



MONASH  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE



OXFAM-MONASH  
PARTNERSHIP

ANNUAL REPORT  
**2017**

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**Cover Image** *Soi Bau with grandchild Natalina Soares. Uma Kaduak, Manatuto District, Timor-Leste.*  
**Photo** *Timothy Herbert/OxfamAUS.*

# INTRODUCTION

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The Oxfam-Monash Partnership was established with the generous support of the Empowerment Charitable Trust.

The purpose of this Partnership is to improve development practice and its outcomes for communities. More specifically, we aim to bring together the differing yet complementary resources of the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) and academic sectors, and combine them to achieve greater development impact than would otherwise be possible.

The Partnership undertook a period of collaborative and participatory reflection to refresh our joint vision and purpose at the conclusion of the 2015 Memorandum of Agreement. Our new Memorandum takes into consideration the outcomes of this process. It commits us to an ambitious collaborative research agenda, student engagement and practitioner development activities. These activities will generate positive change for development communities around the world.

### **This 2017 annual progress update:**

1. Highlights the activities and outcomes of the Partnership's activities in 2017;
2. Confirms the commitment of both parties to the Partnership; and
3. Represents the first report that aligns with Monash University's financial year (January – December).

“The Oxfam-Monash Partnership is part of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI). MSDI is harnessing the strength of Monash — Australia's largest university — to help address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.”

## REPORT ON PROJECT

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During the report period, January to December 2017, the Partnership continued to work to the guiding principles that inform its strategic agenda.

These principles are:

**Equality** — mutual respect between members of the Partnership, irrespective of 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 seeks 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 our comparative advantages and complementing each other's contributions and those of our stakeholders and networks.

**Sustainability** — undertaking our work in a manner that builds the sustainability of our respective and joint projects including sustainable change for those we seek to assist.

**Multipliers** — actively seeking opportunities to scale up and multiply the impact of our work including pursuing additional funding sources for the Partnership's work.

The strategic agenda for 2017 reflected our collective commitments, as stipulated in the 2016–2019 Statement of Strategic Intent. These include:

- world-class research that makes a difference in people's lives;
- connecting current and future practitioners with the evidence base to effect change; and
- evidence-based advocacy for the systems, policies and practices to benefit communities.

*Rural Timor-Leste. Photo Dr Kathryn Anne Cornwell*

## RESEARCH

The Oxfam-Monash Partnership over the past year continued to run quality research that strengthens the evidence base for development impact by using findings to influence policy and practice in international development.

The Partnership continued to operate along the newly formulated thematic research priorities, developed the previous reporting period. These reflect the ongoing and emerging program needs of the communities and partners with which Oxfam works.

### RESEARCH MATCHING AROUND NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES, IN THE AREAS OF MIGRATION, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Our research matching process is built on lessons learned from the prior phase of the Partnership on how to foster successful research relationships. We take a staged approach, which allows for flexible engagement between Oxfam in-country teams, Oxfam Australia staff and Monash University academics.

It is facilitated through a participatory process, involving thematic research champions for each priority area nominated by Oxfam Australia. These champions work with in-country teams to identify research needs and develop preliminary research concepts.

These concepts are then used to undertake a whole-of-university search using research databases and faculty resources to identify Monash capacities in nominated areas. From this search process, multi-faculty matching workshops are 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.

### Thematic priorities 2016–2019:

- **Gender equality** — promoting gender equality with the aim of improving women’s lives, family wellbeing and community development outcomes;
- **Climate change and resilience** — supporting communities to adapt to climate change and to build the capacity to anticipate, mitigate and respond to these changes;
- **Migration** — understanding the migration-development nexus including regular, irregular and multiple migrations and their impact on communities; and
- **Development practice** — as the development community engages with the 2030 Agenda, shaping development goals and milestones to support communities.

## MIGRATION STATE OF EVIDENCE REVIEW

Professor Sharon Pickering (Monash Dean of Arts) and Rebecca Powell (Managing Director of The Border Crossing Observatory at Monash University) finalised three policy briefs on global migration in November 2017:

- **Women and Irregular Migration;**
- **High Harm, High Volume Migration; and**
- **Migration, a Positive Driver of Development.**

The findings show that the number of people forcibly displaced has significantly risen over the past years, particularly for the Asia Pacific region. This gravely affects the safety and security of the most vulnerable population groups — women and young children.



*Fulchuri Haat, Gaibandha District, Bangladesh*  
**Photo** Tom Pietrasik/OxfamAUS

The reports identify the main drivers — conflict and gender-based violence. Migration, which is often irregular, further exacerbates women's vulnerability. The findings also highlight the huge information and data gaps that exist. This data is required for effective and timely response to mitigate the effects of irregular migration on the survival and security of those affected.

## IMPACT

- The findings and recommendations emerging from the three policy briefs will be used to inform policy and advocacy work by Oxfam in the area of migration and displacement.
- It will especially inform Oxfam's migration campaign which is focusing on family reunion.
- It will also provide strategic guidance for Oxfam's continued collaborative work with the academic sector to further strengthen the existing evidence base.



*Keynote address by Dr Helen Szoke, public event for 16 Days of Activism, Melbourne. Photo Paul Philipson*

## SAFE FAMILIES MULTI-COMPONENT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY FOR THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

2017 saw the launch of the first-ever collaborative 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 project was funded by the World Bank-Sexual Violence Research Initiative (WBSVRI)'s Development Marketplace Awards. The project builds upon the Australian Government-supported Safe Families program in the Solomon Islands. It represents the first comprehensive, community-led primary prevention models designed by and implemented for the Solomon Islands by Oxfam and partners, and is showing very encouraging results.

The research was launched in Melbourne in November 2017. The aim of the launch was to contribute to the Global Campaign on 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, to which raises awareness about violence against women, and calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

## RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND RECOGNITION IN SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN POST-WAR SRI LANKA

This long-awaited report on women in agriculture for Sri Lanka, was based on exploratory research undertaken across three districts of Sri Lanka — Hambantota, Polonnaruwa and Ampara. It was completed in November 2017 along with a promotional video. This multi-region research identifies barriers and enablers to women's participation in agricultural livelihoods.

Key barriers include:

- Conflict;
- Ill-health and disabilities;
- Gender norms around social reproduction;
- Domestic violence;
- Climate factors such as drought and flood;
- Disruptions from wildlife;
- Unsustainable or unavailable markets;
- High costs of inputs or underpayment;
- Political patronage; and
- Restricted mobility.

Enablers of participation include support for social reproductive tasks such as childcare, land and asset access, training, and participation in collectives. Some factors such as access to financial capital were found to both enable and hinder production.

## IMPACT

- This research has generated a comprehensive evidence base on the impact of gender-blind agricultural policies at the national and regional level.
- As part of its translation process, in-country meetings with the Australian High Commissioner and the UNDP Assistant Country Director, as well as the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls (in Australia) were held to discuss the findings and policy implications.

## GENDER ANALYSIS OF SAVINGS AND LOANS GROUPS IN TIMOR LESTE

This report, based on qualitative research led by Dr. Sara Niner (Monash Arts), was published in 2017. The study found that the Savings and Loan Groups (SLGs) provided economic and social successes for participants. The groups were also identified as a vehicle for building economic and social resilience and protection, including a growing sense of agency or social empowerment for some.

However, 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.

## IMPACT

- Based on the research findings and recommendation, Oxfam in Timor Leste made a decision to adopt the Oxfam flagship programme on Savings for Change (SfC) model, which specifically targets women in order to enhance their social capital, agency and empowerment.



Group meeting, Timor-Leste. **Photo** Dr Kathryn Anne Cornwell

## COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Our research findings served as the basis for two events: a key public seminar on **Microfinance: Problems, Critiques and Solutions** and a two-day practitioner development workshop on **Women's Empowerment & Microfinance in the Asia Pacific**.

A pre-event article on **Women's empowerment and microfinance: key challenges, lessons and a way forward** by Drs. Saba Mebrahtu and Sara Niner, was published on DevPolicy.

The article highlighted the key challenges around microcredit — though it represents the predominant form of microfinance and has been promoted as central to development strategy to alleviate global poverty, it is yet to effectively address the structural conditions that create poverty.

These events allowed discussion and distillation of the lessons learned on the impact of microfinance on poverty reduction and women's empowerment. Both events served as an opportunity to widely disseminate the OMP report, as well as to discuss in depth issues emerging from the study towards reaching a consensus concerning the way forward.

### **The public seminar was successfully held at Monash College with 40 participants.**

It featured two key international speakers: Dr. Philip Mader, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University and Ms. Sophie Romana, Director, Community Finance, Oxfam America. The presentation by Dr. Mader highlighted that the evolution of early microfinance initiatives into a \$100 billion dollar industry is often criticised for its existing structural issues leading microfinance, microcredit and microsavings initiatives to often be dubbed 'microdebt'.

**“The evolution of early microfinance initiatives into a \$100 billion dollar industry is often criticised for its existing structural issues...”**

Ms. Romano shared the Oxfam experience on Savings for Change (SfC), which is being implemented across some twelve countries. SfC is a form of micro-savings, which has been less at the forefront of the public debate but has emerging evidence on its positive social impact.

She discussed progress in delivering results beyond finance to include contributions toward building social capital in communities, and identified future research priority areas of focus on further strengthening the evidence base on the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment and collective action. A 90-second video clip highlighting the public seminar was also produced.

### **The development practitioners' workshop involved national and international experts.**

It brought together academics and practitioners in a policy-relevant debate about the efficacy of microfinance programs to achieve poverty alleviation and women's multi-dimensional empowerment.

The Partnership made a significant contribution to this workshop by facilitating the participation of Ms. Linda Mayoux, a leading world expert on microfinance and women's empowerment.

Ms. Mayoux has undertaken extensive research to question the 'virtuous spiral' effect of microfinance on women's empowerment. This includes increasing wellbeing for women and their families, women's social and political empowerment, and ultimately contributes to gender equality.

The Partnership also facilitated participation of Ms. Sophie Romano, Director of Community Finance, Oxfam America, who has led the introduction of the Oxfam SfC model, and Mr. Cheth Phay, development practitioner, who manages the SfC Program at Oxfam Cambodia. Their participation enriched the meeting discussion and outcome.

The workshop explored different perspectives on the agency of individuals and communities engaged in microfinance activities, and discussed whether participation in these interventions contributed to results in various dimensions of women's empowerment. The breadth of knowledge and experiences of the participants allowed for an in-depth discussion and debate on the intended and unintended effects of microfinance with some consensus but also contention.



*Women's Empowerment & Microfinance in the Asia Pacific (WEMAP) Workshop, Monash University, Melbourne. Photo Paul Philipson*

It represented a great opportunity to engage in a coherent intellectual debate with the leading academics as well as development experts on this significant and current global issue. Seminar participants concluded that while few positive benefits have been found and many negative ones described, microfinance programs persist and flourish as a key global development strategy. Further ethnographic investigation at this intersection of theory and practice was called for, particularly in the Asia-Pacific where programs are multiplying in new 'markets.' The workshop findings are expected to inform development of a joint Monash-Oxfam position paper.

# 02

## PRACTITIONER DEVELOPMENT

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In 2017, the Oxfam-Monash Partnership continued its work to connect development practitioners and policy makers with the evidence base to effect change. The Partnership participated in a range of practitioner and public events that showcased the Oxfam-Monash Partnership's research and enabled practitioners to develop and share their practice.



*Interview, Timor-Leste. Photo Dr Kathryn Anne Cornwell*





Dr Philip Mader and Sophie Romana speak at the Anthropology Public Seminar, Monash University, Melbourne. **Photo** Paul Philipson

## INFLUENCING AND PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITY ON MICROFINANCE

This activity involved two key thematic events:

- Public Seminar on **Microfinance: Problems, Critiques and Solutions**; and
- A two-day experts' workshop on **Women's Economic Empowerment in the Asia Pacific**.

These events provided a good opportunity to shape the evidence-based debate towards informing future policy decisions on microfinance and gender empowerment. They involved key civil society representatives across countries from the Asia-Pacific and key academic representatives from across Australia.

The Partnership contributed speakers, including Ms. Sophie Romano, Director of Community Finance, Oxfam America; and Mr. Cheth Phay, Program Manager, Oxfam Cambodia, in coordination and collaboration with Dr. Sara Niner, Lecturer, Anthropology, Monash University.

## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM — LAUNCH OF THE WBSVRI PROJECT

The **16 Days of Activism — Launch of the World Bank-Sexual Violence Research Initiative project**, involved three panellists — Ms. Anna Trembath, Senior Gender Advisor, Oxfam Australia, Dr. Emma Fulu, Director of the Equality Institute, and Ms. Atenasi Wasuka, former UN Women Ending Violence against Women Team in Solomon Islands. The panel discussed how academics and practitioners can expand evidence on effective, contextually-relevant approaches to preventing violence against women and girls from the Pacific region. It also discussed how to progress research approaches to violence against women in ways that are ethical, safe and rigorous, especially in small, geographically-dispersed communities. The project will commence in early 2018.



Panel discussion with Anna Trembath, Dr Emma Fulu and Atenasi Wasuka, public event for 16 Days of Activism, Melbourne. **Photo** Paul Philipson

## RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT IMPACT NETWORK CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE

The Oxfam-Monash Partnership Lead, along with the course coordinator for the Monash Master of Development Practice, were members of the Research for Development Impact (RDI) network conference steering committee. The committee worked to shape this key national conference agenda; nominating key speakers and invitees and developing program activities in Partnering for Impact on Sustainable Development.

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In 2017 the Oxfam-Monash Partnership continued to provide Monash students — future development practitioners — with opportunities to develop professional skills through internship, teaching and engagement activities.

### Highlights included:

- Placement of three Monash student interns and volunteers with Oxfam programs and teams. These teams focused on issues of global migration; microfinance; and gender-based violence.
- The Oxfam-Monash Partnership Award for Research Impact was awarded to George Kennedy, a Master of International Development Practice student with the highest achieving research thesis in 2017.
- The profile of Monash Intern, Alex Lia, was featured in the Partnership's webpage, highlighting her research work on SDG Mapping project for Oxfam Australia.

The Partnership continued to facilitate practice insights from Oxfam programs to post-graduate students of:

- **Doctrines of Development;**
- **Gender and Development;**
- **Project Management; and**
- **Research Methods.**



*Oxfam-Monash Partnership Intern Alex Lia with Oxfam colleagues John Siddham, Carina Nodora, James Riturban and Christine Salim.*  
**Photo** John Siddham/OxfamAUS

# 04

## GOVERNANCE

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In 2017, the Oxfam-Monash Partnership continued to strengthen its systems and policies to ensure they are fit for purpose and able to deliver against the Partnership's vision and mission.

- The Governance and Operations Committees met regularly and functioned in line with their respective Terms of Reference.
- The Partnership worked to an Annual Operational Plan and Budget informed by the Memorandum of Agreement 2016–2019 and the Statement of Strategic Intent which sets out measures for success, proposed activities, and a framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- The Partnership website and branding was further refined to bring the Oxfam-Monash collateral more in line with Monash University branding and to align information within Monash Sustainable Development Institute.
- Fair trade positioning at Monash and the Oxfam concessions at Monash's Clayton campus continue to promote the sale of Oxfam fair trade items. They are often featured at Monash student activities, showcasing the labour rights issues for workers and farmers in developing countries.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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The Oxfam-Monash Partnership continues by virtue of the support and vision of the Empowerment Charitable Trust. Through that work, the Partnership is able to achieve research outcomes that can deliver measurable benefits to communities; to connect the current and next generation of practitioners who will work to achieve those benefits; and to lobby and advocate for the policy and practice changes that would transform communities.