



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Oxfam International Update

By Alison Schumer

Introduction

This update will serve to help get you up to speed on all of the topics that will be debated around HMCE 2009 that will be most relevant to Oxfam International delegates. This document should work as a starting point for delegates to, coupled with the briefings, gain an understanding of the issues that they will want to engage with at HMCE 2009.

Group of Eight

Energy and Trade Policy

Oxfam believes that “poverty is not inevitable.” It firmly supports the ideals of “fair trade,” which does not necessarily mean the same thing as free trade. In addition to lobbying for more foreign aid, the organization often lobbies against multinational corporations. In one especially high profile event, Oxfam became embroiled in a spat with Starbucks over the price given to Ethiopian farmers for their coffee beans. Starbucks claimed that their purchase of Ethiopian coffee was ultimately beneficial to the farmers and most economists agreed. The famous British magazine *The Economist* also disagreed with Oxfam, and published a fairly scathing critique of Oxfam’s stance in November of 2006.

Oxfam’s position on trade is quite **nuanced** and depends on the situation and context in question. If the terms of trade are what they consider “fair,” then they will likely support the tariff reduction as a means to eradicate poverty. However, in several instances, Oxfam has actually opposed liberalization of trade when it feels that it disadvantages poor nations.

Nuanced—full of subtle distinctions.

Foreign Aid to the Developing World

Oxfam believes that foreign aid works; moreover, that developed countries are currently not doing enough to help developing nations. One of Oxfam’s primary goals is to encourage governments to increase the amount of economic resources devoted to poverty alleviation. Oxfam points to the improvements in education in sub-Saharan Africa as a success story of foreign aid and is attempting to create similar infrastructure improvements in other countries in the future. In the world today, Oxfam may be one of the most vocal supporters of aid worldwide.

Group of Fifteen

Developing Nations and Climate Change

Although Oxfam is dedicated to its anti-poverty work, it also feels that climate change is an important related issue. Oxfam claims that, “[f]or poor people, who are dependent on predictable weather patterns, the damage brought about to land and crops [due to climate change] – whether by increased flooding, droughts, or rising sea level rises – can mean no food, no earnings, and no way to secure a better future.” Oxfam would be cautious not to put undue pressure on these developing economies in the name of economic development, thus further destabilizing these already fragile nations and driving more people into poverty. However, Oxfam would definitely push wealthy nations to curb their greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to **stave** off climate change, which can have a disproportionately negative effect on the poor.

Stave—to drive or push away.

Food Insecurity in the Developing World

Oxfam International is a non-profit concerned with the **eradication** of poverty around the world; as such, the current food crisis is one of the issues with which Oxfam International is the most concerned. Oxfam has created a list of six suggestions to reduce this problem. These six points, directly quoted, are included below:

Eradication—to away with completely.

- National governments should act now to reduce food insecurity.
- Donors, international institutions, and national governments must invest in agriculture, including support for small-scale farmers.
- National governments must put the creation of decent work opportunities in rural areas at the center of their policy to support waged agricultural workers.
- Governments should recognize the key role played by women producers and workers and pay special attention their needs. Investing in their livelihoods will help to reduce poverty and increase productivity, as well as promote gender justice.
- Allow space for national trade policies to manage rural development.
- Support the organizations of the rural poor, including women who are farmers and agricultural laborers.

World Health Organization

Genetically Modified Organisms

Oxfam soundly condemned the US distribution of food aid containing GMOs to Africa in 2002. Despite this incident, the organization

has expressed support of GM foods as a potential solution to poverty in the third world and has expressed great interest in the **implementation** of GM crops. Oxfam has been accused of straddling the fence on the issue of GMOs; however, for the most part, their stance is that of cautious support; Oxfam is wary of the dangers posed to poor individuals by inadequately tested GMOs.

Implementation—*the fulfillment of an objective.*

Neglected Diseases

Oxfam has long been a strong critic of large pharmaceutical companies and biotech firms. In August of 2008, at the International AIDS Conference held in Mexico, representatives of Oxfam International went as far as saying: “Big pharm has gone all out to destroy India’s role as the pharmacy of the developing world.” The organization points to arguably flagging economic performance in the pharmaceutical sector as evidence of short-sighted policies and a need for increased regulation. Oxfam International supports stringent regulations being placed on pharmaceutical companies to force excess profits to be dedicated to developing medications to combat neglected diseases, one of Oxfam’s primary targets.

World Bank

Gender Inequality and Poverty

Oxfam wrestles with the problem of gender inequality because the majority of the world’s poor are women—70% of the 1.3 billion people who live on less than one dollar a day are women and girls. As such, Oxfam considers gender mainstreaming one of their main priorities—meaning that both women and men, with their different needs, are considered in the design and implementation of governmental and NGO programs. Working with the Institute of Education, the University of London, and the UK Department for International Development, Oxfam has embarked on a project entitled “Beyond Access: Gender, Education and Development Project,” which is aimed at improving policy development and practice. Oxfam has also partnered with groups in Southern Africa to lobby for the Africa Women’s Protocol, which mobilizes resources for financing gender equality measures and women’s empowerment. The protocol was successfully adopted in 2003 in Mozambique and entered into force in 2005.

Oxfam’s Policy on Gender Equality of 2003 also works with men, recognizing that including men in the gender mainstreaming process is an essential part of efforts to build gender equality. Oxfam realizes that it is important to create a broad social consensus among both men and women on the issues affecting equal rights, to mobilize resources and institutions controlled by men, to isolate those men who try to preserve men’s power and deny women rights, and to contribute to

the next generation of boys' education in recognizing this gender equality framework. Therefore, Oxfam helped fund the Gender Equality and Men (GEM) project that was started in 2002 by the UK Poverty Program to address this issues.

Poverty and Agriculture

Combating poverty is Oxfam's primary goal, and using agriculture as a way of lifting people out of poverty is one of its primary methods. Oxfam has long rallied against World Trade Organization protections for agricultural technology that it believes could help third world farmers make a better living. Oxfam also lobbies hard for "fair trade" practices that ensure third-world farmers **union**-type working arrangements and a living wage.

While Oxfam is also careful to ensure that the agricultural projects it promotes are environmentally sustainable, Oxfam generally prioritizes the well-being of those most in need over some of the more nuanced environmental concerns. Agriculture and food are the major components of Oxfam's primary campaign, and they specifically rally against the use of crop land to produce biofuels, agricultural subsidies in developed nations, and climate change as the alleged cause of certain erratic weather patterns that have affected harvests.

Union—*organization run by and for workers who have banded together to achieve common goals in key areas like wages, hours, and working conditions.*

World Trade Organization

Intellectual Property Rights

Oxfam International is extremely concerned with the way that trade policy interacts with human development and, more generally, poverty and governmental infrastructure. For these reasons, Oxfam has historically been critical of the place that the World Trade Organization holds in the international power structure and its effect on the developing world. Most specifically, Oxfam views the TRIPS agreement in a very negative way. While Oxfam believes it is noble that TRIPS seeks to protect the rights of both consumers and producers, Oxfam views it as yet another policy initiated by the developed world to maintain its economic advantage over regions struggling with poverty.

Even more importantly, Oxfam heavily criticizes the intellectual property protections built into TRIPS that keep important agricultural and medical technologies too expensive for widespread use in the developing world, a barrier that Oxfam believes directly results in thousands of deaths every year.

Trade and the Environment

One of Oxfam's central issues is climate change. In particular, this NGO has provided funds and organizational support to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and support individuals experiencing poverty

due to the alleged effects of climate change. Although Oxfam actively supports efforts by the UN and other international organizations to address these topics, it has not yet developed its own distinct policy on the environment and trade, though it seeks to do so. In particular, Oxfam has sought to participate in global surveys conducted by the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** that measure climate change and other issues.

IPCC—a scientific body under the UN that seeks to evaluate the risk of climate change caused by human activity.

Despite the balance the WTO is trying to strike between trade and the environment, Oxfam International is extremely critical of the WTO's trade agreements and mission, arguing that the WTO promotes policies that exacerbate the difference between the wealthiest nations and the poorest nations. Although Oxfam understands the need for comprehensive and global trade policy, it strongly believes that most policies initiated by the WTO have little concern for developing countries and the rights of disadvantaged populations; rather, Oxfam believes the WTO serves the interest of the developed nations that run it. How this stance will play into an environmentally focused WTO policy will largely depend on how the policy deals with the economic differences between developed and developing nations.

United Nations Security Council

Crisis in Darfur

Like Amnesty International, Oxfam has urged the UN to take steps to accelerate the process of troop deployment in the area. In particular, the organization calls for increased protection of refugee camps. It puts strong emphasis on the protection of women, advocating for armed forces to accompany them to markets to help stave off attacks from the *janjaweed*.

Janjaweed—armed partisans drawn from Arabic-speaking tribes that became notorious for alleged massacre, rape, forced displacement and torture.

Aside from lobbying for policy, Oxfam takes many actions to help the people of the region directly. It works within Darfur itself in addition to serving displaced refugees in Chad. The organization works hard to promote sanitary living conditions and access to clean water. It also provides public health education to help fight the spread of disease faced by the victims of the crisis.

Modern Maritime Piracy

Oxfam has a **tangential** concern with piracy due to the difficulties it presents in getting relief materials to those in need. For example, in 2007, pirates performed a lethal attack on a UN vessel carrying food for the relief of the Somali people. These types of attacks on relief ships prevent an adequate supply of food and survival materials from reaching Somalia. As piracy is a result of extreme poverty, Oxfam's anti-poverty mission also serves to combat piracy. The organization would support a stronger stance on piracy, particularly around Somalia.

Tangential—loosely related.

Oxfam International in the News

Afghanistan

Due to a poor harvest this summer, many small farmers in northern and central Afghanistan faced food shortages and hunger this winter. The bad harvest was the result of a harsh winter followed by a country-wide drought. Oxfam assessed the situation in the region and came to the conclusion that more than nine million Afghani people—more than a quarter of the population—could face severe food shortages. In a statement released on September 18, 2008, Oxfam said: “Time is running out to avert a humanitarian crisis.”

Oxfam warned that the food shortage would inevitably lead to civil unrest: refugees from the countryside would likely flock to the cities in search of food, and riots could ensue. In the same statement, Oxfam noted that, [t]he impact as a whole could further undermine the security situation,” indicating the food shortages could potentially reverse the fragile gains NATO forces have made in subduing the region.

Oxfam issued another statement during the summer imploring the US to put more funds into combating poverty in the region and less money into military contractors. Oxfam made a direct plea to the US administration, arguing if it does not “[build] on the existing commitments to help lift the Afghan people out of extreme poverty and protect civilians, it will be impossible for the country to achieve lasting peace.” While Oxfam has been in the region for quite some time, their latest push is to put more money in poverty and hunger relief and less into military and infrastructure contracting.

Israel

This fall, the **ceasefire** between Israel and Palestine was broken as Palestinian fighters launched rockets into Israel, prompting a major Israeli troop incursion into **Gaza**. Oxfam immediately became involved in the humanitarian effort. After fighting escalated, Israel closed the roads to Gaza, which stopped aid relief from reaching the Palestinians. Oxfam called on Israel to open up the roads for relief workers: “[a]s a matter of humanitarian imperative, Israeli leaders must resume supplies into Gaza without further delay. If Israelis and Palestinians alike don’t exert every effort now to maintain the truce which has held since last June, the result could be catastrophic for civilians both in Gaza and in nearby Israeli towns.” Though it is a highly political issue, Oxfam, as an NGO, has tried to remain **impartial** and focus on the humanitarian aspect of the issue.

Ceasefire—*a temporary truce of an armed conflict.*

Gaza—*coastal strip of land along of the Mediterranean Sea that is not internationally recognized as part of any sovereign country but is claimed as part of the Palestinian territories.*

Impartial—*indifferent; neutral.*

WTO and World Bank Criticism

Staying consistent with its criticism of the WTO and **World Bank**, Oxfam released a statement September 10, 2008 criticizing the World Bank after a deal with Chad fell through. In 2000, the World Bank offered to help finance a pipeline that would make available Chad's largely untapped oil reserves. In exchange for the loan, Chad would use the increase in revenue from the oil to combat poverty and hunger that has ravaged the land-locked African country. But in September, Chad repaid the World Bank's loan from oil revenue because they did not actually intend to use the oil money to combat poverty. After the deal fell through Oxfam released a statement stating that "[t]he World Bank made a gamble, it knew the situation in Chad going in, but it argued it could build the capacity of the Chadian government and the governance situation would improve alongside the oil boom. But what we have seen in Chad and in so many other places, it is that boom and that flow of revenue that undermines governance rather than improving it." Oxfam would have preferred the World Bank fund projects that more directly benefitted poor individuals rather than simply benefitting those in power, like the Chadian oil deal ultimately did.

World Bank—a financial institution that provides monetary support to developing countries. The controversy mentioned here refers to the methods the World Bank insists that developing countries follow in order to receive a loan.

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The World Bank <www.worldbank.org>