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# SCALING OF SMALL PRODUCERS' MARKETS IN 24 MUNICIPALITIES

How Oxfam helped create a network of local farmers' markets in Colombia

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To replicate the flagship experience of Bogotá in the creation and consolidation of alternative, direct, and fair marketing channels operating between rural producers and urban consumers, the Colombia Economic Justice Programme implemented a leveraging strategy which produced effective scaling in 24 municipalities of the central region of Colombia.

The scaling was promoted and accompanied by Oxfam, but neither the execution nor the funding have been our responsibility. Local authorities, responding to advocacy, the impact, and emblematic example of the experience in Bogotá, have created the conditions for improving access to markets for small-scale producers and to food for urban dwellers.

## 1. What change(s) was this programme intending to influence through its leverage strategy?

The change sought by the Oxfam Economic Justice Programme in Colombia was to create and consolidate alternative marketing channels that were fair for both rural producers and urban consumers. The aim was to replicate the model implemented in the capital, Bogotá, in central region municipalities.

To carry out this objective, the programme applied a leverage strategy to create an environment in which the learning acquired in the case of Bogotá facilitated replication in other urban contexts in the central region.

As a result, the model is now being implemented in 24 municipalities. These operations were neither implemented nor funded by Oxfam and its partners; we just supplied the conditions for the farmers to do it themselves. As a result of awareness raising and motivation, and some essential material inputs to the farmers, public authorities in co-ordination with small farmers' organizations have acted to change the conditions in which small producers access the market and in which urban populations acquire food.

Oxfam had a strong leadership role in the creation of the first *mercado campesino* (peasant farmers' market) in Bogotá. This model has been very successful: the public sector in Bogotá now allocates £1.66 million for alternative commercialization channels, promoted by Oxfam. We took the idea forward in the following ways:

- resources to set up the first markets (logistics, transportation, publicity);
- resources for activities (including training) to undertake advocacy and actions to pressure authorities;
- facilitating dialogue between the public sector and farmers' organizations (a relationship characterized by enormous distrust);
- designing, testing and adjusting protocols for the efficient operation of markets;
- market research to define market places, price analysis, supply and demand analysis and analysis of consumer preferences;
- funding to support impact studies (this included studies to estimate the importance of small farmers in the supply of foodstuffs to the city, for example);
- developing campaigns to raise awareness among consumers of the role of small producers, their situation and the importance of demanding their products.

In all of this work, we have acted under the principle of empowering and building skills while recognizing the know-how of farmers, sharing information and gradually transferring responsibilities to the small farmers as protagonists of their development.

## **2. What, if anything, was new, innovative or different about the way this programme attempted to bring about change?**

The innovation lies in the combination of five actions, the first three of which can be considered working approaches normally implemented by Oxfam, and the last two as new or different approaches. Together, these elements made up an innovative package:

- A participatory toolkit: A toolkit was constructed in a participatory way to systematize the process of replication and enhance the capacity of rural leaders in advocacy, knowledge of market requirements, logistics, and consumer preferences. This instrument also empowered and enabled leaders to take steps to replicate the alternative marketing experience in their own municipalities. The toolkit consists of communication elements that reflect the experience, such as manuals, magazines, videos, etc.
- Technical and logistical training for participants in the process (leaders and small farmers): This enabled the development and refinement of their capabilities in both advocacy and the autonomous operation of markets in their municipalities. The programme decided to prioritize the training of direct participants (those suffering poverty) and opt for their involvement rather than take other approaches that could have been effective in the short term, such as contracting a resource centre, operators, a university, or external technical expertise. This has a cost in the short term, because the learning curve of a small-scale farmer is slower. However, it is more effective in the medium and long term. Participants learned how a direct market works; how prices are set; how the market is physically set up; how to select quantities; and how to sensitize consumers. These lessons were crucial to the leverage that took place. An external operator enters, fulfils duties, and leaves, taking the knowledge with them. Farmers and leaders learn, improve, innovate, and, above all, leverage new and further changes.
- Long-term commitment: A decisive factor, without which leverage would not have been possible, is time. Oxfam made a long-term commitment to the process as a team, establishing strong and stable relations with partners, allowing the process to mature, systematizing, disseminating and sharing the results, while designing a responsible exit.
- Assets that increased negotiating capacity and dialogue: We purchased basic supplies, essential for setting up and operating the markets, such as canopies, hoardings, banners, and baskets. Some mayors gave verbal support for the farmers' markets but said they had inadequate funds to provide financial support. As the farmers had their own assets, they had a tool whereby they could counter this setback, negotiate better conditions and avoid the obstacles that some public authorities tried to impose.
- An emblematic and large-scale example: The flagship model of small farmers' markets in the capital, Bogotá, and the securing of public resources for their expansion (£1.6 million to date) became an empowering example for farmers and one of the keys to achieving leverage. Markets were held in the most important public square in

the country, the Plaza de Bolívar in Bogotá, a place that many small farmers would have considered inaccessible. The following statement illustrates the impact that this large-scale achievement had on the self-esteem and attitude of the small farmers' leaders: *'If we can hold markets in the Plaza de Bolívar, if we can get such resources, and if the Mayor of Bogotá sits down with us, we can do it! Now we will achieve this in our municipalities!'*

### **3. Recognizing that leverage can be achieved in different ways, how did the programme leverage change?**

Achieving leverage was due to a combination of:

- Capacity building (as described above).
- Drawing attention to issues: This was achieved by conducting forums and meetings with local authorities, and the publication of documents, magazines, and videos documenting the experience. These strategies attracted the attention of mayors and councillors of municipalities to the markets, and sensitized them on the importance of adopting this marketing strategy to make progress in breaking down the barriers faced by small producers.
- Tangible empowerment that strengthens the voices of small-scale farmers' organizations: The ownership of certain assets and the flagship model of Bogotá were key elements in producing a multiplier effect. In contrast to other experiences in which there is minimal infrastructure or no seed capital, in this case the possession of these assets allowed participants' expectations to grow progressively and small farmers' organizations to develop their own initiatives in advocacy, resource management, capacity for adaptation, and the replication of the experience.

### **4. What worked well and not so well with efforts to leverage change through this approach?**

What worked:

- the collective construction of the toolkit for strengthening capacities and consolidation of leadership within the farmers' markets;
- the media strategy and the production of communication elements to ensure effective promotion and dissemination of the farmers' experience of markets;
- the progressive empowerment of rural women, who gradually increased their presence in the farmers' markets, their participation in advocacy, and their leadership in organizations and local media;
- the flagship model in Bogotá led to expansion into the central region, as it was evidence of the maturity and sustainability of the process.

What did not work:

- the dynamics of replication have hampered its monitoring, as regards the recording and measurement of costs and income generated locally in business transactions (supply, inventory, sales, linked producers etc.) and the measurement of economic impact.

## **5. What capabilities, knowledge or skills were helpful when implementing this approach?**

The following capabilities were particularly useful in replicating the example of Bogotá's *mercados campesinos*:

- the capacity of the Oxfam team and partners to systematize and document the stages and progress of the flagship model in market access;
- the ability to communicate about problems, potential solutions, and the feasibility of those solutions to other actors who do not speak our language on rights;
- the democratization of knowledge and extensive socialization of the process with the actors involved, academics, policy makers, and government officials at different levels;
- the convening power and motivation of Oxfam and its partners;
- the leadership of both female and male small-scale farmers in talks with local authorities and in promoting a multiplier effect.

## **6. What has changed as a result of the programme and how have you measured this? (Where possible, quantify the scale of programme success in terms of outcomes and reach, and relate this to inputs and cost.)**

- The marketing channel implemented in Bogotá is currently operating in 24 municipalities of the central region, involving approximately 250 female and male producers. That is ten per municipality, but that number is growing and we estimate that more farmers participate indirectly, so about 350 in total so far.
- Small-scale farmers' organizations have strengthened their communication capacities and advanced in their economic and political empowerment.
- Replicas have not meant additional costs for the project. They are carried out with resources obtained autonomously by small-scale producers in their municipalities and/or from their own resources.
- The expansion of the model has increased the number of urban and rural beneficiaries.

## **7. Can you describe (or measure) Oxfam's contribution to that success?**

Oxfam's contribution included:

- funding and technical support in the systematization and documentation of the experience;
- the construction of a toolkit resulting from the systematization and documentation of the process;
- reporting of the results to the beneficiaries;
- training small farmers' organizations in the use of communication tools and making them visible. For example, Oxfam's communication co-ordinator trained farmers' leaders as spokespersons to be able to

deliver clear messages, shared contacts to give them access to relevant mass media at a national level and helped convene media events. These activities helped to position *mercados campesinos* at the national and district level and to leverage public funds for their expansion;

- consulting, and technical and logistical support under the principle of capacity building and promoting sustainability.

#### **8. Are there any other lessons you have learnt about how to effectively leverage change?**

A lesson mentioned above is the importance of prioritizing participation in all project operations. It is often recommended that, for faster results, external technicians or operators be hired, with large constraints on leverage. It is true that the learning curve of the small farmers' leaders is slower and more complex, but this approach ensures that profits return to the community, participants' capacities are enhanced, and progress is made in sustainability.

The programme has focused on building direct links between small farmers and consumers. We also work with wholesale markets but these channels are more complex, the requirements in terms of quantity and quality of produce are higher and the payment conditions are often impossible for small producers (pay is discounted if the product does not meet certain standards, for example). We have sought and continue to seek fair marketing channels (direct to wholesalers, institutional) taking account the relevance of each of these channels to small farmers' conditions. For instance, most small farmers have very diversified farms (growing up to 110 species), so farmers' markets are ideal because they can carry small amounts of everything they produce. But other farmers have only two or three products to sell during the season and have large quantities; for them it is more convenient to sell to supermarkets or market places, and we have supported them to understand and manage those kinds of channels.

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