

Oxfam Pilipinas 6th MELSA Bootcamp
Quezon City, Philippines | 26-27 February 2025

Background

The 6th MELSA Bootcamp took place in Quezon City on February 26-27, 2025, and provided a significant opportunity for Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Social Accountability (MELSA) officers and program focal points to engage in internal reflection and learning. As Oxfam Pilipinas prepares to integrate as a full affiliate of the Oxfam global confederation, the MELSA bootcamp concentrated on assessing the organization’s evolving MELSA systems and practices, drawing valuable insights, and identifying key areas for enhancement, particularly at the midpoint of its *Patas na Bukas 2022-2027* strategy. The said learning event fostered a collective understanding of previous gains and shortcomings, pinpointed strategic priorities in response to emerging needs, and emphasized critical learning questions to assist practitioners in improving program quality and facilitating broader systems change in the face of challenges such as limited funding, political changes, and backlash in claiming women's rights. Specifically, the bootcamp aimed to:

- 1. **Take stock of Oxfam Pilipinas’ evolving MELSA experiences and practices**, celebrating significant achievements and noting areas for further enhancements;
- 2. **Cul out insights around strategic directions and priorities** in terms of MELSA practice based on emerging needs and thinking in relation to Oxfam Pilipinas’ work as a national organization and new affiliate of the Oxfam confederation; and,
- 3. **Identify and prioritize learning questions and knowledge generation areas** around the country team’s MELSA initiatives with partners and local actors.



Key Discussion Areas

How Can We Promote Decolonized and Localized MELSA Practices?

The discussions highlighted the significance of incorporating social accountability strategies into Oxfam Pilipinas’ work focusing on increasing awareness of people’s rights through the systematic and citizen-led monitoring and assessment of public policies, programs, and services. Away from “one-size-fits-all” interventions, the group emphasized the need for more flexible and adaptive strategies. Moreover, the bootcamp participants suggested promoting a culture of collective and more critical sensemaking among Oxfam Pilipinas staff and partners as an essential element in adapting portfolio strategies amidst complexities and uncertainties in the program context.

What Steps Are Necessary to Ensure Program Quality and Safety?

Discussion on the Climate Justice portfolio’s work highlighted the interconnectedness of climate justice and gender justice. Bootcamp participants supported a feminist perspective on pursuing climate solutions underscoring the significance of tapping women’s involvement and leadership in communities which are most affected by climate change. It was acknowledged that prioritizing

safety, inclusivity, and gender-responsiveness in Oxfam Pilipinas’ and partners’ programming and MELSA work, would be critical to program quality and achieving a more equal and just future.

How Do We Effectively Monitor, Report, and Learn from Our Programs?

Participants noted the significance of the Excel-based program and project tracking sheets, the Participants Tracking Database System (PTDS), and Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA Toolkit as locally developed systems and guidance materials to support both MELSA officers and program focals in their work. These tools are essential to facilitating program quality, transparency, and adaptive management by supporting tracking of program outcomes, culling of insights from implementation of programs and projects, and making informed decisions and timely strategy adjustments.

What Are Our Reflections on Evaluation and Learning Systems?

Reflections on partners’ and Oxfam Pilipinas’ evaluation processes and practice highlighted gains in localizing spaces, knowledge, and resources to capture evidence of change, richer information on how change happened, and insights as to how their actions contributed to transformations. Participatory research approaches were prioritized, enabling program actors to validate evidence of change, understand better the different factors influencing outcomes, and identify ways forward to sustain change. Evaluation reports and other outputs sought to highlight more the voices and insights of marginalized groups and communities. Finally, evaluation findings were disseminated through various media and strategies to facilitate substantive engagement with target users.

Affirmations

The 6th MELSA Bootcamp affirmed that:

- Knowledge creation, co-creation, and re-creation depend on collaborative reflection and learning by key program actors. The bootcamp’s discussions emphasized the significance of documenting and disseminating program actors’ insights from such processes in order to enhance better understanding of a “decolonized, localized, and feminist MELSA”.
- Participants articulation of their experiences and insights represented different levels of articulation of MELSA – “know what” (descriptions of practice), “know how” (procedures), and “know why” (rationale) – and that sustained group reflection and sensemaking, and more regular and systematic knowledge codification could be priorities moving forward.
- Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA Community of Practice (CoP) has evolved into an organic, semi-structured space for collaborative learning. Originally an idea conceived during the 3rd MELSA Bootcamp in 2023, it is now becoming a space where all members are seen as peers and co-learners. Future actions could focus on further strengthening the CoP.

Future Directions

Following the successful conclusion of the 6th MELSA Bootcamp, participants identified several critical steps to ensure the continued progress and impact of Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA practices. These steps are envisioned to further strengthen collaboration of portfolio teams, implementing partners, and local actors, and guide the organization’s toward achieving strategic goals.

Table 1: Future Directions for Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA Strategy

Next Steps	Description
Strengthening decolonized and localized MELSA	<p>Continue exploring and/or adapting mixed methods and action-oriented research approaches that prioritize local voices and contexts to ensure that Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA processes are flexible and responsive to the needs of program participants.</p> <p>Develop and use simpler templates, tools, and guidance notes to capture and codify MELSA processes, particularly those that are geared towards shifting from performance management to facilitating collaborative learning among local program actors.</p>
Capacity building and community engagement	<p>Organize and facilitate MELSA training and learning sessions with Oxfam Pilipinas staff, portfolio partners, and local actors to build a shared understanding of MELSA and cultivate a robust community of practice that is responsive to grassroots needs.</p> <p>Produce Oxfam Pilipinas MELSA practice notes on:</p>

Next Steps	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of gender snapshots to inform programming based on the experiences of the Oxfam Pilipinas Humanitarian and Gender Justice Portfolio Teams and partners. - Designing and conducting more participatory, inclusive, and adaptive evaluations with partners and local actors.
Localizing knowledge, spaces, and resources	Continue implementing strategies to localize MELSA practices by developing more accessible knowledge products (e.g., in the local languages, more visual/video formats, considering access for people with disabilities, better adapted and structured to the information needs of decision-makers, etc.), building inclusive learning spaces, and allocating resources based on the specific requirements of local program actors, particularly women and other marginalized and vulnerable groups in communities.
Enhancing systems for program quality and safety	Do regular briefing on safeguarding policies and processes with Oxfam Pilipinas staff and partners, establish anonymous and safe intake channels for community feedback, and strengthen learning from community feedback in program initiatives.
Expanding use of MELSA tools and systems	<p>Promote customization and use of tools like the Excel-based program and project trackers, portfolio Participants Tracking and Database System (PTDS), and MELSA Toolkit to promote support decision-making and knowledge management.</p> <p>Streamline and refine key performance indicators in the climate justice, gender justice, and resilience portfolios in preparation for the Midterm Review of the Oxfam Country Strategy (OCS).</p>
Sustaining learning and program adaptation	<p>Review, streamline, and update the portfolio learning agendas to align with changing program contexts and requirements.</p> <p>Do a “Learning about <i>Learning and Knowledge Management</i>” session for Oxfam Pilipinas and its partners (potentially as the focus for the next online bootcamp with MELSA focals).</p>
Fostering strategic partnership	Pursue engagement and strengthen institutional collaboration with government agencies, other civil society and community-based groups, and academic institutions to align efforts around MELSA and focus program concerns, share and facilitate the effective uptake of knowledge, and catalyze systemic change.

MELSA Learning Questions

The following questions invite Oxfam Pilipinas’ Core MELSA Team and the other MELSA focals from its portfolios and partners that constitute the MELSA Community of Practice (CoP) to engage in ongoing reflection and learning, drawing insights from their experiences. The questions aim to support continuing reflection on and improvement in Oxfam Pilipinas’ and partners’ MELSA work and approaches towards fostering a feminist, decolonized, and adaptive mindset and practice.

- a) **How do we continue operationalizing elements of “feminist, decolonized, and adaptive MELSA” in our ways of thinking, ways of doing and working, and ways of relating?**
- This question highlights the value of defining both the practices (i.e., activities, strategies, tools) and thinking (e.g., framework) that guides such practices, including that of reflecting on and drawing out insights from action towards further improvement. Discussions could start from partners’ and Oxfam Pilipinas’ programming contexts, and could also cover and examine the quality and nature of relationships and roles of Oxfam Pilipinas, partners, and other actors. The ultimate aim is to co-create a shared understanding of what a “feminist, decolonized, and adaptive MELSA” means to Oxfam Pilipinas and portfolio partners.

b) How might we facilitate and sustain adaptive and progressive shifts from conventional to alternative and emergent MELSA paradigms and practices in our program work?

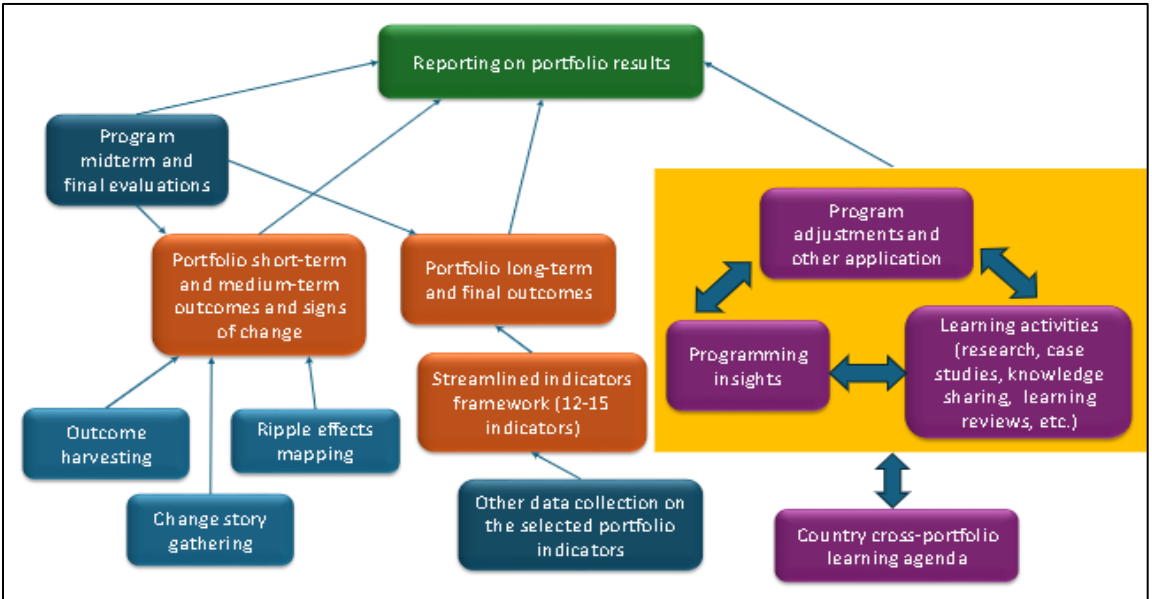
This question explores how to initiate and support progressive transitions from traditional to emerging MELSA ideas and practices. The process necessitates critical reflection on both current practices and new approaches, towards meeting the information needs of key institutional and program actors while making the transition to alternative systems and ways of working that are seen to support better generation of outcomes with other actors. The question also implies the critical need for more timely adoption of strategies to drive, facilitate, and sustain these changes in the face of possible constraints and inertia.

Some of key shifts initially discussed by bootcamp participants included the following:

1. Shifting focus from “tracking performance” to facilitating deeper and more collaborative “learning” about how change happens and broadens toward more systemic shifts;
2. Transitioning from a focus on “customer satisfaction” to prioritizing “deeper and more empathetic engagement” and “substantive accountability” in collecting, processing and making sense of, and facilitating programmatic learning from community feedback;
3. Shifting from “data collection” to “data engagement” mode in monitoring and assessing portfolio results with a focus on co-creating information instead of extracting it; and,
4. Moving from reporting to engaging in “more meaningful conversations” with donors, decision-makers within the organization, policy-makers, and other MELSA audience.

c) How do we systematically report on our portfolio outcomes using existing performance tracking methodologies while also introducing learning-oriented approaches?

This question addresses the challenge of using existing performance management tools, systems, and processes, while making the shift to more learning-oriented approaches. An immediate opportunity for applying such an envisioned transition would be the upcoming midterm review of the Oxfam Pilipinas country strategy with program partners and other actors. Rande Cabaces, Oxfam Pilipinas’ MELSA Manager shared an initial reporting framework for portfolio results and impact that embodied the proposed transition:



As this was the first iteration of the framework, bootcamp participants suggested further discussions and brainstorming, along with prototyping and pilot-testing of its key elements. The MELSA officers and program focals agreed to carry out such refinement and testing as they prepare for Oxfam Pilipinas’ yearend assessment for FY 2024-2025, the midterm review of Oxfam Pilipinas’ strategy, and production of the annual accountability report.

We would love to hear about how this communiqué resonated with your own work, inspired similar reflections within your organizations and/or networks, and informed actions around program monitoring, evaluation, learning, and social accountability in your contexts. Email: randee.cabaces@oxfam.org.ph