leaders within them to take up spokesperson and negotiation roles, and to connect these people with collaborative government process.

Standout characteristic: GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

Oxfam has supported several networks in Vanuatu on different social change agendas. Of these, the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network stands out for the speed at which it achieved government advisory status and begin to play a role in planning disability-inclusive policy.

Context

Vanuatu has a small, largely rural population connected by a centralised democratic government as well as strong traditional influence from local leaders and the Christian church. While not experiencing the same levels of political conflict and coup as some Pacific nations, Vanuatu's political climate has nonetheless been described as volatile and dynastic[5].

Staff associated with the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network saw several advantages to working in coalitions and networks:

- Given the geographical dispersion of towns and villages, a network with geographical reach into localised issues and policy needs can bring priority issues from across communities to government attention.
- Local agencies can be suspected of bias towards a political faction. The presence of an international NGO within a coalition depoliticises and adds credibility to an impartial, informed voice.
- Linked to this, government can choose to work with this type of network to improve its profile for effectiveness and transparency. In these situations, the network becomes a neutral broker between the views of government and those of informed civil society.
- Organisations that might struggle for visibility and representation on their own have much to gain from partnership with more prominent organisations.

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[5] http://pacificpolicy.org/2015/09/by-elections-dynasty-politics-and-saving-costs/

Network purpose: STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY	The **project purpose** was to build civil society coalitions that could act directly on issues concerning them. This is separate from the **network purpose** which was 'creating a forum for sharing ideas and strategies, learning together, supporting each other and working together to address key issues.'
Structure: FORMAL and SELECTIVE INCLUDES GOVERNMENT COORDINATED JOINTLY FUNDED BY OXFAM	Originally starting in 2013 with 10 local organisations, plus Oxfam and Care International, the network has added several new members. They include representative groups of people living with disabilities as well as associated rights groups. Together they are working on a variety of disability needs from low mobility through to hearing and sight impairment. Members do not currently make financial contributions and most, according to staff, would have difficulty doing so. A TOR was in place from early stages including coordination details such as a rotating chairperson and agenda connections with other networks in the project (gender, youth livelihoods). Government departments have also been part of the network, with departments engaging and disengaging depending on relevant sectors at different phases of policy planning.
Policy goal setting: AFTER FORMATION	The Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network formed before policy goals were identified, and is still without an outcome-level policy target. This open-ended agenda works to their advantage. Sub-groups have formed depending on expertise or geographical reach to push through agendas of mutual interest. This indicates that, so long as member interest is sustained, the network's flexibility and knowledge is likely to be of benefit to various disability policies and practices.
Strategies and tactics: RESEARCH INSIDER INFLUENCE CAPACITY BUILDING MEDIA	The Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network developed and implemented a specific plan with two main areas of work: accessibility (roads and buildings) and access to education. For sharing of workload, members committed to actions and reported back on their progress at each meeting. Within this, joint mapping, research and surveying of the experiences and perspectives of people living with disabilities have been essential for government engagement, because they provided accurate and detailed data for the first time. The network is now proactively consulted on disability considerations at multiple levels of decision making. While public awareness through media of disability needs has been among actions, the network has not used popular mobilisation as a tactic; insider advice and influence has been sufficiently effective to meet policy goals.
Outcomes: (by June 2017) POLICY SHIFTS INCLUSION ADVANCES GENDER ADVANCES	• New policies for sign language (recognising that more than one form is used in Vanuatu). • Pending – national Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Act • Inclusion of disability perspectives in town planning, Port Vila
One key lesson	**Part of Oxfam's role is to fill network gaps** Oxfam project design showed intent to build capacity. In reality, organisations in the network were highly capable and engaged in their field; what they lacked was coordination and a full view of the sector. The network has largely self-organised including capacity-building components. Oxfam's main contribution has been in identifying policy moments for the network and sub-groups within it.

3.2 LISTEN Pakistan (2013 – current)

Leverage Women's Rights in Social Transformation of Elected Nominees (LISTEN) created a member organisation that connected women with political and civil society process locally, at district level, nationally and regionally. Through the networks of this organisation, the women supported one another with technical advice, local information and ongoing motivation, as they took up new roles within CBOs and political parties appropriate to their interests and experience.

Standout characteristic:
MAGNITUDE AND DIVERSITY OF MEMBERSHIP

Building on a former project, Raising Her Voice, LISTEN connected women of all backgrounds, from doctors and lawyers through to home workers, across 30 districts in four provinces. In total, 1200 women are a part of the LISTEN network, engaging with local, district, national and international gender empowerment structures. The project pre-empted barriers of low literacy or disability to ensure true representation of women and their issues.

Context

Pakistan's democracy is subject to accusations of high corruption. Disparities of wealth and education place the majority of citizens at a disadvantage in civil society participation. Public demonstration is controversial and usually triggered by political or religious factions rather than rights issues. Women's political participation is extremely low, including voter registration.

In this case, women who were networked through the LISTEN project joined community-based organisations (CBOs) in the 30 districts; however, the CBOs themselves were cross-sector with no shared agenda. This makes LISTEN an unusual networking scenario. While there were clear advantages for participants in their connection to other women rather than working in isolation, these were not context-specific. It is not possible to conclude more broadly whether there are advantages to working in networks in the context of Pakistan.

Network purpose:
STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY

The network was part of a broader project design for LISTEN, one of several pathways to increase women's participation alongside comprehensive gender rights training, community messaging and behaviour change, research and mass media promotion of women's rights. The purpose of networking woman leaders was to multiply their visibility to one another, creating motivation as well as opportunities to share and learn.

Structure:
INFORMAL SELECTIVE VERTICAL and HORIZONTAL

The female members of the LISTEN network were selected for their interest and ability to engage in governance, including politically and with local CBOs. They received gender rights training and were assisted to take up committee membership with a community group relevant to their experience. Beyond this, the network was informal and social, with members contacting each other as needed. Rather than fitting to a national brand, members had naming rights for their district-level network (40 members each) and chose how and how often to stay in touch. Oxfam was not present at this local level, and partnered with appropriate gender CBOs in each district to keep networks active. It was the sole financier.

At national level, Oxfam was already a member of a gender alliance, and used information from district groups to support discussion and advocacy through this alliance. Network members had the opportunity to meet across districts once a year. The women also became members of the regional gender alliance AVAAZ.

Policy goal setting:
NOT SET

The goal of the project was increased political participation from women. Improvement to social policy as a result of women's participation was a projected outcome, not pinned to any specific area of policy.

Strategies and tactics:
CAPACITY BUILDING
INSIDER INFLUENCE
MOBILISATION

Key to the strategy for increased political participation was personal empowerment, with regular intensive training on gender issues and community action research. The women also became involved in the mass media and spokesperson component of the project, particularly at universities. An unusual interpretation of insider influence has been its application to local systems. The appointment of these women to community committees and other CBOs gave them opportunity to add a gender lens to discussions and decisions, while connections to one another reinforced their knowledge and authority for doing so.

Outcomes:
(by June 2017)
POLICY SHIFTS
INCLUSION ADVANCES
GENDER ADVANCES

The theory behind this form of gender inclusion strongly supports the assumption that networks can strengthen civil society. However, results are not yet available in an aggregated and reportable form. In the meantime, localised improvements to implementation of policy relating to girls and women have been anecdotally recognised as a result of women's increased civil participation. The 2016 election saw several women from the network stand as candidates. A mid-term review of women's interaction with government found that the participants in the project were using skills of local government liaison and community research to call for improved responses to issues that were disproportionately affecting women.

One key lesson

Networking individuals strengthens civil society.
Staff observed that networking women leaders has had exponential impact on their empowerment and confidence, compared to other projects which have trained and mentored, but not connected, women. Insight into other districts and internationally has also helped consolidate women's knowledge and action on a broad range of gender issues, not only those faced locally.

3.3 People's Alliance on the Right to Land (PARL), Sri Lanka (2011 – current)

The People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL) has played a significant role in the protection of land rights of rural communities in providing support for litigation, community mobilization, and policy influencing. Oxfam coordinated PARL's work, including enhancing capacity until the network was ready to function independently in 2016.

Standout characteristic:
LOCAL, ORGANIC DEMAND

Since PARL's inception in 2011, the network has been acting against land rights violations of local communities. Network members provide assistance to mobilise community members and liaise with supportive stakeholders. Thus, as well as a national network, PARL is a direct service provider helping vulnerable communities defend their right to land.

Context

After the end of civil war in Sri Lanka, governments maintained tight military control in many areas of the country, and land compulsorily acquired by government during the war was not been returned. Some of it was being sold or developed without regard for local communities' land ownership and rights. A change of government in early 2015 opened up more space and freedom to advocate and mobilise, but land rights violations remained an urgent policy issue.

Particularly at the beginning, a network was necessary for the following reasons:

- National members of PARL faced significant risks in speaking out directly on government's acquisition of land, as did the communities they represented. PARL provided an alternative brand for advocacy and protected individual organisations from any hostile action by the government.
- The link between local CBOs (originally in Paanama and Ampara) and the national partners provided these organisations with visibility and protection from closure or arrest.
- Members brought complementary resources, particularly in providing legal advice and support to local organisations. CBOs knew to approach PARL for representation.
- CBOs were also networked with each other through PARL, magnifying the sense of movement against illegitimate land acquisition across Sri Lanka.

Network purpose:
DRIVE CHANGE

The network developed from a previous, less formal, land rights network to take on more concrete policy and protection targets. Members were highly capable and motivated in their field of expertise, and used the network to multiply their influence.

Structure:
FORMAL
MEMBER FUNDING

PARL's initial focus was on building the network to create strength through numbers. It began with around 15 organisations including local and international NGOs and has grown since that time. PARL is now preparing to

LOCAL COORDINATION	form its own district-level networks to more effectively engage in community campaigning. While Oxfam has been a primary funding partner, other organisations have also contributed where possible, and this has increased the sense of joint ownership of resources and activities. Since 2015, a local NGO has provided coordination support to PARL. Oxfam remains a member bringing technical rather than coordination value.
Policy goal setting: BEFORE FORMATION	PARL members are strongly aligned on the single issue of protecting communities from losing access to their land. They work on both the immediate legal and longer term policy implications of land acquisition and return.
Strategies and tactics: MOBILISATION RESEARCH INSIDER INFLUENCE CAPACITY BUILDING MEDIA	Legal and policy representation at the national level is a cornerstone of PARL's function, with most nationally based members regularly engaged in one or the other. At the local level, PARL's emphasis on mobilisation – the right to be heard - includes capacity building of local groups who wish to speak out on land rights in their area. Local organisations then communicate their observations and needs to their national contacts. PARL produces regular shadow reports to the international human rights mechanisms based on information from its members. This keeps the issues fresh and visible with government and national media.
Outcomes: (by June 2017) POLICY SHIFTS INCLUSION ADVANCES	• Eviction orders sent to a rural community were stayed as a result of litigation supported by PARL • In response to shadow reports and direct lobbying, political commitment from a number of high profile government decision makers to enact stronger policies • Community representatives have led campaigns in several provinces
One key lesson	**Activism opportunities change with context** The change of government was hugely significant for Sri Lanka and its civil society. Organisations that had become used to working under restrictive conditions needed to learn how to approach new opportunities in a different context. When asked how, and how well, PARL was able to do this, project staff commented that having the right members in the first place greatly enhanced the transition; organisations were not risk-averse, and individuals connected to PARL were senior enough to make decisions quickly. PARL used existing analytical and relational strengths in both policy and law to have land rights cases finally accepted for court hearings.

3.4 Close the Gap Campaign, Australia (2006 – current)

The Close the Gap campaign is intergenerational, designed to sustain 25 years of advocacy and technical advice to government to improve the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) Australians. Public mobilisation delivered early political commitment. Now, 10 years on. campaign members are working closely with government ministries on implementation detail.

Standout characteristic:
PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

Using proven health statistics to show the inequality of health status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the Close the Gap campaign gained rapid recognition and support. Ten years on, over 220,000 people have signed the Close the Gap pledge.

Context:

As a wealthy country, Australia rates highly on development indicators and measures for quality of life. However, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People of Australia, who were Australia's first people, are statistically disadvantaged compared to non-Indigenous counterparts; most development indicators in this demographic group are similar to developing contexts. Political and speech freedom is high, with public campaigning through media and popular mobilisation a common tactic to bring about change. The number of social justice campaigns has risen in the last ten years, linked largely to the internet and to an increased capacity for social justice activism through online campaigning organisations such as GetUp! and Change.org.

Interviews with project staff found clear advantages to the networked approach of the campaign, associated more with the issue than with the context (which has few barriers to civil society participation compared to others in the sample):

- A united front, demonstrating to the government that Indigenous Australia spoke with one voice on this issue
- Strengthened collaboration and pooling of resources between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health organisations
- Complementary skills, with Oxfam driving much of the public mobilisation and other organisations heavily focused on research, lobbying and agenda setting.

Specific to the Australian context, the first point above is key. Close the Gap was the first time that organisations with Indigenous health interests worked together at full scale. High profile mainstream health bodies such as the Australian Medical Association and Australian College of Nursing shared a voice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and advocacy organisations to show that the issue was of relevance to all Australians.

Network purpose
DRIVE CHANGE

Member organisations are highly capable and respected actors in health, including Indigenous health, motivated to join the campaign by the call to action on Indigenous health parity.

Structure
SEMI-FORMAL SELECTIVE

From an initial membership of 15 organisations, the Close the Gap campaign now includes 45 members. Members are expected to demonstrate relevance and value to the campaign, and most also make a financial contribution in line with their

MEMBER FUNDING ability to do so. The agreed governance system includes two co-chairs from Indigenous-led organisations, a permanent secretariat from the Australian Commission of Human Rights, and a Steering Committee with representation from each member organisation. However, this structure, while well understood by members, is not documented, and no ToR exists.

Policy goal setting:
BEFORE FORMATION

The network formed in response to the call of the Australian Social Justice Commissioner to achieve a clearly articulated goal: "Raise the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to that of the non-Indigenous population within a generation." The strategy for doing so has required a chain of interim goals to be set, but the overall vision remains the same.

Strategies and tactics:
MOBILISATION
MEDIA
INSIDER INFLUENCE
RESEARCH
CAPACITY BUILDING

The Campaign's early mobilisation probably affected 2007 national election results and certainly delivered strong commitment from the incoming government between 2007 and 2010. It continues annual Close the Gap Days which see over 1000 public events take place across the country. Media engagement has been key for coverage and focus on issues, events and resulting political commitments.

Since 2010, the coalition has produced an annual shadow report raising current priorities including social determinants of Indigenous health disparities. A subgroup of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spokespeople known as the National Health Leadership Forum is working closely with government as an advisory committee to health policy.

While member organisations are senior and high capacity in their field, sharing of knowledge and skills has been an important attribute of the campaign. Though contributing to policy research and insider advocacy, Oxfam's main role has been to lead campaigning and media, in line with their strengths in Australia.

Outcomes:
(by March 2017)
POLICY SHIFTS
INCLUSION ADVANCES
GENDER ADVANCES

- Bipartisan political commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health, 2007 onwards.
- A government health plan and implementation plan, with associated budget, for Indigenous health, 2012-2016.
- The offshoot National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF) is the 'go-to' advisor to government on policy affecting Indigenous health.
- While statistics imply progress towards the generational equity goal is slower than needed, maternal and child health indicators have improved; offshoot campaigns from network members are addressing areas of family welfare and domestic violence.

One key lesson

A long-term goal calls for adaptive strategies, including internal lobbying
The pathway to closing the health gap is complex and context-driven. Beginning with political will, it has since diversified into a range of social, cultural and service delivery policies for inclusive health services across Australia. In lieu of a full 25-year policy roadmap, members have needed an adaptive approach, with regular reflection and realignment to set and meet interim goals. This has included at times internal lobbying on setting priorities – for instance, mental health or disability - a process that is settled where necessary through steering committee vote.

3.5 India Responsible Business Forum (2015 – current)

The India Responsible Business Forum (IRBF) brought together existing partners in corporate social responsibility, including Oxfam, to work on a strategy for encouraging businesses to set their own guidelines for accountability and transparency. The forum liaises directly with representatives of India's Top 100 companies on their uptake of voluntary corporate guidelines.

Standout characteristic: TRANSPARENCY WITHOUT 'NAMING AND SHAMING'

IRBF provides annual reports and a website that pull together public domain information in a way that can be easily accessed and compared. Rather than pursuing unethical targets and practices directly, the forum places the information in the hands of civil society, including media and workers' rights groups, to leverage as required.

Context

India is among the world's BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). It has a rapidly growing economy and resulting middle class, but nationally still sits within a low-to-middle income World Bank strata. Wealth discrepancy and corruption are of concern in this context, particularly as the pressure to expand industry meets environmental and social concerns. The current government has introduced new laws to monitor NGOs and journalists.[6]

Oxfam staff stated a firm belief that working in coalition towards the goal of corporate transparency was essential in this context, due to:

- Greater potential for sustainability, continuity and long-term impact of networks and coalitions as compared to individual organisations.
- Added credibility and 'watchdog' advantages of combining local and international observers in a single entity.
- The workload and type of research required, including highly technical analysis of policy and corporate reporting, which was enhanced by multi-agency inputs.

Network purpose: DRIVE CHANGE

Alongside other initiatives in Oxfam India's private sector engagement team, this project sought specifically to improve disclosure practices of India's Top 100 companies.

Structure INFORMAL FLEXIBLE MEMBERSHIP

Participation is by informal agreement between members with aligned interests and agendas. Four main members, one of which is a network themselves, the Corporate Responsibility Watch, meet regularly to plan actions and longer term strategies. Other members step in and out as needed, for instance to provide thematic guidance or to share a specific industry expertise. Despite this informality of process, the India Responsible Business Forum is a clear brand with its own website and identity in discussions with government, corporations and media.

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[6] https://rsf.org/en/ranking India ranked 133rd of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index in 2016, and 136th in 2017.

Policy goal setting: BEFORE FORMATION	Many partners in the India Responsible Business Forum had previously been working together on diverse aspects of corporate reporting and ethics[7]. The network formed as a way to target transparency and disclosure in particular, while members continued to work on other elements of corporate social responsibility in other ways.
Strategies and tactics: MEDIA MOBILISATION INSIDER INFLUENCE RESEARCH	The annual reporting on disclosure practices is done with media and public in mind; as one staff member put it, "Unless this is seen by the target audience, it doesn't add much value." Business media is of particular interest, including a formal non-commercial partnership with one media organisation. The research and outreach team within the forum engages with all Top 100 businesses, primarily through pre-filled datasheets and invitation to companies to respond with comments. The forum also engages with government with a view to advocate on regulatory improvements. .
Outcomes: (by June 2017) POLICY SHIFTS INCLUSION ADVANCES	• After the first year of IRBF disclosure process, 25 out of 100 businesses responded to their call with additional information on their standard disclosures; in the second year, 33. • Next steps are to push not only for improved reporting but also improvements in performance, for instance in supply chain and community engagement
One key lesson	**Networked action and direct action can be interdependent** Forum members including Oxfam have committed time and resources to the IRBF as part of their ongoing strategies for private sector partnership and corporate social responsibility. Each organisation also continues with their own agenda – for instance in Oxfam's case, community-based supply chain research – contributing to broader accountability objectives. Project staff highlighted this mutual nature of coalition and direct work as an asset to achieving goals.

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[7] Existing relationships are an important element for trust and responsiveness according to Oxfam's partner literature review (Stuart Watts 2017).

3.6 Timor-Leste Land and Inclusive Development (LID) project (2016 – current)

Originally aiming to fill the gap of community mobilisation in negotiations on inappropriate government land development, the LID project quickly developed a broader agenda: civil society partnership with government on economic development strategies and policies. It brought together two local and two national networks, to strengthen their coordination and joint advocacy.

Standout characteristic:
ADDRESSING CAUSES OF LAND ACQUISITION

Existing networks associated with the Land and Inclusive Development project started out with a land rights focus, in response to rapidly moving infrastructure development in two municipalities, Oecusse and Covalima. Recognising that the problems were driven by pressure for economic development in these municipalities, networks at local and national level refocused to ensure accountability, transparency and inclusion in development decisions – the 'inclusive development' of the project title.

Context:

After periods of violence in the first decade of Timor-Leste's independence, the country and its government are now stable. Some progress has been made against development indicators, while economic development was boosted by oil and gas resources. Corruption has grown rapidly; Timor-Leste now rates below countries like India or Sri Lanka on the corruption perceptions index. Since new journalism laws were introduced in 2014, media and mobilisation for pro-poor rights has increased in risk.

Staff saw networked action as the most effective way to bring change, for the following reasons:

- As part of the local to national influencing strategy, a structure of communication and action between network partners helped the national network to monitor situations in remote areas.
- Organisations working together had greater immunity from accusations of political bias or international (particularly Australian) pressure.
- The weakness of national policy on land laws called for a united, consistent voice to government process, while multiple agencies might have 'muddied the water' with different messages and asks.

Network purpose:
STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY

It is important here to differentiate between the networks – two local and two national – and the project itself. The purpose of all networks involved in LID is to drive change, but the theory of change for the project is different; a strengthened and participating civil society is the outcome sought, key to facilitating inclusive development. Skills-building for civil society groups, and identifying government structures and figures making decisions on economic development, helped to maintain the focus on the project's main argument, that development processes need to be inclusive, and to reduce vulnerability without increasing gaps of wealth and opportunity between rich and poor.

Structure:
EXISTING NETWORKS

Under the Land and Inclusive Development project, networks in two municipalities affected by plans for large-scale infrastructure were supported

HORIZONTALLY AND
VERTICALLY CONNECTED
FORMAL WHERE
NECESSARY
JOINT COORDINATION
OXFAM FUNDING

to become more active and formal, while a third at national level advocated to parliament for legislation on community land tenure rights. All had been operating previously. Oxfam had also been working on land issues with the national network and directly for at least six years. Phasing in a project approach helped to mitigate challenges from withdrawal of other donors from Timor-Leste and maintain necessary funds to the three networks at a crucial time for action on infrastructure decisions.

While networks continued to operate much as they had done, without a need for joint decision making, they connected regularly on information and practice, including quarterly meetings and cross-exposure between the two municipalities. National negotiations were enhanced by this information, drawing from priorities and ideas raised by local partners in the two municipalities.

Policy goal setting:
BEFORE FORMATION

As long-term influencers in discussions on land use and rights, members of the national network were strongly aligned on what needed to be achieved in terms of policy.

Strategies and tactics:
MOBILISATION
INSIDER INFLUENCE
RESEARCH
CAPACITY BUILDING

Gap analysis at the start of the project identified community mobilisation as a weakness. Local networks concentrated on empowerment and voice, and contributed evidence to the argument at municipal and national levels for social economic (agriculture and other locally relevant livelihoods) investment. Nationally, the networks have been extremely active in advising government on the need for and content of a land claim law.

Note: The current caution exercised by media in Timor-Leste has meant that journalists have not played a role in bringing large-scale land acquisition to public attention.

Outcomes:
(by June 2017)
POLICY SHIFTS
INCLUSION ADVANCES

Network partners have contributed firstly as advocates to getting land law onto the agenda and subsequently as advisors to ensure the law represents needs and rights of current land users. A land law, which recognises for the first time people's rights in Timor-Leste to claim land based on prior ownership or long-term tenure, was passed by presidential approval in June 2017, a significant achievement for project partners.

Progress on the law was enhanced by positive feedback, rather than resistance, to the law in process, including encouragement from the network lobby directly to the President to move forward with the Bill. This constructive support for proposed legislative change has been noted and appreciated by government partners working on the law, with potential to lead to greater collaboration and political will in the medium term.

One key lesson

Networking the networks encourages local ownership: There is no such thing as the LID network. Rather, Oxfam is supporting local networks to grow and formalise in two municipalities. These networks operate independently of each other and of the national-level alliance of organisations, but are connected to each other for information sharing and organisational strengthening.

Part 4: Meta analysis results

4.1 Coalitions, alliances and networks – do the terms differ in meaning?

The partner literature review examined how three different terms were used to describe types and purpose of groups: coalitions, alliances and networks. It concluded that while there were some correlations of usage in the sample given, the correlations were not sufficient for strong defining parameters: 'the terms coalitions, networks and alliances are used in a fluid and flexible manner… the three terms are often used interchangeably.' (Stuart-Watts 2017 p.1).

The literature review suggests that of the three terms, networks have a stronger alignment with capacity building and long-term member benefits, while coalitions and alliances often form with a specific goal to achieve and less emphasis on value add for member organisations. This is borne out to some degree by the 17 projects in this analysis. As shown in Figure 3 below, the term 'network' is used more than others. It is more likely to be used in cases of startup network building, and also where the Oxfam project identifies network building or member benefits (capacity and CSO empowerment) as an outcome. However, overall, and particularly given the small sample size, there is no great significance to these subjective naming decisions. Being clear about the purpose and function of the network was more important than the title used to do it.

Data, graphs and sample numbers

The maximum number for aggregated data in this section of the report is 17; at times project documentation is unclear about the element under discussion and so the number included in graphs is less than 17. This makes a difference of just one or two examples appear proportionally significant. For this reason, actual numbers are favoured over proportions; pie graphs have not been used. For certain categories, the relevance of using the naming convention 'network' versus other names can be seen, so graphs in the structure section highlight these differences.

Figure 3: Naming conventions in review sample (n=17)
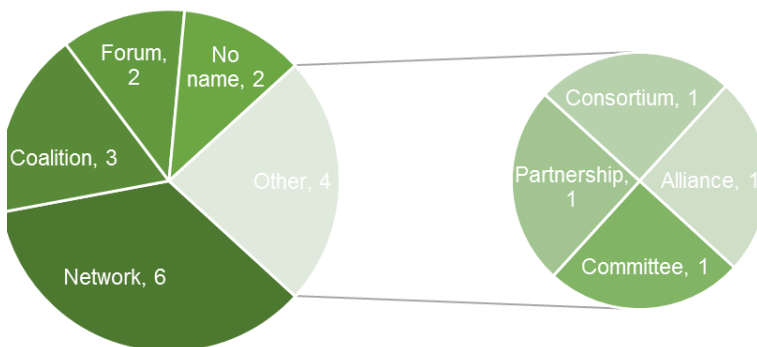
Where the term 'coalition' is used, the group is working closely with government on insider advocacy and policy influence, with less emphasis on community mobilisation. These correlations are not consistently applied. Some networks in the sample are highly targeted and formal, while long-term coalitions evolve towards member benefits including learning, mentoring, and sub-group work on associated priorities.

In two cases, individuals came together to form a single organisation addressing a gap in civil society influence. Both cases were gender projects. The members were women selected for leadership potential, who received intensive training and support to take up civil society roles. In these cases, local level networks had their own naming rights, plus women also connected to sister networks in other locations for the purpose of learning, motivation and

EXAMPLE: Under the LISTEN project in Pakistan, there was no entity known as the LISTEN network. Women connecting at district level chose their own network identity. In many cases, including the collaborative work taking place at national level, a name and brand was not necessary. Reaching further to regional gender network AVAAZ, the women leaders in LISTEN joined as individual members.

amplification of individual achievements. Oxfam could be considered an enabler, but not exactly a member, of this type of network.

4.2 Context

Context analysis began by mapping a small set of externally assigned indicators for each nation where the Oxfam projects were taking place. The aim of this was to identify if there were any similar contexts, and if so, whether networks in these contexts were also showing similar characteristics. Some small correlations were noted, but at the same time, even networks within the same country were working differently, and still achieving good results. The conclusion was that it is not necessary information to the narrative in this section, and it has been included as an annex.

Advantages in Context: Overcoming context barriers to effective policy influence

Staff interviewed for the six case studies in this report were asked about the advantages of working in coalition in their context. In each, several were noted. Details appear in the case studies; below are summarised versions.

- **Neutrality from political factions**
  Mentioned by: Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, PARL
  In the Pacific countries, staff described a context of political factions, where local agencies were usually suspected of bias. In these cases, a network involving an international NGO was less likely to be accused of political leanings, allowing in an impartial, yet locally driven, rights-based stance.

- **(Linked to 1 above), a government preference for networks as partners**
  Mentioned by: Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, PARL
  In contexts where local organisations struggled to maintain perceptions of impartiality, governments often preferred to work with a network over an individual agency, to avoid accusations of favouritism in the civil society sector. Governments were also more likely to accept research and policy briefings prepared by multiple agencies, as the risk of bias or inaccuracy of findings was lessened.

- **Strength in numbers for visibility and protection**
  Mentioned by: Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, India
  In contexts of restricted freedom of speech, operating as a network provided visibility and shared responsibility. Actions and opinions could not be assigned to any one organisation. This was particularly beneficial for local CBOs whose members sometimes faced significant risk speaking out directly.

- **Government as a network member**
  Mentioned by: Vanuatu, Vietnam CSP
  n some cases the sustainability and success of the network was greatly enhanced by including government as a member. As well as demonstrating to the public and partners that political will was in place, this tactic guaranteed legitimacy of research and policy outcomes from a government perspective. In some of the more restrictive contexts, government inclusion

EXAMPLE: When the People's Alliance for Rights to Land (PARL) formed in Sri Lanka in 2010/2011, the government's restrictions on civil society activism put local organisations at personal risk. Oxfam's coordination at that time provided security and continuity of dialogue because the organisation represented an international, politically impartial presence. In 2016, recognising a shift in opportunities for local CBOs and NGOs, Oxfam handed coordination to a national network member.

is mandated.

- **Data and analysis the government can use**
  Mentioned by: Close the Gap, IRBF, LISTEN, Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, PARL, Land and Inclusive Development
  In some contexts, networks were more effective in sourcing and reporting population data than government. This brought great value to governments in terms of data mining and analysis. While organisations were often also providing this service as sole agents, working together on data meant that reach was greater and subsequent policy advice stronger than organisations were achieving in isolation. Supporting government with data was occurring across all contexts, but was particularly helpful in interconnected district or provincial networks where the information was of use to mid-level and national governments.

- **'Watchdog' advantages of international/local combinations**
  Mentioned by: PARL, IRBF, Land and Inclusive Development
  In contexts of high corruption perceptions and / or low press freedom, monitoring government process was difficult and controversial. By working with, and funding, local NGOs and CBOs, Oxfam had greater immunity from accusations of an imposed international agenda, while local partners had a central point for sharing observations.

4.3 Mechanisms

4.3.1 Structure

PURPOSE: DRIVE, STRENGTHEN OR LEARN?

In most cases, the design or monitoring logframe for the project gave a clear sense of primary purpose, at least from Oxfam's perspective. They have been grouped as follows:

1. **Drive specific change:** where partners pooled their skills and community/govt reach on the assumption that many voices, from many directions, could have more impact than a single voice.
2. **Strengthen civil society participation**: where partners focused on local level empowerment and inclusion in political decision making.
3. Enhance **learning and coordination:** where partners came together to improve programme effectiveness through joint planning
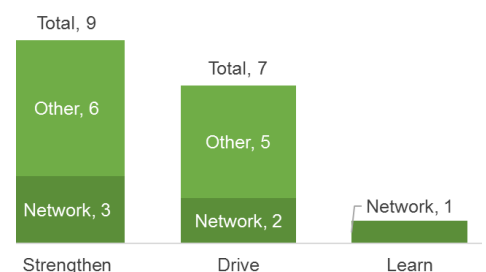
The proportion of each type in this study is shown at Figure 4.

Figure 4: Primary purpose of networks (n=17)

Slightly more projects aimed to strengthen civil society as the primary purpose than to drive change directly, and the pathway for doing so was to strengthen and connect civil society organisations, with each other and with governance systems and structures. This underscores the assumption that networks will benefit civil society inclusion in decision making, the hierarchical theory of change (see p.7). In these projects, it was assumed that a policy would be identified and improved at some stage but this goal, nor the target policy, was not identified at design stage.

While clear primary purpose is recognised as a factor of success (Stuart-Watts 2017), a crucial observation from the sample is that purpose in design does not always reflect purpose in reality. Networks evolved to encompass all three to some degree, given time. An acknowledged limitation of the study was exclusion of networks that did **not** exhibit results, success or sustainability; it would be interesting to explore links between too rigid a purpose and poor sustainability of groups.

NETWORK BUILDING: TACTIC OR OUTCOME IN PROJECT DESIGN?

The focus of project design in the sample is weighted towards a functioning network as an outcome, rather than as a means to an end (Figure 5). Oxfam brought usually brought together organisations working in a sector who could jointly write and pursue pro-poor goals within that sector. Projects that visualised a network as an outcome were also significantly more likely to use the term 'network' to refer to the resulting group. This may be a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' or it may be that Oxfam and member organisations prefer the word over more formal terms for multi-agency influence partnerships, particularly during startup and planning phases when the goals may not yet be clear.

AGENDA SETTING AND POLICY GOALS – BEFORE OR AFTER FORMING?

While it was more common to come together to work on a pre-identified policy or agenda, several cases in the review, particularly those with network building as an outcome, focused on formation before choosing a goal to work on together (Figure 6). In certain situations, it was necessary for the group to be in place in order to define problems and solutions collaboratively. In one case (the Vietnam Coalition Project, not included as a case study), the project did not even set a sector for working, but allowed gap analysis at project commencement to guide network formation and priorities. In another (LISTEN), the network was focused on tactical inclusion of women in CBOs and political process. A specific policy was never intended as the target; it was assumed that greater participation of women in decisions would be of benefit to multiple social and institutional policies. This assumption has been shown as valid in many cases across the project.

EXAMPLE: *The Close the Gap campaign has been clear from its inception on its primary purpose to drive change in Australian Indigenous health. Along the way, an expanding and likeminded membership has allowed for innovation, learning and offshoot Indigenous rights campaigns. After 10 years of campaigning, members remain motivated with constant collaborative refreshing of workplans and priorities.*
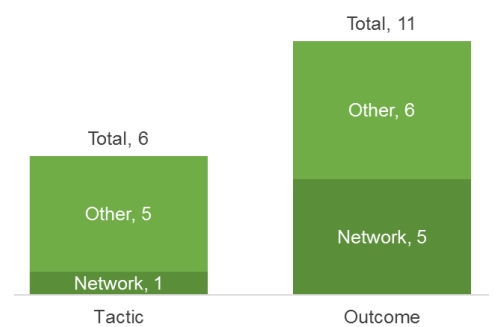

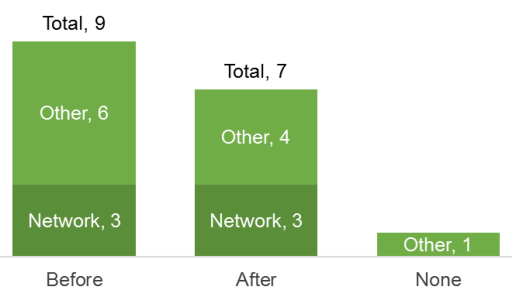*Figure 5: Network building – tactic or outcome in project design (n=17)*

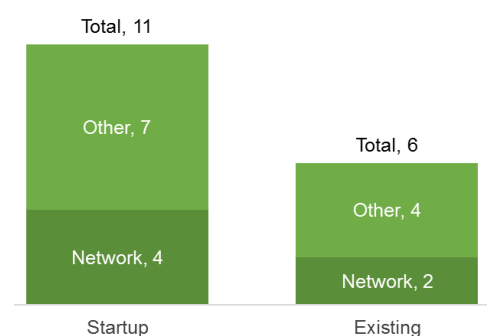*Figure 6: Agenda setting – before or after formation (n=17)*

Figure 7: Network foundation – existing or startup (n=17)

EXAMPLE: LISTEN monitors local-level results of women's inclusion in local governance. Staff confirmed that many outcomes favourable to women are occurring. They gave the example of a woman leader who called successfully for accountability on domestic violence laws. Police who had not met their obligation to protect women were dismissed, with the full support of the community. While there may have been other factors at play in the decision, staff were confident of the causal link between the woman leader's actions and the outcome.

NETWORK FOUNDATION – EXISTING OR STARTUP?

The projects in this review were slightly more likely to start up civil society linkages than to support those already existing (Figure 7). It should be noted, however, that there are nuances in each case. The idea of 'startup' does not necessarily mean that there were no CBOs operating in the sector of influence, or that they were not previously working with each other and/or with Oxfam. The project basis, and its associated influx of funds, usually made it possible to draw these partners together in new way, and the potential for doing so at times led to the proposal in the first place. Sometimes Oxfam tendered for network partners, an approach that identified ready and high-capacity organisations, and also contributed to landscape analysis. For existing networks, Oxfam's support ranged from coordination – formalising structures, meetings and workplans – to technical, with an emphasis on policy analysis and local to national linkages.

EXAMPLE: The People's Alliance for Rights to Land (PARL) developed from a previous network, the Land Forum. Project-based support from Oxfam allowed the network to become more visible and representative, with membership quickly increasing. As the issue of military acquisition of land was relevant to provinces across Sri Lanka, PARL's broadened profile meant that local community groups knew where to go for help on land tenure cases.

NETWORK SIZE

The diversity of size across the sample is shown in Figure 8. Most networks have between five and 15 member organisations. However, due to the successful outcomes cited across the networks regardless of their size, it is difficult to make any conclusions here. It is worth noting that in some cases where numbers appear small, one or more members may be a network themselves, representing multiple organisations and their respective reach. Larger networks appeared to be better recognised by government (and therefore particularly effective at collaborative insider advocacy) but their progress could be slow because of the complexities of message and sign-off between partners. Oxfam staff convening larger groups commented that coordination and administration to maintain quality connections was a full-time role.

Figure 8: size of network membership (n=12)

FORMAL (WITH ToR) OR INFORMAL?

A network's formality was classified for this analysis quite simply, as whether or not a Terms of Reference for the group was in place. Figure 9 shows that more networks were informal than formal in this review. As with conclusions on size, bearing in mind that all networks in the group had successes to share, there is no trend here that one works better than another. Those who worked with Terms of Reference including division of roles and responsibilities saw it as absolutely essential, while those who remained informal, including coalitions with high-profile membership, cited it as a key advantage contributing to goodwill and innovation. The one case that falls in the middle is Australia's Close the Gap campaign.

Figure 9: formality of network (ToR in place) (n=13)

EXAMPLE: Close the Gap started with around 15 members and now has over 45. Necessarily for a group of this size, clear coordination and decision processes are in place. Yet staff express a reluctance to write this down in a formal Terms of Reference for members, in case it negatively affects the sideline networking and collaboration that have become core benefits of membership.

COORDINATION AND FUNDING – OXFAM OR SHARED?

Projects' survival and success were dependent on having a central administrative point holding networks together. This was usually Oxfam (see Figure 10). Staff feedback consistently reiterated how important this was: not necessarily that Oxfam was doing it but that **somebody** was. For startup networks, responsibility fell solely to Oxfam as the network instigator. However, the practicality and likelihood of local coordination increased with the maturity of the network. Also, due to Oxfam's policy of local partnership for community-based programmes, the more local the chapter or group, the more likely it was that local leadership guided activities and decisions.

The partner literature review (Stuart-Watts 2017) found that networks sharing financial responsibility were more likely to sustain and develop than those dependent on a single funding source. Oxfam's sample does not reflect this practice. Only two networks were calling for member contributions, with another two securing some cofunding from other international partners[8] (Figure 11).   Staff explained that there were practical considerations to this. Most CBOs and local NGOs working with Oxfam in the sample had extremely limited funds. For many of these organisations, a key benefit of partnership was increased implementation budget. In exchange they offered reach, knowledge and technical skills that could be considered in-kind contribution.

This is a problematic finding, but not unexpected. Staff were aware of the challenge, at times supporting local organisations to think through alternative funding sources including internal government grants.

EXAMPLE: A local network associated with Timor-Leste's Land and Inclusive Development project wanted to connect with the Publish What you Pay global advocacy group[9]. Membership of Publish What you Pay requires a formal entity with funding to be in place. Oxfam worked with the network to help attain formal status including sourcing of alternative donors.

Figure 10: Responsibility for coordination of network (n=16)

EXAMPLE: Governance of the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability network is shared, including a rotating chair and an emphasis on inclusion of people living with disabilities in coordination roles. This approach builds leadership skills in individuals and coordination capacity for CBOs, and is also intended to enhance sustainability of the network in a long-term advisory role.
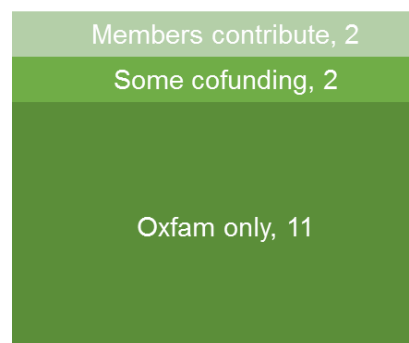

Figure 11: Funding of network (n=15)

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[8] Many projects were unclear in documentation on the question of sole/joint funding, with staff attrition further contributing to uncertainty. As such, this is a fairly unstable conclusion, and possibly an area where further research could contribute to better evidence on the importance of sharing financial responsibility among members.
[9] http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/

4.3.2 Tactics and approaches

Five tactical themes were evident in activities of networks and coalitions: mobilisation; media; research, evidence and expertise; 'insider' advocacy influence; empowering civil society[10]. These themes incorporate a wide range of different ideas for shifting power and influence. Specific examples are available in the case studies at Section 3. As Figure 12 shows, all were widely and reflexively used, with seven projects using all five.

It is important to note that none of these tactics require a network to be in place. Oxfam or partners can do all of these things on their own. Thus, analysis in this section goes to the heart of intent of this review: in what circumstances do these tactics benefit from a networked approach? Meta analysis including staff insights found strong and consistent benefits to networked over individual action for tactics of mobilisation, media engagement and generating research and evidence. For insider advocacy and civil society empowerment, results were more on a case-by-case basis; while these tactics applied jointly were found to be powerful, it was not possible from the sample to conclude that they were **more** powerful than acting alone. The 'advantages in context' discussion at p.28 is also highly relevant here. The summary table on the next page describes what activities and outputs fell into each tactic, as well as the potential advantages of applying them in coalition.
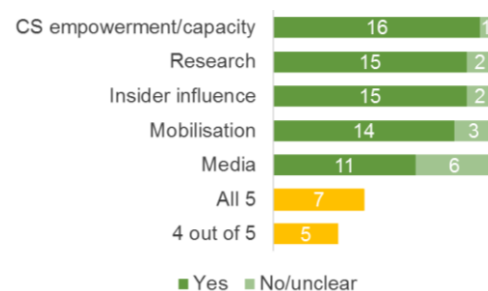

Figure 12: Utilisation of tactics, grouped by five tactical themes (n=17)

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[10] A note on how this term is intended may be helpful. Here, civil society refers to local groups and individuals representing the interests of the poor and disadvantaged. Empowerment tactics in the sample included building technical skills, policy knowledge, political connections and confidence to assume power. These activities supported smaller organisations to be become larger and more visible, both inside and outside the network. They also built leadership capacity in individuals within these groups, and, in the case of the LISTEN network, individual women who were not yet networked into groups.

Tactic	Included:	How did networked action add value over individual action?	Where was it used?	Where was it NOT used?
Mobilisation	• Calling the general public to act or speak on behalf of affected communities (rallies, petitions and social media / online actions), showing solidarity and support for their priorities. • Calling affected communities to take action, and to recognise and endorse action from the general public taken on their behalf.	• The reach and community ownership of public mobilisation increased; it was no longer seen as 'Oxfam's campaign'. It was also safer and more politically neutral than local organisations calling independently for action.	• In contexts where it was safe for people to engage visibly on the issues to be addressed. • Supporting social change locally, for instance by women leaders mobilising support for gender inclusion in Pakistan.	• Where 'people power' was not necessary to call for the change sought, for instance national-level negotiations on the National Disability Act in Vanuatu. • Where it was unsafe to do so, for instance in Vietnam networks.
Media and messaging	• Self-placed materials and messaging (paid/unpaid) to raise awareness and shift public perceptions. • Proactive media engagement including TV, radio and print/online journalists, to change public discourse on issues.	• Network members pooled different channels so that messages had greater reach and audience, including at local levels. A broader set of media relationships was also available to the network and its members.	• In contexts with relative media independence and an issues-focused news cycle, for instance Sri Lanka and Australia. • When public awareness and action were pivotal to results, for instance in consumer pressure to increase transparency of the Top 100 companies in India.	• Linked to the above, where mobilisation of public opinion and action was not a priority, again in Vanuatu, or where journalism was not of high interest to the public, for instance in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. • Where media was state-owned or otherwise constrained, for instance in Vietnam and Timor-Leste
Research, evidence, expertise	• Analysis of policy areas including budget and business case scenarios • Social and geo-political research for government, partner and media use, and to inform the network's internal decisions and directions. • Expert advice and consultation in policy process	• Networks pooled their research skills and their data. As a result, knowledge of local situations was more representative and current, reflecting shared agendas. Networks also connected different levels of information so that organisations at national level had clear insight into local priorities, sometimes across several locations.	• In all contexts: sometimes as a tool to mobilise public, government and partner attention on priority issues, sometimes in direct partnership with government and their knowledge requirements. • In situations where up to date information was crucial, for instance in land rights monitoring in Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka.	• Where policy influence was not the goal, for instance in Pakistan's LISTEN project – but even then, women leaders were pooling their achievements and experiences to create jointly generated outcome data for future use.
'Insider' advocacy influence	Work done directly with policy makers in government and corporations, for instance: • Lobby representation of public and partner priorities. • Technical support to government to achieve accountable promises. • 'Inner sanctum' confidential negotiations with power holders.	• A networked approach to insider advocacy at times opened doors, particularly when government preferred to work with networks over individual agencies. It also brought the full weight of a sector to bear, with individual negotiators becoming figureheads for united advocacy. Advocates gained greater visibility into what other insiders were doing.	• Where local organisations were not yet seen as legitimate and credible government partners, and a shared voice was more likely to be accepted. • Where the relationship with government and policy holders was an existing asset of one or more members; national level coalitions were often set up for the specific purpose of insider lobby.	• Used to a degree in all contexts, though project documentation rarely covers specifics of primary relationship holders, strategies and tactics. **Note that advantages of insider influence in the name of a network, compared to independent negotiations between organisations and power holders, are unclear.**
Empowering civil society	Work done directly with civil society to strengthen long-term participation, through: • Skills in planning and analysis. • Project management for local CBOs • Intra-network mentoring. • Building leadership and confidence levels to assume power. • Building individual champions inside and outside network membership.	• Member organisations learned not only from Oxfam but also from each other; the scope and volume of interagency support was broader. However, being part of a network also increased pressure and expectation on local organisations' performance and results.	• In all LMIC contexts, as primary to Oxfam's Worldwide Influencing Network strategy.	• In the Close the Gap campaign (Australia), where the emphasis was on connecting and mobilising an already active civil society.

4.4 Outcomes; change achieved

All projects in the sample demonstrated results in shifting power or perceptions, grouped into four areas: local policy, national policy, gender and inclusion. Figure 13 shows that project results span the four areas, and also that inclusion – delivering a greater role and visibility of civil society organisations in policymaking - has been the strongest outcome for projects. This aligns with trends of design and structure highlighted earlier. Oxfam's approach has been slightly weighted to strengthening civil society organisations rather than the traditional advocacy of specific, timebound policy goals.

Figure 13: areas of influence where outcomes were achieved

Note that where a project has been marked as a no/unclear, it does not mean that progress has definitely not been made in that category of influence: only that the progress was not strongly evident in document review

Local/national policy – how did networks contribute to pro-poor outcomes?

Staff taking part in interviews were asked how a networked approach contributed to outcomes in ways that an individual approach might not have done. They identified the following attributes:

* **Empowerment and profile for local organisations**
  Mentioned by: Close the Gap, India Responsible Business Forum, PARL, Land and Inclusive Development, Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network
  Empowerment of local CBOs and community voice was fundamental to influence. In networks, capacity building in its usual, operational sense – training and skills mentoring – was often not required due to the high quality of partners already working in the target sector. Rather, empowerment for local organisations was about taking a more visible role than previously, or forming sub-groups of specialised skills and interests to push relevant organisational priorities.

* **Vertical and horizontal reach into geographically isolated local issues**
  Mentioned by: PARL, Land and Inclusive Development, Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, LISTEN
  Oxfam engages with local partners for implementation of community-based activism and empowerment work. Connecting these partners together multiplied the geographical reach for monitoring and reporting at national level. This built an evidence base that reflected community level imperatives in national level policy. It became more feasible for national policy influence to be driven by local data and insights; in reverse, local organisations had resources to drive local mobilisation and change. A further benefit, particularly for strengthening local organisations, was the sharing of experiences and lessons between agencies working in different settings on common agendas.

* **Magnified sense of movement and support**
  Mentioned by: LISTEN, PARL, Land and Inclusive Development, Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network
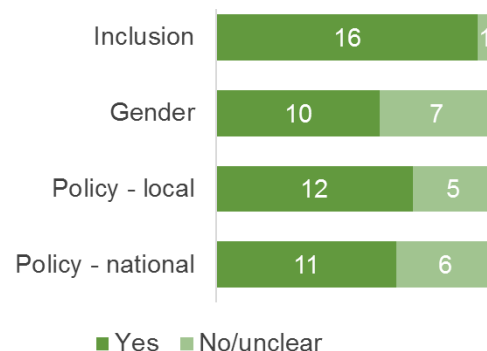
Networking the voices and actions of organisations or individuals in more than one location created a perception of civil society movement and demand greater than it may have been in reality: what is known in campaigning terms as a 'buzz'. This was further enhanced by connection and motivation between networks operating locally, so that they too felt they were part of something larger than their own scope of work.

- **A single voice; a united front; a long-term entity**
  All projects mentioned this attribute.
  Relationships built within networks in the sample were solid and long-term, not only with Oxfam but with each other. Member organisations, or in the case of LISTEN, individuals, were like-minded to start with. Staff talked about goodwill, enthusiasm and passion as drivers for sustained joint action. Networks could show a united front with consistent messages and calls for change. All networks in the sample showed intent for long-term collaboration and expansion, and some were exploring alternative funding mechanisms in recognition of project expiry dates. As with many conclusions in this review, it must be remembered that the sample only contains positive examples. Getting to this point is not an inherent attribute of networks but represents hard work and intuitive processes. Some staff talked about the vital need for adaptability over the long term, to become better at planning inclusively between members and priorities; this was seen as core to longevity and sustainability.
  .

Inclusion (the right to be heard): how did networks achieve a stronger voice for communities?

In the sample under review, local groups working on environment, disaster resilience, land rights and gender have enhanced the skills and confidence of community members to become involved in discussions and decisions on these issues. Results in this area were evident in 16 out of the 17 examples.

Outcomes for political inclusion happen across a range of Oxfam projects, not only those operating through multi-agency partnerships. However, there are three tiers of vocal empowerment, and raising community voice is only the first. Beyond this, networks between local and national influencers are assumed to be of particular importance for carrying voice into the next two tiers: hearing community, and responding to community.

Unfortunately, much of the documentation provided does not highlight the extent to which this occurred. Mapping change and information flow is not a standard question for project documentation so, where significant national level policy change has occurred, project documents make it appear as if member organisations at that level have largely done the talking. As discussed in the conclusion to this document, many national advocacy actors including Oxfam intend to represent citizens only until citizens and their representative groups can represent themselves – the

starting point for community-led policy making – and during this time there are risks of dilution, imposed agenda or poor accountability to face emergent issues.

However, talking to staff, it becomes clearer that local to national data flow has indeed been a powerful attribute of vertical networks (for instance, Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network, PARL, Land and Inclusive Development), representing community voice even though community members are not physically at the table on national negotiations. There are two implications to this: firstly, that project reports and evaluations would benefit from more confident articulation of vertically connected civil society; and secondly, that examples of this theory in action may be more prevalent than documentation suggests. Without this sort of evidence to hand, the role of local civil society in influencing quality policy is less concrete. A gap in knowledge on the regularity and commonalities of local-to-national influence suggests a further phase of research is needed.

How did networks achieve better gender empowerment and shifts to equality?

Five projects in the sample were designed with specific objectives for gender equality, but many more had the participation and empowerment of women within their framework for social change, and 10 had enhanced women's participation as an outcome. In theory, these results might be equally achieved with a non-networked gender initiative. Staff and documentation suggested two reasons to use networked approaches to enhance gender outcomes:

1. Gender considerations in design, planning and implementation are well embedded into Oxfam's process but less so in partner organisations and community initiatives. Networking provides Oxfam with the opportunity to enhance gender priorities for partners.
2. Barriers to women's social participation are also highly contextual and linked to gender norms, ranging from convention and perception of women's roles through to personal risk. Networks provide a sanctioned space for addressing these barriers relatively safely, particularly for networks aiming to support individual members.

Interestingly, all projects with a gender sector focus operated through an informal network. The reason for this would be guesswork only without further enquiry: but as an initial thought, it may have something to do with the fragility of women's participation in the face of cultural barriers, and the need to offer flexibility and support rather than guidelines if women are to stay connected long-term.

The theory of change behind the LISTEN project, as well as other projects in the review from Bangladesh, Solomons and Indonesia, assumed that networking women will enhance project outcomes of leadership and political participation. Compared to other projects in the review, these types of networks blurred the lines between civil society organisations and individuals. Based on the assumption that woman leaders would claim

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their place in local and national structures of power and begin to deliver policy that benefited women and girls, building women's capacity for leadership was often a project objective, and networking a tactic. Leadership components of training, mentoring and assistance to join relevant civil society or political organisations provided a pathway for women, while network components gave women support, knowledge, insight and motivation to work towards personal goals and gender outcomes.

Essentially, this strengthened individuals in order to strengthen CSOs, a reversal of the theoretical assumptions within the rest of this meta analysis that CSOs strengthened civil society. Though this model does not quite fit with other descriptions of networks or their change theories, **undoubtedly these women are networking, and benefiting from it in ways that a leadership programme on its own could not offer**.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Are assumptions valid?

In the introduction to this paper, logical assumptions about the validity of social change pathways were highlighted:

- That a more active, visible, vocal civil society would lead to greater participation of disadvantaged people and communities in decisions;
- That these people and communities would understand how decisions are taken and therefore who, when and how they must influence;
- That these people and communities would bring representative, not personal, interests to bear; that resulting policy will be 'good';
- That this policy would result in change, and that the change would be a positive outcome for society.

Oxfam's support – technical and financial – to networked action by organisations and individuals adds a further, foundational layer of assumption, **that strengthening civil society organisations leads to a strengthened civil society**; that networked CSOs do not simply achieve their policy goal and go back to their old ways of working, but expand their strengths and responsibilities exponentially.

From this assumption upwards, the links between, and within, steps to change are fragile. Success depends on personal and cultural characteristics, technical and planning capacity, and a shared social conscience that uses equality of human rights as its connector. The pathway is also less scrutinised and measured. As momentum moves further towards social impact, it becomes increasingly distant from the original inputs of networks, more difficult to show their contribution, and more vulnerable to influences beyond the network's (or Oxfam's) control.

As hoped, the case studies in this paper give evidence at least to the possibility of these assumptions in context. Each was found to be true somewhere in the sample. For instance, against the assumption that strengthened civil society means strengthened participation, the greater political inclusion of women at local levels through the LISTEN project has allowed more women to engage in decision making now that

policies and social norms give them greater space to do so. Supporting the assumption that people and communities understand who, when and how they must influence, the national networks of PARL continue to provide services and advice to new communities on how to protest their treatment, and it is working. However, the examples cannot 'prove' that in every case the assumptions are valid; nor are they consistent even among the sample. Of the projects in this review, very few are visualising and directing efforts all the way through to the end of the pathway. For some, such as India's IRBF or Australia's Close the Gap, the idea of strengthening is secondary to that of policy change, partners are chosen for existing strengths, and inclusion comes *as a result of* policy change, not to drive it.

The review framework pinpointed a final assumption for consideration, that of vertical networking to bring change at scale. This is a pivotal assumption for pro-poor policy change at the heart of social accountability programmes[11]. The review found it to be a significant advantage of networked action in the examples given. With a network in place, there was a clear channel as well as a clear intention to transfer data between levels of influence and mobilisation. Local organisations seemed clear on what they were looking for and how to move it upwards for awareness and influence beyond their local area. The two land rights cases showed particular alignment with this practice and its advantages. The conclusion on this is that, wherever there a strategy to utilise community voice for policy argument, a network will enhance the likelihood of its success.

5.2 Implications for Oxfam

So, what does this mean specifically for Oxfam's decision processes about joining or starting a network instead of working directly with partners and government?

Based on the examples in this review, there is no conclusion to be made on the ***wrong*** setting, timing, or political landscape for a networked approach. Networks seem always to be a good idea. The question is whether or not they are a better idea than working in direct partnership or independent influence, and the answer is dependent on a number of strategic considerations.

Three are listed below, all of them underscoring the vital linkage between purpose and approach. The list is not exhaustive. Returning to this topic with a broader set of data including failed or poorly performing networks will give greater comparative scope and probably generate several more pointers.

WILL A NETWORK ENHANCE OUTCOMES?
Consider whether, and what type of, networking reflects Oxfam's outcome goal in this instance
The analysis in this review found that civil society organisations thrived when connected to each other for collaborative planning and learning, and were more effective in vertical data transfer when working with multiple organisations. But this was not the goal of every social justice initiative for Oxfam. To achieve specific policy change, sometimes Oxfam and similar organisations work on behalf of, rather than with, disadvantaged communities and groups, Reasons for doing so might be efficiency of process and decisions, sufficient existing relationships to bring change quickly, or the complexities and risks of involving marginalised groups directly. It was less clear that networks worked differently from individual organisations in these instances, or brought different (or more) change.

WILL BENEFITS BE HELPFUL?

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[11] Duncan Greene, Social Accountability in the Trenches, From Poverty to Power blog, available at: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/social-accountability-from-the-trenches-6-critical-reflections/

Consider which of the networking benefits are of use in this instance, and how much work is required to trigger them

The analysis assigned three categories of networking benefits: context (overcoming barriers for working effectively), mechanisms (strengthening the power and reach of activities) and outcomes (positive shifts setting the stage for long-term influence). The benefits were not automatic, nor did they apply to all examples. For instance, though media reach was enhanced by networked action, not all projects were working with media. Advantages of increased local reach and community representation were only useful if the network offered corresponding data collation and reporting capacity. In some cases, triggering these advantages may require significant planning and setup and may not be in line with original project concepts. Especially for larger networks, collaborative planning and joint action can negatively affect agility, courage and accuracy of targeted action by individual organisations. Comparison of benefits against capacity may reveal that certain strengths are best applied directly.

IS LONG-TERM CIVIL SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT THE MAIN AGENDA?
Consider the best way for Oxfam (and other international organisations) to invest their power: use, or transfer?

Staff interviewed for the analysis struggled at times with the ethical duality of Oxfam partnership. The theory at the heart of Oxfam's influencing, that power must be shifted to bring social change, is also at the heart of Oxfam's operational decisions on partners. Unavoidably Oxfam is a partner of power, but with a constant underlying intent to transfer that power to civil society organisations, so the true model of community-led agendas for change can come to life. The balance between accountability to the principle and accountability for results, as well as the heavy expectations of coordination and funding placed on Oxfam as a partner, make it challenging to identify the right time for this transition. However, many of the networks in this sample showed effective practices for handover of power to local organisations. It is not possible to say whether they were *more* effective than one-to-one mentoring partnerships. Common sense suggests that multi-agency interdependencies, including a shared space of learning and experience, will help to reduce perceptions of Oxfam as a primary technical and financial partner. However, it could take time to get to this point, and in the meantime, playing too great a role in networks drained resources. Oxfam was expected to coordinate, monitor and report, including financial management, which was not required in more direct partnerships. This suggests that an important factor in decision making is whether the project has staff capacity to provide this level of support, potentially at the expense of direct advocacy and project management; there may not be time to do both.

Examples such as PARL or the Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network have shown that it is possible to transition to local network administration. The same examples give good evidence to validate the assumption that when CSOs are stronger, they reach out in their turn to strengthen others, creating a movement beyond original partnerships. While these are only two examples out of hundreds where Oxfam is taking networked action globally[12], and again in full recognition that social change is different in every context, this is still a pleasing correlation to highlight as a final comment.

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[12] This number is based on Oxfam's global operations, not only Oxfam Australia projects

Further to the discussion on power above, the ideal scenario for Oxfam and other international NGOs working on civil society participation is the transfer of power from organisation (and donor) into the hands of people and organisations who can best direct it for community benefits. At times, though, NGO power is also used directly, particularly in national advocacy influence. Networks at this level are removed geographically and socially from poor and vulnerable communities. It can be hard to conclude whether community voice is genuinely 'at the table' or whether the power structures within the aid and development sector are operating in parallel to the people they represent.

Despite this, there were times when this was the most effective approach; it was rapid, targeted and maximised specialist skills and reputation held by international actors. Based on the review sample, it also brought large-scale results, often quite quickly, while networks more aligned with the principles and assumptions of civil society leading the way faced a more circuitous route to change, and often had greater difficulty in demonstrating their progress. **It can never be presumed that one pathway has an advantage over the other**; the decision on whether to use or to transfer power is a fundamental starting point for Oxfam's participation in networks.

5.3 Monitoring, evaluation and the challenge of projecting results

There is much that is still left unsaid on the questions under review in this paper. At this stage, the information that has led to wide acceptance of the assumptions above is largely anecdotal; staff in the aid and development sector believe, rather than know, that the change theory works, and the sector lacks nuanced interpretation of when, how and for whom it works. Support is growing for theory-based evaluation, which can take into account complex change, multiple causal factors and partial results with projected outcomes, but no evaluations of this nature were among the sample. For this paper, the lack of specific and robust change enquiry means that, though the mechanisms of networks in context were shown to meet their goals, there is less opportunity to analyse cause and effect: whether the decision to work as a network was pivotal in influencing decision makers, or whether other options may have been equally valid.

From a practical perspective, projects heading straight for policy targets as the outcome (for instance, IRBF or Close the Gap) were often able to demonstrate results and contribution, sometimes quite quickly. Where projects were articulating civil society outcomes as their goal, targets might include reassignment of civil roles, more prominent CSO capacity and power, or establishing collaborative connections between government and community groups. These were harder to measure and did not always demonstrate the final tiers of policy or social change within the timeframe of the project However (and slightly confusingly) these projects are more in line with the review's assumptions of how social change happens; the challenge is that they cannot show change that has not yet occurred.

It has already been noted as a limitation of this review that examples of Oxfam's ongoing 'business-as-usual' networks with other international and local NGOs in-country are not included. These might have given a broader understanding of networks who exist to plan and coordinate, and to bring about efficient, inclusive and mentoring partnerships among themselves and outwards to CSOs. More might then be evident about the assumptions above.

Even then, measuring their validity requires a new approach to monitoring and impact evaluation connected to outcome mapping and contribution analysis. Oxfam has tools for measuring outcomes of increased capacity of CSOs or networks and there are many guidelines and methods suggested for measuring results of policy influence. The use of these tools to demonstrate impact level change is unfortunately challenged by the necessity of projecting future results, rather than measuring them now.

This can even lead to reduced donor interest and investment in advocacy as an approach to end poverty, despite the unequivocal scale of opportunity that comes with positive social policy.

Of the projects in the sample, none are really ready to stand up against the full pathway of logical assumptions listed above. Oxfam could consider a closer tailoring of M&E needs for projects of this nature, recognising and overcoming obstacles to robust measurements, for instance[13]:

- The long-term financial and monitoring commitment to Close the Gap will provide 25 years' of data by the Campaign's end, but may lack a clear link to strengthened civil society at its grass roots (disadvantaged Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote communities) unless methods are also in place to capture this.
- PARL shows strong sustainability and growth of efforts but plays a protective role, aiming not so much for positive change but for the reversal of negative change. This requires a specialised methodology for demonstrating results.
- Corporate policy wins in transparency of reporting from IBRF will potentially deliver strong quantitative results for workers' and environmental conditions in the future, but Oxfam's work with strengthening civil society is taking place in a parallel initiative, not through the network. Change mapping will benefit from following the two initiatives simultaneously.

It is likely, too, that projects from previous decades are able to provide insight into the validity of social change through networked civil society. Testing institutional memory on Oxfam projects that influenced change long-term may be a starting point for responding to the unanswered questions from this review. For all working in the aid and development sector, it would also be a satisfying validation of concerted efforts to mobilise 'the power of people against poverty.'

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[13] These examples are provided to illustrate that creative thinking now on how change is projected to take place in the future will enhance the ability to describe and measure that change. They are not intended as recommendations to Oxfam or to the projects mentioned.

Annex 1: Bibliography and further reading

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Annex 2: Context analysis

Context was mapped at a very basic level. The mapping used a simple set of categorisers drawn from globally recognised indicators, as well as some additional observations from literature or staff perspectives on structures and styles of government, namely:

- Economic strata: Of the projects, 15 took place in what the World Bank classifies as lower to middle income countries (LMIC). Oxfam also works in low income countries and in middle income countries, but none were included in the sample. However, given that the search for networks in Oxfam's projects was not exhaustive, no generalisation can be made on this trend.

- Gender inequality index: Several of the projects focused on gender empowerment including reduction of violence against women and greater political participation of women. This, as well as Oxfam's strategic objective for gender equality, indicates the need to consider the gender context for each setting. Unfortunately, the most recent gender inequality index does not include the three Pacific contexts in the study: Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu. Of the other LMIC contexts, three were in the second quartile globally, two in the third, and three in the fourth.

- World Press Freedom Index: This indicator has been used as a proxy to identify a setting's relative freedom of speech, and thus the ability to mobilise public opinion and community action without risk to participants and local organisations. It is significant to the study that all cases apart from Australia fall into third or fourth quartile scores in this regard. There are tangible advantages of working in networks in these contexts (see Advantages in Context section below).

- Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index: This indicator represents the challenges of working with government and parallel systems to bring about social change to benefit poor and marginalised people: the higher the corruption, the more challenging to maintain effective monitoring and accountability of policy decisions. Mobilisation with 'name and shame' intent can represent some risk in contexts of high corruption, which may also be mitigated by working in coalition (see Advantages in Context section below).

Table xx maps the four indicators to see if any context, even at this high level, mirrors another. While there are some similarities, no directly comparable context is revealed. Note that elements of culture, religion and alternative governance (power of traditional or religious leaders) can also be similar across many of these contexts – South Asia for instance, or the three countries of the Pacific. Drawing these out would require a deeper analysis than allowed in this review.

Context Mapping	WB strata (1 to 4)	GII (1 to 155)	WPFI (1 to 180)	TII (1 to 180)
Australia	1	1	1	1
Bangladesh	3			
		4	4	4
India	3	3		3
			4	
Indonesia	3	3	3	3
Pakistan	3			3
		4	4	
Sri Lanka		2		
	3			3
			4	
Tajikistan		2		
	3			
			4	4
Timor-Leste	3	(grey)	3	3
Vietnam		2		
	3			3
			4	
Zambia	3		3	3
		4		
Solomon Isl.	3	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)
Vanuatu	3	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)
(Mekong)	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)
(BRICS)	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)	(grey)

Annex 3: Project meta analysis matrix

Key: WB=World Bank Economic Strata
GII=Gender Inequity Index
WPFI=World Press Freedom Index
TII=Transparency International Index (perceptions of corruption)

The matrix shows a selection of projects where networks supported by Oxfam Australia led to a strengthened civil society and/or policy change (note: the two examples highlighted in grey were consultant's additions and were funded by another Oxfam entity) For each, loose groupings of relevant factors, under the three main headings of context, mechanism and outcome, allow for analysis of attributes across contexts. The matrix was used to draw trend data and qualitative observations on ways that networks contribute to social change, and whether there are differences and advantages to this change pathway compared to sole action. Information was drawn from project documentation and interviews with project staff. Note that few of the networks had formal evaluation data and the answers to these category questions were at times unclear. Examples highlighted in green have more detail available as case studies in this report.

Country, project name, network name	WB?	GII	WPFI	TII	Purpose	Working at multiple levels?	Connecting multiple levels	Design – network as tactic or outcome?	Existing or startup?	Policy goals set before or after forming?	Membership size	Govt. as member?	Structure - TOR or informal?	Coordination and technical support?	Financial support?	Mobilisation	Media	Research, evidence, expertise	'Insider' advocacy influence	Build local capacity; empower	Govt policy	Corporate policy	Social norms fuelling inequity	Inclusion (the right to be heard)?	Gender?	Policy – local?	Policy – national?
AUSTRALIA: Close the Gap Campaign / Coalition	HIC	24	19	13	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Tactic	Startup	Before	48 (orgs and individuals)	No	Semi-formal (no TOR)	Joint (Oxfam 50%)	Members contribute	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
BANGLADESH: REE-CALL Food Security, Resilience and Adaptation Project	LMIC	119	146	145	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Unclear	Tactic	Startup	After	15 (orgs)	No	Unclear	Oxfam only	Oxfam only		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
BANGLADESH: Urban Resilience Committee	LMIC	119	146	145	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	Before	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	
INDIA: Private Sector Engagement India; India Responsible Business Forum	LMIC	125	136	79	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Tactic	Startup	Before	4 (orgs) plus technical members	No	Informal	Joint	Oxfam only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
INDONESIA: Gender Justice; Forum Peduli Pembangunan Responsif Gender (FPPRG)	LMIC	105	124	90	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Unclear	Outcome	Existing	After	50 (individuals)	No	Informal	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		
MEKONG DELTA: Mekong Water Governance Network	n/a	Varied	Varied	Varied	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	Before	Unclear	No	Informal	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PAKISTAN: Leverage Women in Social Transformation of Elected Nominees (LISTEN)	LMIC	130	139	116	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	Not set	1200 (individuals)	No	Informal	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		
SOLOMON ISL.: Standing Together Against Violence (STAV) Partnership	LMIC	n/a	n/a	n/a	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Tactic	Startup	Before	Unclear	No	Informal	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SOLOMON ISL.: Safe Families; Let's make our family safe Consortium	LMIC	n/a	n/a	n/a	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Existing	Before	5 (orgs)	No	TOR	Joint	Some cofunding	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
SRI LANKA: Land Rights Now; People's Alliance for Right to Land	LMIC	87	141	95	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Tactic	Existing	Before	15 (orgs)	No	Informal	Joint	Unclear	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
TAJIKISTAN: Tajikistan WASH Network		65	149	151	Learning and coordination	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	After	50+	Yes	Unclear	Joint	Members contribute		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes
TIMOR-LESTE: Land and Inclusive Development, varied networks	LMIC	n/a	98	101	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	After	3 (national), varied (local)	No	Informal	Joint	Oxfam only	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
VANUATU: Building resilience; Vanuatu NGO	LMIC	n/a	n/a	n/a	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Existing	Before	Unclear	No	Unclear	Oxfam only	Oxfam only	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			Yes

Name																											
Climate Action **Network**																											
VANUATU: Governance, Leadership and Accountability: Vanuatu Civil Society Disability **Network**	LMIC	n/a	n/a	n/a	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	After	12 (orgs)	Yes	TOR	Joint	Oxfam only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
VIETNAM: Vietnam **Coalition** Support Program	LMIC	71	175	113	Strengthen civil society	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Startup	After	10 (orgs)	Yes	TOR	Oxfam only	Oxfam only		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ZAMBIA: Zambia Extractives; varied **networks**	LMIC	124	114	95	Drive change	Yes	Yes	Tactic	Existing	Before	*Unclear*	No	TOR	*Unclear*	Some cofunding	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
BRICSAM **Coalition**		Varied	Varied		Drive change	Yes	Yes	Outcome	Existing	After	7 coalitions	No	TOR	Oxfam only	*Unclear*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		
			TOTALS		*Strengthen: 9* *Drive: 7* *Learn: 1*	*Yes: 17*	*Yes: 15* *Unclear: 2*	*Tactic:6* *Outcome: 11*	*Startup: 11* *Existing:7*	*Before: 10* *After:7*	*5 or under: 3* *5-15: 5* *Over 15: 2* *Indiv: 2* *Unclear:5*	*Yes: 3* *No:13* *Unclear: 1*	*Informal: 7* *Semi:1* *TOR: 5* *Unclear: 4*	*Oxfam only: 9* *Joint: 7* *Unclear: 1*	*Oxfam only: 11* *Cofunding: 2* *Members contribute: 2* *Unclear : 2*	*Yes: 14* *All:7* *4: 5*	*Yes:1 1*	*Yes: 15*	*Yes: 15*	*Yes:16*	*Yes: 17* *All: 5* *2: 10*	*Yes: 10*	*Yes: 10*	*Yes:16* *All:4* *CS outcome only: 3*	*Yes: 10*	*Yes: 12* *Policy both levels: 9*	*Yes: 11*