

OXFAM POLICY ON PROGRAM EVALUATION

Approved October 2013

Purpose

For Oxfam, evaluation is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation and results of development, humanitarian and campaign interventions (projects, programs, and advocacy initiatives) that considers their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability¹. Evaluation is an integral component of the learning cycle which is essential for maximizing Oxfam's effectiveness in achieving its mission. The purpose of this policy is to support strong and innovative evaluation practice across the confederation. This policy applies to all evaluations of programs² and projects³ which appear in Oxfam's strategic and operational plans.

Oxfam commits to undertake timely, relevant and credible analyses of the performance of our programs to inform the development of future programs and projects, help us to be accountable for the resources with which we have been entrusted and ensure that we are transparent in our program practice. Evaluation should consistently:

- improve the quality and impact of what we and our partners and allies do;
- enhance mutual accountability, transparency and learning between the communities, partners and allies with whom we work, ourselves and our donors,
- enhance the ability of those people whom we seek to benefit to create opportunities and means to hold us –and others- to account,
- use processes and outcomes to influence the practice and accountability of other actors in the development sector, including governments, private sector actors, other INGOs, and civil society organizations, and
- strengthen our credibility as an international non-governmental organization working in development.

An Approach Consistent with Oxfam Values

Oxfam is a confederation of 17 independent, non-governmental organizations working together with partners and allies around the world to achieve its vision of a just world without poverty. Oxfam is committed to a rights-based approach, addressing a wide range of development and humanitarian issues by seeking the transformation of unequal gender and power relations at the national, regional and international levels. As a rights-based organization, accountability, particularly to the communities we seek to serve, is of the highest importance to us. For Oxfam, accountability requires Oxfam to regularly and honestly assess the quality of its work, share and learn from its findings with primary stakeholders, and apply that learning in future work. At the same time, accountability demands that Oxfam build the capacity of partners so that they themselves develop more effective practice in evaluation.

¹ Oxfam does not have its own definitions of these evaluation terms; interested colleagues can access the OECD DAC glossary at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf>.

² **Program:** A set of strategically aligned, mutually reinforcing interventions – by Oxfam and others – that contributes to sustained, positive impact on poor people's lives. This definition was approved by EDs in 2007

³ **Project:** a set of activities or interventions with a well-defined target group and period for implementation aiming at achieving a set of outputs or outcomes that will contribute to bring about changes in people lives. They are designed and implemented by one or several partners, which might include Oxfam itself, and are aligned through outputs, outcomes or objectives to an overarching program. Funding is allocated to this level and usually has a contractual element to it, for which the recipient of the funding is accountable. It can cover any aspect (or combination) of our work – humanitarian response, campaigns or advocacy efforts, and long term development; it also can be oriented towards changes in policies, practices, ideas or beliefs. While projects may be designed and implemented independently for management reasons their mutual reinforcement also contributes to the strength of the Oxfam program.

We believe there is strength in the diversity of our membership and the range of our efforts, which are shaped by the complex and dynamic contexts within which we work. We acknowledge that evaluation is carried out in many different contexts, where knowledge and values are cultural, socially and temporally contingent and intertwined with power relations. We attempt to manage this complexity by our willingness to innovate, experiment, and adjust. We also recognize that there are many different evaluation designs (such as real-time evaluations, participatory evaluations and impact evaluations) and that the most appropriate type of evaluation in any given situation will depend on the context of the intervention, the objectives of the evaluation and the resources available.

This policy is therefore intended to establish a basic set of responsibilities and expectations, while leaving wide latitude on methods and approaches. In addition, Oxfam recognizes that we have a responsibility to promote processes of mutual learning and capacity building amongst ourselves and with partners on effective and empowering approaches to evaluation. Oxfam will finance this policy with a certain per cent of its funds dedicated exclusively to evaluation, taken from its overall commitment to invest a minimum five per cent (5%) of its program budgets to monitoring, evaluation, and learning by the end of the Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019.

Policy Elements

General

1. Ultimate responsibility for compliance with and revision of this policy rests with the Meeting of Executive Directors, operating under the oversight of the Board of Supervisors. The Boards of individual affiliates oversee its implementation by their affiliate. The Oxfam International Executive Director and the Executive Directors of individual affiliates are accountable for the policy, while the support and supervisory oversight of its implementation is housed in the Oxfam International Global Team or the corresponding senior management body in each affiliate.
2. Bearing in mind the criteria in point 4, all Oxfam programs and projects should include a monitoring and evaluation plan. These plans may range from simple top line reviews, to stakeholder reflections or more in-depth assessments. Within the operational plans, details should include a timetable for evaluations consistent with the expectations in this policy, the allocation of budgets for evaluation (including funds for translation as needed) and assignment of affiliate or Secretariat responsibility.
3. Responsibility for Oxfam evaluations rests with commissioning managers (or equivalent, according to affiliate structures); these people are Oxfam colleagues who are nominated expressly for the purpose of overseeing any particular evaluation process. A commissioning manager has considerable latitude to decide the need for and focus of an evaluation. Of course, it is necessary to balance the expectation that all programs will have a monitoring and evaluation plan with the reality of time and financial constraints. Therefore, there should be a strong rationale for doing each evaluation and it should be clear how the findings will be used to improve the quality of our programs. For that reason, Oxfam encourages evaluations to be undertaken at levels where findings will be most relevant.
4. When making decisions about evaluation priorities, managers should consider:
 - the overall cost of the program
 - the visibility and/or the risk associated with the program
 - the importance of systematically listening to and including program constituents (taking particular care to remove barriers to the participation of women, marginalized program participants and their communities) in the evaluation process (as appropriate)
 - the need to capture the challenges of transforming gender and power relations
 - the potential for scale-up, replication or leverage

- demands for accountability from stakeholders, including back donor requirements in direct financing and co-financing arrangements
- the need to comply with inter-agency agreements Oxfam has signed onto (e.g. the ICRC Code of Conduct and Sphere standards)

In addition, Oxfam staff should be open and responsive to emerging opportunities and requests for evaluative exercises, particularly requests from the organizations and communities with which we collaborate.

5. In order to ensure that we are accountable for the resources with which we have been entrusted, Oxfam is firmly committed to the following evaluation frequency:
 - For all programs with a time frame of 5 years or more, Oxfam will carry out a mid-term and a final, external⁴ evaluation at the end of the program.
 - If there are no specific donor requirements for project evaluations, projects with budgets over € 200,000 with a timeframe between 1-3 years will carry out at least one evaluation; the nature of the evaluation (mid-term or final) will be determined by its purpose.
 - Those projects with a timeframe higher than 3 years (at the same budget threshold) will be subject to both a mid-term and final external evaluation.

Finally, Oxfam encourages teams to evaluate all programs or projects where there is significant potential for learning, scale up or leverage, no matter the timeframe or budget threshold, especially those that are high profile, complex, innovative or risky in nature.

The operational guidelines for implementation of this policy are available in a separate document.

6. In the specific case of final evaluations, the process should include an assessment of:
 - Progress towards a program's or projects outcomes or impact (*Impact*);
 - the reasons behind the achievement (or not) of objectives (e.g. if a program or project is not achieving objectives, whether the problem rests in the theory of change, or with difficulties in implementation [including the institutional context], and whether these are leading to unintended [positive or negative] consequences) (*Effectiveness*);
 - whether the objectives are ultimately contributing to the realization of Oxfam's mission (*Effectiveness*);
 - Oxfam's contribution and value-added (*Effectiveness*);
 - the extent to which the intervention is suited to the priorities and policies of the people and communities it is intended to benefit, with specific reference to the experiences and opinions of women and other marginalized groups (*Relevance*);
 - the degree to which the financial resources of the project or program have been used economically and efficiently (*Efficiency*); and
 - Conditions and choices for exiting, scaling up, handover or other types of transitions (*Sustainability*).

The breadth and depth of any evaluation (including the choice of the criteria to consider in its design) should be commensurate with the size and strategic value of the program and, therefore, will depend on its objectives and the resources available.

⁴Oxfam agrees that external evaluations can be carried out by evaluators who are external to Oxfam or by Oxfam staff who are external to the implementing affiliate. Country leadership teams will assess which external modality best fits the situation, based on evaluation needs, donor requirements and cost effectiveness. Further, Oxfam considers that in the case of resource constraints, internal evaluations are acceptable alternatives when the teams consist of internal affiliate staff who are external to the implementing team. In all cases, appropriate processes to choose evaluators must be followed.

7. Oxfam's evaluation processes (from the terms of reference, through the process of collecting information up to the development and presentation of findings) must reflect our values, including the value placed on primary stakeholder participation and the importance of transforming unequal gender and power relations.
8. All evaluations should be carried out under the highest ethical and professional standards, as espoused by numerous evaluation associations⁵. Oxfam is committed to ensuring that people who participate in evaluation processes are fully aware of the purposes of the evaluation and how their input will be used.

In order to strengthen evaluation quality, Oxfam will emphasize the development of clear terms of reference, appropriate and transparent processes to choose the evaluators⁶, coherence in the evaluation design and data collection, the clarity of the final report, the preparation of the management response, and the distribution and use of the evaluation findings. The Oxfam Secretariat and/or the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning staff of Oxfam affiliates can be asked to provide technical support throughout the process, particularly for evaluations mandated by the respective Oxfam Boards or the Executive Directors, to ensure quality control.

9. Evaluations can be formative or centered on outcomes or longer term impacts, developmental or retrospective; they can be comprehensive or only consider areas of particular promise or concern. In all cases, evaluations should be credible, focused, strategic and cost effective. The evaluation process and findings should be outlined in a final report, which should be accompanied by an executive summary; that summary should clearly highlight all the key findings. In both documents, the conclusions should be presented in a way that allows them to be easily understood (including translations as appropriate), owned and acted upon.
10. The commissioning manager is responsible for reviewing the quality of the evaluation process and product(s) and determining that the evaluation has complied with the terms of reference, as well as the ethical and professional standards referred to above. Results, including recommendations, should be shared and processed with primary stakeholders. At a minimum, the quality of the report will be assessed according to its validity, credibility and usefulness.
11. All evaluation reports must be accompanied by a management response that communicates careful consideration of the evaluation's findings and recommendations, detailed actions that will be taken to respond to these findings, and offers an opportunity to comment on the utility of the evaluation process and final report. The commissioning manager is responsible for ensuring that a management response is prepared within a reasonably brief period of time after the finalization of the evaluation document or other products.

Transparency

12. To ensure transparency to Oxfam's constituents, Oxfam will routinely place the executive summary and management response for all evaluations of Oxfam programs or projects on www.oxfam.org and/or the affiliate's website. Barring unacceptable risk or repercussions to staff, partners or program efforts, the complete reports from all final program or project evaluations will be posted on those websites.

⁵Standards have been established and are often promoted by the American Evaluation Association, African Evaluation Association, Australasian Evaluation Society, Canadian Evaluation Association, European Evaluation Society, UK Evaluation Society, OECD-DAC Evaluation Network, and ALNAP. Currently, professional standards are evolving; with continued engagement in the appropriate associations, Oxfam staff will support best practice.

⁶ Appropriate processes should be in place whether the evaluators are external to Oxfam, external to the affiliate or internal affiliate staff (though external to the implementing team).

Learning from the Diversity of Affiliate Experience

Routine sharing and discussion of evaluation practice and results is essential for mutual accountability within the confederation and accelerated learning for both Oxfam and the organizations and people with whom it works. To this end:

13. Every 2 years, Oxfam will undertake a meta-review⁷ of key Oxfam evaluations (both external and internal, and will include meta-evaluations⁸) completed during that timeframe. A consolidated document will be prepared and shared with the Global Team and the Oxfam International Executive Directors (or their affiliate equivalents) for discussion, and will be posted on the confederation website, along with any action points emerging from Global Team and/or Oxfam International Executive Directors discussion. In the intervening years, every effort will be made to support the circulation of evaluations and/or other learning documents to appropriate teams.
14. All affiliates are expected to post evaluations in full on Oxfam's internal website as one channel through which Oxfam's evaluation investments contribute to broader learning on Oxfam program priorities.
15. Oxfam will continue to engage with the broader humanitarian, development, campaign and evaluation communities and will make an effort to publish results in peer-reviewed and other professional journals and present at conferences and workshops.

Monitoring and Evaluation of this Policy

16. With input from affiliate MEL staff, the Oxfam International MEL Coordinator will monitor the implementation of this policy from the date of approval by the Board of Directors.
17. The users' assessment of its clarity and usefulness will be reviewed after 2 years with a view to update and improve the policy.

⁷ In this situation, a meta-review is a summary that distills key lessons and identifies recurring or systemic strengths or challenges that merit special attention.

⁸ A meta-evaluation is an evaluation of evaluation documents to assess their quality

Annex - Humanitarian Evaluation Policy

Due to the short-term nature of humanitarian interventions with high staff turn-over and the fact that even six-month programs almost always have budgets over € 200,000, an annex with evaluation requirements specifically for humanitarian programs is needed. Timing of evaluations stated in the policy is also not appropriate for rapid or slow onset emergency programs as these are often of one to 18 months duration. After this they become more of a chronic program that may still be under the humanitarian goal but could follow the overall policy. Oxfam's Minimum Standards for Humanitarian programs already include details about evaluative processes such as Real Time Evaluations and end of program/project evaluations and these standards should be considered part of the evaluation policy.

Note: this policy is for programs with one or more supporting projects

Categorization (as per the Oxfam Humanitarian Dossier)

Category 1 – regional or cross-country, over 2,000,000 people affected and high impact on population - 50% of affected are vulnerable groups

Guidance: The budget will always be over 1 million Euros and the program longer than 12 months

Category 2 – single country (or limited geographical area), 200,000 – 2,000,000 people affected and high/moderate impact – about 35% of affected are vulnerable groups⁹

Guidance: The budget will always be over 1 million Euros but the program will not necessarily be over 12 months

Category 3 – small, localized, less than 200,000 people affected

Guidance: The budget may/may not be over one million Euros but the program is almost always 6-12 months

1. Real Time Evaluations (RTEs)

All rapid onset emergencies (category 2 and 1) should carry out an RTE at around six to eight weeks mark after the onset of the disaster or (if this does not coincide with the start of the disaster) after the start of the response. Large slow onset emergencies (category 2 and 1) should carry out an RTE at around ten to twelve weeks mark after the beginning of the response. For category 3 – an RTE-lite or an RTE with selected benchmarks should be carried out as best practice by (external to program) staff at about six weeks with a management plan as an outcome.

The Minimum Standards details how these will be carried out and include the benchmarks to be used. An action plan with names against activities and a country leadership team mechanism to ensure that this happens should be the outcome of the Day of Reflection. All RTE reports should be posted on Oxfam's internal internet (unless there are security concerns) within six weeks of completion and signed-off by the country leadership team. RTE reports are considered to be internal documents and are not posted on external websites.

2. Final/impact/outcome Evaluation

All Category 1 and Category 2 programs should have dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning staff and at least 5% of the budget dedicated to MEAL. In Category 3 programs, there should be a dedicated focal point for MEAL and an allocated percentage corresponding to the overall budget.

If there are no donor requirements¹⁰, then programs under a year should carry out a self-evaluated after-action review (either joint or per affiliate). This should be in the last two months of the program.

⁹Oxfam Humanitarian Dossier

The OECD DAC¹¹ adjusted humanitarian criteria are the most commonly used.

If there are no donor requirements, then programs over a year should carry out an outcome or impact¹² evaluation (preferably as a joint exercise or per affiliate). In these longer-term programs (especially if two years or over) a mid-term evaluation at the end of the first year should be followed by a final evaluation during the last two months before the program ends, in order to utilize the learning.

In category 3 responses where there are no donor evaluation requirements, the program should carry out a self-evaluated after-action review¹³ involving partners.

All programs must hold a learning event before moving towards recovery (including affected population consultation). Lessons learnt from the first phase should be factored into the program plan for the next phase.

¹⁰ Different affiliate donors will have different affiliate evaluation policies, which should be adhered to.

¹¹ OECD DAC is the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

¹² Impact: a sustained, significant, positive change in both the material condition and social position of affected populations

¹³ A review (including field visits) led by a facilitator who assists the team to critically appraise their program and to identify lessons learnt.