

Oxfam America



In each issue of the Corporate Examiner, we profile an ICCR member organization and its work in corporate social responsibility. Below we spoke with Irit Tamir and Peter O’Driscoll of Oxfam America.

Beginning in late 2011, Oxfam began its “Behind the Brands” scorecard initiative, measuring the social and environmental impacts of the world’s largest food companies. How is the scorecard different from other sustainability ranking tools currently in use, and what led to the inclusion of women as a key theme?

OXFAM: The Behind the Brands Scorecard measures the publicly available policies of the top 10 food and beverage companies in the world that Oxfam identified as being crucial to having positive social and environmental impacts in sourcing countries. The Scorecard looks at seven themes that include transparency, workers, women, small farmers, climate, land and water. While there are many indices that measure company performance and policies, Oxfam’s Scorecard does so from the perspective of the most vulnerable people impacted in the supply chains of the food and beverage industry. This is why the inclusion of women as a theme was crucial. Women disproportionately represent workers in low-wage and precarious work in the food system. In most countries they are also responsible for growing food crops. Finally, while women often work in commodity crops like coffee, cocoa and tea, they are too often invisible in the system, working as casual or family labor, thus companies are not taking them into account when creating projects and programs to improve their supply chain management.



Irit Tamir, Senior Advisor, Private Sector Department

Oxfam filed its first-ever shareholder resolution at Chevron in 2009, and its second in the fall of 2012. As a relative newcomer to the work, how does engaging in shareholder advocacy help Oxfam to advocate for justice around food and nutrition issues? Do you envision corporate engagement becoming more of a focus in the future?

OXFAM: Oxfam is a campaign and advocacy organization. Shareholder resolutions are one of the tools in the campaign toolbox. Prior to releasing our Behind the Brands Scorecard, we engaged all 10 companies in the scorecard over a course of several months on developing the indicators and the policies they had that corresponded to them. In 2012, we filed a shareholder resolution with Mondelēz as part of our campaign to improve the livelihoods of women cocoa farmers in the supply chains of three chocolate companies.



Peter O’Driscoll, Project Director, EquiTABLE Food Initiative

Prior to launching the campaign, Oxfam engaged Mondelēz (as well as Mars and Nestlé) on the issue of gender in its cocoa supply chains. Our cocoa campaign targeted the three chocolate companies in the Scorecard because they source 40% of the world’s cocoa. Oxfam filed a resolution with Mondelēz only because Mars is a private company, and Nestlé is incorporated in Switzerland. The resolution helped keep Mondelēz engaged in dialogue, while the company’s looming annual meeting in May provided the perfect pressure point to get Mondelēz to implement new policies which will mean better conditions for women cocoa farmers.

Our Scorecard revealed that most companies have little to no policies or understanding of land as a resource in their supply chains, or on women and the unique challenges they face in their supply chains. Following our cocoa campaign, all

three chocolate companies signed on to the UN Women's Empowerment Principles, and committed to undertaking impact assessments in their sourcing countries, focusing on gender. They further agreed to publish their data and action plans, and to advocate with their industry associations, suppliers and certifications schemes to raise up gender as in priority in programming and standards. Our Behind the Brands campaign will target more companies on different issues in our Scorecard. Where appropriate, shareholder advocacy will be considered and will likely be used again as a tactic to get the companies to implement policies affecting their social and environmental impacts in sourcing countries.

Oxfam has historically tried to influence corporate policies and practices from the outside via campaigns, petitions and research; how is working with other ICCR members on the "inside" as a shareholder strategically different?

OXFAM: For Oxfam, a good campaign strategy will include external along with internal pressure on a given company. ICCR is the perfect forum for Oxfam to learn more about a company's values, its internal champions, and its future direction. ICCR members have tremendous experience in engaging hundreds of companies. We have benefited from that experience through ICCR meetings and in conversations with members. We will continue to strategize with ICCR members on how best to influence a company's practices. Our Behind the Brands campaign has used the insider strategy more than any other corporate campaign we have conducted. Our collaboration with ICCR is an integral part of that campaign.

While most people not closely involved with agriculture assume that food is grown in the U.S. under fair and safe conditions, that's

not always the case. How is Oxfam working with the Equitable Food Initiative to seek worker justice and safety?

OXFAM: The produce industry relies on manual labor to plant and harvest fruits and vegetables. The work is necessarily arduous—many hours in a day, done in sunny, humid, hot conditions, and involving exposure to chemicals. At the same time, farm workers are treated differently from almost all other workers in the country; they are excluded from many of the federal and state laws and regulations that provide basic labor protections. This lack of protection weakens their bargaining power and causes high turnover in the industry. Farm workers' wages are low, often based on piece work. The vast majority of farmworkers are immigrants, which can leave them more susceptible to exploitation.

At the same time, produce retailers and consumers share important concerns. Produce is the leading source of foodborne illness, and recalls cost the industry millions in loss and liability. Retailers are also aware that public concern about labor conditions in their supply chains can negatively impact their brands. And those companies are also attentive to consumer concerns about pesticide use and its impact on safety and worker health.

The Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) is taking a fresh approach by simultaneously addressing the concerns of all stakeholders – workers, growers, retailers, and consumers. EFI trains and empowers farm workers and growers to collaborate in reducing food safety risks, pesticide use and health hazards in the fields. Informed, motivated, and respected farm workers play a key role in assisting farm owners and other partners in implementing and monitoring EFI standards. Much like quality improvement teams in an industrial setting, farm workers who understand and embrace food safety and environmental stewardship can help improve productivity, safety and quality.

EFI thus presents an opportunity for the produce industry to offer increased assurance to retailers and consumers that their fruit and vegetables have been grown and harvested in ways that respect workers and reduce the potential for transmission of food-borne illness.

How do Oxfam's programs and root-cause analysis promote a more equitable food system?

OXFAM: Oxfam works across the spectrum of actors and methods within the food system. In order to create a more equitable food system for all, it will take collaborations with the willing, to campaigns targeting the laggards. It will also require a multi-stakeholder approach, one that involves government, civil society, consumers, buyers, producers and workers to effectively change a system that will feed everyone, enough, always. EFI represents one of our collaborations with stakeholders in the food system and Behind the Brands represents one of our campaigns.

How will a company scorecard help to promote corporate progress?

OXFAM: The Behind the Brands campaign is spurring a race to the top among the 10 food and beverage companies, which we believe will have a cascading impact on the traders and producers throughout their supply chains. Companies have already shared with us that the Scorecard has created dialogue within their companies. In some cases, new dialogue has broken barriers between corporate social responsibility departments and procurement departments. There are many individuals in companies who understand they need to change how they do business moving forward; the Scorecard gives those individuals, along with consumers, investors, and most importantly, impacted communities, a tool to push for better policies and practices.