

**Oxfam International: Working for a Fairer World
(1942-2009)**

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E.ON shelves Kingsnorth: Pressure from Oxfam supporters forces E.ON to drop its plans to create a new coal-fired power station, and gives poor people hope of a better future.

E.ON, a British company, was preparing to create a new large coal-fired power station, the first to be built in the UK for 30 years. It would have emitted the combined emissions of 6 million tonnes of CO2 annually – the equivalent of 25 developing countries'. Around the world, communities are telling Oxfam that the seasons are changing. Droughts are intensifying, floods are becoming more severe and farmers don't know when to plant their crops anymore. Climate change is affecting the poorest people on the planet and Kingsnorth threatened to make things worse.

As part of the Stop Climate Chaos coalition, over 5,000 emails from Oxfam supporters were sent to E.ON chief executive Paul Golby, asking him to commit E.ON to seeking clean energy solutions for our energy needs. Even more emails were sent to the Department for Energy, telling the UK government that we needed to go down a path towards a low carbon future. Thousands of people physically turned up at Kingsnorth for the Mili-band in June when E.ON announced that it was to delay building Kingsnorth, effectively pulling the plug on the dangerous plans and delighting the climate campaigners. It is all because of people's relentless pressure, unending passion, and refusal to give up.

This campaign success is only a stepping-stone towards the green future that we need. But equally, it should not be underestimated. The focus of Oxfam's campaign is to get an international agreement at the UN Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Oxfam was originally founded in Oxford in 1942 as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief by a group of Quakers, social activists, and Oxford University academics. It was

one of several local committees formed in support of the National Famine Relief Committee. Their mission was to persuade the British government to allow food relief through the Allied World War II blockade for the starving citizens of Axis-occupied Greece. Oxfam opened one of the world's first charity shop chains, beginning with a shop in Oxford in 1948. This innovative fundraising idea attracted donations ranging from false teeth, and various stuffed animals to a houseboat. The first overseas Oxfam affiliate was founded in Canada in 1963. The committee changed its name to its telegraph address, OXFAM, in 1965.

The early 1960s was a critical period of growth as Oxfam began its own program development in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. During this same period, Oxfam began to analyze its role in the development process, moving from a traditional model of charity (one-time grants) towards long-term development programming (working with communities to affect lasting positive change). Deeply involved in the international movement against apartheid in South Africa and for Central American solidarity through the 1970s and 1980s, Oxfam sought to address the fundamental, underlying causes of poverty. This, in turn, led to Oxfam's role in the 1990's as a major advocacy organization mobilizing public support for changing the policies that perpetuate poverty. Today, the 13 member organizations of the Oxfam International confederation include: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Ireland, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Quebec, Spain and the United States. The Oxfam International Secretariat is based in Oxford, UK with advocacy offices in Brussels, Geneva, New York and Washington DC. Oxfam International employs 5,955 staff worldwide (in 2008) and a total income of £299.7 million. Oxfam GB is the largest member of the confederation with its head office is located in Cowley, Oxfordshire and offices and programs in over 70 countries in 8 regions.

PROGRAMS

Mission: Oxfam works with others to overcome poverty and suffering

Beliefs

- All human lives are of equal value
- Poverty makes people more vulnerable to conflict and natural disasters
- People's vulnerability to poverty and suffering is increased by unequal power relations, based on, for example, gender, race, class, caste and disability
- In a world rich in resources, poverty is a morally indefensible injustice which can and must be overcome
- With the right resources, support and training, people living in poverty can solve their own problems.

Values

Empowerment: Everyone involved with Oxfam – whether contributing to its work or benefiting from it – should feel empowered to help end poverty.

Inclusiveness: Oxfam listens to and is open to everyone, regardless of ethnic background or religion.

Accountability: Through our results-focused approach, Oxfam holds itself accountable in everything it does –and expects the same high standards from others.

Building on the mission, values, and beliefs, Oxfam has developed a global strategic plan for 2007-2010 (a new 4-year plan will be in place by the middle of 2010) to expand in those areas where it can have the most impact. The strategic plan includes the following key themes:

Inequality: In many poor and middle-income countries, inequality between rich and poor people is increasing. Oxfam plans to build a stronger focus on inequality into its work.

Women’s rights: Gender equality has been a priority for many years, and Oxfam is committed to putting women’s rights at the heart of all that it does.

Climate change: This is the one new area where Oxfam will increase its work substantially. Oxfam aims to highlight the impact of climate change on poor people, and work with them and with organizations at all levels, to reduce their vulnerability to its effects.

Attitudes and beliefs: Oxfam believes a shift in attitudes and beliefs is needed to overcome poverty and suffering and aims to build a worldwide movement of people who express a desire for change, so that political leaders make the decisions necessary to end poverty.

National and global work: Oxfam wants to continue to work at a global level and also strengthen its understanding of the countries it works in, and aims to make its global campaigning ‘fit’ better with the country and regional work.

Oxfam uses a rights-based approach to address immediate problems through service delivery and underlying causes through advocacy activities. Oxfam believes that all people have social, economic, political, and civil rights. To overcome poverty and suffering, Oxfam works to ensure that these rights are fulfilled and protected. Oxfam believes that given resources and power, people can solve their own problems and achieve self-reliance. Oxfam also recognizes national or global issues that need to be tackled. Its work on the ground informs both its analysis of issues and advocacy to secure lasting change. Oxfam works in three main areas: saving lives through emergency response; long-term development work; and advocacy and campaigns. These different approaches are intertwined, mutually-reinforcing and need to be used together to achieve lasting change. In all its program work globally, it focuses on five main goals

The right to a sustainable livelihood

The long-term goal is to ensure the rights of people to food and income security that is sustainable for their future and for the environment. Oxfam wants to see the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (on less than \$1/day) reduced by 50% by 2015 in all countries of sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America (reflecting a marked reduction in the extreme disparities in wealth within and between countries). To achieve these goals, Oxfam: 1) supports small farmers (usually working with partners) to become drivers of economic growth, 2) delivers programs to achieve sustainable rural

livelihoods in areas of long-term decline by lessening the impact of climate change on poor households, 3) supports the enhanced organization of rural producers and processors as a pre-condition to strengthening their power in markets, and ability to shift local and national government policy regarding poor and vulnerable livelihoods, 4) analyzes knowledge and learning from all rural livelihoods in order to improve practice and to increase the impact on local, national and international policies and practices, 5) undertakes trade campaign with greater national and regional focus in line with the external opportunities for change, 6) increases understanding and campaigning on climate change, particularly, bringing the voices and experience of poor and vulnerable communities to national and international debates, 7) enhances understanding of key corporate sectors (agriculture, energy and finance) and works in partnership with individual companies in those sectors, 8) engages with the private sector to apply their skills to the issues of livelihoods, 9) ensures that all livelihoods work (activities focused on increasing people's incomes) and enables partners and poor people to be heard, especially women, 10) contributes to improved legislation and corporate practice that promotes decent work and labor rights, particularly for women workers in precarious employment situations.

The right to basic social services

The goal is to ensure people's right to basic services, particularly education and health care, through advocacy and campaigning on the provision of essential services and to strengthen people's ability to hold their governments to account and increase good governance. Oxfam achieves this aim through: 1) continued and strengthened public pressure in the UK and across the world, especially at key moments, such as G8 meetings, 2) education programs to demonstrate how poor children, especially girls, can have good quality, gender-equitable, basic education and to have the knowledge and skills to advocate for quality education services at national and global levels, 3) ensuring greater government accountability in the delivery of quality services at national and/or local level in the majority of education programs through the development of budget tracking and monitoring mechanisms as well as participatory planning, 4) contributing to a movement to achieve the right to health care, 5) delivering HIV and AIDS programs, mostly in Southern Africa, using locally-appropriate strategies to address the continuum between prevention and treatment for the poorest and most vulnerable people, 6) increasing the availability and affordability of medicines, health services, and funding for HIV and AIDS through advocacy and campaigning, and 7) supporting the campaigning and advocacy of groups who monitor how budgets are allocated and spent to ensure that governments are held accountable.

The right to life and security

Oxfam aims to ensure that all civilians affected by crises will receive humanitarian assistance and protection (based on commonly-accepted quantity and quality) that are consistent with their needs. The main interventions in this area include: 1) maintaining and consolidating its position as the leading international non-government organisation (INGO) in water, sanitation, and health promotion, 2) positioning itself as a leading INGO in food security and emergency livelihoods, with sector leadership on alternatives

to food aid, 3) building delivery capacity, at the centre and in regions, enabling growth of 50 per cent in water/ sanitation/public health work by 2009-10, including developing its experience in water services in post-disaster situations, 4) enhancing its ability to deliver timely and effective assistance by integrating protection (especially of women and girls), consistent gender analysis and response, and accountability to beneficiaries in its own work and that of others, 5) promoting conflict-sensitive approaches to programming, 6) improving work with partners and developing partner capability, 7) developing an understanding of how to reduce people's risk before, during, and after disasters, 8) developing capacity for every region to be able to respond to medium-scale emergencies, 9) contributing to sector-wide initiatives and debates on standards and accountability in humanitarian assistance, 10) undertaking campaigning to ensure fast, effective, acceptable, humanitarian assistance by the international community for the increase of aid for humanitarian assistance to at least \$15 billion and for the UN to be held to account for the proper management and disbursement of these resources based on need, and an end to the under-funding of forgotten or neglected emergencies, and 11) promoting adherence by governments to their responsibility to protect all their civilians, and if they are unwilling or unable to do so – for the international community to fulfil their 'responsibility to protect'.

The right to be heard

One of Oxfam's guiding principles is that poor and marginalized people are able to influence decisions affecting their lives, including using their civil and political rights to achieve social and economic rights and to challenge inequality. As a rights-based organization, Oxfam seeks to ground all of its work in strengthening the ability of people living in poverty to demand and defend their rights and ensuring that governments and institutions fulfil their obligations to respect and protect the rights of poor people. All of its work should increase the ability of poor and marginalized women and men to be heard, and it is committed to improving its own accountability to them. The interventions in this area include: 1) focusing on aid and budget accountability by supporting civil society organizations to ensure that increased budgets enable poor and marginalized men and women to have high-quality essential services, 2) further developing its own accountability to partners and the people it works with, 3) building the capacity of local and national civil society organizations and poor people's associations and movements that can mobilize people to pursue their rights, 4) in recognition of the growing importance of regional and global institutions in governance processes, supporting and strengthening trans-national coalitions and alliances of civil society that can effectively represent the interests and voice of poor people at regional and global levels, and 5) building social movements where active citizens can play a proactive monitoring and influencing role in relation to governments and institutions.

The right to equity (gender and diversity)

One of Oxfam's goals is to see that millions of women gain power over their lives and overcome the barriers that keep them in poverty. Oxfam focuses on achieving equal rights for women and men, based on an understanding that poverty affects women and men differently and that the majority of people living and suffering in poverty are

women. In addition to focusing on targeted activities to defend and promote women's rights, participation, and leadership, Oxfam puts women's rights at the heart of all its work. While the long-term goal is that ethnic, cultural and other groups oppressed or marginalized for reasons of their identity will enjoy equal rights and status with other people, the priority for Oxfam at present is gender equality. The main interventions in this area include: 1) achieving measurable change in women's empowerment and gender equality including the engagement of men in these programs, 2) strengthening and expanding programs related to violence against women, including the Oxfam *Can* campaign, in South Asia and other regions, and working to recognize the role of violence in the transmission of HIV and AIDS, 3) developing new program initiatives to promote women's economic and political leadership at all levels, 4) upholding women's rights by contributing to the advancement of the Convention on Eliminating Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Women's Protocol, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on peace building, and 5) achieving gender equity through work on women's leadership and the eradication of violence against women.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

The key areas where Oxfam wants to develop its capability include the following:

- *Program quality*: improve its relationship with and accountability to partners and implement new monitoring, evaluation and learning systems that enable greater impact.
- *Developing its people*: so that its skills better match its scale of ambition through significantly improving people-management and program-management skills. The priority areas are: project management; people management; national level analysis and capability to integrate campaigning into our program approach at national level. These need to be reflected in better management performance, linking performance management to delivery, and program quality.
- *Developing its thinking about what it means to be an international organization*: This is about how Oxfam listens and is open to external learning (eg. from different community and faith groups; from the private sector; from those with very different views of the world.) It is about how Oxfam understands the world and how Oxfam makes decisions. In thinking about what it means to be an international organization, Oxfam needs to look at the implications for Oxfam's role and the type of organization it will need to be in the future, along with its affiliates in Oxfam International.
- *Assessing and improving its environmental impact*: in the context of the increasing focus on climate change, both globally and through our own program work, Oxfam needs to ensure that its own internal policies and ways of working minimize Oxfam's environmental footprint.
- *Building movements*: through deepening an understanding about how change happens, Oxfam needs to support the development and strengthening of worldwide movements. In Great Britain, Oxfam aims to increase public support through the *I'm in* campaign;
- *Improving Oxfam's accountability to all stakeholders*: To be able to achieve its goals over the years ahead, Oxfam needs to continue to increase its income and support, and to develop Oxfam's internal capability.

- *Securing resources*: By 2010 the key income goals are for total income to reach £337.4 million – average growth of more than five per cent throughout the period.

OXFAM IN SRI LANKA

The way this global strategy is implemented can be best understood by taking a closer look at one of its programs. This case study focuses on Oxfam's programs in Sri Lanka that grew substantially after the Tsunami illustrates how the agency responds to both conflict and natural disasters in relationship to long-term development work.

History

Oxfam's engagement in Sri Lanka goes back to the 1970s when it started supporting local NGOs in Sri Lanka as part of its India program. It established a physical presence in the country in 1983 after a partner committed major fraud and it became clear that close monitoring of partners is essential. This period also coincided with the escalation of violence in the Northeast part of the country as the Tamil minority waged a liberation war. Over the next 20 years, the bulk of Oxfam's programs focused on providing relief and rehabilitation assistance in Northeast Sri Lanka. In early 2003, there was a temporary period of truce between the government and the rebels that was followed within a year by the massive Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004. Oxfam's focus then shifted to tsunami relief and rehabilitation. With the end of the conflict as well as the tsunami operations in 2008, Oxfam has developed a new strategy for its work in Sri Lanka.

Current Program Strategy 2009-2012

Conflict Assistance Program: Oxfam continues to provide high quality humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected persons and undertakes advocacy activities to ensure their rights and entitlements. The program utilizes the considerable strengths developed during the Tsunami response but puts additional emphasis on increasing the awareness among staff, partners and other stakeholders on protection issues. The program focuses on public health, sanitation and livelihoods recovery, as well as advocacy to ensure that standards of aid delivery to these communities are equitable and meet international agreements. Both women and men in conflict-affected areas have experienced major changes in their lives. However, Oxfam uses a gender sensitive framework of analysis to focus on the differential impact of conflict on women and men. The program response strategy includes both practical and strategic action to help women given the greater impact on them. The practical action has a short term effect of making daily life safer and more comfortable for women and girls in affected communities. The strategic action has a longer term effect on reducing the exclusion of women and their issues in decision-making processes, increasing the recognition of women as responsible and active community members, reducing the exclusion of women from opportunities to support their livelihoods, and reducing the prevalence of violence against women. While ensuring responsible phase out of emergency services provision at the end of active conflict, Oxfam is maintaining its capacity to respond to the needs of internally displaced people

(IDPs), host communities and returnees. Oxfam is continuing to build the capacity of partners and local level administrations to deliver effective humanitarian programs. Given the much reduced country budget after the end of tsunami operations, Oxfam focuses on the production of innovative public health and sanitation research and analysis that can be used to shape government policy and influence donors and other agencies involved in the sector. In addition, the ongoing conflict posed a significant risk factor for HIV transmission in Sri Lanka. While Oxfam does not plan to develop a significant HIV program in Sri Lanka, it is engaging in awareness raising of HIV and conflict issues with staff and partners.

Women's Economic and Political Leadership Program

Sri Lanka is experiencing increasing incidences of violence against women and a lack of participation of women in economic and political decision-making processes. In the past Oxfam in Sri Lanka had focused on mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout its programs. However, this strategy failed to strengthen the decision-making role of poor women in family, community or national decision-making processes. Oxfam has now adopted a new twofold strategy: 1) promoting and supporting women as owners and managers of assets, resources and processes of community development (women's collectives in public health, humanitarian and livelihoods work), and 2) working on a women's empowerment ('We Can') campaign throughout its programs to build an enabling environment that supports women's rights, promotes violence free relationships, helps women and men adapt to change in their gendered roles through awareness raising and challenges attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate inequality. Building on the strengths and innovations of Oxfam's existing livelihoods programs, specifically the coir (products made from coconut) project in the South and the dairy development project in the North, the goal is to build women's interest, understanding, confidence and skills to develop relevant business plans either for existing products or for entering into new markets. Furthermore the program strengthens women-led social structures or self-help groups (SHG's) to engage not only in economic activity but also in solving community issues such as violence against women (VAW). Oxfam also seeks to build a supportive social environment for change through awareness raising interventions that challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate inequality between women and men. Oxfam aims to mobilize other civil society actors through local and national level advocacy and networking local groups.

Private Sector Engagement and Economic Development Program

Supporting communities whose livelihoods have been adversely affected by the conflict is a major focus of the country program, especially where infrastructure destruction has forced the population into subsistence farming and/or seasonal labour. The program seeks to improve the share of the poor (the percentage of profits being earned by the poor versus middlemen) through trade in selected activities. The programs seeks to increase access to resources from the formal financial services sector, integrate women and men as value chain actors, remove bottlenecks and unproductive activities, increase profitability, improve information flow, and ensure equitable distribution within the targeted community. There is a strong emphasis on women in the program since more women

remain the poorest of the poor due to prejudice and violence that limits their access to opportunities to reduce poverty.

There is a strong emphasis on strategic engagement with the private sector beyond the typical buyer-seller approach of traditional NGO livelihoods programs in order to generate pro-poor economic growth and contribute to a reduction in underemployment and poverty in the targeted districts by setting up businesses where poor people can work and better connect with the market. Oxfam also aims to strengthen the property rights of small producers so that they can interact with businesses, buyers and contractors confidently. Oxfam is also linking communities with sustainable formal or semi-formal financial institutions and service providers to provide loans to individual producers at preferential rates through community structures such as cooperative societies, producer groups and farmer organizations. The program compliments the development policy priorities of the government of Sri Lanka (in relation to provision of financial services) and Oxfam GB and can contribute towards dynamic economic growth with a broad impact. Owing to its broad three level approach, the program has the potential to make a significant impact on Sri Lanka's microfinance sector and its contribution to poverty reduction.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Program Approaches and Ways of Working

The new program strategy will necessitate a significant change in Oxfam's program approach and ways of working. In the changing country context with a greatly reduced budget and structure, the key issue for the Oxfam program will be 'leverage': How does Oxfam and partners work for systemic change to reach tens of thousands of people rather than apply direct assistance to help a few enterprises or farmers? At which points can leverage be applied to reach the intended systemic change? In order to address these issues, Oxfam needs to move away from traditional service delivery programming to more transformative work, bringing about change by utilizing the relationships created over the past years with both public and private sector as well as other civil society actors. .

Working in Partnership

Oxfam's mandate is "Working with Others". In the direct aftermath of the Tsunami however, the program was largely operational and now Oxfam needs to pro-actively seek out opportunities to bring government, civil society and private sector together to increase the scale and effectiveness of poverty alleviation and to empower communities. As the range of actors engaged in social change widens, Oxfam seeks to establish effective and diverse (multi-stakeholder) partnerships to bring about change. Oxfam's ways of working need to be adapted to ensure complementarities and added value of Oxfam's work. The partnerships needs to reflect Oxfam's efforts to address the inequality of power, not just in society at large but in Oxfam's own working relations with others. Five principles need to underpin Oxfam's approach to partnership: 1) complementary purpose and added value, 2) mutual respect for values and beliefs, 3) clarity regarding

roles, responsibilities and decision-making, 4) transparency and accountability, 5) commitment and flexibility.

Transparency and accountability

As part of the process of developing partnerships, Oxfam needs to be explicit about how it is accountable to partners and how Oxfam's partners and Oxfam are accountable to people and communities. Through the partnership approach, the knowledge, experience and skills that local organisations and communities bring to the relationship can be valued and acknowledged as equally essential to ensuring the success and sustainability of Oxfam's joint interventions. Oxfam has a specific responsibility to encourage sharing of knowledge amongst partners.

Commitment and flexibility

While short-term service delivery interventions can be appropriate, Oxfam's humanitarian, development and advocacy campaigns are more likely to be sustainable and effective if program approaches are based on long-term partnerships and build capacity for fundraising and linking partners to alternative sources of funding where possible. Oxfam recognizes the need of Oxfam's partners to balance project funding with core funding and, within the limits of funding constraints, aims to increase the proportion of multi-year funding agreements with strategic partners. Oxfam recognizes that it is often one piece in a complex and time-consuming jigsaw of funding and reporting requirements, and Oxfam often coordinates financing and reporting requirements with other donor agencies, including other Oxfam International affiliates.

Beneficiary Accountability

To date the program has implemented a number of accountability initiatives (including translating accountability frameworks into local languages, public information campaigns, developing complaints mechanisms for many of its programs and campaigning on the issue of rights and entitlements with the human rights commission) and is now the lead country for accountability in the region. As it moves forward, Oxfam needs to further integrate the principles of accountability throughout its program and develop a number of case studies on promising practices and lessons learned.

CONCLUSION

This case study has traced Oxfam's evolution from a small relief agency in 1942 to one of the largest INGOs in the world that undertakes program activities at the community level and advocacy activities nationally and globally on livelihoods, social services, emergencies, and gender equity in more than 80 countries. The agency has retained its comparative advantage in emergency work and is recognized as the leading agency in the areas of water and sanitation. However, it is also working to develop greater capacities in food security and international advocacy on climate change. To be able to achieve these ambitious goals, the agency is enhancing and diversifying its financial base and building the capacities of its staff.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What does its rights-based approach mean?
- 2) What are its five global goals?
- 3) What is the program focus in Sri Lanka?
- 4) What are the main global challenges identified by Oxfam that are reflected in its priorities?

SOURCES

Oxfam website (www.oxfam.org.uk)

Oxfam International Strategic Plan (available on website)

Oxfam Sri Lanka, National Strategy