Thembelphi Chiliza and Sinethembe Ndlovu, recently having finished their final year at school in 2009, are pictured learning how to use a computer for the first time as part of Woza Moya's outreach and skills-based training. The students were supported by Monash University students Elsa Carnaby and Ivan Achimune from Zambia, both of whom spent four weeks at Woza Moya as part of their academic program.
TWO MISSIONS, ONE GOAL

To find solutions to the pressing development challenges of our time, we need strong partnerships. They cannot be solved by one organisation alone.

At Oxfam Australia and Monash University, we have our different missions, but we share a common purpose: to improve people’s lives.

On behalf of all who have been part of Oxfam Monash Partnership, we are delighted to present a report celebrating the impact that this transformational grant has enabled across a decade of collaboration and research.

The formal funded partnership between Oxfam and Monash reached its conclusion on 31 December 2020. For over 10 years we’ve been working to bring together our different and complementary resources — world leading academic research and extensive development experience — to achieve greater development impact than would otherwise be possible.

The Oxfam Monash Partnership has supported innovation to improve livelihoods and address poverty. Access to world class research, design and development capacity at Monash has enabled communities where Oxfam and partners work to pursue and implement robust solutions to critical problems.

For Monash, the Partnership has provided unique opportunities for our students to contribute to the work of Oxfam and the development sector more broadly, and also to increase their skills as development practitioners and participatory action researchers.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 — Partnership for the Goals — reflects global recognition that strong partnerships are paramount to achieve the SDGs.

The legacy of the partnership is the close and dynamic working relationship that has been forged between Oxfam and Monash, and the demonstration of the immense value arising from effective cross sectoral engagement around shared opportunities.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration as new opportunities emerge to contribute to the evidence base for international development programs and policy — bringing together the best of Oxfam’s grassroots approach and the best of Monash’s academic expertise and student body, to create better outcomes and lasting solutions for some of the world’s most vulnerable people.

Lyn Morgain
Chief Executive,
Oxfam Australia

John Thwaites AM
Chair, Monash Sustainable Development Institute and Oxfam Monash Partnership
# 1 Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The Partnership was founded on a vision to bring about evidence-based change for some of the most vulnerable communities and intractable issues globally.

In 2008, Monash University and Oxfam Australia started working together to harness the combined power of students, academics and development practitioners in pursuit of a more just and equal world; to forge new solutions to development challenges; and to enhance the contributions of both Oxfam and Monash to positive global change.

Initial engagement between Monash and Oxfam took place through a range of person-to-person linkages before the Oxfam Monash Partnership was formally established in 2010 through the generous support of the Empowerment Charitable Trust, with the aim of improving development practice and its outcomes for communities.

Development organisations and academic institutions both play key roles in global development and poverty reduction, yet their impact can be much greater when these efforts are combined. With the challenges of sustainable development becoming ever more pressing, it is increasingly recognised that collaborative approaches will be crucial to developing some of the new solutions that we are in such clear and urgent need of.

Recognising this, the Oxfam Monash Partnership was established with the aim of bringing together the differing yet complementary resources of the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) and academic sectors, combining these resources to achieve greater development impact than would otherwise have been possible.

THE PARTNERS

As Australia’s largest university, as well as one of its most international and research-intensive, Monash University recognises its fundamental role in helping local and global communities address the great challenges of our time. Monash is committed to advancing social inclusion, human rights, climate change action and environmental sustainability through its campuses, research, innovation, education and leadership.

Oxfam Australia has been fighting poverty and injustice for 65 years in Australia and overseas. Oxfam Australia is part of an international confederation working in 94 countries, and directly supports programs in 28 countries, working with partners and communities to generate simple, smart solutions to tough humanitarian problems. Oxfam Australia carries out long-term projects, campaigns for change, responds to natural disasters and conflicts, and raises public awareness about the causes of poverty.

CREDIT: Carla Gottgens/OxfamAUS

The Oxfam-Monash Partnership Research Symposium, whose theme was Learning Through Partnership, was held at the Melbourne Multicultural Hub, Melbourne on Friday 5th June 2013. The day-long symposium focused on action research, learning and practice and the sustainability of partnerships, drawing on the experiences of almost three years of funded research projects.
PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Partnership begins and ends with the goal of improving and extending good practice on the ground — where people and communities impacted by poverty and inequality most need support — through enhanced development effectiveness, humanitarian and advocacy action.

Over the past 10 years, the Partnership has endeavoured to achieve this through a collective commitment to:

- **World-class research that makes a difference in people’s lives:** facilitating participatory action research projects that brings Oxfam and Monash staff together to develop and test new community empowerment initiatives focused on helping people living in poverty to improve their lives and livelihoods.

- **Connecting current and future practitioners with the evidence base to effect change:** providing learning opportunities for development practitioners through tailored workshops and public discussions promoting learning, collaboration and knowledge-sharing to help strengthen development efforts; and engaging the next generation of development workers and activists by providing them with the skills and opportunities necessary to contribute meaningfully to the work of the development sector.

- **Evidence-based advocacy for systems, policies and practices to benefit communities:** communicating the evidence generated through the above initiatives to strengthen and improve Oxfam’s own policy and programming, and to enhance the efficacy of broader development efforts.

PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

The Partnership work was guided by the following principles that informed its strategic agenda:

- **Equality** — mutual respect between members of the Partnership, irrespective of each institution’s size, power and influence.

- **Transparency** — dialogue on equal footing with an emphasis on early consultations and sharing of information.

- **Action-research oriented approach** — outcome-based and action-oriented research that sought to directly and indirectly improve the lives of people living in poverty.

- **Responsible and ethical behaviour** — a commitment to accomplishing tasks responsibly and with integrity.

- **Complementarity** — building on comparative advantages and complementing each other’s contributions and those of stakeholders and networks.

- **Sustainability** — undertaking work in a manner that builds the sustainability of respective and joint projects including sustainable change.

- **Multipliers** — actively seeking opportunities to scale up and multiply the impact of the Partnership’s work including pursuing additional funding sources.
MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

This report seeks to celebrate the significant activities and outcomes that our alliance has made possible, and to convey a tangible sense of the positive difference that the Oxfam Monash Partnership has made in the world over the last decade.

Significant achievements for the Partnership include:

- 11 major participatory action research projects conducted in Bangladesh, South Africa, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands and Australia, which have generated important learnings for development policy and practice, and which have contributed to positive change at the community level.

- Student engagement programs that have empowered students to contribute meaningfully to positive social change, and that have enabled them to share their fresh ideas and innovations with the sector. Over 1220 students have been directly engaged in the Partnership’s student engagement programs, which have included internship placements and opportunities, and guest lectures from Oxfam staff to Monash courses.

- Practitioner development opportunities that have promoted ongoing learning and knowledge-sharing within the development sector. The Partnership has hosted over 50 public and practitioner learning events, including Development Effectiveness Talks at Oxfam, public events and workshops, conference submissions and research presentations, as well as supporting researchers and practitioners to attend major international events and conferences.

- Strengthened ties and engagement between Oxfam and Monash, including through Monash Workplace Giving and the Oxfam Shop at Monash Clayton.

- Sharing partnership learnings and ways of working in a genuine and open way, by documenting learnings and contributing to the evidence base on managing NGO-academic partnerships.

REPORT OUTLINE

This 10-year Impact Report focuses in two parts on what we have learned through Partnership activities:

1. The first section on completed research activities shares how the Partnership’s activities supported action-oriented research that made a difference in people’s lives.

2. The student engagement section outlines recent activities and headline achievements in areas including the internship program, Oxfam Monash Partnership Prize, Guest Lecture Series and the Oxfam at Monash student committee.

Reports arising from the Partnership’s ten years of activity are listed in the Appendix.
Throughout its 10-year life, the Oxfam Monash Partnership conducted a program of quality research that strengthened the evidence base for development impact and used findings to influence policy and practice in international development.

Given the Partnership’s unique ability to combine the research rigour of Monash academics with the ground-level expertise and networks of Oxfam staff, the Partnership was able to accomplish innovative action research projects that have directly improved development outcomes around the world.

### THEMATIC RESEARCH AREAS

The Partnership’s research aligned with four thematic research priorities, reflecting the ongoing and emerging needs of the communities and partners with whom Oxfam works:

- **Accountability:** how best to improve the capacity of communities to engage in the 2030 development agenda, by shaping development goals and milestones and holding key stakeholders to account;

- **Climate change:** how best to support communities to adapt to climate change and to build the capacity to anticipate, mitigate and respond to these changes;

- **Gender equality:** how best to promote gender equality as a basic human right, for improving lives of women and achieving sustainable development outcomes;

- **Migration:** how best to improve understanding of the drivers and consequences of multiple migrations, including regular, irregular and forced displacement, for influencing policy and practice.

▲ CREDIT: Nicolas Axelrod/OxfamAUS

Oxfam’s Savann and Clara collect information from Ngor Chhro (88). The nearby Lower Sesan II Dam is a 400 MW hydropower dam 1.5 kilometres below the confluence of the Sesan and Srepok rivers, two Mekong River tributaries, in Stung Treng province, northeast Cambodia. The dam flooded Kbal Romeas and the villagers were relocated.
RESEARCH MATCHING AROUND NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES

In its earlier years, the Oxfam Monash Partnership operated on an open-call expression of interest process at fixed periods each year.

From 2016, the Partnership followed a research matching process and took a staged approach, allowing for flexible engagement between Oxfam in-country teams, Oxfam Australia staff and Monash University academics.

It was facilitated through a participatory process, involving thematic research champions for each priority area nominated by Oxfam Australia. These champions worked with in-country teams to identify research needs, and develop preliminary research concepts. These concepts were then used to undertake a whole-of-university search to identify Monash capacities in nominated areas. From this search process, matching workshops were held to support interdisciplinary research teams to:

- develop research questions together;
- identify methodologies;
- identify avenues for involving communities as active agents in the design; and
- identify delivery and analysis for research.

This rolling matching process led to new and emerging project collaborations across multiple faculties in the areas of migration, desalination, microfinance, gender-based violence, and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

THE PARTNERSHIP’S RESEARCH APPROACH: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was identified at the beginning of the Partnership as the guiding methodology to ensure that subsequent research would play a direct role in empowering communities and local NGOs to achieve their development objectives.

PAR is a cyclical research process, in which researchers work closely with communities to identify and define the challenges they experience, to design and implement new solutions, and to collaboratively reflect on their outcomes and further iterate and strengthen responses.

As a partnership, the team recognised it was uniquely placed to conduct this challenging and rewarding form of research, and to share its findings to contribute to, and improve, development efforts.

PROJECT TEAMS

All project teams are listed in the body of the report under individual projects. Project team member and quoted staff titles are included as they were at time of project and may no longer be current. The team listing under each project may not be exhaustive, as they have been sourced from publicly available reports.
ACCOUNTABILITY

Governance and Accountability in the Health Sector: A People’s Policy for Health in South Africa
Community-driven Accountability: Steering Multi-level Accountability Systems from the Ground Up
Empowering Community Voices: Research Studies from South Africa and Bangladesh
Conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice continue to pose a threat to sustainable development globally. Whilst some regions enjoy peace, security and prosperity, others fall into perpetual cycles of conflict and violence. This is not inevitable and must be addressed; no-one should be left behind.

At the core of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda lies the recognition that human rights, peace and security, and development are strongly connected and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development cannot be truly achieved without the presence of peace and stability, access to justice and effective governance, based on the rule of law.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 aims to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. It promises a new type of development; where people can influence the decisions that affect their lives and create communities that thrive.

If this goal, as well as the Agenda’s core principle of ‘leave no-one behind’ are to be met, the most marginalised people — in particular women, girls, and minorities — need to participate in accountability of development goals and targets. A participatory process that enables personal empowerment, collective alliance building, awareness of rights, and enhanced capabilities for political engagement is necessary. Collective action for accountability must go hand in hand with advocacy efforts to influence policy and practice.

Partnership research conducted under the accountability thematic area was strongly concentrated in the first half of the Partnership’s life. It aimed to improve community capacity by shaping development goals and milestones and holding key stakeholders to account, focusing on questions around the relationships required between governments, the private sector, civil society and communities to guide inclusive, sustainable development. This research also explored what development consequences may result from the shifting landscape of development models, actors and accountability frameworks.
Governance and Accountability in the Health Sector:
A People’s Policy for Health in South Africa

PROJECT TEAM

- Professor Geoff Setswe (Professor and Head of Health Sciences, Monash South Africa)
- Dr Ravayi Marindo (Senior Lecturer — Epidemiology, Monash South Africa)
- Professor Brian Oldenburg (Professor and Chair of International Public Health, Monash Australia)
- Katherine Lay (Essential Services Program Coordinator, Oxfam Pretoria Office)
- Kevin Roussel (Advocacy and Campaigns Manager, Oxfam Cape Town Office)
- Urvarshi Rajcoomar (Senior Program Coordinator — Advocacy, Policy and Humanitarian, Oxfam, Country Office in Durban)

This project was initiated in 2011 in response to concerns that the needs of the most disadvantaged communities in South Africa were being excluded from the development of a new National Health Insurance scheme (NHI).

The joint action research proposal between Oxfam Australia in South Africa, the Global Health Unit and the School of Health Sciences at Monash University received funding from the Oxfam Monash Partnership to test a model of public policy engagement, as well as conduct project impact evaluation activities.

Publications arising from the research1 explored principles and practices for effectively facilitating active civic engagement and drew directly on the experience of organisations and communities who participated in the project.

OBJECTIVE

Historically, quality health services have been unaffordable and inaccessible for many disadvantaged people in South Africa, with more than 80%2 of the population forced to rely on an under-resourced, substandard public health system and the majority of the population having no access to medical insurance. In this context, the government developed the NHI to ensure universal access to efficient, high-quality free health services through a complete restructure of the national healthcare system.

However, concern that disadvantaged communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) were not properly consulted or included in the drafting and implementation of the NHI led to fears that the new system would ultimately fail to meet the needs of those most reliant on it.

This project explored how to make democratic processes for the introduction of the NHI in South Africa more participatory, inclusive and representative of civil society, strengthening capacity of communities to participate in and use these processes to engage with and influence government about their health needs and ensure this translated into development of a responsive, effective and pro-poor health policy in the context of the proposed NHI.

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1 Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
METHODOLOGY

This action research pilot project involved a five-phase process that aimed to test a model of public policy engagement to increase awareness of, and accessibility to, policy at a local level. It used a range of context appropriate methodologies including formal literature reviews, quantitative and qualitative data collection, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and participatory mapping to determine views on the implementation of the NHI. Wherever possible the methodologies employed were participatory and aimed to elicit as wide a set of opinions and experiences as possible from the people most affected by the policy.

Phase 1
Two desk-based literature reviews were conducted to build a better understanding of the major debates and positions on the NHI at a national level: the first on the implications of the NHI for strengthening health systems; and the second to map public participation frameworks in health policy development in South Africa.

Phase 2
Key components of the research findings and government Green Paper were used to develop a public education package, aimed at raising community awareness about the NHI and stimulating community dialogue. The public education materials were also translated into plain language documents to be used in broader community-focused awareness raising and consultation processes.

Phase 3
Partner organisations adapted the public education materials to the local context before designing and training community facilitators to conduct a community consultation process. Selected communities were given the opportunity to define their own health needs and policy expectations through engagement with the materials, helping determine the appropriateness, relevance and adequacy of the materials in enhancing community understanding and capacity to contribute to the NHI process. Selected case studies were documented and learnings from this process were used to frame a draft policy position on the NHI.

Phase 4
Community representatives were supported to directly engage with the policy process by making presentations on the NHI to Parliament’s Portfolio Committee on Health and other relevant forums.

Phase 5
Quantitative and qualitative evaluation activities were undertaken to measure and document the project’s impact on the quality of community participation and engagement in the NHI policy process.

The project uses engagement in the NHI process to focus on understanding accountability in health within the South African context. It is an iterative project, which allows it to respond to the different needs of the communities as they arise. The ripple effect has been that these active citizens engage in other important social and political issues within the communities.”

— Urvarshi Rajcoomar, Senior Program Coordinator of Advocacy, Policy and Humanitarian Programs, Oxfam, Country Office in Durban.
PARTNERSHIP

The success of this project relied heavily on the respective strengths of its partners.

Oxfam’s work in South Africa is based on the understanding that programs and projects implemented in partnership with local civil society organisations increase the collective knowledge, skills, reach and experience applied to an issue; their historic presence in South Africa and strong partnership principles of joint learning shaped the project framework design.

Monash South Africa led on the research components of the Project, compiling the first NHI research piece in-house. Their exploration of historical aspects of the South African Health system and the proposed reform components greatly informed the project direction.

Three local community-level partner organisations were identified to participate in the project: the HIV and AIDS Prevention Group (HAPG), Sophakama and the Pietermaritzburg Association for Community Social Action (PACSA). Each organisation had considerable pre-existing experience of working in health and social development, as well as design and implementation of unique community consultation processes within their respective communities. The project resourced these partners to develop and implement an approach that would make the emerging NHI discourse accessible to their local community in a way that promoted engagement and dialogue.

The project relied on strong governance and accountability structures, including:

- A six-member Project Management Team tasked with providing expert guidance and strategic leadership to the project’s planning, management and implementation; and
- A four-member Advisory Team, which provided guidance, support, insight and advice on the national context, and informed decisions about the project’s strategic direction.

IMPACT

This project played a significant role in enhancing active citizenship and public participation in South African health sector reforms by demystifying the policy process and supporting communities to actively participate in an open, consultative and transparent process of policy engagement and formulation, ultimately impacting discussions on National Health Insurance by shifting the power relations of political decision making around this issue.

This model can be replicated to promote active citizenship and social inclusion in other policy areas as well as to inform understanding of similar health reform issues in other low and middle-income countries, enabling more confident expressions of citizens’ civic voice and agency and thereby strengthening democratic accountability in a broader sense.

In 2015, Oxfam went on to commission a process for learning, concept and process analysis based on its experience of the NHI Accountability Project.

The participation of the public in matters related to delivery of services to them is a mechanism that can help promote social cohesion between government and the people. People, as both citizens and consumers of services, should be allowed and encouraged to express their views on governance and service delivery matters.”

— extract from final program evaluation

The research fed into larger knowledge-transfer processes through dissemination of findings to local, national and global audiences via publication channels and civil society forums, enhancing the knowledge base globally and supporting partners to lead on campaigns and advocate for improving the health outcomes of the poorest and most vulnerable.

The project impact evaluation allowed the research team to draw out key lessons on how communities engaged with the generated materials and effectiveness of the community facilitated processes. The evaluation findings were used to support better evidence-based programming, advocacy and campaigning by partners.
(L-R) Ivan Achimune & Zweli Shelenbe. Monash interns joined the community care workers and regular staff at the Woza Moya centre, in listening and participating in a demonstration by Lynn Shorthouse (UK) doing courses on craniosacral therapy.
Community-driven Accountability: Steering Multi-level Accountability Systems from the Ground Up

PROJECT TEAM

- Dr Shelley Marshall (Senior Lecturer, Economics and Commerce, Monash University and Vice Chancellor’s Senior Research Fellow, RMIT University)
- Dr Adam McBeth (Senior Lecturer, Law, Monash University)
- Dr Kate MacDonald (Lecturer, Political Science, University of Melbourne)
- Michael Simon (Advocacy Manager, Oxfam Australia)
- Pauline Taylor McKeown (Mekong Regional Program Manager, Oxfam Australia)
- Depika Sherchan (Research Coordinator)
- Kol Leakhana (Project Officer)
- Chheong Sotheavan (Development Watch Research Officer, Equitable Cambodia)
- Ruth Bottomley (Research Coordinator)
- Net Virak (Senior Research Officer, Equitable Cambodia)

With contributions from Dr Tamas Wells (Research Fellow, University of Melbourne).

This research project grew out of the 2010 Oxfam Monash Search Conference, during which experts from a range of disciplines and development specialities agreed that a clear accountability problem existed within the development sector.

The project was awarded funding from the Oxfam Monash Partnership to examine bottom-up accountability among communities impacted by large-scale infrastructure and development projects in Cambodia, bringing together experts from the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Faculty of Law, and Department of Business Law and Taxation at Monash University; School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne; and Oxfam Australia in Melbourne and Cambodia.

The work generated a series of academic publications and presentations, including a suite of Learning Briefs that helped enhance the support provided to communities seeking accountability in Cambodia.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

In Cambodia, many communities have been displaced and their livelihoods threatened by large scale infrastructure and development projects that they had very little knowledge of or control over. These activities were pursued in many cases by the private sector, facilitated by the central government, and in some cases, funded through aid programs from developed country governments and International Financial Institutions.

The ability to hold government, aid institutions and private sector interests to account is an essential component of protecting livelihoods and minimising negative impacts of external interventions.

The research team worked with three communities in Cambodia, each of which had been affected by such projects or had experienced NGO intervention in their area, to:

- Discern community perceptions and experiences of accountability, particularly the types of and preferred methods for seeking accountability, and their sense of ability to influence different forms of decision-making in the context of development projects;
- Understand how different stakeholders influence and contribute to community-based accountability processes;
- Investigate existing barriers and facilitating conditions underpinning effective accountability processes;
- Identify recommendations and strategies to strengthen communities’ ability to hold external actors to account by identifying the key factors that enable some communities to develop relatively stronger community-centred accountability processes; and
- Fill important gaps in literature and practice by mapping the interaction of multiple and overlapping power and accountability structures which ultimately reinforce, challenge or undermine community-based accountability processes, as well as generating methods for use by practitioners to assist communities in navigating these interactions and advocating for better coordination of accountability and redress mechanisms — ultimately leading to greater mobilisation of community power.

It was hoped that findings would be relevant to other communities in comparable situations, including those outside Cambodia, and to the NGOs that work with them.

The timing of this research project coincided with the alignment of Oxfam country programs under a single strategy and management structure and the exiting of Oxfam Australia as a direct implementer. Oxfam in Cambodia continued to build on the work of this project.
METHODOLOGY

Cambodia was chosen as the location for the study because of its plethora of multi-layered development projects, and the capacity and enthusiastic support offered by Oxfam Australia’s Cambodia and Mekong Region program specialists.

The research methodology was designed to be as participatory as possible, given the complexity of the subject matter being investigated. It involved local community members and local and international partner organisations of Oxfam, anchoring the project’s empirical research at the community level and strengthening the capacity of local communities to actively explore their own situations, ideas and perceptions.

The study took place in three localities in Cambodia. Case study selection was undertaken in close consultation with Oxfam and partner organisations, being areas where these organisations had an existing presence:

- The Lower Sesan II dam in Stung Treng province where remote, rural ethnic minority communities faced relocation and livelihood impacts from construction of a large dam on the Sesan river;

- The Boeung Kak Lake community in Phnom Penh, where some 20,000 people of different socio-economic status and wealth were affected by a luxury urban land development project;

- Two remote, rural villages in the Stung Treng and Kratie provinces where communities had faced challenges to their livelihoods due to proposed Mekong dams. The villages had been supported for many years by Oxfam Australia’s Integrated Community Development (ICD) program — an approach originally developed to address the basic needs of rural communities who had experienced years of conflict, trauma, and displacement.

Within each case study, the research involved a mix of qualitative research methods, including tailored semi-structured key informant interviews, focus groups, and a variety of participatory research methods. The extensive use of participatory methods enabled the research participants to direct the topics and priority of the discussions within a framework imposed by the research team, thereby engaging in ‘co-learning’. Particular efforts were made to support women participating in a meaningful way, both in group settings and in individual interviews, to ensure that their voices are taken into account.

PARTNERSHIP

Accountability is fundamental to the work of Monash academics across a number of disciplines and is a central theme for much of Oxfam’s international programmatic, public policy and advocacy work.

The project governance structure was crucial to achieving successful outcomes. Steering Committee members based in both Melbourne and Cambodia provided strategic direction for the project and helped coordinate the team of experienced and knowledgeable staff from diverse disciplines to conduct this intensive community-level research program. The Committee also included Cambodian researchers and representatives from host organisation Equitable Cambodia, bringing extensive practical knowledge and understanding of the Cambodian context, and ensuring local perspectives were represented and stronger ties with local institutions were formed — all of which contributed to a successful collaboration and the quality research.

The Monash, Oxfam and Cambodia-based research team worked closely together throughout the project, with respondents agreeing that the support of these organisations provided different perspectives and experiences.

Oxfam Australia supported the project through provision of established on-ground support, much-needed access to networks of authorities, communities and NGOs, and considerable experience and expertise with accountability mechanisms, whilst the backing of Monash enabled the research to maintain a neutral position in the field, allowing researchers to ask questions about issues that would have been difficult for an NGO. The involvement of Monash also ensured that the research and its findings reached a wide audience of academic institutions, with Oxfam sharing the findings throughout the NGO community. This provided a strong foundation for a process of mutual learning throughout the project.

Local and regional partner organisations which had existing relationships with communities and Oxfam, and considerable experience and understanding of accountability mechanisms, were also invaluable. Integration of personnel into these organisations helped facilitate the research program, build partners’ knowledge and share their experience with a broader range of actors, ultimately supporting better alignment between community and NGO perceptions of accountability and assisting communities to assert their rights. These existing relationships helped the team to more quickly build trust with research participants, including government, NGOs and community representatives.
IMPACT

The research findings highlighted a number of new ways for NGOs and other actors to enhance the support provided to communities seeking accountability and build their capacity to hold external actors to account, providing new insights to further international debates around accountability, citizenship and governance.

The project generated a number of outcomes for policy and practice relevant to Oxfam’s work in Cambodia and internationally, facilitating improved development practice by Australian and international practitioners more broadly.

Participatory mapping activities conducted during fieldwork led to better understanding of community-level accountability processes; more clearly differentiated strategies to support communities and NGO/CSO networks affected by varying configurations of external power to engage with these processes to address their accountability concerns; and better alignment between community and NGO perceptions of accountability. This work also built greater understanding of how Oxfam’s external engagement and policy influencing work — with the Australian government and internationally, with the aid and development sector, and with the private sector and other entities whose activities impact on communities that Oxfam works with, including the Asian Development Bank — can contribute to strengthening the performance of accountability systems.

The project findings established a strong evidence base for Oxfam’s work on accountability, and for gathering and responding effectively to feedback from communities it serves, through strong internal engagement to share program learning and findings, and their implications for practice.

Understandings and strategies gathered from different communities were shared through a variety of methods including community forums and more informal gatherings. A paper created by the Boeung Kak Lake community to document their experiences and community strategy was a major achievement and a good example of a way knowledge could be shared effectively with other communities.

Mutual communication and learning between researchers and communities was fostered throughout the research process via a number of channels, including stakeholder workshops with communities, concerned agencies, NGOs and businesses in the field at the beginning and completion of research, providing opportunities for communities to reflect on sources of learning from the research process and consider ways of responding to key lessons.

Academic outputs focusing on the Oxfam Australia case study were generated through the project, including:

- Book chapter ‘Capacity, Sustainability and Accountability in the face of Modern Development: Lessons from Oxfam Australia’s Development Model in Cambodia’ was accepted for inclusion in the 2013 book Growing Sustainable Communities: A Development Guide for Southeast Asia; and
- Conference paper ‘Mapping Accountability Processes in Cambodia’ was presented at an ANU conference on the Challenges for Participatory Development in Contemporary Development Practice in November 2012.
Empowering Community Voices: Research Studies from South Africa and Bangladesh

PROJECT TEAM

- Dr Larry Stillman (Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University)
- Professor Sue McKemmish (Director, Monash University Centre for Organisational and Social Informatics)

One of the fundamental goals of international development work is to empower communities on the ground. Yet in the long and complex development chain, the voices of communities can be neglected or inadequately represented in decision-making, advocacy and policy processes. Furthermore, there is often poor information flow to communities, including on the issues that affect them most, which can result in ‘informational poverty’, isolation and disempowerment.

This project arose out of considerable interest in the potential outcomes for international development activity of Participatory Action Research methodologies.

Over five years to 2015 the Partnership Research Fellow worked to identify how Oxfam Monash Partnership-funded research could best contribute to community voices being represented in international development initiatives and decision-making processes.

Two pieces of work were conducted as part of this project:

- Examination of the process of action or community-based research used by Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) in South Africa for the National Health Insurance public policy engagement project;
- Examination of potential innovative use of mobile technologies to promote community empowerment in international development settings.

The project produced an instructive model for participatory, community-driven development in South Africa, and identified new ways of using mobile technologies to promote community empowerment in Bangladesh.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

In the face of this real and pressing need to find new and practical means of bringing community voices into relevant decision-making processes, and to improve the delivery of information that affects their lives, the Empowering Community Voices project aimed to explore how the Oxfam Monash Partnership’s research programs could best contribute to raising community voices, and to ensure communities were represented in the planning of international development initiatives.

By working with research project teams and local communities in South Africa and Bangladesh, the Partnership Research Fellow sought to better understand to what degree action research principles governed the collection, analysis, distribution and use of community information and knowledge in Partnership-funded research (South Africa); and how Participatory Action Research and Information and Knowledge Management could help overcome the informational barriers that communities faced (Bangladesh).

In South Africa the aim was to better understand how PACSA empowers communities and amplifies their voices, needs and interests. Through this process, the project sought to identify methods and strategies that might be applied elsewhere to strengthen community development efforts.

In Bangladesh, the aim was to conduct an evaluation of current understandings and capacities, and future potential, for the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to provide poor and isolated people with relevant and high-quality information and communications. Oxfam in Bangladesh was interested to learn more about how participatory activity could be used for advocacy, reporting, and policy development in the future.

— Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh.
METHODOLOGY

The project explored a number of research questions, modified for local circumstances across the two study areas.

The South African research took the form of interpretive naturalistic inquiry, arising from researcher experience in conducting in-depth interviews and a strong interest in participatory forms of research in indigenous and development settings.

A research visit was conducted with Oxfam South Africa in October 2013 to explore issues of participation, information and knowledge transfer in the National Health Insurance scheme, with the hope of constructing a case study focusing on understanding the type of Participatory Action Research used by PACSA and its relationship to broader issues of Information and Knowledge Management work and advocacy in NGOs.

Interviews and focus group sessions were conducted with PACSA staff members as well as community co-researchers from different community organisations (men’s and women’s HIV/AIDS and sexual health and relationship networks) and Oxfam South Africa, all of whom had worked on the Partnership-funded project seeking community input to the development and delivery of an effective and efficient health system through a new National Health Insurance policy.

The original idea for the Bangladesh work came from Oxfam Bangladesh staff members, who identified the critical need for an accessible emergency communication system to alert people living on chars to environmental threats. Evaluative interviews were conducted with individuals in three locations to understand views of and capacity to use ICT including mobile phones for purposes of emergency disaster alerts, domestic violence reporting, and agricultural information:

- Dhaka, with Oxfam staff and representatives of NGOs, and universities;
- Dinajpur (Rangpur Division) and Faridpur (Dhaka Division) with NGOs, universities and journalists, and local government; and
- Two remote char (sand island) village settings in the Dinajpur (in the north) and Faridpur (Ganges Delta) Districts.

The sites were selected on the basis of their isolation, poverty, and vulnerability to issues of environmental degradation and food security in fragile areas.
PARTNERSHIP

In both South Africa and Bangladesh, the success of the project rested heavily on relationships established through the Oxfam Monash Partnership.

In South Africa, the work capitalised on the goodwill and strong working relationships established through the earlier NHI project. The project also relied heavily on the input of community co-researchers from organisations supported by PACSA.

In Bangladesh, the research proposal was developed in close conjunction with Oxfam Bangladesh staff, informed by planning meetings with local Bangladeshi NGOs, climate specialists at the University of Dhaka, local government representatives and villagers living in at-risk areas.

Outreach to communities required within this project was also made possible by partnership with two local community development organisations identified by Oxfam Bangladesh on the basis of their expertise and long experience with Oxfam.

IMPACT

By developing new communications, information and knowledge skills in conjunction with beneficiaries, this project provided a new mechanism through which communities are better able to influence the decisions that affect them, and to hold external actors to account for the impacts they have on their lives.

This process of distillation of common essential practices that represent a concise, unified model for effective, high-impact community engagement, consultation and public participation in policy reform supported development of a strong Theory of Change linked to community consultation and public participation.

The South African research interviews revealed powerful insights and lessons into how NGOs and other development actors can practice radical community-based research that produces strong community outcomes, and into methods by which communities can act as empowered educators, facilitators and co-researchers in driving community action from the ground up.

PACSA’s approach was found to be a truly instructive model of participatory development action, with the organisation’s work focused strongly on building the capacity of the communities they work with, and demonstrating a clear and deep commitment to prioritising the voices and interests of communities in this process.

Through documenting and sharing these findings — including at workshops on community leadership and participation in development during the International Information and Communication Technology for Development Conference in Cape Town, South Africa — the research produced a valuable reference resource for Oxfam and other NGOs with an interest in conducting genuinely participatory, community-driven development research and programs.

In Bangladesh, interviews identified significant potential for a future research project to explore the use of mobile technology to improve community information flows by integrating mobile phone technology with other forms of community media and information sources, providing important insights into the way that Oxfam and other NGOs make use of community information processes, as well as providing examples of new technologies and techniques that could be employed to support community-driven development.

Study findings were integrated into ongoing community education programs, and used to develop long-term strategies to support the needs of these communities, including work with the partner organisations and the villagers to develop grass-roots capacity to provide information as well as receive it.
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Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 recognises that the achievement of gender equality and the end of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls is critical to inclusive and sustainable development, and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Empowering women and girls is proven to have a multiplier effect, and contributes to overall social and economic development.

Despite progress over recent decades, major challenges remain; inequality, discrimination and social exclusion persist worldwide. Women, minority communities (including gender non-binary people) and people with a disability are the most affected, often limited in their equal participation in political leadership, community and household decision-making processes as well as their access to economic and social services. Gender and poverty are inextricably linked.

Gender justice is central to Oxfam’s work. Globally, Oxfam partners with local organisations and governments to implement programs and projects that promote women’s rights and gender equality. A focus on gender equity and inclusivity has likewise been fundamental to the Monash organisational strategy for more than three decades.

To this end, gender equality has remained one of four key thematic research priorities throughout the life of the Partnership. The Oxfam Monash Partnership has supported a number of projects aiming to positively impact women’s lives, family wellbeing and community development outcomes, both through gender mainstreaming as well as stand-alone gender justice programs, to create transformative change.

**CREDIT: Sanjeewa Bootawa/OxfamAUS**

The irrigation canal in Kukulpone, Sri Lanka was completed by OAus partner DCF in Warakapola. The length of this canal is 165 ft. The project directly benefits 10 ultra poor families from our target village and 17 in surrounding areas. Prior to the canal these families could only cultivate once per year, during the Yala season.
Facilitating Rural Women’s Participation and Recognition in Sustainable Livelihoods in Post-War Sri Lanka

PROJECT TEAM

- Dr Samanthi Gunawardana (Co-Chief Investigator, Project Lead and Lecturer, Monash University)
- Balasingham Skanthakumar (Co-Chief Investigator, Social Scientists Association)
- Thiagi Piyadasa (Project Lead and Gender Coordinator, Oxfam Australia)
- Dr Pradeep Peireies (Social Scientists Association)
- Shashik Silva (Social Scientists Association)
- Buddhima Padmasiri (Open University)

With contributions from Heshani Ranasinghe (Gender Justice Advisor, Oxfam Sri Lanka) and Kate Greenwood (Program Management Coordinator, Oxfam Australia).

Over five years commencing in 2014, a multi-disciplinary project team worked with women from three Sri Lankan districts to identify the barriers and enablers across women’s life-course that affect their participation in sustainable agricultural livelihoods, contextualised against social, political and institutional interactions within the broader political economy.

The summary report *Rural Sri Lankan Women in Agriculture: Participation and recognition in sustainable agriculture livelihoods across their life course* was officially launched in Melbourne on 26 March 2018.

The public launch included a keynote address delivered by Professor Jacqui True, Director of Monash University’s Centre for Gender, Peace and Security, and was followed by a panel discussion with key researchers including project lead, Samanthi J. Gunawardana, Lecturer in Gender and Development at Monash University; Min Wah Voon, Portfolio Manager, Oxfam Australia; and Heshani Ranasinghe, Gender Justice Advisor, Oxfam Sri Lanka.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

The UN has affirmed that women are the ‘backbone of rural livelihoods’ and community sustainability. In Sri Lanka, women make a highly significant contribution to agricultural production, yet this contribution is largely unrecognised and undervalued; women have been ignored in the design and implementation of policy and programs, even as the Sri Lankan government has embarked on a range of ambitious development programs to stimulate livelihoods in rural areas.

This work aimed to address a significant research gap. While existing data showed that women had higher rates of participation than men in the Sri Lankan rural agricultural sector, data did not accurately capture the totality of people’s lives both in terms of the activities they were undertaking within the agricultural sector, but also in terms of their life course, with policies and programs not appropriately responding to the needs of women in this sector.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Produce an evidence base allowing women and relevant organisations to advocate for greater recognition of women’s role in the rural economy, and for policy that more directly responds to their needs;
- Increase awareness of individual and collective agency in overcoming barriers to sustainable agricultural livelihoods;
- Develop an action plan to empower women in their pursuit of greater participation and recognition in agricultural production; and
- Build capacity and skills to support these activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a life course approach to understand how women engaged, disengaged and at times abandoned agricultural livelihood activities while also engaging in parallel non-agricultural income earning activities.

Within this project, development practitioners and academics worked closely to undertake collaborative action research to endorse existing good practices, improve international development practice and share knowledge and experience with other stakeholders. They followed a model of partnership built around principles of equality and complementarity between institutions using strong action research to make a positive impact on people’s lives.

“We visited a number of villages and we spoke directly with the community members and through that process we were able to understand some of the issues that women were facing in the post-war agrarian economies.”

— Dr Samanthi Gunawardana, Co-Chief Investigator, Project Lead and Lecturer, Monash University

We, like Oxfam, wanted to support women to economically empower themselves.”

— Heshani Ranasinghe, Gender Justice Advisor, Oxfam Sri Lanka
PARTNERSHIP

Gender justice and women’s economic empowerment are key program areas for Oxfam in Sri Lanka, working to empower rural women and men for over thirty years. Exploring durable solutions for women’s economic empowerment, the results of this research aimed to prioritise rural women’s livelihoods in the development agenda, recognise and address the spectrum of inequalities rural women face, enhance more equitable participation and recognition for women, and ultimately ensure that women can forge pathways out of poverty.

This research helped build a comprehensive, evidence-based advocacy framework, to influence development organisational policy and practice and help inform Oxfam’s approach to economic empowerment, priorities and understanding of how women are impacted by various economic development programs.

This work strengthened the engagement between Monash University and Oxfam Australia, including through development of the Master of International Development Practice. In particular, students within this discipline were lucky enough to take part in an in-country internship in partnership with UNDP Sri Lanka off the back of this important research work.

"For Oxfam this partnership has been really important because it has given us lots of statistics and data to influence at a higher level.”
— Heshani Ranasinghe, Gender Justice Advisor, Oxfam Sri Lanka

What has been really amazing about this partnership is the way in which I’ve been able to use the research as a teaching case study, and so students have been deeply engaged with the process, they’ve watched it unfold, they’ve given feedback on it and it’s inspired them as well, particularly partnering with an organisation like Oxfam.”
— Dr Samanthi Gunawardana, Co-Chief Investigator, Project Lead and Lecturer, Monash University

Dr Samanthi Gunawardana, Co-Chief Investigator, Project Lead and Lecturer, Monash University
This multi-region research project has deepened understanding of women’s roles and experiences in the Sri Lankan agriculture industry as well as of the barriers they face in establishing safe, equitable and sustainable livelihoods, empowering existing networks of rural women working with Oxfam to advocate for change to overcome these barriers.

By working closely with networks of rural women in Sri Lanka to understand the specific changes they wanted to see their government and other key actors pursue, this project has correspondingly strengthened Oxfam’s programs in Sri Lanka’s rural and agricultural communities, including through sharing preliminary findings during Economic Justice Week in October 2015 which informed Oxfam’s future Economic Justice program, and at the Asian Women Farmers’ Forum, organised by Oxfam and held in Sri Lanka in December 2015.

The project has generated a comprehensive evidence base on the impact of gender-blind agricultural policies at the national and regional level, helping identify priority areas for national policy reform and strengthening Oxfam programs and projects on the ground.

The recommendations and evidence that emerged from the research project fed into Oxfam’s Women Farmers’ Campaign which was launched in December 2015. The campaign aimed to mobilise women farmers, civil society groups and other stakeholders to influence policy makers by bringing rural women into direct contact with government representatives and other key stakeholders to articulate their needs. This work provided a platform for continued action and support to women to advocate for access, participation and recognition within rural livelihoods.

As part of the research translation process, the results and policy implications were shared with Parliamentarians from Sri Lanka, the Australian High Commissioner and the UNDP Assistant Country Director, as well as the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls (in Australia). The findings were used to inform a gender review of the sector by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and to inform and strengthen Oxfam Sri Lanka’s gender justice campaign.

As a development practitioner and a gender advisor … we take evidence based research to inform our programs and policies. This research looks more at the life course, which is not always done, so it informs us better in order to really advocate and ensure that the critical analysis goes through to the stakeholders, and also inform our audiences how to better people’s lives in this sector and other sectors when it comes to the economy of women."

— Heshani Ranasinghe, Gender Justice Advisor, Oxfam Sri Lanka

CREDIT: Maureen Bathgate/OxfamAus

A local woman undertakes agricultural work in Sri Lanka.
Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands: A study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program

PROJECT TEAM

- Anna Trembath (Senior Gender Advisor, Oxfam Australia)
- Dr Emma Fulu (Director, The Equality Institute)
- Professor Jane Fisher (Director, Jean Hailes Research Unit and Professor of Women’s Health, Monash University)
- Dr Tomoko Honda (Jean Hailes Research Unit, Monash University)
- Julieanne Wickham (Safe Families Program Manager, Oxfam Solomon Islands)
- Doris Puiahi (Safe Families Program Manager, Oxfam Solomon Islands)
- Kiri Dicker (Gender Justice Program Manager, Oxfam Solomon Islands)
- Sarah McCook (Research Associate, The Equality Institute)
- Dr Sarah Homan (Research Associate, The Equality Institute)
- Loksee Leung (Research and Evaluation Lead, The Equality Institute)

2017 saw the launch of the first-ever collaborative research project between Oxfam Solomon Islands and Oxfam Australia, The Equality Institute of the University of Melbourne, and Monash University’s Jean Hailes Research Unit.

The initiative, funded by the prestigious World Bank-Sexual Violence Research Initiative (WBSVRI)’s Development Marketplace Awards, built upon the ‘Let’s Make Our Families Safe’ (Safe Families) program, an Australian Government-supported initiative implemented by Oxfam and partners. This was the first time an SVRI grant has been awarded to a project operating in the Pacific region. The work resulted in the compilation of the report Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands: A study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program.

The launch of the project coincided with and contributed to the global campaign for 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which raises awareness and calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. The launch included a panel discussion exploring how academics and practitioners can expand evidence on effective, contextually-relevant approaches to preventing violence against women and girls from the Pacific region using research approaches that are ethical, safe and rigorous, especially in small, geographically-dispersed communities.

7 Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

The Safe Families program served as the first comprehensive, community-led primary violence prevention model designed in and for the Solomon Islands context, and one of the first emanating from the Pacific region. The project model facilitated sustained normative change by mobilising communities to understand the root causes of family and sexual violence, and to take action to address these causes, including a significant focus on addressing systemic drivers such as policies, access to resources, and coordination of stakeholder response.

This collaborative project conducted an in-depth review of the impact of the Safe Families program on attitudes, beliefs and social norms that drive family and sexual violence in two provinces in the Solomon Islands, aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in that context; build understanding of complexities and dynamics of family and sexual violence in the Solomon Islands, beyond prevalence; deepen evidence of the processes for shifting these harmful social norms to reduce rates of violence against women and girls; and share information on effective violence prevention interventions within the Solomon Islands and the broader Pacific region.

METHODOLOGY

The research applied a multi-component, qualitative approach to evaluate the Safe Families intervention, including the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) tools through which community members (local researchers) were engaged as co-researchers to refine research tools, research methodology, and generate evidence from community conversations.

This in-depth qualitative study included:

- A thorough review of all monitoring data and technical reports from the Safe Families project;
- Participant observation, including observation of community conversations and other key activities;
- In-depth interviews with community members, project team members and facilitators;
- Key informant interviews with key stakeholders and community leaders;
- Focus group discussions with different sub-groups of the community to understand specific social norms contributing to and driving family and sexual violence in the Solomon Islands.

The study followed international ethical and safety guidelines for research on violence against women.
PARTNERSHIP

This program opened up new partnership avenues with specialist agencies outside the Oxfam Monash Partnership and was a collaborative effort between the research partners. Collectively, these partners brought decades of expertise in delivering world-class research to build evidence for interdisciplinary programming in gender, primary prevention and community responses to violence.

By partnering with world-leading academic institutions and agencies, Oxfam was able to ensure that the research was both academically rigorous and culturally appropriate in the Solomon Islands context.
IMPACT

Prior to this project, there was very little rigorous published evidence on the effectiveness of primary prevention interventions from the Pacific, making it one of the most under-researched regions despite having some of the highest prevalence rates globally.

This research therefore provided essential evidence on the effectiveness of community mobilisation strategies addressing violence against women (VAW) in the Pacific context and what elements need to be adapted to meet the needs of small and very remote communities, as well as generating important learnings in how to adhere to international ethics, safety standards and guidelines for VAW research in such settings. These findings are already being used to inform global policy and practice to address these challenges.

As discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive globally — and with 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 reporting that they have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period — projects like this are critical in furthering the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Transforming harmful social norms is key to breaking the cycle and preventing violence against women. This research project contributed significantly to better understanding, testing and refining how Safe Families community strategies shift violence-supporting norms in the Solomon Islands, as well as contributing to the global evidence base by:

- Expanding the fine-grained evidence around contextually-specific attitudes, beliefs and social norms that drive violence against women and what works to address them, particularly in post-conflict, high-prevalence settings such as the Solomon Islands;
- Progressing methodological approaches to researching violence against women in ways that are ethical, safe and rigorous in the context of small, geographically-disparate small island communities where violence is relatively normalised.

The research also generated a series of recommendations for the future implementation of the Safe Families program and other violence prevention projects in the Pacific region and beyond. These recommendations included working with communities to ensure interventions are transformative of attitudes, norms and behaviour, and not limited to awareness-raising; ensuring the program emphasises the benefits of gender equality to the community; and utilising a collaborative co-design process for the development of prevention initiatives.

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Lilian Vuria (49) is married to Timothy Vuria, the chief of Binu village. Timothy and Lilian’s daughter Alice said, “Daddy would bash the door. Even our own vehicle, he came and smashed it. He even threw stones in our house. Inside the house, breaking the wall.” Timothy has gone from being an angry, violent drunk to a community champion in reducing family violence.

Toswel Sau (64) in Ngalitatae village. Toswel said, “Oxfam brings a lot of training. Before, we saw drinking, hitting, wife abuse and beating children. We’ve turned away from that violence. I help with cooking, fetching water and cutting firewood. In the morning, I cook something for the children to go to school. Today, it’s nice. So I’m happy with Oxfam. They’re very, very good. I like it!”
Gender Analysis of Savings and Loans Groups in Timor-Leste

PROJECT TEAM

- Dr Sara Niner (Chief Investigator and Project Lead, Monash University)
- Dr Kathryn Anne Cornwell (Senior Researcher, Monash University)
- Christina Jeronimo De Sa Benevides (Team Leader, IOB)
- Herminia Varela Niha (National Enumerator, IOB)
- Felismina de Araujo Sarmento (National Enumerator, IOB)
- Policarpo Benevides (National Enumerator, IOB)
- Jose Mendes Nono (National Enumerator, IOB)
- Lucia Viana Branco (Timor-Leste Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries)

With contributions from Glenda Lasslett (Country Director, Oxfam Timor-Leste) and Jaclyn Donahue (East Asia Project Management Coordinator, Oxfam Australia).

Commencing in 2015, this project investigated the gendered dynamics within microfinance groups including the Oxfam Savings and Loan Groups (SLG) in Timor-Leste, exploring the relationship between women’s control of economic resources and their social, political and economic empowerment. From this work, a major report was produced, titled Gender Analysis of Oxfam Savings and Loans Groups in Timor-Leste.

In 2018, building on these research findings, the Oxfam Monash Partnership continued to work with research lead Dr Sara Niner on analysis of savings-led microfinance and gender empowerment. This work focused on the emerging discourse surrounding ‘socially responsible’ or ‘inclusive’ finance, examining community-led and microsavings approaches as a more promising model for women’s multidimensional empowerment in the Asia-Pacific.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

A deeply gendered division of labour characterises the Timor-Leste economy, with women particularly vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment. With women aged 25–34 being 25% more likely than men to live in extreme poverty, women’s economic empowerment is seen as both a catalyst and a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Women are increasingly becoming involved in savings and loans schemes – one of which is administered by Oxfam in the capital Dili – with the aim that women’s increasing leadership and participation in these schemes might accelerate their social and economic empowerment.

Despite these hopes, however, the gendered and social dynamics within such schemes, as well as their real impacts on gender relations in Timor-Leste more broadly, remain understudied. As microfinance programs continue to expand in the region, they remain under-examined in the vast microfinance literature, which is largely dominated by programs in South Asia, Latin America and Africa.

This research aimed to broaden the available evidence base by examining the gendered social dynamics and impact of Oxfam-partnered diverse SLGs in Timor-Leste, leading to better programming decisions by actors in the space and further seeking to ensure that negative impacts were mitigated and benefits maximised.

METHODOLOGY

As with all research projects supported by this Partnership, researchers sought to create real synergy between action and research with a view to improving the lives of people living in poverty.

The overarching research framework was a critical study of Oxfam’s SLG program in Timor-Leste, referred to by the Indonesian acronym UBSP (Usaha Bersama Simpan Pinjam, Joint Savings and Loan Groups). The key questions the research team sought to answer were:

- Are these programs successful / unsuccessful and to what degree?
- What are the motivations for men and women to join these groups, and what do they perceive as the benefits of membership?
- What are the factors that enable and inhibit women and men to participate, lead and benefit from these groups and are there any related negative results?

The research covered 17 savings and loans groups in four districts of Timor-Leste, including women-only, men-only and mixed-gender groups. The single gender groups were examined in comparison to the social dynamics of mixed gender groups. The team used a variety of strategies to talk with all stakeholders, including individual interviews with local NGOs, partners and group leaders, focus group discussions with single gender groups, and demographic surveys.

In 2019, building on previous collaborations, the Oxfam Monash Partnership supported additional supplementary work involving review of policy and selected microsavings programs in the Asia-Pacific region, made possible through the Partnership’s connection with Monash Masters-level students through both internship and guest lecture programs.

In 2017 and 2018, students from the Monash Arts Gender and Development unit were tasked with examining and assessing alternative microsavings approaches in the Asia and Pacific, generating a consolidated overview of the most promising practices, challenges that remain and lessons learned. Monash interns also contributed to a policy review, which undertook a comparative analysis of existing global microfinance and gender empowerment policies and guidelines against Oxfam’s Theory of Change and ‘Do No Harm’ principle, and several PhD students have enrolled at Monash to complete theses about the effects of Microfinance.

CREDIT: Kate Bensen/OxfamAUS

Bobometo, Oecusse, Timor-Leste: Marcelina Aquesen and her husband Fernando Meo have received training from Oxfam to teach them new methods of growing crops better suited to the climatic conditions they experience.
PARTNERSHIP

Both Oxfam Australia and Monash University seek opportunities to build on our joint work in order to scale up and multiply project impact by sharing knowledge and experience with other stakeholders.

The research findings were widely disseminated and the issue was debated during a public seminar on Microfinance: Problems, Critiques and Solutions and a two-day practitioner development workshop on Women’s Empowerment & Microfinance in the Asia-Pacific bringing together national and international experts in a policy-relevant debate about the efficacy of microfinance programs to achieve poverty alleviation and women’s multi-dimensional empowerment. Workshop participants included Linda Mayoux, a leading world expert on microfinance and women’s empowerment; Sophie Romano, who led the introduction of the Oxfam ‘Savings for Change’ (SfC) model; and Cheth Phay, who managed the SfC Program at Oxfam Cambodia.

Both events served as an opportunity to widely disseminate the research findings, as well as to discuss in-depth issues emerging from the study and to shape the evidence-based debate towards informing future policy decisions on microfinance and gender empowerment.

“...The seminar went so well. I feel like the participants gelled well and that’s why we could get into the really fundamental stuff, rather than remaining superficial like much work on microfinance.”
— WEMAP seminar postgraduate student participant
IMPACT

This project examined the gendered and social dynamics being reproduced within microfinance groups, helping build greater understanding of the way in which women’s increasing participation and leadership in the schemes may accelerate their social and economic empowerment.

Initial research ultimately found that whilst savings and loans groups provided some economic and social successes for participants, for the most part the groups demonstrated adherence to established gendered roles and economic strategies, and in many cases did little to challenge gender inequity and associated attitudes.

Expansion on this first research phase with the help of Monash Masters students and Oxfam colleagues confirmed these earlier findings. However, results also indicated that non-predatory microsavings and cooperative approaches displayed potential in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, showing greater promise for women’s multi-dimensional empowerment than some mainstream microfinance programs.

Research outcomes provided a valuable resource for engagement with the Timor-Leste government regarding policy and procedures underpinning rural financial services and programs around women’s roles in rural development. Preliminary policy recommendations were also shared at the 2020 inaugural Development Studies Association Conference in Melbourne, Australia.

The research findings and recommendations continue to have a significant influence on programming and policy work of many key actors within this space, including Oxfam and their affiliates leading the SfC flagship program.

The research filled a significant gap in the evidence base underpinning Oxfam’s programming in this area, consequentially impacting how they work to support women’s empowerment through their savings and loans group initiatives. Oxfam Timor-Leste transitioned from a savings and loan approach to the SfC methodology targeting women living in poverty in rural areas, assisting them in improving their savings habits, and using the accumulated money to make loans to others in their group.

This project provided a foundation for establishing links with ongoing research by Oxfam America on the SfC model in Timor-Leste and Cambodia, presenting an opportunity to share findings and further discuss policy and program implications. The policy review undertaken as part of this work also helped expand engagement with Oxfam Novib, which has been actively involved in the development of international policy on microfinance and gender empowerment, with a focus on savings-led models.

The research team has since consulted with Oxfam to discuss the practical implications of the findings for Oxfam’s Integrated Rural Development Program design, and to assist in integrating these findings accordingly.

The most useful thing is the information obtained from the differing context of the impact of microfinance on the lives of women. This has enabled me to understand the different folds to ensure that what we are practising is not doing any harm but is actually achieving what is aimed for and that is empowering women. As a nation that is growing, the information obtained gives me as a practitioner an in-depth understanding where it is provided to the different groups and to be aware of the positive implications and negatives being shared by the academics.”

— WEMAP seminar participant
Research on Sourcing Practices of Iconic Brands in Australia

PROJECT TEAM

- Professor Amrik Sohal (Co-Chief Investigator, Department of Management, Monash Business School)
- Nayeem Emran (Co-Chief Investigator, Oxfam Australia)
- Associate Professor Glen Croy (Monash University)
- Dr Fahreen Alamgir (Monash University)
- Professor Ingrid Nielsen (Monash University)
- Dr Tharaka de Vass (Monash University)
- Dr Kazi Mahmudur Rahman (Associate Professor, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh)
- Dr Sumon Rahman (Professor, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh)

Supply chains in all industries, including fashion, have become increasingly globalised, complex and competitive. Conventionally, outsourcing production — particularly to developing and emerging economies — is seen to deliver benefits in terms of reduced costs and contribution to development. However, the ready-made garment industry and textiles more broadly, have come under particular scrutiny for their environmental, economic and social impacts.

Commencing in late 2019, this project brought together experts from within Oxfam Australia, Monash University and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, to conduct groundbreaking research into the international sourcing practices of leading Australian fashion brands that source their clothes from Bangladesh — the first detailed investigation of its kind.

Oxfam Australia’s project report Shopping for a Bargain⁹, released in November 2020, provides a strong foundation to advocate for living wages for the workers who make our clothes, and engage Australian consumers to apply public pressure to Australian clothing brands, building on Oxfam Australia’s previous work, including the ‘What She Makes’ campaign.

⁹ Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.

▼ CREDIT: Fabeha Monir/Oxfam AUS
Dhaka, Bangladesh: Garment workers seen on their way to work on the streets of Dhaka.
OBJECTIVE

In 2019–20, the Australian fashion industry was worth more than $22 billion, with the majority of garments stocked in Australian and online stores made offshore — in factories in major countries such as China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam and Indonesia, amongst many others. The global garment industry employs more than 75 million workers worldwide, with around 85% of factory workers being women, who generally work in more precarious and low paid jobs in garment industry supply chains.

The industry has been hugely profitable, but these profits are earned off the back of a system of entrenched exploitation, where the workers who make our clothes, particularly women, are frequently paid poverty wages.

It is increasingly acknowledged that the way a retailer does business with its suppliers has a significant impact on the wages and working conditions of garment workers. Conventional purchasing practices including aggressive price negotiation, inaccurate forecasting, late orders, short lead times, and last-minute changes to orders put manufacturers under intense pressure and result in poor working conditions and low pay for garment workers, particularly women.

Oxfam Australia comprehensively detailed the impact of poverty wages in its 2019 report, Made in Poverty: The True Price of Fashion. The report called on Australian brands to disclose the locations of their factories, and to ensure workers throughout their supply chains are paid a living wage.

Citing research by Deloitte Access Economics for its 2017 report, What She Makes: Power and Poverty in the Fashion Industry, it was estimated that ensuring payment of living wages for workers in Australian clothing supply chains would only increase the retail cost of an item of clothing by 1%.

This project aimed to build on earlier work, examining the buying practices of selected buyers in detail and the impact on business and working conditions in factories in Bangladesh, and rating each brand’s purchasing practices based on the findings of surveys of major Australian retailers and their suppliers.

This was a unique opportunity to demonstrate research-led social accountability in a high-priority area of sustainability, namely, gender and labour rights in the ready-made garment industry.

“[The research] found that these poor purchasing practices of brands are making it impossible for factories to increase wages, despite many of the same brands making public commitments to ensure the payment of living wages. Instead, wages are trapping workers — mainly women — and their families in a cycle of poverty.”

— Lyn Morgain, Chief Executive, Oxfam Australia
METHODOLOGY

Under this project, in-depth research was conducted to identify the impact of sourcing practices of selected brands leading to poor wage and working conditions of the women making clothes in production countries.

The companies included in this project were Best&Less, Big W, Cotton On, H&M Group, Inditex (Zara), The Just Group, Kmart, Myer, Mosaic Brands and Target Australia, all of which contract garment factories in Bangladesh.

An assessment matrix and associated questions were developed based on a detailed review of secondary studies, including qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed literature, grey literature, and policy and media databases, using a systematic sampling strategy.

More than 150 surveys and 22 in-depth interviews were then conducted with factory owners, managers, supervisors, workers and industry experts including leaders from the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Selected brands were also interviewed by researchers from Monash University.

Each brand’s purchasing practices were evaluated across seven categories using the assessment matrix. The results of the surveys with factories and brands were used to develop a comparative rating of purchasing practices, representing the score the brand gave itself against that given by the factories from which their clothes are purchased. Each brand’s overall rating was determined by averaging the item ratings within each of the seven categories.

The research was synthesised for clear articulation of key debates and insights, with the final report presenting the overall concerns related to sourcing practices impact by aggregating the survey results and ranking selected brands based on their sourcing practices.

PARTNERSHIP

Oxfam had already undertaken several, aligned research projects in the area of living wages and supply chain practices, resulting in a handbook for companies on best practice as well as a report revealing data from Deloitte Access Economics.

The co-design of data collection instruments, data analysis and report preparation relied on close working relationships between the Monash team, Oxfam Australia representatives and the data collection team in Bangladesh.

This project therefore presented an ideal opportunity to jointly demonstrate thought leadership by positioning Oxfam’s strong advocacy work together with Monash’s established understanding of evidence-based research.

A number of Monash academics contributed to this research, including members of the Global Value Chains Research Network (GVCRN), Centre for Global Business and Monash Business School. Oxfam Australia staff also provided significant in-kind coordination and research support for this project.
**IMPACT**

This work built on a 20-year legacy of Oxfam Australia’s human rights-based influencing work on labour rights, with a focus on the women in the ready-made garment sector.

A range of opportunities were capitalised on to communicate this research to stakeholders and transfer this knowledge for internal and external practice and policy change, including publication of the major project report Shopping for a Bargain which was disseminated via Oxfam Australia and Monash University websites.

This project generated a meaningful evidence base that directly informed the development of Oxfam Australia’s approach to the next phase of influencing the sourcing practices of brands and contributed to the ongoing Oxfam International global campaign. Following release of the report, four brands committed to ring-fencing labour costs — separating out labour costs in price negotiations — making it easier to identify and protect the wages of the women who make our clothes.

Existing advocacy and influencing work with several brands has identified ongoing training needs in relation to improving sourcing practices and wage conditions. This report was showcased and formed a foundation for targeted training work with brands to support ongoing knowledge transfer activities. It will continue to be used as a platform for training interventions with big brands to demonstrate the pathway to ethical supply chain improvements. Several brands have indicated their early interest in this training and support.

The project also provides the impetus for further research; opportunities have been identified to extend the current research into a larger project that can be supported through the Australian Research Council, Linkage Projects Scheme and possibly by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection. GVCRN is specifically invested in research that interrogates supply chains and related issues. This collaboration presents a direct opportunity to contribute to a second International Conference on the Apparel Industry, hosted by the Network and rescheduled due to COVID-19. The team from Monash University will also be preparing articles based on the data collected for publication in academic journals during 2021–2022.

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Oxfam is calling on Australian brands to develop and publish responsible purchasing policies and to ensure that labour costs are ‘ring fenced’ in negotiations with factories — that is, separately calculated to ensure the payment of living wages to workers. And brands that are lagging behind need to take the step of making a public, credible commitment to living wages.”

— Lyn Morgain, Chief Executive, Oxfam Australia

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**CREDIT:** Fabeha Monir/Oxfam AUS

Dhaka, Bangladesh: Garment worker, “Chameli (30) holds a shirt typical of one she would manufacture daily for global brands, outside her home in Dhaka.” Names of the workers and their family members have been changed for their wellbeing and the protection of their employment.
In the face of a changing climate, we are seeing an increase in the scale, frequency and severity of extreme weather events including heatwaves, floods and tropical cyclones, as well as slow-onset events, including droughts and salinisation of land and water resources. This in turn exacerbates water management issues, impacting agricultural production and food security, escalating health concerns, damaging critical infrastructure, impeding the provision of basic services including water and sanitation, education, energy and transport, and increasing prevalence of conflict and displacement resulting from resource constraints.

Climate change presents the single greatest threat to global sustainable development and its widespread, unprecedented impacts are felt disproportionately by the world’s poorest and most vulnerable.

Urgent action to address climate change and respond to its impacts is central to successfully achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and saving lives and livelihoods.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on Climate Action calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. One of the specific targets under this goal is the promotion of mechanisms for increasing capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalised communities.

Since the formation of the Oxfam Monash Partnership, Climate Change and Resilience has remained a key thematic area, with research focussing on supporting communities to adapt to climate change and to build the capacity to anticipate, mitigate and respond to these changes.
Gendered Impacts of Climate Variability in Bangladesh

PROJECT TEAM

- Professor Margaret Alston (Director, GLASS Research Unit and Head of the Department of Social Work, Monash University)
- Tania Cass (Program Manager, India and Bangladesh, Oxfam Australia)
- Md Badi Akhter (Program Manager, Bangladesh, Oxfam Great Britain)
- Dr Kerri Whittenbury (Senior Research Fellow, GLASS Research Unit, Monash University)
- Alex Haynes (Project Manager, Oxfam Monash Partnership)
- Dr Alexandra Gartrell (Research Advisor, Oxfam Australia)
- Sonia Sarder (Program Coordinator, Bangladesh, Oxfam Great Britain)
- Henna Hasina (Program Officer, Bangladesh, Oxfam Great Britain)
- Farhana Hafiz (Program Officer, Bangladesh, Oxfam Great Britain)
- Julia Ahmed (Gender Program Coordinator, Oxfam Australia)
- Cinzia Pedrotti (South Asia Program Support Officer, Oxfam Australia)

With contributions from Naomi Godden (Program Research Advisor, Oxfam Australia).

This three-year project was the first to be funded by the Oxfam Monash Partnership, and was a collaboration between the Gender Leadership and Social Sustainability (GLASS) Research Unit at Monash University, Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) and local partners in Bangladesh.

Commencing in 2011, the research team worked across three communities in Bangladesh to identify climate impacts on food security, employment, education, health, and other related areas, and understand how these impacts affected men and women differently within the communities studied. From this process, the academic paper *Are climate challenges reinforcing child and forced marriage and dowry as adaptation strategies in the context of Bangladesh?*11 was produced.

This research was linked to Oxfam’s REE-CALL program, an integrated livelihoods, humanitarian and women’s leadership program working with NGO partners and communities to develop strategies for adaptation to climate change and extreme weather events.

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11 Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

Bangladesh is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world due to its location and hydro-geological characteristics, combined with its socio-economic conditions.

Climate change has exacerbated both the scale, frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including floods, cyclones and storm surges; and the instance of slow-onset events such as droughts and salinisation of land and water resources.

A range of factors are increasing the impact of disasters, exacerbating existing poverty and inequalities and causing ongoing loss of lives, homes, livelihoods and critical infrastructure, and creating the need for a more complex emergency response.

Prior to this research program, there was little understanding of how these changes affected men and women differently, and of how women’s safety and security was compromised by a changing climate. This was particularly concerning given evidence suggesting women are most acutely affected by climatic changes.

In this context, the project’s central aim was to assess the gendered impacts of climate variability in Bangladesh, maintaining a particular focus on slow onset events.

The project paid systematic attention to women’s stories in a climate change context, seeking to capture and learn from their experiences, vulnerability and agency, to determine appropriate and practical ways to address these issues and identify strategies to make women and girls safer.

METHODOLOGY

This project was designed around a collaborative, action research model allowing flexibility to introduce modifications in design and methodology as needed and suggested by OGB and their local partners who were familiar with the context.

The team worked together to develop a robust and culturally sensitive methodology that balanced capturing quantitative data (climate and socio-economic) with qualitative information gathered from stories and experiences of women (and men) about their coping strategies.

Three regional areas were selected for in-depth study:

- Gaibandha in the north with NGO partner GUK Gana Unnayan Kendra — a char river island area subject to river erosion and drought;
- Satkhira in the southwest with NGO partner Shushilan — a coastal area including mangrove forest subject to salt water inundation and water-logging; and
- Barguna in the south with NGO partner Jago Nari — a low lying coastal area where there were many char villages affected by river level rises.

Site selection enabled researchers to compare and contrast their different geographies, socio-economic contexts, programs, livelihoods, types of climate variability and events, responses and adaptations in order to inform a detailed understanding of gendered impacts and dynamics in the context of climate variability.

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Bangladesh: Monika Rani Paine collects drinking water from the solar-powered pond sand water filter at Atulia, Shatkhira. "We had to collect water from a long distance before and wasted a lot of time. But now we can easily get better water from this tube well and living better than before," she said. Oxfam's REE-CALL program seeks resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership and Learning.

Data collection was conducted in two principal stages:

- **Stage 1**: detailed qualitative key informant interviews with union and district level officials, health workers and staff from community-based organisations (CBOs); individual interviews with community members across multiple villages in each district; and focus group discussions with local CBOs, young women and men. A total of 72 interviews and 26 focus groups were completed. A desk audit of existing literature was also undertaken;

- **Stage 2**: a quantitative survey, based on analysis of the Stage 1 interviews, administered by trained research assistants in multiple villages in each of the three districts. Over 300 survey responses were recorded.

Two ideas sharing workshops were held to introduce the research to a range of government representatives, development partners, academics and other INGOs, identifying opportunities to discuss how the new knowledge could inform the policies, practices and mechanisms in Bangladesh to address the gendered impacts of climate change.

As the first Partnership-funded project, it provided important lessons in the management of the partnership and individual projects, highlighting how to successfully and collaboratively work together to ensure equality and transparency among the partners.

The project drew on the strengths of all organisations involved, providing skills in research and policy development for people in the field, and a greater understanding by Monash University staff of the issues facing NGO development teams. The project also engaged with other agencies and universities as part of a broader constituency for development and learning.

OGB and its local partner organisations in Bangladesh enhanced the design and practical application of the research, providing crucial access to their networks; critical logistical support including assisting with site visits and helping facilitate interviews and focus groups for the research team; publicising the project; and acting as a contact point for community research participants.

Staff and students from the University of Dhaka were trained and supported by both Monash and OGB staff to provide important project support. Their inclusion in the research team added further depth to the international relationships emerging from the project.

Linkage with Oxfam's REE-CALL program streamlined the data collection process, and meant that learnings from the project could be considered in the development and review of the local programs and assisted the NGO partners.

We are consciously building relationships with a network of potentially influential people and organisations in the hope that we can use this to fashion effective policy responses.”

— Research team’s project progress reflection

**CREDIT**: Abir Abdullah/OxfamAUS

Bangladesh: Monika Rani Paine collects drinking water from the solar-powered pond sand water filter at Atulia, Shatkhira. "We had to collect water from a long distance before and wasted a lot of time. But now we can easily get better water from this tube well and living better than before," she said. Oxfam’s REE-CALL program seeks resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership and Learning.
This project delivered a comprehensive and critical investigation of a key cross-cutting issue. The emerging evidence and insights filled an important gap in broader understandings of gender and climate change and were used to inform policies, practices and mechanisms instituted by international, regional and local NGOs, government and other agencies to better support women in the face of climate change.

The project partners were mindful of identifying and capitalising on opportunities for dissemination, communication and advocacy throughout the project, and sharing knowledge and learnings to help inform ideas about gendered impacts of climate variability in the international development community. GLASS’ existing relationships with UN agencies, including UNESCO and FAO, enabled broad communication of the findings and solutions and contribution to the joint UN working group on violence and climate change in the Pacific.

The project timeline was developed to make initial findings available to key UN agencies and NGOs including UN Women and the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) — both of whom expressed keen interest in this research project — to inform their advocacy work during the Earth Summit +20, an important and significant milestone in the global politics of climate change. The findings were also used in profiling gender and climate change issues at the 2012 Earth Summit, providing input to COP meetings and the 2015 SDG negotiations on the impact of climate change in vulnerable countries.

The project was also presented in several other international fora, including:

- Gender and Climate Change International Conference in Prato, Italy, to a range of international academics and advocates (September 2011);
- International Council of Women Asia-Pacific Forum in Fiji (November 2011);
- World Universities Network Gender Justice Climate Change group in the United States; and
- 5th Annual Community-Based Adaptation to Climate Change Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh (March 2011).

A number of publications arose from this important research, including book chapters, journal articles in Women’s Studies International Forum and Oxfam journal Gender and Development, and submission of an abstract to the International Women’s Conference in June 2012.

The research team held a series of policy dialogues in Bangladesh in late 2013, presenting key findings and demonstrating possible solutions to help motivate NGOs and government to rethink their Disaster Risk Reduction and preparedness methodologies, messaging and budgeting.

Findings were built into Oxfam’s in-country campaigns, influencing their advocacy, program strategy and direction, feeding into both their long-supported WE CAN gender-based violence campaign in South Asia and their role in the Disaster and Emergency Response Group sub-committee for Gender and Diversity. The project was also included in the work and focus of the Oxfam Australia Gender Equality hub.

The team worked in close collaboration with Oxfam Bangladesh’s policy and advocacy unit to ensure that evidence generated also informed effective resilience policy, advocacy and programming responses to help influence the government’s approach to climate change adaptation, improving service delivery, social protection and safety.

The project provided the tools and resources for communities to articulate their own demands to national governments and international fora, with a particular focus on engaging women and women’s organisations. Oxfam developed interactive communication materials and used these to share the key findings with partners and communities in their native language, facilitating discussion and supporting communities to address the issues raised themselves.

A key outcome from this project was the enhanced capacity of Dhaka University students, partners, women movement leaders, climate change researchers and Oxfam staff to critically link gendered impacts of climate variability with other issues, which opened up practical opportunities to make this research a living document for networking leadership.

Women’s strong sense of agency and resilience has helped them make significant headway over the past decades.”

— Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha
Micro-Desalination for Remote Off-Grid Communities

PROJECT TEAM

- Xiwang Zhang (Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering and Director of ARC Research Hub for Energy-efficient Separation, Monash University)
- Dr Saba Mebrahtu Habte (Program Lead, Oxfam Monash Partnership)
- Jimi Peters (First Peoples Lead, Oxfam Australia)
- Jie Zhang (Associate Professor, School of Chemistry, Monash University)
- Dr Farzaneh Mahmoudi (Research Assistant, Monash University)

The Partnership’s research matching process resulted in this exciting collaboration between Oxfam Australia and Monash University’s Australian Research Council Research Hub for Energy-Efficient Separation (ARC-EESep), for development of a micro-desalination prototype water purifier to improve access to clean, potable water for resource-poor communities in remote off-grid locations.

Prototypes based on an emerging Low-Pressure Reverse Osmosis (LPRO) concept were successfully developed in line with Oxfam’s internationally-agreed performance requirements.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document/website may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.
The prototype development was supported in 2017 by a seed grant from Monash Infrastructure (MI) and Oxfam Australia. The project has since received external funding from Perpetual Impact to develop and test three models for durability and quality performance under controlled conditions in the laboratory and the field.

The Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation provided further support to launch the second phase of the project in mid-2020, involving collaborating with First Nations communities affected by high salinity and other water contamination issues.

This exciting project has been featured in Today Strategic Design magazine and Devpolicy Blog.

I work to look at what might be best for our mob on the ground and support our people to address issues they face on a daily basis, and to make sure they have a voice and are exercising their right to self-determination.”

— Jimi Peters, First Peoples Lead, Oxfam Australia

CREDIT: Keith Parsons/Oxfam AUS
Melbourne, Australia: Jimi Peters, National Program Lead First Peoples’ Program at Oxfam Australia speaks with Today’s Kate Bensen about the Oxfam-Monash partnership’s desalination pilot and the potential benefits for communities in Australia.

OBJECTIVE

Water scarcity remains one of the world’s most pressing development issues, with more than 2.8 billion people in both developed and developing countries still lacking access to safe water.

High salinity and other harmful contaminants such as nitrates and pathogens are making surface and groundwater more unsafe due to growing populations, rising sea levels associated with climate change, industrial and agricultural waste, and increasing competition for increasingly scarce fresh water resources, impacting people’s lives and livelihoods. With 5.7 million hectares of land classified as ‘high potential’ for salinisation in Australia and 6 million people in Vietnam’s Mekong River delta currently affected as saline groundwater moves inland, access to clean water remains a pressing global health and environmental issue.

As a result, more countries are turning to alternative water sources to produce much needed potable water via technological solutions, with the overwhelming majority of these systems utilising reverse osmosis (RO) to transform saline water to potable water.

Conventional centralised desalination approaches require specialised maintenance procedures and are capital and energy-intensive, rendering them inappropriate for remote, small, off-grid and low-income settings, including the humanitarian context. Innovative, tailored and cost-effective desalination solutions are urgently needed to meet the growing demand for reliable and affordable safe water globally.

To this end, this joint project aimed to improve access to clean water through development of prototypes for three different low-cost, energy-efficient and sustainable desalination modules for use in rural, off-grid areas. In addition to creating a robust evidence base of technological solutions, the project aimed to assess opportunities for local, private sector actors in the replication of proven cost-effective scalable desalination technologies.

This is a ‘game changer’ in terms of bringing clean water to vulnerable communities around the world.
METHODOLOGY

The project involves two distinct phases of work: a research, design and prototyping phase, to be followed by a field piloting testing phase which commenced in 2021.

During the seed funding period, the project team reviewed the key requirements of decentralised desalination models for complex contexts.

Support was provided by undergraduate students from the Faculty of Engineering and postgraduate students in the interdisciplinary Master of Environment and Sustainability to conduct literature reviews and comparative studies of key technological and methodological considerations, including social and economic analysis of the scalability of small desalination units; technical performance reviews of prototypes; surveys of water treatment characteristics; and benchmarking against Oxfam’s internationally-agreed performance criteria.

An Oxfam Australia intern also undertook a comparative assessment of technologies available in the market. This review of existing commercially available small- to medium-scale water purification systems in the market has shown that our prototype is among the most affordable water purification technologies that are being field-tested and expanded, with consumables available in the local market.

On this basis, a small-scale, solar-driven, low-cost, portable and easy to maintain micro-desalination prototype using five-stage LPRO technology was designed and manufactured. Feasibility testing was undertaken to optimise design pre-prototype and make improvements based on results and incorporating the gender study.

Laboratory testing was conducted in both indoor and outdoor settings, satisfying quality and durability criterion in both contexts.

These robust preliminary results will be used to secure external funds to introduce and scale-up the selected technology at the community level. Findings will feed into development of a larger project to field test the chosen prototype in rural community settings using participatory action research under a gender and social equity lens, ensuring global water standards are met and in ways that are culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable.

The first location for field testing will be in conjunction with the Gunditjmara community in north western Victoria. Field testing will involve First Nations communities that are heavily affected by water issues, aiming to result in community-led refinements proven to meet local water-use requirements, with positive impact on health and livelihoods and the environment.

As a cross-sectoral research initiative, the research has been conducted collaboratively as participatory action research. The project uses a human-centred approach to engineering design, equitably involving both women and men to refine the technology design to fit local water use requirements and preferences, in close collaboration with First Nations organisations, such as Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations.

Having water is a human right, it’s not just a black issue. We want to work together with communities to co-design the final technology — informed by community feedback generated during the trial.”

— Jimi Peters, First Peoples Lead, Oxfam Australia

A micro-desalination prototype that can produce clean, fresh drinking water for remote off-grid settings. It is affordable for small communities, portable and environmentally friendly.

CREDIT: Dr Saba Mebrahtu Habte
PARTNERSHIP

Three years ago, Oxfam approached the Monash Department of Chemical Engineering to explore a possible collaboration to develop a low-cost, small-scale, portable solar-driven water desalination and purification unit. An innovation that can save lives.

The resulting partnership brought together Oxfam Australia’s links to partners and communities in the Asia and Pacific regions, global experience in development and humanitarian disaster contexts, fundraising knowledge and international reputation, with leading researchers in the field of advanced separation materials and electro-mechanical equipment, whose dedicated research agenda is to develop innovative products and processes to reduce the energy consumption and capital cost in desalination technologies.

The project has also drawn on social science resources to consider drivers of usage, public perceptions of water sources in order to improve public messaging, community partnerships and individual training and support for the community testing phase of the project.

This partnership extends the collaboration between Oxfam and Monash to a new and pressing development field and demonstrates the diversity of collaborative opportunities that have been realised through the Partnership.

“By joining the best of Monash’s meticulous academia with Oxfam’s hands-on approach, positive outcomes for some of the world’s most vulnerable people can be created.”

— Eleanor Jackson, Program Lead, Oxfam Monash Partnership

IMPACT

To date, there has been little comparative research and evidence to guide practitioners, communities and policy makers on the appropriate selection of desalination technologies for specific contexts and technologies, particularly in humanitarian or development settings requiring minimal energy consumption and/or simplified solutions.

The project has produced results identifying existing and emerging desalination technologies available and prioritising their appropriateness, effectiveness and scalability in target countries.

It has addressed critical gaps in global understanding and practice, offering a global sector-wide impact in a critical and emerging area of water risk, and as a result was nominated in the IChemE Global Awards 2020 under the Water Award Category.

Building on these exciting outcomes, the Partnership team actively sought opportunities to scale up and multiply impact, including pursuing additional funding sources for the Partnership’s work, and collaborative opportunities with community partners to further co-design and field test community pilot projects.

There remains an ambition for a broader program of work, which would encompass both Australian and international research sites and pilot program delivery.

In late 2020, three years of philanthropic funding was awarded for Oxfam Australia staff to undertake community engagement activities and particularly to support First Nations capacity building from the project outset.

The pilot phase findings have supported engagement with key stakeholders — including government, businesses and entrepreneurs, development practitioners and academic researchers — to develop an investment case and scale-up strategy, which have and will continue to inform the advocacy efforts of Oxfam Australia and Monash to jointly influence policy and practice, to promote and support innovation for addressing water scarcity.

“It could save lives and improve the health and livelihood of people in many remote and off-grid communities across the world.”

— Eleanor Jackson, Program Lead, Oxfam Monash Partnership
5

MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT

State of Evidence: 56
Key Issues in Migration and Displacement

The Social Impact of 60
Family Separation on
Refugee Settlement and
Inclusion in Australia
The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has recognised for the first time the contribution of migration to sustainable development. Migration is a cross-cutting issue, relevant to all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); in fact, 11 of the 17 goals contain targets and indicators that are explicitly relevant to migration and displacement. The Agenda’s core principle to ‘leave no-one behind’, expressly includes refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

The number of people forcibly displaced is now at its highest since records began. According to the United Nations, a person is forced to leave home every two seconds — a crisis worsened by public policies that put families in harm’s way.

As global population dynamics change, the relationship between migration, displacement, conflict and urbanisation is becoming increasingly complex and important. Whilst movement of people is normal, there are particular challenges associated with irregular and forced migration, especially in the Asia-Pacific region where displacement is an increasingly pressing issue.

To respond to these challenges, the Oxfam Monash Partnership added a thematic area around migration and displacement following our mid-term review. Under this thematic area, the Partnership supported research aiming to improve understanding of the drivers and consequences of multiple migrations, including regular, irregular and forced displacement. Research also focused on examining the social impact of family separation on refugee resettlement and social inclusion. The research findings have been used to inform Oxfam Australia’s policy-influencing efforts, practice and beyond.
State of Evidence — Key Issues in Migration and Displacement

PROJECT TEAM

- Professor Sharon Pickering (Dean of Arts, Monash University)
- Rebecca Powell (Managing Director, The Border Crossing Observatory and Research and Centre Manager, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre)
- Dr Nicole Bieske (Humanitarian Advocacy Lead, Oxfam Australia)

With contributions from Professor Jacqui True (Director, Centre for Gender, Peace and Security, Monash University), Kelly Dent (Food, Climate and Humanitarian Advocacy Manager, Oxfam Australia), Min Wah Voon (Portfolio Manager, Oxfam Australia) and Dr Chrisanta Muli (Head of Research & Knowledge Translation, Oxfam Australia).

Commencing in 2017, this collaborative secondary research project between Oxfam Australia and the Border Crossing Observatory at Monash University was awarded a seed funding grant from the Oxfam Monash Partnership as the first step in a multi-stage collaborative program. The program was aimed at examining the existing evidence base for three issues of strategic priority to Oxfam Australia: high-harm and high-volume migration pathways; gender and migration; and migration as a positive driver of development.

Three policy briefs aligned with these focus areas were launched on 6th March 2018 ahead of International Women’s Day, highlighting the significant and growing impact of irregular migration on women and children. Research Lead Professor Sharon Pickering, Dean of Arts at Monash University, delivered the keynote address at the launch, followed by a rich panel discussion involving Denise Cauchi, Executive Director of Diaspora Action Australia, and Nicole Bieske, Project Lead, Humanitarian Advocacy, Oxfam Australia.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

Irregular migration and displacement is a significant global phenomenon, with root causes in conflict, violence, persecution, poverty and food insecurity. The number of people forcibly displaced has risen significantly in recent years, and is now at its highest since records began. There is increasing concern that forced displacement is affecting safety and security of the most vulnerable population groups: women and young children.

Whilst movement of people is normal, in the Asia-Pacific especially there are particular challenges and complexities to irregular and forced migration. Yet there is still more work needed to map the magnitude of the problem, identify the main drivers and consequences, as well as gaps in policy and evidence.

Towards this end, a series of briefing notes on migration and displacement issues were commissioned to identify and scope sources of data and information as a means to provide an evidence base around three key migration topics for Oxfam Australia:

- Women and Irregular Migration;
- High Harm, High Volume Migration; and
- Migration: A Positive Driver for Development?13

The papers brought together key theoretical approaches underpinning available data and analysis of existing research and served as a basis to identify issues for further inquiry and gaps in existing knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

This project involved a desk-based review of the existing evidence, with a regional focus on Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The approach included the use of a systematic research sampling to ensure a robust and varied sample; accessing relevant documents and materials in close consultation with Oxfam and via relevant databases and open access platforms; and a robust program of research analysis including data synthesisation and mapping to allow clear articulation of key debates and insights.
P ARTNERSHIP

As the Oxfam Monash Partnership entered its second phase of research collaboration, there remained the desire to collaborate in creating systematic responses to key systems, policies and processes that enable sustainable development.

This work presented an ideal opportunity to jointly demonstrate thought leadership by positioning Oxfam together with Monash’s established understanding of the evidence base.

Key project team members including Oxfam’s Country Directors, Oxfam research and policy staff across the confederation and Monash University academics worked closely together to undertake this important desk-based research program, supported by various Monash academics from across a range of fields who contributed as-needs support for the project.

Crucial assistance was provided by the Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre (GPS); Castan Centre for Human Rights Law; and the Border Crossing Observatory based at Monash University.

Importantly, this project’s timeline allowed for the exploration of new models for collaboration between Oxfam Australia and Monash University, aiming to build on existing empirical knowledge, enable multi-directional movement of knowledge and allow more room for academic leadership.

Models explored included:

- New primary research at the country level, as had been previously undertaken by Oxfam Monash joint projects;
- Secondary research, analysis, literature reviews that consolidated the evidence base;
- Synthesis and translation to policy and practice;
- Working papers profiling existing expertise and joint strategic interests, blogs, short briefs and framing papers; and
- Showcasing existing work and profiling respective organisational strengths in aligned areas.

CREDIT: Dylan Quinnell/Oxfam AUS

Unciprang-Teknaf camp: Rohingya refugees carry rations hand in hand. Nearly 700,000 Rohingya refugees have crossed over to Bangladesh from Myanmar. Now, there are a million people crowded together in camps with little or no food, shelter and clean drinking water, the risk of waterborne diseases is alarmingly high. Women, girls and children are also particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.
The research also provided the basis for continuing collaborative work between Oxfam Australia and the academic sector, focusing on the social impact of family separation on refugee settlement and inclusion.

“...The research and particularly the focus on women is something that I think is particularly important in a programmatic response for us to really think about the implications of the programs that we are doing but also some of the broader advocacy and policy that we could do.”

— Dr Nicole Bieske, Humanitarian Advocacy Lead, Oxfam Australia

Southeast Asia and the Pacific, when it comes to migration, has been the biggest global black spot. If you think about where the biggest international organisations have put their investments, their research, and their efforts, in relation to irregular migration, it has not been Southeast Asia and the Pacific.”

— Professor Sharon Pickering, Dean of Arts, Monash University

The impact of the research is evident in several areas:

**Policy briefs**
- The policy papers showed that the number of people forcibly displaced has significantly risen over recent years, particularly for the Asia-Pacific region where it remains a pressing issue. They identified the main drivers, and showed that migration – which is often irregular – further exacerbates women’s vulnerability.

- The research findings highlighted large information and data gaps, especially with regards to Southeast Asia and the Pacific, which have long been a global black spot in terms of migration. This research provided a much-needed foundation for more targeted investment, programming and policy interventions to help ensure protections and vulnerabilities of migrants are recognised and responded to through a human-centred approach. It also helped fill critical gaps in the state of evidence around migration and displacement globally.

- The findings and recommendations emerging from these policy briefs contributed to the Oxfam International global campaign on migration, being showcased at a number of events and public activities and ultimately supporting ongoing knowledge transfer activities. As the global campaign broadened to focus more broadly on displacement and irregular migration, this project correspondingly evolved to keep in step with the global campaign direction, guiding Oxfam Australia’s contribution to the global campaign by scoping and expanding the available evidence base.

- The project’s contribution helped ensure that Oxfam was better informed in decisions about strategic focus areas; guiding policy, campaigning and advocacy work in the area of migration and displacement, specifically the migration campaign focusing on family reunion.

- It enabled Oxfam Australia to support and work with country teams in the Asia-Pacific as they determined their interest in and appetite for work on displacement, helping improve development outcomes for communities.

- As this work focused on secondary research, direct benefits for communities are diffuse. However, this was an important policy setting collaboration to ensure that subsequent campaigns and community-led initiatives could be informed by best known evidence, and enabled by a policy context in line with that evidence base.
The Social Impact of Family Separation on Refugee Settlement and Inclusion in Australia

PROJECT TEAM

- Associate Professor Rebecca Wickes (Director, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre and Associate Professor and Head of Criminology at the School of Social Sciences, Monash University)
- Rebecca Powell (Managing Director, The Border Crossing Observatory and Research and Centre Manager, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre)
- John van Kooy (Research Associate, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre)
- Claire Moran (Research Associate, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre)
- Lily Gardener (Humanitarian Advocacy Coordinator and Advocacy Lead, Oxfam Australia)

An Oxfam Monash Partnership-supported project was initiated in 2018 to understand the impact of family separation on refugee settlement and inclusion outcomes. This collaborative research program was informed by the earlier analysis of the evidence gaps that exist in the Asia-Pacific region, as outlined in the 2018 Migration Policy Briefs.

Seed funding was received from Monash Arts, with matched funds from the Oxfam Monash Partnership, to conduct a comprehensive literature review and analyse secondary data from the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) survey. This research provided foundational evidence to inform Oxfam Australia’s policy on family reunion in Australia, with a specific focus on the impact of family separation and resettlement on social inclusion outcomes for refugees.

Oxfam Australia’s Families Together campaign was launched in Melbourne in August 2019 along with Oxfam’s central report for the campaign, Stronger Together.

The campaign was based on data and insights generated through quantitative and qualitative research by the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre (MMIC) and Deloitte Access Economics.

The research report produced by MMIC, The social impacts of family separation on refugee settlement and inclusion in Australia presented compelling evidence of the negative impacts family separation has on social cohesion and individual wellbeing, whilst Deloitte’s report Economic and social impact of increasing Australia’s humanitarian intake highlighted the potential benefits to the Australian economy of streamlining the family reunion process.

The well-attended event saw Oxfam Australia Chief Executive, Lyn Morgain, launch the campaign, with a powerful discussion bringing together perspectives on the migration experience from representatives from refugee groups. Also in attendance were Oxfam Australia Head of Advocacy and Campaigns, Rachel Ball; Director for the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre, Associate Professor Rebecca Wickes; and Deloitte Australia Senior Economist, Monique Champion.

MMIC has drawn a picture of the social effects of family separation and made a compelling case that family reunion leads to a lower probability of mental illness and PTSD, and a higher likelihood of engagement in study or job training.”

— Lyn Morgain, Chief Executive, Oxfam Australia

14 Please refer to Appendix 3 for document links.
OBJECTIVE

The available data on refugees in general and specifically on the social impact of family reunification is limited, relying mostly on qualitative information, so assessing the refugee situation is difficult. Most existing studies do not use a coherent conceptual framework for effectively assessing the impact on resettlement, social inclusion, cohesion, or integration outcomes and indicators.

The specific focus of this study was to determine the impact of family separation on resettlement and social inclusion outcomes for refugees and their host communities in Australia. In doing so, the research aimed to strengthen the evidence base on resettlement in support of Oxfam Australia’s campaign to increase humanitarian family reunion intake by demonstrating both the positive social impact of this measure on the well-being of refugees and asylum seekers and the positive contribution to Australian society.

To this end, a key purpose of the research was to document diverse human migration and resettlement experiences, with a particular focus of migrants from Syria, the Horn of Africa, and Asia (especially Afghanistan). It was driven by the need to address the drastic geopolitical imbalance in responsibility-sharing for displaced populations, resulting in large numbers of displaced people living in prolonged destitution in poor countries without access to basic rights.

METHODOLOGY

This project was developed using a staged approach, bringing together a range of technical expertise and resourcing from across the contributing institutions.

Three primary data analysis methods were used in addressing the research questions, which covered topics such as the main drivers of migration, migration pathways, and the effects and consequences of migration and family separation on individuals and their families.

Stage 1

Building upon a systematic search already underway by an Oxfam volunteer, a comprehensive desk-based literature review was undertaken, examining available scholarly and grey literature for evidence on the impact of family separation on resettlement and social inclusion in Australia for both refugees and host communities.

A secondary quantitative data analysis of data from the BNLA longitudinal study was also undertaken. The BNLA is the largest and the most comprehensive survey of humanitarian migrants in Australia; it was commissioned by the Australian Government to trace the settlement journeys and measure settlement indicators of participants for at least five years.

The research team then completed identification and analysis of the information gaps to be addressed by the study, as well as lessons on how the generated information could be used to inform policy and practice.

Stage 2

This Partnership-funded stage involved piloting research instruments and conducting preliminary data collection for selected diaspora communities and stakeholder groups, as well as consultation with key stakeholders including government, civil society, and key experts.

In-depth documentation and interviews were undertaken by Research Assistants from the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre with relevant stakeholders including selected refugee groups and communities, Oxfam Australia staff, and partners such as the Refugee Council, Diaspora Learning Network of Diaspora Action Australia and UNHCR. This work generated insights on the migration policy issues related to family reunion in Australia as well as informing identification of diaspora organisations to undertake purposive sampling.

From this interview data, two comprehensive written case studies of refugee experiences of family separation in Australia were developed.
PARTNERSHIP

Oxfam Australia, Monash University and key partners worked together to design and implement this collaborative research project to fill a knowledge gap and inform migration — particularly refugee settlement and inclusion — policy and practice in Australia.

The Monash team produced a strong research report from a desk-based literature review, including secondary analysis of the existing BNLA data; whilst the Oxfam Australia and Partnership teams were instrumental in determining the scope of secondary data analysis activities, creating a summary report of the main findings and policy recommendations, review and inputs to draft research briefs, and engaging Monash student interns/volunteers to conduct preliminary data collection in Melbourne.

This research benefited the Partnership by contributing to its goal on world-class research that makes a difference in people’s lives. The project strengthened understanding of the social impact of family separation on refugee settlement and inclusion, with the findings being an integral part of Oxfam’s influencing work on migration and inclusion.

Family separation is very harmful to humanitarian migrants’ access to education, employment and the economic market. This leads to stress and missed opportunities for economic development and brain gain for Australia.”

— Associate Professor Rebecca Wickes, Director, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre

▲ CREDIT: Kim Landy/OxfamAUS

Melbourne, Australia: Lelisse, who was reunited with her family in Australia, after seeking refuge from Ethiopia, looks at old photographs in their family home in Melbourne.
PARTNERSHIP

This in-depth social impact analysis of family separation on settlement and inclusion deeply enriched the existing evidence base for contemporary migration policy and practice.

Family separation research had not, to date, focused on the benefits of family reunion — including a lower probability of mental illness or PTSD — only on the devastating effects of separation. This research collaboration brought a unique approach to examination of the relationship between family reunion and successful settlement for refugees.

“We often look at the short-term costs of family reunion, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); missed opportunities for educational development and building a new life. We need to focus on the long-term gains of reuniting families.”

— Associate Professor Rebecca Wickes, Director, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre

The findings and recommendations emerging from this Partnership-supported research were pivotal to Oxfam Australia’s national campaign, Families Together, focusing on the importance of family reunification for refugees and the country in terms of settlement, integration and inclusion; and advocating to make it easier for refugees and humanitarian migrants to reunite with their families.

The findings were widely disseminated to enhance awareness and influence policy, using multiple communication channels, including the 2019 launch of the campaign, professional blogs, social media and online platforms, and peer reviewed journals; the expanded evidence base has already and will continue to feed into any global Oxfam and other partners’ future public policy, campaigning and advocacy activities and materials.

The research generated much-needed public discussion on family separation issues, and has been widely covered in the media, including SBS, ABC, The Guardian, Devpolicy, Independent Australia and Pro Bono News.
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Monash University hosts over 80,000 enrolled students at its campuses around the world — an immense student body, representing an immense potential to inspire and engage these students as active citizens, and to mobilise their skills, talents, knowledge and enthusiasm in pursuit of global development objectives.

In pursuit of the long-term goal to create a generation of researchers and practitioners who engage in, critically assess and reflect on best practice in development, the Partnership offered a number of programs that built meaningful connections between Monash students, Oxfam Australia and the wider international development sector, to inspire a generation of aware and informed development and other social justice practitioners and researchers, by facilitating professional skills through internships, teaching and engagement activities.

The Partnership connected students from diverse academic backgrounds with the development sector; built a commitment to development action; encouraged them to make real contributions to the work of Oxfam and its partners around the world; and provided them with the skills, knowledge and opportunities necessary to effect positive social change.

These activities provided the best possible preparation for students to take on roles as future leaders in the field of social justice with feedback consistently demonstrating the impact of student engagement programs on personal and professional development, as well as on students’ commitment to pursuing development action in their own careers.
PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

The South Africa Summer Student Placement program was one of the longest running Oxfam Monash Partnership programs, providing annual international placement opportunities for students between 2008 and 2015. Over its course, the program provided 56 students with first-hand, immersive learning experiences with Oxfam and its local partners in South Africa.

The close nature of the relationship between Oxfam and Monash enabled and lent a professional nature to the placement experience that was unparalleled by other international placements then available to students. The program provided unique skill development opportunities, deepened student understanding of community development, and enabled students to make a direct and valuable contribution to the work of their partner organisations; ultimately encouraging and inspiring many participants to pursue work in international development.

The program involved collaboration with a number of Oxfam South Africa partner organisations, including Refugee Social Services, Lawyers for Human Rights, Project Empower, Save the Children, Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust, Woza Moya, the Children in Distress Network, and the Gay and Lesbian Network.

Students reported that they found the placements to be challenging, rewarding and extremely worthwhile experiences, with students making a tangible impact at these partner organisations while building skills and learning about community development initiatives.

Through my experiences in Durban, I have learnt about the gulf between development in theory and in practice, as well as how to apply what I have learnt in university in a real-world context.”

— Le Van Phuc, 2015 participant

INTERNSHIPS AND VOLUNTEERING

The Partnership-supported internship program provided meaningful and valuable development industry experience for Monash students for academic credit, while also ensuring that their work contributed to real-world project outcomes.

Students from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines took part in the program over the life of the Partnership, including students studying international development, public health, arts, science, business, journalism and law.

Opportunities available to students were aligned with the Partnership’s thematic research priorities of migration, gender, climate change, and resilience and accountability. Project activities ranged across communications, events and research assistance within the Partnership-funded action research projects. These opportunities enabled students to complement and enhance their academic studies with practical research experience.

During the Partnership, 37 interns and volunteers contributed their fresh ideas, energy and skills to multidisciplinary projects with Oxfam Monash Partnership teams.

In 2018 and 2019 alone, interns worked on a broad range of projects, including:

- **Micro-desalination** — policy analysis in a range of contexts; technological performance; alignment with Oxfam’s performance criteria; gender, social and economic considerations; and transition from pilot to manufacture
- **Blockchain technology** for cash-transfer programs in humanitarian contexts — existing evidence; and security concerns
- **Feminist transformative leadership** for gender equality with a focus in South Asia, in particular Pakistan
- **Gender mainstreaming** in humanitarian contexts, including relating to Oxfam policies
- **Social impact of family separation**, refugee settlement and inclusion
- **Microfinance and Gender Empowerment**: case study of Savings for Change in Cambodia and Mali; and policy review.

Responses from students engaged through the program were overwhelmingly positive, providing opportunities to deepen their knowledge in specific development areas and build important networks within academic and development sectors.
Undertaking a research internship with the Oxfam-Monash Partnership (OMP) stood out as an appropriate opportunity to gain invaluable insight on the productivity of international actors in promoting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and to learn about the sustainable management of water to eliminate disease and global poverty - an issue I personally feel extremely passionate about.”

— Yvanah Hernandez, Intern, Social and Economic Analysis of Scaling Small-scale Desalination for Rural Settings Off-grid

While I found my internship challenging at times, I think it was an incredibly valuable addition to my degree, helping me to grow personally as well as develop professionally, and gain some insight into what it actually means to work in this area, something I don’t believe I could have attained from university alone.”

— Edith Fahey, Intern, Potential Uses of Blockchain Technology in Humanitarian Development

Doing the internship at the Oxfam Monash Partnership helped me to develop skills that otherwise, I could not be able to develop. Gaining experience in a partnership that involves such prestigious institutions not only elevates my level of expertise regarding social change but also expanded my professional network, both crucial for the next career step.”

— Marisela de Los Rios Lamos, Intern, Women’s Leadership for Transformative Change in Pakistan

I chose the internship because I wanted to have a taste of the experience in the field of international relations, and also, I am passionate about the use of technology to solve global problems, improving the conditions of the ones in need.”

— Jeisson Lasso Vargas, Intern, Use of Blockchain to Scale Cash Transfer Programs in Developing Contexts
The Partnership’s close working relationship with Monash University’s Faculty of Medicine resulted in the development of a new Depth Unit in 2010: Improving Health Futures in a Global World — an elective, multidisciplinary unit, engaging expert Oxfam Australia staff as guest lecturers, and covering a range of global health and development issues.

Depth Units are research-based units that introduce students to major research challenges, industry experts and professional skills, which can be applied to transform local and international communities. The units aim to teach students how to ‘act now for a better tomorrow’.

This unit enabled students from all disciplines to have the opportunity to learn about critical issues affecting the health and wellbeing of people around the world, develop critical thinking skills and strengthen their leadership abilities. With a strong research component, the unit encouraged students to delve into the transnational issues facing healthcare and its impact for development, with case studies drawn from Oxfam’s development experience forming the core learning and teaching materials.
Later in its life, the Oxfam Monash Partnership shifted focus to facilitate practice insights into contemporary international development and professional role models and programs, through guest lectures and workshops in postgraduate units offered across a number of Monash University faculties. The series helped inspire a generation of aware and informed development activists, ready to drive positive global change into the future.

With their extensive on-ground experience, speakers brought an invaluable practical perspective to the Lecture Series, providing a unique opportunity for students to move beyond theory in their studies and develop a real understanding of how development issues are tackled in practice. Many of these guest lectures expanded into informal mentorships for Monash students, and ongoing collegial engagement between Monash academics and Oxfam program experts.

In 2019 alone, the Oxfam Monash Partnership facilitated industry experts to provide real-life experience to almost 400 students across the following Monash course offerings:

- Colab M: Mentoring for development practice and professional development, Faculty of Arts
- Deconstructing development, Faculty of Arts
- Gender and development, Faculty of Arts
- Green Steps, Monash Sustainable Development Institute
- Guiding principles for professionals engaged in disasters and humanitarian crises, Faculty of Arts
- Human rights in global politics, Philosophy, Faculty of Arts
- Issues in international communications, Communication and Media Studies
- Leading change for sustainable development, Faculty of Science
- Monitoring and evaluation, Faculty of Arts
- Project planning and management in international development, Faculty of Arts.

In 2017, the Partnership was particularly delighted to support a Digital Interactives collaborative subject between Oxfam and Monash Art Design & Architecture (MADA), involving journalism and interactive design students. Approximately 50 students were involved in the project to produce an applied industry-focused example of work for a mainstream media outlet.

For this subject, MADA course advisors partnered with Oxfam to create an online package using content from the Oxfam Words and Pictures database, the public domain and “talking heads” interviews with Monash experts and Oxfam staff. Students worked in small groups to generate high quality digital/interactive stories around this suite of content aimed at a general public (including high school) audience.

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Before Pam Anders (former Director of Public Engagement, Oxfam Australia) came and spoke with our class, I would never have considered a career in international development or aid — now I’m completely reconsidering what I can do with my degree to make an impact!”

— Student participant in Issues in International Communications course

Adam Stanic (Acting Associate Director, People and Culture, Oxfam Australia) was an incredible guest speaker! So interactive and student-focused!”

— Student participant in Colab M: Mentoring for development practice and professional development course
Since 2016, the Oxfam Monash Partnership has presented a $500 Award for Research Impact to the highest achieving student in a thesis or research methods unit within the Master of International Development Practice (MIDP) at Monash University.

The award has been presented to the following students:


- **2017**: Felicitas Bran ‘Photovoice: whose voice? A Critical Evaluation of Photovoice as a Methodology for Research in International Development Studies’

- **2018**: Donhathai Sutassanamarlee ‘English Language Education and Development in Thailand: A Secondary Analysis from a Capability Approach Perspective’

- **2019**: Tied between Harry Quealy ‘From “adapting” to climate change to democratic socio-ecological futures: Climate change adaptation and rural livelihoods in Sri Lanka’s dry zone region’ and Daniella Guzman ‘Intergenerational analysis of child labour in the Mexican agricultural sector: Social, economic and cultural aspects influencing its persistence’

The Prize has been invaluable in motivating, supporting and recognising the outstanding work of MIDP students. In recognition of the excellent partner relationship between Monash and Oxfam Australia, the Prize will continue to be offered for the next five years (2020–2024).
The Oxfam at Monash Student Committee aims to create awareness, dialogue and action about global poverty and injustice in the Monash university campus community. As a student-led organisation, Oxfam at Monash has been affiliated with and supported by Oxfam Australia, Monash University and the Monash Student Association since its inception in early 2011. The Oxfam at Monash Student Committee will continue to operate following the completion of the formal Oxfam Monash Partnership.

Throughout its life, the Partnership has provided Oxfam at Monash with contacts, materials and resources, working closely with the Committee to build their capacity and support their awareness-raising activities.

Highlights of the group’s activities and events over the years include:

- Circulating petitions and information about the Close the Gap campaign for Indigenous health;
- Promoting Oxfam Australia’s GROW campaign for food security;
- Support for Oxfam Australia’s What She Makes campaign through events including a documentary screening of The True Cost and a clothes swap event;
- Hosting Fairtrade events;
- Networking events with development industry professionals; and
- Speaker sessions across a variety of development and humanitarian issues.

Oxfam at Monash has also linked students to community development internships, lectures and events through its website and Facebook page.

We appreciated the support of the Partnership in organising events that aimed to provide a forum on the issues faced by those living in poverty. I hope that the ongoing presence of Oxfam at Monash will allow for the continued engagement with students on the positive changes they can create to advance social justice.”

— Ashling Morone, 2019 Oxfam at Monash President

CREDIT: Courtney May
L-R: Jessie Wen and Anna Gebbert from the Oxfam at Monash Student Committee at Monash University Clubs Day in 2019.
In 2013 and 2014, Oxfam Monash Partnership supported a dynamic two-week program that mobilised students from diverse academic backgrounds to drive real-world change with their own new and creative ideas.

Working in interdisciplinary teams, students worked with expert mentors to develop innovative solutions to social and development challenges posed by Oxfam Australia and pitch these solutions for the chance to see them implemented in practice.

The most exciting and innovative idea each year was then awarded funding and mentoring to help make it a reality.

The multidisciplinary nature of the program was frequently cited by participants as one of its most valuable aspects, presenting them with a rich learning experience not typically afforded by their normal academic studies.

A standout example of the program’s success was the 2013 winning project idea, ‘Sustain Me’ — a mobile app that encouraged and supported individuals to live more sustainably in their everyday lives.

The winning team, Eleanor Meyer and Stephen Halpin, worked for two years to realise their project idea, launching the Sustain Me app in July 2015 and founding the Sustain Me Group — a social enterprise that counted Melbourne’s metropolitan councils as major clients.

What the Innovators experience really did for me was give me an opportunity to think about certain problems that I cared about, and to ponder whether I could somehow address these. The Innovators really propelled me into thinking about what I could achieve with my own capacity ... it made me realise what I could do. From there, there was no ignoring it. I had to do it.”

— Eleanor Meyer, 2013 winning team member
Yemen: Naaser Mohamed Fakh and his granddaughter Fatima* fill jerry cans with water. He operates Oxfam’s desalination plant in Khor Omeira region, settlements of Ras al-Ara and Al-Mudaraba, Lahij Governorate. According to the United Nations, more than 24 million Yemenis urgently need humanitarian aid, which is equivalent to about 80% of the country’s population. *Name is a pseudonym to protect the identity.
Appendix 1 — Governance Committee

The Partnership’s achievements have been due in part to the strong governance structure allowing both Oxfam Australia and Monash University to equally contribute to its strategic direction and financial management. With membership comprising Oxfam and Monash staff with the commitment, skills and expertise to direct the Partnership, the Governance Committee has provided a dynamic and focused environment for both organisations to chart a course for the Partnership and deliver against its vision and mission.

We thank the following members for their contribution over this time:

- Dr Simon Adams, Pro Vice Chancellor (International Engagement), Monash University
- Pamela Anders, Director of Public Engagement, Oxfam Australia
- Michelle Armstrong, Chief Operating Officer, Monash Sustainable Development Institute
- Rachel Ball, Head of Advocacy and Campaigns, Oxfam Australia
- Professor Rebekah Brown, Director, Monash Sustainable Development Institute
- Mark Clisby, Director Operations, Oxfam Australia
- Professor Fang Lee Cooke, Professor Human Resource Management and Asia Studies, Monash University
- James Ensor, Director of Public Policy, Oxfam Australia
- Dr Natalie Gray, Research Manager, Oxfam Australia and Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University
- Katie Greenwood, Manager Program Expertise and Associate Director Strategy and Advocacy, Oxfam Australia
- Dr Cecilia Hewlett, Director of the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Monash University
- Alexia Huxley, Director International Programs, Oxfam Australia
- Associate Professor Louise McCall, Director of the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Monash University
- Professor Sue McKemmish, Director, Monash University Centre for Organisational and Social Informatics
- May Miller-Dawkins, Research Manager, Oxfam Australia
- Judy Mitchell, Oxfam Australia Board Member and Chair
- Dr Chrisanta Muli, Development Effectiveness Manager and Head of Research & Knowledge Translation, Oxfam Australia
- Chris Roche, Director of Development Effectiveness, Oxfam Australia
- Colin Collett van Rooyen, Associate Director (Development Effectiveness), Oxfam Australia
- Associate Professor Marie Seagrave, Associate Professor Criminology, Monash University
- Professor Adam Shoemaker, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Monash University
- Anthea Spinks, Director of Programs, Oxfam Australia
- Professor John Thwaites, Professorial Fellow, Monash University and Chair of Monash Sustainable Development Institute and ClimateWorks Australia
- Professor Jacqui True, Professor of Politics & International Relations, Associate Dean Research and Director, Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre, Monash University

Please note that Governance Committee member titles are included as they were at time of membership, and may no longer be current.
Appendix 2 — Program Staff

The appointment of a dedicated program manager with reporting lines to both organisations was crucial in maintaining focus and momentum of the Partnership. The program manager acted as the key point of liaison between Monash and Oxfam and was responsible for driving the research agenda and for facilitating the genesis, development and monitoring of research projects funded under the Partnership.

PROGRAM MANAGERS

- Lisa Elford
- Thu-Trang Tran
- Alexandra Kennedy
- Eleanor Jackson
- Saba Mebrahtu Habte

PROGRAM OFFICERS

- Jaclyn Donahue
- Naomi Godden
- Anna Donaldson
- Tshering Denka
- Courtney May
- Carla Alzamora Goncalves

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr Larry Stillman, Senior Research Fellow for the Partnership and the Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University, from the Partnership’s establishment until November 2014. Dr Stillman played a key role developing the relationship between Oxfam Australia and Monash University, and we recognise the important work he undertook to support the Partnership’s success, particularly in its formative years.
Appendix 3 — Reports

ACCOUNTABILITY
- Community Engagement in the Introduction and Implementation of National Health Insurance in South Africa
- Facilitating Civic Engagement Through Consultation: Report
- Facilitating Civic Engagement Through Consultation: Poster
- National Health Insurance in South Africa: Get Informed and Participate
- Accountability Series I: Strengthening Community Driven Accountability
- Accountability Series II: Strengthening the Accountability of NGOs
- Accountability Series III: Approaches to Seeking Accountability
- Accountability Series IV: Issues, Consultation and People’s Participation with Respect to the Lower Sesan 2 Dam
- Mapping Accountability Process in Cambodia
- Sharing the Advocacy Experience of Boenung Kak Community (English)
- Sharing the Advocacy Experience of the Boeung Kak Community (Khmer)
- Empowering Community Voices Project: Research Studies from South Africa and Bangladesh

CLIMATE CHANGE
- Are Climate Challenges Reinforcing Child and Forced Marriage and Dowry as Adaptation Strategies in the Context of Bangladesh

MIGRATION
- Migration Displacement and Briefing Note Series I: State of Evidence, Women and Irregular Migration
- Migration Displacement and Briefing Note Series II: State of Evidence, High Harm, High Volume Migration
- Migration Displacement and Briefing Note Series III: State of Evidence, Migration: A Positive Driver for Development
- Stronger Together: The impact of family separation on refugees and humanitarian migrants in Australia, Oxfam Australia
- The social impact of family separation on refugee settlement and inclusion in Australia, Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre

GENDER EQUALITY
- Rural Sri Lankan Women in Agriculture: Participation and recognition in sustainable agriculture livelihoods across their life course
- Executive Summary in English
- Executive Summary in Tamil
- Executive Summary in Sinhalese
- Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands: a Study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program
- Gender Analysis of Oxfam Savings and Loans Groups in Timor-Leste: Research Report
- Understanding international sourcing practices of iconic brands in Australia: the case of ready-made garments in Bangladesh

PARTNERSHIPS FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT
- ACFID University Network Case Study: The Oxfam Monash Partnership
- ACFID Learning and Development Note: Research Partnerships in Practice