

# **Oxfam GB in Partnership**

**A Global Strategic Evaluation  
2006/07**

**Full Report**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Executive summary

### 1) Introduction to the study and debates

Through 2006–2007 Oxfam GB undertook a global strategic evaluation of how it works in partnership. An independent team of evaluators drawn from four continents conducted the review. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- to understand how partners view their relationship with Oxfam GB;
- to identify what is working well and what needs to change in the way Oxfam GB works with all partners;
- to understand how Oxfam GB's approach to partnership is changing and to explore new and emerging approaches to partnership.

For the purpose of the report and study, 'partner' was taken to mean any organisation Oxfam GB was funding between 2005 and 2007. This amounted to almost 1500 organisations. Eleven partnership case studies were chosen to cover a range of types and issues, including one from each region and one each from Oxfam GB's humanitarian and campaign programmes. In addition a survey was sent to 852 of the partners for whom Oxfam GB had email addresses. There was a 47 per cent response rate.

A literature review, staff workshops, and key informant interviews helped establish five key debates that the study attempts to explore:

1. **What is Oxfam GB's added value beyond 'donorship'?** In a globalising world where national NGOs are beginning to access funding directly, what is Oxfam GB's added value to partners beyond being a donor?
2. **How deep should Oxfam GB go?** Growing cynicism in the literature around the use of the term 'partnership' raises the question: what do we mean by partnership and what kind of collaboration is 'best'? Should Oxfam GB always seek 'full' partnership – with the associated costs entailed – or are there other approaches?
3. **How can Oxfam GB reduce the burden of partner accountability?** As concerns about fraud and impact have placed tighter 'results-based management' requirements on partners, how can Oxfam GB ensure accountability demands add value and do not become a burden?
4. **How does Oxfam GB strike a balance between empowerment and compliance?** In an age of risk management and performance control, how does Oxfam GB balance its need to control with its desire to empower?
5. **How can Oxfam GB remain involved without taking the space?** How does Oxfam GB ensure that its relationships are transformational and create lasting, positive changes in the institutions with which it engages, while ensuring that it does not 'take the space' of smaller national organisations?

These questions are considered throughout the evaluation. Insight into the workings of a variety of partnerships drawn from the evaluation results are summarised in Sections 3 to 8 and conclusions are found in Sections 9 and 10.

## 2) Complementarity and added value

Complementarity is central to Oxfam GB's principles of partnership, and this section focuses on partners' perceptions of Oxfam GB's added value. While funding support is central, 69 per cent of partners feel that Oxfam GB is more than just a donor. Four key areas are identified where Oxfam GB brings added value.

- **Administrative and management capacity** – 60 per cent of partners said they receive dedicated time and resources from Oxfam GB for capacity-building. This is greatly appreciated, but there was a call for more support to help build partners' financial independence and reduce their reliance on Oxfam GB. Building the institutions of civil society (and pro-poor government and private sector) is one of the driving motives for working through partners and is central to Oxfam GB's model of sustainable change. It is therefore suggested that a capacity-building strategy is clearly integrated into all partnership agreements.
- **Advocacy, influencing, and credibility** – Oxfam GB's support with advocacy is highly appreciated and should be continued. Few other international NGOs provide the same degree of assistance as Oxfam GB. Partners also greatly appreciate the credibility that association with Oxfam GB brings. There is sometimes weak cross-over between the development and campaigns work in Oxfam country programmes. There were calls for Oxfam GB to engage more with partner-identified country advocacy priorities rather than international objectives.
- **Information, knowledge, and networking** – Oxfam GB is valued for helping partners to make connections and access information, but more could be done. A systematic approach to relationship management, and the development of thematic newsletters and updates and distribution of key resources and publications would go a long way to improving contact and information flows. Involvement of partners in joint events would also go some way to make partners feel more part of an Oxfam GB family and community. There may be lessons from the way Novib supports its counterparts from a distance.
- **Facilitation, reflection, and moral support** – partners generally identify Oxfam GB as having a facilitative and listening approach to partnership with a strong emphasis on coaching, reflection, and mentoring. Oxfam GB's moral support and encouragement is also greatly valued.

The Project Officer (PO) is key to building strong partnerships, especially those who go beyond an audit and monitoring role. In most situations POs are greatly respected and are doing an excellent and often complex and difficult job. Increasingly they also act as organisational development consultants, advisors, and coaches. Rarely are their 'softer' skills explicitly supported in training or performance review. There is sometimes little to guide the new PO in partnership style, other than observing other staff members around them.

Partners highly value the support of the POs during their field visits. These provide an opportunity for rich learning and reflection. Most partners want more of these visits and want them to be longer. They feel these visits are being eroded by time spent on internal management and accountability systems, and ask for them to be protected. Related to this, several partners also feel that Oxfam GB staff sometimes lack understanding of poverty on the ground and call on them to spend more time in communities, understanding partners' perceptions of the causes of poverty.

### 3) Clarity around roles and responsibilities

Results of the survey reveal that 78 per cent of partners agree there is clarity over the roles and responsibilities of each party. Suggestions about how Oxfam GB can improve its clarity around roles and responsibilities include:

- more consistency in its policies and strategies (25 per cent of established partners say that Oxfam GB changes its mind about what it asks of its partners as a result of its own changing priorities;
- stronger internal co-ordination;
- fewer staff changes (re-investing in new relationships when existing Oxfam GB staff leave is a major cost for partners, so longer-term contracts and longer hand-over periods might help).

The section goes on to introduce a range of partnership typologies and a simple framework for considering the breadth of collaboration (i.e. number of functions which are co-operative) and the depth of joint decision-making (i.e. how much autonomy each side has to act independently). It is important to recognise the potential costs and risks of an intense (deep and broad) partnership model while also ensuring key decisions are jointly made. It is also important to clarify what degree of influence each party will have over different decision-making domains early on, in order to reduce the potential for conflict. Several management and organisational structures for partnership are reviewed.

### 4) Partner accountability to Oxfam GB

Most of the partners involved in the in-depth evaluations feel that Oxfam GB's reporting requirements are less onerous and more reasonable than those of most funders. Most also see them as a necessary and reasonable requirement in our modern 'high accountability' funding environment. A few said they add value to the management of their projects by providing a chance to reflect on their work. Some also mentioned improvements in their own accountability practices from working with Oxfam GB.

However, there is no doubt that reporting requirements feel heavy and are costly, taking approximately 4–5 days per month for each partner staff member. Some partners suggested it takes 30 per cent of their time, and many work long hours to complete them. Reporting also consumes large amounts of Oxfam GB PO time. There was a call for 'decent' requirements and the following suggestions were made:

- **Increase responsiveness and feedback** – reporting without feedback has limited learning value and gives the impression that the time spent reporting is not useful. In the best-case scenario, written reports are a catalyst for verbal dialogue.
- **Use verbal debriefs and field visits** – most partners deemed these to be more valuable than written forms of reflection, particularly those from cultures with a more oral tradition. Field visits were also identified as a useful time to support partners with financial reporting and capacity-building.
- **Improve report usability and consistency** – all partners prefer short, consistent, easy-to-complete formats with clear guidelines on what information is needed, for whom, and why.

- **Integrate financial and narrative reporting** –and ensure programme and finance staff are working in a ‘joined-up’ manner.

In two of the case-study partnerships, Oxfam GB has provided grants for partners to employ dedicated programme or finance accountability staff. Some Oxfam GB offices work through finance outreach staff who provide on-the-job training at the partner’s office. Two offices have also out-sourced capacity-building to specialised organisational development companies. The PINORD partnership provides an example of a centralised capacity-building resource for several partners. Several Oxfam GB finance managers called for a clearer standardisation of accountability levels and systems so that partners know what to aspire to and what targets to hit. Such a model has been piloted in Pakistan and is based around silver, gold, and platinum levels of capacity. This framework highlights the value in discussing capacity-building issues at the beginning of a partnership and is useful as a catalyst for discussion and planning rather than as a rigid set of standards.

## 5) Oxfam GB’s accountability to partners

Increasing Oxfam GB’s accountability to its partners is one of the main ways of addressing power imbalances in partnerships. Only 54 per cent of respondents agree that Oxfam GB is accountable to them. Partners called for:

- a review of some of the stronger language and clauses in their contracts;
- two-sided agreements (with both partners’ logos);
- clarity over what the partner can expect to receive in addition to funding, and clarity on what behaviours it can expect from Oxfam GB;
- guidance on how to hold Oxfam GB to account.

The following were discussed as ways to improve accountability:

- **Paying on time** – only 66 per cent of respondents agree that Oxfam GB delivers when it says it will. It is important that Oxfam GB fulfils its primary commitment.
- **Mutual accountability charters** – these provide the formal framework for open dialogue about expectations and commitments.
- **360 degree feedback** – 59 per cent of the survey respondents agree that Oxfam GB responds well to constructive criticism, but a regular performance review, similar to those held for staff, would be a useful discipline. The case-study workshops provided this opportunity for the first time for many of the partnerships and were very well-received.
- **Clear commitment and fair termination** – one of partners’ biggest concerns is that they do not know how long their relationships with Oxfam GB will last. This is a particular concern for small organisations (of whom less than half are clear on the duration of their partnership with Oxfam GB). Lack of consultation around exit strategies is also a concern. Developing possible scenarios for partners’ exit and independence at an early stage would allay fears and help them to plan for the future.
- **Complaints procedure and dispute-resolution process** – partners would welcome a formal complaints procedure but feel it is more important to have systems to deal with problems before they escalate. Mechanisms include:

- ensuring partners know how to contact the PO's manager or director independently;
- training internal Oxfam GB mediation 'first-aiders' who can help at an early stage of partnership conflict and provide ongoing support to relationship-building;
- access to external facilitators for more complex projects and conflicts.

## 6) Equity and shared decision-making

Decision-making is generally quicker and easier when there are fewer people involved. However, it is important that those decisions that have a significant bearing on partners are made jointly, or at least with clear influence from the partner. The existence of joint decision-making processes is a key indicator of partnership relationship quality.

Twenty per cent of partners think that Oxfam GB is in the driving seat of their partnership and that they have little decision-making control. Twenty-eight per cent feel that they have to conform to Oxfam GB's working style. Fourteen per cent said that Oxfam GB asks them to do things they do not agree with. The case studies also revealed two partnerships – one a humanitarian project and the other a UK campaigns partnership – where partners are very bitter about skewed decision-making processes and Oxfam GB's level of dominance. Several areas were identified to help equalise power:

- **Softening dominant cultures and attitudes** – Oxfam GB is a powerful organisation staffed by well-educated, confident people, and in joint operational work it can easily slip into a dominant role, particularly in campaigns work and sometimes in humanitarian work. There is little excuse for being defeatist over the power-inequality issue. Oxfam GB may have a lot of money and influence, but working in a joint way – if that is what it decides it wants to do – is as much an attitude and choice as it is about balance of resources.
- **Transparency and information-sharing** – 26 per cent of partners think that Oxfam GB does not consult them before making big changes to their strategy and ways of working. In particular there was a big call to demystify Oxfam GB's structures and decision-making processes – particularly around funding.
- **Sharing risks and rewards** – several comments were made by partners about Oxfam's perceived self-interest in media work (and occasionally taking centre stage in humanitarian work). One case-study partner felt the risks and dangers in their advocacy work were not shared by Oxfam GB;
- **Sharing and recognising real costs** – several partners incur unpaid organisational costs as a result of delivering Oxfam GB projects. Sometimes these costs are borne personally by partner staff in unpaid overtime and sometimes the costs are borne by the organisations. While a degree of partner co-financing is not a bad thing, it should at least be fully acknowledged. Oxfam GB should encourage partner organisations to develop good practices such as full cost accounting, and recognising the hidden costs they incur. If not, there is a risk that organisations will struggle so much that their capacity and resilience never develops.

## 7) Shared values, cultures, rapport, and trust

Seventy-four per cent of survey respondents agree that Oxfam GB shares and respects their values and beliefs, and 86 per cent of partners feel a strong sense of solidarity with Oxfam GB. Several partners commented that this has contributed to the strength of their relationship. Fifty-six per cent of respondents feel that Oxfam GB has been positively influenced by their values.

Out of the 11 partnerships explored through the case studies, Oxfam GB's organisational rapport was found to be particularly strong with two medium-sized church organisations in Honduras and Malawi in which there was a strong, shared culture of personal commitment and clear, equitable (or 'horizontal') relations. Differences in organisational culture between Oxfam GB and its partners tend to revolve around:

- different or unexplored theories and models of development, such as how to work with the government or the private sector;
- different expectations around partnership styles, particularly around how decisions are made and the levels of influence of each party;
- differences in professional styles, particularly bureaucratic 'clashes' with other large organisations (Oxfam GB is sometimes seen, particularly by smaller organisations, to be very document-driven and British in culture).

Over 47 comments were received in the survey on the importance of high-quality relationships. Trust is seen as the pillar of good communication and the 'soil' or social capital of successful partnership – increasing the benefits of co-operative work and reducing its costs.

In some cases trust has been built on the basis of existing personal relations and mutual respect, but generally trust has to be earned and time is the key investment: time spent planning, working together, reviewing and reflecting together. The following are also useful:

- **Being polite, timely, and choosing words carefully** – especially in correspondence;
- **Sharing problems** – 79 per cent of survey respondents agree that they find it easy to share their problems with Oxfam GB and several said they could have frank exchanges without fear. Honduras offered an open forum where solutions could be found jointly;
- **Talking about values, vision, and approach** – few Oxfam GB partnerships have had an explicit discussion about their values. However, where it has been tried, it has been worthwhile. Often the definitions of particular words need to be fully explored as they can seem nebulous. There is often greater synergy around higher-level values and vision than around lower-level issues such as theories of change or cultures of working.

It is important to remember that partnerships are based on a team of individuals who work with each other across organisations. Personal relationships are central to Oxfam GB's inter-organisational partnerships. It may be that management mechanisms in Oxfam GB should give more emphasis to facilitating personal relations between organisations while seeking to mitigate the vulnerabilities this might cause (particularly problems with institutionalising partnerships).

While Oxfam GB POs do an exceptionally difficult and diverse job very well, there seems to be no clear framework of professional development for supporting the interpersonal skills on which they so rely. There is room for a more systematic approach, perhaps including a set of relationship competencies, training resources, and a guidance series. Secondments were also mentioned as a way to build organisational collaboration.

## 8) Emerging partnership models

Insights into opportunities for new forms of partnership emerged through this study:

- **Facilitating multiple partnerships** – more and more, Oxfam GB is finding itself in multi-pronged partnerships of community, NGO, government, and other international NGOs. The model of PINORD shows how Oxfam GB can begin to support groups of partners – thus reducing individual transaction costs – while also building associations and alliances. This creates economies of scale for support and capacity-building, and ensures Oxfam GB is facilitating co-operation not competition.
- **Building smaller organisations** – Oxfam GB is highly respected in the development sector for the intensive capacity-building and mentoring it gives to building nascent organisations and supporting emerging civil-society leaders. However, there are questions about how it safeguards the investments that it makes. Models of social venture capitalism may be useful for the future.
- **Working with government** – Oxfam GB has been working with local-level government for decades, and opportunities are emerging to work with national government as advisors. This is very much about working towards attitudinal behaviour change – using organisational consulting and coaching skills.
- **Private-sector partnerships** – Oxfam GB is already advanced in its facilitation of market access for small-scale producers. On a larger scale, there are opportunities to support businesses indirectly, through business associations, services, and trade links, such as Fairtrade.

## 9) Making strategic choices for partnership

In conclusion the study returns to some of the key debates:

### Beyond donorship

- Partners appreciate Oxfam GB's support in advocacy and want Oxfam GB to act with them, putting its credibility and influence behind their issues – particularly at a national level.
- Partners see Oxfam GB as a connector: linking them to knowledge, ideas, and networks of organisations across the world.
- Partners want Oxfam GB to commit to long-term strategic partnerships and to help them become independent.

### How deep to go

- Oxfam GB's relationships with partners are complex as they include multiple forms of collaboration. For example, a partnership may be based on a sub-



contracting model, but have joint venture elements (e.g. around brand ownership) and network elements too (e.g. around advocacy).

- Shared decision-making can take many forms, and an approach based on complete consensus and full participation on every issue is not always cost-effective or useful. Key to managing expectations and avoiding conflict is early clarification of decision-making domains.
- It is important that partnerships do not 'run before they can walk' and that appropriate time and energy is put into building the 'relationship capital' on which partnerships depend.
- Management costs of collaboration can be reduced by a creating a pool of trust, respect, and mutual personal commitment.

### **Reducing the burden of accountability**

- Partners emphasise the value of face-to-face reflection, review, and dialogue but gain less value from written processes. They ask that PO time spent in the field reflecting and listening with partners be preserved.
- Reporting only becomes useful as a learning experience when it catalyses feedback and ideally dialogue.
- Time spent building relationships and understanding between Oxfam GB and its partners is critical to enabling mutual accountability.

### **Empowering rather than controlling**

- Upward accountability mechanisms – such as 360 degree feedback and mutual accountability charters – balance downward accountability and increase the value and sense of fairness in the whole accountability system.
- Oxfam GB is perceived as dominant in certain settings and there are calls for it to co-operate rather than compete.
- Being dominant is more about attitude than about actual power. Developing 'horizontal' relationships is mainly a choice and managers need to take the lead.
- A wide variety of best practice exists in Oxfam GB for equalising relationships. They include softening dominant cultures and attitudes, demystifying Oxfam GB's structures and funding processes, sharing the media limelight, and recognising the hidden financial contributions partners often make to projects by not practising full-cost accounting.

### **Leading from behind and not taking the space**

- Partners are calling for Oxfam GB to remain in the field, working as a facilitator, coach, and supporter, but taking care not to dominate, compete, or take their space.
- Oxfam GB has an excellent track-record of supporting others to become leaders in development. At the heart of this process lie Oxfam GB's Project Officers. They are able contract managers but are also adept as facilitators: e.g. leading participatory organisational assessments, facilitating strategic advocacy reviews, mentoring local leaders, and advising organisations.
- Even if funds drop, Oxfam GB's influence can continue, based less on how rich Oxfam GB is, but on how respected it has become.
- Continuing to build a participatory partnership culture requires committed leadership, rewards for partnership performance, investment in skills, and most of all: staff time.

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## 1 Introduction

Oxfam GB has always worked with partners and always believed them to be intrinsic to achieving its aims.<sup>1</sup> Partnership has been a much-debated topic in Oxfam for many years. A major strategic review of Oxfam GB's work in 1998 ('Setting the Course for the Twenty-First Century') laid down a number of challenges, including listening to partners more, helping them promote themselves and become independent, and helping partners hold funders and Oxfam GB to account.<sup>2</sup> Almost ten years on, these empowering ideals still present several challenges for Oxfam GB and raise questions about how it collaborates and builds relationships with others.

Between 2006 and 2007 Oxfam GB undertook this global strategic evaluation<sup>3</sup> of how it works in partnership. An external team of evaluators from Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe carried out 11 case studies of partnerships from around the world. They held a series of partner review workshops, interviewed over 50 members of Oxfam GB staff at all levels, and conducted an anonymous survey of almost 400 partners. The study aimed to feed into the practical formulation of a new Oxfam GB partnership policy and to:

- understand how its funded partners view their relationship with Oxfam GB;
- identify what is working well and what needs to change in the way Oxfam GB works with funded partners;
- understand how Oxfam GB's approach to partnership is changing and to explore new and emerging approaches to partnership (see Annex 1 for more details of the terms of reference).

This report documents the results of the study. It includes partners' own words about their experience of the partnering process and it reveals some of the vital ingredients to building strong and transformational relationships. It also identifies the choices and challenges that Oxfam GB faces as it continues to realise the potential of partnership.

The study defines a 'partner' as any organisation that works with Oxfam GB to help it achieve its aims, whether from civil society, government, or business. This study focuses only on Oxfam GB's 1450 funded and sub-contracted partners which form the majority of its partners.

This report is structured to explore the practical lessons Oxfam GB has learned in relation to five possible partnership policy principles (Sections 3 to 8). In so doing it also explores five enduring partnership-related debates that are relevant to all international NGOs (described in Sections 1.1.1 to 1.1.5).

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'partnership' covers a wide range of relationships between Oxfam GB and civil-society, government, and private-sector organisations. Oxfam GB sees partnerships as being critical to the achievement of its mandate: it works *with others* to overcome poverty and suffering.

<sup>2</sup> 'Headlines' from 'Setting the Course for the Twenty-First Century', Oxfam GB Strategic Review, July 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Strategic evaluations are cross-programme *process* evaluations that provide point-in-time, in-depth reflections on particular areas of Oxfam GB's work. They are an important part of Oxfam GB's new Learning and Accountability system. The evaluations aim to create a shared organisational vision of what constitutes 'good practice' within a programme area, and influence the direction of our programmes based on an improved understanding of what does and doesn't work.

## 1.1 Key partnership debates

### 1.1.1 What added value beyond 'donorship'?

In a globalising world where national NGOs are beginning to access funding directly, what is Oxfam GB's added value to partners beyond being a donor?

Many national NGOs are becoming well-established; have highly developed accountability systems; and are able to access funding from donor governments directly. Donors are able to 'by-pass the middleman', which means there is increasing pressure for international NGOs, such as Oxfam GB, to show added value in the field. Glorified funding relationships are not enough any more, and donors and partners alike are beginning to call for a clearer sense of how Oxfam GB creates space for these NGOs and complements what they do. Oxfam GB clearly has an important role as a funder, managing and distributing more funds to partners in developing countries per year than any other British NGO. But how else does Oxfam GB help partners to carry out their work, and how do Oxfam GB and its partners work together to deliver more than the sum of the parts?

Partners had a lot to say on the topic and these questions are considered in Section 2, together with Oxfam GB's partnership principle around 'complementarity and added value'.

### 1.1.2 How deep to go?

Growing cynicism around the use of the term 'partnership' in the literature has led Oxfam GB to ask what kind of collaboration is 'best.' Should Oxfam GB always seek 'true' partnership or are there composites that are more fit-for-purpose?

The work of Alan Fowler summarises a growing cynicism with the term 'partnership' and the dilution of its original pure meaning derived from the 1970s definition as solidarity and mutuality.<sup>4</sup> Now it has become synonymous with any collaboration or sub-contractual relationship. This, he and others claim, has created a decade of unmet expectations and disillusionment, particularly for southern NGOs.

As a result there is a great struggle in the literature to try and create typologies of the different types of partnership. Some focus on the characteristics of the individual organisations; some on the purpose of the partnership; and others on the nature of the relationship. They are varyingly useful, and much depends on the questions they are trying to solve and for whom they are intended.

The technical definition of 'partnership' comes from business use and is a 'legal contract entered into by two or more persons in which each agrees to furnish a part of the capital and labour for a business enterprise, and by which each shares a fixed proportion of profits and losses'. However, its use in non-business settings, particularly over the last 15 years, has expanded its definition to mean also any 'relationship between individuals or groups that is characterised by mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a specified goal'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A. Fowler (2000) 'Negotiating NGO Relationships', Oxford: INTRAC, Occasional Paper Series No. 32. A complementary piece is A. Fowler (1998) 'Authentic NGDO partnerships in the new policy agenda for international aid: dead end or light ahead?', *Development and Change* 29 (1): 137–59. See also the introduction to *IDS Bulletin* 31(3), edited by Fowler. A useful overview of the same debate is also provided by Katharine Welle, SOAS 2001 (with a water-issues perspective).

<sup>5</sup> Both definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary.

Oxfam GB's own typology centres on three forms:

- project partnerships
- strategic partnerships
- alliances.

This reflects the prominent partnership models in the three main areas of programme work: humanitarian, development, and campaigns. In Section 4 the report discusses partnership models and structures and considers the costs and benefits of different approaches. This helps feed into a discussion of how well Oxfam GB is doing with respect to its partnership principle on 'clarity around role and responsibilities'.

### 1.1.3 Reducing the burden of partner accountability

As concerns about fraud and impact have placed tighter 'results-based management' requirements on partners, how can Oxfam GB reduce the burden of accountability on its partners?

In the last ten years the pressure for accountability has intensified. As governments committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, so they and their citizens demanded more proof that aid will be spent responsibly and will deliver impact. Several high-profile frauds in the USA; new changes in the UK Charity Commission law, and greater competition for funding continue to turn up the pressure on all international development NGOs. Several of Oxfam GB's internal financial audit reports emphasise weaknesses and the need for systems of tighter accountability to ensure compliance in this more stringent environment, to protect against fraud and to reduce the organisation's risk.<sup>6</sup> This in turn has prompted Oxfam GB, like all other international NGOs, to adopt results-based management' tools (e.g. logframes, performance indicators, and project-cycle management) to drive better management and performance but also control how money is spent.

The fiercest critics of the aid system suggest that these demands on partners to be accountable to funders are too high. Tina Wallace in her book *The Aid Chain*<sup>7</sup> makes three assertions about the culture of results-based management and upward accountability. The first is that learning to use the tools of results-based management is complex and time-consuming for Southern NGOs and takes a great deal of training and resources. There is an assumption that the tools will be useful, but most NGOs only see them as useful in gaining access to funding from donors.

Second, the time spent on these tools takes away from attention to development work such as better engaging with local people, developing their own skills and confidence, and trying to understand better the complex and hierarchical nature of communities and development problems. Third, to focus on pre-set indicators in logframes biases the reporting towards showing how indicators have been met, rather than learning from experience. The realities of fieldwork do not always fit easily into the planning and reporting formats.

*The Aid Chain*, and other publications, also argue that with dwindling NGO funding resources, more and more of partners' and Oxfam GB's money is being taken up with processes and procedures that are essentially wasteful, based on mistrust, and of limited value to poor people. A quotation from *The Aid Chain* summarises this:

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<sup>6</sup> 'Project Partner Relationship Management', Internal Audit Report No. 216, Kevin Rodd, July 2005; Project Partner Relationship Management No.5', summary of findings on Project Partner Relationship Management from internal audits undertaken during 2005/06, David Bateman.

<sup>7</sup> T. Wallace (2006) *The Aid Chain: Coercion and Commitment in Development NGOs*, Bourton-on-Dunsmore: ITDG.



*‘the pressure for upward compliance and accountability undermine many aspects of the partnerships that INGOs seek out and crave to develop with southern aid agencies...the disconnect between the work that development requires – often slow, building trust over time, in the complex context of entrenched and deep poverty and inequality – and the paper trail that is self reinforcing was evident in many interviews.’<sup>8</sup>*

How can Oxfam GB ensure that accountability systems are only as resource-intensive as they need to be? And how can it ensure that they encourage learning and problem-solving, rather than detract from them? Oxfam GB’s experience of developing fair but sufficient levels of accountability (a further partnership principle) is discussed in Section 5.

#### **1.1.4 Striking a balance between empowerment and compliance**

In an age of risk management and compliance, how does Oxfam GB balance its need to control with its desire to empower partners? How does Oxfam GB ensure that it is also accountable to its partners?

The tension between downward and upward accountability is the subject of perhaps the longest-running debate in the literature on development and partnership.<sup>9</sup> How does Oxfam GB balance the need for upward accountability in a more critical funding regime with the desire for downward accountability; providing partners with the space and flexibility to work with creative autonomy to find solutions to complex and difficult problems? There is a concern that partnerships may be becoming more sub-contractual in nature. Partners may become agents of international NGOs rather than agents of the people they represent. This would be ‘neo-colonial’ in nature and also reduce their chance of finding workable solutions to locally specific problems. It could also squeeze out the room for more innovative and radical social organisations and initiatives.

How can Oxfam GB ensure accountability to donors and the public – increasing their confidence that aid money is being spent well – while also providing the flexibility for its partners to work without unreasonable constraint and micro-management? This tension and debate centres on the issue of power. These issues are discussed in relation to principles of accountability, shared values, and joint-decision making in Sections 6, 7, and 8.

#### **1.1.5 Staying involved without taking the space**

How does Oxfam GB ensure that its relationships are transformational and create lasting, positive changes in the institutions with which it engages while ensuring that it does not ‘take the space’ of smaller national organisations?

If international NGOs do want to fully empower partners and let them take the lead in finding their own solutions, should they work more closely with partners, or retreat to an ‘arm’s-length’ position? The concept of international NGOs and donors as fully involved local organisational actors – rather than funding managers at a distance – is taken forward in a recent book called *Relationships for Aid*.<sup>10</sup> This reflects the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, page 172.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance V. Brehm (2004) *Autonomy or Dependence: Case Studies of North–South NGO Partnership*, Oxford: INTRAC, and V. Brehm (2001) ‘Promoting Effective North–South NGO Partnerships: A Comparative Study of 10 European NGOs’, Oxford: INTRAC, Occasional Papers Series No. 35.

<sup>10</sup> R. Eyben, ed. (2006) *Relationships for Aid*, London: Earthscan.

authors' experience with DFID in Bolivia during a period of intense strategic change. DFID realised that their main tool for creating change was not their money, but their personal and organisational influence and leadership. The book argues that the concept of 'aid' is best seen as an empowering relationship rather than a funding transfer to be managed. It introduces the concept of a *transformative* approach to aid rather than a *transactional* one, where the process of funding is as effective as the funds themselves.<sup>11</sup> The potential of these ideas, and some of the emerging options for how Oxfam GB positions itself for partnership, are discussed in Sections 9 and the concluding strategic Section 10.

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<sup>11</sup> It also suggests that this requires an attitudinal change among the British public.

## 2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation involved four stages:

1. A stock-take of Oxfam GB's funded partners and internal and external literature on partnership
2. Engagement with key Oxfam GB staff through a series of interviews and workshops
3. A broad survey of all funded partners
4. An in-depth analysis of Oxfam GB's partnerships based on 11 case studies

The evaluation was conducted between November 2006 and April 2007. Details of the methodology process and the survey instruments can be found in Annexes 1 and 2. For each case study, a partnership-review workshop was facilitated that allowed both parties to review the relationship's strengths and weaknesses.<sup>12</sup> This proved to be a useful tool in its own right for strengthening partnership relationships. More details are given in Section 6.2.3.

### 2.1.1 The case studies

The 11 case studies were selected from a pool of approximately 30 partnerships offered up by Oxfam GB regional and country staff for review, following a call for evaluation case studies. In all cases the partnership was highly valued by the Oxfam GB staff involved and there was considerable interest in reflecting on or investing further in the relationship. The final 11 were selected to represent a range of partnership approaches and types. The characteristics of these partnerships are summarised in Table 1. The partnerships included:

- nine partnerships managed by country programme staff (one from each of the nine regions), one from the Humanitarian Department, and one from the Campaigns and Policy Division;
- six bilateral funding partnerships and five that had a multilateral element;
- partnerships with organisations of a range of sizes and types, from partnerships with very small, newly formed community-based organisations with only seven staff, through to partnerships with national governments and major international NGOs with staff of 300 plus;
- partnerships with a wide range of different functions, including engagement, campaigning, disaster relief, development, institution building;
- partnerships which had only started in the previous two years, through to those that were complete.

**Table 1: Overview of the case study partners**

Primary partner organisation	Country	Bilateral/ Multilateral	Other key players	Size of partner organisation	% of partner's funding from Oxfam GB	Age of relationship (years)	What does the partnership do?
Control Arms	Int'l/UK	M	3 co-partners; Amnesty; IANSA (including	Brand only, no secretariat	About 50% in kind, but directly through	Established (3)	Public engagement, campaigning, and policy development

<sup>12</sup> This was not completed in three cases: Control Arms, Dian Desa, and ALRMP.

			700 members)		Oxfam staff time		
SWC (Scottish Women's Convention)	Scotland	M	11 co-partners, about to become independent body: including Scottish Trade Union Congress	Small (3 staff secretariat)	3% but key contributor of staff time (25%)	Developing (2)	Public engagement, campaigning, and policy development
PINORD (Programme d'appui aux Initiatives du Nord)	Senegal	B/M	6 co-partners: member producer organisations	Small (3 staff secretariat)	100%	Developing (3)	Organisational development and advocacy
JNC (Junta Nacional del Café)	Peru	B/M	(223 member producer groups / co-ops)	Medium (20)	15%	Developing (3)	Organisational development and advocacy
ALRMP (Arid Land Resource Management Project)	Kenya	B	Several sub-fora and units such as Peacenet and Kenya Livestock Marketing Council	Large (250), plus satellites	3%	Matured / Complete (5–10)	Engagement component of delivery of services
YDD (Dian Desa)	Java	B	None	Large (250)	3%	Complete	Disaster relief / water sanitation
OCDIH (Christian Organisation for the Integral Development of Honduras)	Honduras	B	None	Medium (40)	40%	Established / Matured (6)	Rural development and village institution-building
WAMI (Word Alive Ministries International)	Malawi	B	None	Medium (30)	35%	Established (3)	Rural and health development, and village institution-building
Sidreh	Israel	B CBO	None	Small (10)	20%	Established (4)	Literacy and women's empowerment
PIAR (Perkumpulan Pengembangan Inisiatif dan Advokasi Rakyat – Centre for People Initiative and Advocacy)	West Timor	B Dev	None	Small (15)	Major 70%	Developing (3)	Promote citizen rights and advice
DOABA (Between the rivers)	Pakistan	B CBO	None	Small (10) and young	90%, and sole funder	Developing (3)	Flood disaster management at community level and village institution-building

### 2.1.2 The survey

The survey consisted of three main sections:

1. Introductory questions about the partner organisation and the partner's relationship with Oxfam GB;
2. A series of 30 statements against which the partner was asked to rate their agreement or disagreement under five themes: (a) Oxfam's respect for their values and beliefs; (b) clarity around roles and responsibilities; (c) their complementarity; (d) Oxfam's accountability; and (e) shared decision-making;
3. Three open-ended questions about the partner's thoughts on how Oxfam should work with local organisations in the future.

The five themes (a) to (e) above have been used to structure the main findings of this report (Sections 3 to 8).

The survey was administered online using a survey tool 'Surveyshack'. It was translated into the four standard Oxfam languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French) and a personalised invitation was sent with the email link, encouraging the person with the most day-to-day contact with Oxfam GB to complete the survey. Partners were given three weeks to submit their response, and a reminder was issued one week before the deadline for completing the survey. Oxfam GB was funding 1442 partners (in late 2006). In absolute terms, the survey 'reached' (i.e. did not bounce back from) 852 Oxfam GB partner email addresses,<sup>13</sup> and 399 partially or fully completed responses were received. The overall response rate, based on those who received the survey, was therefore 47 per cent. It ranged from 27 per cent in the UK to 50 per cent in 'other Northern countries'.<sup>14</sup>

The breakdown of these respondents is as follows:

- **Size of organisation** – 65 per cent of respondents were small organisations with 50 or fewer staff, members and/or volunteers (41 per cent were under 20 staff).
- **Type of organisation** – 53 per cent of respondents identified themselves as state or national-level NGOs, 16 per cent as community-based organisations (CBOs), and 11 per cent as international NGOs. The remaining respondents were made up of academic institutions, social movements, government departments, and businesses. Responses to the 'other' category included several networks, development-education centres, and faith-based organisations.
- **Length of the relationship** – 74 per cent of respondents have been working with Oxfam GB for five years or less (45 per cent for under two years). Only three per cent have been working with Oxfam GB for over 20 years.
- **Proportion of funding from Oxfam GB** – 56 per cent of respondents stated that their organisation receives ten per cent or less of their total funding from Oxfam GB. Eleven per cent receive over 51 per cent funding from Oxfam GB. A large proportion (58 per cent) of Oxfam GB's partners see their relationships with Oxfam GB as being in the developing stages.

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<sup>13</sup> The survey was emailed to 948 partners but a number of the email addresses were incorrect, which meant they bounced back. Although the email was received by 852 email accounts, there is no guarantee that it was received and understood by the appropriate person working with Oxfam GB.

<sup>14</sup> The electronic survey was supplemented by a number of telephone calls to partners in countries which were particularly under-represented in the survey sample (where email addresses were not available through Oxfam GB's programme and partner database, OPAL – Oxfam Programme Learning and Accountability). Interestingly, all the partners who were telephoned did actually have email addresses – despite them not being recorded in Oxfam GB's OPAL database – and all chose to receive the survey by email. Therefore, telephone interviews did not become an important part of this survey.

### 3 Complementarity and added value

Complementarity is central to Oxfam GB's principles of partnership. To be successful, each partner should bring capacities and resources to an interdependent relationship, and the added value of working together should be clear and recognised. This mutual flow of resources into a joint project is what creates a sense of joint investment and partnership.

The survey revealed that a high proportion of partners (85 per cent) feel that each organisation brings different skills and expertise to the relationship. Some of the values that partners bring are summarised in Annex 3 (Table 8) and include local knowledge and understanding, dedication and commitment, and a wide range of professional skills. This section mainly seeks to understand partners' perspectives on what capabilities Oxfam GB brings, and how these benefits can be enhanced.

#### 3.1 Oxfam GB's added value

Central to all the partnerships studied (and most of the partnerships Oxfam GB engages with) is a financial 'contractual' agreement in which the partner receives funds to carry out a specified piece of work. Oxfam GB is most certainly valued for this donor role, but the survey reveals that 69 per cent of Oxfam GB partners feel that Oxfam GB is more than just a donor and brings a wide range of additional 'value-added'. Table 2 provides one way of looking at these contributions.

**Table 2: Oxfam GB's value-added in partnership**

Administrative and management capacity	Advocacy, influencing, and credibility
Information, knowledge, and networking	Facilitation, reflection, and moral support

##### 3.1.1 Administrative and management capacity

Working with Oxfam GB provides a strong grounding in how to grow and develop a professional organisation with internationally acceptable administrative standards, systems, and procedures. Box 1 summarises many partners' experience.

#### **Box 1: Building stronger organisational systems**

Sidreh described how it has benefited as an organisation from the partnership with Oxfam GB. It has developed its financial and narrative reporting skills. It is better organised, it has improved its filing, its use of the Internet, and staff retention: *'we have fewer absences now'*. It has developed technical skills, such as how to test beneficiary education levels, how to evaluate, build links with ministries etc.: *'We are able to start projects and even to help others do so.'* Importantly, the women have developed considerable confidence in their skills and knowledge. *'I help women, but who helps me? I needed support to be a role model [and Oxfam GB gave it].'* Oxfam GB has given the organisation a broader vision and constructive

self-criticism. All this adds to greater effectiveness: *'we feel supported and more relaxed and happy in our work.'*

Source: Sidreh case study

Partners gain some of the benefits simply by working together in project design and management.

*'Throughout the development phase of the action plan, we exchange information and our understanding of what an action plan is, what indicators etc., are ... These encounters are very useful for all the partners and for Oxfam.'* (Survey)

Other benefits are received through more formal capacity-building programmes and strategies. For instance, the Oxfam GB programme in Indonesia describes its role as building partners' capacity in four key areas:

- financial management
- project management
- programme analysis and strategic direction
- skill development as part of a human-resource strategy (for example, increasing partner capacity to carry out project monitoring).

Sixty per cent of the survey respondents agree that Oxfam GB has dedicated time and resources to helping them grow as independent organisations.<sup>15</sup> Oxfam GB should be congratulated for its work in supporting partners' administrative capacities. However, it is important to ensure that investments in capacity keep up with requirements for accountability. Some of the smaller partner organisations have struggled with the process of administrative capacity building and found financial and narrative reporting requirements difficult and stressful to achieve (e.g. Doaba and PIAR). The report explores the thorny issues of how much accountability to demand from partners (Section 5) and returns to the specific issue of capacity-building for accountability systems in Section 5.3.

When asked how Oxfam GB can better support the organisations with which it works, partners responded with a large number of comments calling for more capacity-building to enable partners to become financially independent and sustainable (see also Section 10.1):

*'Oxfam GB should have space for developing the institutional support systems to carry out its work more effectively if it believes in the viability and importance of the civil society movement.'* (Survey)

*'Plan for institution capacity building for the organisation to go self sustainable and effective delivery of service.'* (Survey)

Most case-study partners received a substantial contribution from Oxfam GB in time and resources (Annex 3, Table 9). However, there is little systematic data on how much Oxfam GB spends on capacity-building or how it provides it.<sup>16</sup> More could be

<sup>15</sup> More long-standing partners are likely to have received more investment than newer partners; so are organisations with a high financial dependency on Oxfam GB (in which Oxfam GB may have invested heavily). Capacity-building was perceived to play a more significant role in longer-term relationships – over six years – than in newer relationships, perhaps because of growing expectations for Oxfam GB to support partners' financial and institutional sustainability and eventual exit and independence from the funding relationship. Whether this reflects a failure of Oxfam GB to invest in its organisations, or growing expectation and dependency by the partner, is not clear.

<sup>16</sup> Oxfam GB suggests a guide figure of no more than 25 per cent of a project budget to be spent on capacity-building.

done to clarify guidance around capacity-building and to recognise the links to partnership and accountability policy. Some partners also suggested that Oxfam GB should invest in a dedicated capacity-building fund and strategy.

### 3.1.2 Advocacy, influencing, and credibility

Oxfam GB plays a major role in helping projects to have more policy impact and in helping partners to develop their influencing skills. Thus Amnesty, IANSA, and SWC mention Oxfam GB's knowledge and experience of popular campaigning. Doaba, WAMI, OCDIH, and PIAR explain how Oxfam GB helps them reach inside government and communicate their messages more clearly. The survey also reflected the variety of ways in which Oxfam GB brings strong experience in advocacy, campaigning, and influencing:

*'We found Oxfam GB to be an excellent partner both substantively and in financing our efforts to develop capacities of civil society organizations for evidence-based advocacy. The expertise in advocacy is especially appreciated.'* (Survey)

*'One of the best things is the back up of a large campaigning organisation.'* (Survey)

#### **Box 2: How Oxfam GB's support to advocacy fulfils a need and niche in Peru**

Civil society in Peru is weak and fragmented compared to civil society in other Latin American countries. A history of political violence and armed guerrillas in the 1980s dismembered social networks in the country. Two main capacity-building requirements were highlighted: citizens' participation and monitoring of public policy. The main capacity-building offered by other international NGOs is in the service delivery of health, education, and small credits projects. Oxfam GB has found a *niche*, and provides capacity-building in the area of advocacy and citizen participation. Given the weakness of civil society in Peru, it is foreseen that capacity-building will still be a priority.

*Source:* JNC case study

Capacity-building in advocacy and influencing skills is a niche service that Oxfam GB brings to many of its partnerships. It fills a gap in the market that other international NGOs are not always able to fill (see Box 2). These skills are greatly valued by partners. Partners tend to learn them informally by working alongside Oxfam GB programme staff. However, more could be done to reflect Oxfam GB's 'One Programme' vision of integrated development and advocacy work. In the nine *development* partnerships examined (i.e. those not managed through the campaigns or humanitarian programmes), advocacy experience and strategy was being provided by Oxfam GB's development staff with relatively little input by the dedicated campaigns and policy staff (who were mainly focused on their campaigns-orientated partnerships). There was relatively little interaction across programmes.

While the existing support of Oxfam GB was appreciated, there were also requests for Oxfam GB to do more in advocacy and to be more engaged in backing nationally relevant, partner-identified campaign issues. Some partners feel that international and regional campaigns have much less relevance to them.

Oxfam GB's success in advocacy is built on its credibility. Association with Oxfam GB is very important to partners for this reason. Seventy-six per cent of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB's international status helps their organisation to gain credibility too. Credibility gained from working with Oxfam GB –



particularly on advocacy and campaigning – was cited in the survey<sup>17</sup> as one of the best things about the relationship:

*'Besides funds, OGB's overall objectives and the credibility all over the world keeps our relationship well. At the local level, OGB invests on partners to boost their initiatives and build organisations.'* (Survey)

*'Oxfam GB is doing a great job in terms of credibility and added values for both organisations.'* (Survey)

A further advocacy benefit is Oxfam GB's independence from local politics. For smaller organisations, Oxfam GB's reputation as an apolitical organisation was important, especially in highly politicised contexts such as Israel:

*'If people know we are with Oxfam GB they know we are not linked to politics.'* (Sidreh)

### 3.1.3 Information, knowledge, and networking

As an international NGO one of Oxfam GB's advantages is its ability to link partners to wider networks of knowledge and information. This was mentioned with appreciation in every case study from the very smallest, rural grassroots organisation (e.g. Doaba) to the very largest (e.g. ALRMP, a project of the Kenyan government):

*'Oxfam GB brings the links to a wider system: to actors, practitioners and global trends; to a network of political influencers who can effect changes in policy and to a community of funders and donors. This complementarity creates highly effective vertical linkages, from grass-roots mobilisation to global advocacy and an excellent example of the One Programme approach in action.'* (Doaba case study)

*'Oxfam GB provides direct support for government initiatives, such as WTO presentations – for which they helped write ALRMP's position paper – and the PRSP process – for which they helped ALRMP lobby for a specialist group on pastoral issues. They also feel they have helped ALRMP make links to other donors, such as DFID, the WB and other allies.'* (ALRMP case study)

Similar responses were received from the survey:

*'In our relations with Oxfam GB, transparency, information exchange and regular discussions work most well.'* (Survey)

*'Regular communications and inputs during planning and critical times. Oxfam GB visits with intellectual resources and shares with the partner.'* (Survey)

Oxfam GB often brings specialist technical experience to projects,<sup>18</sup> and partners say that even if Oxfam GB does not have the knowledge in-house it knows where to get it. *'One of the most valuable things has been Oxfam GB's access to experts,'* explained PIAR. Often this involves providing access to resources and information as a *'conductor and not a virtuoso'* according to Oxfam GB Israel. However, some

<sup>17</sup> Eight comments.

<sup>18</sup> For instance in Malawi, WAMI has been able to bring knowledge of HIV and AIDS work whereas Oxfam GB has brought knowledge of livelihoods approaches. Together this has created an integrated programme. In Kenya, Oxfam GB has been able to bring strong knowledge of community engagement to the government. In Israel it has brought useful advice on gender mainstreaming and in Honduras it has helped the project develop better market access.

partners also said that Oxfam GB could do more to send them publications and resources that would help their learning (as illustrated in Box 3).

**Box 3: Opportunities for creating local networking and learning**

WAMI feel that there is a missed opportunity for them to network with other partners and to link into an international learning forum. They can see that Oxfam GB is an extremely well-connected and knowledgeable organisation and they are keen to take advantage of this. They would like more opportunities to network with the other partners in the country partnership programme and with other partners of Oxfam GB's other country programmes too. But they also feel that there is more opportunity to be part of the more formal learning processes in Oxfam GB. They would like to receive reports, publications, newsletters or books, in the same way they do from other donors. They are working on HIV and AIDS and would like to see more documentation from other Oxfam GB country programmes, or from Oxfam GB's Oxford office. They would also like to have a better idea of who, in Oxfam GB Malawi and regionally, is doing what, related to HIV and AIDS work. Including them in this kind of documentation and networking would be a relatively simple and cost-effective thing to do. It would provide a more formal package for partners and make them feel more a part of a larger international learning network.

*Source: WAMI case study*

Ideas for improvement include newsletters, bulletins, and updates which would cover international news on development issues,<sup>19</sup> but also internal news about which partners Oxfam GB is working with and the latest staff changes inside the country office. This could be communicated very cheaply as regular updates by email or printed newsletter and could have a large impact on partners' sense of belonging to an Oxfam GB network. Involving partners in group processes such as strategic reviews and planning groups (discussed in Section 7.2.2) would also help create a greater sense of an Oxfam GB partner family and community. Overall a more systematic approach to relationship management would go a long way to improving contact and information flows and help reduce internal partner co-ordination problems (as detailed in Section 4.1.2).

### 3.1.4 Facilitation, reflection, and moral support

One of the strengths of a well-functioning Oxfam GB partnership is the quality of dialogue, reflection, and review. When asked what is working best in their relationship, survey respondents commented:

*'The best part is joint planning on issues and there is a lot of flexibility to change the strategy when needed.'* (Survey)

*'Review of the programme activities in a regular manner, sharing of the observations and rendering help to take decisions in accordance.'* (Survey)

Informal learning is central to most of Oxfam GB's partnerships:<sup>20</sup>

*'It's been great to work with Oxfam GB. Would cherish the past years even when Oxfam GB is no longer our partner formally. The learning has been tremendous and many faceted, though often unarticulated ...'* (Survey)

Encouragement and solidarity also counts for a lot and has a real impact on morale, particularly among staff who are working for low wages in difficult conditions.

<sup>19</sup> There may be lessons that can be learnt from the way Novib supports its counterparts in this way from a distance.

<sup>20</sup> Only 10 per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that they have not learnt very much from working with Oxfam GB.

Provision of moral support is a crucial, intangible role that also helps political mobilisation. There was also a call to mark and celebrate progress:

*'Oxfam GB brings capacity and confidence. The men were waiting for us to fail, and Oxfam GB was the first organisation which helped us in every which way, in cash and in everything. I feel proud when I say I work with Oxfam GB.'* (Sidreh)

*'Perhaps it is part of our British culture of "modesty"? We are always talking work; let's have some fun, invite everyone, and recognise hard work loud and clear!'* (Oxfam GB Israel and the Palestinian Territories)

### 3.2 The value of the Project Officer (PO)

It is Oxfam GB's Project or Programme Officers (POs) who actually implement the wide variety of ways in which Oxfam GB adds value to its partnerships. At the most basic level a PO is a project and contract manager ensuring that budgets, plans, and milestones are adhered to, monitoring and evaluating the project, authorising release of payments, and ensuring that reports of an appropriate quality are delivered.

However, the key to being a successful PO is to balance the 'audit and monitoring' role with a mentoring approach that brings the added value to the partner, and therefore the project. In most situations POs are greatly respected and are doing an excellent and often complex and difficult job.

Central to the Oxfam GB approach is PO as facilitator and listener:

*'The Programme Officer is a facilitator: linking partners (e.g. government and beneficiaries) and networking people. They need to be a good collaborator and also have access to a wide information base on what Oxfam GB does. They also need to be analytical and inquisitive, able to see gaps and ask questions that help project staff reflect.'* (Malawi case study)

*'Oxfam GB does not order, it challenges, keeps us on our toes, and encourages new ideas. It opens your eyes to new ways and you can decide to take them on board or not; it is like a mother-daughter relationship; it shows you the right way. It is a shepherd rather than a sheepdog trainer.'* (Sidreh case study, Israel)

In PINORD, Oxfam GB's partnership style is appreciated because it involves a degree of 'coaching' in areas where partners' skills are less developed, while recognising and valuing the real strengths and expertise that individuals and organisations contribute.

In Malawi the Oxfam GB PO described her role as half organisational development and half management and monitoring. In many partnerships, particularly those with small and medium-sized organisations, the Oxfam GB PO has a major role in supporting the development of the partner organisation and its programme.

The PO clearly has a wide variety of roles that demand complex inter-personal skills and political sensitivity.

*'It is clear that being an Oxfam GB PO is far from easy. It means being in the middle, 'the jam in the sandwich'. You have two eyes: one is on the field and the partners' needs, the other is on Oxfam GB's interests and priorities and*

*often you are pulled in opposite directions.’ (Oxfam GB Israel and the Palestinian Territories)*

The report returns to the difficulties of this role – and ideas for how to support POs in their professional and personal development – in the forthcoming chapters and particularly in Section 8.3.5.

### 3.3 The value of the field visit

Perhaps the most valued role of the PO is their support in the field. Field visits are conducted extremely well in almost all cases. Oxfam GB takes a style that is supportive and inquisitive without being interrogative. Oxfam GB Honduras provides an excellent example. Two survey respondents describe the benefits of these field visits to them:

*‘Joint field visits are most valued. This is a good way of sharing views, knowledge and to make the program a joint program rather than ‘the donor checking if things have been implemented.’ (Survey)*

*‘Partner visits are most useful – monitoring or familiarisation (these have been mutually productive and inspiring).’ (Survey)*

However, some partners (e.g. JNC in Peru, ALRMP in Kenya, partners in Pakistan) called for more time from POs and suggested that POs are being distracted by increasing internal management and accountability duties. A workshop of partners in Pakistan called for the protection of PO visits (Box 4).

#### **Box 4: Keeping the field visit sacred in Pakistan**

Many partners were concerned that the length of these visits was reducing or their importance was declining. An action plan agreed that:

- a date for the visit would be set at the beginning of each quarter;
- a terms of reference should be agreed for each visit, to include monitoring but also other areas important to the partner;
- five days, excluding travel time, was an ideal amount of time for the visit;
- there should be a quality de-briefing discussion at the end of the community visits – by OGB visiting staff and partners – to agree on key observations, areas of improvement, and follow-up actions with timeline and responsibilities (both of the project and the partnership);
- a standard reporting format should be agreed for the visits;
- Oxfam GB visiting staff should write a short report and share with the relevant colleagues for feedback, and also with the partners for feedback, within 15 days.

*Source: Pakistan partners workshop, September 2006*

In addition, approximately 12 respondents commented that Oxfam GB staff sometimes lack understanding of the grassroots, and called on them to spend more time in the field understanding their reality.

*‘We would appreciate Oxfam GB to come often on the ground and understand our real challenges instead of keeping at bay.’ (Survey)*

*‘For Oxfam GB staff we strongly encourage them to integrate with the community for say a week in order to have a broader understanding about the situation how people lives.’ (Survey)*

*'A very strong orientation is required for the manager and they should spend more time with the partners in the field of implementation of project.'* (Survey)

These findings suggest that Oxfam GB's role in the field is at the core of its added-value offering and at the heart of relationship-building. They suggest that safe-guarding PO time in the field, and safe-guarding Oxfam GB's local presence, are both important to building high-quality partnerships.

## 4 Clarity around roles and responsibilities

The Introduction noted a number of debates about how to achieve effective partnership and how to ensure the co-ordination costs of partnership do not become so complex, expensive or time-consuming that they outweigh the potential benefits. How well are Oxfam GB partnerships doing?

Overall, 73 per cent of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that there is clarity around their roles and responsibilities. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have a clear Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) spelling out how they work with Oxfam GB. This is felt most strongly (83 per cent) by those organisations for which Oxfam GB provides more than one-fifth of their funding. It is felt less strongly by those organisations for which Oxfam GB provides a smaller proportion of their funding.<sup>21</sup> Newer partners score Oxfam GB more highly than older partners do (particularly around clarity of MOUs, decision-making, and length of relationships).<sup>22</sup>

The case-study partnerships revealed a variable degree of clarity around co-ordination. All have a contract or some form of partnership agreement and all are achieving their aims. The bilateral-funded partnerships tend to have more management tools such as logframes and these are found to be moderately helpful for day-to-day co-ordination. The two main multilateral partnerships – SWC and Control Arms – are not based on funding relationships and have less formal paperwork. The bilateral partnerships tend to be much simpler to manage because there is only one partner and there is a clear contract governing deliverables. The details of specific case studies are summarised in Table 10 (in Annex 3).

### 4.1 Opportunities to improve clarity

#### 4.1.1 More consistency in policies and ideas

Twenty-five per cent of partner organisations which have worked with Oxfam GB for 3–5 years agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB often changes its mind about what it asks of them.<sup>23</sup>

*'Frequent changes in Oxfam GB's policies despite of long term approach sometimes makes it difficult to correlate the ongoing process with the new aspects.'* (Survey)

*'We hope Oxfam GB will not always change its mind.'* (Survey)

*'All the formalities which are used, like the memorandum, are clear, as are the people with whom we need to communicate; however sometimes we feel that*

<sup>21</sup> Seventy-seven per cent for 1–20 per cent funding and 68 per cent for less than one per cent funding. This reflects the closer and more intense relationship with those smaller organisations which are more dependent on Oxfam GB.

<sup>22</sup> It may be possible to conclude that Oxfam GB is improving in this area over time. Or it might be that newer partners have more recently negotiated the agreements and are therefore clearer about the requirements.

<sup>23</sup> Only 11 per cent of partners that have worked with Oxfam GB for 0–2 years agree, suggesting there may not have been sufficient time for Oxfam GB to change its mind about its priorities!

*as Oxfam GB's priorities change, they discard initiatives on which we have been working together.'* (Survey)

However, only one of the partnerships involved in the case studies (PIAR) described a similar problem.

*'Even working closely with PIAR the process of re-developing the logframe took more than five months, which has resulted a long delay and interruption in the disbursement of funding to PIAR. This creates frustration in the side of PIAR. Oxfam GB acknowledged fully to PIAR the difficulty and has tried hard to speed up the process and the disbursement of the funding.'* (PIAR case study)

#### **4.1.2 Stronger internal co-ordination**

There were several comments about the problems caused by poor internal co-ordination.

*'Lack of coordination between different departments.'* (Survey)

*'Once we had experience where there was lack of coordination between Oxfam GB itself. From one office to another office, which has a different programme.'* (Survey)

*'Changing priorities and plans can be devastating for a small organisation, especially if the NGOs campaign plans and timetables are no longer in their own control but in the control of Oxfam GB!'* (Survey)

Co-ordination was also poor in the one humanitarian partnership case study (Dian Desa). This was due to internal disorganisation within Oxfam GB. *'They [Oxfam GB staff] seem not to talk to each other.'* This culminated in seven truck loads of supplies turning up unannounced at the partner's warehouse without anywhere to put them. After this incident, Oxfam GB revised their internal co-ordination system and Oxfam GB assigned a staff member as a contact person to co-ordinate with the partner (see also Box 13).

A tension noted in several of the case studies is a lack of joined-up working within different offices of the country programme (PIAR) or between the country programme and the regional office (PINORD). In the former case, different parts of Oxfam GB developed relationships with the partner independently and then mistakenly accused the partner of double accounting. In the latter case the regional office's priorities were evolving in a different direction to the country programme's priorities. Just as the partner was feeling they were understood, they realised the decision would be made by a level above.

*'Within Oxfam GB there is limited decision-making power at the level of the Senegal Country Office, which will shortly cease to exist and be absorbed into the region, where all key decisions concerning funding availability and hence the future of the programme are made. This has been the source of some frustration on both sides of the partnership. While PINORD is able to negotiate through its representatives with full decision-making powers, the Senegal Programme Coordinator negotiates with PINORD and has then to negotiate at multiple levels within the Regional office, so has the difficult job of juggling both sides rather than feeling that he has the trust and confidence of his organisation.'* (PINORD case study)

This reflects several comments made by Oxfam GB staff, and some partners, that the autonomy of the country office has been subsumed to regional centres that are distant from the partnership. This creates extra relationship-building costs for the partner and for the Oxfam GB PO.

#### 4.1.3 Fewer staff changes

In the survey, partners often attribute the above problems to changing staff (14 comments). This is clearly a major cost for partners who then have to re-invest in new relationships.

*'Often change of Oxfam GB grass root level staff. Deviation of thoughts.'*  
(Survey)

*'Oxfam GB is requested to have a minimum of 3 years for the existence of any new relationship before any changes can be implemented, otherwise the newly established relationship's impact can not be adequately monitored.'*  
(Survey)

*'A change in senior staff at Oxfam GB leads to changes in programme areas and strategies. This is not good.'* (Survey)

*'Oxfam GB often changes grass root staff and that affects the rapport of the relationship between Oxfam GB and the organisation.'* (Survey)

*'We had difficulties due to the staff turn over in the field level Oxfam GB staff.'*  
(Survey)

*'Sudden change in the already established relationship within short space of time.'* (Survey)

*'We have been facing problems with regards to changes in team members of the programme that deals with our project. The departing members lose interest in our project matters in their last days, new recruitment then takes time and the new members again take time to understand our project matters. In the meantime we face many problems due to weak monitoring, communication gap, delays in release of funds, and consequently delayed project activities...'* (Survey)

Several of the case-study partnerships also expressed their concern about staff changes (e.g. PIAR, PINORD, Doaba, and Sidreh). For Sidreh, boundaries have to be redrawn every time a new Oxfam GB staff member is appointed. They are keen for Oxfam GB to avoid the frequent staff turnover of previous years by giving staff long-term contracts and sufficient handover periods, with time spent in the field. Where possible, staff should know the target community well and be patient, flexible, technically capable, and willing to learn.

#### 4.1.4 Clarifying the length of the agreement

A number of partners in the survey took the opportunity to seek more clarity about the length of the relationship:

*'We are quite clear about our roles and responsibilities as laid out in the project agreement / contract. However, as these are short-term, there are*



*some unclarities about the long term strategic relationship. Oxfam GB should consider strategic partnership.’ (Survey)*

*‘In general the roles are very clear, however we consider that Oxfam GB sometimes does not appreciate the complex nature of our work, which aims at a change in culture, something which is impossible to achieve in a short time and with small resources, apart from the fact that we are constantly threatened by a context which goes backwards in relation to the formal advances achieved on the promotion of women’s rights.’ (Survey)*

*‘Although we have worked closely together over the past 10 years at a variety of levels, there is no written agreement regarding the nature of the relationship. Although I assume it is an on-going long term and strategic relationship, it does at times feel as if it is only instrumental to OGB in achieving its current programme priorities - and may simply tail off if personnel or priorities change – and I’m not sure anyone would bother telling us.’ (Survey)*

## 4.2 Typologies of partnership

### 4.2.1 Graduations of inter-organisational collaboration

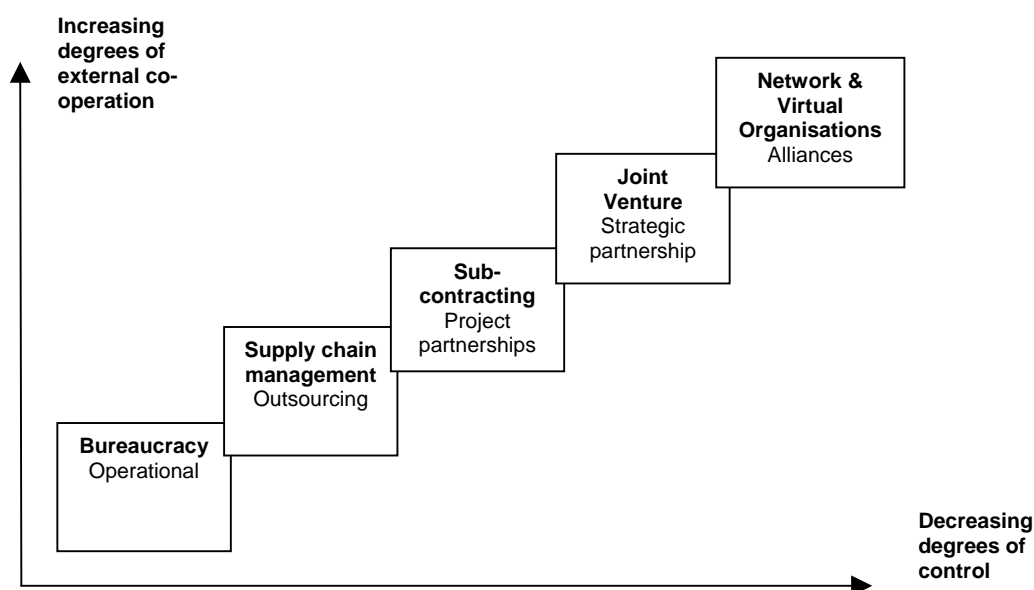
While roles were often well-defined, responsibilities and the wider structure and governance of the partnership were often not. Oxfam GB’s own typology centres on three forms of partnership:

- project partnerships
- strategic partnerships
- alliances.

This is a useful typology because it reflects the prominent partnership styles in the three main areas of programme work: humanitarian, development, and campaigns. It also reflects the management literature on organisational structures and inter-organisational collaboration. In the bottom left of the diagram in Box 5 is the operational model of working – fully internalised, with no partnership, and full control over resources and decisions. Organisations can begin to enjoy the value of collaboration as they move right towards sub-contracting (often equivalent to shorter-term project partnerships). A further stage of devolution of control is full joint-venture partnerships (most closely aligned to the dictionary definition of partnership given in Section 1.1.2, and most similar to Oxfam GB’s strategic partnership model). Finally networks and alliances reflect the least control and widest collaboration.

The reason that Oxfam GB relationships can become so complex is that they can include multiple forms of collaboration: they may be based on a sub-contracting model but have joint-venture elements around brand, and networking elements around advocacy. Joint-venture partnerships represent Oxfam GB’s concept of strategic partnership and the form of collaboration that most smaller NGOs tend to desire with Oxfam GB (see Section 10.1). This form suggests a true joint venture with shares in ownership and control. Rarely is Oxfam GB able to offer this without setting up a separate organisation and governance structure. However, there are *elements* of this in many of partnerships, including PINORD and Control Arms.

### Box 5: Structures of organisational and inter-organisational collaboration



Source: C. Mabey, G. Salaman, and J. Storey (1998) *Human Resource Management: A Strategic Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, page 236.

#### 4.2.2 Breadth and depth of partnership

One model proved particularly useful in clarifying roles and responsibilities in the partnerships, and disentangling the overlapping elements. Building loosely on Alan Fowler's work (2000),<sup>24</sup> there are varying intensities of organisational collaboration based on a function of:

- **breadth** – the range of tasks, functions, and roles across which the organisation wishes to collaborate;
- **depth** – the degree of joint decision-making, from unilateral where one party makes a decision and simply informs the other of what they've done, to consensual in which the decisions are taken together. In the middle may be management styles that are more consultative.<sup>25</sup>

Thus in relationships in which Oxfam GB is relatively 'hands-off' – such as with JNC and ALRMP – the emphasis is on devolved tasks and decision-making. Thus JNC takes an independent lead in the field implementation and in the reporting of the project and simply informs Oxfam GB of progress. Oxfam GB tends to lead on funding decisions, but does consult JNC. In advocacy, training, and design there has been more shared influence in decision-making, though with one or other partner in the relationship still taking a lead (see Table 3).

<sup>24</sup> A. Fowler (2000) 'Negotiating NGDO Relationships', Oxford: INTRAC, Occasional Paper Series No. 32.

<sup>25</sup> We might recognise this as being similar to Arnstein's 'ladder of participation'. It reflects a basic but useful way of thinking about co-management.

**Table 3: Assigning roles and responsibilities (JNC example)**

Roles	Lead partner	Levels of shared responsibility			
		Informing	Consultation	Shared influence	Joint decision-making
<i>Reviewing and reporting</i>	JNC				
<i>Strategy and design</i>	JNC				
<i>Field implementation and tactics</i>	JNC				
<i>Fund allocation and resourcing</i>	Oxfam				
<i>Advocacy and influence</i>	JNC				
<i>Training learning and dissemination</i>	Oxfam				

In the Control Arms partnership, joint decision-making is the preference across the broad range of tasks and activities, with relatively large costs in time (Box 6 and Table 4), but intense levels of collaboration.

**Table 4: Assigning roles and responsibilities (Control Arms example)**

Roles	Lead partner	Levels of shared responsibility			
		Information exchange	Consultation	Shared influence	Joint decision-making
<i>Reviewing and reporting</i>	All				
<i>Strategy and design</i>	All				
<i>Field implementation and tactics</i>	All				
<i>Fund allocation and resourcing</i>	All				
<i>Advocacy and influence</i>	All				
<i>Training, learning, and dissemination</i>	All				

The case studies demonstrate that it is very important to clarify decision-making domains – who is responsible for what decisions – at the beginning of the relationship. Donors need to be clear about how much decision-making they are devolving, and what the non-negotiable conditions are. It is much better to be clear up-front about the influence a partner can have over different functions than to decide on a case-by-case basis. The latter course leads to feelings of disempowerment and frustration. Mismanaged expectations over who has most influence for what are one of the greatest causes of conflict in the case-study partnerships.

Full, shared decision-making based on complete consensus and full participation on every issue is complex and depends on very high levels of trust and rapport and can easily become time-consuming and fraught. Some of the lessons learned by the Control Arms partnership are summarised in Box 6. Some of the most efficient partnerships devolve and delegate large areas of control to each other. Partnerships that have clarified which decisions will be made jointly and which can be taken in smaller groups or alone have tended to be the simplest and safest to manage. However, strategic decisions which have a significant bearing on the joint resources and future direction do always need a commitment to consensus if the concept of partnership is to be retained.

**Box 6: Full joint decision-making can be a burden**

The partners have suggested the joint decisions 'model' was flawed and that there should have been more division of labour between the organisations and more room for different organisations to lead and take responsibility for different areas of work.

*'The management group has dwelled on the detail of decisions when it should have dealt with strategy, there has been duplication of labour and an inability to let go on issues which did not need to consume so much time.'*

*'You have to go with good enough, not perfection. The moments when we haven't worked well and it's been frustrating has been the bit where each organisation has been trying to cheat perfection from its own view, for instance Amnesty wanted to make sure that the legal content is perfect, IANSA wanted to consult every single one of its grassroots members, and Oxfam GB wanted to ensure that the political strategy is perfect. Actually all three have to lighten up a bit and just accept that things have been done slightly differently from how they would do it alone. Sometimes it can end up like designing horse by committee and creating a camel. Too many people trying to work on something together.'*

While joint decision-making is a good principle for strategic and high-impact decisions, it has been applied right down to the most detailed day-to-day decisions and has created a great deal of frustration for all concerned. In the worst case, the development of 'joint' press releases and policy statements can take weeks, not only because of each organisation's internal sign-off procedures, but also because of heated and difficult negotiations as each party fights its ground.

Such high costs for consensual decision-making create an incentive for each organisation either to act unilaterally, or to develop tactics to force their own way.

*Source: Control Arms case study*

### 4.3 Developing clear management structures

Once it has been established how decisions in the project and partnership are to be delegated or shared, it is important to establish appropriate management and decision-making structures that support this. Most of the case-study partnerships rely on informal groupings of POs and partner representatives to make decisions, but some had more formal and innovative structures such as PINORD as described in Box 7.

Oxfam GB in Senegal devolved power, finances, and staff to the steering committee of PINORD, which has become an advocacy and capacity-building 'apex' organisation for six producer organisations. The staff of this organisation are called the Technical Support Unit (TSU) and are at the service of the partners. Each partner has a seat at the board of the steering committee that decides how funds will be used. An orientation committee is responsible for the strategic decisions concerning the programme, and the steering committee and TSU develop the work-plan and budget. In this way, decisions about capacity-building and joint advocacy are devolved to the partners, with Oxfam GB retaining an interest and influence, but removing itself from day-to-day decisions. This may be a model Oxfam GB wants to pursue if it decides to be more hands-off but still wants to support smaller organisations.

**Box 7: Supporting many organisations through a co-managed organisation**

PINORD is a programme initiated by Oxfam to provide viable livelihoods for the people of the Senegal River Valley. Rather than working with individual partner organisations to implement the programme, Oxfam GB has facilitated the development of a network of six community organisations of agricultural producers, collectively referred to as 'PINORD'. Oxfam GB provides funds for programme implementation, of which 60 per cent goes on institutional capacity-building for the partners. The programme is managed through several interrelated bodies. The programme's policy and overall direction is defined by the orientation committee, while the steering committee is responsible for co-ordinating programme implementation. The key partnership interface is between the Oxfam GB Senegal Programme Co-ordinator, who manages the Oxfam GB side of the partnership, and the president of the PINORD steering committee. PINORD's only salaried personnel staff constitute the Technical Support Unit (TSU) which assists and advises the steering committee with programme implementation. The producer organisations are investigating becoming a legally registered federation, which would enable them to raise funds in their own right.

*Source: PINORD case study*

Working with ALRMP, a special government project in Kenya, no formal management committee was developed, but a number of stakeholder forums (such as the Kenyan Livestock Marketing Council and the National Steering Committee for Peace and Conflict Resolution) have evolved around key issues.

The two multilateral partnerships involved in the case studies have more formal decision-making structures. They both have steering groups, and sub-policy or working groups, but the partnership resources are structured in fundamentally different ways. SWC has independent funding which enters a separate bank account. It also has dedicated secretariat staff who were originally seconded from a parent organisation, but who now work for a newly formed SWC organisation with a board of directors (to replace the steering group).

Control Arms resources are retained by the partner organisations and offered on a project-by-project basis for different campaign events and initiatives. The partners are able to work more unilaterally as the resources are perceived to be their own, rather than part of a joint venture.

It is important to establish how partnership resources will be ear-marked and managed. Will the partnership establish a separate bank account or organisation, or work through more ad-hoc informal collaboration? Placing resources into an independent pot creates more administration but increases the visibility of the joint funds. It tends to create a perceptual shift which sees the funding as joint money, held in independent stewardship by both parties and managed according to specified donor criteria. This approach is rarely followed in Oxfam GB partnerships – the only example here is PINORD – as it entails higher levels of risk, investment, and co-management. However, it may warrant further exploration if Oxfam GB is keen to develop jointly owned initiatives.

#### **4.4 Costs and benefits of different partnership approaches**

Oxfam GB needs to understand what elements of collaboration they want, because each form comes with different costs and benefits and different prerequisites for success. The benefits of partnership and the drivers for why Oxfam GB and other international NGOs work in partnership are complex, but can be divided into efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and sustainability arguments (Table 5).

**Table 5: Costs and benefits of collaboration – a complementarity perspective**

Complementarity perspective	Benefits		Costs
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Efficiency	Collaboration brings lower operational overheads and salaries. Partners are closer to beneficiaries ...	<b>But...</b>	INGOs should factor in management costs and difficulties of ensuring upward accountability and compliance.
Effectiveness	Collaboration brings greater knowledge of the problem and solutions. Partners know the right people and can get things done in communities...	<b>But...</b>	Partners might also bring out-of-date practices and disproved ideas, and can also make mistakes.
Equity	Collaborators are also beneficiaries. INGOs have a moral duty to devolve power and funds to them and INGOs gain 'legitimacy' from this ...	<b>But...</b>	Losing control introduces risks and unknowns that can derail plans
Sustainability/ capacity-building	Collaborators (partners from all sectors) are the future institutional actors in-country, and the ability to fight poverty sustainably is mostly in their hands. Collaboration empowers...	<b>But...</b>	Capacity-building is expensive and influence is difficult to guarantee

However, the business literature is quick to emphasise the large cost of full and shared decision-making over a wide range of resources. Management becomes difficult, communication and negotiation costs increase, and controlling and predicting outcomes becomes an art not a science. The main prerequisite for successful collaboration is a strong pool of trust and rapport or 'relationship capital'. Often this needs to be built before or in parallel with the growing collaboration. Collaboration should not grow at a faster rate than the underlying relationship can sustain. Building relationships requires investment, particularly of time, patience, and respect. If these can be achieved, the partnership has the potential to fulfil some of the highest aspirations (see Box 8).

**Box 8: Benefits produced by high-quality relationships in Oxfam GB**

- **Flexibility** and the ability to move the partnership quickly and co-manage effectively (as mentioned)
- High levels of **mutual accountability** based on trust and proximity
- Openness to exchanging ideas and developing **innovative** solutions to intractable problems
- Opportunities to **reflect deeply and learn** together, build skills and personal capacity
- Opportunities therefore to **influence** each other, and support each other to be bold and brave

## 5 Partner accountability to Oxfam GB

In the last ten years the accountability requirements set by governments for the use of aid money have increased. These have been passed on to international NGOs, such as Oxfam GB, and Oxfam GB has had to pass some of them on to their partners. Everyone has come under pressure to prove the cost-effectiveness and impact of their work. Several recent studies have highlighted the costs and difficulties this creates for smaller organisations in developing countries. What experience have Oxfam GB partners had of these increased accountability requirements?

### 5.1.1 Positive perceptions of the accountability process

Most case-study partner organisations feel that Oxfam GB's reporting requirements are less onerous and more reasonable than those of other funders. Oxfam GB is generally seen to be a fair and reasonable manager who does not extract unreasonable reporting requirements and does not audit as frequently as other donors. This reflects the views of Oxfam GB finance staff who feel they are at the lenient end of the accountability spectrum, compared with other donors.

Some of the smaller organisations, particularly those with less administrative capacity, do find that the reports take a long time and are challenging to complete. However, most see them as a necessary requirement in the modern funding environment, and have come to see the necessity of rigorous accountability for their organisational credibility and therefore eventual sustainability (as discussed in Section 3.1.1).

*'We understand the importance of having good financial and narrative reports. It is actually useful for us too. For example, we use Oxfam GB's accounting format not only when we submit our project report to Oxfam GB but also to other funders too. Accountability is important because the more accountable you are...the more attractive you are to donors.'* (PIAR)

Others have grown to realise the benefits of monitoring and reporting to project management. For instance, Sidreh appreciates the need for these reports and its staff said that better planning *'saves us money'*. OCDIH officers stated that the reports are useful for their own internal management, to revise strategies, analyse loop-holes, and reflect on the direction of the project. Some partners in the survey also agreed.

*'Oxfam GB brings value to the word accountable as it helps the partner NGO to learn from its mistakes and make mid course corrections if need be.'* (Survey)

The programme manager in WAMI went as far as to say she enjoys writing the reports and enjoys the opportunity to reflect.<sup>26</sup> Her field nurses find the reporting process more time-consuming, but agree that it allows them to improve their English writing and analytical skills and *'helps them to identify problems and to think differently'*, a comment shared by others (e.g. PIAR).

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<sup>26</sup> She suggested that this was because she was also studying for an MSc in development management.

### 5.1.2 Less positive perceptions of the accountability process

Many staff, from both partners and Oxfam GB, did complain about the time and distraction of reporting – on average about 4–5 days per month. Some felt reporting took resources away from other priorities, including time spent in the field and with beneficiaries. The smaller organisations had clearly invested considerable resources in training staff in reporting skills; time that could have been spent on other needs.

Oxfam GB's gender advocacy partners in Pakistan feel that Oxfam GB's demands for documentation and reports are sometimes...

*'...irritating as one is caught up in number of things which do not allow immediate compliance. There has to be some workable method in this regard.'*  
(Pakistan partner workshop report, September 2006)

Sidreh called for a 'decent' (i.e. partner-achievable) reporting schedule. Generally there is a call to keep reporting requirements reasonable – particularly in terms of deadlines.

## 5.2 Improving the accountability process

There are costs and benefits to formal, paper-based accountability systems. A degree of monitoring and measuring is important for project managers, but the time and energy invested by staff also create a cost which Oxfam GB and beneficiaries ultimately bear in reduced performance. Ideas from the study on how to reduce these costs are discussed here.

### 5.2.1 Responsiveness and feedback

The survey results reveal that only 11 per cent of partners think that Oxfam GB does not read or act on the reports they provide. However, 22 per cent of the survey respondents are unsure how their work will be assessed by Oxfam GB. This is particularly a concern for small organisations.<sup>27</sup> A number of comments (at least six) were made by the partners suggesting that they would like more feedback from Oxfam GB on their work and on their reports in order to gain the most value from the time they put into writing them.

*'We don't get useful feedback on reports, so we don't know how Oxfam GB views its relationship with us, which in turn, means that we don't have a strong sense of relationship with Oxfam GB as an organisation. It's more a case of relationships with some individuals within Oxfam GB. Feedback on reports and discussion of ways to improve would be helpful, as would more timely communications sometimes.'* (Survey)

*'Though we share our experience, shortfall and failures with Oxfam GB we do not get the feedback.'* (Survey)

*'It would be useful to have some constructive feedback or maybe a visit/meeting to discuss what we are doing at least once during the 3 years.'*  
(Survey)

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<sup>27</sup> For whom 32 per cent are unsure of Oxfam GB's measure of success compared with 16 per cent of large organisations.



*'Since our three year programme ended we have not received any feedback from programme staff.'* (Survey)

*'NGO partners should be made aware about the process taken to assess the work done by them.'* (Survey)

There is a sense that some of the reports that partners toil over are never read. This can heighten any sense of reporting as a burden which does not offer value-for-money. If reports are indeed intended to aid learning and are not just a mechanism for compliance, then a response is essential. Response times could be monitored to ensure Oxfam GB is as accountable to the partner as the partner is to Oxfam GB. In an ideal world the report would be the catalyst for a deeper verbal dialogue.

### 5.2.2 Verbal debriefs and field visits

Verbal forms of reflection and review are deemed more valuable than written forms – particularly in the many cultures which have a predominantly oral tradition – and field visits are an important mechanism (see Section 3.3). Oxfam GB uses field visits to great effect with partners in Honduras, particularly in helping them deal with financial issues (see Box 9). In addition, verbal debriefs by telephone have been much appreciated.

*'When I called PIAR staff who are responsible for the project implementation, they told us many interesting stories that they never put it in their narrative report. Only through one-to-one conversations with them could we understand what has been achieved in the project.'* (PIAR case study)

#### **Box 9: Financial training in the field**

In-the-field visits are organised with the partner a week before the submission deadline for financial reports. One financial manager and one assistant travel to the partners' offices and work together with their financial team, supervising reconciliation of invoices and project expenditures and spotting any problems or errors in the financial report drafts. OCDIH's financial manager said that in-the-field visits are a good source of learning for them and that it had helped them to improve their financial management. Both parties assert that this system has reduced dramatically the amount of paperwork and written communication between Oxfam GB and OCDIH, reducing uncertainties and acting as a valuable training resource for the partner.

*Source:* OCDIH case study

### 5.2.3 Improving report usability and consistency

All partners prefer short, standard, easy-to-complete formats with clear guidelines on what information is needed, for whom, and why, with a clear link between the financial report and the narrative information.

JNC in Peru explained that reports do not seem to be standardised to other local reporting formats. They said reports run from July to June and do not follow the South American financial year (January to December). Dian Desa's experience is of changes in reporting formats, sometime with no discussion about the reason and no consultation on how to make the report useful to the partner too. Even if reports are standardised, Oxfam GB could communicate better what it needs, so that partners are better able to meet those needs:

*'[We would like] forms to apply for financing or the execution of concrete projects (progress or final reports, etc).'* (Survey)

*'[We would like Oxfam GB] To establish clearer general guidance on financial and administrative procedures.'* (Survey)

There is also a sense that the quarterly narrative report format does not always allow partners to capture the successes of which they are most excited or proud. Doaba explained that *'we want to write these reports because we are so proud of all the work we do. Unfortunately we cannot fit all our achievements in these reports'*.

WAMI feels that Oxfam GB systems are less onerous than those of other donors, but can also be less rigorous. They feel the USAID reporting system is more logically structured and facilitates a stronger management-performance perspective, particularly in relation to tracking ongoing progress on different performance targets, and being able to reflect from one report to another on progress.

#### **5.2.4 Integrating financial and narrative reporting**

Integrating narrative and financial management elements is another important means of harmonising and simplifying reporting. In Oxfam GB Honduras the project teams encourage a strong inter-relation between the financial and narrative reports. Financial and programme managers in Oxfam GB meet regularly after submission of reports to monitor project implementation, and a similar 'joined-up', integrated process is encouraged in their partner organisations. This enables project planners in OCDIH to implement holistic monitoring of the projects: checking expenditures incurred to date and considering programme adaptations, while taking into account possible budget constraints.

In Oxfam GB Pakistan, the office has attempted harmonisation via the Project Cycle Management (PCM) system and OPAL.

*'We wanted to find a practical framework which could help us incorporate our values around partnership more systematically. The OPAL and PCM systems drive Oxfam GB programme behaviour and it's a reality we need to build on. We build on the existing systems and integrate our partnership principles and practices into these. This is not only a support for programme officers, but for partners too, who like to understand the framework that is being used to manage the programme. It helps improve accountability and clarify mutual expectations.'* (Doaba case study)

Such communication and collaboration between Oxfam GB programme and financial staff is important to encourage at all levels, including regional centres and head office.

### **5.3 Building partner capacity for accountability**

With increased partner-reporting and accountability requirements comes the need for increased partner capacity to meet these requirements. Section 3.1.1 noted that building partner administrative capacity is one of Oxfam GB's core contributions in partnership. But how does it go about it?

*'My goal is to create "mini-Oxfam GB" in our partner...however, my biggest challenge is that I cannot dictate [or force] them to do what we [Oxfam GB] want them to do. We could only propose suggestions about all the things that we want them to follow. We cannot force them to implement our requirements.'*

*Therefore, building a good relationship with them is the most important key to making this task a success.' (Finance Officer, Indonesia)*

With the youngest and smallest case-study organisations, Oxfam GB has funded the direct recruitment of new partner staff dedicated to reporting and finance (see for example Box 10 with respect to narrative reports). When it is impossible to provide dedicated staff to support reporting, Oxfam GB works through its own outreach staff and trainings (see Box 11).

**Box 10: Developing reporting skills**

Writing an informative narrative report is a challenge for PIAR (and other local partners as well). They want to improve this capacity but do not know how to do it. Unfortunately, this is a skill that cannot easily be improved through short-term training, and Oxfam GB does not have the resources in place to assist their partners to improve their writing skills. To deal with this situation the PO at first tried to assist by providing comments and suggestions about what additional information is needed. Then she took to ringing them up and asking for an oral report and then writing the formal report herself. Oxfam GB has now agreed to provide additional funds to PIAR to hire someone to help with their reports. This will also help them with their fundraising as they have not been able to write funding proposals either. This is an example of Oxfam GB investing in capacity-building.

*Source:* PIAR case study

**Box 11: Training partners in financial systems in Indonesia**

At the beginning of a partnership in Indonesia, Oxfam GB provided a two-day training for their partners' accountants and finance managers and created a simple Excel spreadsheet format to help them to prepare their financial report. Finance staff in Oxfam GB also schedule a field visit to each of their partners at least once or twice a year, not only to conduct an internal audit and financial monitoring, but also to provide follow-up assistance to make sure that partners follow all Oxfam GB financial requirements and accounting procedures. Oxfam GB financial staff also have telephone conversations with partner finance staff to make sure there are no problems related to fund management.

*Source:* PIAR case study

In Kenya, Malawi, and Honduras, there are dedicated finance outreach officers. The focus is on capacity development via on-the-job training. This has helped to develop trust and rapport, and partners regularly come to the finance outreach officers for advice and support on additional issues such as the recruitment of finance staff, software systems, etc. Before this role was developed, the finance team used to train up the PO to understand budgets and accounts, but this was a struggle and drew their focus away from programme-quality work.

In Pakistan and Kenya, financial training support has been successfully outsourced to organisational development consultancies (DevCon and Iceberg respectively). This shows that some elements of capacity-building can be out-sourced and funded under separate capacity-building agreements and policy.

PINORD is a coalition established to support a group of producer organisations. The PINORD arrangement provides dedicated and centralised reporting staff that support the group of partners. The reporting staff are independently employed, but are dedicated to supporting and building the capacity of partners. They produce all the reports and are able to remove much of the reporting burden from partners.

In most cases, however, partners are eventually expected to internalise reporting capacities, requirements, and costs. To support this process of capacity-building, Oxfam GB finance managers called for clearer standardisation of accountability

levels and systems so that partners know what to aspire to and what targets to hit.<sup>28</sup> In Kenya, the office is keen to develop a handbook on levels and standards of financial capability so that partners have a programme of development and a goal.<sup>29</sup> Staff are keen to encourage a culture of *'building quality in, not screening it out'*,<sup>30</sup> to encourage investment in partners' accountability systems from an early stage, not a patching up of problems as projects evolve.

A similar idea from Oxfam GB Pakistan and an adviser from Internal Audit in Oxfam GB consists of developing a set of partnership capacity standards (see Table 6). These would give partners a set of goals to achieve, and would also lay down the basic minimum standards for partnership with Oxfam GB at the levels of alliance, project, or strategic partner.

The concept of assessing partner organisational capacity at the beginning of a partnership relationship is already well-established within Novib and could prove useful for Oxfam GB too. Such a framework is valuable, not for setting rigid barriers for inclusion and exclusion of certain partners, but for catalysing discussions on current capacity levels<sup>31</sup> and future capacity-building needs. It would not be useful to begin turning away small and innovative organisations who will clearly need a lot of support. This risk-averse and investment-averse approach contributes to a trend that sees many smaller partners struggling to find funding and support. However, a more open discussion about capacity at an early stage could allay confusion and miscommunication at a later date. Not having this discussion has hampered the development of some partnerships, and a clearer route-map explicitly clarifying Oxfam GB's requirements is likely to be appreciated by partners.

**Table 6: Example of staged approach to levels of partner accountability capacity – Pakistan**

Partnership stage	Pre-requisites
Silver (basics)  <i>Ideal for alliance-based partners?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner is an organisation registered under any of the legal instruments in Pakistan as non-profit</li> <li>The vision and organisational philosophy of partner and Oxfam GB are compatible and both the organisations are frequently in touch with each other on different issues</li> </ul>
Gold (basics + MoU)  <i>Ideal for project-based partners?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner and Oxfam GB are interested and show intention to work with each other to alleviate poverty and sufferings</li> <li>Partner and Oxfam GB have signed MoU, outlining the shared organisational values and expressed intention to work with each other as and when opportunity arises</li> </ul>
Diamond (basics + MoU + contract for a specific project)  <i>Ideal for strategic partners?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner and Oxfam GB have a formal contract (including a project document, project budget, and a work plan) for regulating financial support, and ensuring transparency and accountability</li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> WAMI in Malawi suggested that this be combined with a review to examine similarities and differences with other donor accountability systems and thus begin a donor harmonisation initiative.

<sup>29</sup> Apparently this is a model that Oxfam GB Brazil has followed.

<sup>30</sup> An approach pioneered by Sony to improve quality control.

<sup>31</sup> Including a wide range of organisational capacities beyond narrative and financial reporting (e.g. governance, transparency, administrative, and human-resource systems).

## 6 Oxfam GB's accountability to its partners

### 6.1 Formal accountability to partner

Increasing Oxfam GB's accountability to its partners is one of the main ways of addressing power imbalances in partnerships. Every partnership should have two-way accountability. However, Oxfam GB's performance in this area is variable. In the survey, only 54 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB is accountable to them.

*'The rights and responsibility part of the contract signed between Oxfam GB and partner organisation is vague. It has underlined responsibilities for the partner organisation and almost nothing about its rights. There is also nothing mentioned about the responsibilities of Oxfam GB.'* (Survey)

*'If you look at the MoU, it is one-sided. It really binds the partner and lacks any accountability to Oxfam GB.'* (Survey)

*'In the course of the encounter, there wasn't a time when we found Oxfam GB to be unaccountable, or when we had to demand specific accountability from them. However, as the balance of power is in their favour, we feel that there is little we can do if they choose to be unaccountable in their relationship with us. From the way things are at the moment, we hope we will not get to that stage. The spectre, however, constantly haunts small organisations like ours.'* (Survey)

One respondent expressed concern that Oxfam GB is more worried about meeting internal accountability requirements than external ones:

*'I don't think Oxfam GB feels externally accountable at all! Oxfam GB staff spend vastly more time with internal accountability tasks than any external-facing accountability to their partners.'* (Survey)

Similarly, results from the case studies (which are detailed in Annex 3, Table 12) revealed that the written or 'formal' accountability of Oxfam GB to the partner can also be weak.

*'The language, the letterhead, and the process in drafting this agreement is more like a business contract than a partnership agreement...an agreement means that both sides need to be agreed upon the content ...you need to actually sit down and discuss it with the partner...also, how can we say this is a partnership agreement, if it is printed on Oxfam GB's letterhead without any partner logo on it?'* (PIAR)

In a partner review workshop in Pakistan, partners also called for a review of some of the stronger languages and clauses in the contracts that were written in Oxfam GB's favour. Most of the grant letters and contracts were one-sided and provided little information about what the partner could expect to receive in addition to the funding (e.g. capacity-building inputs), or what behaviours from Oxfam GB it could expect. There was little guidance or support on how to hold Oxfam GB to account.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For Oxfam GB, it is important to have a written contract or agreement because it increases its sense of security about its own and the partner's rights and obligations. For PIAR (and many Indonesians, in

However, there were two notable exceptions. One was the exemplary work of OCDIH (6.2.2), and the other was a short document outlining what both sides could expect, drawn up by the UK Poverty Programme with partners.

## 6.2 Improving Oxfam GB's accountability

### 6.2.1 Paying on time

The first and most basic step towards ensuring that Oxfam GB is accountable to its partners is for Oxfam GB to fulfil its primary commitment – to pay on time. In most relationships a transfer of funds is central to the relationship, and is the one formal commitment Oxfam GB has to its partners. However, only 66 per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB delivers when it says it will. Concerns about delays in the release of funds without explanation were expressed by a number of organisations.<sup>33</sup>

*'It would be good if Oxfam GB paid out the financing on time.'* (Survey)

*'The delayed funding in the first quarter which eventually delays the activities/implementation.'* (Survey)

*'The supply of needed funds to run our programs. They take too long to forward the much needed assistance.'* (Survey)

### 6.2.2 Mutual accountability charters

Only one partner (OCDIH) has a mutual charter which lays out Oxfam GB's accountabilities as clearly and equally as the partner's (Box 12). Such a simple mechanism is relatively straightforward for Oxfam GB, with relatively few cost implications. It would demand an investment of more time at the beginning of a project, and more time along the way to regularly review, but it provides the formal framework for open dialogue about expectations and commitments. It also sends out the kind of organisational messages that could facilitate a shift in attitudes and thus create a shift in the balance of partnership power.

#### Box 12: An example of a mutual responsibility charter in Honduras (OCDIH)

OCDIH'S MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES	OXFAM GB'S MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES
To carry out the field-level implementation of the project, in accordance with the detailed approved budget and planned activities included in the agreement.	To accompany the field-implementation process, establishing communicative and horizontal co-ordination relationships with OCDIH staff.
To have the necessary technical, management, and social-promotion personnel to fulfil the objectives of the project.	To jointly identify with OCDIH the evaluation requirements, advice, and qualified technical support needed for the optimal execution of the project. If hired consultancy is required, the terms of reference will also be discussed and decided jointly.
To execute, direct, monitor, and follow up the technical, organisational, and training activities to ensure the achievement of the project targets.	To provide comments to narrative and financial reports not later than eight days

fact), a written contract does not always function like this. A written contract or agreement could also represent mistrust between parties.

<sup>33</sup> With 14 comments in the survey.

<p>To submit a narrative and financial report every three months following the specific Oxfam GB guidelines and accounting/banking requirements detailed in the agreement. (Specific dates for report submission are included in the agreement.)</p> <p>To carry out participative evaluations every three months to identify the necessary implementation changes that should be pursued to fulfil the objectives and targets of the project.</p>	<p>financial reports not later than eight days after submission of the reports.</p> <p>To monitor the budget execution in order to verify its correct management according to the detailed budget included in the agreement. If Oxfam GB needs to audit the project, OCDIH will commit to provide the required assistance.</p> <p>To participate in the processes of systematic evaluation and the final evaluation of the project.</p>

Doaba feel that clear information should be available both to Oxfam GB and Doaba staff on how they should behave towards the other organisation and what is expected of them. This could be incorporated into the charter, perhaps based on a template for discussion. It could act as a set of principles and standards for induction, but also as a reference should relationships become tense. Such a charter could contain information on language and attitudes, and provide guidance on how to respond to some of the difficult dilemmas POs can face. Some of these ideas are explored further in Section 8.3.

#### **Box 13: Difficulties in partnership**

*'It was not a true partnership... We don't want to be just a subcontractor to Oxfam GB. True partnership is about being fully involved in designing the programme.'*

How can we explain why Dian Desa had such a bad experience of this partnership? Firstly, it seems that Oxfam GB was under pressure to speed up the project implementation in order to meet the project deadline with certain technical and administrative standards. Very little space and time was available for the partner to negotiate and discuss these requirements. Secondly, many of the staff involved in this emergency-response project were newly hired, mostly Westerners, with little (or even no) working experience in Indonesia. Since they worked on short-term contracts, the staff turnover was very high. Thirdly, Dian Desa felt that as an organisation in their position is relatively equal with Oxfam GB, they expected Oxfam GB to treat them as an equal partner.

Dian Desa also pointed out that Oxfam GB sets up lots of bureaucratic processes: the bidding requirement for purchasing the material is a standard procedure developed by Oxfam GB for all partners. Dian Desa argued that it does not make sense when this requirement is applied in emergency-response projects that require quick action in order to meet the needs of the people affected by natural disasters, such as in the case of the earthquake in Yogyakarta.

*Source:* Dian Desa case study

### **6.2.3 Facilitating 360 degree review**

Oxfam GB also needs to be open to responding when it is not performing. Overall, 59 per cent of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB responds well to constructive criticism from them,<sup>34</sup> but others were not so sure.

<sup>34</sup> The large proportion (32 per cent) of 'neither agreed or disagreed' replies to this question suggests that partners may not have put this to the test by providing constructive criticism to Oxfam GB. Generally, large, fairly non-dependent partners who have been working with Oxfam GB for a long period of time are most likely to feel that Oxfam GB is less open to criticism from them.

*'Though we get a sense that our criticism is valued, we do not have ways to see whether suggestions have been acted upon.'* (Survey)

*'The letters to Oxfam GB often stay unreplied, the comments done by the partner organisation are accepted negatively and create tension in the relationships.'* (Survey)

Regular performance reviews, similar to those held for staff, could possibly be held every six or 12 months with partners. These could review the state of the partnership and take an appreciative angle, highlighting what is working well, as well as where there is room for improvement. It would be critical to ensure that the format includes a two-way, 360 degree component, in which every party has equal time and space to express their concerns and acknowledgements. A possible format for a 360 degree workshop is described in Box 14.

The case-study workshops provided this opportunity for the first time in many of the partnerships, and those who were able to go through the half- or one-day process found them to be of great value:

*'The partnership evaluation process was experienced as useful by all concerned. They felt it made them celebrate the achievements of the partnership: how hard they had worked and how much they had learned and achieved and to "document the friendship" between Oxfam GB and its partner.'* (Sidreh case study)

*'The case study process was an excellent opportunity to discuss in detail some of the core values and beliefs that WAMI and Oxfam GB held. Both sides had a very good understanding of each other's values, but they had not properly been discussed before. Vocalising them was a way of appreciating the common values.'* (WAMI case study)

*'I have been surprised. I was not thinking I would come to the workshop. Then when I did come I did not think I would stay right through to the end! But it has been very useful and improved our relationship with Oxfam GB.'* (WAMI Director)

Independent facilitators can be a great help at these events, providing a safe space for people to talk frankly about their experiences. Often the involvement of a third party can radically change a fixed dynamic. Their presence allows things to be said that can shift a relationship and open up new ways of working. Sharing mutual appreciation can also be deeply motivating for people, just as airing a problem safely can shift resentment that might be blocking performance or collaboration.

Pre-interviews based on questions about the partnership can also be very helpful for warming people up and giving them a chance to collect their thoughts and feelings. They also provide a space for opinions to be given anonymously. Additional questions from the facilitator can help probe areas where there are difficult issues or dynamics.

**Box 14: Simple 360 degree workshop format**

- In partnership pairs, establish key strengths and challenges to the partnership (SWOT analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats)
- Seek clarification and discuss each point raised
- Report back any additional points from the pre-interviews
- Clarify any focus areas for further action/discussion
- Provide time for groups to discuss action areas further
- Conclude by establishing key tips and lessons for building strong partnerships



#### 6.2.4 Clear commitment and fair termination

Despite clear MoUs, the results of the study reveal that one of the biggest concerns of partners is that they do not know how long their relationships with Oxfam GB will last (see Section 4.1.4). This is a particular concern for small organisations<sup>35</sup> and for organisations that are highly dependent on Oxfam GB for funding. Survey respondents called for Oxfam GB to take a more long-term strategic approach to its partnerships:

*'Oxfam GB is hesitant to give indication for long-term partnership, which makes the partner little disturbed / uncertainty. Oxfam GB should take serious thought in avoiding uncertainty.'* (Survey)

*'Developing long term partnership based approach would be better for continuity and stability and consolidated efforts rather than applying a short term thematic oriented project based approach.'* (Survey)

*'It is better to support and create a link for a long term community based partnership than time bound activity.'* (Survey)

*'Through developing long term work plans and contracts though this could be annually renewable but should have specific long term attachments or partnerships, let's say by the year 2015.'* (Survey)

*'It seems to us for example that to start processes like truth, justice and reparations require longer commitments than those which Oxfam GB decided on. Similarly in relation to prioritising geographical areas: to see an impact, periods of at least five years should be maintained.'* (Survey)

Through the survey, 15 partners complained that their partnership with Oxfam GB is too short-term and that there is no clarity about whether it will evolve into a more strategic partnership. The case-study partnerships also expressed concern over the likely length of funding, particularly the smaller organisations. These included WAMI (whose renewed funding is yet to be re-negotiated), Doaba (who remain concerned about their continued dependency on Oxfam GB), PIAR (who are uneasy about what they will do when funding ends), and the smaller off-shoot organisations of ALRMP.

Partners particularly commented on the problems caused by lack of consultation around exit strategies. In Mali, some partnerships of 20 years were suspended without discussion, resulting in field-workers being unpaid for months, and resources intended for communities remaining stockpiled. The concern that termination may occur abruptly can create an undercurrent of insecurity in a project:

*'Particularly in disaster situation and withdrawal phase, Oxfam GB has to take decision on consultative manner. Which was missed in the 2006 tsunami programme withdrawal.'* (Survey)

*'Partners needs MOU with Oxfam GB clearly stating the duration of the relation and the exit strategy.'* (Survey)

*'Clarity about how long the support would last, and in case of withdrawal, for what reason.'* (Survey)

<sup>35</sup> Only 44 per cent of small organisations are clear about length of relationships.

It may always be difficult for country offices or regional programmes to know what funding they will have on a year-to-year basis. But much of the insecurity of smaller partners could be reduced if they had a clearer sense of what the future with – or without – Oxfam GB might look like. Developing alternative scenarios and tentative plans at an early stage might help. These would include plans for the partnership evolving or not evolving, and plans for different levels of Oxfam GB assistance. This would also provide an important opportunity for Oxfam GB to help the organisation think about its own future.

### **6.2.5 Complaints procedure and dispute-resolution process**

Some partners involved in the case studies would like to know whether a complaints procedure is in place, even if it is never or rarely used. Others feel that if things get that bad, it is time for the partnership to end. All case-study partners feel it is important to deal with problems before they escalate.

A basic first level of accountability and possible redress is for the partner to know who the PO's line manager is and how to contact them should there be a problem. This is by the far the safest and simplest way to hold an Oxfam GB PO to account, and one that might have helped provide an early resolution to difficulties in one of the case studies. In addition, the partner should have full knowledge of Oxfam GB's management structure in-country, so that it knows where to go if things get really bad. Making this information available would be very empowering and is a very simple initiative.

If the line-manager approach fails, there could be an independent person in Oxfam GB nominated who can act as confidential counsellor or mentor to the partner, and as a bridge to the PO or their manager. This could provide a means for gently mediating and clearing up misunderstandings. These people could be like organisational 'first-aiders', trained in basic partnership skills and relationship facilitation, and able to help as needed.

If these informal approaches fail, and the partner can clearly articulate where Oxfam GB is breaking an explicit or implicit agreement, they should be able to call in a fully independent mediator, at Oxfam GB's expense. This process should be clearly laid out in the contract or agreement.

## 7 Equity and Shared decision-making

### 7.1 Variations in shared decision-making

Central to mutual accountability is a commitment to joint and equitable decision-making. We have seen in Section 4.4 that not *all* decisions need to be made jointly, and that there is a continuum of involvement in decision-making that can vary according to different roles or decision-making domains (see for example

Table 3). While full and joint decision-making should not necessarily be encouraged across all aspects of the partnership, important decisions should be made jointly, or at least with partial influence from the partner. This is particularly true for any decision that has a significant bearing on either organisation. Experience from the case studies shows that variations in the quality of these decision-making processes are perhaps the greatest indicator of relationship quality and strength.

#### 7.1.1 High satisfaction with joint decision-making

Despite the differing amounts of funding that Oxfam GB gives to partners, 54 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that there is joint decision-making on important issues.

*'We have seen with great satisfaction that Oxfam GB takes us into account in doing analysis or discussions. We feel part and also consider Oxfam GB part of the struggle.'* (Survey)

Sixty-one per cent of respondents also agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB has a clear decision-making structure and meets regularly with partners to review progress and make decisions. This is felt most strongly by newer partners, particularly by those with a greater financial dependency on Oxfam GB.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, those organisations that have begun partnerships with Oxfam GB in the last two years feel happier about all aspects of decision-making than more long-standing partners.<sup>37</sup> Newer partners also have a greater sense that the money they receive from Oxfam GB is a shared resource over which both sides have influence. These results probably reflect the more intensive effort that Oxfam GB puts into new relationships, particularly when co-designing new projects.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the case-study partnerships displayed very strong levels of mutual decision-making and joint planning (for details see Table 12 in Annex 3). One example is WAMI. *'Oxfam GB view us as partners, not subordinates'* was a recurring theme in the WAMI workshop and interviews. Where there is strong trust and working relationships, the issue of power did not seem to be an overriding dynamic in the relationship. WAMI feels that the partnership is based on a mutual stewardship of the money, not an *'our money, not yours'* approach. WAMI is confident of its own ability

<sup>36</sup> Seventy-two per cent of those most financially dependent on Oxfam GB agree or strongly agree with this, compared with 59 per cent and 52 per cent of the less dependent organisations.

<sup>37</sup> Thus only 17 per cent of new partners agree or strongly agree that they have little decision-making control, compared with 22 per cent and 24 per cent of medium- and long-term partners respectively.

<sup>38</sup> It might also be due to changes in Oxfam GB's overall policy towards new partnerships, or to the increasing confidence of the civil-society sector.

and knows it is a partner of choice in Malawi. It knows Oxfam GB respects WAMI's views and does not want to lose it as a partner. The fact that WAMI has funding from other donors, and Oxfam GB's contribution is only about 25 per cent, helps a lot, as does the fact that the director of WAMI is a confident and dynamic leader.

The OCDIH director and officers also feel there is an equal power dynamic between Oxfam GB and their organisation. They feel confident to question Oxfam GB's decisions, express their concerns, and communicate any problems that might arise. The partnership has developed an extensive system of joint reviews, joint planning, and joint decision-making meetings which, though time-consuming, seem to have been highly successful in creating 'horizontal' relationships.

Even the smallest organisations and those most dependent on Oxfam GB funding are able to stand up to Oxfam GB and get their own way when they need to (e.g. Doaba, PIAR, and Sidreh). Doaba can speak its mind, despite being wholly dependent on Oxfam GB for funding. It knows Oxfam GB has invested a huge amount in the formation of its organisation. Doaba is aware of the value and importance of its work to Oxfam GB and has pushed Oxfam GB on certain issues, particularly financial accountability systems and procedures.

In Sidreh, staff are well aware of how powerful Oxfam GB is, and of the fact that its staff are well-educated, English-speaking males compared with Sidreh's mainly female and less well-educated staff. Yet Sidreh staff did not feel the imbalance of power was necessarily negative. One Sidreh staff member even felt that Sidreh had the upper hand. *'[Oxfam GB] may have the money and be international, but they don't get into the field which is the greater challenge and makes you strong.'* Others at Sidreh did not agree: *'Oxfam GB has the cash'* said one Sidreh staff member succinctly: *'and divorce would not harm Oxfam GB as it would Sidreh.'*

### 7.1.2 Low satisfaction with joint decision-making

Sidreh's mixed comments hint at the fairly large group who do not feel positively about equality in their partnership. In the survey, 20 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB is in the driving seat of their partnership and that they have little decision-making control. Twenty-eight per cent feel that they have to conform to Oxfam GB's ways of working and do things its way. Fourteen per cent said that Oxfam GB asks them to do things they do not agree with. This is felt more acutely by small organisations.<sup>39</sup>

*'Decision-making is unequal. Oxfam GB are the dominant partner.'* (Survey)

*'[Oxfam GB should do more to] deal with partners on an equal footing.'*  
(Survey)

The case studies reveal two partnerships – one a humanitarian partnership and the other a UK campaigns partnership – where partners believe that Oxfam GB clearly acts as if it is the main decision-maker. Their experiences are especially bitter because they believed or expected that the partnerships would be equal (see Box 13 and Box 15).

#### **Box 15: When Oxfam GB takes control – Control Arms and Dian Desa**

Oxfam GB's Control Arms partners feel they each bring equal value and resources – and the partnership agreement implies that decisions should be made by consensus – yet they claim

<sup>39</sup> Twenty-three per cent of smaller organisations felt this, compared with 17 per cent of larger organisations.

that Oxfam GB always has a tendency to get its own way. They see Oxfam GB's managers as bullish and insensitive and feel they try to bypass agreed joint decisions or decision-making processes. They feel they have suffered large staff costs in terms of time spent fighting their ground, and have considered on several occasions whether the costs of involvement are worth the outcomes.

In the Dian Desa partnership an independent evaluation report of the partnership stated that: *'the partnership adhered to the principles of mutual trust and openness, however both staff of Oxfam GB and partners still felt subordination in the partnership'*.

*Source: Dian Desa and Control Arms case studies*

A great deal of resentment can be generated if partners feel they are being manipulated or controlled, especially if they are expecting a different dynamic and greater decision-making rights. In many cases it is better to be realistic and honest about the limited possibilities for joint collaboration or to explore expectations around this (see also Section 4.3).

## 7.2 Approaches to increase equality

### 7.2.1 Softening dominant cultures and attitudes

No governance model is perfect, and no management structure can guarantee joint and equitable decision-making. Oxfam GB is a powerful organisation staffed by well-educated, confident people and it can easily slip into a dominant role, especially if there are time or performance pressures.

*'Oxfam GB is part of a very large and growing global network with a global vision. With your strong brand, as well as your strong financial and intellectual capacity, your greatest challenge will be to strengthen, rather than smother or displace small and fragile locally conceived CSOs.'* (Survey)

*'[Oxfam GB should] not always assume they are leaders in that area of work but learn to work with others on a more equal basis. It's accepted that this is difficult considering the organisation size and reputation. But Oxfam GB has huge shoes with which, at times, it just squashes smaller organisations.'* (Survey)

Across the organisation it is fairly clear that Oxfam GB has different cultures of partnership with international development programmes (which tend to act in a more participative manner), campaigns, and humanitarian programmes. These issues sometimes relate to particular personalities but likely reflect an organisational or departmental culture which gives the dominant behaviour permission to persist.<sup>40</sup> It is senior management that sets the tone for the approach in different divisions and regions, and it is the performance measures in certain areas (and lack of them in others) that can motivate particular culture and staff behaviour. The following quote, from a bitter partner, may be an extreme view but demonstrates the kind of frustrations that can be created:

*'Oxfam GB headquarters does not have to be accountable to anyone. Its country offices are subjugated and partners are seen as a mechanism to achieve their own ends...Oxfam GB is overly obsessed and driven by media*

<sup>40</sup> This is probably due to the fact that campaigns and humanitarian work are much more operational in nature than development programmes. They are also more prone to time and logistical pressures and, because they are higher profile, provide greater chance for Oxfam GB to take the limelight.

*targets, and it will pursue these to the cost of its partners, without any regard to them...Senior management in Oxfam GB clearly condones this kind of careerist and ambitious behaviour, because it rewards those involved.'* (Anonymous partner)

Another comment from the survey suggests that more than one partner may have similar concerns:

*'Because Oxfam GB is so big in name, resources, reputation and expertise it can go it alone and often does even in contradiction to what is agreed and happening in the network. This has happened twice in the last 4 months alone. It is not the individuals working for the organisation but part of accepted culture. We know how Oxfam GB works. Sometimes it's a very good relationship of sharing and Oxfam GB throwing its resources behind an activity. Other times it is the total opposite. We have grown used to Oxfam GB doing its 'own thing'. It's almost predictable when particular opportunities are on the horizon.'* (Survey)

There is little excuse for Oxfam GB to be defeatist over the power inequality issue. Oxfam GB may have a lot of money and influence, but working in a joint way – if that is what it decides it wants to do – is as much about an attitude and choice as it is about balance of resources.

## **7.2.2 Transparency and involvement in Oxfam GB's wider processes**

The discussion of exit strategies and commitment in Section 6.2.4 emphasised the distress that uncertainty over Oxfam GB's funding decisions can create. Involvement of partners in these decisions can go a long way to helping them feel empowered. Seventy-eight per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB is happy to share information with them. However, 26 per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB does not consult them before making big changes to strategy. Approximately 27 partners commented further on the need to put better systems in place for consultation and decision-making. A number of partners (approximately nine) commented on the negative and undermining impact that lack of consultation can have on their organisation:

*'Strategy has been changed without any inputs from us and has negatively affected our future funding relationship with Oxfam GB. We were merely informed about this, rather than consulted.'* (Survey)

*'Oxfam GB policies are not consulted upon. Once finalised, these are merely circulated. And this is how it takes time to understand new OGB policies and at many occasions partners don't feel convenient with the new policies. Partners in a poor country like us always obey OGB because we can't afford to lose project and future relations with OGB.'* (Survey)

*'Oxfam GB should permit greater participation by its counterparts consulting them in advance on the changes in the new decisions that are important and that affect the institutions.'* (Survey)

Other partners (approximately eight) believe the consultation processes to be tokenistic:

*'Whilst there is a certain willingness to discuss strategies together, Oxfam GB staff don't involve partners in their own decisions. The UKPP held a major stock take exercise which included a token consultation with partners – but*

*then didn't even bother to inform even close partners of the outcome of the stock take. I don't get a sense that at a strategic level they think they have anything to learn from external partners (other than the lessons they themselves chose to draw).'* (Survey)

*'We think that it is basically a matter of sharing decisions that have already been taken, rather than participation in the process of decision-making.'* (Survey)

*'There had already been a decision pre-established and the consultation was a mere formal requisite.'* (Survey)

There was a big call – both from survey respondents and partners involved in the case study – to demystify how Oxfam GB is structured, to be involved in priority-setting, and to open up about how funding decisions are made.

*'We should like to be better informed about your initiatives and priorities for support in this country.'* (Survey)

Oxfam GB Honduras has done a lot to open itself up to scrutiny, and open up the processes used for funding decisions (see Box 16).

#### **Box 16: Honduras approach to transparent funding decisions and lesson-learning**

In addition to the list of mutual responsibilities that Oxfam GB and the partner agreed, OCDIH described Oxfam GB Honduras as transparent regarding financial management, selection criteria, and distribution of funds among partners. Partners are invited to express their concerns about Oxfam GB's financial management, and information is shared with them on the selection criteria and projects chosen for funding, and the evaluation criteria and evaluation scores for each project and organisation. A management committee of main partners has been formed and is instrumental in this, providing a space for partners to share and learn from each other. It is a multilateral space created by five partner organisations and Oxfam GB Honduras in 2003, where all engage in a process of synthesising learning and mutual capacity-building. The committee meets every three months and so far has produced ten booklets summarising their good practices and learning strategies. OCDIH was selected by the rest of the partners to lead the management committee during their first three years.

*Source:* OCDIH Case study

In Peru, Oxfam GB staff feel that a key way to promote more accountability is to invest time in promoting multilateral joint planning meetings with other Oxfam GB partners. This would contribute to transparency and openness of Oxfam GB's strategies. In Malawi, partners called for the return of country strategy sessions (see Box 17). One Oxfam GB staff member with wide experience reminisced about how Oxfam GB in Southern Africa (Zambia) used to bring all country partners together for the participatory development of its strategy each year. The end of these meetings reflected a general sense that since Oxfam GB has become more centrally managed, and country-office autonomy reduced, there is less room for partners at country level to be involved in strategy setting.

#### **Box 17: A call by Malawi partners for more involvement**

At a meeting of partners in 2006 as part of a country review, partners identified areas for improvement. These included a clearer exit strategy for the partners, and more information on Oxfam GB's own strategic and organisational processes. For instance:

*'Partners expect to be included in strategic planning. The current process does not allow partners to know in advance what the strategic plan will contain. For example, some partners were surprised during the discussion about the last strategic plan to see that education had*

*been dropped and they were also not sure how land issues would be incorporated in the next plan.'*

Source: Malawi Oxfam Joint Programme Review, 2006

### 7.2.3 Sharing risks and rewards

Sharing the risks, rewards, and costs of an endeavour is an important principle in partnership. In general, where there has been a success, Oxfam GB works hard to share the glory and give emphasis to the partner's role. However, particularly in its media and campaign work there is a tendency to 'go it alone' when opportunities arise, ignoring its more participative values.

*'There appears sometimes to be tension between the aims of the organisation and the apparent need to promote the organisation in its own right. This sometimes appears to be almost competitive with other development NGOs and can sometimes appear to be to the detriment of joint goals of eradicating poverty. Would be of benefit to work more together ideally!' (Survey)*

*'[We would like Oxfam GB to be]...making more visible the work and contribution of the organisations with which it works.' (Survey)*

Other survey complaints have been directed towards Oxfam GB's high-profile role in humanitarian relief. In Pakistan some partners felt that during the earthquake Oxfam GB had begun to take the glory for good work, while its partners had had a lower profile.

*'Partnership should be a collective effort for common goals irrespective of funds.' (Pakistan partner workshop)*

*'It [Oxfam GB] should be a body which supports development processes as it has done recently in the case of the disaster emergency: they have to be an agency of support and facilitation and not put themselves to the fore as saviours.' (Survey)*

However, there is also an example in the case studies (PINORD) where Oxfam GB was not mentioned during a half page article in a national newspaper about the launch of the rice charter that PINORD had developed.

Oxfam GB clearly needs to balance a responsible desire to protect its media profile and reputation with its principles of respecting and supporting others. Simply explaining its position on media work might help reduce misunderstanding. Alternatively it might be possible to promote joint coverage more actively.<sup>41</sup>

Partners had less to say about sharing risks. When Sidreh's weaving products were stolen by what appeared to be insiders from the community, Sidreh could have lost a lot, but Oxfam GB and Sidreh worked together to help the women overcome their difficulties and not to give up. But in Pakistan the gender-advocacy partner group feel that Oxfam GB did not fully share their risks. Often it is the partner on the front line, doing controversial work trying to sensitise the community. *'There should be some system of rescue, if while performing our job we are handcuffed and sitting in police custody.'* At the moment they feel that Oxfam GB does not provide this assurance. It may be that Oxfam GB should invest more fully in risk analysis at the beginning of projects and discuss with partners how different scenarios may be handled.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, however, that the press often prefer a bigger name in a story.



## 7.2.4 Recognising partner organisational costs and contributions

There were many more comments from partners about fair sharing of organisational costs. Several partners incur organisational costs – that are not covered by Oxfam GB funds – as a result of delivering projects. Sometimes these costs are borne personally by partner staff in unpaid overtime (e.g. to finish narrative reports for Oxfam GB). Sometimes the costs are borne by the organisations in unmet administrative overheads (e.g. WAMI), or by the directors in out-of-pocket expenses for travel and time spent to get to essential meetings (e.g. PINORD). Further details can be found in Box 18.

### Box 18: Three types of unaccounted organisational cost

#### 1) WAMI – unpaid organisational costs and ‘overheads’

While WAMI's field-staff costs and a small share of the programme manager's time are covered, there are other costs. These include the cost of office space, vehicles, financial officers, administrators, training courses, information resources, and the strategic input of the director. Commercial firms or consultancies recognise the real organisational costs as being about 100 per cent – the same again – as the basic field-staff wage costs. WAMI suggests that 30 per cent would be a fair rate to add to the core staff costs. In the current situation these costs are not recognised in the budget, and are covered by WAMI's own core funds from its congregation, and by ‘borrowing’ vehicles for a USAID-funded project. While this kind of cross-subsidisation is not fundamentally problematic, they feel it should be properly recognised and reflected in the budget, and in project decision-making.

#### 2) PINORD – unpaid director time and transport costs

The voluntary president of the PINORD steering committee has a full-time day job as the director of a small producer association. *‘If I am invited to a PINORD meeting in Dakar I can't afford the time to travel by public transport so I pay to put fuel in my car. At the meeting they give me a per diem that doesn't even cover my transport costs let alone anything else.’* Oxfam GB staff are not only salaried, as opposed to working on a voluntary basis, but also have all their expenses covered when they travel.

#### 3) Doaba – unpaid staff time

Staff joining Doaba commit to a working lifestyle based on 16-hour days, low wages, and communal living, as well as a great sense of personal fulfilment. This could be viewed as a personal ‘cost’ to the individuals. As an organisation, the salary rates charged are clearly below market rates and although Oxfam GB offered administrative costs, for instance to cover the cost of a finance manager, Doaba would not accept them.

*Source:* WAMI, PINORD, and Doaba case studies

Oxfam GB and partners are always under pressure to make funds go further, and the likely temptation for both parties is to scrimp on overhead costs. While a degree of partner co-financing is not a bad thing, these hidden costs should be fully acknowledged, especially when it comes to joint decision-making and influence.

Equally importantly, if Oxfam GB really wants to help grow partner organisations, it should encourage them to develop good practices such as full-cost accounting for the range of often hidden costs they incur. If not, there is a risk that organisations will struggle so much that their capacity and resilience does not grow – a wholly counter-productive result.

*‘The best way is to strengthen the institutional capacity of partners by improving our systems, and structures. It is so important to give*

*comprehensive funding support to partners. By this I mean to cover the governance capacity of the organisation.’ (Survey)*

Finally it’s worth repeating the point that some of the organisational costs that partners incur are costs imposed by Oxfam GB for Northern standards of accountability. A Northern perspective would be that these are international standards. A Southern perspective might be that these are imported costs that are not the full responsibility of the Southern organisation.

## 8 Shared values, cultures, rapport, and trust

Overall, 74 per cent of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB shares and respects their values and beliefs, and 86 per cent of partners feel a strong sense of solidarity with Oxfam GB. Several partners commented that this has contributed to the strength of their relationship:

*'We share the same vision and agree on ways for achieving it.'* (Survey)

*'[We have] mutual concern for the work we do and shared values.'* (Survey)

*'[We have similarities] in mission and vision, and to respect each other.'* (Survey)

*'[There is] united aspiration of Oxfam GB and partner organisation to ensure the project sustainability. The similarity of goals on the reduction of poverty...'* (Survey)

The 11 case studies reveal a similar picture. There is agreement around key Oxfam GB values, such as tackling poverty and suffering and seeing poor people as agents of their own change. A rhetoric (if not always a full reality) on gender equality is also shared by all the partner organisations. (See full results in Annex 3, Table 14)

In some situations, Oxfam GB has helped partners develop their principles and approaches, most particularly around gender (e.g. with PINORD and Doaba, to which it gave substantial support). In many cases, supporting principles have been about demonstrating and upholding a strong policy position, and Oxfam GB is generally regarded as having high ethical standards and values:

*'Oxfam GB policy provides an incentive to talk about and tackle gender issues that might not otherwise be addressed in the male dominated society of Senegal. If it was down to PINORD on its own, without the push from Oxfam GB, gender equity might not be given the same priority. The partner said that they didn't see Oxfam GB's gender policy as an imposition from a different culture but as a valuable contribution to local reflection and action.'* (PINORD case study)

Fifty-six per cent of survey respondents feel that Oxfam GB has been positively influenced by *their* values,<sup>42</sup> although a number of respondents (approximately 13) commented that they would like to provide more input into Oxfam GB's values and beliefs.

### 8.1 Strong similarities in organisational culture

Out of the 11 case-study partnerships, the strongest similarity in culture is seen between Oxfam GB and the two medium-sized church-influenced organisations. For WAMI, Oxfam GB's compassionate and committed approach has been core to creating meaningful working relationships and inspiring them to go the extra mile for Oxfam GB (Box 19). At OCDIH the driving shared value has been around

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<sup>42</sup> This is significantly higher (66 per cent) for large organisations (those with more than 50 staff or members) and for those partners that have been working with Oxfam GB for six or more years (63 per cent).

participation and creating horizontal relationships (Box 20). Both these partners have formed very strong bonds with Oxfam GB based on mutual commitment to these values.

**Box 19: A shared compassionate approach**

World Alive Ministries International (WAMI) in Malawi has very strong core values around compassion, care, love, and goodness. Many of these are founded on its Christian beliefs. However, it does not feel that any of these values are different from those of Oxfam GB. Indeed, WAMI spoke repeatedly of the passionate nature of Oxfam GB staff for whom they have great respect. Likewise, they feel that Oxfam GB staff have great respect for their beliefs.

Oxfam GB respects WAMI for its commitment, passion, values, accountability, and professionalism. WAMI respects Oxfam GB for its flexibility, sensitivity, and participatory approach, and for the general respect and mutuality with which it treats WAMI. There seems to be no problem created by working with a faith-based organisation. The only small difference that was identified was their different approach to working with government, but this is seen more as an issue of strategy rather than of values.

Without doubt this common pool of strongly shared beliefs creates a degree of personal commitment to each other, and moves the relationship from the organisational to the personal. In fact the word 'love' (perhaps in its more technical, Christian definition) was used on several occasions to describe the feeling between the two organisations.

*Source: WAMI case study*

**Box 20: A shared participatory approach**

OCDIH emphasised Oxfam GB's commitment to horizontal relationships; their respect for partners' knowledge; their openness to promoting alliances and learning with other partners; and their commitment to their work (shown in the fact that they often exceed their working hours to provide a better service to their partners). All OCDIH officers interviewed stated that this 'working style' is very special and quite different from the working styles of other international and national co-operation agencies. Oxfam GB shares a very strong organisational rapport with them and both are highly passionate and committed.

*Source: OCDIH case study*

## 8.2 Common differences in organisational culture

At the level of organisational systems and culture, partners have a mixed experience of working with Oxfam GB. Twenty-eight per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that there is a cultural divide between the way that they work and the way that Oxfam GB works. A similar percentage (26 per cent) agree that they don't understand why Oxfam GB has the priorities it has. There are three areas where organisational relations tended to need work: theories of development, collaboration and management, and professional styles.

### 8.2.1 Theories of development

Different change ideologies are an issue for many of the partnerships highlighted in the case studies. JNC and Oxfam GB share the same strategic goals but agree they still need to deepen mutual understanding of each others' views in order to build a common vision. In part this relates to a lack of clarity about exactly how rural economic development can be achieved, and the role of small-scale coffee producers in this.

Similarly WAMI and Oxfam GB share a huge amount of common ground around commitment to relieving suffering and integrating health and livelihood approaches, but they have more difficulty agreeing on the right role for government relative to NGOs in their longer-term vision of change.

### 8.2.2 Collaboration and management style

In two of the partnerships included in the case studies, Oxfam GB and the partner had different views on what 'partnership' and collaboration meant. Therefore, when Oxfam GB engaged with Dian Desa for the Yogyakarta earthquake response, it brought with it a 'sub-contractor and supervisor' approach that offended Dian Desa. When Oxfam GB started its partnership with Amnesty and IANSA to launch Control Arms, there was also a mis-match of expectations, with Oxfam GB's partners expecting more equality, respect, and consensus in the way decisions were taken.

### 8.2.3 Differences in professional styles

Differences in working style occur in most of the case-study partnerships, and perhaps are to be expected when two organisations work together. When working with larger organisations, cultural problems tend to be rooted in different approaches and organisational systems. Larger organisations tend to have more rigid and 'bureaucratic' systems and Oxfam GB is no exception. When large organisations come together both may have difficulty adapting to the other's ways of working. For example, when Oxfam GB worked with Amnesty and IANSA in the Control Arms partnership, the partners found that they all:

*'...had different ways of doing almost everything, from organising a press conference to signing off a research report.'* (Control Arms case study)

With smaller organisations, differences tend to be found in levels of financial and administrative capacity, systems, and views on 'professionalism' (Box 21).

#### **Box 21: Differences in 'professional' styles**

Oxfam GB and Doaba share fundamental ideals, particularly those focusing on helping suffering and vulnerable communities. However, Doaba has struggled with the concept of becoming a more 'professional' organisation, particularly employing people with professional skills at the market rate. This reflects their strong ideological pro-poor stance and their suspicion of people who might wish to earn money, or profit from development. They have questioned the high salary rates that professional development staff receive and this has meant that they have had problems recruiting staff with management experience. This anti-profit perspective has also discouraged them from taking any overheads from the projects they carry out for Oxfam GB. The result has been that the organisation has not been able to build up any financial reserves – making it financially vulnerable and even more dependent on Oxfam GB funding.

*Source: Doaba case study*

PIAR has been challenged by what it calls Oxfam GB's very 'document-driven' culture and focus on written contracts rather than personal relationships. Other organisations (e.g. Sidreh) commented on Oxfam GB's very British way of doing things (including language and management style).

*'In the end it is British, from its writing style to its senior staff whose norms influence our work.'* (Sidreh)

This also reflects comments in the survey from smaller and newer partners who feel a stronger sense of having to conform to Oxfam GB's ways of working than larger and more long-standing partners (Section 7.1.2).

### 8.3 Building strong relationships

Quality relationships are highly appreciated by partner staff, and Oxfam GB should continue to work towards them. Over 47 comments were received in the survey to this effect:

*'Knowing people and being able to communicate effectively with people we know well and trust.'* (Survey)

*'Complete trust and space to work with the community. They make efforts to understand our work and perspective and then support us throughout without interference. Very supportive relationship.'* (Survey)

Many respondents commented that their relationship with Oxfam GB is also based on mutual respect:

*'...we feel that it respects our values and objectives for our work, and our mission and institutional vision...we would not change any of those aspects which have governed our respectful relationship of solidarity.'* (Survey)

*'Oxfam GB has been characterised as an organisation which respects the values, the autonomy and the ways of thinking and acting of our organisation. It is an ally in the processes of struggle which we believe to be appropriate and we respect the working methods.'* (Survey)

A small number of comments suggest that Oxfam GB could still do better in respecting partners' knowledge and experience:

*'Presently we are looked upon as a developing organisation but we do have a long working experience which also needs to be recognised and shared with others for our growth too.'* (Survey)

It is more important to have mutual empathy and strong respect for a partner's values, beliefs, or ways of working, than it is to share them all. Eighty-three per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel valued by Oxfam GB for the role that they play in their relationships.<sup>43</sup> Through the interviews it became clear that trust is seen as the pillar of good communication and rapport. In some cases trust has been built on the basis of strong existing personal relations or mutual respect, but generally trust has to be developed, and time is the key investment: time spent planning, working together, reviewing, and reflecting together.

All OCDIH interviewees stated that trust has enabled them to express and communicate with total transparency. The OCDIH finance officer stated that trust between Oxfam GB and OCDIH has enabled them to tackle problems and search for solutions together. This trust has been strengthened by their approach to joint planning and sharing of responsibilities.

Sidreh agreed:

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<sup>43</sup> This is felt more strongly by newer partners and by more financially dependent partners, reflecting the intensity of new relationships with smaller organisations.

*'Mutual trust is seen as the 'soil' of a successful partnership. It leads to effective communication and conduct and therefore to a successful project.'*  
(Sidreh)

In Senegal, Oxfam GB feels the best way to decrease the costs of partnership is to have a partnership based on solid personal relationships, common vision, and an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each other's organisations; *'the partnership is much more than the things that are written down on paper'*.

### **8.3.1 Being polite, timely, and choosing words carefully**

Many partners mentioned the importance of a polite and timely manner, particularly in returning phone calls and working to deadlines. For WAMI, this timely and responsible approach is seen as very important to building trust and respect in the working relationship. ALRMP also commented on Oxfam GB's *'pleasant professional style: easy to interact with, very courteous, always prompt to return calls, helpful'*. The way Oxfam GB communicates with its partners is very important, right down to the language it uses. OCDIH feels it is essential to:

*'pay attention to small issues (such as wording and language used in e-mail and letter writing, approach when communicating verbally with the partner). This is just as important as wider styles (e.g. inclusion of the partner in decision-making and joint programming, creating the spaces to solve problems jointly, etc.)'* (OCDIH)

Sidreh agrees and feels that words such as *'audit, monitoring, control, ensure'* give the partners a sense that Oxfam GB does not fully trust them. Rather than asking where the partner went wrong, Oxfam GB could ask how it could have supported it better, and then follow up on those suggestions.

In West Timor, Oxfam GB POs understand the local cultural norms and values, and this significantly helps to build good working relationships. Because the Oxfam GB PO is from East Nusa Tenggara, PIAR staff feel it is easier for them to communicate, and because they both understand the culture perfectly, there is natural rapport.

It is important to remember that partnerships are based around teams of individuals who work with each other across organisations. Personal relationships are key to Oxfam GB's organisational relationships, and the quality and attitudes of its POs is critical.

### **8.3.2 Sharing problems and aspirations**

Seventy-nine per cent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that they find it easy to share their problems with Oxfam GB. This is felt particularly strongly by new partners.<sup>44</sup> Sixty per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that Oxfam GB asks for informal advice from its partners.

PINORD staff feel it is possible to have heated discussions and negotiations with Oxfam GB without risking the fundamental vision and solidarity on which the partnership is based. PIAR also described their ability to have heated conversations and confront Oxfam. More importantly:

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<sup>44</sup> Eighty-four per cent of those with partnerships of up to two years agree or strongly agree with this statement, compared with 74 per cent of older partners.

*'Oxfam GB is not merely a donor institution. With them, we share thoughts about our project...In our perspective it is good that they [Oxfam GB] participate in our activities so they could understand many obstacles that we are facing during the implementation of the project.'* (PIAR)

The approach Oxfam GB has taken in Honduras during difficult times has further developed trust and transparency between Oxfam GB and its partners. When the results of a partnership project evaluation were not good or when the partner had difficulties facing new financial requirements, instead of pressurising and blaming the partner, Oxfam GB offered an open forum in which solutions could be found jointly. Rather than focusing on blame or failure, the focus was placed on creating shared solutions. Sidreh describe a similar philosophy in Box 22.

#### **Box 22: Importance of close involvement and open communication**

Both organisations feel interpersonal interaction is valuable and leads to good co-ordination. Particularly useful are the weekly phone calls and visits of the Project Officer as well as visits by other Oxfam GB staff. Such face-to-face contact is felt to encourage trust and openness, and allows partners to solve problems innovatively and as they arise *'through discussion, not judgement'*. Visits make Oxfam GB visible and help it to understand their work better (*'formats do not cover everything'*). They also create a greater sense of partnership and mutual enrichment and learning. Besides regular personal contact, it is felt that good co-ordination is encouraged by:

- open and frank communication (*'never leaving the table until you have a solution'*);
- good, committed staff that do not change too often – which has been the case recently;
- good management;
- openness to criticism and a willingness to discuss strengths and weaknesses (*'to ask, to challenge ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and ways of working'*);
- clear project objectives, plans and schedules, with good monitoring and evaluation carried out jointly;
- time and flexibility to feed learning back into project and processes.

Source: Sidreh case study

### **8.3.3 Explicitly discussing values and vision**

A few organisations have actively discussed values with Oxfam GB, although they tend to be discussions about Oxfam GB's values rather than those of the partner (e.g. Sidreh). It is much rarer for each partner's values to be documented. Certainly a written charter could be useful, but more important is a space and process to discuss likely areas of convergence and divergence. SWC called a workshop with its partners early on to address differences of opinion and approach to gender equality:

*'The workshop wasn't discussed again but there was a shift, and some organisations did drop away shortly afterwards, in particular the ones that were less committed. It created tensions, but it did serve to sort those who were there for the good of the convention from those who were not. Interestingly it is the less 'radical' who have stuck it out with most commitment, time, and engagement.'* (SWC partner)

In many cases, the conception of 'values' may be too broad and nebulous to spark really meaningful engagement and discussion. Workshop questions such as: 'where do we tend to agree on approaches?' and 'where do we tend to disagree?' are likely to more useful, particularly if a good facilitator is used.

From experience of using these questions in the case-study partnership workshops, it is clear that there are large areas of coherence around higher-level values and



principles, but more disharmony around lower-level approaches such as models of change and ways and cultures of working. Often the definitions of particular words need to be fully explored:

*'It's important to put everything on the table at a very early opportunity, and avoid making a lot of assumptions...you can be using the same words but meaning different things.'* (Oxfam GB, Control Arms)

### 8.3.4 Personal relationships in organisational partnerships

The central government of Kenya was once particularly hostile to civil society, yet Oxfam GB has maintained a strong connection for many years through one of its special projects set up specifically to tackle poverty in Kenya's arid regions (ALRMP). Some of this strong rapport can be traced back to close personal relationships between early champions from each side. This has since fertilised further inter-organisational exchange.<sup>45</sup> The personal elements of Oxfam GB's relationships are a very strong and binding force that provide the basis of good, cost-effective working relations, and very high levels of commitment.

Doaba really wanted to emphasise that they are trying to build a long-term organisational relationship, not just a project partnership. For Oxfam GB and PIAR the issue is less about conflict and more about friendship. They agree that their biggest challenge is *'how to balance friendship and professionalism. Their friendship should not impair their need to be professional'*. They are worried that personal friendship might remove independence and increase conflicts of interest.

In the broader literature there is generally an acceptance that partnerships which work are those in which there is a pool of trust and rapport based on personal relations between the two organisations. This can be drawn upon in order to solve problems and bridge power inequalities.<sup>46</sup> Technically these are known as 'actor bonds'; individual relations around which broader collaboration may grow. It may be that management mechanisms in Oxfam GB should give more emphasis to facilitating personal relations and overcoming the vulnerabilities these may cause.<sup>47</sup>

### 8.3.5 Developing inter-personal relationship skills

Working in partnership clearly requires a wide range of inter-personal skills. The competencies regularly mentioned included diplomacy, facilitation, coaching, guidance, and management, together with a systematic approach to capacity-building (see Section 3.2).

*'A good Project Officer should have listening skills, should be sensitive to the partner's needs and context, should understand and take on the agenda, should have experience in the issues, should be able to provide expertise, should have a critical and constructive vision and should have the ability to prioritise. Finally, they need good training skills to provide support in technical, financial and programme management.'* (Oxfam GB Peru)

<sup>45</sup> So much so that the second ALRMP Chief Executive later became the first Oxfam GB HECA Regional Director!

<sup>46</sup> See for example Brown and Ashman (1996) 'Participation, social capital and inter-sectoral problem solving: African and Asian issues', *World Development* 24 (9): 1467–79.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Lister in: 'Christian Aid and Partnership, a critique of the partnership literature', (IDS 2002).

However, while Oxfam GB POs do an exceptionally difficult and diverse job very well, there seems to be no clear framework of professional development for supporting POs and other staff to build the diverse range of skills and attitudes needed for partnership.

Regional experience appears quite variable. Oxfam GB has done work in Honduras on how to develop horizontal relationships (see Box 20, Box 16, and Section 6.2.2), including developing a set of training materials for new staff. However, in Indonesia there are no systematic guidelines about partnership issues and no guidance on what to look for when hiring staff. The person responsible for human resources at the Oxfam GB Yogyakarta office acknowledged that partnership issues have not been emphasised in their internal staff training – especially for those who have just joined the organisation.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the needs are for inter-personal skills, and it often falls on the individual to develop themselves in this area, by watching colleagues and by gaining informal feedback. New POs could benefit from mentoring or supervision from more experienced colleagues with a good track-record, perhaps connected to visits to a range of partners to see how strengths have been developed and challenges resolved. There is also room for a far more systematic approach; perhaps a set of relationship competencies and a set of resources.

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<sup>48</sup> Of course, this also depends on the person's experience and working ethic prior to joining Oxfam GB. But the important aspect here is that recruitment of new staff members should not focus solely on their technical skills but also on their interpersonal skills and attitudes.

## 9 Emerging models and patterns of partnership

### 9.1 Facilitating partnership alliances

Some insights into new forms of partnership have emerged through this study. Some of Oxfam GB's more recent approaches focus on facilitating a range of support to a group of similar partners in one package. These often include alliance development, capacity-building, solidarity networking, and advocacy. Working with a number of partners reduces transaction costs and helps build associations between organisations.

#### 9.1.1 Facilitating co-operation, not competition

These new forms of partnership respond to some partners' perceptions that Oxfam GB's funding promotes competition between national NGOs and that Oxfam GB itself is competing with national NGOs for funds and 'taking their space'. There is a sense that Oxfam GB is not distinguishing itself from these emerging new-generation Southern NGOs, as these comments from the survey suggest.

*'The main mission of Oxfam GB should be establishing co-operation ties and exchanging experience by respecting the values of each organisation and excluding any competition between partner organisations acting in the same region...'. (Survey)*

*'It is imperative that Oxfam GB rethinks the way it works in our region. The current way is nothing but competing with national NGOs in most of the cases. At the end national NGOs are more knowledgeable in the local context and culture and therefore, they can handle the situation better...Of course as a national NGO we can't compete with Oxfam GB over funding. They have much more strength in this field.' (Survey)*

These national NGOs call for Oxfam GB to define how it can add value to their organisations, empower them, and support them with advocacy and networking. They also call on Oxfam GB to facilitate their co-operation and support them with funds, not compete with them.

#### 9.1.2 Catalysing programme advocacy and alliances

Facilitating co-operation lends itself well to supporting alliances and advocacy. A wide range of partnerships and alliances in the South are building stronger research and advocacy elements, and partners are pleased with the approach (see also Section 3.1.2).

*'Oxfam GB needs to work as a link at higher government level to make grassroots work more effective. The social movement for policy changes need strong recommendations at district and state level also.' (Survey)*

*'Research-action-advocacy should be made the way to go.' (Survey)*

*'Bringing international organisations/forums which can influence the policies and bills which are against the development of poor in to the partnership of partners working at grassroots.' (Survey)*

*'By integrating more clearly advocacy, policy issues on globalisation and campaign popular mobilisation.'* (Survey)

Supporting grassroots and nationally identified advocacy is a core area where Oxfam GB can add value to its in-country networking role. Engagement with governments should be structured around each government's framework of issues, rather than fitting into Oxford's priorities and perceptions. Partners are keen for Oxfam GB to be bolder in actively supporting local advocacy positions, rather than focusing on international priorities.

More and more, Oxfam GB is finding itself in multi-pronged partnerships of community, NGO, government, and other international NGOs. In the Philippines, this approach is used to facilitate policy analysis. It is also used in the formation of advocacy positions and campaigning activities amongst education reform and trade advocacy groups, some of whom, but not all, receive grants. Tips on how to make this approach work are given in Box 23.

#### **Box 23: Oxfam GB as facilitator of multi-pronged partnerships**

More and more, Oxfam GB in the Philippines is finding itself in multi-pronged partnerships of community, local NGOs, government and other international NGOs. In such relationships, more than a typical donor, Oxfam GB is able to add value by playing the role of catalyst or facilitator of relationships amongst the range of stakeholders. In playing this role, partners value Oxfam GB's:

- neutrality and impartiality
- ability to link various partners
- global character that brings in knowledge from other places
- capability to update country-level partners on global issues and link them with regional and international developments and actors
- goodwill
- efforts to develop capabilities, including support for systems and standards
- reputation and credibility.

*Source:* Oxfam GB Philippines partnership consultation response

### **9.1.3 Working with associations and groupings**

Adding value through facilitation of a group of partners is fairly well-developed in the PINORD partnership model. Oxfam GB has facilitated the formation of an apex organisation for advocacy, programme work, and capacity-building among rice-producing associations (see Box 7 and Section 4.3). This approach has the advantages of reaching many more beneficiaries by working through existing associations.

Several other initiatives in the case studies also worked through groups of partners (e.g. the national 'management committee' in Honduras, the Livelihoods Security through Partners programme in Malawi, and the Driving Change Programme in Indonesia). All these approaches allow Oxfam GB to take advantage of economies of scale in their partnership work and help organisations to associate with each other. Increasingly, Oxfam GB might see itself as a bridge between funders and local civil society. Most funders do not have the administrative capacity to work directly with local groups themselves, nor the specialist skills.

## 9.2 Working with higher-risk organisations

As well as supporting organisations through collaboration and capacity-building, Oxfam GB builds new organisations, often from tiny seeds (e.g. PINORD, Doaba, Sidreh, and Dian Desa, back in the 1970s). Oxfam GB is unusual in the development sector for this skill and is highly respected for retaining this function, particularly when so many donors are shying away from the risks and transaction costs involved, or do not have the necessary field staff (e.g. Novib).

### 9.2.1 Social venture-capitalism

This type of intensive capacity-building is not new, but in modern terms might be viewed as a form of 'social venture-capitalism' in which financiers invest in new social opportunities but also keep shares and a seat on the board. The risks and difficulties can be high and are well-illustrated by the example of working with the young organisation Doaba as it developed work in a major new area (Box 21 and Box 24). Oxfam GB has clearly invested a great deal in Doaba. The challenge for the future is how to ensure the continuation of Doaba's work – and thus secure their investment to date – if it also relinquishes its influence. This creates a dilemma for Oxfam GB: does it have a responsibility and duty to ensure that it keeps a watchful eye over Doaba in its current vulnerable growing phase or should it stand back and see what happens?

#### **Box 24: Doaba and fast-track organisational development**

Doaba is a radical group of social activists based in the heart of the very poorest and disaster-prone areas of Pakistan. Their staff's passion, commitment, and closeness to this community are unique and Oxfam GB has invested heavily in them. Doaba staff have seen their organisation grow from three to 37 staff members in three years, and have had the opportunity to realise their dream to reach nearly 100 villages. Doaba has had to expand, but it has taken a long time to come to terms with what building an organisation involves. It has kept staff salaries low, leading to problems in recruiting skilled and experienced staff (although it has certainly grown a highly committed workforce). None of the co-ordinators in a particular project has more than six months experience of working in any organisation before. The founder – also the Executive Co-ordinator – has become burdened with the core administrative tasks, for which he is not qualified (although sufficiently experienced), and for which he does not have time. Such fast-paced organisational development does place strains and risks on the partnership, especially as it is so dependent on one main leader. About six months ago Oxfam GB decided that it needed to stabilise the organisation, and temporarily halt any further expansion of activities, so that more work could be done on developing its core systems.

*Source:* Doaba case study

Oxfam GB is caught between competing principles. On the one hand Oxfam GB does not want to control or influence the new organisations that it has helped to set up, but at the same time it has a duty not to abandon them once its project funding is up. It is important to ensure that issues of governance, values, and strategies have been clearly laid down, to protect against an organisation falling into the wrong hands or being diverted to other causes. Sometimes models of joint venture funding, as seen in venture capitalism, including taking formal places on boards and management, may be appropriate.

One of Oxfam GB's most successful forms of joint social venture is its microfinance institutes in the Commonwealth of Independent States (e.g. Azerbaijan and Georgia). Oxfam GB invested money, line-managed staff, and then spun off the organisations as independent entities and held seats on the boards. This rather interventionist and 'operational' model of organisation-building possibly provides a good model for growing other highly innovative but risky ventures.

### 9.2.2 Creating space for innovation and failure

If Oxfam GB is to retain its strong role in finding new solutions to intractable problems of poverty, it also needs to retain a bold attitude to risk and experimentation. The UK Poverty Programme has a category of 'exploratory partnerships' or pilot partnerships. These are partnerships where all parties are getting to know each other. They may or may not progress to alliance, project, or strategic partnerships.

In Indonesia's Partnership Unit, a 'space to fail' concept is being developed. The idea is to have a much simpler contract agreement for short-term collaborations with only a 'small' amount of money. The team predict about eight different levels of contract agreements for different levels of involvement in the future.

Oxfam GB needs to balance high-quality, accountable partners (the ones that are 'easy' to work with) with an openness to newer, smaller, more innovative, or more radical types of social venture.<sup>49</sup> Not to do so will exclude new partners of tomorrow.

*'Organisations like ours in Nicaragua have institutional weaknesses: these tend to be seen by Oxfam GB as obstacles to the collaboration. It seems to me that this is at the root of one of the main problems of the country in terms of the model for the struggle against poverty, for example. Oxfam GB should assist in the construction of institutional support for its counterparts rather than excluding them for lack of it.'* (Survey)

### 9.2.3 Leadership and change-agent development

Much of the risk attached to working with small organisations is because they are dependent on one or two highly charismatic, visionary, and committed people:

*'One of the main problems commonly found in civil organizations in eastern Indonesia is the availability of skilled personnel within the organisation. Many CSOs have problems of their organisation having a "one-man or one-woman show", usually as the top leader of the organisation.'* (PIAR)

An alternative approach to building organisations is to support fellowships and programmes to build leaders of organisations, or potential leaders. This can be done through mentoring, training, networking, and supporting skills in influencing and mobilising. Alternatively, fellowships or schemes could be developed that would help link individuals with Oxfam GB's established partners.

### 9.2.4 Organisational consultancy

Increasingly, Oxfam GB staff are working as organisational development advisors and consultants; mentoring leaders, advising on structures, and helping develop strategy.

Many case-study partners (e.g. Doaba, PINORD, Sidreh) are of the view that Oxfam GB works best when it encourages inquiry rather than delivers diagnostics, and that it should facilitate participatory analysis of organisations' gaps and needs, followed up by specific inputs and resources. They want Oxfam GB to promote and facilitate an ongoing cycle of reflection and action, enabling partners to continually adjust and improve both the process and the content of their initiatives. PINORD and Doaba in

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<sup>49</sup> Clearly, appropriate risk-assessment mechanisms should be in place; there is no point in taking risks for the sake of it.

particular feel it is important to let partners make their own mistakes, as long as these are monitored and mentored.

Working with organisations to help them develop their capacity is a particular field of practice and area of expertise. It would be well worth providing specific training to help POs understand how best this kind of support and capacity can be provided. If provided well it becomes an invaluable resource.

Increasingly, Oxfam GB is seeking to influence larger organisations such as governments (e.g. ALRMP). These may not need financial support, but they may need specific skills and leadership development. Developing the ability to work well with larger organisations will open new opportunities, and Oxfam GB staff should be trained in these new areas; there is a wide range of established and effective practices and skills, particularly in organisational coaching. Oxfam GB staff are likely to be good at these things, given their existing facilitation skills. However, these skills do need to be recognised and supported.

### 9.3 Working with new sectors: government and private

Staff in Kenya question whether Oxfam GB should be so reliant on working with civil society when other institutions are so important in alleviating poverty. Aren't public and private agencies the core mechanism for delivering services to poor people? The role of civil society is to hold these organisations to account, but not to replace them. Therefore it is crucial to learn how to build the pro-poor capacity of public and private sectors too.

#### 9.3.1 Working with government

The Malawi programme team suggests that '*the main evolving opportunity for new types of partnership is by building stronger and more influential relationships with government*'. However, it suggests that these need to be presented within the government's own framework and perception of the issues.

There are challenges but also opportunities when working with national governments to create change (see Box 25). An active approach and a particular style of working are required in order to develop contacts and opportunities. However, Oxfam GB should be careful not to fund the government to do its core job, as this undermines it. There are ways to support government, such as technical assistance and secondments, which Oxfam GB should develop.

#### **Box 25: Tips and lessons for working with government from Kenya**

- An increasingly positive political context and range of personal contacts provide a window of opportunity for collaboration – seeded at the local level to be elevated to the national level. Oxfam GB should monitor and be aware of when opportunities like these emerge.
- Constructive criticism is key to close working relationships between Oxfam GB and government. It is very important to know and understand issues and challenges of government, so that you know how to engage sensitively. This is why it is so important to retain local operational involvement and day-to-day local contact. Only if you understand their perspective can you frame criticism in a sensitive way.

- Develop an ‘accompanying’ approach, similar to mentoring and coaching. Develop practical answers collaboratively. Share information and ideas freely. Always aim to help without fear of losing ownership of an idea.
- Concentrate on shared ends, not necessarily shared means. Government is likely to see the solution differently, but may want to get to the same place. For instance the Kenyan government did not care particularly about participation, but it was interested in securing peaceful outcomes between fighting factions. Participation turned out to be a means to create both. Be clear early on about what you need to achieve, and what government needs to achieve.
- Be wary of being sucked into service delivery on a large scale. It is one thing to help develop and pilot an approach, but another to help government scale-up. This requires different skills and experience.
- Governments are influenced by evidence-based pilots. Focus on these. Use government itself to demonstrate its pilots and achievement openly and widely to its own colleagues internally.
- Avoid open criticism. Don’t write critical pieces in the press, but do remain independent. While there may be some concerns about being too close to government,<sup>50</sup> it isn’t about losing your viewpoints, but ensuring your own reputation, credibility, and reliability.

Source: ALRMP case study

Are there dangers of getting too close to government, thereby compromising Oxfam GB’s voice and independence? Kenya programme staff believe this can be handled. In Peru, like other places, Oxfam GB explained that the government is quite segmented. *‘You can have allies in one part of the government while still exercising political advocacy in another’.*

Local government is a key entry point for Oxfam GB’s work. The case studies highlighted the excellent work Oxfam GB does, and has been doing, at a local level with local government.

In Pakistan, as in other Oxfam GB country programmes, the key current challenge is to further develop relationships at the local district level. Formalising this type of partnership is not easy. It rarely involves the transfer of funds, and grows out of informal collaboration. Training courses and transportation costs (e.g. paying for petrol, providing lifts to project villages) are important ways to influence and build rapport.

In Malawi, Oxfam GB works closely with district-level administrations and feels that these relationships should also be covered under MoUs with the higher-level government. This provides legitimacy but also acts as a route into national policy debates and increases profile. The government should be made more aware of Oxfam GB support at the district level.

The strength of the relationship and the influence that Oxfam GB can bring to bear in an informal non-funded relationship are highly dependent on the skills of the PO in the field, and the partner staff who are liaising on a day-to-day basis. Getting inside the head of district officials and trying to understand how Oxfam GB can support their

<sup>50</sup> ‘In some civil society quarters, stakeholders feel that while Oxfam GB’s close relationship with government is a real strength because it can influence the Government of Kenya’s policies much more easily, there is a danger that Oxfam GB and indeed the project could lose its independence and be seen by the Government of Kenya as merely one of its instruments in the civil society world. This may become a problem in dealing with other civil society partners that may not be as close to the Government of Kenya.’ Acaccia consultants, 2002.



agendas – as well as its own – is key to developing influential strategic partnerships with local government. The way Oxfam GB staff work is by mentoring government staff. It's very much a 'process', and is about dealing with attitudinal behaviour change, but it still needs to be planned as a strategy.

The UK Poverty Programme is working with local government in Scotland via a secondment. This gives it influence within the system, as well as experience. Oxfam GB is able to develop strong personal relations that can be called upon at a later date. Secondments may be a very good way to develop a basis for future partnerships.

### 9.3.2 Private-sector partnerships

The private sector has many elements and there is much potential to work with it. One area in which Oxfam GB has already advanced is in its facilitation and development of micro-enterprises, rural financial services, and market access. Oxfam GB is well placed to catalyse, pilot, and build social enterprises in rural areas that provide further services, particularly where market penetration is weak. Much can be learned from the model for developing microfinance institutes.<sup>51</sup>

On a larger scale there are opportunities to support businesses indirectly, through business associations and business services: for instance by helping to link unemployed people to jobs (e.g. Georgia: SBDF and Civil Society Institute), or by providing access to business loans, or by developing apprenticeship schemes. Other opportunities exist to develop trade links, for instance via the Fairtrade initiative.

In Malawi, opportunities were mentioned to work with exporters on trade issues, to work with pharmaceutical companies on HIV issues, and to work with agricultural service suppliers (e.g. inputs and marketing) on livelihoods issues. However, staff feel that Oxfam GB is a strong, left-leaning socialist organisation and many see players in the private sector as exploiters, not as potential partners.

Through linking to large-scale enterprise, particularly multinationals, Oxfam GB has developed some excellent corporate social responsibility and advocacy-based partnerships from Oxford (e.g. Unilever and the Fairtrade Foundation), but has struggled with its attempts to link to national-level companies. In Israel, opportunities for creating links with or gaining support from the private sector are very limited. Few Israeli companies are willing to work with Oxfam GB, given its support to poor people in the Palestinian territories. In Honduras, Oxfam GB developed a few initiatives to engage with the private sector, but these had limited success given a fundamental difference in values. In Peru the advice about working with national-level companies is cautionary:

*'NGO and private sector approaches differ greatly; while the first has a rights-based approach, the latter has a profit one. Rather than developing a partnership with them, Oxfam GB in Peru stated that they should include them as a strategic ally on specific issues.'* (JNC case study)

The general advice is that if Oxfam GB were to partner with private-sector organisations, this should only be done through a multilateral alliance, rather than a bilateral partnership, so as to make the company more accountable to civil society and to protect Oxfam GB's reputation.

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<sup>51</sup> Further information and ideas are provided in Penrose-Buckley (2007) *Producer Organisations: A Practical Guide to Developing Collective Rural Enterprises*, Oxford: Oxfam, and through a new resource pack produced by Oxfam GB's Markets Adviser.

## 10 Making strategic choices for partnership

### 10.1 Beyond donorship: clarifying Oxfam GB's added value

This study opened with a series of questions and debates. The first was about Oxfam GB's role beyond being merely a donor (Section 1.1.1). The results of this study reveal that partners see Oxfam GB as a powerful ally who can politically support, globally connect and financially invest in their organisation and their priorities for supporting poor people.

First, partners appreciate the support Oxfam GB gives them in advocacy. This includes practical help with skills and training. However, they also call for Oxfam GB to act with them, and put its credibility and influence behind local and national issues. Sometimes there is a feeling that Oxfam GB's international campaigning priorities are less relevant to them. They want Oxfam GB to help them make the link between local field experience and influencing national government policy – as the following survey respondent explains:

*'Oxfam needs to work as a link at higher [national] government level to make grassroots work more effective. The social movement for policy changes need strong recommendations at district and state level also.'* (Survey)

Second, partners see Oxfam GB as a connector, an organisation with access to knowledge and contacts. It can bring people together and help with the sharing of information and ideas. Almost 40 partners in the survey described this as an area in which Oxfam GB could do more. A systematic approach to relationship management and networking would go a long way to improving contact and information flows (Section 3.1.3). It would also break down some of the artificial divisions between partners from different Oxfam GB programmes, often working on related issues. People feel that there would then be more opportunity for partners to come together on a regular basis – perhaps to help decide Oxfam GB country priorities – and to create more of a sense of an Oxfam GB 'family' and membership of a global club.

Third, over 100 partners made requests for more serious investment in their funding and capacity-building over longer periods of time. They greatly appreciate Oxfam GB's support but they want more help to become independent organisations able to carry out their own fundraising and promotion.<sup>52</sup> They want help to lay out provisional plans for their growth and explore possible scenarios for their eventual exit from the relationship. They are vulnerable and they are concerned about their future. This raises questions about Oxfam GB's approach to civil-society building and its legacy:

*'Oxfam GB should have space for developing the institutional support systems to carry out its work more effectively, if it believes in the viability and importance of the civil society movement.'* (Survey)

Several partners are keen to see Oxfam GB support close harmonisation of donor funding, to help remove the transaction costs of finding and accessing funding from multiple sources. Related to this are requests for more and fairer funding. Partnership with Oxfam GB leads to capacity-building (Sections 3.1.1 and 7.2.4) but can also be costly to partners and their staff, through long hours and a burden of accountability. Partners also feel that a more strategic relationship with Oxfam GB would help them

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<sup>52</sup> This was also a headline recommendation of Oxfam GB's 1998 strategic review.

improve the impact of projects and remove their sense of insecurity. Some of these issues were discussed in Section 4.1 on improving clarity, others relate to the importance of developing clear commitments (Section 6.2.4).

*'It seems to us for example that to start processes like truth, justice and reparations require longer commitments than those which Oxfam decided on. Similarly in relation to prioritising geographical areas: to see an impact, periods of at least five years should be maintained.'* (Survey)

## 10.2 Partnership models: knowing how deep to go

The second key debate was about the growing cynicism and confusion around the use of the term 'partnership'. Should Oxfam GB always seek 'true' partnership or are there composites that are more fit-for-purpose?

Oxfam GB's relationships with partners are complex and not easily categorised. They include multiple and overlapping partnership models. For example, their legal core is usually based around a sub-contractual contract, but they may have joint-venture elements around brand and learning, yet networking and alliance elements around dissemination and advocacy. Section 4.2 went some way towards clarifying these different elements and considering notions of depth and breadth of partnerships. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 explored the management structures in place to achieve partnership and the costs and benefits of different approaches, emphasising that partnerships should not run before they can walk: collaboration requires very real investments of time, patience, and mutual respect to grow the relationship capital that ensures that teams of individuals will work effectively together.

A narrow and shallow partnership, or a simple sub-contracting arrangement, can form a perfectly adequate starting point for deeper partnership later, once relationships and trust have evolved. While there is a call for more long-term and strategic partnership, pilot relationships that provide space for organisations to explore and experiment are also extremely important (Section 9.2.2).

The danger of 'lesser' forms of partnership is that they appear to be – or are sold as – something more, and expectations are not met. If sub-contracting is all that is required and there is little prospect of moving to a fuller form of partnership, then Oxfam GB should at least ensure that the organisation's full costs are covered (Section 7.2.4). More often than not, partners make an implicit contribution that is never fully acknowledged. In the worst sub-contracting relationships, the details of the tasks and roles are so poorly defined, and so prone to change, that the contract needs to be micromanaged, a wholly disempowering experience (see Section 4.1). In this case, the organisation should either be allowed freer reign or an operational approach should be considered.

## 10.3 Reducing the burden of accountability

As concerns about fraud and impact have placed tighter 'results-based management' requirements on partners, how can Oxfam GB reduce the burden of accountability on its partners? One of the greatest blocks to creating a participatory and empowering space for partnership is the growing demand to hold partners to account.

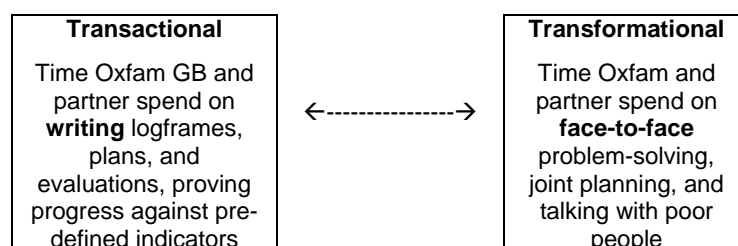
The focus of the book *The Aid Chain*,<sup>53</sup> a recent study of partnership, is on the costs of these accountability requirements, not only to partners but also to Oxfam GB staff and ultimately the donors and public who give. It claims that the tools of results-based management are difficult for partners to master, are inappropriate to the complex nature of local poverty interventions, provide a distraction to real processes of reflection and learning, and take everyone a lot of time to implement and manage. The authors of the book allude to a different approach: to choose committed, experienced, and trusted professionals and provide them with more autonomy to come up with innovative and locally specific solutions.

The results of this study suggest that partners accept detailed reporting as a part of the modern funding regime. They say that written reports do provide some opportunities for learning and capacity development, especially if they lead to feedback and discussion. But the project and relationship value of written reports is less than the time spent in listening and joint problem-solving (Sections 3.1.4, 3.3, and 5.2.2), especially in cultures that are based on an oral tradition.

*‘Joint field visits are a good way of sharing views, knowledge and to make the program a joint program rather than “the donor checking if things have been implemented.”’ (Survey)*

POs and partners describe spending a decreasing amount of time in the field to reflect with each other and listen to poor people, and an increasing amount of time in the office writing reports for managers and funders up the chain. The relative time spent on the two is an interesting indicator of where organisational drivers and approaches lie (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Transactional versus transformational accountability**



The good news is that Oxfam GB is a donor that is relatively light on reporting requirements compared with other organisations, and it seems to be doing a better job than most at reducing the management burdens on all sides. It is also developing a wide range of innovative approaches to ensure that it remains accountable to partners (Section 6.2). These processes include 360 degree feedback, mutual accountability charters, and dispute-resolution systems. There may also be opportunities to empower partners further by providing clearer commitments to building their independence, and more opportunities to involve them in the strategic and funding decisions that Oxfam GB takes in-country.

One of the main lessons from Oxfam GB programme teams that have developed these approaches is that they depend on high-quality relationships, and these, in turn, depend on investments of time. The rewards may be high – mutual accountability comes much more easily, creative solutions flow, beneficiaries can be involved in decision-making – but the up-front commitment to investing in relationship capital needs to be made.

<sup>53</sup> Tina Wallace (2006), *op.cit.*

## 10.4 Empowering partners: reducing inequalities

In an age of risk management and compliance, how does Oxfam GB balance its need to control with its desire to empower partners?

A tour of Oxfam GB reveals variations of partnership style across the organisation. In its development programme there is a longer track-record of working in partnership and a greater culture of participation and equality with partners. Many of the case studies describe this approach in detail (Sections 6, 7, and 8). In campaigning work, and occasionally in humanitarian work, where Oxfam GB has a more 'operational' style, there is a risk of it being less participatory and of dominating other NGOs.<sup>54</sup>

*'Oxfam is part of a very large and growing global network with a global vision. With your strong brand, as well as your strong financial and intellectual capacity, your greatest challenge will be to strengthen, rather than smother or displace small and fragile locally conceived CSOs.'* (Survey)

While Oxfam GB is large, successful, and at the head of its game, there is little excuse for it being defeatist over the power inequality issue. Oxfam GB may have a lot of money and influence, but working in a joint way – if that is what it decides it wants to do – is as much about an attitude and choice as it is about balance of resources. There are many excellent examples of where Oxfam GB staff are working to equalise power relations, and these have been reviewed in Section 7.2. They include softening dominant cultures and attitudes, demystifying Oxfam GB's structures and funding processes, sharing the media limelight, and recognising the large financial contributions partners often make to projects by not practising full-cost accounting.

Inter-personal skills and facilitation, listening, and mentoring are central to this empowering approach (Sections 6.2.3 and 8.3). But while Oxfam GB POs do an exceptionally difficult and diverse job very well, there seems to be no clear systematic framework of professional development for supporting these skills on which they so rely.

## 10.5 Leading from the back: creating transformational relationships

How does Oxfam GB ensure that its relationships are transformational, creating lasting, positive changes in the institutions with which it engages, whilst ensuring that it does not 'take the space' of smaller national organisations?

The Introduction (Section 1.1.5) noted calls in the literature for aid to become less transactional and more transformational;<sup>55</sup> to be as much about empowering relationships<sup>56</sup> as about transfers of funds. These lessons were based on DFID's own experience in Bolivia where it noticed that the personal relationships it developed with key members of government were just as influential as the aid budget it spent. These relationships provided the opportunity for it to advise and to inspire based on DFID's values and beliefs.

Oxfam GB has had similar experiences in Kenya over the last ten years. With a relatively small contribution (three per cent) to a government programme, Oxfam GB programme staff have become mentors and advisors to the permanent secretary of one of East Africa's most innovative area-based poverty and peace projects (see Box 25). At the other end of the spectrum, Oxfam GB, by investing in relationships, won

<sup>54</sup> This was an issue that was also raised in the Programme Impact Report 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Rosalind Eyben (ed.) (2006), *op.cit.*

<sup>56</sup> This is an approach ActionAid has also declared.

the trust and commitment of a group of passionate young leaders from one of Pakistan's poorest and most remote flood-prone regions. Three years later, these leaders are running one of the most innovative programmes in Pakistan and gaining regional attention.

The concept of transformational relationships links to the 1970s concept of 'accompaniment' and 'solidarity'. Despite modern top-down accountability requirements – and the continued growth of Oxfam GB in size and profile – the case studies show in detail how equality can still be achieved. With the right management attitudes and organisational incentives, accountability mechanisms can be softened, Oxfam's duties highlighted, partner's rights clarified, and dominant behaviours adapted (see lessons from Oxfam GB experience in Sections 5, 6, and 7). From this place Oxfam GB can work better to facilitate co-operation and is likely to have a more gentle form of influence.

*'We see Oxfam as a facilitator to bring various stakeholders together to achieve development goal. Oxfam needs to push partners to collaborate more and build synergy to consolidate their efforts for a sustainable development.'*  
(Survey)

Oxfam GB is already practising a wide range of approaches for deepening rapport and mutual learning (Section 8) and is recognising the impact this can have on creating institutional and personal change. The beauty of such roles is that even if funds drop, the influencing can continue, based less on how rich Oxfam GB is, and more on how respected it has become.

If a strategic and transformational approach is to be taken to building relationships, the right choice of relationships will be key. Country programme teams are at the heart of finding and catalysing these relationships. Proximity and continuity are required, as are flexibility and autonomy. From a partnership perspective, Regional Management Centres are most effective when they are accountable to and supporting the work of country offices.

A 'transformational relationship' approach will also require Oxfam GB to remain hands-on and involved. Almost all partners asked for more contact with their Oxfam PO, not less (e.g. Sections 3.1.2 and 3.3).

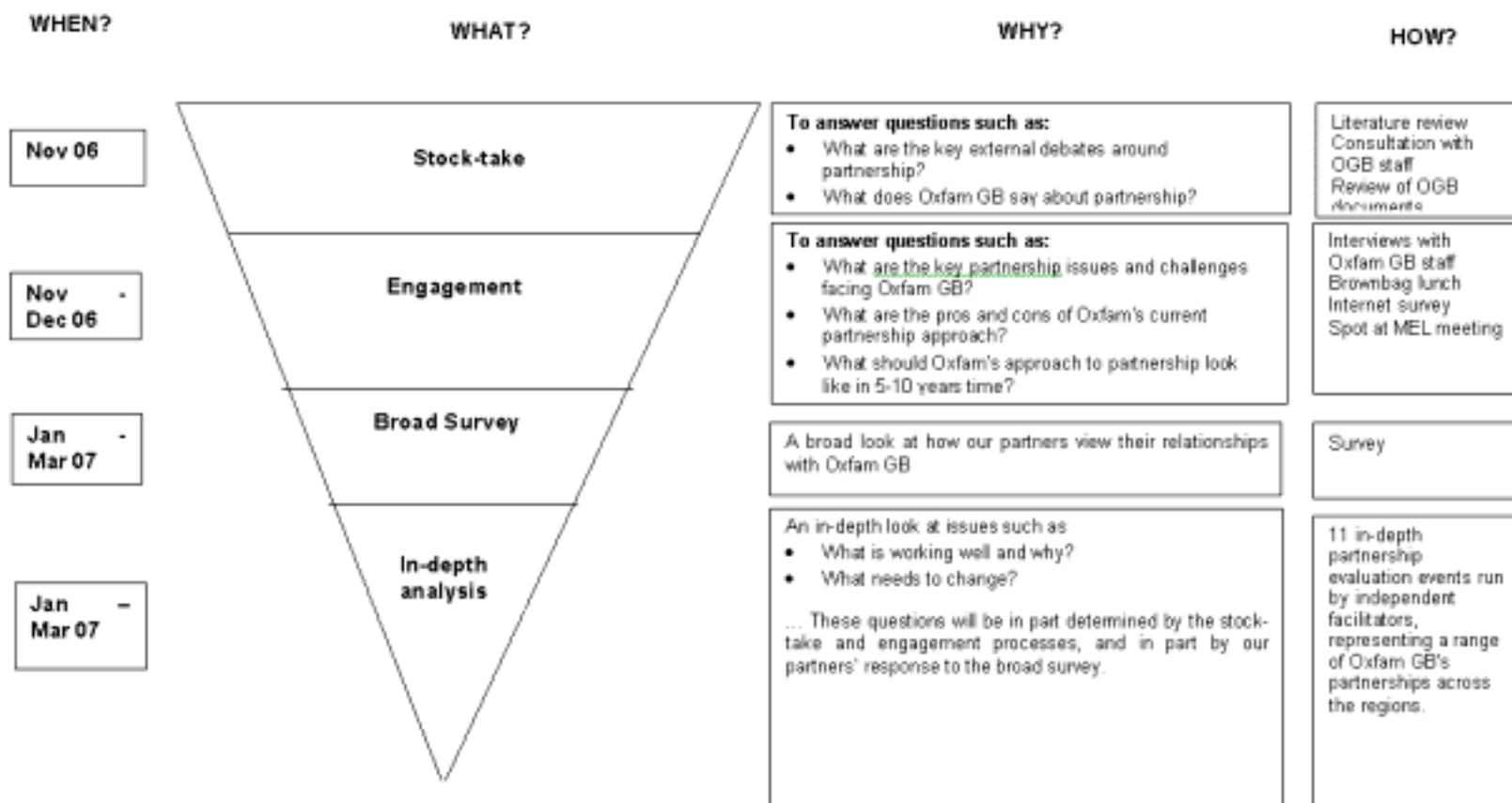
*'We would appreciate Oxfam GB to come often on the ground and understand our real challenges instead of keeping at bay.'* (Survey)

If POs retreat to management centres they risk losing a sense of reality, and their credibility may also drop. Moving to an arm's length approach would leave an even larger space that currently only Oxfam GB and a few other international NGOs fill.

Continuing to build a participatory partnership culture requires committed leadership, rewards for partnership performance, investment in skills, and most of all: staff time. If people criticise Oxfam GB for its high staff levels it will be important to explain that this is not an administrative overhead. These staff are building organisations, improving governments, linking poor people to global movements, researching new solutions and lobbying for people's rights. They are not glorified contract managers, but development actors in their own right, lobbying, building, and connecting: in service to partners, and always leading from behind.

## 11 Annexes

Annex 1: Diagrammatic overview of the evaluation methodology





## **Annex 2: Questionnaire**

Oxfam GB works with a wide range of civil-society, government, and private-sector organisations. These relationships are described as partnerships. But what does partnership with Oxfam GB mean to these organisations? Is Oxfam GB working in the right way? And how can it improve its relationships with others?

We would like your views. This is an opportunity to give honest feedback on Oxfam GB's relationship with your organisation. The results of this survey will feed into a major review of partnerships within Oxfam GB that will help us to improve our relationships with others.

This survey will take approximately 20 minutes. We would like each organisation to submit one survey response. We suggest the best person to complete the survey is the staff member with the most day-to-day, operational contact with Oxfam GB.

The results of this evaluation will be available on Oxfam's website at [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk).

### **Section One – About your organisation**

Where are you based? [Drop-down list of countries]

What is the size of your organisation? Please estimate the number of staff, volunteers and/or members in your organisation:

- 1–20
- 21–50
- 51–200
- >201

Which of the following best describes your organisation?

- Community-based organisation
- National NGO
- International NGO
- Government
- Business
- Academic institution
- Social movement
- Other (please state)

### **Section Two – About your relationship with Oxfam GB**

1. Approximately how long has Oxfam GB been supporting your organisation?

- 0–2 years
- 2–5 years
- 5–10 years
- 10–20 years
- >20 years

2. How would you describe the current phase of your relationship with Oxfam GB?

- Early stage
- Developing
- Well-established

Ending  
Complete

3. Approximately what percentage of the income of your organisation came from Oxfam GB from January to December 2006?

<1

1–10

11–20

21–50

51–100

4. To what extent do the following activities play a role in your relationship with Oxfam GB?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
Your organisation receives funding from Oxfam GB				
Your organisation receives non-financial support from Oxfam GB such as training, advice, accompaniment etc.				
You make joint decisions about project objectives and activities with Oxfam GB				
You carry out joint research, advocacy and/or campaigning with Oxfam GB				
Other (please state)				

### Section Three – How do you feel about the way Oxfam GB works with you?

This is the main section of the survey and is structured around five sub-themes that are important to building effective organisational relationships:

Values and beliefs

Roles and responsibilities

Complementarity and added value

Accountability systems

Communication and co-decision making

Under each sub-theme, we ask you to read six statements about how you feel about your relationship with Oxfam GB staff and then rank how much you agree or disagree with them. There is no need to research the answers; we are interested in your feelings, reactions, and perceptions more than proof!

At the end of each sub-section we ask you to give a broad rating on how well Oxfam GB is doing on that theme, and ask you to provide any further comments to explain your thoughts and ideas.

Remember, we're not interested in the results of the project or programme you are delivering with Oxfam GB. We are simply interested in how healthy, useful, and productive you feel the relationship is to your organisation.

Scale:

Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
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### 1) Values and beliefs

There is a real feeling of solidarity and joint vision between our organisation and Oxfam GB

We have in the past been asked to agree on actions that do not fit with our values and beliefs

Sometimes we don't understand why Oxfam GB has the priorities it has

We feel Oxfam GB has been positively influenced by our values

There is a real cultural divide between how we work and how Oxfam GB works

We feel Oxfam GB wants us to conform to its ways of working and do things its way

Overall in the relationship, how strongly would you say Oxfam GB shares and respects your values and beliefs?

1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very strongly
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Please provide any additional thoughts that explain your responses. How would you like Oxfam to change?

### 2) Roles and responsibilities

We have a clear Memorandum of Understanding spelling out how we work together

It is sometimes unclear who in Oxfam GB can give us a decision on certain issues

Sometimes we duplicate our efforts with those of Oxfam GB

If something goes wrong with the work we do, Oxfam GB always takes its share of the blame

Oxfam GB often changes its mind about what it wants from us

We are clear about how long we expect our relationship with Oxfam GB to last

Overall in the relationship, how clear are you and Oxfam GB about your respective roles and responsibilities?

1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very clear
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Please provide any additional thoughts that explain your responses. How would you like Oxfam to change?

### 3) Complementarity and added value of working with Oxfam GB

Oxfam GB is like a donor – there's little added value of our relationship beyond that

We each bring different skills and expertise to the relationship

We feel valued by Oxfam GB for the role we play in our relationship

Oxfam GB's international status helps our organisation gain credibility

We have not learnt very much from working with Oxfam GB

Oxfam GB has dedicated time and resources to help us grow as an independent organisation

Overall in the relationship, how strongly would you say you and Oxfam GB complement each other in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience?

1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very well
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Please provide any additional thoughts that explain your responses. How would you like Oxfam to change?

#### **4) Accountability**

We are not sure how our work will be assessed by Oxfam GB

Oxfam GB always delivers when it says it will

Oxfam GB is always happy to share information with us

Oxfam GB does not seem to read or act on the reports we provide them

It feels very uneven, Oxfam GB can threaten not to pay us, but we have no means of holding them to account

Oxfam responds well to constructive criticism from us

Overall in the relationship, how accountable is Oxfam GB to you?

1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very accountable
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Please provide any additional thoughts that explain your responses. How would you like Oxfam to change?

#### **5) Communication and co-decision making**

We find it easy to share problems in our work with Oxfam GB staff

Oxfam GB staff often ask us for informal advice and guidance

Oxfam GB is in the driving seat: we have little decision-making control

We have a clear decision-making structure with Oxfam GB and meet regularly to review progress and make decisions

We don't feel like its Oxfam GB's money – more a shared resource over which both sides have influence

Oxfam GB never consult us before making big changes to their strategy and ways of working

Overall in the relationship, how much joint decision-making is there on important issues?

1 None	2	3	4	5 A lot
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Please provide any additional thoughts that explain your responses. How would you like Oxfam to change?

### **Section Four – About Oxfam GB's work**

1. Oxfam GB's purpose is to work with others to overcome poverty and suffering. How well do you think Oxfam GB is doing? Would you say it is doing:

Very well  
Well  
OK  
Badly  
Very badly  
Don't know

2. Do you think Oxfam GB is getting better or worse given its overall purpose?

Much better  
Better  
No change  
Worse  
Much worse  
Don't know

3. How well is Oxfam GB doing compared to other similar organisations?

Very well  
Well  
OK  
Badly  
Very badly  
Don't know

### **Section Five – Other thoughts and future strategy**

Overall what is working most well in your relationship with Oxfam GB?

What is working least well?

How could Oxfam better support the organisations with which it works?

Do you have any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your comments are very valuable to us. Please submit your response by 28th February 2007. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please do not hesitate to contact Susanne Hartley at [shartley@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:shartley@oxfam.org.uk).

### Annex 3: Detailed tabulated results from case studies

**Table 8: Added value from each party in the partnership**

Country	Partner	Added value from Oxfam GB to the partner	Added value of partner to Oxfam GB
Scotland	SWC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility and influence</li> <li>• Strong analytical capability</li> <li>• Good track-record, knowledge, and experience of what has been done before and what can work</li> <li>• Good advocacy and media skills/capability</li> <li>• Skills in partnership working</li> <li>• Understanding of organisational systems and how to develop them</li> <li>• Able to help provide wider networking opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to strong network of new organisations, contacts, ideas, and resources for country programme development</li> <li>• Forum to display capabilities and win credibility with a large number of organisations</li> <li>• Access to wide membership base (300,000+)</li> <li>• Privileged access to government policy making</li> </ul>
Int'l /UK	Control Arms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility with governments</li> <li>• Large media and press resources, able to fund big events</li> <li>• Ability to simplify messages and reports for public consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive network of grassroots organisations provides legitimacy (IANSA)</li> <li>• Good access to case material (Amnesty)</li> <li>• Complementary perspectives from human-rights and humanitarian angle</li> </ul>
Kenya	ALRMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility and trust within local communities</li> <li>• Experience of community engagement and conflict resolution</li> <li>• Specialist on arid-lands development</li> <li>• Support to wider international processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of government, and how to work constructively</li> <li>• Opportunity for massive influence</li> <li>• Credibility with government, and access to policy processes</li> </ul>
Java	DD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds only, which enabled a much larger post-earthquake response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge network of local experts</li> <li>• Ability to have a much larger post-earthquake response</li> </ul>
Peru	JNC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global organisation providing contacts and visibility in national and international level advocacy</li> <li>• Strong courageous approach on advocacy</li> <li>• Access to research resources for completing studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of reality of small producers</li> <li>• Strong model of organisational and entrepreneurial development services</li> <li>• Innovation around working with young producers and gender issues</li> <li>• Insight on long-term strategies to develop agricultural sector</li> </ul>
Honduras	OCDIH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness, equality, co-decision-making</li> <li>• Organisational development – financial programme administration</li> <li>• Advocacy skills, international perspective, global context</li> <li>• Networking with other Oxfam GB partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong links to community</li> <li>• Experience of popular education</li> <li>• Commitment to institutional learning</li> <li>• Strong leadership</li> </ul>

Malawi	WAMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to government, national profile, and credibility</li> <li>• Networked to wider practice learning and knowledge</li> <li>• Flexibility and sensitivity, participatory approach to partnership</li> <li>• Experience of scaling up and connecting to local government structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong community networks and credibility</li> <li>• Specialist knowledge of HIV aids and home care</li> <li>• Passion and commitment of a welfare approach</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>
Senegal	PINORD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical support</li> <li>• Time and support of TSU</li> <li>• International and national perspectives</li> <li>• Global reach of campaigning network and information base</li> <li>• Development expertise</li> <li>• Bringing people together</li> <li>• Gender policy provides incentive to tackle gender issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local knowledge and experience</li> <li>• Local credibility and trust for organising</li> </ul>
West Timor	PIAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management resources and skills</li> <li>• Respected internationally – brings credibility to government</li> <li>• Network of experts, resource people, and related organisations</li> <li>• Skills in advocacy and influencing government budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilising and organising people</li> <li>• Knowledge of local political context</li> <li>• Influence in local politics</li> <li>• Network of government officials, media journalist, academics</li> </ul>
Israel	SIDREH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to donors</li> <li>• Encouragement and confidence</li> <li>• Thoroughness, accuracy, and transparency</li> <li>• Broader perspective for advocacy, learning, and scaling up</li> <li>• Reputation and pride</li> <li>• Independence from local politics</li> <li>• Safe zone for women's empowerment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to a marginalised community and its women</li> <li>• Understanding of traditions and culture</li> <li>• The trust of the community</li> <li>• Committed female staff</li> <li>• Open, sharing</li> <li>• Motivating, friendly, and warm</li> </ul>
Pakistan	DOABA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to wider system: to actors and practitioners with lessons and experience</li> <li>• Network of political influencers who can effect changes in policy and can access funding</li> <li>• New skills and technical expertise, from knowledge on how to grow an organisation, to marketing and documentation skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely strong focus and commitment to working closely with riverine people</li> <li>• Building community-owned models of co-delivery</li> <li>• Deep understanding of the culture, politics, and environmental challenges of the area</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Organisational benefits from working with Oxfam GB in partnership**

Country	Partner	Benefits to organisational development
Scotland	SWC	Support in new systems and procedures ( e.g. staff contracts), international links, reputation, experience, skills in partnership working.
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	Popular campaigning and media and promotional skills.
Senegal	PINORD	Partnership created and wholly funds PINORD. This then provides financial and technical support to members, and also facilitates reflection and action. Needs have been identified by members.
Peru	JNC	Widening contacts and visibility in national and international advocacy arenas.
Java	DD	Limited, due to DD's own high capacity and shortness of relationship. Some support on gender approach.
Kenya	ALRMP	New ideas and approaches around community involvement, reputation as progressive government department, credibility and trust in the communities.
Honduras	OCDIH	Processes and systems for learning, including documentation. Financial training in field, before report submission. (Oxfam GB invests 30 per cent of its budget in capacity building). Improved financial mechanisms, particularly in harmonising multi-donor reports.
Malawi	WAMI	New skills on livelihoods, experience of scaling up projects, some limited links to international and national learning and advocacy network.
West Timor	PIAR	Improved financial systems, more human resources, improved government engagement (from confrontational to constructive) and advocacy strategy ( from case to issue-based), development of its network, reputation developed as a think tank with government
Israel	SIDREH	Financial and narrative reporting, evaluation skills, confidence and self-criticism, vision.
Pakistan	DOABA	Oxfam GB has provided huge investment in Doaba and grown it from 3 people to 37. Supporting development of all administrative and financial systems through subcontracted consultancy. Wholly funding finance manager for organisation.

**Table 10: Quality of co-ordination and clarity of role in the case studies**

Country	Partner	Quality of co-ordination and clarity over roles and responsibilities
Scotland	SWC	Moderate, through informal discussion and some work planning.
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	Low, due to disagreements on what should be done and how. Works better during events when all working together.
Peru	JNC	Good; JNC works independently so little need to co-ordinate.
Senegal	PINORD	High, via procedures manual and dedicated support staff. Co-ordination between Oxfam GB country and regional office is sometimes a problem.
Kenya	ALRMP	High, though ALRMP work quite independently and there is less Oxfam GB involvement in some aspects.
Honduras	OCDIH	High, through detailed co-planning and review. Also a multi-partner management committee.
Java	DD	Low, though better once nominated contact person was put in place.
Malawi	WAMI	High; good plans and open lines of communications and review.
West Timor	PIAR	Poor start but now high, via good personal contacts. Co-ordination between Oxfam GB offices sometimes a problem.
Israel	SIDREH	High, particularly because of strong personal contact and regular visits.
Pakistan	DOABA	Good, due to regular meetings, project mobilisation workshops, monitoring visits, understanding each others' viewpoints, and easy access if needed.

**Table 11: Partner's experience of the accountability system**



Country	Partner	Partner's accountability to Oxfam GB	Reporting	Time spent
Scotland	SWC	Medium; little documentation, though the partnership is becoming more formalised.	Very little reporting as little fund transfers	Minimal
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	Medium; partners feel they are accountable to partnership, not to Oxfam GB.	Very little reporting as little fund transfers	Minimal
Kenya	ALRMP	Medium; there is an agreement but it's able to do what it wants as it is the government.	Quarterly financial and six-monthly narrative	Unknown
Java	DD	High, essentially sub-contracted.	Weekly report; final narrative and financial report including lessons learnt and recommendations; final stock report	Unknown
Peru	JNC	High; via grant letter and clear tasks.	Reports every six months. As a lot is on advocacy it's sometimes difficult to distinguish between multiple activities.	Four days for narrative, five days for financial. They suggest better formats; a training workshop.
Honduras	OCDIH	High; co-planning and agreements, Oxfam GB visit one week before quarter to help with reporting. Narrative and financial are co-ordinated.	Narrative report every three months per funded project.	Seven days for narrative, eight days for financial reporting.
Malawi	WAMI	High; co-planning and decision-making, very close relationship.	Quarterly financial and narrative six-monthly.	Three to four days for officer, two to three days for the two field staff.
Senegal	(PINORD + TSU)	High; clear agreements and delivery.	PINORD provides Oxfam GB with brief monthly updates on programme implementation and more detailed quarterly reports, including financial returns. These are written by TSU staff and are also sent to individual producer organisations.	One day for monthly and three days for quarterly.
West Timor	PIAR	Medium; it doesn't write reports but accounts verbally.	PIAR submits monthly financial report and quarterly narrative report to Oxfam GB as part of the partnership requirement. This requirement has been clearly described in the agreement. Then, Oxfam GB submits a progress report (financial and narrative) to DFID, quarterly.	Oxfam GB conducts report orally and writes up itself.
Israel	SIDREH	High; clear agreements and delivery, though often very tight as from the EC.	Six-monthly narrative and quarterly financial reports.	Up to 30 per cent, often partially outside work hours.
Pakistan	DOABA	Medium; good programme reports but weak financial	Quarterly	Four days for field officers.

		monitoring and systems.		
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**Table 12: Oxfam GB's accountability in the partnership case studies**

Country	Partner	Oxfam GB's accountability to partner
Scotland	SWC	Informal
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	Low; Oxfam GB sometimes feels it can act unilaterally
Kenya	ALRMP	Medium; though no paperwork, Oxfam GB respects the status of the government officers
Java	DD	Low; partner expected more respect
Peru	JNC	Medium; there's now a written document and JNC would like Oxfam GB to be a closer partner
Honduras	OCDIH	High; co-planning mutual agreement of expectations and responsibilities. Partner holds Oxfam GB to account and shares lessons via a management committee.
Malawi	WAMI	Medium; no system or paper but co-planning and agreements, informal accountability to partner fuelled by co-working and respect.
Senegal	(PINORD + TSU)	Medium; Oxfam GB has signed list of commitments, but still dictates funding. High accountability of PINORD to its members due to involvement in steering committee.
West Timor	PIAR	Medium; Oxfam GB dictates funds but there is good communication.
Israel	SIDREH	Medium; Oxfam GB treats Sidreh well but there are no formal processes.
Pakistan	DOABA	Medium; no formal agreement except written capacity-building commitments.

**Table 13: Levels of equality and trust in case-study partnerships**

Country	Partner	% of funds from Oxfam GB	Does partner feel there is inequality?	Levels of trust in Oxfam GB, and what underpins this trust
Scotland	SWC	<1%	No, there is a strong process of debate and consensual decision-making.	Weak at first, with competition, but now strong and rising, based on a track-record of achieving results and working together. Forming, storming, norming.
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	3% but key contributor (25%)	Yes, it feels Oxfam GB often tries to get its own way and can 'steamroll' others.	Low, based on numerous let-downs and differences of opinion. Expectations of equal and consensual decision-making have not been met.
Kenya	ALRMP	100%	No, although the situation is a little reversed with the government calling the shots.	High, particularly those relations based on the original founder's close personal relationships.
Java	DD	15%	A little; it feels Oxfam GB needs it more than it needs them. It feels they deserve more respect than they get.	Low, partly influenced by hurried partnership and bad relationship with Oxfam GB.
Peru	JNC	3%	No, JNC is capable of standing up to Oxfam GB, and can challenge it.	Strong and professional, based on a relatively simple framework of support and little need for Oxfam GB to be heavily involved.
Honduras	OCDIH	3%	No, very equal processes and decisions. Able to challenge Oxfam GB	Very high, based on a culture of regular learning, review, and reflection, and investments of time in

				planning together.
Malawi	WAMI	40%	No, inequality is not an issue, it is joint money for which we share stewardship.	Very high, based on significant mutual respect.
Senegal	(PINOR D + TSU)	35%	A little, based on disappointment over a fund that was promised but not delivered. They still do not understand why.	Strong trust in programme manager but low trust in Oxfam GB regional office.
West Timor	PIAR	20%	A little; Oxfam GB is the only funder and only likely funder. It has already cut funding without notice and could do so at any time. There is no commitment beyond 2008 or exit strategy.	Very high, can have very open discussions. Close personal friends.
Israel	SIDREH	major 70%	A little. Oxfam GB holds the cash, but Oxfam GB needs Sidreh too. Sidreh knows the local situation much better and is respected for it. Thus it s not negative.	High, perhaps even higher than Oxfam GB's trust for partner.
Pakistan	DOABA	90% and sole funder	A little, but they are confident and know Oxfam GB has invested a huge amount in them and the project. They know Oxfam GB has great respect for them.	High, very devoted, though nervous since involvement with humanitarian projects.

**Table 14: Shared and differing principles on which the organisation is based**

Country	Partner	Shared principles	Where there is difference
Scotland	SWC	Close, and poverty angle now central to all that SWC does.	Oxfam GB is seen to have stricter ethical standards, particularly about working with business.
Int'l/UK	Control Arms	Priorities similar at highest organisational level.	Mis-match in ways of working and organisational culture, particularly on media issues.
Peru	JNC	Similar, particularly around representation/participation.	Still working on finding a shared vision for rural development.
Senegal	PINORD	Founded, funded, and part-directed by Oxfam GB, so very similar values.	Some differences in ideals with the Regional Management Centre of Oxfam GB which is less 'bottom-up'.
Java	Dian Desa	Similar ideals and abilities, but there is no close working in this partnership.	DD weaker on gender issues. Oxfam GB accused of treating them like a sub-contractor.
Kenya	ALRMP	Similar in rhetoric around poverty and participation.	ALRMP clearly behind in practice, particularly on gender.
Honduras	OCDIH	Very strong and similar, particularly strong on gender.	This Christian organisation prefers not to work with homosexuals, thus challenging Oxfam GB's diversity policy.
Malawi	WAMI	Very similar, with core ideals on compassion and commitment.	WAMI is less keen to work closely with government. Although it appreciates the role of the government, WAMI finds working with the government frustrating as it lacks commitment to grassroots efforts.

West Timor	PIAR	Similar, particularly on pro-poor, human rights, and democracy.	PIAR feel Oxfam GB has a document-driven culture.
Israel	SIDREH	Very strong similarities and mission.	Possible slight difference in the exact interpretation of gender equity in a rural tribe.
Pakistan	DOABA	Same core principles, particularly around pro-poor and participation. A strong gender dimension has now been incorporated.	Doaba fears that the difference in ideals and culture of 'professionalism', is a form of organisational 'corporatism' or exploitation.

## Annex 4: Recommendations from individual case studies

### Malawi (WAMI)

Lessons for good partnerships:

- Partnership should go beyond financial support. It is a relationship of people, not money, and it needs to be based on mutual respect and compassion. The partnership is made up of grown individuals with differences and should be treated with grown-up maturity.
- Clear and timely communication is important. Good communication is important to any relationship.
- Both sides need to be flexible when challenges occur; there should be mutual understanding of different perspectives.
- Clear documentation and discussion of expectations on both sides is an important starting point. It would be useful to review and renegotiate expectations throughout the Livelihoods Security through Partners programme.
- There should be an organisational and staff code of conduct/commitments, against which the partner staff can hold Oxfam GB to account. This would encourage a culture of dual accountability.
- Collaborative proposal and budget development. Be conscious that the proposal is the partner's own, do not try to control it. Know when to step back and allow the credit to be the partner's.
- Give allowances for mistakes, failures, and challenges; it's part of the process. Focus on what works well; appreciate the approach. Keep a grassroots, ground-level presence and be interested in what's happening.
- Don't let WAMI try and be Oxfam GB or vice versa. Respect diversity and different ways of doing things. It is easy to think your own way is best.
- Partnership should be based on genuine shared vision and values, not just 'how can we get the money' and 'how can we spend the money'!

Suggested principles in good donorship:

- Openness in decision-making around partnership agreement
- Good collaboration
- Handling each other as partners – mutual respect
- Flexibility (e.g. if a major change occurs)
- Able to listen to each other
- Trust from both sides
- Constant communication and sharing of information between Oxfam GB and WAMI (i.e. regular line of communication, regular contact)
- Understanding and acceptance of values from both sides
- Mutual respect
- Complementarity skills and knowledge (e.g. WAMI on care and support, Oxfam GB on livelihoods)
- Timely funding
- Timely, detailed feedback from Oxfam GB
- Reports are prepared on time

## Israel (Sidreh)

Summary of key recommendations:

- *'Plan together in good time.'* Detailed planning from the start, including an exit strategy and work on financial sustainability.
- A willingness to learn on both sides.
- Agreeing on the desired outcome.
- Frequent, clear, transparent, honest communication.
- Clear roles and expectations.
- Staff sustainability and continuity.
- Increased participation, particularly of beneficiaries.
- Being as flexible as possible, so that projects and procedures can be adapted according to needs.
- Linking projects to advocacy to address larger underlying causes.
- Defining partnership policy clearly, though not in too much detail as partnerships will vary according to location and partner.
- We (Oxfam GB) don't know best! *'If we did, there would be no need for anyone else.'*

Suggested principles of good donorship:

People were surprised at the mention of 'donorship' in a partnership evaluation, and felt it was a negative term and contrary to partnership. Oxfam GB staff say they *'want to be a partner, to deliver programmes and not money, and to be involved in changing things'*. Good principles for partnership were:

- **Clear objectives and expectations** (*'Do what you say, and say what you do.'*) This should include clear agreements on capacity-building needs and delivery, and defining how partners can help Oxfam GB.
- **Support for sufficient periods of time** to allow projects to become sustainable and to allow for the transfer of experience and values.
- **Spending time in the field** with partner staff and beneficiaries.
- **True participation** at and across all levels from beneficiaries to senior management.
- Assess and agree **minimal standards of financial controls**.
- **Openly share all reports**.
- **Respect for local culture**, traditions, and power structures and the partner's expertise: *'Try and understand the situation. Don't give us orders or tell us how to do things as if we are not doing the work or do not know: trust us.'*
- **Co-ordination with other donors** to avoid duplication.
- **Open communication and encouragement**: *'smile, praise, explain, speak directly and be open; don't accuse us of things indirectly.'*

## Honduras (OCDIH)

Key recommendations:

- **Partnership is a relationship** that needs investments: the quality of the relationship between Oxfam GB and OCDIH was not created from dust, but it was the result of investments in capacity-building, joint planning, and synthesised learning processes.
- The **'horizontal'** approach needs to be embedded in both strategic and more practical levels: horizontal relationships entail a systematic approach with a

focus on day-to-day issues such as wording and communication styles, in organisation as well as externally.

- In Oxfam GB Honduras, financial management is not marginal but an integral component of programming and decision-making.
- **Organisational changes and new staff:** how do we sustain horizontality in a process of decentralisation and multiple-layer decision-making needs? Investments in the partnership have enabled strong communication and working relations between members from both organisations, but care and further investments may be needed in order to maintain this closeness and strong compatibility as new people enter the relationship.

Suggested principles of good donorship:

- Establish a horizontal relationship with partners, where both senior and junior members of Oxfam GB treat the partner as an equal, listen to and embrace opportunities for learning from their partners, and are open to their suggestions.
- Invest in 'face-to-face' time at the beginning of the relationship to build the capacity of the partner.
- Invest in capacity-building on financial management so as to strengthen the partners' capacities and skills.
- Provide the space and time for synthesising learning, and engaging in joint planning and evaluation.

## Indonesia (PIAR)

Lessons learned:

- Importance of communication skills and personal attitude and commitment, besides having clear written agreements, project objectives, and strategy.
- Partnership is also about the negotiation process. There should be enough room for both parties to negotiate their interests. It is about a 'give and take' process. Thus, if Oxfam GB cares about partnership, it is important that this value is reflected in the language (discourse) they use, in the day-to-day practice they operate, and also in the thing that symbolises this value (i.e. contract agreement).
- Develop capacity-building networks.
- Lack of co-ordination within Oxfam GB might hamper Oxfam GB ability to expand and improve their partnership strategy with local partners.

## Pakistan (Doaba)

Suggested principles of good donorship:

- more transparency about how Oxfam GB makes its decisions and strategies
- more transparency in sharing reports
- clearer timeframes for exit, and more time for projects to establish
- clearer commitment to capacity-building, particularly financial systems
- establish a horizontal relationship with partners, both senior and junior members (where Oxfam GB treat the partner as an equal, listen to them, embrace opportunities for learning from them, and are open to their suggestions)
- more opportunity to network and learn from other Oxfam GB partners and experiences

- more co-ordination and harmonisation with other donors
- moral support and encouragement
- provide the space and time for synthesising learning, and engaging in joint planning and evaluation
- better links between humanitarian and development work
- we don't like the word 'donor' or 'donorship'; partnership or relationship is better

### Senegal (PINORD)

Suggested principles of good donorship included:

- **Capacity-building** – supporting appropriate institutional capacity-building based on a participatory assessment of the partner organisation, in addition to developing capacity specifically related to programme activities.
- **Transparency** – sharing reports concerning the programme produced by or for Oxfam GB with partners as a matter of course (this apparently hasn't always been the case in the past).
- **Appropriate partner selection** – basing the choice of partner on the profile needed for the successful implementation of a specific project (as opposed to adding successive projects concerning different sectors to the workload of existing partners, regardless of their experience in the sector concerned).
- **Interface between humanitarian and development initiatives** – developing partner capacity to respond to potential emergencies in the precarious environments where Oxfam GB tends to work as an automatic part of its development initiatives. This would mean that in the event of a humanitarian crisis in the same geographic area where development work is taking place, the two can be successfully integrated. During the devastating locust invasion of 2005/2006, Oxfam GB refused significant external funding to tackle the problem and concentrated their response in the Senegal River Valley around a successful intervention defined and managed through the PINORD programme – hence reinforcing partner capacity and local credibility and avoiding potentially inappropriate intervention from actors from outside the area. (Which prompts comparison with neighbouring Mali, where Oxfam GB responded to food insecurity in the North by importing a number of expatriate personnel from the humanitarian division into an area where it was supporting longer-term development initiatives, with questionable effect.)

### UK Poverty Programme

From consultation with partners, Oxfam GB's UK Poverty Programme has developed these guidelines for working in partnership:

- clear explanation of our aims and objectives
- a shared aim and objectives for the partnership, with realistic expectations and appropriate flexibility (including clarity about what we are not supporting, if necessary)
- honesty, openness, and respect
- support and sharing of skills, knowledge, experience
- willingness to learn, through evaluation and other mechanisms
- clear and regular communication



- access to our international development expertise
- the power of a well-known, large organisation
- inclusive, empowering, and participatory ways of working
- financial support and development support as agreed in the partner agreement, administered efficiently and effectively