OXFAM'S POLICY OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

1   About the Policy

This document outlines Oxfam's policy of program evaluation, which serves as a guiding framework to support strong and innovative evaluation practice across the confederation, in line with our values and principles. It establishes principles and standards for conducting evaluations that are ethical, inclusive, and evidence-based, ensuring accountability to stakeholders, continuous learning across the organization and knowledge sharing with partners.

The policy supports Oxfam's commitment to transparency and improvement by promoting evaluation practices that inform strategic decision-making, enhance program quality, support evidence-based influencing and foster learning.

2   Who is Oxfam?

Oxfam is a global confederation of 22 independent member organizations, known as affiliates, working together in over 70 countries to challenge inequality and injustice, together with thousands of partners and allies, rooted in communities. Because we want lasting solutions, we fight the inequalities that keep people locked in poverty and injustice, we tackle not the symptoms but the systems, and we campaign for genuine, durable change. Together, we advocate for just and fairer economies, strive for gender justice and the rights of women and girls in all their diversity, fight for climate justice and create safe spaces that allow people to hold the powerful to account. Rooted in communities, we tackle the causes and consequences of disaster and conflict.

In an explicit acknowledgement of the systemic nature of poverty and injustice, Oxfam's 2020–2030 Global Strategic Framework (GSF) specifically proposes to transform systems that perpetuates inequality[1]. It is not enough to address the daily consequences of poverty and injustice without challenging and changing the entrenched, long term global causes of these systemic problems.

Oxfam pledges to seek and nurture long-term strategic commitments to work with others to tackle those complex problems by supporting local leaders and groups to drive systemic and sustainable change in their effort to fight inequalities, reduce poverty and relieve suffering. It is therefore essential to assess the degree to which Oxfam, partners and allies are doing the right thing, not just doing things right, and to identify signs of change that together, over time, contributes to structural, relational and normative changes, challenging the conditions that hold unjust systems in place.

---

[1] Oxfam's 2020–2030 Global Strategic Framework (GSF) refers to unjust systems that perpetuate inequality, among them the following systems: Unjust and unsustainable economic systems that do not protect people and the planet; Harmful attitudes, norms and belief systems that drive abuse and keep women poor; Patriarchal systems where men hold primary power and dominance; Neo-colonial systems that perpetuates the influence and control by colonial powers; Public education systems that prevent the empowerment of young people, especially girls; Non-inclusive and unaccountable governance systems that do not protect human rights or our planet; and Systems that contribute to fragility and humanitarian crises.

The future is equal OXFAM

3   Values of the Organization

Across all its work, Oxfam is informed by its values, and evaluation is no exception:

o   Empowerment: Oxfam affirms and seeks to expand people's agency over their lives and the decisions that impact them;

o   Inclusiveness: Oxfam embraces diversity and differences and values the perspectives and contributions of all people and communities in their fight against poverty and injustice;

o   Accountability: Oxfam takes responsibility for our action and inaction and holds ourselves accountable to the people we work with and for;

o   Equality: Oxfam believes everyone has the right to be treated fairly and to have the same rights and opportunities;

o   Solidarity: Oxfam joins hands, supports, and collaborates across boundaries in working towards a just and sustainable world;

o   Courage: Oxfam speaks truth to power and acts with conviction on the justice of our causes.

Oxfam acknowledges that knowledge is power; structures of exclusion exist in the generation and valuing of knowledge, often being dominated by Western-, male-, and formal-institution perspectives, with the loss of rich diverse voices emerging from different races, genders, classes and languages. We seek to challenge these historical biases and urge colleagues to question whose ideas are heard and whose knowledge counts, as we strive to ensure that our evaluative practice (and that of external consultants) is as inclusive as possible. Evaluation is not a neutral exercise; the power of knowledge must be democratized in order for knowledge to be used for good.

4   Purpose of the Policy

For Oxfam, evaluation should provide systematic assessment(s) of the design, implementation and results of our programs, encompassing long-term development work (projects[2] and programs[3]), advocacy and campaigns initiatives and humanitarian actions (both preparedness and response), with influencing integrated across all these arenas. It should enable us to assess discrete aspects of our work as well as to identify how Oxfam and partners have contributed to transforming the system.

The purpose of this policy is to support strong and innovative evaluation practice across the confederation, in line with our values and principles. Oxfam acknowledges that traditional evaluations, which may be technically strong, will likely struggle to adapt to the characteristics of complex problems, and the need to address emergence, uncertainty and interdependency in our work. Still, Oxfam expects that the evaluation of efforts to shift the conditions that hold unjust systems in place can be encouraged by the choices we make in what we pay attention to, the questions we ask, as well as how and when, and what we do with the answers.

This policy is applicable to evaluations across all our work, whether it is funded by restricted or unrestricted funds, in any location where Oxfam works directly, through partners or in alliance with others. As such, this policy intends to set out a vision for our evaluations and establish a basic set of responsibilities and expectations, while leaving wide latitude on methods and

---

[2] Program: A set of strategically aligned, mutually reinforcing interventions – by Oxfam and others – that contributes to sustained, positive impact on poor people's lives. This definition was approved by EDs in 2007.

[3] Project: a set of activities or interventions with a well-defined target group and period for implementation aiming at achieving a set of outputs or outcomes that will contribute to bring about changes in people lives. They are designed and implemented by one or several partners, which might include Oxfam itself, and are aligned through outputs, outcomes or objectives to an overarching program. Funding is allocated to this level and usually has a contractual element to it, for which the recipient of the funding is accountable.

The future is equal OXFAM

approaches to the different entities of the Oxfam Confederation (i.e., countries, clusters, regional platforms, affiliates, global advocacy offices, and OI Secretariat).

As outlined in Oxfam's Knowledge and Learning Framework that accompanies its Global Strategic Framework (GSF), evaluations should consistently:

o Strengthen our accountability to the communities and partners we work with, to public supporters and institutional donors and to each other, mutually, across the confederation;

o Improve our approaches, strategic processes and the operational implementation of our work;

o Enhance our learning and facilitate sharing what we have learned, as well as identifying areas where we need to bring in learning from others outside our organizational boundaries;

o Facilitate the use of our evidence to influence social change by understanding the lessons we have available to advocate for change while also identifying what additional evidence might be needed.

5 Ambitions for Impactful Evaluations

Oxfam commits to ensure our own principles guide all our evaluative thinking and practice as well as all specific evaluation exercises. Oxfam expects our evaluation processes to consider:

o **Feminist Principles:** Centering power relations and gender equality in the engagement of partners and community members throughout the exercise, in the design and implementation of the evaluation itself, including by considering the manner of disseminating the findings (see Oxfam Feminist Principles);

o **Partnership Principles:** Incorporating learning and knowledge sharing across our partnerships and relationships, encouraging partners, allies and community members to offer their diverse voices, experiences and the knowledge that is unique in their contexts, in assessing the effectiveness of our common efforts as well as working to enable them to hold Oxfam to account. (see Oxfam Partnership Principles);

o **Decolonial Practices:** Proactively promoting decolonial theory in practice (see Oxfam key concept of decolonial practice) by interrogating the effects of ongoing coloniality on evaluation theory and practice, such as information extractivism, limited broad participation, and the hierarchization of knowledge holders. We will instead invest appropriately in different approaches to better engage with diverse forms and sources of knowledge and place the people Oxfam and partners work with at the center of evaluations and learning. Prioritizing systematic participation of, and meaningful engagement with, the people Oxfam and partners work with requires different models for the resourcing and delivery of evaluations. We recognize that this requires a different mindset and additional time, money and expertise;

o **Learning:** Complexity informed approaches that are built around clearly defined learning and feedback loops, identifying ways to adapt and pivot quickly, with strategic learning questions guiding the efforts to understand dynamic, interconnected relationships and patterns rather than isolated impacts; and

o **Transforming:** Encouraging more widespread and systematic adoption of evaluation that offer a systems perspective, where evaluation is about assessing the shifts, both subtle and significant, in the relationship between the different conditions that hold unjust systems in place[4]. The evidence of these shifts, identified in Oxfam's evaluative work, serve as the foundation for building Oxfam's impact narrative in cooperation with its partners at local, national and international levels.

---

[4] See, for example, Kramer, Mark R., John Kenia and Peter Senge "The Water of Systems Change." Report. FSG, May 2018 (accessed August 2025).

The future is equal OXFAM

6 Responsibilities and Governance

6.1 Roles

No matter what structures and roles are set up to support any given evaluation, the key organizing principle must be the focus on the use of the findings. Therefore, there should be a strong rationale for doing each evaluation and it should be clear how the findings will be used. For that reason, Oxfam encourages evaluations to be undertaken at levels where findings will be most relevant and offer the greatest strategic insight.

There is no single support structure that will be applicable to every evaluation that Oxfam commissions; the teams/committees will depend on the scope and context of the work. Responsibility for Oxfam evaluations will usually rest with commissioning managers (or equivalent, according to the different team structures); these people are Oxfam colleagues who are nominated expressly for the purpose of overseeing any particular evaluation process. A commissioning manager has considerable latitude to decide the need for and focus of an evaluation.

The team/committee will engage closely with the evaluator(s) – whether internal or external – and will request proposals, review methodological outlines, provide basic background documents and contact information and general support for the overall process, including ensuring stakeholder (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Team (MEAL), Program staff, partners, community members) engagement from the design stage through to feedback processes, until the delivery of a final evaluation product (report, or other format) with a management response attached.

6.2 Evaluation teams and stakeholder engagement

As noted above, evaluations are not value free but are undertaken in specific contexts which differ socially, temporally and culturally, and come with specific power relations. Evaluators are the facilitators of collective learning and thus need to reflect on how their role affects relationships of power and their own exercise of the same in any evaluation. This responsibility extends to evaluators (including external consultants) who must also reflect on their own power and ensure respect for Oxfam's principles throughout the exercise. Evaluators should also promote deep and open dialogues that allow Oxfam to understand other forms of knowledge and experience, including what 'effective' and 'good' look like from a local or national perspective.

Where possible, Oxfam can – and should – take steps to strengthen the local evaluation ecosystems by prioritizing local consultants, investing in national evaluation systems and networks, and supporting long-term local (or even in house) capacity for evaluation in a way that enables greater contextualization while also serving Oxfam's mission.

When making decisions about evaluation priorities, the evaluation team should consider the need to comply with inter-agency agreements Oxfam has signed onto (e.g. Sphere standards for humanitarian actions, donor requirements, etc.).

6.3 Management response requirements

All evaluation reports must be accompanied by a management response that communicates careful consideration of the evaluation's findings and recommendations, detailed actions that will be taken to respond to these findings and offers an opportunity to comment on the utility of the evaluation process and final report. The team/committee is responsible for ensuring that a management response is prepared within a reasonably brief period after the finalization of the evaluation document or other products.

The future is equal OXFAM

7 Elements of an Evaluation

7.1 Dual focus: project/program outcomes and systems change

To the extent possible, evaluations must consider the two dimensions to Oxfam's efforts: the work to confront the daily consequences (program/project outcomes) as well as their implications as contributions to address the global causes (contributions to shift systems) that are the root of poverty and injustice.

With these two focuses, Oxfam is committed to assessing the outcomes and effects of its work (i.e. attribution) where Oxfam has a direct responsibility to the deliverables, but also where Oxfam plays a secondary role and the outcomes are a result of collective efforts with partners and allies (i.e. contribution).

Oxfam recognizes that evaluations are not neutral. By focusing on inequality, using an intersectional approach, and centering diverse voices and perspectives throughout data sharing, analysis, and sense-making, with a specific focus on women and girls, we contribute to social change and increased gender equality with our evaluation processes themselves.

Oxfam acknowledges the non-linear nature of systems change, particularly in the face of push-back and disruptions. Oxfam also proposes that where rights or progress are under attack, an explicit achievement of 'no change' (successful resistance to pushback) should be acknowledged and welcomed as a positive outcome. Given the nature of systems change, teams will need support to establish realistic expectations of how success is defined in evaluations and evaluators (including external consultants) must be open to explore how success may show up differently in specific contexts (and not necessarily how the teams initially defined it).

7.2 Inclusive and holistic approach

Collective learning and knowledge sharing among Oxfam, partners, donors and stakeholders are critical both for evaluation processes as well as the quality of the partnership itself. Oxfam will support the active leadership of local actors in shaping the evaluation focus and questions, data collection, analysis and reflection, as well as the work to disseminate findings and use them in their respective organizations. In any evaluation, it is important to both assess Oxfam's and partners' contributions to change as well as to assess the relationship between Oxfam and the partners themselves.

Especially in medium and long-term partnerships, Oxfam encourages the capacity strengthening of the partners in evaluation as well as mutual accountability and collective learning. Oxfam recognizes that the knowledge teams construct is not exclusive to those who facilitate the processes but rather emerges from those who participate in them, as the knowledge originates from—and must also belong to—the communities with whom we work. It is essential to avoid evaluation as an exercise in extracting information and instead value diverse forms of knowledge, as knowledge is socially, culturally and temporally contingent.

All of the above points demand serious rethinking about all the steps in evaluations, including decision-making, prioritizing resource allocation, timeframes for processes, the effectiveness and presence of participants' voices, as well as the forms of knowledge we value and the space we give to diversity. The practical expressions of these new perspectives will necessarily be expressed in up-to-date approaches, methods, guidance and tools, including Oxfam's Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability [see CAMSA].

The future is equal OXFAM

7.3 Mutual learning and adaptation

In line with using a systems perspective in evaluation, Oxfam also recommends that teams explore prioritizing cross-initiative, consistent use of learning questions to link lessons learnt across project evaluations, program-level evaluations where possible to understand the full spectrum of change processes (including small and larger contributions to change) that happen over the long term which might not be visible through evaluations of isolated initiatives.

Oxfam is committed to supporting strong and innovative evaluative practices while simultaneously ensuring good quality evaluation. For that purpose, Oxfam encourages evaluation managers to review proposed evaluation processes to ensure they are methodologically sound, and to assess all evaluation products to ensure they have reached credible conclusions. Oxfam is committed to learn from both evaluation processes and products, with the aim of continuously improving our overall evaluation quality.

8 Frequency and Financing Evaluations

Oxfam is fully aware that evaluations need financial resources as well as staff and partner capacity, enthusiasm and time; these resources must be allocated and used responsibly. Oxfam commissions evaluations to ensure that we are accountable for the resources with which we have been entrusted and accountable to the people we work with. Therefore, the usability of any evaluation must be balanced with the time and capacities invested by Oxfam staff and partners. Oxfam continues to be committed to meeting all donor evaluation requirements.

8.1 Budgeting guidance and prioritization of evaluations

In the absence of specific institutional requirements or financing, Oxfam encourages all staff to include 5% of the total budget of any initiative (humanitarian, development programs or projects, advocacy and campaigns efforts or influencing efforts woven throughout these types of work) as the minimum allocation for evaluation. The requests for these funds should be presented to institutional donors, governmental entities, private foundations or corporations with a view to recovering the investment with new insights, renewed strategies, and a strong understanding of Oxfam and partner contributions to our more transformative ambitions.

Oxfam encourages the organization of pooled or otherwise shared funding mechanisms across programs, locations or thematic areas as one means to support cross-initiative and systems-level evaluations.

8.2 Real-Time Reviews and pooled funding

Oxfam's Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) has a long-standing practice of carrying out Real Time Reviews (RTRs), where funding is provided by the institutional donor; these will remain mandatory for Cat 1 and Cat 2 responses during the life of this policy. Oxfam encourages the continuation of annual meta-reviews of the RTR documentation as currently practiced. Further, Oxfam acknowledges that, when humanitarian crises trigger significant changes in context, new strategies can be well informed through evaluations. These can be carried out collaboratively, as possible and appropriate, considering local academic centers, governmental data, partners information and more.

More broadly, Oxfam encourages teams to evaluate all our efforts where there is significant potential for learning, scale up or leverage, no matter the timeframe or budget threshold, especially those initiatives that are high profile, complex, innovative or risky in nature.

The future is equal **OXFAM**

Evaluations where there are insights to be gathered related to Oxfam and partners' contributions to shifting the conditions that hold unjust systems in place will be particularly welcome as these will further our understanding of this, still emerging area of evaluation practice.

9   Accountability and Transparency

Oxfam has improved the centralized collection and storage of, and access to, evaluations and other learning documents in its Knowledge and Evidence Database, with the intention of enabling easier use of existing data sets, learning documentation and other information sources[5]. Oxfam encourages all teams to use this resource – and to nurture it with their own evaluations and other knowledge products.

The decision on the level of dissemination and external communication of the evaluation findings of Oxfam's country projects and programs, including the publication on Oxfam's websites, is under the responsibility of Oxfam's senior leadership at country level, prioritizing the transparency and the security conditions of the different contexts.

Oxfam is committed to use evaluation results not only to support the improvement of the ongoing projects and programs implementation but also to inform and nurture the identification and design of future interventions in the same or different areas of interventions. In this context, Oxfam also recognizes the importance of learning from failure and poor performance as a chance to develop more effective decision-making processes and impactful programs.

The operational guidelines for the implementation of this policy are available in a separate document.

10 Technology and Responsible Program Data

In this digital age, where the current pace of change challenges us to provide meaningful guidance that is specific to digital tools related to evaluation practice, we are challenged to define the parameters of what will remain relevant over the next 10 years. Oxfam must focus ever greater attention and resources toward feminist, anti-ableist, and racially and economically just policies and practices that address the barriers to the fair, humane, appropriate, and rights-respecting implementation and use of technology, and the myriad challenges inherent in this global transformation. This remains particularly true in the practice of evaluation, where people in their communities, different social organizations, governmental and other public institutions, and private sector actors all engage with each other across constantly fluctuating digital systems with underpinning technology that is less visible.

10.1 Data protection and digital tools

Oxfam is committed to using data responsibly to uphold the rights of the individuals, groups and organizations with whom we work. Using data responsibly is not just an issue of technical security and encryption but also of safeguarding the rights of people to be counted and heard; ensuring their dignity, respect and privacy; enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their data; and not be put at risk when providing data. Oxfam recognizes that people have rights with regard to information related to them and it has a responsibility to uphold those rights in any evaluation effort.

Any electronic data collection conducted for the purposes of evaluation must align with Oxfam's Responsible Program Data Policy, and must use Oxfam tools approved for data collection

---

[5] This database is currently set up for Oxfam and partner use. For further inquiries, please reach out to knowledgeteam@oxfam.org

The future is equal   OXFAM

(currently Microsoft Forms and SurveyCTO) as outlined [on Compass](#) to ensure adequate thresholds of security and clarity regarding data ownership[6].

For the purposes of this policy, data are considered to be the physical representation of information in a manner suitable for communication, interpretation, or processing by human beings or by automatic means. Data may be numerical, descriptive, audio or visual. Oxfam (and/or external consultants) may collect data from individuals, community members, women or youth groups, cooperatives, or other entities that participate in evaluation processes.

10.2 Alignment with Oxfam's digital rights policies and AI

Any use of other digital tools at any stage in the evaluation process must align with the policy positions outlined in Oxfam's [Rights in a Digital Age Policy](#).

Any technology must be harnessed in ways that ensure that it serves Oxfam's broader goals of social justice and human rights. This consideration of Oxfam's overall objectives allows affiliates to align around common values and safeguards in light of the accelerated development of technology, while remaining flexible and responsive to the legal requirements of specific national legislation. It ensures that our approach to Artificial Intelligence, for example, remains globally consistent, legally complaint, and always centered on the dignity, rights, and wellbeing of the people we serve. Any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the analysis, synthesis, translation or interpretation of data collected for evaluation purposes, must align with Oxfam's [AI Principles](#) and [AI Policy](#).

11 Ethical Considerations in Evaluation

The principles of research ethics (respect, beneficence, justice, integrity) apply to program evaluations. Specific ethical issues are relevant to particular topics and/or groups of people and should be considered in evaluations that directly engage with those topics and/or groups of people. This includes, for example, evaluations where the primary focus is gender-based violence, or where children or adolescents are involved in primary data collection, and others. All evaluation managers as well as external consultants should strive to ensure the safety of all participants during evaluations, showing care and continuously considering participants' well-being, especially those in particularly vulnerable situations or in high-risk contexts[7].

As noted above, as Artificial Intelligence continues to permeate our working practices, it is critical to ensure the ethical use of the same in our evaluation practices. As this area of digital development continues to evolve, Oxfam's policy must ensure the highest integrity around our ethical considerations in its use.

To ensure that Oxfam-supported evaluations adhere to our commitment to do no harm, independent ethical reviews must be conducted to identify and mitigate ethical risks. Ethical review may be conducted in-house or with an external ethics review board. Ethical considerations, and the reviews themselves, should be discussed and agreed with partner organizations. Ethics approval must be received before primary data collection begins.

12 Policy review: assessing implementation

The steering committee of Oxfam's Evidence, Learning and Accountability Network (ELAN) – or its equivalent – will organize periodic reviews (every 3 years) of the relevance and implementation

---

[6] Oxfam staff must follow the practice guidelines outlined in Oxfam's [Responsible Data Management Training Pack](#); pay particular attention to the [Responsible Data Checklist](#). More information related to Oxfam tools approved for data collection can be found [on Compass](#)

[7] In order to best understand everyone's responsibilities for safeguarding, please review the detailed guidance on [Oxfam's safeguarding policies](#) in Compass

of this policy, and seek recommendations on potential updates to the policy, collaborating with ELAN members in countries, clusters, regions, global advocacy offices and affiliates, as well as appropriate leadership bodies.

The ELAN steering committee should make use of existing mechanisms and processes as much as possible to ensure each review is both nimble and effective. If such mechanisms and processes are not available, the steering committee will propose potential alternatives to ensure these reviews are put in place.

Findings from the reviews will determine the need (or not) for the development of additional guidance or support material to improve implementation.

As a second step, ELAN steering committee will recommend any necessary adjustments to the policy to Oxfam International senior leadership and/or the board as appropriate.

- END -

The future is equal **OXFAM**