

Keystone Partner Satisfaction Report – Oxfam Novib

Management Response of Oxfam Novib's Board of Directors, April 2013

INTRODUCTION

The present partner satisfaction report was conducted by Keystone Accountability. Every three years, Oxfam Novib conducts a partner satisfaction study. In 2012, for the first time, we did this together with 15 other members of Partos – our branch organisation. The Board of Directors is glad with the joint Partos initiative, in particular because we can benchmark our results with other Partos organisations and with a cohort of 30 international organisations.

Oxfam Novib highly values feedback from partners as partner organisations and social movements in poor countries are crucial to Oxfam Novib's learning. We believe that empowered citizens are the driving force behind change, so we place people power at the centre of our work. Above all, we aim to help people help themselves so they can find their own road to sustainable development. Helping to build strong civil society organisations and social movements is our most important task. Feedback from partners helps Oxfam Novib to understand how/why partner organisations value the support they get from Oxfam Novib and how we can improve our support to meet the needs of partners to become strong and impactful civil society organisations. For this reason, the implementation of the follow-up action points will be strictly monitored by the Board of Directors.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

The Board of Directors agrees with the findings of the partner satisfaction study, and will take account of the emerging study findings in the midterm review of Oxfam Novib's business plan 2011-2015 and in new policies and practices. Some major findings and follow-up actions are summarised below.

1. High level of overall satisfaction

Oxfam Novib is rated 10 out of the 46 NGOs. According to Keystone, the picture that emerges from the survey is of an organisation that maintains respectful relationships with partners and brings real added value to them. Oxfam Novib is satisfied with this positive result. Nevertheless, we are ambitious and aiming for a higher position in the nearby future.

This overall rating is not significantly higher or lower than our score during the previous survey where 7 international NGOs scored better. This most recent result gives the impression that it is too early to measure the gains of our decentralisation process that was started in 2011. An important reason for Oxfam Novib to decide to decentralise its international department is the ambition to improve accountability to partners and stakeholders both in the Netherlands and in our partner countries. We want to intensify the involvement of those already involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects and programmes, which can be done more successfully in the field – as can our work on capacity building with partners, learning, campaigning and networking. In 2013 the decentralisation process will be finalised. We expect that partners will experience the advantages of these changes, as off this year. These changes have to result in an increase in overall partner satisfaction.

- *To monitor our performance, Oxfam Novib will conduct a partner satisfaction study within 3 years from now.*

2. Low response rate

ON has a remarkably low response rate (18%). This is also low compared to the Dutch cohort (36%) and compared to the response rate in 2007 (39%). According to Keystone the low response does not affect the credibility of the outcomes as customer satisfaction survey. Nevertheless, the Board of Directors is not satisfied with this outcome. A reason for the low response rate might be the fact that

Oxfam Novib works with many new partners who still have limited experience in working with Oxfam Novib and therefore possibly feel more hesitant to fill in the survey.

3. Financial support

Oxfam Novib is glad to see that its financial support is highly appreciated by our partners. Also compared to the other Dutch and international NGOs, Oxfam Novib has high ratings. In 3 out of 4 areas Oxfam Novib scores above average on our quality of financial support. Like all NGOs, Oxfam Novib scores best on 'payments in appropriate phases' and received the lowest score for allowing respondents to make changes to specific conditions of the grant.

- *We will continue with our approach regarding financial support and in particular to assure that we maintain our appropriateness on payments.*
- *Oxfam Novib received the lowest score for allowing respondents to make changes to specific conditions of the grant. Oxfam Novib has indeed become stricter in making partners adhere to contractual obligations: we are convinced that an accurate financial management is of paramount importance. At the same time partners have the possibility to propose changes in the project approved, e.g. when the context in which the project is implemented, changes radically. As said before, it could be that the many new partners that Oxfam Novib has established relationships with over the past years are not sufficiently familiar with that possibility.*

4. Non-financial support

An important subject of this study was the level of satisfaction on non-financial support. The report shows that in 7 out of 9 areas, Oxfam Novib provides capacity building support to an equal or higher number of respondents than most other NGOs. This high score confirms that capacity building has been a high priority on our agenda. Along the lines of our corporate plan 2011-2015, we co-operate with partners in all our intervention strategies, exchanging knowledge and information, sharing expertise, broadening each other's networks and conducting joint campaigns. In our co-operation with partners we apply Oxfam's 'partnership principles'. An important basic principle is reciprocity: a relationship must benefit both partners, so our relationship with partners must consist of more than mere funding. To increase partner organisations' independence, sustainability and ability to determine their own direction, we invest in building their capacities on matters such as fundraising, humanitarian responses, financial management, target group participation, accountability towards the target group, lobbying, applying the rights-based approach, and mainstreaming gender and HIV policies. We also aim to encourage our partners systematically to integrate learning and innovation in their work, and to participate in networks. Oxfam Novib has already decided to bring more focus into its capacity building support to partners. We are hopeful that this will also bring more quality into our services.

In 2011 we have started developing capacity building materials and providing trainings to our partners. Based on various pilots and informal feedback from partners we have decided to invest more in our capacity building activities coming years. Therefore, we have started with improving our training materials and tools to support partners' financial management and humanitarian response capacity, in autumn 2012. The results in the Keystone report are in line with our own experiences and therefore the low scores are recognizable: among partners there is a need for support on monitoring and capacity building while this is still in development within Oxfam Novib. Our low score in all 9 areas on the perceived value of partners regarding our capacity building activities emphasises the need to improve and extend our materials and approach. The follow-up actions are:

- *In 2013, Oxfam Novib will strengthen its role in capacity development of partners, especially focusing on financial sustainability and humanitarian work. In 2011 a “5C”¹ assessment tool was introduced for assessing partners’ capabilities and improving dialogue on capacity development priorities. A second round of assessment will be carried out in 2013, leading to agreements with our partners on concrete plans for capacity building that will be explicitly included in contracts with partners and the annual plans of our country offices.*
- *To improve partner engagement, we will include feedback from partners in capacity building tools. As soon as we start using the training materials that are now being developed, we will include a feedback and evaluation moment in all training sessions.*
- *We will better management of expectations: being more explicit on which areas we provide capacity building and which areas not. This will be communicated to partners before summer, in Oxfam Novib’s reaction to them about the outcomes of this survey, and the follow up steps as described in this management response.*
- *In 2013, we will investigate to what extent our monitoring and impact measurement tools can be made more useful for partners so that they better meet partners monitoring needs.*

¹ Capability to balance diversity and coherence; Capability to adapt and self renew; Capability to relate and to attract resources and support; Capability to commit and Engage; Capability to carry out technical service delivery and logistical tasks.