

# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For Sustainable Alliances in the South Caucasus



**OXFAM**

# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

## 1 Overview

### Programme information

Name	Improving Regional Food Security Through National Strategies and Smallholder Production
Country	Armenia and Georgia
Budget	£1.9m
Start Date	September 2013
End Date	September 2017
Donors	European Union Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO)

### Problem analysis

Georgia and Armenia share a common history as constituent parts of the former Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the bloc in the 1990s, both countries experienced conflict and economic stagnation, from which recovery has been slow and inequitable. Agriculture remains the primary source of income for rural communities in both countries, representing 46 percent and 37 percent of the income of the total populations of Georgia and Armenia, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Oxfam's 2014 programme baseline examined food security in the region, and found that despite large (if inefficient) agricultural sectors and apparently sufficient calorific energy intake (120 percent adequacy in Armenia and 116 percent in Georgia<sup>2</sup>), significant challenges to food security and related health outcomes persist.

The programme countries remain reliant on food imports, and are subject to high food prices and price fluctuations. In a context in which over half of household income in both countries is spent on food (64 percent in Armenia, 54 percent in Georgia) and significant numbers of households borrow each month for food consumption (30 percent in Armenia, 18 percent in Georgia),<sup>3</sup> such volatility can have a direct and severe impact on food and economic security.

Moreover, household food consumption is characterized by low levels of nutritional diversity: diets are dependent on starchy foods with low nutritional value, and there is increasing consumption of high levels of sugar and fat.<sup>4</sup> The situation has had direct consequences for health outcomes, with a high prevalence of diet-related disorders, ranging from stunting and malnutrition to diabetes and heart disease.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the study identified women as principle food producers at the same time as taking the lead in domestic responsibilities. It also found that health outcomes for men are significantly worse than for women, and their counterparts in Europe.

### Brief programme description

The programme consists of a single, four-year, EU-funded project, running from 2013–17, with a total budget of £1.9m. The programme's overall objective is 'to contribute to the improvement of food security and nutrition in the South Caucasus through smallholder farmers' representation in the governance processes'.

The project focuses on working with government structures and civil society actors to develop, implement and monitor food security-related strategies and legislation, ensuring that support mechanisms are in place for small-scale producers. The programme also supports national alliances and institution-building, enabling sustainable civil society engagement in the policy process, a critical component given the project's planned phase-out in 2017.

The programme works through two national alliances of civil society organizations: the Agricultural Alliance (AA) in Armenia, and the Georgian Alliance on Agriculture and Rural Development (GAARD) in Georgia. Additionally, Oxfam's broader programming within the South Caucasus is being transferred to two recently-established national NGOs: OxYGen in Armenia, and BRIDGE in Georgia. Both organizations will play a key role in each alliance following Oxfam's phase-out.

The programme's is built upon three results-focused pillars:

#### **1. Design and implementation of effective, gender-sensitive food security and nutrition strategies at a national level.**

Activities include: the review of national agricultural strategies in Armenia and Georgia in partnership with national alliances; research on food security and nutrition; public campaigns to leverage the evidence in support of local food production before relevant line ministries; and events to strengthen public awareness of nutrition and local food production.

#### **2. Enact food security and nutrition legislation to support local food production and consumption.**

Activities focus on ensuring that the national strategies translate into programmes and budget which support smallholder farmers. The programme arranges for government officials to visit European countries to highlight good practices in, for example, investing in co-operatives and food security.

#### **3. Increase the representation of civil society in strategy/ policy decision making processes.**

Activities include: consultations with local, regional and national stakeholders; national farmers' congresses to bring together farmers and government representatives; food fairs to showcase local produce, promote healthy eating and networking among food security actors; and a range of activities to strengthen the AA and GAARD.

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## 2 Achievements and challenges

### Achievements to date

#### Influencing

The AA, supported by Oxfam in Armenia, has provided recommendations to the Ministry of Agriculture on strengthening the nationwide Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development 2017–25. The strategy has been passed to the Prime Minister's Office and is awaiting final adoption by the new government following elections in April 2017. The GAARD also provided recommendations to the Strategy for Agricultural Development of Georgia which was adopted in February 2015.

#### Monitoring

Oxfam has produced baseline research on food security and nutrition,<sup>6</sup> and conducted research on food security and nutrition data collection for the countries of the South Caucasus.<sup>7</sup> In Georgia, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has used the findings to support the Ministry of Agriculture to develop recommendations to improve the food security and nutrition monitoring system. Further, in Armenia, a framework and draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for monitoring of nutrition-related strategies and programmes has been developed and signed by the Mother and Child Health Alliance and the Ministry of Health, followed by the launch of the joint pilot monitoring of the state of nutrition in schools in Armenia.

#### Impact

In Georgia, the GAARD sub-working group on smallholder farming cooperated with the Agency for Cooperative Development, which in 2016 resulted in 7.5 times more grant funding for smallholder co-operatives than the previous year.

In Armenia, a Law on Co-operatives adopted on 21 December 2015 allowed all agricultural farmer organizations to register as agricultural co-operatives. New co-operatives will now be able to make and register a profit, supporting members with agri-inputs and marketing of products, reducing costs and increasing access to new markets.

#### Gender

In Armenia, the programme has successfully lobbied for the official adoption of guidelines on gender analysis and mainstreaming by the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs. The guidelines are mandatory, and outline measures to ensure all provincial governments integrate analysis of women's issues and measures to address gender inequality in their socio-economic development plans.

### Specific challenges

#### Ensuring prioritization of smallholder farmers and women in strategic planning

In both Armenia and Georgia, government priorities in relation to food security and agriculture are overwhelmingly production and export-driven, and thus predominantly concerned with the large agricultural enterprises. The programme seeks to use the legislative and strategic planning processes of target governments to ensure support is given to smallholder farmers, women and rural communities. Oxfam, and its partners in the AA and GAARD, have actively engaged to secure commitments from governments on women's issues and smallholder enterprises, which while comprising a major component of each country's agricultural sector, are considered too challenging by policy makers due to abrupt changes in the political and economic environment. In 2016, GAARD issued a *Declaration on Rural Cooperation Development and Empowerment of Small Holder Farmers in Georgia*,<sup>8</sup> which advocated for increased support mechanisms specifically to co-ops, smallholder farmers and women's groups.

The process of influencing government strategies has been core to the programme, and has presented unique challenges. In Georgia, in part as a consequence of personnel changes in the Ministry of Agriculture, key recommendations by Oxfam and GAARD were not adopted. Recognizing the need for concrete steps in important areas and a clear plan of action, the team successfully lobbied the government to set up a food security working group under the Ministry of Agriculture, which was mandated to develop a detailed action plan on food security. The working group has been a more effective entry point for influencing, and has issued 20 recommendations to support smallholder farmers and women on issues such as land registration, credit and access to extension services.

### Lessons learned

Alliances are not sustainable by default. Social network analysis (SNA) is one tool which, combined with others (power analysis, SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, threat), etc), enables programmes to understand how their coalitions work, and undertake actions to ensure sustainability when a project is over.

There is a need for adaptive and targeted advocacy. The programme carried out research to gather evidence to understand what to focus on and determine which changes were achievable. Targets were reviewed and adjusted as the context changed and depending on government willingness and priorities. This resulted in specific policy changes.

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## 3 Partnerships and links with other programmes

### Partnerships

As part of the Oxfam's withdrawal from Armenia and Georgia in 2018, it has created two new organizations to continue programming based on its values and commitments. The development of OxyGEN in Armenia and BRIDGE in Georgia is the culmination of a five-year process, from inception through assessment and business planning to registration in 2015, and continued capacity building to date.

Oxfam has supported both newly-established organizations to gain project experience, bringing them into existing long-term EU grants as partners, and has been successful in supporting fundraising initiatives which have secured ongoing financial support following Oxfam's departure.

In September 2015, OxyGEN and BRIDGE took over responsibility for AA and GAARD, leading coordination, assuming responsibility for network fundraising, and implementing action plans based on each country's Oxfam exit strategy including the funding and advocacy strategies.

#### Creating platforms to influence strategy

Oxfam has played a lead role in building the capacity of, convening and facilitating two major alliances on agriculture and rural development: the Agricultural Alliance in Armenia,<sup>9</sup> and the Georgian Alliance on Agriculture and Rural Development (GAARD) in Georgia. Both alliances emphasize the needs and rights of rural communities, women and smallholder farmers and bring together key agricultural actors, including national interest groups, credit unions, academic institutions, environmental organizations, and international agencies.

These alliances have been central to advocacy and influencing activities under the programme, and have provided a united voice when approaching governments on issues of strategy and legislation. While the alliances are large and broad-based – AA has 18 members and GAARD 30 – a key concern for the programme has been ensuring sustainability and impact of the alliances.

Experience in Georgia has been that, following the completion of the consultation process for the National Agricultural Strategy, levels of activity within the network subsided. In Armenia, as the strategy approval process is still ongoing, the extent to which this dynamic will occur is not yet known. Oxfam's role – both as a convener and conduit for funding – has also been critical to developing momentum behind AA and GAARD. Given the planned phase-out, the project has focused on activities which will strengthen these networks.

### Links with Oxfam programmes

#### Campaigning

Recognizing a gap within the programme structure, the team identified and reallocated resources to secure two secondments from other Oxfam countries to help develop, deliver and evaluate its campaigning strategies and activities. In cooperation with a PR company, the campaign used the evidence from the research to develop key messages conveyed through social media and public events to advocate for specific changes in the food system and ensure the commitment of the governments.

#### Social Network Analysis

Oxfam in the South Caucasus is grateful for the learning on social network analysis generated by ECSN-BRICSAM,<sup>10</sup> an Oxfam-supported network of organizations in Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, South Africa and Mexico. The network had previously used the methodology in standardizing and cross-country comparison processes, and was a valuable resource throughout the programme's deployment of SNA.

The programme has also supported other Oxfam programmes to adopt network assessment tools, holding a multi-country workshop<sup>11</sup> in Yerevan in December 2016. Follow-up support was also provided to other country programmes via a webinar<sup>12</sup> in February 2017. Oxfam's WASH programme in Tajikistan is also working with networks,<sup>13</sup> and following its participation in the workshop, is planning to take forward the SNA methodology in its own work.

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## 4 In focus

### Social Network Analysis for sustainable networks

In response to the challenge of network sustainability, Oxfam has undertaken detailed SNA<sup>14</sup> of AA and GAARD. SNA is a set of mathematical, graph theory and statistical tools that map systems – in this case national networks – providing a means to describe, measure and analyse the system's characteristics and relationships between constituent parts.

The tool enables users to examine whole networks and their individual relationships. It can answer questions such as: 'How dense (interconnected) is a network?', 'Which organizations are central and which are peripheral?', and, crucially in the context of the programme, 'What is the impact on the network if a particular organization (i.e. Oxfam) is removed?' The answers to such questions can be used to establish processes which will strengthen the network.

Oxfam began the SNA analysis with an online survey of network members and other food security actors from outside the

alliances (e.g. government agencies, non-participating UN actors). The data was analysed using Netminer,<sup>15</sup> a tool for network analysis, which assessed the network for information sharing, joint advocacy and formal relations (e.g. MoUs, contracts).

The analysis, which is available online,<sup>16</sup> provided numerous recommendations for strengthening the network. For example, a particularly well-connected node which to date has not played a leading role in an alliance could be brought forward to strengthen the system as a whole; or where an actor which is not yet a member of an alliance could be introduced to build influence with a particular government agency. These recommendations have since been translated into an action plan, which will guide activities conducted by the alliances, Oxfam, and its off-shoots, OxYGEN and BRIDGE during the phase-out period.

For further information about this programme:  
[www.oxfam.org.uk/south-caucasus](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/south-caucasus)

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## Notes

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