



OXFAM
Italia

OXFAM ITALY CASE-STUDY

Learning from experience

ABSTRACT



Tackling Poverty Through Decentralisation and Local Governance: Five Concrete Experiences of Oxfam Italy

Introduction

Between November 2013 and March 2014 an analysis of five Oxfam Italy (OIT) projects was worked out in order to systematise and capitalise the OIT intervention strategy in low-middle income countries. The analysis has been conducted through the case-study method (mainly: documentation review and interviews with key informants).

The cases analysed are as follows:

- 1) Latin America, La Basura Sirve. Part of the Urbal-III programme. Topic: waste management. 2009-2013;
- 2) South Africa, Waste Community Based Organisation (CBOs)/Coops in Ekurhuleni.

Part of the NetsAfrica programme. Topic: waste management. 2010-2013;

- 3) South Africa, Maternal and Child Health: Local Authorities and Decentralization of services in SADC;
- 4) Republic Democratic of Congo, Strengthening Decentralized Territorial Entities (ETDs) and Local Associations ETD in the Management of the Local Health Service and Sanitation of the City of Kananga, Topic: waste management. 2011-2013;
- 5) Bosnia Herzegovina, Strengthening the System of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) – Part of the SeeNet 2 Programme. Topic: economic and local development. 2009-2013.

Rationale

The Oxfam theory of change essentially relies on Duncan Green assumption that “*development, and in particular efforts to tackle inequality, is best achieved through a combination of active citizens and effective states*”¹.

Citizens, because they are right-holders, are critical to holding states accountable; and states, because they are duty bearers, can guarantee rights and the rule of law as well as being legitimated to design policies and strategies to support the development of society.

Main Evidence

The projects show that the main underlying criteria of Oxfam Italy interventions is addressing specific local issues (lack of basic services, precarious and unsafe work conditions, social conflicts) through the design of local public policies for triggering **a real change in the livelihood conditions** in poor and marginalized areas.

At the same time the projects show that the OIT intervention strategy aims at supporting the creation of a **local policy-making process** in order to ensure both ownership and sustainability of the results achieved.

Therefore the evidence which arose from the projects can be clustered into two main groups:

- in terms of direct **benefits for the beneficiaries** (that is, the concrete improvement of livelihood conditions) and in particular:
 - improved or introduced basic services in the target areas (*broker of innovation*);
 - increased income of marginalized groups and created new job opportunities;
 - increased civil society awareness and participant of local community;
 - supported capacity building of local stakeholders;
- terms of **policy-making** (that is, the effectiveness of the process) and in particular:
 - created a legitimated policy-making process, through adoption of rules, ordinances, official circulars, strategic plans;
 - established inter-institution alliances to support the vertical subsidiarity and the creation of public-private partnership to support the horizontal one;

¹ Green, Duncan, 2012, *From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*, 2nd ed. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing and Oxford: Oxfam International

- reinforced civil society's capacity in the policy-making process (stakeholder inclusion).

Practical cases

In **Latin America, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo**, informal waste workers have gained a formalised status and waste treatment services have been improved or introduced, so reducing the risk related to poor hygienic and sanitary conditions.

In **South Africa** rural communities are benefiting from a more effective health service for HIV-infected mothers and infants.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** SMEs benefited from start-up services, business centers, and exchange of good practice and new jobs were created as well as new trade in national and international markets.

Intervention Strategy

In OIT's vision, it is crucial to promote actions oriented: (1) to **make the civil society an “active citizenship”**; (2) to **influence sub-national policy change**; (3) to **build a bottom-up process of policy-making** to trigger political leverage, that is, raising local issues to the higher institutional levels to obtain resources and well-addressed national policies.

The Oxfam Italy intervention strategy is a result of several important context variables and in particular: a) medium term process, b) low-middle income contexts, c) developing countries with fledgling democratization and decentralisation, d) focus on local issues.

Considering these primary aspects, the main recurrent component of OIT experiences are: (1) **capacity building** in order to strengthen the local institutions' (and in some cases key stakeholders) technical capacity both in managing the policy-making process and providing services; (2) **participation**, in order to enhance civil society's awareness and capacity to actively contribute to the policy-making process; (3) **institutional brokering and networking** to include all the relevant stakeholders in policy-making and to activate horizontal subsidiarity.

The elements which could ensure repeatability in future action are: (1) the establishment of an operational secretariat able to implement brokering/networking and play the role of facilitator, (2) the inclusion of qualified technical project partners, the selection of competent staff, (3) the inclusion of local institutions in the project as partners and direct implementers, and (4) the creation of wide stakeholder networks.

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