

# WORKING TOGETHER

OXFAM'S PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Cover: Buton Island, Indonesia. Zafra her husband Misa harvesting seaweed which they have been growing.  
Photo: Suzi O'Keefe/Oxfam  
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OXFAM



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Partnerships lie at the core of how Oxfam understands the world and our role in working for change. We are pleased to share with you this summary of Oxfam's Partnership Principles. We hope that by setting out our partnership principles we can clarify, and be held to account for, the kinds of relationships we want to foster with different types of partners.

All of Oxfam's work in long-term development, humanitarian response and disaster prevention, and campaigns and advocacy will be guided by these principles. We welcome all opportunities to discuss with you our performance, and how we can improve.

## OXFAM IS PART OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

Oxfam aspires to make a sustained and significant positive impact on global poverty and injustice, and believes that it is only through the collective efforts of many actors that this goal can be achieved. We think of this as a 'global movement for change', which we believe is creating the conditions and structural changes necessary for effective, people-centred, sustainable change and development. As part of this movement, Oxfam works in a variety of partnerships in dozens of countries around the world and at global level.

The number of partners with whom Oxfam engages grows year by year. The key relationships we seek are those that most effectively address the root causes of poverty, vulnerability and injustice, and that help strengthen people as empowered agents of their own development.

Oxfam is privileged to be able to partner with thousands of local civil society organizations – organizations that we believe are crucial in supporting the actions of poor and marginalized people and communities in the development of lasting, locally-owned solutions; and in raising their diverse and locally-grounded voices for equitable development at home and worldwide.

The global movement for change is expanding and growing in strength every day with an ever-increasing diversity in social-change actors. Oxfam welcomes and engages with these diverse actors in a variety of ways, including long-term partnerships, shorter-term strategic alliances, one-on-one relationships and active participation in networks and coalitions.

As part of our reflections on partnership, we have considered our own contributions – in long-term development, humanitarian response, and campaign and advocacy work. Our aim is to bring value by:

- **helping to bring together different actors to work on common problems;**
- **supporting organizational and institutional capacity-strengthening;**
- **generating and sharing knowledge, whether produced at local or global levels;**
- **promoting innovation and alternative solutions that may be brought to scale;**
- **helping to hold duty-bearers to account for recognising, protecting and fulfilling the rights of women and men living with poverty and injustice.**



Rafiga Ahmedova, from Azerbaijan, holds up yellow onions harvested from her onion field in Barda. Photo: Kieran Doherty



## OXFAM AND PARTNERSHIP

Oxfam understands partnerships as mutually-empowering relationships, which are aware of power imbalances and focused on mutual growth, organizational development, institutional strengthening and above all, on achieving impact. We believe that programs implemented in partnership increase the collective knowledge, skills, reach and experience applied to an issue or challenge. Programs implemented in partnership are likely to be better at encouraging and enabling the real participation and investment of people living in poverty. Partnerships can be challenging, and we do make mistakes – but we strive to learn from these, in the hopes that our partnerships evolve and grow stronger.

## SIX PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Reflecting this understanding, we have developed a set of core Partnership Principles. At Oxfam, we strive to ensure that these principles underpin all our work – with local communities, with local civil society organisations, with other actors – both in funding and non-funding relationships. While differences in context may require different approaches, we strive to ensure that all of our work respects these six Partnership Principles:

- Shared vision and values.
- Complementarity of purpose and value added
- Autonomy and independence.
- Transparency and mutual accountability.
- Clarity on roles and responsibilities.
- Commitment to joint learning

### 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.**

While 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.**

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 Oxfam adds 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 in non-funding relationships with a variety of partners and allies.

Partnering processes must create opportunities for partners and 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.

### 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 our 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.

### 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. 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 the 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. We will support partners to develop and implement monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches that reinforce partners' accountability to their communities, giving women and men living in poverty 'voice' to provide feedback on partners' performance.

Left: Ethimilata Gabriel, 46, farmer and teacher with her students at Ngilima school in the Dungu area of the Democratic Republic of Congo Photo: Simon Rawles  
Below: Bolivia, South America. A boy holds up a tomato plant which he is about to plant on his family's camellone. Photo: Mark Chilvers



We will put in place feedback mechanisms that enable partners (and other stakeholders) to assess Oxfam's performance, 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 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 organisations being marginalized or sidelined, and will fulfil our commitment to strengthen partnerships with women's organizations, networks and movements.

### 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. Oxfam understands that the credibility and trust required to sustain healthy partnerships comes from good communication, competence and reliability.**

Oxfam and partners are the co-strategists of programs and activities on which they jointly work, though the extent to which they are co-owners of programs 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 will 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 our understanding of roles 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 towards strengthening and/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.

### 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.**

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.

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For further information on Oxfam's programme please e-mail [information@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:information@oxfaminternational.org)

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- Oxfam Japan ([www.oxfam.jp](http://www.oxfam.jp))
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