Lessons learned about conducting project impact reviews
This document captures practical knowledge drawn from the experiences of Oxfam Pilipinas and its partners in the implementation of the “Adaptive Livelihoods and Emergency Readiness and Timely Response of Communities” (ALERT) Project specifically in the design and conduct of an Annual Impact Review (AIR). Within the project period of February 2018 – October 2020, three rounds of AIR were organized as part of the project’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Social Accountability (MELSA) processes.

As Project ALERT closes, drawing lessons and identifying insights and good practices from the experiences of conceptualizing, designing and implementing these annual project review sessions will help inform future learning activities. Specifically, the contents of this knowledge product will be relevant and useful as Project ALERT goes into its Phase 2 in 2020 to 2023, now known as Strengthening Harmonized Action for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Preparedness and Early Recovery (SHARPER).

This document was written by Matt Wamil, the design consultant and facilitator of Project ALERT’s AIR from 2018 to 2020. This contains consolidated information, learnings and insights drawn from the documentation of the AIR sessions, interviews and group discussions with Project ALERT’s implementing organizations and project staff along with Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA team, with additional notes and synthesis points provided by the author.

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About the Cover: Ma. Lorena Dagatan, Area Team Leader of Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), shares her insights and reflections about the accomplishments of Project ALERT in 2018-2020 during the Annual Impact Review. (Photo: Leah Payud/Oxfam)
The Adaptive Livelihoods and Emergency Readiness and Timely Response of Communities (ALERT) project sought to enhance the capacities of communities affected by recurrent natural disasters for disaster preparedness, response and recovery, enabling them to be better equipped to co-lead relief and recovery efforts in collaboration with local authorities. The project was implemented from October 2017 to October 2020 in the communities of Balangiga, Quinapondan, Salcedo and Lawaan in the province of Eastern Samar. The project was developed and implemented by Oxfam Pilipinas in partnership with the Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP), the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Inc (PRRM) and the Regional Climate Change, Research and Development Center of Visayas State University (VSU-RCCRDC) in Region VIII or Eastern Visayas. Building on previous DRR interventions, Project ALERT brought in an additional emphasis on the integration of asset protection into DRR and humanitarian response in order to strengthen community resilience and reduce vulnerability.

Project ALERT was part of the program “Strengthening Community Preparedness, Rapid Response and Recovery in Asia/Pacific Islands”, also known as the Asia Pacific Local Innovation for Transformation (AP-LIFT), a multiyear program implemented in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and the Philippines.
The Annual Impact Review (AIR) is a project learning activity envisioned as a space for Project ALERT implementers—Oxfam, CDP, PRRM and VSU–RCCDC—to critically track and reflect on the project’s progress, agreed strategies and changes that could be observed and experienced over time in relation to the project’s interventions. Moreover, AIR was also conceived as a platform for synergy, cross-learning and joint planning, which implementing organizations could tap while building greater consensus and ownership of the processes and outcomes the project wished to achieve.

As a learning activity, AIR employed participatory processes, methods and tools that allowed participants to jointly acknowledge and celebrate successes and achievements of project implementation, analyze gaps and areas for improvement, and exchange views on issues within and outside the project context and how these could be addressed while identifying ways to support each other.

There were three rounds of AIR organized and conducted by Project ALERT. The table below shows when and where these learning activities were held and the participants in each event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIR</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIR 1</td>
<td>17–21 September 2018</td>
<td>Palo, Leyte</td>
<td>CDP, PRRM, VSU–RCCDC, Oxfam Pilipinas, Oxfam America, representatives from partner municipal Local Government Units (LGUs) (Quinapondan, Lawaan, Salcedo, Balangiga), Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in Region VIII, community groups, community leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIR Philippines</td>
<td>– Taking Off</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIR 2</td>
<td>14–18 October 2019</td>
<td>Borongan City, Eastern Samar and Tacloban City, Leyte</td>
<td>CDP, PRRM, VSU–RCCDC, Oxfam Pilipinas, Oxfam America, representatives from partner municipal LGUs, representatives from the provincial LGU (Eastern Samar), private sector representatives, youth groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIR Philippines</td>
<td>– Soaring High</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIR 3</td>
<td>10–21 September 2020 (remote preparatory work); 22–23 September 2020 (remote synchronous session)</td>
<td>virtual/digital space: Zoom meeting</td>
<td>CDP, PRRM, VSU–RCCDC, Oxfam Pilipinas, Oxfam America, representatives from partner municipal LGUs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIR Philippines</td>
<td>– Touching Down</td>
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All these learning sessions adhered to the project tracking and learning objectives of Project ALERT. Effort was made to ensure that the processes, methods and tools used to facilitate the conversations and draw lessons from practice were participatory and inclusive. Each of these learning events also held distinct features which provided nuance and texture to Project ALERT’s practices and experiences in doing AIR. Such features are highlighted in the succeeding discussions of this section.

**AIR 1: “TAKING OFF”**

The first AIR of Project ALERT was held on 17-21 September 2018 in Palo, Leyte. It was participated in by the project management and implementation staff from Oxfam Pilipinas, CDP, PRRM and VSU-RCCRDC. Representatives of the APLiFT program management team of Oxfam America also participated in the learning sessions. Representatives from partner municipal LGUs (Quinapondan, Lawaan, Salcedo, Balangiga), national agencies such as the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), community groups and community leaders also took part in the learning process and knowledge exchange.

AIR 1 was designed and implemented based on the following contexts:

- Project ALERT was at the early stage of its implementation. The project’s inception phase was from October 2017 to Feb 2018 and implementation commenced in March 2018. At the time of the AIR, Project ALERT was only on its sixth month of implementation.

- Oxfam and its partners identified the need to refine and sharpen the project’s understanding and analysis of community contexts – primarily the DRR context – within which it was being implemented. It was agreed that since the project was still at an early stage of implementation, there was still room for enhancing the project design and reviewing the Theory of Change (ToC) and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework based on an improved understanding and analysis of contexts.

- There was also a need to strengthen synergy among the implementing partner organizations.

- Results of the formative studies such as the baseline study, Household Economy Analysis and Pre-crisis Market Analysis (HEA-PCMA) and Participatory Capacities and Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA) were ready for dissemination and discussion with stakeholders inside and outside Project ALERT.
Based on these contexts, AIR 1 was developed and implemented with the following objectives:

- Build a shared understanding of the local contexts within which Project ALERT is situated
- Affirm successes and recognize gaps during the six-month implementation of Project ALERT
- Jointly review Project ALERT’s strategic interventions, informed by context and in line with the MEAL framework
- Draw significant lessons and insights from project implementation experiences
- Agree on ways forward for Years 2 and 3 of Project ALERT

The agenda and activities of the four-day project review were clustered into three parts: grounding, reflecting and action planning. The “grounding” activities included field visits and interaction with community partners plus a convergence meeting with LGUs and National Government Agencies (NGAs) on DRR through which the research results and findings of formative studies were discussed. The second part (reflecting) included a process of individual reflection (involving questions such as “Who am I as a development and humanitarian worker?” and “Who am I as a Project ALERT staff?”), reporting and drawing lessons from the project’s progress during the six months, and reviewing the Project ALERT MEAL framework. The last part—action planning—was composed of sessions which enabled the project implementation teams to review and revise the project’s work and financial plan for Years 2 and 3, plot activities on the project calendar for the next six months, and discuss operational concerns through a project management team (PMT) meeting.
AIR 2: “SOARING HIGH”

The AIR for Year 2 of Project ALERT was done on 14-18 October 2019. The first part was held in Borongan City, Eastern Samar while the second part was done in Tacloban City, Leyte. The project implementation team from Oxfam Pilipinas and its partner organizations (CDP, PRRM and VSU-RCCRDC) were the main participants of the learning event. Representatives from Oxfam America, the provincial and municipal LGUs, private sector organizations and youth organizations also participated in AIR 2.

The design and implementation of AIR 2 were informed primarily by the need to review and track the progress of the project which at that time was entering its third and final year of implementation. AIR 2 was about tracking milestones and checking output progress. In the sessions comprising this part, the implementing partners presented their year 2 accomplishment report, identified convergence in their deliverables in relation to project outcomes and surfaced action points for catching-up and adjustments in Year 3. The Output Dashboard was also updated in the zooming-in sessions. Moreover, this first part of AIR 2 also contained the presentation of mid-term monitoring report prepared by VSU-RCCRDC and a review of the ToC facilitated by the MELSA team.

The second part of AIR 2—zooming-out— included learning sessions where the municipal and provincial LGU representatives as well as those from the private sector presented and discussed DRR initiatives which could open opportunities for engagement with Project ALERT in Year 2 and beyond. A separate daylong activity (workshop) with various youth organizations’ representatives in the province and in the region was also held.

The third and last part of AIR 2—seeing ahead— was about reviewing the project’s Year 3 workplan, prioritizing and incorporating action points identified in the zooming-in and zooming-out sessions, creating a common calendar for Year 3, and building a vision or scenario for a possible Phase 2 of Project ALERT (“ALERTwo”).

AIR 2 had the following objectives:

- Take stock of the project gains from the design, implementation and adaptation of the project for the past 16 months and learn from strategies that aided in creating its successes

- Understand challenges and limitations (in key milestones for implementation) and areas for improvement

- Reflect on the implications of lessons learned for future programming (last year of the project) and identify opportunities to integrate approaches into existing Oxfam and partner programmes and scale-up effort
AIR 3: “TOUCHING DOWN”

The third and final AIR was done in remote mode through video conferencing as the Philippine government continued to implement COVID-19 lockdown measures. To address the limitations of synchronous virtual meetings (connectivity issues, shortened time frame, video streaming quality), AIR 3 included a period for asynchronous preparatory work in its timeline from September 10 to 21. During this period, Project ALERT implementing partners worked on their Year 3 accomplishment reports, prepared initial presentation of outcomes harvesting results together with the MELSA team and rehearsed the use and navigation of online or digital platforms to be used in the synchronous AIR 3 session.

Project ALERT management and implementation staff (Oxfam Pilipinas, CDP, PRRM, VSU-RCCRDC) convened in real-time on September 22 and 23 for presentation, discussion and reflection. In each day, the learning sessions were designed and structured for only four hours. Colleagues from Oxfam America – APLIFT Program Management Team – also participated in the synchronous learning sessions.

Partners and project stakeholders from the municipal governments of Lawaan, Balangiga, Salcedo and Quinapodan in Eastern Samar were linked to the video conferencing through co-location hubs set up by PRRM and CDP—one in Lawaan and another in Salcedo. The same remote broadcast scheme was utilized by the VSU-RCCRDC team in their office in Baybay, Leyte.

The agenda for AIR 3 primarily responded to Project ALERT’s end-of-project context. AIR 3 specifically sought to achieve the following learning objectives:

At the end of the AIR 3, Project ALERT partner-implementers and participants shall have:

- Identified and shared accomplishments, gaps, and adjustments made in Year 3 of project implementation with emphasis given to the COVID-19 pandemic context and its implications
- Systematized lessons, insights, and agenda for future action drawn from the three-year Project ALERT journey
- Affirmed the gains of the project as well as the needs for scale up and sustained action in relation to capacity building, risk reduction and asset protection, and knowledge sharing and learning

To achieve these objectives, the following topics or discussion themes comprised the AIR 3 agenda:

- Partners’ report on Year 3 accomplishments, gaps and challenges, and adjustments made in the implementation
- Reflection on the effects and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on project strategies and activities, partners’ ways of working (internal and external) and conditions of the community where Project ALERT was being implemented
- Presentation and reflection on the results of outcomes harvesting and endline evaluation, including the information generated through the Community Score Card (CSC)
- Celebrating the gains of Project ALERT and challenging partners and participants to broaden perspectives, seeking opportunities for scale-up, and creating spaces for integration of existing programs, projects or interventions

Although there were limitations and challenges to the conduct of AIR in a remote and digital modality, the preparatory activities and the two half-day synchronous sessions were still able to surface substantial content and discussion points.
TYING UP AIRS 1 TO 3

The three rounds of AIR, while adhering to the common agenda of tracking and drawing lessons from the implementation of Project ALERT, also responded to specific learning inquiries. For instance, AIR 1 responded to the questions “What is the context?” and “How might Project ALERT respond to this context?”. In AIR 2, the sessions were designed to answer the questions “What have we been achieving in terms of outputs?” and “What have we been learning so far?”. In AIR 3, the questions it sought to answer were “What have we achieved in terms of outputs?”, “What outcomes have we been observing/experiencing?” and “What lessons can be drawn from the three years of Project ALERT?”. Through these inquiries, the conversations which took place in the three rounds of AIR stimulated reflective and critical thought and followed a pattern of progression and non-repetition.

In terms of process and methods, all sessions from AIR 1 to 3 were designed to employ participatory and inclusive approaches to facilitate conversations and interaction among participants. AIR 1 combined fieldwork and community interaction with workshops and discussion sessions while AIR 2 integrated mini conferences with the private sector, provincial LGU representatives and youth groups into its design. For AIR 3, even if it was done purely in remote mode through a virtual platform, strategies such as setting up co-location hubs, utilizing online collaboration applications and tools, and allowing time for small group or “within organization” interaction to happen were used to create a participatory and inclusive learning environment.

Using meta cards and photos, AIR participants create a visual map to capture what the project has achieved, including insights from the project implementation. (Photo: Leah Payud/Oxfam)
In this section, reflections on the design and conduct of the three rounds of Project ALERT’s AIR are presented. Lessons learned as well as insights were generated, captured and synthesized through a series of reflective conversations with the Project’s management and implementing staff and Oxfam’s MELSA team. Key reflections were highlighted under five themes: 1) AIR’s contribution to the MEAL agenda, 2) AIR’s contribution to organizational and cross-organizational learning, 3) insights on the process and methodology, 4) co-design approach to conceptualizing AIR, and 5) doing AIR in remote-online mode.

1. AIR’s contribution to Project ALERT’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Agenda

1.1. Validating and enriching MEAL information

AIR provided space for implementing partners to present yearly accomplishment reports. These reports validated the information collected and consolidated by the MELSA team. For AIR 2 and 3, the presentations and reports done by the implementing partners helped check the accuracy of information, provided additional data and narrated the “stories behind the numbers.” Such qualitative information spoke of strategies used to deliver outputs, experiences and observations on ways of working with local stakeholders and project participants, gaps and challenges in practice, and the ways issues were resolved or imagined to be resolved.

It was also through AIR that implementing partners and the MELSA team reviewed the Project’s ToC and, when necessary like in AIR 1 and 2, revisions were made based on an emerging and deeper understanding of community contexts and observed results of project activities.

During AIR 2 and 3, the implementing partners’ and project participants’ views were also significant in identifying and analyzing changes and results that were observed and experienced and how these could be attributed to Project ALERT. Such information were significant inputs to the validation of the community scorecard (CSC) and endline evaluation data.

AIR also provided an opportunity for implementing partners to hear and learn about the systematized MEAL information and the methods through which such information was obtained. For these organizations working on the ground, the presentations and feedback coming from the MELSA team were also significant for them to revisit and refine their respective MEAL information as well as the methods they employed.

1.2. Providing a holistic view of Project ALERT

Through AIR, partners and stakeholders in the project management and implementation of ALERT were able to see and appreciate how components of the project (Capacity Building, Asset Protection and Livelihoods Development, and Knowledge Sharing and Learning) were connected. It was a common experience, particularly for the field staff, to be more focused on and concerned with the implementation
of project activities specific to their assigned project components. It was through AIR that they heard and learned more about each other’s work and the ways through which the project activities were supplementing, complementing or building on each other to contribute to achieving the project’s expected results or outcomes. For Oxfam and its partners, such a wholistic view justified the necessity to strengthen synergy and coordination mechanisms both at the level of project management and in the day-to-day processes and activities happening on the ground.

AIR was also an opportunity for the project management and implementation staff to see and reflect on the project’s progression and evolution across the three-year timeline. Such opportunity was deemed important in gaining a shared and deeper understanding of the project’s ToC as it was actualized or manifested in the buildup of outputs as well as the changes observed and experienced over time.

Moreover, having a wholistic view of the project through AIR also meant seeing the different actors and stakeholders of ALERT and understanding the project from these diverse actors’ points of view. As each AIR involved not only the project management and implementation teams but also representatives of local stakeholders (LGUs, community groups) and members of the broader APLIFT program management team, participants benefited from the diverse knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. In this manner, the validity, reliability and usability of the information generated through AIR processes were ensured by a "community of inquiry" and a "community of practice."

1.3. AIR as space for feedback

Project ALERT’s MEAL agenda and system also benefitted from the conduct of AIR through feedback. Within the project, AIR served as a channel for information coming from the implementation to be fed back to the management systems of the project. At the same time, AIR also facilitated the transmission of information to the LGU and community stakeholders. Such information became inputs to the continuity of project implementation in the four municipalities, sustaining local participation in the project activities and demonstrating capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) and Local Humanitarian Leadership (LHL). It was also through AIR that implementing partners were able to provide feedback on each other’s work (accomplishments and areas for improvement).

In AIR 1 and 2, Project ALERT was also able to share information to stakeholders or actors outside the project. Provincial LGU representatives, resource persons from national government agencies, and delegates coming from the private sector and various youth formations were invited to participate in these rounds of AIR. In both learning events, these stakeholders or actors outside Project ALERT also shared information and feedback on the project.

1.4. Foregrounding “learning” in MEAL

Aside from output and outcome tracking and harvesting, there was a consensus among implementing partner organizations and Oxfam staff that AIR should highlight the “learning” dimension of the MEAL framework. It was clear in the purpose, agenda, process design and methodology of the three rounds of AIR that drawing lessons and insights from the project implementation experiences was an integral component of the review process. Through AIR, the project management and implementation teams, together with local stakeholders, were able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their work, recognize good practices, critically analyze gaps and areas for improvement, and propose action points for adjustments, modification and innovation.

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i “Community of Inquiry” refers to individuals or groups who collectively construct knowledge through discussion and shared understanding. In this type of inquiry, ‘learners’ actively and collaboratively explore, create meaning and verify their understanding of knowledge through collaboration (Garison, 2000; Anderson & Archer, 2001).

ii “Community of Practice” refers to a group of people who “share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Etienne, 1991).
In all three rounds of AIR, learning was also associated with critical reflection not only on the project activities, outputs and outcomes, but also on how organizations involved in the project worked together, how each organization gave meaning to their roles and contributions as actors in DRR, humanitarian and development work, and how each individual staff also grew as development professionals.

1.5. AIR as “celebration”

AIR was also optimized as a space for “celebrating” and “showcasing” local partners’ (LGUs and community groups) achievements and experiences which directly or indirectly exhibited the intended results of Project ALERT. For the implementing staff, hearing and learning about these achievements as shared by local partners or stakeholders during AIR made them feel good and satisfied with their work. This emotional benefit kept them motivated and inspired to do more and be better.

2. AIR’s contribution to organizational and cross-organizational learning

2.1. Opportunities for knowledge sharing and exchange

Through AIR, Oxfam and its partner organizations also benefitted from the collective processes of sharing, inquiring and reflecting on on-the-ground experiences as well as the expertise, strategies and techniques which the organizations brought into Project ALERT. For instance, AIR facilitated the process of learning more about each organization’s conceptual and practical frameworks in relation to the following:

- community organizing and empowering community groups and formations
- forging partnerships with LGUs
- DRR governance
- community-based and participatory approaches to research, training and education, and livelihoods development
- gender mainstreaming

The participating organizations in AIR also mentioned learning more about LHL, specifically its application in relation to the communities or LGUs involved in Project ALERT. The discussions during AIR also allowed these groups to think more about how such applications could enhance indicators of tracking changes in LHL and imagining future application of LHL as a framework. They also mentioned enhanced knowledge and understanding of Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) as an innovative humanitarian and DRR intervention.

2.2. Organizations learning about MEAL

For the implementing partner organizations, participating in AIR—from conceptualization, preparation to actual learning sessions—was also an opportunity for them to learn more about MEAL and how they, within their organizations and in other projects they implement, could apply the processes, methods and tools the MELSA team shared and applied to Project ALERT.

2.3. Gaining insights on MEAL learning

For Oxfam Pilipinas, participating in AIR also provided space for the organization to gain insights on the “learning” dimension of MEAL particularly in crafting the learning agenda, formulating questions to stimulate reflection, and understanding the methodologies which could be employed to facilitate learning and reflection processes. AIR also allowed Oxfam Pilipinas to generate insights to enrich its practices in operationalizing the Strategic Partnership Model, primarily in facilitating cross-organizational learning and in creating spaces for “community of inquiry and practice” to flourish.
3. Insights on process and methodology

3.1. Opportunities for knowledge sharing and exchange

In terms of process and methods, all AIR sessions (from 1 to 3) were designed to employ participatory and inclusive approaches to facilitate conversation and interaction among participants. AIR 1 combined fieldwork and community interaction with workshops and discussion sessions. For AIR 1 participants, the interaction with LGU and community partners was valuable in further understanding the contexts within which Project ALERT operated and linking this understanding to the design of the project. In AIR 2, mini conferences with the private sector, provincial LGU representatives and youth groups were integrated into its design. For AIR 3, which was done via a virtual platform, strategies such as setting-up co-location hubs, utilizing online collaboration platform and tools, and allowing time for small group or “within organization” interaction were used to create a participatory and inclusive learning environment.

When asked about specific learning strategies employed in the conduct of AIR which helped facilitate conversations and the overall learning process, the participants outlined the following:

- Face-to-face interaction and conversation with local stakeholders during field visits
- Discussions where local stakeholders and community partners were invited to participate and engage in the conversations
- Preparatory guidelines and activities that provided focus and structure to the content of reports and presentations
- Specific sessions or allotting time for sharing of experiences in addition to reporting outputs and deliverables
- Structured reflection sessions (guided by questions or prompted by reflection themes)
- Use of visual methods to capture key ideas, illustrate links and relationships between outputs and outcomes
- Use of MEAL information to validate and affirm partners’ accomplishment reports and the use of Dashboard to show what was achieved and what else needed to be done
- Revisiting and reviewing the ToC
- Having an external facilitator to guide the process, systematize and synthesize information, primarily lessons and insights that emerged from the learning process

4. Co-design approach in conceptualizing AIR

All three rounds of AIR were conceptualized through a co-design approach. In this approach, the objectives, content, processes and methods for the conduct of AIR were developed by the Project Management Team together with the learning consultant-facilitator. This approach provided space for Oxfam and its partners in Project ALERT to collectively frame the content and methodology of AIR based on the project’s needs, MEAL agenda and organizational interests. The approach also built on existing experiences and practices of the organizations on “how to do learning and project reviews.” Through the co-design approach, Oxfam and its partners shared ownership, responsibility and accountability in the conduct of AIR.

5. On being suddenly remote

The third and final AIR was done in remote mode as the Philippine government continued to implement lockdown measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. From this experience of being suddenly compelled to adopt remote or online learning modalities, the following insights were drawn:
5.1. Rethinking and reimagining are a must

The objectives, content and methods for the conduct of AIR had to be reimagined to consider the “newness” of the platforms to be used as well as the uneven capacities to access and navigate these platforms – all without a significant departure from the learning agenda.

5.2. Doing AIR in remote mode is not just videoconferencing

Setting up co-location hubs (participants being physically convened in a remote location and linked to the video conferencing) helped address limitations of community partners in accessing and navigating the online platforms.

5.3. Broadening time frames

Notions of “time” must be reimagined as well—to think not only of the time allotted for synchronous sessions, but to broaden the time frame to include hours and days spent for asynchronous learning activities. In AIR 3, time frames for preparatory activities were included and structured as part of the overall design.

5.4. Conversations are still at the core of our learning process

But creating, facilitating and sustaining these conversations when face-to-face or physical interaction is limited will require a combination of creative and practical thinking—balancing novelty with feasibility.

5.5. Facilitating learning processes in remote mode goes beyond facilitating the conversation

It is also about guiding or enabling participants to navigate the platform, shift their assumptions and expectations about the learning process, and adopt to the norms of learning in remote mode.

5.6. Design based on existing digital divide

This means designing the online learning process for participants with the least capacity to access internet connectivity.

AIR 3 was a good prototype (proof of concept) of how to organize and manage project or program learning and review sessions remotely. Structuring a period for preparatory work helped in focusing the content although it was not fully maximized. The full potential of the platforms and tools for remote learning can only be realized if users continue to practice, test and use them. Everyone is still in the early stage of adopting this modality and the methods and tools that go with it. People’s mindsets and ways of working are also in the process of adapting.
Project adjustments that emerged and were carried out coming from the AIRs

AIR 1
a. Integrated project design strategies related to natural resource management (NRM) as part of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies (e.g., PRRM provided small grants to women-led or community-driven livelihood projects that involved NRM such as mangrove rehabilitation)

b. Looked into both inclusiveness (community involvement and inputs) and status of implementation of local water improvement or WASH planning initiatives as part of partners’ DRR and CCA work

AIR 2
a. Enhanced knowledge dissemination (knowledge materials in local language, stories about community benefits from disaster preparedness, etc.) and learning processes with community members and other local actors apart from the DRR orientations and emergency simulations, towards strengthening interactions and facilitating application of DRR knowledge

b. Established more synergy among partners (e.g., synchronization of Financial Inclusion iAFFORD card distribution and practice use done by PRRM with emergency simulations organized by CDP and VSU conducting simultaneous documentation of experience and insights)

AIR 3
a. Explored possible innovations around mobilization of resources for local DRR investment (e.g., incorporated a local DRRM fund study in the design of follow up project – SHARPER – to address observed underutilization of DRRM funds)

b. Employed more explicit approaches in strengthening women’s leadership in DRR while achieving more impact in terms of livelihoods development interventions (e.g., creation of self-help groups (SHeGs) and building their capacities in DRR and small enterprises through the SHARPER Project)
The following recommendations or action points are proposed to guide future design and conduct of project learning reviews such as AIR:

1. Designing and preparing for project learning and review sessions

1.1. Continue and strengthen the practice of collectively designing project learning and review sessions (co-design approach) to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the content, processes and methodologies employed in the learning event. This means involving the project management team, implementing partners, Oxfam’s MELSA team and the external learning event design consultant or facilitator in the conceptualization and preparatory activities.

1.2. Conduct timely site visits and interaction with stakeholders to gather information and feedback on the project. This information will be used to structure and direct the project learning and review agenda in terms of questions to address, content to be presented and discussed, themes to be explored and reflected on, and the means or methodologies to be employed in facilitating the learning and review processes, accessing and navigating the online platforms.

1.3. Provide advance copies (in partial or full form) of formative and summative studies (such as baseline study, mid-term review data, endline evaluation, community scorecard results) to the intended participants of the project learning and review session for preliminary discussions, analysis and reflection.

1.4. Include specific guidelines for internal learning and reflection of the organizations involved in the management and implementation of the project. This activity will require being deliberate in asking questions about how the participants’ organizational ideals, identity and ways of doing are affirmed, challenged and enhanced or enriched by the project experience.

1.5. In addition to setting specific objectives for each round, also determine the knowledge products or outputs expected to be produced after each round of project learning and review sessions.
2. Doing project learning and review sessions

2.1. Continue utilizing project learning and review sessions as a means to track the progress of project implementation. Such activity will entail determining accomplishments and gaps in output delivery, discussing project-specific issues, concerns and resolutions, identifying changes or results, and reflecting on how the project contributed to the achievement of these results.

2.2. Maintain the logical sequence of learning and review processes which progressively links accomplishments (outputs), results (changes and outcomes) and lessons learned.

2.3. Privilege the implementing partners’ and local project stakeholders’ experiences, accounts and reports by giving them the space to present and discuss before the presentation of MEAL information, and/or results of formative and summative studies. This means providing opportunities to level off on understanding of information and to determine themes for clarification, deepening discussions, reflection and analysis.

2.4. Deliberately include prioritization of action points for catch-up and follow-through in the agenda of project learning and review sessions.

2.5. Create a specific session for cross-learning among Oxfam and implementing partners. The specific agenda may include discussions on lessons or insights related to intervention frameworks, strategies and ways of working in relation to the Strategic Partnership Model.

2.6. Continue employing visual, participatory and conversation-based methods and tools to aid the learning and review process. Strategically utilize prompts and probes (e.g., guide questions, dashboard, photos and video materials) to stimulate conversations and the participants’ thought processes.

2.7. Maintain the practice of enlisting an external facilitator to manage the process and synthesize the content of the project learning and review process. Ensure the external facilitator is supported with a thorough induction and background to the project and its stakeholders.

2.8. Continue good practices in documenting the process, content and output of the project learning and review sessions. Ensure the external facilitator is supported with a thorough induction and background to the project and its stakeholders.

2.9. Retain the multi-stakeholder composition of project learning and review sessions involving the project management and implementation personnel, local stakeholders and project participants from communities covered by the project.

3. Following through after project learning and review sessions

3.1. Following through after project learning and review sessions. Such knowledge products may be shared internally among project management and implementation teams, project participants and local stakeholders and/or with other stakeholders outside of the project. These groups may benefit from the harvested and curated lessons and insights.

3.2. Utilize the outputs of the project learning and review sessions as bases for determining the agenda for follow-through. Other MEAL activities may benefit from the documentation of the learning event.

3.3. Provide guidance on how implementing partner organizations may continue their respective internal organizational learning processes. Such guidance may come in the form of guide questions or themes that they can reflect on. The results of their reflection may be shared during partners’ meetings or included in reports and other forms of summative documents.
4. Ideas for further thinking and discussion

4.1. Exploring the feasibility of holding project learning and review sessions biannually—one in the middle and the other at the end of the project year

4.2. Integrating project learning and review agenda in quarterly local partners’ meetings

4.3. Designing and implementing project learning and review sessions exclusive to LGU, community and other stakeholders outside the project

5. Doing project learning and review sessions in remote mode

5.1. Keep the objectives focused and be more straightforward on what the learners or participants are expected to produce during the project learning and review session.

5.2. Employ a multi-modal approach to address uneven capacities and access to internet-based platforms and tools for remote learning. For instance, in Project ALERT’s AIR 3, the following modalities were utilized:

*Blended learning*

This modality combined face-to-face sessions with internet-mediated sessions such as video conferencing. In the face-to-face interaction, participants were physically co-located while still linked to the video conferencing. A shared screen for projection plus microphones and speakers for audio transmission were set up.

*Blended online learning modality*

In this modality, there was a fusion of synchronous and asynchronous online sessions. Synchronous sessions were held in real time while asynchronous sessions were designed to be accessed and participated in at the participants’ or learners’ chosen time.

5.3. If co-location hubs will be set up, it will be good to develop a session structure specific to these hubs so that participants may also actively engage in the conversations and not just be passive recipients of transmitted information or an unresponsive audience to the discussion happening online.

5.4. Expand the time frame to include both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

5.5. Invest time and resources for pre-recording and pre-packaging of presentations. Pre-recorded and pre-packaged reports allow for better time management or “timeboxing.” Organizers of learning events may provide a storyboard or template to guide the content and structure of the presentation. Considering the low bandwidth and slow internet speed in many areas in the Philippines, a delay or lag in online video streaming while in session may always be an issue. Preparing a slideshow with voice over (recorded or live) instead of video or movie may be a better alternative as it will stream even at low internet speed.

5.6. Schedule a technical dry run or tutorial session for participants should specific online discussion or collaboration platforms and tools be employed. Being in remote mode also means learning or acquiring new (or different) sets of habits and practices.

5.7. Shift ways of thinking and doing from facilitation of conversations alone to overall tasks of learning management. Facilitators should be more deliberate by preparing and clearly communicating guide questions and instructions. Worksheets or templates and guidance notes for more structured preparatory work sessions may be provided in advance.

5.8. Produce a detailed project learning and review session guide where content or agenda, guide questions and instructions on how to access online platforms and tools are outlined and discussed.