



## The Role of Oxfam and OSIWA in Africa

Name

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Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an extremely crucial role in the contemporary world. They typically focus the efforts on developing society, bettering communities, and encouraging the participation of citizens in a wide range of activities. The issues that NGOs seek to tackle range from environmental degradation and social problems to human rights and political instability. Through their undertakings, members of NGOs can facilitate much-needed transformations locally or globally (Paternotte & Seckinelgin, 2015). Over the years, numerous NGOs have emerged, with the majority of them said to have brought about wide-ranging positive changes in their areas of operation. This paper solely focuses on Oxfam International and Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), two NGOs that continue to attract attention for their members' capacity to trigger positive change in several countries. The following discussion presents an assessment of these organizations by addressing their background, their missions, countries/regions of operation, and strategies for supporting LGBT rights.

### **Background of Oxfam and OSIWA**

Oxfam International is an NGO whose members primarily focus on alleviating global poverty. The organization was founded in 1995 following the decision of leaders of different independent NGOs to form a confederation (Oxfam, n.d.d). Their resolution to come together was premised on the belief that such a strategy would result in efficiency maximization, allowing them to attain greater success in their fight to tackle indigence and injustice across the globe (Oxfam, n.d.d). Oxfam's leadership places particular emphasis on activities aimed at addressing the fundamental factors that give an opportunity for inequality to thrive. Additionally, the organization's management is committed to saving and protecting lives during the crisis and collaborating with individuals to build resilience.

Since the organization's leadership wants permanent solutions to identified problems, they dedicate most of their time to campaigns that revolve around the need for genuine, durable change (Oxfam, n.d.b). Oxfam's members yearn for a world where all people have the freedom to address to the authorities, can claim their rights as humans, and are able to take steps toward building a better future for themselves (Oxfam, n.d.b). Some of the issues that are at the heart of the organization's agenda are land rights, climate change related problems, and gender rights. As of now, Oxfam operates in numerous countries around the world.

Furthermore, OSIWA is a West African NGO that aims to promote democratic values (OSIWA, n.d.b). Created in 2000, the organization dedicates itself to the formation of open societies in West Africa by advocating inclusive democratic governance, greater transparency and accountability in institutions, as well as active citizenship (Tanko & Afadzinu, 2010). Aside from advocacy, members of OSIWA are involved in grant-making, providing technical assistance, and partnership building, both within and along with other groups that are active on the same territory (OSIWA, n.d.b). Currently, OSIWA is present in nearly a dozen countries in West Africa.

### **The Missions of Oxfam and OSIWA**

Oxfam's website shows the organization's mission as a commitment "To help create lasting solutions to the injustice of poverty" (Oxfam, n.d.b). The NGO's leaders note that Oxfam is just one of the numerous groups that intent on making positive social change possible, especially by empowering individuals to build a future that is not only secure but also devoid of injustice and poverty (Oxfam, n.d.b). Given Oxfam's global reach, members of the NGO are certain that they are making progress in their efforts to accomplish their noble goals. Oxfam's mission is underpinned by three core values, including empowerment, accountability, and inclusiveness, and a set of guiding principles that are primarily grounded on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Key figures within Oxfam strongly believe that it is possible to avoid and stamp out indigence and powerlessness if there are a political will and an unwavering human commitment to tackle the phenomena (Oxfam, n.d.b). Furthermore, OSIWA's mission is "To enable open societies and inclusive democratic governance that are based on transparent and accountable institutions and an active citizenry" (OSIWA, n.d.b). The values that OSIWA's leadership has identified as indispensable for attaining their mission are integrity, commitment and passion, respect for diversity, creativity and innovation, and fun. These principles guide, define, and govern the conduct of the organization's members and their interactions with grantees and partner groups.

### **The Countries/Regions in which Oxfam and OSIWA Operate**

As pointed out earlier, Oxfam is present in different countries around the world. As of now, the NGO operates in over ninety countries, with thousands of partners, communities, and allies regularly lending their support to assist in saving and protecting lives in times of emergency; helping individuals in rebuilding their livelihoods; campaigning for real, long-term change; and fighting for the rights of women (Oxfam, n.d.c). The Oxfam International Confederation includes nineteen member organizations. The NGOs are based in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Ireland, India, Italy, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Quebec, South Africa, Spain, and the United States. Oxfam's leadership also established two public engagement offices (in South Korea and Sweden), which deal with awareness creation and activities related to the generation of funding.

As part of their efforts to bring change in Africa, Oxfam's leaders focus on campaigning against extreme inequality and the need for the provision of essential services; advocating gender justice and women's rights; educating people on issues linked with food, climate, and natural resources; providing humanitarian help during crises, for instance, conflicts and disaster; and improving access to clean water. OSIWA operates in ten states in West Africa as of now. The countries in which it is active include Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. The principal strategies that OSIWA's leadership employs to achieve its goals are grant making, advocacy, research, litigation, and providing technical support (OSIWA, n.d.a). These methods of operation are illustrated in the organization's five key pillars: Economic Governance and Advancement, Justice Reform and Rule of Law, Journalism, Equality and Anti-Discrimination, and Democratic Practice.

### **The Mechanisms that Oxfam and OSIWA Employ to Promote LGBT Rights in Africa**

Oxfam's leadership envisions a world where every individual is allowed to enjoy their rights fully and is treated with dignity (Paternotte & Seckinelgin, 2015). However, they are also cognizant of the fact that people who identify themselves as LGBT community members face varied forms of persecution in several states globally, preventing them from affirming their sexual rights (Paternotte & Seckinelgin, 2015). In Africa, LGBT rights are recognized in only a handful of countries, with homosexuality being punishable by death in Nigeria and Somalia (Oxfam, n.d.a). In a bid to protect LGBT rights across Africa, members of the NGO also advocate for the rights of people who identify as LGBT, constantly working alongside LGBT groups (Maseko, 2015). The organization's leaders

are also committed to tackling the stigma and discrimination that surrounds sexual orientation and gender identity by speaking publicly on the topic (Oxfam, n.d.a). Additionally, they continue to call upon governments to decriminalize restrictive LGBT laws, which is arguably the greatest barrier to the inclusion of LGBT people across the continent. The organization's leadership focuses on empowering members of LGBT community to claim their rights. Without financial support, LGBT groups cannot grow or put the programs they have developed into practice (Armisen, 2015). OSIWA's leadership hopes that their commitment to helping the LGBT community will eventually translate into long-term positive impacts.

Finally, George Soros, the billionaire philanthropist who created the organization from which OSIWA emerged, the Open Society Foundations, is one of a number of public figures who have been speaking out in support of LGBT rights for a long time. Open Society essentially means tolerant democracies whose governments hold accountability in high regard and show openness to operation of different groups of individuals (Inside Philanthropy, n.d.). The organization aims to provide financial support for civil society groups across the globe in a bid to advance education, justice, independent media, and public health (Open Society Foundations, n.d.). Soros mostly focuses on developing countries, in particular, those in Eastern Europe and Africa (Inside Philanthropy, n.d.). Through the organization, Soros funds LGBT grant-making (Inside Philanthropy, n.d.). George Soros' LGBT initiative is aimed at combating "discrimination by empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities to promote and defend their human rights" (Open Society Foundations, n.d.). To achieve this goal, Soros mainly funds LGBT organizations that focus on LGBT issues across Europe and Africa. Soros has also invested in a number of African NGOs for them to act against the particularly cruel treatment to which members of the LGBT community are subjected in the region.