

Oxfam (GB) Guiding Principles for Response to Food Crises

Introduction

The overall goal of Oxfam's Guiding Principles for Response to Food Crises is to provide and promote effective humanitarian assistance to save lives and protect livelihoods in food crises.

Oxfam defines a food crisis as:

"a situation of unusually severe food insecurity which threatens people's lives and/or livelihoods".

The Guiding Principles for Response to Food Crises aims to contribute to:

- Consistency and coherence in Oxfam's response to food crises.
- Quality and accountability in Oxfam's food and nutrition programming.
- Alignment of Oxfam's advocacy and programme activities in responding to food crises.
- Guidance on Oxfam's position and focus on different food and nutrition programmes.
- Development of a common understanding and language within Oxfam for responding to food crises.

The principles relate to food aid and food security interventions to address food crises. It applies to all the following Oxfam GB departments:

- Humanitarian Department
- Oxfam GB staff based in regional management centres and in country offices
- Policy
- Media
- Campaigns
- International Funding Unit

The Guiding Principles for Response to Food Crisis comprises eight policy principles. Specific policy points are included under each policy principle, and guidance notes relevant to the principles and policy points are included at the end of the document. Numbers in superscript indicate where a guidance note has been included. A separate Strategy Paper sets out how the Guiding Principles can be implemented.

Principles, rights, and Oxfam GB's policies¹

Oxfam's Guiding Principles on Response to Food Crises follows the rights, principles and standards outlined in a number of key documented laws, standards and policies assert that:

International Law

- Everyone has a right to adequate food and to freedom from hunger².
- In the case of conflict, the primary responsibility for the welfare of civilians lies with the state, or warring parties who control the area³.

Principles of Humanitarian Action

- Humanitarian assistance will be provided to prevent and alleviate suffering wherever it might be found, and such assistance will be provided solely on the basis of needs⁴.

Minimum Standards for Disaster Response

- The application of minimum standards for disaster response is essential to ensure the accountability and quality of humanitarian response, and the realisation of the humanitarian principles.
- Response to emergencies should be built on local capacities, or at a minimum should not undermine local capacities⁵.
- The participation of the population affected by emergencies, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, is essential in all stages of programming⁶.

OGB policies and strategies

- Emergency response is always conducted with the long-term goal of gender equity in mind.
- HIV/AIDS is a major humanitarian issue, the impact of which goes far beyond the health sector⁷.
- The application of SCO 3.1 and SCO 1.1 are essential to save lives and protect livelihoods.

Policy principles and points for Oxfam GB's response to food crises

Underlying principles

Principle 1: Food crises are an acute cause of human suffering and the severest crises lead to excess deaths. Oxfam's humanitarian mandate makes it imperative that Oxfam acts.

- Oxfam will:**
1. At a minimum analyse the severity of the food security situation.
 2. Determine whether and how to respond on the basis of the analysis, and the response of other humanitarian actors.

Principle 2: Adequate food security⁸ and nutrition is of utmost importance to save lives as part of an emergency public health response.

- Oxfam will:**
1. Use the conceptual framework on causes of mortality⁹ and the sustainable livelihoods framework¹⁰ in order to give equal consideration to food and nutrition, water and sanitation, and health outcomes within emergency public health analysis and response.

Principle 3: Livelihood support is essential to help people achieve improved food security and nutrition both in emergency and development contexts, and to reduce vulnerability to food crises in the long term¹¹.

- Oxfam will:**
1. Define livelihoods protection objectives during emergencies in relation to longer-term existing livelihoods analyses.

Prevention and preparedness

Principle 4: The effectiveness of response to food crises is improved by emergency preparedness.

- Oxfam will:**
1. Consider vulnerability to food insecurity in existing and future regional emergency preparedness plans and livelihoods analyses.
 2. Ensure that partners are appraised for their capacity to respond to emergencies.
 3. Protect livelihoods before lives are at risk by preventing the loss of livelihood assets through provision of free food aid and/or non-food alternatives.

Assessment and analysis

Principle 5: The identification of appropriate interventions to respond to food crises should be based on an analysis of the nature and severity of food insecurity. This should include an analysis of vulnerable groups and of diversity (including gender) at all stages of food and nutrition programming.

- Oxfam will:**
1. Include an analysis of vulnerability and diversity in all assessments. Vulnerability and diversity may be:
 - Physiological;
 - social/economic;
 - political;
 - gender-related;
 - related to the prevalence of HIV/AIDs.

Nutrition surveys

2. Include the following objectives in nutrition surveys:
 - confirm the severity of food insecurity;
 - advocate for an appropriate response;
 - assess the impact of programmes with nutritional objectives.
3. Include an analysis of the underlying causes of malnutrition in nutrition surveys¹².

Food security assessments and monitoring

4. Use Oxfam's livelihoods approach¹³ to food security assessments in emergencies.
5. Support systems to monitor food security in countries that suffer recurrent food crises and promote links with existing response mechanisms.

Food aid needs assessment¹⁴

6. Quantify food aid needs based on existing approaches, guidelines and standards.

Targeting

7. Assess the feasibility and appropriateness of different targeting methods following the identification of vulnerable groups. In general, Oxfam support targeting by:
 - geographical area;
 - livelihood or socio-economic groups;
 - nutritionally vulnerable groups¹⁵

Programming

Principle 6: Oxfam will focus its emergency food security and nutrition programming on non-food alternatives and general distribution of free food aid; areas in which it has a comparative strength. Where Oxfam has no comparative strength (in therapeutic feeding), it will support other agencies to respond.

Principle 7: There are a range of different interventions to respond to food crisis, both food aid and non-food alternatives. A combination of different types of interventions is frequently the most effective.

Oxfam will:

1. Tailor interventions to the severity, phase, duration and scale of crisis, as well as the type of disaster, livelihoods affected and infrastructure available in country¹⁶.

Non-food alternatives

2. Promote alternatives to food aid where appropriate and feasible.

Non-food alternatives include:

- cash and food vouchers;
- cash and food for work programmes;
- micro-finance programmes;
- market support interventions;
- agricultural and livestock support (e.g. livestock off take, fodder distribution, veterinary care, restocking etc)¹⁷.

Free food aid¹⁸

3. Distribute free food rations where the capacity of other agencies is limited¹⁹ and where the need for food aid is identified because:
 - livelihoods are at risk because of food insecurity;
 - lives are at risk because of deteriorating nutritional status;
 - there is an absolute shortage of food;
 - certain population groups suffer restricted access to food;
4. Promote the distribution of an adequate general ration²⁰ (both in quantity and quality), and where necessary procure additional food commodities for inclusion in the ration.
5. Consider the positive and negative long term impact of free food aid in terms of human health, the environment, and prospects for agricultural development and food security²¹.
6. **NOT** distribute free food aid as a substitute for government social welfare in situations of chronic food insecurity.
7. **NOT** implement therapeutic²² or wet supplementary feeding²³ programmes.
8. Encourage and support other agencies to implement therapeutic or wet supplementary feeding where it necessary²⁴.

9. Support the provision of dry take home supplementary foods where the general ration is adequate, but there is a problem of moderate malnutrition or nutritionally vulnerable groups.

Implementation

10. Adopt active measures to ensure that assistance effectively reaches those most affected by minimising the abuse of food aid by any party.
11. Implement programmes appropriate to the capacity and accountability of Oxfam and its local partners.
12. Maintain and promote good practice in community based food distribution
13. Design programmes which minimise the security risks for both staff and beneficiaries.
14. Design programmes which incorporate an exit strategy.
15. Monitor programmes on a regular basis against the indicators for achievement of the Sphere Minimum Standards in Disaster Response. New, unusual and innovative programmes, will be evaluated and learning shared²⁵.

Advocacy

Principle 8: Commitment on the part of States affected by food crises, donors and the UN, is required to ensure that everyone's right to adequate food is met.

- Oxfam will:**
1. Base global humanitarian advocacy messages relating to causes and responses to food crises on firm evidence²⁶, and make use of expertise from Oxfam's food and nutrition sector.
 2. Base country advocacy messages for specific food crises on firm evidence, knowledge of practical constraints, and make use of expertise from Oxfam's food and nutrition sector.
 3. Link country-level advocacy messages relating to food security and nutrition programmes with global advocacy and lobbying of donors and UN agencies.
 4. Promote state accountability for preventing and alleviating food crises at country-level.
 5. Prioritise advocacy or programming on the basis of a net benefit analysis²⁷.
 6. Agree on advocacy messages between Oxfam GB and other members of the Oxfam International family as appropriate.
 7. Contribute to the development of new ideas and approaches in responding to food crises through technical influence on the wider aid community.

Guidance notes

¹ *Sources of rights, principles and standards.*

The right to adequate food is recognised in several instruments under international law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in December 1948 (article 25), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the General Assembly in December 1966 and entered into force in January 1976.

International Humanitarian Law is concerned with the protection of civilians in times of war, and includes the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, on international armed conflict, and the Additional Protocols of 1977, on international and non-international conflict.

Human rights law and humanitarian law define the legal responsibilities of states or warring parties to provide assistance or to allow it to be provided, and refrain from behaviour that violates fundamental human rights.

The purpose of the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards is to make humanitarian agencies more accountable. The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response were first produced in 1998, with a first final edition in 2000. The Charter takes key aspects of international law (rights, humanitarian and refugee), as well as the core principles of humanitarian action (humanity and impartiality) and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. The Minimum Standards were developed to ensure the realisation of the principles of humanitarian action in practice. The sectors covered are: water and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site planning, health services.

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief was adopted by humanitarian agencies in 1994 and seeks to guard standards of behaviour. It gives ten principles of conduct, including the core principles of humanity, impartiality, and neutrality, as well as approaches such as building on local capacities, and involving beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.

Oxfam GB's Humanitarian Policy was finalised in December 1999, and guides the work of the Humanitarian Department.

Oxfam GB's Gender Policy guides Oxfam's work in both emergencies and development, and was agreed by Oxfam Council on the 13th of May 1993. Oxfam also produced "A Little Gender Handbook for Emergencies, or, Just Plain Common Sense" (Clifton, November 1999).

Oxfam GB developed a global HIV/AIDS strategy in March 2002 to decrease the transmission of HIV, increase access to high quality treatment, care and support, and to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on social and economic development. The Humanitarian Department has produced a briefing document on HIV and Food and Nutrition Programming (Skinner, August 2002).

Oxfam GB Strategic Change Objectives SCO 3.1 and SCO 1.1 state that:
"Fewer people will die, fall sick, and suffer deprivation, as a direct result of armed conflict or natural disasters" (SCO 3.1).
"People living in poverty will achieve food and income security" (SCO 1.1).

² *Human Rights Law on the Right to Food:*

The right to food is stated as follows in human rights law.

"Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (Article 25 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

"The States Parties ... recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement in living

conditions. The States Parties will take adequate steps to ensure the realisation of this right, recognising to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation"

"The States Parties ... recognise the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international cooperation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed" (Article 11 in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

Note that the right is one that States have committed to *progressively* achieving, either on their own, including through the adoption of legislative measures, or through "international co-operation"- for example assistance/ aid programmes (See Article 2 in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Legal opinion suggests that the implication of this is both that other States will assist when needed and that the State in question will not refuse appropriate assistance.

³ *Obligations of warring parties to provide humanitarian assistance*

Where urgent needs are not being met, States (and by implication other warring parties) are obliged to allow free passage of relief supplies which are humanitarian and impartial in character (See Additional Protocol 1, Article 70 - referring to international armed conflict and Additional Protocol 2; Article 18 - referring to non-international armed conflict). "Humanitarian" refers to basic needs essential for survival such as foodstuffs and medical supplies. Impartial is defined under guidance note 4 below.

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions- applicable to all forces in all conflicts (ref. Nicaragua decision of the ICJ)- calls for those not of no longer taking part in hostilities "*in all circumstances to be treated humanely*". This is widely interpreted, *inter alia*, as a prohibition on the use of starvation as a weapon of war. Protocol I (Art 54; covering international conflicts) and Protocol II (Art 13; certain non-international conflicts) explicitly prohibit this, but are only applicable on certain conditions- including that the State has signed up to them.

The International Criminal Court makes it a war crime to use starvation as a weapon of warfare, including "depriving [populations] of objects indispensable to their survival" and "wilfully impeding relief supplies" (Art 8 (2) (b) XXV Rome Statute)). This applies in both international and non-international conflicts.

⁴ *Humanitarian principles*

This refers to the core principle of humanity and impartiality, which are in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief have been defined as follows:

- Humanity: to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it might be found. To protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being.
- Impartiality: no discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. Relieving the suffering of individuals guided solely by their needs, and giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

⁵ *Building on local capacity*

Principle 6 in The Code of Conduct states: "We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities". And also: "Where possible we will strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials, and trading with local companies. Where possible, we will work through local non-governmental humanitarian agencies as partners in planning and implementation, and cooperate with local government structures where appropriate".

⁶ *Participation.*

For all sectors in the Sphere Handbook on Minimum Standards for Disaster Response, there is one analysis standard on participation: "the disaster affected population has the opportunity to participate in the design and implementation of the assistance programme".

⁷ *HIV/AIDS*

This statement is taken from Oxfam's HIV/AIDS strategy 2002-05 of March 2002.

⁸ ***Definition of food security***

Oxfam defines food security as: "...when everyone has access to and control over sufficient quantities of good quality food for an active healthy life".

⁹ ***Conceptual framework on underlying causes of mortality.***

The most widely known and adopted framework is that developed by UNICEF in the early 90's on the causes of malnutrition and mortality, and incorporated into the Sphere Minimum Standard for nutrition. The Oxfam food and nutrition sector adopted this framework in 1996. The framework gives the immediate, underlying and basic causes of malnutrition and the links between them.

¹⁰ ***Sustainable livelihoods frameworks.***

Oxfam GB adopted a sustainable livelihoods framework in the early 90's for its development programming. Like other sustainable livelihoods frameworks, it considers the vulnerability context, livelihood capital, transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies and outcomes. Livelihood outcomes in the model include; more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, improved social equity, more sustainable environmental resources, and non-use values of nature secured.

¹¹ ***Livelihood support***

Livelihood support can be at both micro and macro-level. At micro-level it may include food and non-food interventions as given in guidance notes 15 and 16. At the macro-level it can include protection and advocacy or even campaigns at global level, for example Oxfam's fair trade campaigns.

¹² ***The underlying causes of malnutrition***

In the conceptual framework on the causes of malnutrition and mortality, the underlying causes of malnutrition are; household food security, the social and care environment, and the health environment and access to health care.

¹³ ***Oxfam's livelihoods approach to emergency food security assessments.***

Oxfam developed a livelihoods approach to food security assessments in emergencies in 1998, which is described in detail in the ODI Humanitarian Practice Network Paper no. 36. "Food-Security Assessments in Emergencies: A Livelihoods Approach" (2001), by Young et al. A livelihoods approach to emergency food security assessments considers risks to livelihoods as well as to lives. Assessments incorporate an analysis of the food security of different livelihood groups. This should lead to the identification of interventions specific to each livelihood group.

¹⁴ ***Food aid needs assessments***

Food aid needs assessments gather information to estimate the quantity of food aid required for a defined emergency affected population. It should take into consideration the affected populations nutritional requirements, and people's access to food, and an estimate of the number of people affected. Food aid needs assessments should also consider local acceptability, fuel requirement, and access to milling facilities. Guidelines for food aid needs assessments and for planning free food rations, are included in WFP's Food and Nutrition Handbook, and in WHO's guidelines for "The Management of Nutrition in Major Emergencies". The Food Economy Approach developed by SC-UK, is a method for quantifying access to food for different food economy, and wealth, groups. The Minimum Standards for Disaster Response includes a chapter on food aid standards.

¹⁵ ***Refugees, IDPs and the internally stranded***

Refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDP) and the internally stranded may be at particular nutritional risk.

¹⁶ ***Identifying appropriate interventions***

Part 2 of "Against the Grain Revisited" on "The nature of food crises and response; the external environment" has a section on identifying appropriate interventions according to the severity, scale, phase of emergency etc. For each intervention, the appropriateness and feasibility in different contexts is described.

¹⁷ ***Non-food alternatives***

For further information on these types of interventions see Part 2 of "Against the Grain Revisited" on "The nature of food crises and response; the external environment".

¹⁸ ***Free food aid interventions.***

Free food aid refers to general ration distribution, supplementary and therapeutic feeding, and vulnerable group feeding through MCH and emergency school feeding. Further information on these interventions can also be found in Part 2 of "Against the Grain Revisited".

¹⁹ ***Determining the capacity of other agencies.***

The capacity of other agencies (government agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations) can be judged on the following criteria: use of a distribution method which is most likely to reach intended recipients, information given to the population of their ration entitlements, participation of the affected community, adoption of end-use monitoring, consideration given to the number of distribution points and distribution intervals, adequacy of logistics for procurement, receipt, transport and warehousing of food.

²⁰ ***An adequate general ration***

An adequate general ration meets the population's minimum nutritional requirements, is diversified, culturally acceptable, fit for human consumption, easily digestible for children and other vulnerable groups, maximises the use of available resources, and is economic in terms of fuel requirement, preparation time and waste.

²¹ ***Genetically modified crops***

Concern has been raised about the long-term impact of GM crops.

²² ***Therapeutic feeding***

Therapeutic feeding refers to the feeding and medical treatment needed to rehabilitate severely malnourished children.

²³ ***Supplementary feeding***

Supplementary feeding refers to the provision of food aid to the nutritionally or socially vulnerable in addition to the general distribution, to save lives and/or to prevent malnutrition. 'Wet' supplementary feeding refers to food aid provided in the form of a cooked ration to be consumed on site while 'dry' feeding is in the form of a dry (take home) ration.

²⁴ ***Therapeutic feeding strategy***

Until Oxfam has established an effective Memorandum of Understanding with agencies with the capacity and expertise to implement therapeutic and wet supplementary feeding programmes, there may be limited situations where Oxfam must carry out therapeutic and wet supplementary feeding.

²⁵ ***Evaluation***

The International Division of Oxfam GB has an evaluation policy.

²⁶ ***Firm evidence***

Firm evidence is considered to be field based and reliable evidence.

²⁷ ***Net benefit analysis***

Oxfam GB has developed guidelines for a net benefit analysis (NBA) in humanitarian programmes. NBA has similarities with the "do no harm" approach developed by Mary Anderson in 1996, but differs in important respects. On a continuum between the precautionary principle of doing nothing for fear of doing harm, and the humanitarian imperative to intervene in response to suffering, "do no harm" is closer to the former and NBA to the latter. NBA more openly acknowledges that some degree of harm is inevitable, but retains a default position to intervene.