CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Transforming cultures of violence to overcome injustice and poverty

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Overview of Oxfam's approach to conflict transformation

All people have a fundamental right to life and security. Oxfam works to ensure this right is respected, not only by responding to humanitarian emergencies, but by addressing the violent conflict which, as its *Humanitarian Strategy 2020* recognises, is one of the key drivers of poverty. That is why **conflict transformation** has become one of the 'crosscutting issues' running through Oxfam's programmes and tackling some of the key driving factors that fuel direct, cultural and structural violence.

Through that conflict transformation framework Oxfam seeks to work strategically, based on a thorough conflict analysis, to address these factors according to Oxfam and its civil society partners' mandates.

That analysis in each country determines where and how Oxfam can go beyond conflict-sensitive aid to specific work designed to transform conflict. Depending on the factors in each country, that work might be linked to land rights, governance or other issues that Oxfam works on in its wider work. All the goals that Oxfam seeks to achieve – including gender justice, a fair share of natural resources, and a right to be heard by all people – are vital elements of peaceful societies, and, in the long-term, vital ways to reduce the number of conflict-related humanitarian crises.

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1   Background

Oxfam's mission of a just world without poverty faces key barrier in the endemic violence individuals and communities face in countries around the world. Oxfam works predominantly in countries that are socially, economically and politically unequal; countries that are frequently affected by violence, armed conflict, and a lack of peaceful mechanisms to reconcile opposing interests (e.g. through effective, accountable governance and justice). It is for this reason that Oxfam and its civil society partners work to help transform conflicts into more peaceful societies in which every citizen's rights are respected.

Countries associated with violent conflicts and fragility typically have poor public services, weak and often corrupt or repressive forms of governance and justice, and politically and economically marginalized communities and groups. As a result, a large part of the population may not see the state as legitimate. Groups may respond to acts of state repression or perceptions of inequality with violence, leading to further instability.

By 2015, half of all people living in extreme poverty around the world are expected to live in conflict-affected or fragile states.[1] It is this connection between conflicts and poverty that

prompts Oxfam to take a more deliberate approach in contributing towards conflict transformation. While this may not be possible or appropriate in every context, where it is, Oxfam and its partners will make a concerted effort to tackle the conditions that allow violence to persist.[2] This includes analyzing the impact of what Oxfam and others are already doing, and, crucially, listening to the views of the affected population.

Using such a people-centred approach, Oxfam's conflict transformation framework looks at how to influence the **key driving factors**[3] of the conflict. Within conflict transformation, violence and conflict are seen as multi-dimensional: violence is interwoven with (formal and informal) structures and cultures. In practice, this means that to build peace, the solutions must also be multi-dimensional. Interventions must address:

• **Direct violence,** for example through peace building and re-integration of ex-combatants;

• **Cultural violence,** for example through implementing the UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 regarding women, peace and security to help promote gender justice; and

• **Structural violence,** for example through tackling issues of governance and security sector reform.

Men and women not only have a right to live free from violence; they encounter violence differently, and so any rights-based approach to conflict transformation must have an awareness of gender, as it works to end direct cultural and structural violence.

What is important is that the conflict transformation strategy in each context is driven by the conflict analysis, the civil society actors that Oxfam works with, and Oxfam's mandate. Though it may have an immediate humanitarian goal – to reduce conflict-driven human suffering – it is a long-term process, closely linked to Oxfam's other goals of helping to build societies founded on gender justice, a fair share of natural resources, universal access to essential services, and where every citizen can enjoy their human rights.

2   Oxfam's approach to conflict transformation

In all countries, Oxfam strives to be conflict sensitive.

Conflict sensitivity seeks to 'Do No Harm'; working within a conflict to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive impacts of Oxfam's programming, so that, at the very least, it does nothing to further fuel the relevant conflict. This also means taking responsibility for the unintended negative consequences of aid programmes.

.In some contexts, Oxfam increasingly goes beyond conflict sensitivity to support dedicated conflict transformation activities.

Conflict transformation, and the **peace building** within it, works within the conflict, to contribute to peace and reduce the drivers of conflict. (Peace building specifically consists of activities addressing political and social transformation.[4])

Both approaches must, of course, be rooted in thorough conflict analysis of strategic entry points, as well as a continual re-assessment of the conflict sensitivity of the programmes. What is done in each context may be different, but a '**good enough**' **conflict analysis**[5] should:

1. Identify the key driving factors, stakeholders and actors in the conflict, at the national, regional and, where appropriate, international level;

2. Analyze the dynamic nature of the conflict, and the inter-relatedness of the different factors and actors/stakeholders;

3. Identify strategic entry points for programming, based on the analysis and mandate of the organization;

4. Be informed by the successes and failures of previous efforts for conflict transformation.

Contributing to conflict transformation

Strategy: Oxfam's global strategy includes dedicated work towards building resilience against conflict, as well as other shocks and stresses, by supporting civil society groups and communities (especially of women) to address the key driving factors of conflict.[6] Its *Humanitarian Strategy 2020* recognises violent conflict as a key driver of humanitarian need, and conflict transformation as one of the 'crosscutting issues' that runs through its programmes.

Analysis: Oxfam therefore prioritizes conducting a conflict analysis when analyzing humanitarian crises, and building up staff understanding of violence and armed conflict, to make its programming and campaigning more effective. Oxfam increasingly links up its humanitarian and development strategies to ensure that it is not only alleviating the symptoms of direct violence, but also addressing the attitudes used to justify violence, and the structural systems (for example governance structures) fuelling conflict.[7]

Advocacy can be an important tool to support and strengthen conflict transformation work. Oxfam's advocacy work, like all its work, seeks to uphold a rights-based approach, advocating for and supporting the voices of others to challenge inequalities and injustices. This includes challenging unequal gender relations, and looking at gender roles at each step of the planning, implementing and phasing out of all projects. At each stage, this means more than the participation and representation of women in the political and security realm. It means tangibly contributing to the realization of women's rights and gender equality as a central condition for a positive and sustainable peace.

Oxfam's conflict-related advocacy focuses on influencing governments and others to improve protection and assistance to men, women and children in crises, such as those unfolding in Syria, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, **and the need for the causes of their vulnerability to be addressed.** The latter includes: advocating for women's rights, such as through the promotion of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other Security Council resolutions that focus on women's role in peace building,[8] and gender roles in livelihood and conflict; and better control of the trade in arms and ammunition.

Partnership: Supporting civil society groups is central to Oxfam's work on conflict, as the examples in Boxes 1 and 2 below suggest. Oxfam aims to go beyond one-off investments in partners' work to more sustained development of their capacity to address the key driving factors of conflict. Much of this work also aims to support civil society partners to work with and advocate to the state and state bodies, as in the Parwan peace hearing in Afghanistan (Box 2).

Oxfam and partners can contribute to change through different strategies, based on their mandates, and on strategic entry points and opportunities.

The two cases below cannot transform the conflicts in Sudan and Afghanistan by themselves, but they do provide good examples of aspects of peace building work that can be part of a conflict transformation strategy.

1: SOS Sahel: Addressing resource-based conflicts in South Kordofan, Sudan

SOS Sahel is an Oxfam partner that takes a low-cost, lasting approach to building peace and prosperity through sustained engagement at community level. In South Kordofan, its programmes have helped to reduce resource-based conflict between farmers and pastoralists. In order to capture the main causes of conflict in an area, SOS Sahel used stakeholder workshops to canvas the views of tribal leaders, women's group representatives, youth representatives and local government. This information was then used to inform programme design.

For example, in El Kewiak in 2010, community representatives pointed to seasonal conflicts over land use and water between farmers and herders moving livestock along traditional migration corridors. These conflicts, mainly over land and water, have resulted in insecurity and damage to crops. As a result of stakeholder workshops, specific recommendations were made, including demarcation of migration routes, with more water sources along them, and enhancing the power of the local administration to resolve disputes. These recommendations were integrated into SOS Sahel's work to directly meet the needs of the local communities.

2: Uniting civil society for peace: Rebuilding peaceful communities in Afghanistan

Oxfam is working through the Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace (ACSONP), a national network of over 70 civil society organizations (CSOs), to strengthen their capacity to help build peace. ACSONP helps civil society play a catalytic role in negotiations at the provincial level.

The Parwan provincial peace hearing in August 2012 brought together influential actors and CSOs, including the Governor of Parwan, the Chief of Police, the head of the provincial parliament, media representatives, and ACSONP members. A range of issues were discussed, including violence against women and the need to create a level of security that would enable women to participate in society, and the role of the parliament in promoting inclusive peace. It even discussed the public stoning of a woman, which had taken place the previous month.

The hearing was an important reminder that there will only be peace and development in Afghanistan when the root causes of conflict are addressed. Oxfam and its partners have an important role to play in creating a dialogue for reconciliation – at local, provincial and national levels – that is led by both political parties and civil society. This must include the many opposition groups, not just the Taliban who oppose women's participation in a vibrant civil society. And it must address poverty, social exclusion and justice. The Parwan hearing gave a real sense that such a dialogue is possible.

Oxfam is dedicated to:

- Expand and improve its conflict analysis, in order to have a better understanding of the complexity of conflict environments in which we and partners work, and regularly re-assess this analysis and the conflict-sensitivity of its programmes in conflict-affected countries;

- Mainstream conflict sensitivity in all its aims and programmes, including ensuring that our humanitarian programmes do no harm by meeting Sphere's Protection Principles, as well as all Sphere minimum standards;[9]

- Strengthen its co-operation with civil society organizations to address and remedy key driving factors of conflict, and help transform violent conflict towards sustainable positive peace;

- Continue to ensure that conflict-affected women and men have their voices heard;

- Increase its investment in programming and campaigning on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security;

- Encourage donor governments to develop a policy framework on conflict transformation, invest in their ability to conduct conflict analysis, and use this as a basis for specific activities. The expertise from research institutes and civil society should be utilized when developing the policy framework on conflict transformation.

Notes

[1] Defined as those living on less than $1.25 a day: OECD-DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility (2013) 'Ensuring Fragile States are Not Left Behind: 2013 factsheet on resource flows in fragile states', OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/factsheet%202013%20resource%20flows%20final.pdf.

[2] Human security focuses primarily on protecting people. The UNDP defines human security as having seven components: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.

[3] A key driving factor can be defined as a factor in the conflict that, if it did not exist, would drastically change the nature of the conflict .

[4] P. Woodrow and D. Chigas (2009) 'A Distinction with a Difference: Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding', CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/53164/A-Distinction-with-a-Difference-Conflict-Sensitivity-and-Peacebuilding.pdf

[5] Based on 'Reflecting on Peace Practice: Participant training Manual' (2013), Collaborative Learning Projects, http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/94317/rpp-i-participant-training-manual.pdf

[6] Oxfam International (2013), 'The Power of People Against Poverty: Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019, p. 17, http://www.oxfam.org/en/about/accountability/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019/

[7] Oxfam Humanitarian Strategy 2020 (unpublished)

[8] Resolution 1325 has since been followed by other Resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) which address sexual violence and install accountability mechanisms in UN institutions, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)

[9] Sphere Project (2011) 'Sphere Handbook', http://www.spherehandbook.org/

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