

Oxfam's Global Leaders Empowered to Alleviate Poverty (LEAP) - Evaluation

Executive Summary

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This report is an evaluation of Oxfam's Global Leaders Empowered to Alleviate Poverty (LEAP) project. The aim of this evaluation was to contribute to Oxfam's learning in two areas: Oxfam's relative contributions to specific policy advocacy outcomes, and to understand how Oxfam's linking of national and global advocacy for policy change has yielded measureable added value. The evaluation covered the first three years of the four-year project, from June 2011 to June 2014. Funded through a grant of US \$15.75 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the aim of LEAP is to promote political leadership for global development. Support for some 27 initiatives is provided for three distinct strands across the Oxfam confederation.

Given that LEAP is a broad project in terms of geographic reach and involvement of Oxfam affiliates and offices, the evaluation investigated in-depth selected initiatives for five case studies, while providing a broad picture of overall progress. Eight consultants worked for a total of three months to conduct the evaluation. Interviews were conducted with 50 Oxfam staff and 87 external stakeholders, mainly from Brazil, France, Spain, South Africa and USA, in addition to the Pan African and European Union (EU) institutions. This was complemented by additional research in Haiti, India and Mexico.

Findings

LEAP has enabled Oxfam to make significant contributions to policies in favor of poverty reduction and enhancing global development. These achievements were facilitated by LEAP's support to substantially increase Oxfam's advocacy capacity in the South despite the challenging economic and political environments.

These findings are supported by the 20 policy outcomes and/or steps identified by this evaluation as where Oxfam had influence (detailed in Annex Two).

Strand I - Improving and making the case for aid to fight hunger and poverty

- **Most progress seen on EU, French and Pan Africa aid policies**
Significance of change: Changes in EU influential on aid policy for six-year budget cycle and potentially long-term on tax issues; changes in France sets long-term standards/policies but could be overturned by future governments; changes in Africa are long-term and potentially significant dependent upon implementation.

Oxfam and its coalition partners have made some significant achievements through LEAP to defend and maintain current EU aid budgets, notably on budget support, the development cooperation budget and influencing the decision to introduce a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT). In Spain, the focus of LEAP was on increasing public awareness on development aid and putting pressure on the government not to decrease it further through creative tactics and creating a new supporter group estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. In France, LEAP has enabled Oxfam to reinforce its position as a key reference point on development aid and to accelerate several key policy outcomes, such as the implementation of the International Aid Transparency Initiative and an FTT, even if symbolic at this

Oxfam has access to ministers and their staff and an understanding of the political context that gave us opportunities to influence”
CSO France

stage. In Japan, through LEAP, Oxfam and its civil society (CS) partners have increased their advocacy and coalition-building with some incremental progress seen. At the Pan African (PA) level, LEAP has enabled Oxfam to be instrumental in increasing the voice of the African CS by strengthening their capacities to engage with key PA institutions and consequently contribute to several key policies.

Strand II - G20/BRICSAM leadership on global poverty

- **Most progress seen on G20 CS process and policy commitments**
Significance of change: G20 commitments have moderate to high impact on governments; CS process significant in it is now a formal structure but it is too early to assess its influence on the G20.

“Oxfam has been quite strategic about its BRICSAM approach – getting in early and putting local people and actors forward” Academic

LEAP created increased advocacy capacity in Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa, thus allowing Oxfam and its CS partners to develop a more in-depth and coordinated dialogue with governments. From 2011 to 2014, the G20 has made policy commitments that align themselves with Oxfam’s advocacy “asks”, notably in inequality, the post-2015 development agenda, financial issues, tax justice and food security. Through LEAP,

Oxfam has supported CS organisations (CSOs) of these countries in reinforcing their place in national, regional and global policy fora. A key achievement was the establishment of the C20, a formal CS engagement mechanism for the G20. Oxfam has also been active in establishing a more formal CS role for the annual BRICS summit, resulting in the gradual acceptance of a greater role for CS. Examples in all four countries were seen, where progress has been made on a range of domestic policies, although this was a secondary priority given the regional and global policy focus.

Strand III - Making the US a global development leader.

- **Most progress seen on US aid policies and protection appropriations**
Significance of change: Commitments secured for the medium term but could be overturned by Republican-dominated Congress or Republican Administration.

“Oxfam has technical expertise that gains the respect of policy experts in governments, but it is also willing to call government to task if it doesn’t measure up.” Foreign policy expert

Oxfam was seen as one of the key players in supporting the Obama administration’s priority of securing dedicated funds and commitment on food aid and smallholder agriculture, notably by supporting the commitment of the US to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Project (GAFSP) and the Feed the Future (FtF) initiative. Oxfam was credited with helping USAID reform efforts, notably holding the line on its ambitious goal of 30% country ownership by 2015. Building bi-partisan support has been central to its strategy and crucial in, for example, beating back language

in the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act that would have drastically limited the percentage of funds going to local organizations, and advancing the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act in both the House and Senate, laying the groundwork for future efforts to pass that bill. Despite the myriad of international issues the US has had to cope with, the US demonstrated a leadership role in development aid at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and to a lesser degree in other multilateral high-level meetings, with Oxfam’s support.

Factors that facilitated the success of LEAP were mainly internal, and included the long-term and flexibility of funding, the capacity and credibility of Oxfam and the collaborative approach used. **Factors that hindered the success** were mainly external and included capacity of CSOs, perceptions of Oxfam, external crises and political blockages leading to slow policy progress. **Strategies and tactics** found to be effective included the collaborative approach with CS partners, actors and internally for policy influence; facilitating South to North and South to South exchanges and adapting messages. Less-effective strategies were not as evident, but some strategies proved ineffective over time. The strategic use of social media and the exchange of success stories between initiatives were also limited.

Linking **local to global** brought added value through amplifying (local) southern voices, facilitating the attendance of Southern CS to high level fora (HLF) and working “behind the scenes” on policy development. Linking global to local brought added value at HLF by bringing Oxfam’s global concerns to the local level in the South, and research conducted as part of FtF at the country-level was a way of seeing how global norms were being applied locally, and then in turn, what learning could be drawn out (for both local and global use).

Project management: Oxfam staff were positive about the management of the LEAP project, which was centralized in Oxfam America and managed by different staff for each strand. The straightforward reporting and the funding procedure were compared very favorably with other similar projects. The relatively long-term nature of the project (four years) allowed for better planning and the consequent commitment of staff and their ability to follow up longer-term processes. For some initiatives, LEAP started nearly a year late, which led to delays in starting activities.

Coordination: As Strand II and Strand III had common themes that unified staff, they were easier to coordinate, compared with Strand I which had staff dispersed across Africa, Europe, Japan and Brazil. Challenges in management and coordination identified included:

- Some overlap with other projects, notably with the Empowering CSO Networks in an Unequal, Multipolar World project
- Some challenges in coordinating with other relevant programs and projects
- An absence of a common LEAP vision for staff to identify themselves with
- No consistent tracking of policy outcomes across and within initiatives
- No overall theory of change nor a simple visual presentation that aided staff to understand how LEAP fitted together

Conclusions and considerations

This evaluation’s overall conclusion would be that LEAP allowed Oxfam to contribute towards significant policy progress, which is expected to eventually reduce poverty and enhance global development. But what would have happened if LEAP didn’t exist? It’s 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 the CS 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 CS and other partners; it was willing to “lead from behind” and put other organizations forward; and it had access to extra funding to support LEAP. Following are six general conclusions and considerations on LEAP for Oxfam.

1. **Policy influence:** The evaluation found positive examples of Oxfam’s and its partners’ influence on policy processes and outcomes. In general, most policy influence was done in a collaborative environment that was mutually beneficial for both Oxfam and governments. But what are the risks of this approach – could Oxfam one day be “burnt” by its close proximity to governments? Oxfam and its CS partners were credited (by policymakers) with the technical know-how and policy expertise they brought to the issues. However, are CS partners able to offer the technical expertise required? And how to ensure policymakers will keep offering a space for CS inputs? Further, Oxfam has been astute in selecting the policy environments to focus on, but to what extent is Oxfam able to identify and capitalize on these as they emerge?

Considerations for Oxfam: Oxfam to consider further the risks of its collaborative approach to policy influence, the extent to which it should support further CS partners in their policy expertise and how it can retain its credibility/trust from policymakers within an increasingly “competitive” environment. An option for Oxfam would also be 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).

2. **LEAP tactics:** This evaluation illustrated that a wide range of tactics were deployed for LEAP, the most common ones being the use of coalitions and alliances, research-based messaging and direct consultation with governments and their allies. However, there seemed to be little cross-fertilization of tactics across strands. For example, a common research agenda, or exchange on and reuse of newly tested tactics. The evaluation showed that the use of online media tools was very limited. However, the latter have a lot of potential and offer ever more opportunities to reach key stakeholders. At the same time, LEAP funding enabled Oxfam to be agile in its tactics, for example, by creating temporary posts in host countries in the lead-up to HLF that proved effective, given the influence that the hosts appeared to have on the agenda and proceedings. The decision to locate the BRICS Bank in China is one such example that deserves attention and has already been flagged by Oxfam.

Considerations for Oxfam: 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 tools and put to better use its ability to move human resources quickly to match new opportunities (e.g. secondment of staff in host countries of major developments and meetings/HLF).

3. **The global balance in practice:** LEAP demonstrated that Oxfam has come a long way in the past three years in being a better collaborator and really investing in advocacy capacity in the South. LEAP supported a genuine strategy for southern engagement instead of a sporadic approach as seen in the past. There is still a way to go and challenges to be faced, but the investment in Strand II and the links made to Strands I and III have been consistent with Oxfam’s World-wide Influencing Network (WIN) strategy and a concrete example of readdressing the “global balance”, a key priority of Oxfam’s 2020 vision. What this evaluation felt was needed was to build the same strong knowledge base that Oxfam has on northern advocacy, an understanding of what has and has not worked in southern advocacy.

Considerations for Oxfam: Oxfam to consider how it could 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.

4. **CS role in global development policy:** Collaboration with CS was a dominant common feature across LEAP initiatives. This evaluation believes there was enough evidence to show that CS does have an influence on development policy outcomes. Oxfam has made a strategic choice to work within the development system. But what are the risks of this? How can Oxfam ensure not to alienate those CSOs that remain “outside”? How can Oxfam counter the weaknesses seen with some CS partners whose contribution is key but who lack financial stability? At what stage will Oxfam feel comfortable to step back and let southern CSOs direct further?

Considerations for Oxfam: Oxfam should 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.

5. **Public support to global development issues:** The effort to mobilize broad public support around global development issues was limited. Roughly speaking, it was theorized that public support needed to change in these contexts in order to foster political support for aid, which has been supported by research. Where public support was not a focus, it was not judged as necessary – even more so, that public support could work *against* political support. National contexts evidently influence the role of public support to global development issues. Across LEAP initiatives there was perhaps more potential to consider the public’s role.

Considerations for Oxfam: Oxfam should consider further the role of public support and its link to political support on global development issues; the current initiative in Spain may be an opportunity to do so.

6. **LEAP identity, strategy and priorities:** LEAP initiatives were relatively free in selecting their priorities to contribute to the overall goal. Given the results seen by this evaluation, it could be that more thought is needed as to how the pieces fit together; what are the common lessons learnt; where are the biggest gaps, even if challenging to achieve (e.g. declining ODA of Europe); how is LEAP integrated with other programs; and what is the envisaged exit strategy in areas where funding will end. This could also help better shape an overall view of what LEAP is and provide a clearer identity for the project and its staff. Finally, as the aid agenda could be further derailed by world events such as the Syria crisis, the Ebola outbreak and the increasing East-West tension, LEAP may need to consider further future possible scenarios with appropriate assumptions, also as humanitarian aid may overtake development aid in importance.

Considerations for Oxfam: Oxfam to 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 scenario planning on the future of aid.

Long-term issues

The following are five broad issues with longer-term implications identified for reflection by Oxfam as a result of the evaluation.

- 1. Defending aid:** LEAP is based largely on the notion of the worth of ODA as an approach to alleviate poverty and support development. However, this concept is increasingly being questioned, and ODA makes up a decreasing component of developing countries' budgets (now down to 6%), even if others would argue that ODA is still very relevant, particularly for least-developed countries. In what regard has Oxfam, through LEAP, aligned itself with an outdated concept? There are many alternatives that deserve critical attention from Oxfam, including remittances, domestic resource mobilization and public-private partnerships for development projects. Oxfam is already considering some of these alternatives and it may need to go further in this regard.
- 2. The impact of HLF:** A broader debate exists on the ongoing relevance and impact of HLF such as the G20 and the G8 that Oxfam is well aware of and has taken into consideration in its approach. However, there is little documented reflection by Oxfam (to the knowledge of this evaluation team) on the impact and implementation of HLF policy commitments that Oxfam champions, so as to better inform Oxfam regarding its future priorities and resource allocation (e.g. to advocate for HLF follow-up actions and monitor their implementation). In this respect, Oxfam should consider using existing independent studies (e.g. one study found a high implementation rate (90%) for a food security issue Oxfam has championed, the Agricultural Market Information System). Further, although it may be too early to assess, what is the impact of the C20 on G20 policy commitments? This may not be a major focus of LEAP but is worth considering when analyzing results and setting future priorities.
- 3. Beyond the BRICSAM countries:** As this evaluation has found, LEAP has supported Oxfam in establishing a solid anchoring in the BRICSAM countries. The latest WIN strategy recognizes that Oxfam needs to think beyond the BRICSAM countries and the next "in line", notably Indonesia and Turkey. Yet, although mentioned briefly, the Middle Eastern states seem to be largely absent in this reflection, which is surprising given their rapidly increasing role in development and humanitarian aid. Of note, the highest ODA/GNI average is not in the North but belongs to the United Arab Emirates.
- 4. Alignment with Oxfam's global advocacy:** As a global effort for Oxfam, LEAP has shown that a major, multi-affiliate initiative can achieve significant accomplishments. Many of the policy "asks" in development aid advocated by LEAP are heavily informed by research conducted by Oxfam GB so there is good alignment between the two. But more broadly, to what extent do the advocacy priorities of key components of the confederation (e.g. Oxfam GB, Novib and OI) align with that of LEAP? This will become even more crucial in the next year as both Oxfam in Brazil and South Africa transform into affiliates and will need (financial) support from the Oxfam network to ensure that projects such as LEAP can be sustained.
- 5. Growing membership and public support to Oxfam's advocacy:** The initiatives in Spain have shown the potential of campaigning for reaching new audiences that have an interest in global development issues. Other Oxfam affiliates, such as Oxfam France, have a membership base that to date was not much implicated in the LEAP initiatives. In the Southern countries, a criticism of Oxfam is its lack of roots in communities and representativeness of their citizens. Yet, the experience of LEAP and campaigns such as GROW and its project Behind the Brands illustrate that Oxfam can create interest and a supporter base around global issues – potentially reaching millions – but it is rarely coordinated or used extensively. What are the opportunities and risks for Oxfam to leverage on its membership and to create/mobilize a global online social movement for change that could even give it more legitimacy in its advocacy?

As part of its ongoing commitments of responsibility and to learning, Oxfam will communicate the findings and recommendations of all external evaluations. We will send these to the relevant decision makers internally, in order to allow for constructive discussion of the results. We will also publish the evaluation reports and make them available on our website.

As a rights-based organization, we attach the highest importance to this responsibility, especially to the communities and beneficiaries with whom we work. For us, This responsibility means that we must assess regularly and honestly the quality of our work, and share the results of these assessments with the key decision makers and apply the lessons learnt to the future actions of Oxfam.