

## Oxfam Policy on Program Evaluation

### **Purpose**

For Oxfam, evaluation is the process of rigorously assessing the design, implementation and results of development and humanitarian interventions (projects, programs, advocacy initiatives and campaigns) considering their impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance<sup>1</sup>. Evaluation is an integral component of the planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning cycle which is essential for maximizing Oxfam's effectiveness in achieving its mission, but warrants particular attention as Oxfam seeks to match its strong planning disciplines with equally strong and strategic evaluation practice. This policy applies to evaluations of programs which appear in Oxfam's strategic and operational plans. This document should be used in conjunction with 'Oxfam's Principles underlying Our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Practice' and seeks to build upon the strong and innovative evaluation practice that is taking root amongst affiliates.

The objective of this policy is to help institutionalize this practice throughout the Oxfam confederation, so that evaluation consistently:

- improves the quality and impact of what we and our partners do;
- enhances mutual accountability and learning between the communities and partners with whom we work, ourselves and our donors;
- enhances the ability of those people whom we seek to benefit to create opportunities and means to hold us to account;
- uses processes and outcomes to influence the practice of other actors; and
- strengthens our credibility as an international non-governmental organization working in development.

### **An Approach Consistent with Oxfam Values**

Oxfam is a confederation of 14 independent, non-governmental organizations working together with partners and allies around the world to achieve its vision of a just world without poverty. Oxfam is committed to a rights-based approach, addressing a wide range of development and humanitarian issues at the national, regional and international levels. As a rights-based organization, accountability, particularly to the communities we seek to serve, is of the highest importance to us. For Oxfam, accountability requires Oxfam to regularly and honestly assess the quality of its work, share and learn from its findings with primary stakeholders, and apply that learning in future work. We believe there is strength in the diversity of our membership and the range of our efforts, which are shaped by the complex and dynamic contexts within which we work. We attempt to manage this complexity by our willingness to innovate, experiment, and adjust.

We also believe that there is no one best approach to evaluation, so this policy is intended to establish a basic set of responsibilities and expectations, while leaving wide latitude on methods and approaches, so we can fully benefit and learn from the expertise and creativity of affiliate members and our partners. This includes promoting processes of mutual learning and capacity building amongst ourselves and with partners on effective and empowering approaches to evaluation. Oxfam has committed to investing at least one percent of its program budgets to monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam does not have its own definitions of these evaluation terms; interested colleagues can access the OECD DAC glossary at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf>.

## Policy Elements

### General

1. Ultimate responsibility for the development and implementation of this policy rests with the Executive Directors, with the support and supervisory oversight of its implementation by the Global Team.
2. Bearing in mind the criteria in point 3, all Oxfam programs should include a monitoring and evaluation plan. Within the operational plans this includes the allocation of budgets for evaluation (including funds for translation as needed) and assignment of affiliate or Secretariat responsibility. In addition, Oxfam staff should be open and responsive to emerging opportunities and requests for evaluative exercises, particularly requests from the organizations and communities with which we collaborate.
3. When making decisions about evaluation priorities, managers should consider:
  - the overall cost of the program;
  - the visibility and/or the risk associated with the program;
  - the potential for scale-up, replication or leverage;
  - demands for accountability from stakeholders, including back donor requirements in direct financing and co-financing arrangements;
  - the need to comply with inter-agency standards Oxfam has signed onto (eg the ICRC Code of Conduct and Sphere standards) or widely used and accepted standards (such as the DAC Humanitarian Standards for European affiliates).
4. In very broad terms, evaluations should focus on:
  - determining the degree to which Oxfam programs are achieving their objectives over time;
  - analyzing the reasons behind the achievement (or not) of objectives (eg if a program is not achieving objectives, whether the problem rests in the theory of change or with difficulties in implementation, and whether these are leading to unintended consequences);
  - gauging whether or not the objectives are ultimately contributing to the realization of Oxfam's mission;
  - identifying Oxfam's contribution and value-added; and,
  - determining whether the program is cost effective.
5. Responsibility for Oxfam evaluations rests with commissioning managers, Oxfam colleagues who are nominated expressly for the purpose of overseeing any particular evaluation process. The commissioning manager is often working in a lead affiliate where multiple affiliates support a program, and is selected according to confederation structures and agreements and/or affiliate line management structures, as relevant.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, a commissioning manager may designate a colleague to carry out the day-to-day management of the evaluation process, but the commissioning manager remains ultimately responsible for the process itself including the follow-up to ensure implementation of

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<sup>2</sup> There are different schools of thought about whether the commissioning manager has to be at least at once removed from direct program responsibilities. This is often, but not always, the case, depending on the purpose of the evaluation. The idea is to identify someone who has enough authority and capacity to ensure that a credible evaluation process is carried out and is positioned so that s/he can ensure evaluation results are fully considered and steps put in place to implement any changes.

recommendations and action points emerging from the evaluation in collaboration with Oxfam colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

6. The Oxfam Secretariat and/or the monitoring evaluation and learning staff of Oxfam affiliates can be asked to provide technical support throughout the process, particularly for evaluations mandated by the OI Board, to ensure quality control. In other cases, a commissioning manager may request technical assistance, and depending on the particular institutional arrangement, s/he should either go through their own line management structures or the appropriate confederation structures. The OI MEL coordinator can provide guidance on this, as needed.

### **Responsibilities of Commissioning Manager**

7. Commissioning managers (with his/her designate if one exists) are responsible for approaching primary stakeholders to discuss the evaluation process and procure their input; identifying an appropriate design; developing the ToR (see annex 1); contracting and managing the relationship with the evaluators; and ensuring the evaluation is implemented according to plan or with reasonable adjustments. Further, they must communicate the values that underlie Oxfam's evaluations, including the relevance of primary stakeholder participation toward empowerment. The commissioning manager needs to ensure that the final product meets quality criteria; that the results, including recommendations, are shared and processed with primary stakeholders; and that management formally addresses findings through a written-management response and subsequent actions. While final responsibility rests with the commissioning manager, s/he is expected to work collaboratively with colleagues and key stakeholders during the evaluation process.
8. Commissioning managers, unless they are bound by agreements with donors, have considerable latitude in deciding the need for and focus of an evaluation. Evaluations can be formative or focused on outcomes or longer term impacts; they can be comprehensive or focused on areas of particular promise or concern. Commissioning managers also have considerable latitude in deciding the methodological approach, which is refined with the evaluators. In all cases, they are responsible for ensuring that evaluations are credible, focused, strategic and cost effective. External evaluators should be used when conducting final evaluations or formative evaluations for programs facing significant challenges. Ultimately, evaluations should be carried out and presented in such a way that results are easily understood, owned, and can be acted upon.

To this end, managers should carefully consider:

- level and locus of analysis (from individual to global; single level to multi-level; single site to multi-site);
- the purpose of the evaluation and how it will contribute to the learning of stakeholders, being mindful of the primacy of interests of the stakeholders as well as program participants in the immediate program setting, including the interests of groups potentially excluded on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity or religion;
- a *limited* number of core strategic questions;
- the degree and manner of stakeholder involvement in the evaluation design, implementation and interpretation of results, seeking the maximum participation feasible;
- the make-up and qualifications of the evaluation team (external consultants; Oxfam peers; program staff; partners; program participants; community members; others);

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<sup>3</sup> The designate can be someone with direct program responsibilities, but their management of the process is subject to review by the commissioning manager. The commissioning manager may, in turn, have either a formal reference/oversight group (such as a PGG) or set up an informal advisory group.

- how the evaluation is going to determine the differential impact of program interventions on women and men, and whether the program contributes to women's empowerment;
  - the mix of methods (quantitative and qualitative; highly participatory vs more extractive; intensive/in-depth vs broader/more representative) that will provide the most reliable information, to answer the core questions with actionable evidence.
9. The commissioning manager is responsible for developing a ToR, based on the guidelines in Attachment 1.<sup>4</sup> The ToR is a foundational document for an evaluation, used to create common understanding and buy-in as well as defining roles and responsibilities in the evaluation process. The commissioning manager should use the ToR to monitor implementation of the evaluation.
  10. The commissioning manager is responsible for reviewing the quality of the evaluation product(s) in both draft and later final form and determining that the evaluation has complied with the terms of the ToR. At a minimum, the quality of the report should be assessed according to its validity, reliability and usefulness.
  11. To promote both accountability and learning, the commissioning manager is responsible for sharing evaluation conclusions and recommendations with relevant stakeholders, both within the Oxfam system and externally in accessible language (considering clarity for non-specialists as well as translation when necessary) and ensuring that stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in discussion of those results in meaningful ways, including identification of concrete action points based on evaluation findings.
  12. The commissioning manager is responsible for writing a management response within a reasonably brief period of time after the finalization of the evaluation document or other products. The management response should summarize the evaluation process, including a brief description of how the results were disseminated and any discussions or other exchanges that took place; an overall assessment of the quality of the evaluation; points of agreement and disagreement with results; and identification of the action points that have been agreed to with primary stakeholders and follow-up that is needed, including the individuals responsible for it.
  13. Finally, the commissioning manager is responsible for ensuring that action points are followed up, either through direct implementation of changes where he/she has the authority or by taking it up to higher levels of authority within affiliate and/or confederation systems for decisions.

### **Transparency**

14. To ensure transparency to Oxfam's publics, Oxfam will routinely place the executive summary and management response for all final evaluations of Oxfam programs on [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org).
15. The final evaluations of program efforts (particularly those in which Oxfam has made multi-million dollar investments, and/or has drawn on substantial effort by at least four affiliates over several years; and/or are particularly innovative or path breaking) will be placed on the website in full, barring unacceptable risk or repercussions to staff, partners, or program efforts, at the determination of the OI MEL Coordinator in consultation with the affiliate or confederation entity responsible for the evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup> This is often a two-step process, where the initial ToR is used for soliciting proposals from evaluators and then the methodology and process is refined and further elaborated once an evaluator is identified and can consult with the commissioning manager and other relevant stakeholders.

16. In the event that the full document is not posted, a detailed summary identifying key conclusions and lessons learned, accompanied by the management response, will be posted.

### **Learning from the Diversity of Affiliate Experience**

Routine sharing and discussion of evaluation practice and results is essential for mutual accountability within the confederation and accelerated learning for both Oxfam and the organizations and people with whom it works. In strengthening its own evaluation practice, it is committed to being more intentional about testing and sharing experiences of the efficacy of different evaluation approaches that not only produce reliable assessments about outcomes and impacts, but also contribute to stakeholders' sense of agency and empowerment. To this end:

17. Annually, the OI MEL Coordinator will coordinate a meta-review of key Oxfam evaluations (both external and internal, and will include meta-evaluations) categorized by priority themes (such as humanitarian, gender, campaigning, livelihoods) completed in the year. S/he will draw upon the commissioning managers for the evaluations as well as Oxfam affiliate staff specialists; these colleagues will act as reviewers who will prepare brief summaries focused on distilling key lessons learned across experiences and identifying recurring or systemic strengths or challenges that merit special attention. The reviewers will also address the overall quality of evaluation efforts. These summaries should be incorporated into the regular meetings of the full range of relevant confederation teams and working groups.

In addition, the OI MEL Coordinator will prepare a consolidated document that will be shared with the GT and the OI Board for discussion. The consolidated document will be posted on the confederation website, along with any action points emerging from GT and/or OI Board discussion.

18. All affiliates are expected to post on SUMUS:
  - their respective MEL policies and procedures;
  - any institutional guidelines for the application of different methodological approaches, which may be supplemented by case examples of their application.
19. All affiliates are expected to post evaluations on SUMUS in full that contribute to broader learning on Oxfam program priorities (as identified by the EDs).
20. Oxfam will engage with the broader humanitarian, development and evaluation communities and will make an effort to publish results in peer-reviewed and other professional journals and present at conferences and workshops. It will encourage and support MEL staff to co-author and/or co-present with non-MEL staff to increase the latter's exposure to specialists and thinking in the field of development and evaluation. Authors will be expected to post their presentations on SUMUS (or more public site).

### **Monitoring and Evaluation of this Policy**

21. With input from affiliate MEL staff, the OI MEL Coordinator will *monitor* the implementation of this policy, looking at the following from the date of approval by the Executive Directors:
  - How the policy is disseminated through confederation and affiliate structures.
  - The familiarity of Oxfam teams and program leads with the policy at both HQ and regional levels.

- The application of the policy and users' assessment of its clarity and usefulness to be used in a review of the policy after a year.
- The extent to which the policy generates increased sharing and exchange of evaluation results and practice amongst affiliates and preliminary determination if this is contributing to changes in practice.

ENDS

## **Annex 1: Elements of a Terms of Reference (ToR)**

### **1. Background and context of the evaluation**

### **2. Main objectives and key questions**

The main objectives of the evaluation should be clearly elaborated, including how the evaluation will be used and by whom. A limited number of gender-sensitive strategic question(s) should be specified.

### **3. Methodology**

A clear framework for the evaluation should be specified, including the methodological approach, the identification of primary stakeholders as well as the degree of and process for their involvement, the evidence that will be used, sources, and data collection methods. It should also include a statement about respondent confidentiality. Every effort should be made to include primary stakeholders in all phases. This section should also specify which Oxfam entities the evaluator will be gathering information from, including the identity and contact information of point-persons, and who is responsible for facilitating access to information (including partner contacts).

### **4. Evaluation team**

The ToR should specify:

- Composition and size of the team.
- Essential and desirable expertise, including gender expertise.
- The expectation that the evaluator consults and negotiates in a transparent and understandable manner with Oxfam (and other stakeholders as relevant) concerning ToR, expenses, the tasks to be carried out, the reasons for and against the methodology to be used, the scope of the results and the use of the data of the evaluation.
- The evaluator complies with agreements.

### **5. Evaluation report and any other products**

The ToR should specify:

- Preparation of executive summary (ensuring focus on findings).
- Guidance on the contents, structure, and length of the evaluation report and any other products.
- The users of the evaluation report/products and means by which results will be shared, discussed.
- Language of the report/products and whether it will be translated to other languages.
- Terms specifying ownership of the product(s) and confidentiality of materials.

### **6. Implementation Plan, Logistics and Budget**

- Time frame for various parts of the evaluation. Every attempt should be made to build in an opportunity for a validation exercise before the report is finalized.
- Agreements on logistics (eg payment schedule, who arranges and pays for travel, how evaluator(s) access documents, arrangements for partner contacts as appropriate, etc).
- Budget.

### **7. References / bibliography**

- All relevant references and documents that serve as background information for the ToR should be listed.

## **Annex 2: Quality Criteria for Evaluation Report**

### **1. General**

- Is the report written in clear, accessible language and targeted to its primary and secondary users?
- Does the report meet criteria laid out in the ToR? Does it meet the overall objectives of the evaluation or are there some remaining elements to be addressed?
- Does the report provide the information needed to improve the quality of the program, meet accountability demands, and promote broader learning?

### **2. Quality of Content**

- Are the objectives of the evaluation clear?
- Do the strategic evaluation questions (and sub questions) logically follow from the evaluation objectives?
- Is the methodology explained clearly and its appropriateness and limitations for addressing the key questions clearly identified? Is the methodology appropriate to the type of program it is evaluating?
- Do the findings address all the evaluation questions? Is data and information (both quantitative and qualitative) presented in a way that is easily understood? Is enough evidence, drawn from an adequate number of sources, provided to support conclusions?
- Has gender been adequately dealt with in the analysis?
- Do the recommendations follow logically from the conclusions drawn from the analysis? Are they framed in such a way to be useful for end users (targeted, practical, and actionable) given a program's operating context?

### **3. Process**

- Was the level of participation of stakeholders appropriate in each stage of the process (from developing the ToR to drawing conclusions and recommendations)?
- Was there a validation exercise or process in which key stakeholders could review a draft of the report and is there evidence that comments were incorporated into that report?
- Do people leave the evaluation process feeling that they were heard, their views were respected, and they were treated fairly? Overall, was this an empowering or disempowering process?