

Oxfam Management response to the Global LEAP Evaluation February 2015

A: Context, background and findings

1. The context and background of the evaluation, i.e. the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

The evaluation of Global LEAP 2011-2014 aims to contribute to Oxfam's learning in two areas: (1) Oxfam's relative contributions to specific policy advocacy outcomes related to the work under the project, and (2) the extent to which Oxfam's linking of national and global advocacy for policy change has yielded measureable added value. The primary audience for the evaluation is internal, but important secondary audiences include Oxfam funders, Board of Directors, and relevant allies and networks, especially at national levels. The evaluation, conducted by independent consultants (Owl RE based in Geneva <http://www.owlre.com>) will also be shared publicly on the Oxfam website, as well as with potential funders and the advocacy evaluation community.

An Evaluation Advisory Committee made up of key stakeholders drawn from across the Oxfam confederation played a significant role in defining the evaluation purpose and scope, then reviewing and commenting on the consultants' preliminary findings and iterative drafts of the final report. The committee also played an important role in ensuring the evaluation is used in the future (see Section B, Action Plan below).

2. Summary of main findings and recommendations

The evaluation's overall conclusion is that LEAP allowed Oxfam to contribute towards significant policy progress that is expected to eventually reduce poverty and enhance global development. If LEAP didn't exist, it goes on, it is reasonable to conclude that certain issues would not have been placed on policy agendas; key policy positions would not have been defended and some aid budgets would have possibly eroded further; and less coherent pro-poverty policies would have been adopted. Perhaps the most significant difference would have been that civil society would have been in a weaker position in development debates at the national, regional and global levels. Oxfam was also seen as an appropriate organization for LEAP: it could build on its previous advocacy experience; it was seen as a credible partner by governments and other stakeholders given its technical expertise on the priority subjects; it has a global network and a presence in most of the G20 countries; it has an ability to work with civil society (CS) and other partners; it was willing to "lead from behind" and put other organizations forward; and it had access to other funding to support LEAP. The evaluation identifies six emerging areas for Oxfam to consider:

- i) Risks of its collaborative approach to policy influence, the extent to which it should support further civil society partners in their policy expertise, and how it can retain its credibility/trust from policy makers within an increasingly "competitive" environment. An option for Oxfam would be also to keep a "watching brief" on potential policy processes and forums that could emerge as crucial in aid development (e.g. sub-regional grouping; dormant UN forums; BRICS or other initiatives).
- ii) Creation of more exchanges between strands on tactics with the concrete aim of resource-saving through adaptation/reutilization of tactics and strategies as appropriate. In addition, LEAP should consider reviewing its use of online media tool and to better use its ability to move human resources quickly to match new opportunities (e.g. the secondment of staff in host countries of major developments and international meetings/High Level Forums (HLF)
- iii) Build a stronger knowledge base on southern advocacy; this would imply more exchanges between Oxfam in the south and building up and documenting advocacy strategies and tactics used.
- iv) Reflect further on the role of CS within LEAP; how can it do more to strengthen their advocacy capacity and make them genuine co-strategists, being mindful of the risks associated with this in terms of Oxfam's need to direct its own priority agenda.
- v) Role of public support and its link to political support on global development issues.
- vi) Review these evaluation findings with several options (not mutually exclusive) proposed in relation to LEAP's identity, strategy and priorities:
 - Refine priorities and strategies for LEAP;
 - Set a clearer "big picture" to communicate about LEAP internally;
 - Define possible exit strategies as appropriate;
 - Conduct some scenario planning on the future of aid.

B: Oxfam's response to the validity and relevance of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.

We consider that the evaluation is valid and relevant. It accurately pointed to our many achievements under LEAP and the factors that facilitated or hindered these successes. While the evaluation missed some context-specific political nuances in Oxfam's work under LEAP (for example, the careful calibration, and adaptation, of

political positioning vis-à-vis policy targets in the different contexts) we will consider those areas identified by the consultants for reflection and improvement on practice. Indeed, as a start, Oxfam's priorities, strategies and strand cross-fertilization have been refined for a proposed reinvestment by the donor in LEAP.

3. Summary of evaluation quality assessment, i.e. quality of the evaluation is strong/mixed/poor and short assessment of the process (e.g. good, wordy report)

Oxfam staff reported that the evaluation was “strong and useful” and “the quality of the evaluation is strong as it provides a balanced well-rounded report”.

The method used for this evaluation report (a mix of interview-based information collection and reading of Oxfam's strategic documents) proved to be successful. As a result, the evaluation report captures the main successes and challenges of LEAP work. We were pleased to have had the opportunity to suggest relevant names of the interviewees that would contribute to the case study (from civil society and government).

One Oxfam staff member was not satisfied with the USA case study, feeling that it was not fully representative of the work and “felt cobbled together by conversations with only a few people”. Another staff member expressed concern that the outcome harvesting methodology might have resulted in the evaluation being overly focused on positive outcomes. Other members of the team said they had confidence in the process and outcome of the evaluation, but noted some areas where they felt the evaluators missed key aspects of our work in their recommendations or considerations, or that these were not aligned with Oxfam's mission/approach/experience.

In the EU case study, staff members were not completely satisfied with the process or quality of the evaluation. For example, they felt it had overlooked some areas of success in building relationships during the European Parliamentary Elections (May 2014).

4. Utilisation of the Evaluation – what was particularly interesting, surprising and/or useful about the evaluation findings and areas to consider?

The evaluation was interesting and useful for its recognition and validation of the approaches Oxfam used in this first phase of LEAP. For example, the typology of tactics is insightful; it helps to organize and classify type of actions. Also, the list of factors that have hindered is helpful to have in mind for the next phase. In addition, the evaluation's reflection on policy influence and the role of Oxfam and civil society indicates a grasp of a complex project with multiple approaches.

It was also interesting and useful in its recognition that change can take several years to bring about (e.g. setting up of the Civil20 under G20).

We agree with the evaluators' comments that there could have been better coordination within Strand I and between Strands. This was recognized by members of the team and steps had already begun at the time the evaluation to address one aspect: Oxfam created an Aid and Development Finance Group, which brings together Oxfam staff working in multiple countries to build a common vision and plan for Oxfam's work on aid going forward. Based on the learning and the recommendations from the evaluators, we will focus efforts in further improving collaboration and joint planning.

The case studies helped show the variety of strategies and results in specific contexts.

With respect to Oxfam's work on emerging powers, there is a useful recommendation relating to the need to consolidate investment in BRICSAMs (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Mexico) with further strengthening of advocacy resources in the global south. In the next period, it would be crucial to build on the successful strategies identified by the evaluation report (e.g. collaborative approach with BRICSAM governments, as well as putting local CSOs at the forefront and using Oxfam's added value as international connector, organizer and facilitator) by developing further these strategies and involving further local CSOs in this work (both qualitatively and quantitatively). These successful strategies should be mentioned explicitly in future Oxfam BRICSAM strategy documents to ensure that all staff working on LEAP are conscious of what worked in the past (and was positively valued by LEAP evaluators). Knowledge management of the way our advocacy processes were successful is crucial, especially given that Oxfam is going through a major restructuring process, which may result in losses of know-how if knowledge management and advocacy handover is not seen as a priority. The evaluators recognized that the creation of spaces for dialogue between G20/BRICSAM governments and CS are key achievements of the LEAP 1.0 project. Oxfam has a true added value in engaging in G20 and BRICSAM high level forums as a convenor and organizer with partners, and that this added value is perceived by relevant stakeholders.

Finally with regard to the work on BRICSAM, one staff member remarked that: “It was very surprising to find out the huge impact LEAP has had on the national and international policy advocacy agendas despite all the national political and economic challenges”. Similarly, it was valuable to know that without LEAP certain issues would not have been placed on policy agendas and key policy positions will not have been defended. Some of the positive findings were the G20/BRICSAM leadership. Since 2011, the G20 has made commitments aligned to Oxfam's

main asks and civil society has gained a formal discussion space called C20. However, it is too early to evaluate C20's impact on the G20. On the other hand, this evaluation was very useful to plan our work ahead, as it takes into account our strengths and weaknesses regarding the project.

In the US case study in Strand III, we were less surprised by the evaluation finding that "there are some tensions around Oxfam policy positions that some organizations feel are problematic – specifically around the goal of a significant shift to country ownership with a short time frame". Oxfam's strong support of USAID's goal to increase funding to local actors to 30% by 2015 has put us at odds with some of our allies, particularly those who accept government funding. We purposely included these allies in our suggested list of interviewees, as we value their perspectives and feel they were needed to adequately evaluate this area of our work. While the results give us food for thought in terms of our engagement with our allies who hold opposing views on this issue, we maintain our support for USAID's target and our belief that effective development hinges on local actors (e.g. government, civil society) leading their own development and that USG efforts to provide increased funding directly to these local actors is very important in achieving this.

Some staff noted that a past evaluation of our legislative work found that peer organisations valued Oxfam taking a strong, principled position on issues and felt this opened up a wider space for debate, which is different from what our peers seem to have said in this evaluation. The team felt that this may be partly due to the fact that the focus of this evaluation was on our advocacy work with the Administration, while the previous evaluation focused on Congress where there are a wider range of views.

In regards to the Haiti Feed the Future research, the case study notes: "What gives Oxfam America credibility in DC (not accepting USG funds) means it had little experience of or standing with USAID at the country level". While Oxfam and local partner (PAPDA) did try to engage the USAID mission in Haiti, we did not initially receive a response and appears that the USAID mission had little interest in speaking to Oxfam. However, the final PAPDA research along with prompting from USAID in Washington seemed to spur the USAID Haiti mission to engage with PAPDA (and Oxfam). We expect to encounter this challenge even more going forward as we build on Oxfam's worldwide influencing network (WIN). We have seen that our good relationships and work with USAID in Washington can open spaces for us in countries.

5. Main Oxfam follow-up actions (detailed follow-up actions should be included in the table below)

Our follow up actions include:

A commitment to building better synergy between and across Strands in LEAP 2.0, including greater exchange between affiliates and strands for in cross-fertilizing of strategies and tactics.

Using more consistently the Oxfam International Intranet, Sumus, as a learning and sharing space.

Reflecting on the role of public support and its link to political support in this issue and to systematize and disseminate our learning on the strategic role of digital social media. Identifying opportunities to work with partners that targets might deem 'unusual' (e.g. academia, economists, the private sector) and not the usual NGO suspects.

Taking concrete steps to consolidate investment in BRICSAMs with a further strengthening of advocacy resources in the global south. Where various INGOs are involved, we believe that there is an opportunity of creating funding/advocacy synergies, a strategy that may have been under-utilized in the past. We agree that a major challenge is related to the creation of synergies with LEAP and ECSN (Empowering Civil Society Networks) EU-funded project, and intend to focus ESCN more on civil society capacity building, while LEAP concentrates on advocacy and communications.

Reviewing with academic experts and civil society our policy asks regarding the BRICS Bank, given that BRICSAM governments are expecting political contributions from civil society, while at the same time they are suggesting that civil society's proposals for influencing the bank are inappropriate.

Investing more attention in LEAP 2.0 on building greater internal collaboration and a common understanding of the LEAP grant's purpose and scope. This will begin with coordination meetings for key implementers once the grant has been awarded.

Reviewing the findings with the USA case study evaluator to get more details regarding the findings and identify specific learning and adjustments going forward.

Ensuring that our most effective tactics and strategies are part of future plans. These included: collaborative approach with CS partners and actors; coordinated approach within Oxfam for policy influence; collaborative approach for policy influence, working closely with governments and institutions, and facilitating South to North and South to South exchanges; and adapted messages to the given context or issue.

6. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon - and why (*this reflection should consider the results of the evaluation quality assessment*)

The assertion in the evaluation that a lack of LEAP “identity” and profile may have compromised effectiveness is not a wholly convincing finding. We do not regard a LEAP “identity” as key to effectiveness, yet will strive to have all staff working on LEAP understand fully the grant’s purpose and scope.

Some in Oxfam are not convinced that there are major risks in our collaborative approach to policy influence with ally governments, as long as the policy asks are clear and well communicated. The evaluators perceived that influencing BRICSAM foreign policies as an INGO remains a sensitive issue with governments in the BRICSAM countries, but we think that this is only partially true. Moreover, we believe that the fact that Oxfam is perceived as a foreign player creates more potential problems in terms of civil society alliance building/construction of joint positions within BRICSAMs (given the perception as a competitor/lack of legitimacy) than in the work of engagement with BRICSAM governments.

We differ on how the evaluators saw the choice to engage in more public campaigning. This depends on context, for example, public campaigning in the United States would require a lot of resources to educate and mobilize the broader US public on issues of foreign aid to a level that would be effective in influencing policy. As a result, the team chose targeted approaches with ally organizations, influential individuals, and other influential target audiences.

7. Additional reflections that have emerged from the evaluation process but were not the subject of the evaluation.

We consider that many of the evaluation findings and the learning e.g. seeking to strengthen synergies, reflect on positioning, good practice in partnership working) are useful for other aspects of the grant, Female Food Heroes and research into social accountability models in the Extractive Industries team. These areas fell outside of the scope of the evaluation nevertheless this learning is useful and can be used more widely.

Given the timetable and logistics of proposal creation, we lack early involvement of local partners in setting goals for each BRICSAM country. This lamentably reinforces the perception of local partners that Oxfam's advocacy objectives are not representative of what the BRICSAM civil society wants to achieve. To mitigate this, we always ask local partners to engage in advocacy work that we (as Oxfam) have identified as important with specific output and outcomes.

With respect to Oxfam being perceived as an international rather than national actor, it is important to note that Oxfam Mexico emerged from a national organization called “Rostros y Voces”. Therefore, Oxfam Mexico is not fully perceived as a foreign international actor and thus has added local legitimacy.

Detailed Action Plan on Key recommendations – for internal use only

A: Summary actionable evaluation recommendations

Please list all recommendations that require specific actions as per the management response above.

No.	Evaluation Recommendation (copy from above)
ER 1	Oxfam to consider further the risks of its collaborative approach to policy influence, the extent to which it should support further civil society partners in their policy expertise and how it can retain its credibility/trust from policy makers within an increasingly “competitive” environment? An option for Oxfam would be also to keep a “watching brief” on potential policy processes and forums that could emerge as crucial in aid development (e.g. sub-regional grouping; dormant UN forums; BRICS or other initiatives)
ER 2	Oxfam to consider how it can create more exchanges between strands on tactics with the concrete aim of resource-saving through adaptation/reutilization of tactics and strategies as appropriate. In addition, LEAP should consider reviewing its use of online media tool and to better use its ability to move human resources quickly to match new opportunities (e.g. the secondment of staff in host countries of major developments and meetings/High Level Forums)
ER 3	Oxfam to consider how it could further build a stronger knowledge base on southern advocacy; this would imply more exchanges between Oxfam in the south and building up and documenting advocacy strategies and tactics used
ER 4	Oxfam should reflect further on the role of civil society partners within LEAP; how can it do more to strengthen their advocacy capacity and make them genuine co-strategists, being mindful of the risks associated with this in terms of Oxfam’s need to direct its own priority agenda
ER 5	Oxfam should consider further the role of public support and its link to political support on global development issues.
ER 6	Oxfam to review these evaluation findings with several options (not mutually exclusive) proposed in relation to LEAP’s identity, strategy and priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine priorities and strategies for LEAP; • Set a clearer “big picture” to communicate about LEAP internally; • Define possible exit strategies as appropriate; • Conduct some scenario planning on the future of aid

B: Detailed action plan

One action may address several recommendations. In this case list all recommendations that are addressed.

Key action(s)	Responding to recommendation no.	Time frame	Responsible person/team	Review	
				Comments	Status
1. To use LEAP evaluation report, findings and recommendations to inform outcomes, plans and strategies for the next phase of LEAP 2015-2018	All (see Section 5 above for specifics)	1 st and 2 nd quarters 2015	All Strand leads and teams		
2. To use evaluation evidence to inform strategy development for AE advocacy in 2015/16. To invite US based LEAP consultant to facilitate this.	1, 2, 3 and 5	1 st quarter 2015	OA Aid Effectiveness Team (within LEAP Strand 1)		

Signed off by:	enter person who signed off the draft response on behalf of management	
Date: Barbara Durr, Global LEAP Project Director and Deputy to the Vice-President of Policy & Campaigns	Country/Region/Campaign: Oxfam America	