

Partnership Policy

Oxfam Canada has a long tradition of working in partnership and solidarity with civil society actors in the global South and in Canada as a key strategy in realizing its mission to end poverty and injustice.

Oxfam's partners are independent development actors in their own right. Our theory of change asserts the pivotal role partner organizations play as protagonists in the struggle to build and channel the assets and energies of individuals and communities to promote, defend and secure their rights. Our Gender Policy underlines the critical leadership role women and women's organizations play in supporting transformative change and affirms our commitment to support them in this role. And our ways of working respect the prime importance of our partners as agents of change within the majority world, without diminishing the value of Oxfam Canada's role in accompanying our partners in complex processes of change, helping build their capacity and nourishing their efforts with knowledge, linkages and resources.

Statement of Partnership Principles

Oxfam Canada subscribes to the Statement of Partnership Principles adopted by Oxfam International and commits to work within the confederation to privilege and support partners' leadership.

Oxfam understands partnerships as mutually empowering relationships, cognizant of power imbalances, focused on impact, mutual growth, organizational development and institutional strengthening.

The Statement of Partnership Principles describes different kinds of partnerships, how each should work and the values and responsibilities attached to different partnership arrangements. As well it reaffirms the legitimacy and importance of three key roles for Oxfam: as an active member of a worldwide constituency for people's rights; as a catalyst for change; and by directly engaging to ensure people's rights are met.

The Statement of Partnership Principles provides a framework for all Oxfams. Oxfam Canada has made women's rights and gender equality both its priority and its key strategy for ending poverty and injustice. In keeping with this commitment, Oxfam Canada will give priority to women's organizations and movements and will seek and create opportunities to privilege partners working to address power imbalances between women and men, girls and boys in all their diversities in support of transformative change.

Attachments

Oxfam International Statement of Partnership Principles 2010

Statement of Partnership Principles¹

Status: Final. Approved at EDs March 2010

¹ This version of the *Statement of Partnership Principles* incorporates revisions following a second round of consultations with key informants through March 11, 2010.

Purpose of document

The decision in November 2008 to move the Oxfam family to a Single Management Structure prompted the development of a set of policies, standards and tools to provide the foundation of a more coherent approach to programming. In September 2009, the need for an OI Partnership Policy was confirmed and the decision taken that Oxfam Canada and Intermon Oxfam would lead a consultation process in early 2010 in order to develop such a policy.

A Discussion Paper based on existing OI and affiliate literature on partnership was circulated across the confederation in January 2010. Fifty Oxfam staff² actively participated in the ensuing consultation process either through individual interviews, or by contributing written comments and additional literature. At least two affiliates convened internal consultation processes across their organizations.

In the process of this consultation, it was determined that the document should in fact take the form of a *Statement of Partnership Principles*. A draft Statement was submitted to the RST SG and LRMs for feedback in early February, and this document incorporates the (relatively modest) amendments proposed at those tables, and is prepared for submission to the ED Reference Group.

The Statement of Principles provides a unified framework and foundation for addressing partnership issues across the confederation. Its primary purpose is to contribute to a common understanding of partnership by providing both:

- a set of clear *definitions* related to partners and partnership; and
- a set of aspirational *principles* to guide Oxfam's relationships with others.

The document does not however include statements of standards, tools, procedures or plans to guide the application of these principles. These supporting instruments remain to be developed through subsequent processes (summarily listed in Annex 3).

² A sample of EDs, all PDs, all LRMs, all Change Goal Leaders, a sample of Country Directors in most regions, 3 members of the Campaign group, 3 members of the Humanitarian group, OI staff, and MEL representatives of various affiliates. Of the original 59 people contacted, 85% responded in some form.

Introduction

The imperative of alignment

The OI 2007-2012 Strategic Plan *Demanding Justice* affirms that due to the scale of human need and injustice around the world, in a context of growing inequalities, there is an imperative for Oxfam affiliates to maximize their combined contribution towards an agenda for the realization of people's fundamental human rights. It emphasizes that: "*priorities need to be set and Oxfam's assets aligned to achieve as much impact as possible*". The SMS process will move OI towards a more robust alignment in all areas of Oxfam's work (humanitarian, development and campaigning) at every level – national, regional and global.

The notion of partnership lies at the core of how affiliates understand the world (i.e., our model of change) and our role therein (i.e., our identity). A **common understanding** of partnership is therefore a pre-requisite for successful convergence of affiliates and our programs. Some important steps have already been taken in this direction³, but the case for a formal Statement of Partnership Principles is compelling and closely tied to our commitment to increased affiliate accountability to each other and other stakeholders.

Why Oxfam works with partners

Oxfam currently works with over 3,000 partners in approximately 100 countries. Through this work, Oxfam aspires to make a sustained and significant positive impact on poverty and injustice. Oxfam believes it is only through the collective effort of many actors (civil society, state, private sector and others) that this goal can be achieved. Each of these actors has a role to play in accordance with its responsibility, legitimacy, its capacities and strengths, while holding duty bearers to account for their commitments. These relationships are not about side-lining, displacing or instrumentalizing others; they seek instead to foster complementarity and to harness the added value each may bring.

The one program approach is Oxfam's strategic framework for achieving change. The key relationships through which Oxfam develops this approach are those that most effectively impact on the root causes of poverty, vulnerability and injustice, and help people become empowered as agents of their own development. Amongst the many actors with which Oxfam has such relationships, local civil society organizations stand first and foremost, given Oxfam's conviction that these actors have both the legitimacy and position to foster lasting changes in their societies.⁴

Section 1: Definition of key concepts

In general, Oxfam's relationships with local organizations are commonly referred to as partnerships. However, Oxfam has relationships with a wide range of actors with which it engages in different types of activities and assumes diverse and often context-specific roles. In attempting to categorize and define these partnerships, it is therefore proposed to focus less on the actors themselves and more on the nature of the relationships with Oxfam.

It is clear that these relationships vary greatly in scope, depth, maturity and length. In fact, the notion of a **partnership continuum** may be a helpful device to represent the diversity of relationships. At one end of the spectrum are relationships which are effectively tactical: ad hoc, short-term and output-driven. At the other end of the spectrum, the relationships are strategic in nature: long-term and impact-driven. In order to achieve its mission, Oxfam establishes relationships across the entire spectrum, depending on the national and programmatic context, agreed model of change, and specific objectives sought.

³ OI has adopted a number of documents which help frame OI's understanding of partnership: namely, the OI Strategic Plan, the OI Working Principles, the OI Southern Campaigning and Advocacy paper and, more recently, the OI Program Standards (see Annex1) and the OI Policy on Working with Partners in Humanitarian Response (see Annex 2).

⁴ While some affiliates apply the term 'partner' exclusively to civil society organizations, other affiliates consider their relationships with government and private sector actors also to be a type of partnership.



Although no one set of relationships is by definition 'better', Oxfam's **one program approach**, driven by a rights-based analysis, finds its foundations in mature strategic relationships on the impact-driven side of the spectrum.

It is in this sense that Oxfam understands **partnerships** as *mutually empowering relationships, cognizant of power imbalances, focused on impact, mutual growth, organizational development and institutional strengthening*⁵. Oxfam partnerships commonly include contractual relationships which are nevertheless based on trust, and evolve through dialogue, shared experience and a deep commitment to achieving sustained changes in the lives of vulnerable and marginalized people. Underlying this definition is the notion of partnership as a perfectible and evolving relationship.

A useful distinction made by some affiliates is that between two broad **categories** of actors, **partners** and **allies**, which both fall within the partnership continuum.

Partners are autonomous, independent, accountable organizations that share OI's core values and work towards common goals on a long term basis under an agreement that ties accountability and performance to the existing relationship.

Allies are individuals or organizations with whom we work towards a specific goal, even though their organizational and institutional mandates and long term purpose may be different from Oxfam's.

These are not mutually exclusive categories, and the nature of the relationship with a particular organization may evolve over time or vary across program. In either type of relationship (tactical or strategic), Oxfam may or may not contribute funding to partners or allies. In general, Oxfam's **funding relationships** are based on a shared goal and mediated by a contract that binds parties to the achievement of results and carries other obligations, with explicit power imbalances at play that need to be addressed.

A distinct sub-set of partnerships has been negotiated between those Oxfams engaged in Fair Trade activities and the range of small-scale producer, intermediary and trading groups with which these affiliates collaborate as part of a broader strategy of sustainable economic development. These relationships constitute a quite particular form of '**trading partnership**' based upon dialogue, transparency and respect that seek greater equity in international trade. The global Fair Trade movement has elaborated its own comprehensive set of principles and guidelines to govern these long-term relationships⁶.

Section 2: The Role of Oxfam

Oxfam is an independent development actor in its own right, as are Oxfam's partners and allies. Oxfam's voice, its agenda and global capacity constitute the added value we bring to our relations with others in local, national, regional and global contexts. In these relations, Oxfam plays a number of different and often evolving roles:

- ***Oxfam is an active member of a worldwide constituency for people's rights:*** we work with others to build a global citizen movement for change, acting in solidarity with people living in poverty, especially women, to achieve their rights and assert their dignity as full citizens by holding duty-bearers to account for their responsibilities. In this role we aspire to changing the terms of the debate.
- ***Oxfam is a catalyst for change:*** by using our convening and facilitating capabilities to bring together actors to work on common problems; by accompanying, mentoring and coaching others;

⁵ This definition is set by the OI Program Standards, Standard 6 (see Annex 1).

⁶ Most recently in the *Charter of Fair Trade Principles* adopted in January, 2009.

by stimulating learning and strengthening partner capacities; by generating knowledge, promoting innovation and alternatives that may be brought to scale; and through development, campaigning and humanitarian work. In exercising this role, we provide both financial and non-financial support, and work increasingly with networks and coalitions of partners.

- **Oxfam directly engages to ensure people's rights are met:** when local capacity is unavailable or when our engagement can clearly increase impact⁷, we will promote inclusive, active citizenship and participation; advocate for the rights of people in poverty; and provide humanitarian assistance and protection to people affected by disaster. Such engagement will be accompanied by investments in developing the capacity of local organizations to secure long-term impact and framed by an exit strategy to ensure long-term sustainability.

Section 3: Partnership Principles

Oxfam's partnerships are based on six core principles. Whilst recognizing that these principles are not equally applicable to all types of relationships along the partnership continuum, we nonetheless aspire to follow them in all our working relations with others.

1. Shared vision and values

Partnerships between Oxfam and other organizations are built on a shared vision of a fair world, free of poverty and injustice, which implies solidarity beyond the implementation of specific programs and activities.

Whilst recognizing and respecting differences – and welcoming dialogue and debate – sufficient common ground must be found for our partnerships with others to be viable. At a minimum, Oxfam and partners with which we work must share both a belief that people living in poverty should enjoy their fundamental human rights and an organizational commitment to gender equality and respect for diverse identities. Our shared understanding of change processes should encompass the agency of poor and marginalized people and the importance of movements and organizations representing their interests, while affirming state institutions as ultimate duty bearers.

2. Complementarity of purpose and value-added

Oxfam works in partnership with a variety of actors in a diverse set of relationships. Across the partnership continuum, the emphasis will be placed on identifying the common goal to which we are working, whether in long or short term relationships, looking to build on the distinctive contribution of all actors and ensuring that our combined efforts bring about change.

We recognize that each partner brings different capacities and resources to an interdependent relationship. We believe that working with others towards common objectives creates synergies and the potential for real collaborative advantage. For this potential to be realized the diverse knowledge, experience and skills which each partner brings to the relationship must be valued and acknowledged as essential to ensuring the success and sustainability of joint efforts. The value-added Oxfam brings to the relationship will vary across our continuum of partnerships as well as our diverse roles, and must be clearly stated. Funding is understood as only one aspect of partnerships, however determinant, with Oxfam increasingly engaging non-funding relationships with a variety of partners and allies.

Partnering processes must create opportunities for partners and for Oxfam to articulate what is important to them and what they believe they can contribute to the partnership, and to arrive at a common understanding of shared purpose, mutual benefits and interests. In making decisions about with whom to partner, Oxfam will always consider the contribution the partnership will make to bringing about positive outcomes for people living in poverty.

⁷ Existing OI policy provides some guidance as to when recourse to *operationality* is justified (See OI Southern Campaigning and Advocacy, OI policy on working with partners in humanitarian response and OI Program definition).

3. Autonomy and independence

Our partnerships will strive for mutual respect for institutional integrity and autonomy. We are aware that, in many of our partnerships, particularly in funding relationships, power imbalances exist that may undermine the principle of autonomy and independence. Oxfam will work to manage this tension through our partnering processes and accountability systems.

Oxfam must not impose its views on partners. We take responsibility for clearly communicating our positions to partners. We are open to being challenged and will create opportunities for dialogue and debate around goals, values, results and impact. While there must be some commonality in vision and values in order for the partnership to be viable, we accept that partners may not share all our views. The right of each partner to determine their own institutional identity, directions and priorities should be respected. In our capacity strengthening work with partners, we must be attentive to the challenge of balancing respect for institutional autonomy and independence with program support for institutional growth and development.

We are open, within the limits of our mission and mandate, to being influenced as to where, how and with whom we work, and on the messages we convey through our campaigns. This includes being open to learning from different experiences of, and approaches to, development, campaigning and humanitarian work which may challenge us to question our own assumptions about effective practice – and to change the way we do things. Every effort is made to build mutual respect for different viewpoints, values and beliefs within the partnership.

4. Transparency and Mutual Accountability

Oxfam and partners have multiple accountabilities to a variety of stakeholders, including supporters and donors, and – most importantly – to those women and men living in poverty who are engaged in and benefitting from our programs. We will strive to achieve a balance between upward and downward accountability in our own systems and processes, and improved mutual accountability within our partnerships. As part of the process of developing partnerships, we explicitly discuss how Oxfam is accountable to partners and how we and our partners are accountable to people and communities with and for whom we work.

In funding relationships, Oxfam and partners recognize and are committed to high standards of financial management, as we hold in trust money which others have offered in good faith and for which we are jointly responsible. Oxfam also acknowledges and strives to address accountability issues associated with all our partnerships, including those involving non-funding relationships.

Oxfam and partners have a mutual interest in demonstrating impact and in designing accountability systems that support this need. Within the limits imposed on Oxfam by back donor requirements, Oxfam will not oblige a partner to adapt its own planning, management and evaluation systems to those of Oxfam. Oxfam will attempt to coordinate financing and reporting requirements across affiliates and with donor agencies. We will support partners to develop and implement monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches that reinforce the partner's accountability to their communities, giving women and men living in poverty 'voice' to provide feedback on partners performance. We will lead by example by putting in place feedback mechanisms that enable partners (and other stakeholders) to assess Oxfam's performance. Such systems will be supported by formal grievance procedures or complaints mechanisms. We are committed to openness and transparency about how decisions are made regarding partnership, and will establish regular consultations and communications with partners.



Oxfam has an obligation to ensure that our partners are aware of various international accountability charters and quality standards⁸ to which we have adhered and to clarify how these codes and principles are applicable to partners' work.

As part of our power analysis, Oxfam and partners discuss the power imbalances that exist between us, created by funding discrepancies, size, experience, access to information, and North/South dynamics. Where we are in the position of power, we will act with humility and aim to reduce such imbalances. We acknowledge that such power relations have often led to women's civil society organizations (CSOs) being marginalized or side-lined and will fulfil our commitment to strengthen partnerships with women's organizations, networks and movements.⁹

5. Clarity on roles and responsibilities

Partnerships are built on clear understanding and robust partnership agreements. For funding partnerships, all the elements of the partnering process and decision-making are discussed and agreed by partners (partnership appraisal and assessment processes, contractual and financial arrangements, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, joint learning and exit). Oxfam understands that the credibility and trust required to sustain healthy partnerships comes from good communication, competence and reliability.

Oxfam and partners are co-strategists of programs and activities on which they jointly work, though the extent to which they are co-owners of program will vary according to the nature and maturity of programs and partnerships themselves. Whatever the nature of the relationship, Oxfam will create opportunities for regular consultation with partners, ensuring that such spaces enable all partners to voice their issues.

Partner relationships, and with them the roles and responsibilities of each party, will evolve over time. The understandings and agreements that define a particular partnership shall need to be revisited at regular intervals. This evolving reality will require flexibility and responsiveness on all sides as organizational circumstances and social contexts change.

Oxfam will discuss its understanding of its roles (see Section II) with partners and clarify the ways in which we will work together within and across these dimensions. At all times we will work with local and accountable organizations and/or towards strengthening or facilitating the establishment of such organizations or structures. Whatever can be done with sufficient quality, effectiveness and efficiency by local organizations *must* be done by them. We will support efforts to increase partners' visibility across all areas of our work and will explicitly acknowledge the work they have done.

Every effort will be made to live up to the aspiration embodied in OI Program Standard 6 which states that "*effective partnering is a fundamental strategy through which Oxfam seeks to become redundant*". We will deepen, by discussing with partners and amongst ourselves (being particularly attentive to the perspectives of Southern-based Oxfams) our long-term vision of partnership and related to this how we can contribute most effectively to strengthening local organizations and a sustainable civil society.

6. Commitment to joint learning

Oxfam, as a learning organization, promotes continuous and systematic learning. In partnerships this requires upfront agreement on how Oxfam and partners can learn from their joint work, and from each other, with the aim of incorporating learning, communications and knowledge sharing into the relationship. How program results and learning will be shared outside the partnership will be agreed by Oxfam and partners so that no misunderstanding arises.

⁸ International Non-Governmental Organisations' Accountability Charter; the Sphere Project, and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief, for example. Oxfam affiliates have also signed on to own country accountability charters/codes of conduct which must be considered in partnership relationships as SMS unfolds.

⁹ OI Program Standards Final Draft (9), Nov 09, Gender Justice Outcomes.



Our learning agenda with partners will explore both partnership processes and outcomes. As Oxfam works primarily through partnerships, we have an interest in understanding the factors, including ways of working that condition successful partnerships. We will work with partners to ensure that joint learning is used regularly to adjust our strategy and plans as we strive for increased impact.

Annex 1

Standard 6 of the OI Program Standards

STANDARD 6:

Programs rely upon partnership and alliances with autonomous, independent, accountable organizations to achieve positive changes in people's lives as well as policy changes- these relationships should be mutually empowering, cognizant of power imbalances between partners, and focused on impact, mutual growth, organizational development, and institutional strengthening.

Our Working Principles speak directly to the principles, beliefs, and values that Oxfam holds regarding partnership. Key values for Oxfam International are respect for the diversity of people and partner organizations, respect for their autonomy, transparency and accountability of their own organizational policy and processes, and a consultative style that ensures that the voices of partners and allies can effectively influence Oxfam thinking and practice. Programs do not instrumentalize partners. Effective partnering is a fundamental strategy through which Oxfam seeks to become redundant.

We are transparent in how we select partners and allies through our country and regional joint analysis and strategic planning. We make long-term commitments to partners, set agreed mutual expectations, and are clear about when and why partnerships end. Programs establish explicit mechanisms for partner feedback and mutual influence. We talk openly and consistently about power imbalances between partners, imbalances created by funding discrepancies, size, North/South dynamics. The quality and productivity of partnerships and alliances is subject to regular and formal evaluation.

As approved by the EDs, November 2009.



Annex 2

Working with partners in humanitarian response, Partnership Policy Implementation Support Kit (PPISK) - Oxfam International's Emergencies Management Network (2009)

Diversity in humanitarian partnerships

In any one humanitarian response, there may be a variety of partnership working models. Broadly, partnerships could be divided in following categories:

- Partner-driven model wherein the affiliate programs are determined by the partner based on proposals submitted by them
- Consultative driven model wherein the affiliate consults the partner through which proposals are formulated
- Sub-contract driven model wherein the Oxfam formulates the project and identifies a suitable partner for implementation

Beyond a Statement of Principles

The primary purpose of the *Statement of Partnership Principles* is to contribute to a common understanding of partnership by providing both:

- a set of clear *definitions* related to partners and partnership; and
- a set of aspirational *principles* to guide Oxfam's relationships with others.

Effective application of these principles will likely require a number of follow-up steps, including:

- Exploiting existing tools and procedures (on partner assessment, selection, management, evaluation, complaint procedures, partner feed-back mechanisms/satisfaction surveys, open information/transparency policies, etc.) as well as creating new, improved tools and procedures as required.
- Establishing monitoring and evaluating standards and mechanisms that speak to partnership issues.
- Building staff skills and capacities to apply tools and maintain systems.
- Elaborating and operationalising accountability mechanisms across Oxfams, into the operational agreements under SMS, with partners and allies, and to people living in poverty.
- Building on the specialized knowledge of affiliates and good practice on partnership.
- Learning from field staff's and partners' experiences on what constitutes 'good practice' in partnership relations.
- Progress towards a set of common principles for *trading partnerships* across all affiliates engaged in Fair Trade activities.