

WITHIN & WITHOUT THE STATE

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Effective Programming in Fragile Contexts

The *Within and Without the State* project is working to strengthen civil society, and encourage more accountable governance, in conflict and fragile contexts

A third of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people live in countries where governments are unable, or unwilling, to provide them with public goods and services. But the question of how to go beyond dealing with the symptoms of fragility – the immediate needs of citizens for food, protection, a livelihood – to achieving long-term, transitional change, is extremely challenging. *Within and Without the State* (WWS) is enabling Oxfam to pilot innovative programming in conflict and fragile contexts, and to capture and share learning about what makes it effective.

Funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), WWS works in four focus countries: South Sudan, Occupied Palestinian Territories/Israel, Afghanistan, and Yemen. DFID funding is allowing these country programmes to develop new programming which is strengthening civil society and governance structures, promoting dialogue between citizens and power-holders, and supporting more poor men and women to claim their rights.

By their nature, conflict and fragile contexts are unpredictable, insecure, and subject to rapid social, political, and economic change, and therefore call for different approaches to programming. Approaches being used in our focus countries include: putting more emphasis on political economy analysis to identify where change can happen; working with a wider range of 'non-traditional' partners, including religious groups; a continued emphasis on evaluation of risk throughout the life-cycle of the project; and being responsive to the particular challenges of fragile contexts, such as high staff turnover.

WWS also has a strong emphasis on capturing knowledge and learning. Learning – both from the four pilot projects, and from the experience of a wider group of Oxfam country programmes working in fragile contexts – has been documented and shared across Oxfam through a major workshop and a community of practice, and externally with other development practitioners and policy-makers through a newsletter, case-studies, blogs, and programme resources.



Mary Adawei
Dhlokoc, community
member in Maper,
North Rumbek,
South Sudan. Photo:
Crispin Hughes



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Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel



Community committee meeting in Al Walajah.
Photo: Rola El Chami

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel (OPTI), WWS is working to build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with power-holders and claim their rights.

Gaza

In Gaza, WWS is co-financing work funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). WWS is working with five NGOs and 13 community-based organisations (CBOs) to build their capacity to address the impact of the Israeli blockade and advocate for freedom of movement throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Capacity building, which has included practical workshops and coaching visits to different organisations, has enabled the organisations to strengthen their internal governance and financial management, and develop skills in community mobilisation and advocacy. This will allow them to be more accountable to the communities they represent and better able to advocate for their rights to duty-bearers. In particular, CSOs are supporting marginalised groups to challenge power-holders through 'policy days', in which affected communities meet with government decision-makers to discuss issues affecting them. This has resulted in commitments from Ministries to follow up on complaints brought to them.

The 18 organisations have also been supported to develop a greater understanding of international human rights frameworks, which is helping them to document violations such as illegal restrictions on access to the sea or agricultural land. Now they are

planning to take this further by participating in the Palestinian NGO Network and collaborating around monitoring of human rights violations.

WWS in Gaza is also working at the international level to increase access to information and awareness of the effects of the blockade through the media, publications, advocacy trips, and meetings.

West Bank

In the West Bank, WWS provided co-financing to EU-funded work to strengthen the capacity of Palestinian civil society to identify its needs and priorities and engage with power-holders around these issues. This project ended in November 2012.

Oxfam worked with partners to establish community committees in four villages in the Jordan Valley and one in Bethlehem Governorate. These committees include representatives from village councils, local CBOs, and different sectors of the community.

The community committees received training in how to carry out a participatory needs assessment and draw up a community action plan, as well as in governance and institutional accountability, women's leadership, and conflict resolution. CBOs were also strengthened by training in project cycle management, proposal writing, and participatory governance. Public meetings enabled community members and leaders to discuss community priorities and start to work together to address them. A number of public forums provided the opportunity for communities to engage with power-holders at local and provincial level.

These forums have increased people's confidence to engage with power-holders and advocate for their rights. Um Ammar from Oja commented: "Oxfam connected us to different levels of power-holders. Now we are able to hold them to account." Women in the villages also have increased confidence to express their opinions and take a greater role in society.

Small grants from Oxfam also allowed communities to implement projects from the community action plans. In one village in the Jordan Valley, the grant purchased agricultural equipment which is helping farmers save money as they no longer have to rent it. In Al Walejeh, street lighting was purchased to make the streets safer at night. Majdi Abu Teen commented: *"It felt like Eid when we got the street lights. More than that... the street lights mean the sustainability of the community committee, as we did it together."*

Action Research

An action research project is being carried out which aims to identify how change happens across OPTI, what opportunities for influence exist in this increasingly restrictive environment, and what Oxfam's role in achieving change should be.

Action research is conducted by non-professional researchers recruited from a variety of backgrounds. The 'emergent change' model it utilises means that research outcomes, and the actions that may follow from them, are driven by the researchers themselves rather than being pre-defined by Oxfam. In OPTI, this process is allowing engagement with new, 'unusual' partners, revealing how the priorities of the population differ from development agendas, and reflecting some internal difficulties across civil society.

An important outcome of the process so far is the increased optimism and confidence researchers experience through being given ownership of the project. Eyad, a researcher in Gaza, commented: "This is the first time donors have asked Palestinians, 'what do you want?'... this is the first time that we have had the opportunity to analyse deeply what our society needs." The project has identified a number of actions to be taken forward by the researchers, which are being supported by small grants from Oxfam. These include a community-led evaluation of what makes economic development projects effective, which will be shared with international NGOs and donors to help to improve the quality of interventions.

Yemen

Yemen joined the WWS project in March 2013. In Yemen, WWS works with civil society networks to increase their capacity to engage with power-holders and ensure policies and decisions meet the needs of poor women and men.

Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East and is currently experiencing significant political and economic instability, exacerbated by civil unrest and high food and fuel prices. But the current 'transitional' political process (due to end in 2014) is reviewing the government system, and presents an important opportunity to achieve greater public participation and ensure governance actively supports social development.

At the moment, civil society has limited capacity to respond to these opportunities: its experience is mainly in service delivery, it is not familiar with working to improve governance, and it has limited capacity to articulate the needs of, and be accountable to, communities. WWS will work with six civil society networks in two governorates to build their capacity to engage with governance structures, influence decision-making, and improve transparency.

A governance specialist has now been recruited to strengthen the capacity of the selected civil society networks. Training will be given around



the principles of rights-based development and the role of civil society in promoting good governance, and support given with fundraising and organisational development. WWS will also work to create mechanisms for engagement between local authorities and civil society.

Transition offers opportunities to strengthen governance in Yemen. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith

South Sudan

Since South Sudan became an independent state in July 2011, its new government has faced numerous challenges, including continued conflict with Sudan over national borders and oil sites, and high levels of corruption. Many communities have poor access to basic services (including health care and education) and many face food insecurity.

WWS is strengthening civil society's ability in South Sudan to become a voice for citizens, including the most marginalised, and engage effectively with power-holders at various levels. This approach promotes the idea of a 'social contract' between civil society and government. Each actor has their own roles and responsibilities to fulfil; by engaging with each other – sharing views, experience, and expertise – they can work together to create a more effective state. Rama Anthony, project manager for WWS, comments that, *"The approach WWS takes is not confrontation... We are not holding up a placard... We want to engage with decision-makers – this helps us to be accepted by government."*

Oxfam is grant-funding five CSOs, which are working with communities and power-holders to promote good governance through a series of distinct projects. The CSOs are working at national level in Juba and at local level in Lakes State (see box), building on Oxfam's existing development programme. Projects range from working to build civil society networks and a high quality, independent media, to promoting civil society engagement in legislation, and ensuring government accountability for allocation of resources.



WWS partners were selected through a roundtable forum of CSOs convened in Juba to share expertise, nominate possible organisations, and support the selection process. Oxfam has developed the capacity of the selected partner organisations through training in aspects of effective organisational governance, programme management, finance, and advocacy, as well as assistance in recruitment and purchasing essential assets. WWS has also worked to develop and support a network of CSOs in Lakes State.

Hakim Ciponyu Awur, Director of SDRDA (Oxfam partner) at WWS advocacy training in South Sudan. Photo: Crispin Hughes

MP/CONSTITUENCY DIALOGUE

Many people in Lakes State complained that their MPs had not visited them since their election in 2010, and that they had not delivered on their campaign promises; MPs said that they didn't have the resources or mechanisms to engage with communities – and many didn't understand the need to do so. But Oxfam is bringing both sides together in a series of public meetings to build trust and accountability.

Hundreds of people attended the MP/public dialogue in Wulu in February 2013. Before the meeting, community member Mary commented: *"Those MPs said, 'If you vote for me we will provide bore-holes and tools for the community.' I want to ask the MPs where those things are now."*

At the meeting, people had their say about the issues which concern them in Wulu, such as food, water, health care, and education. The MPs were able to listen, explain why some issues had not been addressed, and reassure their constituents that they were making progress on others.

A month after the meeting, Oxfam partner SDRDA followed up with the community to see what has changed. Hakim Ciponyu Awur, Director of SDRDA, said: *"The public is used to the idea that they are not allowed to question power-holders, but this is helping them to see that actually it is their role to do so, and that it helps the government to be more accountable."*

Afghanistan

Parwan Provincial
Peace Hearing,
Afghanistan.
Photo: Oxfam



In Afghanistan, WWS is supporting the development of a national network of CSOs, the Afghan Civil Society Organisations Network for Peace (ACSONP), and enabling it, and wider civil society, to make links with power-holders and engage in peace-building activities.

The ACSONP network is made up of more than 70 organisations from provinces across the country and represents a wide range of interests, including community- and national-level organisations working in health, education, peace-building, advocacy, and women's rights. The network has existed since 2006, but Oxfam's support since 2011 has helped to reinvigorate and strengthen it.

The ACSONP network now has a well developed vision, mission, and work objectives, a thriving leadership, and a core group of 25 active member organisations. The membership has also elected a Chair and Steering Group; six out of the nine organisations represented in the Steering Group are women's organisations, while the Chair of the network is also from a women's organisation. ACSONP has recently undertaken an exchange programme to Azerbaijan to learn from, and share experiences with, CSOs in that country.

Increased capacity has enabled ACSONP to play a catalytic role in peace negotiation and ensuring accountability of duty-bearers at the national, provincial (see box), and local level. At the community level, ACSONP members are delivering an innovative and successful programme of conflict resolution in five areas, working with tribal *jirgas* (courts) to reform an often retributive justice system and to settle community conflicts in ways which respect women's rights and promote social justice.

WWS in Afghanistan is also working with stakeholders at national level to ensure that peace-building strategies engage with civil society. The

project is enabling dialogue and debate between the private sector, parliament, high peace council, and the government, with ACSONP playing a facilitating role in this process. A roundtable held in Kabul in April 2013 was attended by more than 200 participants, including high-ranking politicians and members of the private sector, and achieved significant media coverage.

The majority of people in Afghanistan want peace. Peace is, however, being eroded every day by insurgents and opposition parties trying to further their political objectives through violence, injustice, and exclusion. WWS in Afghanistan is building the capacity of civil society to hold power-holders to account and express their views about what peace really means for ordinary citizens.

The Parwan provincial peace hearings, held in August 2012, were an inspiring example of this approach in action. The hearings brought together a range of power-holders and CSOs, including the Governor of Parwan (previously a warlord), the Chief of Police, the Head of the Provincial Parliament, and Gulsoom Satarzai, Coordinator of ACSONP.

The formal power-holders listened and responded to the concerns of the activists, "almost as though they were their line managers," as WWS project manager Babrak Osman comments. "The provincial peace process is a great forum for civil society to engage with power-holders, and offers a real opportunity for influence."

Within and Without the State was initiated in April 2011 and will run until April 2014. To find out more about the project, receive our newsletter or join the Conflict and Fragility Learning Group, please contact Amanda Buttinger, Programme Coordinator: abuttinger@oxfam.org.uk or Louie Fooks, Global Learning and Communications Officer: lfooks@oxfam.org.uk
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Other resources:

See: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk>

- *Programming in Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries: A learning companion*
- *Programming in Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries: Programme policy guidelines*
- *Within and Without the State: Strengthening civil society in conflict-affected and fragile settings (research report)*
- *Power and Fragility: Governance Programming in Fragile Contexts: A programme resource*



A citizen has his say at the MP/public dialogue in Wulu, South Sudan.
Photo: Crispin Hughes



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