



Photo credit: Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam

# Working with others

**OXFAM GB**  
**PARTNERSHIP POLICY**



Oxfam

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## OXFAM GB PARTNERSHIP POLICY

Dear friends and colleagues,

I'm delighted to present Oxfam GB's policy on partnership. This important document has been developed through extensive consultation with both staff and partners around the world.\*

All of Oxfam GB's work in long-term development, humanitarian response and prevention, and campaigns and advocacy will be guided by these principles. They will underpin how we develop our working relations with an increasingly wide and diverse set of people, organisations, and partners – from grass-roots communities to governments and the private sector. We aim to hold ourselves accountable to these principles and standards, and expect to be held accountable by others. This includes providing a clear rationale in any aspect of our work where circumstances might lead us to decide to go against any of these principles in any partner relations. Ignoring them is not an option.

I have witnessed some marvellous relationships between Oxfam GB programme staff and partners, allowing delivery challenges, critical feedback, and difficult issues to be dealt with together in an honest and open way. I've also heard glowing feedback from partners on how much they appreciate the accompaniment and skills of our staff. Our priority is to use these principles to achieve consistently good-quality and honest relationships with all our partners, and to ensure that we are as effective as we can be in the global struggle against poverty, suffering, and injustice.

'Working with others' is central to our mandate. While we can achieve much as Oxfam GB, we can achieve so much more working in partnership with others. This policy is a significant foundation for us all to ensure that we build partner relationships that are inclusive, accountable, and empowering – and based on openness, trust with respect, and equality. Our approach to partnership must reflect our values and is central to what we believe as an organisation and how we think change will happen now and in the future.

With many thanks to all those involved and warmest regards to all,

**Penny Lawrence**

International Programmes Director

October 2007

\* To view the Oxfam GB's Global Strategic Evaluation of Partnership please visit:  
[www.oxfam.org.uk/partnershipevaluation](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/partnershipevaluation)

Front cover photo: Grandmothers, mothers, daughters, carers, and farmers are calling people to rallies in which they demand their right to be recognised for the work that they do. Oxfam works with Samarpan Jan Kalayan Samiti (an NGO in North India) to focus on mobilising and empowering rural women.

# Policy statement

Oxfam GB works with and through others to take action to achieve common goals for overcoming poverty and injustice, based on complementarity and respect for the contribution that each party brings. Oxfam GB's partner relations are informed by and managed to a set of clear principles. These five principles underpin our programme and partnership decisions in development, humanitarian, and campaigns work at every level of activity.

We hold ourselves accountable to these principles and seek to be held accountable by partners, communities, and other stakeholders with whom we and partners work:

- **Complementary purpose and added value**
- **Mutual respect for values and beliefs**
- **Clarity about roles, responsibilities, and decision making**
- **Transparency and accountability**
- **Commitment and flexibility**

Photo credit: Vidyadhar Sreepasad/Oxfam

Health activists, HIV patients, and their friends and relatives hold a rally in Chennai to campaign against the Novartis court case against the Indian government which would prevent them producing generic drugs.



# Why do we work with partners?

Oxfam GB works with others to build a global movement for change to support the actions of poor and marginalised people and communities in order to overcome poverty and suffering more effectively. We believe that this is more likely to ensure lasting, locally-owned development, and relevant and accountable campaigns and humanitarian interventions.

We believe that local communities and other civil society partners can better understand, represent, and address the rights, needs, and aspirations of poor people. All partners, including government and the private sector, are central to creating the conditions and structural changes necessary for effective people-centred, sustainable change and development. The programmes we implement together can encourage and enable the real participation of people living in poverty, be more sustainable, and have greater impact. The knowledge, skills, reach, and experience that we offer each other mean that, together, we can make more of a difference than if we worked separately.

## Who do we work with as partners?

Oxfam GB's work with others builds on an ever-increasing diversity of relationships. As the range of participants in social change widens – from local communities to the private sector – Oxfam GB aims to establish effective and diverse partnerships to bring about change.

Within this context of increasing diversity, Oxfam GB partner relations fall into three broad groupings. These are not always clear-cut categories, and relationships may fit into more than one category at the same or different times:

- Project partnerships for a specific project with mutually agreed aims and objectives
- Strategic partnerships, working together over time with sufficient alignment of goals and objectives towards achieving a lasting impact on poverty
- Alliances with single organisations or groups of organisations working together towards a specific goal, even though organisational/institutional mandates and long-term purpose may be quite different

The policy governs all our work with local communities and other civil society organisations in both funding and non-funding relations. The distinctive nature of humanitarian and advocacy/campaigning contexts may present additional factors that influence how we work with others. While differences in context may require different approaches, we believe that the same principles apply to all activities across our one-programme partner relations.

As Oxfam GB develops its ongoing work with the private sector, a wider range of partner-type relationships will arise. In these cases, the emphasis will be on identifying the common goal towards which we are working, looking to build on the distinctive contribution of all partners, and ensuring that our combined efforts bring change.

Photo credit: Andrew Njoroge/Oxfam Novib

This cash-for-work project near Bender Beyla, northern Somalia has been supported by the Somali organisation, Horn Relief, with the support of Oxfam Novib. This project aims to give income support to the most vulnerable within the community.



# Five principles of partnership

## 1. Complementary purpose and added value

**Any partnership between Oxfam GB and other organisations is based on shared objectives to empower and/or otherwise benefit poor, suffering, and marginalised people. The added value of working together is clear and recognised by all partners. Each partner brings different capacities and resources to an interdependent relationship, and the diversity and value of all contributions is acknowledged. Each partner is clear about what each brings to the partnership, as well as being open about limitations.**

Oxfam GB adds value in partnership through the provision of financial and non-financial development, campaigning, and humanitarian support and expertise. Increasingly, we act as a catalyst for multi-faceted relationships involving alliances of civil society, including local communities and others seeking to bring about change. We do not replace civil society in the countries where we work, but support its development and links with other global actors and movements.

Oxfam GB respects the right of partners to determine their own direction and priorities. We are open, within the limits of our mandate and mission, 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 that may challenge us to question our own assumptions about effective practice.

We develop our analysis of the causes of poverty and suffering in any given context together with our partners and we define joint goals and strategies based on this analysis. When our perception of priorities changes, we share our rationale for this and are transparent in exploring what this means for the relationships we have.

## 2. Mutual respect for values and beliefs

**Whilst recognising and respecting differences, sufficient common ground in terms of shared values and beliefs must be found for our partnerships with others to be viable. We must share a desire to work towards a common position on important issues, including a commitment to gender-equality and respect for diverse identities, and a belief that poor and marginalised people should enjoy their fundamental rights and are agents of their own development.**

Photo credit: Toby Adamson/Oxfam

Peach harvest in San Fernando, Chile: This family got this land in 1972 under President Allende's land reform programme. The land supports this family of ten to make a living.



### 3. Clarity about roles, responsibilities and decision-making

Credibility and trust in partner relationships comes from good communication, competence, reliability, and delivery. When the rights and obligations of each partner are negotiated, the expected contribution of each party, including Oxfam, is clearly stated. All partners are able to do what they say they will do, or describe the process and time frame needed to develop the required capacity. The process for making decisions is also discussed and agreed. While the aim is to work towards shared decision-making as the work and relationship progress, this will not always be possible nor desirable. As we each take responsibility for fulfilling our agreed roles, so we take an equal share in celebrating success and learning together from failure.

Every effort is made to build mutual respect within the partnership, as characterised by open dialogue and a willingness to give and receive constructive criticism. Problems and disagreements are dealt with openly and transparently through agreed procedures, including Oxfam GB's formal complaint mechanism, to ensure that complaints about Oxfam GB's work are heard and properly dealt with.

### 4. Transparency and accountability

All parties involved in the partnership recognise the need to be accountable to people experiencing poverty or affected by disaster and to other stakeholders including donors and governments. As part of the process of developing partnerships, we explicitly discuss how Oxfam GB is accountable to partners and how we and our partners are accountable to the people and communities with and for whom we work.

Oxfam GB and partners are serious about the importance of good financial management, as we hold in trust money given by others in good faith, and for which we are jointly responsible. Genuine mutual accountability is rooted in an understanding and recognition of the diversity of resources brought to the relationship. The power imbalance created by the financial and material resources that Oxfam GB makes available, and the implications of this, are openly discussed and handled with sensitivity.

The diverse knowledge, experience, and skills that other organisations and local communities bring to the relationship are valued and acknowledged as essential to ensuring the success and sustainability of our joint interventions. Working together is as much about an attitude and a choice, as about a balance of material resources.

We agree together how we learn from our joint work, with the aim of incorporating learning, communications, and the sharing of knowledge into the design and delivery of projects and partnerships. As Oxfam GB, we have a specific responsibility to encourage the active sharing of knowledge with and among partners.

Photo credit: Abbie Traylor-Smith/Oxfam



Children play during breaktime at Al Kwod Othman School in Aden, Yemen. This school is in one of the slum areas of Aden and is supported by Oxfam.

## 5. Commitment and flexibility

Whilst short-term interventions can be appropriate, our humanitarian, development, and campaigns programmes are more sustainable and effective when based on long-term partnerships. Where Oxfam GB is a donor, we are open about our plans to fund or to stop funding and our reasons for doing so; we build partners' capacity for fundraising, linking them to alternative sources of funding where possible.

We recognise the partners' need to balance project funding with core funding and, within the limits of funding constraints, aim to increase the proportion of multi-year funding agreements with strategic partners. We recognise that, for partners, Oxfam GB is often only one piece in a complex and time-consuming jigsaw of funding and reporting requirements; we aim to co-ordinate financing and reporting requirements with other donor agencies, including other Oxfam International affiliates.

Our partnerships – and these principles – reflect our efforts to address the inequality of power, not just in society at large but in our own working relations with others. The principles and values contained within this partnership policy serve as the framework for ensuring clear and transparent working relationships with others, based on openness, trust, respect, and mutual accountability – enabling all of us to be more effective in the global struggle against poverty, suffering, and injustice.

Photo credit: Geoff Sayer/Oxfam



Women and members of the community youth group sell maize at the trading centre in Piyaya, Tanzania. The maize was funded by Oxfam as a start-up supply for the local grain store.



Children prepare for the Stand Together to Oppose Poverty campaigning event in Glasgow, UK.

## Oxfam GB partners believe these are essential for positive partnerships:

“Mutual concern for the work we do and shared values”

“Reciprocal learning”

“Advice and information exchange”

“Regular contact and feedback”

“Flexibility to change the strategy when needed”

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