

Stop the Sugar Rush

Teacher's notes and background information.

The purpose of this guide is primarily to inform the teachers who support Oxfam Youth Ambassador groups and similar active global citizenship projects. It introduces Oxfam's 'Behind the Brands' campaign and suggests how young people can plan their own actions to support the campaign.

However, teaching about sugar also overlaps with the history, geography and science curricula, and citizenship teachers may combine topic teaching with active global citizenship activities. Therefore the guide also includes suggestions for curriculum making and the resource includes a lesson plan exploring the values leading brands exploit to promote their products.

A short and sweet history of sugar

Widespread cultivation of sugar cane first took place in India and Persia around the seventh century BC. It spread through trade and conquest throughout the medieval Arab world to Spain and Portugal. In 1493 Christopher Columbus took sugar cane on his voyage to Santo Domingo and found the soil and climate of the Caribbean ideal for growing the crop. The Atlantic slave trade developed to supply forced labour for sugar plantations in the Caribbean, Central America and Brazil. Much of Britain's wealth was built on the brutality of slavery and the lucrative trade in 'white gold'.



A sugar cane plantation in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. The land has recently been seized from local indigenous communities who depended on the forest for their food.

Photo: Tatiana Cardeal/Oxfam

In 1747 the German chemist Andreas Marggraf discovered how to extract edible sugar from the sugar beet plant. Sugar beet can be grown in cooler European climates and, with the abolition of slavery, sugar beet cultivation increased in Europe and North America while sugar cane cultivation declined in many tropical territories. Today, for example, few Caribbean islands produce significant amounts of sugar.

As worldwide sugar production grew the use of sugar in our food became commonplace. What was once a luxury for the rich became the everyday product we take for granted. While we're all used to having sugar at home to sprinkle on our breakfast cereal and sweeten our hot drinks, a key driver of the current high demand for sugar is the processed food and drinks industry.

Behind the Brands – Stop the Sugar Rush

Oxfam's Behind the Brands campaign is holding the world's 'big 10' food and drinks companies to account for what's happening in their supply chains and the impact they're having on the world's poorest people. Oxfam has already secured promises from big consumers of cocoa, like Mars, to change their policies on how they work with women farmers.



Teng Kao, 53, is from Cambodia. He used to grow tamarind, sugar palm, rice, watermelon and vegetables on his farm, earning up to \$1,200 a year. Mr Teng says his land was taken and cleared to make way for the sugar cane plantation, which is majority-owned by sugar conglomerate KSL. Now he is struggling to pay for the basics and send his children to school.

Photo: Caroline Gluck/Oxfam

Now Oxfam is putting the big soft drink companies under the spotlight and asking them to guarantee the huge amounts of sugar they buy don't come from land grabbed small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples. Soft drinks companies hold a lot of influence over the sugar industry, but their current policies have been so slack they don't seem to know if the sugar they buy is grown on grabbed land.

The Behind the Brands campaign aims to make people more aware of the many food and drink brands controlled by the 'big 10' companies, the impact of how these companies do business and how they can make changes for the better. Oxfam is not asking the public to boycott any brands and we are meeting constructively with 'big 10' companies to discuss changes they can implement. Oxfam believes that even the biggest food companies will change how they do business because they care about what their consumers think.

Taking action

Many young people's knowledge of sugar may be incomplete. For example many may be surprised that the world's top four sugar producing countries are Brazil, India, China and Thailand. The **Curriculum Making** section at the end of this guide has links to resources that will expand young people's knowledge of the issues raised in this resource.



Global demand for sugary drinks, sweets and processed foods is driving land grabs. The photo shows a supermarket in Cambodia.

Photo: Caroline Gluck/Oxfam

Action 1

Oxfam's **action guide** begins by asking young people to learn about the connections between sugar cane cultivation and current land grabs, and to share this knowledge with other students through peer teaching. The suggested activity is for students to **present an assembly**. Alternatively young people could peer teach a lesson, or some members of a Youth Ambassadors group could peer teach the others in the group. The principle is that young people should develop a good working knowledge of the topic before planning their actions.

Action 2

Next we ask young people to get creative and create an **artistic message**. They should think carefully about the simple message they wish to send and then design a collage to get their message across. As well as creatively using visual images borrowed from company branding, young people should add their clear and simple thoughts and asks for the companies.

In November 2013 Coca Cola listened to campaigners and agreed to ensure zero tolerance of land grabs in their sugar supply chains. However PepsiCo have yet to make a similar commitment. Therefore the following action should be targeted at PepsiCo.

Young people could research the different products manufactured by PepsiCo by checking slide 7 of the presentation and the infographic at <http://bit.ly/l0ISU7> Then they could add product wrappers or packaging to their collage.

Company advertising and sponsorships promote the corporate values the company wishes to share with the public. For example PepsiCo has sponsored X Factor. Young people could research PepsiCo's advertising and sponsorships and comment on them. The **lesson plan** includes ideas about how to do this.

Completed collages should be displayed prominently in school and photographed. The image should then be **tweeted** at the relevant company. Use the handle **@pepsico** and the hash tag **#behindthebrands**. Alternatively email your photograph and school details to Kate Evans at kevans@oxfam.org.uk and Oxfam will tweet the photo on your behalf.

Oxfam believes that big companies more likely to respond positively to the campaign if communications are made in public on visible platforms like Twitter. For example more than half the recent tweets using Coca-Cola's handle came from Oxfam supporters, despite the company telling Oxfam that they didn't believe that many consumers know, or by implication, care about the links between land grabs and sugar production. Publically communicating your collages with PepsiCo is a great way of demonstrating otherwise.

Action 3

Finally another way to publically demonstrate support for a campaign and spread the word is **writing an article for a school newsletter or blog**.

Writing a successful blog post is a specific form of writing for an audience and the potential for reaching a real audience can make it motivational and fun. There are useful tips from the BBC and British Council on how to structure a blog, use the appropriate writing style and avoid common pitfalls at <http://bit.ly/eT6PuC>

Email the links to any blogs you do post to Kate Evans at kevans@oxfam.org.uk so we can tweet them from the @OxfamEducation account. Young people could share published blogs

with their peers and families and on social networking sites. There are guidelines about internet safety at <http://bit.ly/1c51XD2>



*Oxfam campaigners visit Coca-Cola's UK head office in London
Photo: Mike Kemp/Oxfam*

Curriculum making

Sugar may feature across the curriculum, particularly in history, geography and science. However the how, where and why of sugar cultivation is a fast moving topic. Global supply chains are complex, fluid and difficult to track. These resources are useful for tracking the connections between sugar cultivation and land grabs in the 21st century and for placing them in context.

Behind the Brands - <http://www.behindthebrands.org/en-gb>

Oxfam's resource to help make sense of global food chains and how the 'big 10' companies affect the world's poorest people. Oxfam will post updates on how Coca-Cola and PepsiCo respond to the campaign on this site

The 'big 10' Company Infographic - <http://www.convergencealimentaire.info/map.jpg>

Food For Thought – <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/school-projects/food-for-thought>

Oxfam's Education & Youth's learning resource on the global food system. Lesson plans are tailored to meet curriculum requirements of English, Science and Geography. The Geography resources directly address the issue of land grabs.

Sugar Nutrition UK - <http://www.sugarnutrition.org.uk/what-is-sugar.aspx>

Straightforward fact sheets about the history, geography ('Production of Sugar') and science ('How do plants make sugar?') of sugar.

Oxfam Youth Ambassador Groups

For more information about setting up an Oxfam Youth Ambassador Group go to <http://bit.ly/13TLwA7>

Your resources

Please share any new resources you develop by emailing education@oxfam.org.uk