



## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

### Oxfam International

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#### Introduction

Welcome to Oxfam International, one of the world's most prominent non-governmental organizations (NGOs)! Oxfam is an international **non-profit** confederation of 13 like-minded organizations working together to bring about lasting change by ending social injustice. As an organization, Oxfam ultimately hopes to end worldwide poverty. Oxfam believes that all human beings are equal and should have equal rights. The main function of Oxfam is to fund and implement initiatives to rid worldwide poverty. In other words, Oxfam's main goal is create long-term solutions to issues such as poverty, hunger, and social injustice. In broad terms, some of the issues that Oxfam works on are disease, hunger, climate change, gender equality, minority rights, trade, and aid reform. As an NGO, Oxfam walks a fine line between trying to give policymakers objective information while also arguing or lobbying for initiatives that Oxfam supports. As a member of Oxfam it will be your job to go to policymakers and represent the values that Oxfam believes in.

**Non-profit**—does not make, nor tries to make a profit, typically because its objectives are charitable or social.

#### History

Founded in 1942 by a group of **Quakers**, Oxfam was originally called the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, and it was established to petition the government to ship food and supplies through an Allied naval blockade of Greece during World War II. After the war, Oxfam continued to aid Europe's poor in various ways. As the post-war situation in Europe improved, however, Oxfam started to gear its attention to the poor in developing countries.

**Quakers**—sect of Protestantism founded in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; best known for their pacifist beliefs.

The first American chapter of Oxfam started in 1970 with the help of other international chapters. After being established in the US, Oxfam America made it official policy not to take grants or funding from the US government. Oxfam America refused this funding because it wanted to remain separate and distinct from official US Foreign Policy. Instead, the organization established itself financially by raising money through fundraising and other grassroots efforts.

Oxfam International was formed in 1995 by a group of independent non-governmental organizations. Their aim was to work together for greater impact on the international stage to reduce poverty and injustice. The international confederation gained most of its promi-

nence and credibility through its efforts during the Kosovo War as well as Hurricane Mitch, both in the late 1990s. Today, Oxfam is a respected and renowned international non-profit organization active in over 100 countries around the world. Though it started small, Oxfam now consists of 13 organizations as well as almost 3,000 local organizations throughout the world.

## Means of Action

As stated before, Oxfam is an NGO, meaning that it has no affiliation or official connection with any government. Oxfam does not take government money, nor do any government officials sit on its board of directors. In order to lobby governments to support the major initiatives and objectives of the organization, Oxfam utilizes two primary techniques.

First, Oxfam uses the media to bring attention to issues that have not yet captured the attention of the public. Oxfam will launch awareness campaigns to draw the public's eye to an issue of importance to Oxfam, letting public support drive efforts to address the problem. Once Oxfam has popular support, it can gain the fundraising and governmental support that it needs to act decisively. Oxfam (and other NGOs) have been crucial in drawing the public's attention to issues like HIV/AIDS, fair trade, and the lack of clean water and sanitation in the third world.

Oxfam is able to use the media so effectively because it has built its credibility upon a long history of in-depth, reliable research. It is critical for Oxfam to maintain its reputation as an organization that is above politics and can impartially deliver reliable information both to the public and to government entities.

Oxfam's other chief technique that allows it to affect policy is consultation. Oxfam will often consult directly with national and international governments to help craft effective policy and to lend the weight of its expertise to official efforts to fight poverty and other issues. When the United Nations or any other government entity wants to start a new initiative, it is very valuable to have the stamp of approval from a group with the expertise and independence to lend the new policy credibility. Oxfam often is one of those groups.

## Campaigns

### *Agriculture*

As an organization, Oxfam is in support of reducing **agricultural subsidies** in the United States. Oxfam believes that farm subsidies do not help who they are designed to actually help—small farmers. Instead, these subsidies mostly help large corporate farms. As a result,

**Agricultural subsidies**—government funds given to farmers to allow them to sell their products more cheaply, helping consumers get cheaper produce and farmers be more competitive in global markets.

these subsidies lead to overproduction, which can flood the market and edge out smaller farms as well as agricultural imports. Even though farmers abroad are growing a much cheaper product, agricultural subsidies allow large farms to stay competitive with the foreign competitors by artificially lowering the price of their products. As a result, consumers will purchase the cheaper product from the domestic subsidized producers, ultimately decreasing international free trade.

### *Climate Change*

Oxfam focuses on the effects of climate change, particularly how it can have detrimental effects on the world's poor. Oxfam is pushing policymakers to pass laws that would require the developed nations to not only lower **carbon emissions**, but also to encourage other countries to lower their carbon emissions. Oxfam is also asking policymakers to give funding to programs that will help the world's poor in dealing with the effects of climate change. Climate change has allegedly caused droughts, floods, and many other natural disasters that greatly affect and harm those in poverty, who mostly live in **agrarian** communities that are more affected by these phenomena.

**Carbon emission**—the release of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere, widely believed to lead to climate change.

**Agrarian**—relating to fields, land, and farming.

### *Medicine*

In the developing world, most life-threatening diseases are usually preventable. In other words, there are medicines and treatments for these diseases, but access to it in the developing world is substantially limited. Most people in these countries cannot afford the necessary medicine and the countries in which they live do not have a proper healthcare system in place. As such, Oxfam has sought to fight pharmaceutical companies that try to stop generic versions of their drugs from being made. A generic version of the medicine would make it far more affordable for poor people to get the medicine they need, and this has become a priority goal for Oxfam.

### *Fair Trade*

Oxfam has been pushing hard for fair trade, which is distinct from free trade. Today, poorer countries are being forced to follow the rules that wealthier countries set, but do not abide by themselves. For instance, when the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** decides to give an impoverished country a loan, that country must open up to international business. Wealthier countries, however, do not have to openly compete with poorer countries. For example, even though poorer countries offer cheaper crops, wealthier countries do not buy these goods, but rather give their farmers subsidies so that they can compete with and edge out the foreign farms. Oxfam is pushing for policymakers in the West and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ban agricultural export subsidies to address this issue. This is the major objective of Ox-

**International Monetary Fund**—an international organization dedicated to macroeconomic aid and monitoring macroeconomic measures globally.

fam's "Make Trade Fair" campaign.

Fair trade also works on a much more personal level as well, however. Fair trade programs are set up in a way to enable producers in the developing world to sell their products at a price that allows them to not only live off of their earnings, but invest some of it back into their community and their businesses. Fair trade programs require producers to not discriminate because of gender or race, and also to use **environmentally sustainable** processes. Fair trade programs have rapidly grown in popularity in recent years.

**Environmentally sustainable**—refers to practices that have a more neutral impact on the environment than traditional methods.

## Conclusion

As a member of Oxfam International, realize that your main obstacle will usually not come in the form of outright disagreement. Everyone agrees that something must be done to fight poverty. Instead, your main objective is to ensure that your issues rank as the highest priorities on others' agendas. You can accomplish this goal with clear, insightful arguments, supported by solid facts and statistics.

There is an abundance of information that you can use to open people's eyes to the crises taking place all over the world. Come prepared with sound data and clearly articulated arguments, and you will help further the cause of ensuring human rights everywhere.

As you can see, the task before you is not going to be an easy one. But with persuasive arguments, good research, and enthusiasm there is no doubt that you will succeed in your endeavor.

## Guide to Further Research

Beyond reading this briefing on Oxfam International, there are two main ways to further prepare yourself for lobbying for your NGO while at the conference. First, the most valuable resource will be Oxfam International's website. Here you can find various information on its history, their mission and goals, as well as details on their latest campaigns and causes:

- <http://www.oxfam.org/>  
This is the main Oxfam website. This is a great starting point for learning more about this NGO.
- <http://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/trade>  
This is an example of one of Oxfam's several causes. Fair Trade will likely be a prevalent issue at HMCE 2009, so familiarize yourself with this campaign.

- <http://www.oxfam.org/en/climatechange>  
Oxfam has been instrumental in leading the way for a solution to the current environmental crisis that we are experiencing worldwide.
- <http://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/agriculture>  
Yet another prevalent issue at HMCE 2009, agriculture encompasses an entire set of issues facing today's world. Oxfam has been involved in everything from the current rise in food prices and its effects to the impact that **biofuels** are having on the hungry worldwide.

**Biofuels**—solid, liquid or gas fuel derived from relatively recently dead biological material, usually from corn and other starch crops.

The second primary way that you can prepare further is by reviewing the issue briefings of the committees at HMCE, particularly the ones that will be considering issues that are relevant to Oxfam. Look over the briefings and the questions that the committee will be considering. In doing so, you should be able to gain an understanding of how your organization can interact with the committee in order to further your initiatives and campaigns.

As a member of Oxfam International, it is your job to familiarize yourself with the several different campaigns of your organization, as well as the issues that are going to be considered at HMCE. There is plenty of opportunity to lobby the committees in order to advance the principles of Oxfam International.

## Bibliography

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