



Contrasts between rich people and poor people are highly visible in most countries where Oxfam works. Here, a rickshaw driver works next to a luxury car on a road with modern office buildings and apartments. Photo: Saikat Mojumder.

FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT AND UNIVERSAL ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Executive summary by Claire Kumar

This report presents the results of a reflection and sense making exercise regarding the Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013–2020. It focuses on Goal 6: Financing for Development and Universal Essential Services. As such this report covers the Fiscal Accountability for Inequality Reduction (FAIR) program, the Even it Up (EiU) campaign, and essential services work. The report documents outcomes achieved, as well as reflecting on approaches and gaps. Recommendations are also presented to inform the next strategic plan period.

The defining feature of this period is Oxfam's thought leadership on inequality. The organization has a unique position amongst its peers, with a powerful global voice and increased potential for influence. At national level, Oxfam has achieved notable success promoting inequality reduction policies in Spain, as well as helping create a national inequality commission in Scotland. Initiatives to kick start national inequality debates are underway in many southern countries. Latin American teams stand out as having developed innovative strategies to change the narrative on inequality in the region.

Oxfam's progress on tax is also impressive. The organization has gone from very little work on tax pre-2013, with the exception of the extractives industries (EI) sector, to becoming a key actor in the global movement. A number of global outcomes merit highlighting: Oxfam's contribution enshrining country-by-country reporting rules as a transparency measure within OECD and EU rules; the EU and Canada implementing new payment disclosure rules for EI companies; and commitments made by 14 EI companies in relation to contracts disclosure. At national level interesting tax policy outcomes were identified in Vietnam, Pakistan, Ecuador and Bolivia. Oxfam has also influenced EI legislation in various African countries (improving governance, transparency, fiscal terms and controls), as well as influencing governments to renegotiate terms in their contractual agreements with EI companies.

Oxfam has been very successful improving budget transparency and formalizing spaces for citizen participation. The active citizenship approach has also led to wins in terms of new/increased budget allocations by local governments that have directly benefited poor communities. In parallel, Oxfam is successfully influencing local level expenditure of extractives' revenue. When it comes to national level budgets, there is some progress enshrining legislation incorporating gender responsive budgeting (GRB) principles into budget planning. There are also some significant wins in Ghana: securing high proportions of extractives' revenue for education and agriculture, and influencing the IMF bailout terms in relation to social spending. Additional wins achieved include increased spending on medicines in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, and increasing the budget share invested in education in Burkina Faso.

The essential services portfolio has seen many positive local level educational outcomes and some changes to regional education policy and practices. However, there is less evidence of influence on national education policies, with the notable exceptions of experiences in Ghana and China where impressive scale has been reached. Influencing education financing appears to be the weakest aspect. For health, one highlight is that

Oxfam's influencing led to the adaptation of an SDG indicator, from one of measuring coverage of insurance schemes to a more progressive indicator measuring the impact of out of pocket payments on health. There were also some examples identified in the review of successful influencing of the quality of health service provision at local levels via social audit type work.

An important conclusion is that national level budget advocacy focusing on essential services should be a priority for (re)investment in the next strategic plan period. This portfolio has suffered with the various transitions and realignments. There are also fewer national budget wins than would be expected. While there appears to be a strong focus on local level budgets, there is a lack of strong popular mobilization, campaigns and successful advocacy around national budgets. This gap was emphasized by many who felt that essential services, and advocacy around health and education particularly, is *the* critical missing element.

This review demonstrates how sustained investment on fiscal justice can bring significant rewards. This is evident from EI work and from the experience in Ghana. If Oxfam is interested in impact at scale, long-term investment is essential. It is also clear that Oxfam has impressive levels of access to governments and constructive dialogues are facilitating change. This is visible across EI work and tax work generally. Genuine capacity gaps appear part of the reason why governments are open to Oxfam's contribution. Though active citizenship is a key strategy for the FAIR program, it is not the only route to change. It may be useful to acknowledge more the success of high level, insider advocacy strategies.

There also appears to be a lot that those working on fiscal justice can learn from EI work, including particularly its selective nature. The EI team often directs resources to countries with new oil, gas or mining activity. As such teams are, by definition, led by political opportunities. These are specific to geological contexts, but it is clear that having focus has rewards. The question is: can this be achieved across fiscal justice work, identifying political opportunities at country level and investing strategic support for teams in these locations, and is this an appropriate strategy for Oxfam to follow?

Finally, while some would prefer more mass campaigning, there is also recognition that popular campaigning perhaps needs to be done differently. Some of this is down to shrinking civic space. However, there is also a shift towards long-term narrative change and cultural strategies to win over 'hearts and minds' and to garner public support for new inequality reduction strategies. More investment in strategic research combined with innovative communications and media work could yield success. There appears to be learning accumulated in these areas that could be explored more in the next period.

Recommendations

1. Don't squander the thought leadership established on inequality. It is rare and compelling. Many are urging Oxfam to embrace inequality as the overarching future framework: with inequality at the centre and the main drivers of inequality – including but not limited to the fiscal aspect – clearly conceptualised under the next plan.
2. Don't disinvest in tax even if concrete wins appear lacking. Oxfam has developed serious expertise and is positioned as a leader in this area. Progressive taxation is a 20+ year fight. Similar to work on EI fiscal regimes, a long-term commitment is needed here.
3. Reinvest substantially to influence public spending on essential services. Guard against the complacency that may set in because the new EiU campaign is framed around fiscal justice for women and girls. Ensure that 'growing the footprint' in relation to advocacy on health and education budgets is a central feature of the new plan. Consider the potential inclusion of other priority social spending areas – such as social protection and early childhood care and education – given their importance for gender equality.
4. Look deliberately at Oxfam's value added on essential services. Focus strongly on the financing angles – bringing the revenue raising side into debates and developing more fully equitable financing approaches that ensure increased revenue is appropriately allocated – both geographically and programmatically – to reduce education and health inequalities. Focus strongly on privatization and taking work on this to scale. Reinvest in the global policy advisor structure in relation to public services to support this work.
5. Conduct a gender audit of the FAIR program to assess exactly how teams are integrating gender into their tax and budget work. Ensure GRB approaches, techniques and principles are integrated into national budget advocacy on essential service provision, involving women's rights organizations from the beginning in these initiatives.
6. Consider whether Oxfam can and should do more to secure national victories, including identifying countries with the greatest political opportunities for fiscal justice wins and potentially directing significant policy resources and support to those with the highest potential for transformative change.
7. Invest in more systematic learning from the new, creative, cultural and communications strategies being employed and the 'new media' work.
8. Invest more in capacity building on narrative change strategies. At the same time invest in learning in this area to assess the impact of strategies. Identify some country programs or affiliates that can pilot evaluations in this area. This is important to really demonstrate what Oxfam can achieve in this area.

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