

## Oxfam IBIS' Activist strategy 2020-2022

### The need for a volunteer strategy in Oxfam IBIS

The Oxfam IBIS volunteer strategy 2020-2022 is an extension of the sub-strategy for the Oxfam IBIS Political Engagement department which has set a clear ambition to strengthen volunteer activities in the organization. On a more concrete level, the goal is to improve and strengthen the already existing volunteer community in order to engage even more volunteers in the future. Both active and no longer active volunteers have come up with constructive, visionary and progressive ideas on how we as an organization can create an even better framework for our volunteers and it is with this in mind that this strategy has been written<sup>1</sup>.

The reality that faces us today, whether you live in Copenhagen, Nairobi, New York or in New Delhi is impacted by the consequences of the COVID-19 virus. But even before the crisis COVID-19 has brought along, our global community has been impacted by poverty, oppression, and unjust systems that have centered the power and means of the world on a rich minority in the west. And as a consequence we all live in a world dominated by extreme inequality.

We're living in a time where the need for us to take action and stand together to stop the exploitation of the weakest and the fast growing inequality.

If we want it enough, we can change the world and as an organisation and as part of Oxfam we have all the prerequisites to engage more people in the fight against inequality and for global justice. Thus the central goal of this strategy is to create fruitful conditions to strengthen the commitment of volunteers and activists in the fight against inequality.

Oxfam IBIS has the potential to create a solidarity movement in Denmark with a global perspective and with the courage to challenge the structures and the power elite which keeps people trapped in poverty and oppression in an economically unjust system, and it is our responsibility to fulfill this potential.

Our global network of partners and the knowledge we have gives us and our activists(volunteers) the best conditions to make a difference, and we have the ideas and the courage to speak truth to power which is needed to create engagement. We need to use and develop this position in order to create an offer where people will want to volunteer their time. Oxfam IBIS should create a fruitful starting point for activists to establish the energy, tools and courage to join the fight against the structures creating the growing economic inequality we see locally, nationally and globally.

As a knowledge based civil society organisation we must use our knowledge and competences to include and mobilize activists in order to create action, participation and engagement and ensure that their work is of a high standard. We need to invest in our activists by giving them tools to put their knowledge into action and become strong ambassadors for Oxfam IBIS, who are engaged with our work for many years and know the organisation, visions and key issues inside out.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the initiation of writing the volunteer strategy, a survey was sent out to all former and current volunteers in Oxfam IBIS. A summary of the responses to this survey is attached as an appendix.

## **Our prerequisite for success**

The thoughts behind this strategy is that it is a management tool as much as a tool for development of our organisation which we should work with continuously. The success of this strategy depends on our ability as an organisation to change how we work and start including activists and volunteers as a natural part of our work process in order to become even better at engaging people in the fight against inequality.

We need to keep asking ourselves where we, as an organisation, differ from others and how our offer to make a change stands out from the crowd. Amongst other things, we believe that the answer lies in the meeting between the global, the national and the local. This is where Oxfam IBIS invites people to participate in our organisation and practice political activism, where we are leading the way on how we in collaboration can change the power balance creating inequality. We want to create an unique and attractive space for collaboration aimed at people driven by both acquiring knowledge and taking action.

The goals described in this strategy will create the foundation which will ensure that Oxfam IBIS can attract political enthusiasts, those willing to fight against social and economic injustice and those who want to join the fight against the power elite maintaining the inequality we see today.

As with everything else, the success of this strategy and what can be attained with it depends on the resources we will be able to put into the work as well as the extent of financial means we will be able to raise through fundraising and other initiatives.

## **Goals**

As Oxfam IBIS, we want to improve our degree of recognition. More people should know who we are and what we do. We want to change the debate on inequality, we want more documented influence and we want more citizens to participate in the fight against inequality. Achieving these goals depends on whether we are able to engage more activists in our work. Activists are central to how we can create an impactful movement, achieve results and gather people in the belief that change is possible.

The activists already have knowledge and skills already, but lack alignment, training and a shared vision on how we as an organisation consisting of employees, members, a board and activists can act together in order to be even better at what we do. For us to get to where we want to be we need to create a space for shared thinking and action where the activists are better integrated in our organisation.

Thus the goals for the volunteer strategy are the following: 1) to train global citizens of solidarity, 2) create and increase political agency and 3) creating agency in a diverse movement.

### **Goal 1 - Training global citizens of solidarity**

The ambition is to create a strong foundation for the coming generations of Oxfam IBIS activists, who have the tools to create change and are closely linked to our organisation and confederation. To do so, we must invest in our activists and inspire them to become global citizens in solidarity. What we aim to do is:

- a) Develop an ambitious *Activist Seminar*, an introductory course for all new activists which will be held twice a year, in September and February.

New activists will receive a thorough onboarding in the goals, visions and ways of creating change for Oxfam IBIS. Here they will meet employees, board members and the other activists who will help equip the new activists to take part in the activities planned by the activist groups. From the very beginning of their commitment new activists will feel closely connected to our organisation, get insights on how they as activists participate in creating change, what they must be able to do, and how their contributions feed into a global organisation that works worldwide to combat inequality in all its forms. The *Activist Seminar* will also give the activists insights into how they, by being active in Oxfam IBIS, can develop professionally and use the knowledge and skills they each bring with them to create action.

- b) Have an Annual Activist Assembly which is held in connection with the Oxfam IBIS general assembly.

In order to create a space for collaboration between the employees, members, the board and the activists it is necessary to create a structure which can facilitate this. Therefore, every year in connection to the Oxfam IBIS general assembly we are going to gather activists from all over the country for an *Activist Assembly*, with the purpose of: 1) strengthen the relation both to the organisation and the other activists 2) ensure the quality and skills of the activist group 3) strengthen the activist's presence at the general assembly, which will be a central part of the program for the weekend.

At the annual *Activist Assembly* the activists will decide on their work program for the coming year and set goals and create direction for their joint work. This work program will not stand on its own but will also reflect the work program framing the work of the secretariat. Especially the objectives defined by the new political department in Oxfam IBIS will have an important role in shaping the activists' work program and the related activities. This will ensure strong synergies between the activists' work and the secretariat. Hence it is essential that relevant employees from the organisation are participating, contributing and inspiring the activists during this process, in order for the activists to leave this weekend every year with new tools and insights, which can help qualify, develop and strengthen their future activities.

- c) Create an online course portal.

As a part of the world's biggest development organisation we have resources, experience and knowledge that the activists should be able to access. Training of activists is one of Oxfam's strengths and there is an already existing database of online courses and training within the confederation that we should encourage the activists to use in order to strengthen their global outlook and the association to our confederation and connect our activists to activists in other affiliates. Furthermore, courses that are obligatory to employees such as '*Oxfam code of conduct and values*', '*Gender Justice*', '*Guide to Feminist Influencing*' and '*Safeguarding Awareness*' should also be offered to the activists as well.

## Goal 2 - Create and increase political agency

Oxfam IBIS as a political civil society organisation works determined towards influencing politicians in Denmark and globally in order to decrease inequality and change the structures responsible for the increasing differences between rich and poor. Our strongest weapon is our campaigns, communication and mobilisation of people who want to participate in creating political change. The activists must partake in and actively contribute to Oxfam IBIS' political ambitions. Strengthening the political agency of the activists will take inclusion and coordination across the public engagement department, the new political department, our program department and the activists. To ensure this we are going to implement monthly meetings for all our activists across the country, called *Activist Forum*. At these meetings it will be possible for the activists to seek sparring on the activities they are planning, from relevant employees as well. Furthermore the purpose of the monthly Activist Forum is to create a framework for a more coordinated and structured activism, where the activists from different groups can meet each other, both at physical meetings and on online platforms, and exchange experiences and inspire each other in their work. It is important that these meetings are planned around concrete and meaningful goals in order for the employees to realise how the activists are contributing and vice versa. The meeting should become a space for employees and activists to collaborate and where knowledge can be put into action.

## Goal 3 - creating agency in a diverse movement

For us to succeed in creating an energetic movement of informed activists with political agency, it is a requisite that we realize goals 1 and 2. But to create agency in a diverse movement while also having an ambition to increase the number of activists, requires a targeted recruitment effort and a restructuring of how we communicate with, maintain and connect our activists with each other. We are going to work with the following initiatives:

a) Diverse representation in our activist group.

Today, most of our activists are based in either Aarhus or Copenhagen and are over 22 y/o. Thus, we lack representation of young people living outside of the two major cities. Further, a vast majority of our activists either have or are in the process of getting a university degree. For us to become a diverse movement we need to focus on recruitment of activists with attention to class, gender, ethnicity and age. During the strategy period up to 2022 we are going to work on creating a more diverse activist group based on the forthcoming Oxfam IBIS gender - and diversity - policy. In order to create a real demand on structural change from below it is central that we are able to mobilise and engage people across social strata. Furthermore we will focus on attracting more activists in Aarhus and Aalborg, where we through our already existing activist groups have the right conditions for strengthening our recruitment. We aim at establishing activist groups in Odense and Roskilde as well, since our goal is to organise activists in all the big university cities. Besides, we are going to make a focused effort at mobilising activists studying at professional educations, which will be related to new activist activities, as described in appendix 1.

b) The entrance points for activists need to be multi-strand and cover different levels of engagement.

Our ambition is to mobilise more people to stand with us in the fight against inequality and in order for us to succeed there need to be different options for participation, depending on the activist. Our movement should be recognized by how it is possible to participate both by meetings face to face as well as digitally, which is strengthened by our newest initiative '*Aktivistisk beredskab*'. Engaging

more activists at a high level is a clear ambition as well, thus we need to encourage and clarify the journey from signing up as a digital activist to participating in the physical activist community.

Furthermore, our campaigns and communication on social media are effective ways of offering our supporters and followers different options to sign up as activists.

Another entry point is to improve the involvement of our members and offer them more options on how to become activists. We want to activate the potential of our members, by being more proactive in our communication of the possibilities for engaging in activism activities, both with new and former members.

#### c) An efficient communication platform

If we want to create a movement it is necessary to have a communication platform which connects our activists and leaves them with the feeling of working towards a shared goal, even when their activities differ. We have started implementing the use of the online platform Discord, which makes it easier for our activists to organise and communicate across the country. The platform has already shown us the first examples of productive collaborations between activists from Aarhus and Copenhagen.

Additionally, all activists will have access to a calendar with a visualisation of the biggest events and activities of each activist group. This will increase the awareness of the activities in other groups and the possibilities for collaborations or participation in campaigns across the groups.

The goals listed above are the concrete actions we are implementing during this strategy period, and are a way for us as an organisation to create the best conditions for long-term commitment, influence and integration of the activists in the organisation. These goals are necessary for us to create agency in a diverse movement which will question the status quo and has the courage to challenge the power structures creating the growing inequality we live under today.

#### **How do we measure our success?**

Prior to the initiation of the work on the activist strategy a survey was sent out to all former and current activists, and their answers are what forms the basis of many of the initiatives described in this strategy. In order to measure if we have succeeded with the intentions of the strategy we are going to make a qualitative mid-term evaluation in collaboration with the activists to see if we are going in the right direction. By the end of the strategic period we are going to send out a survey as well to do a follow up on the parameters described below, which we would like to measure in order to finally assess if the strategy has been a success.

Goal from the sub-strategy: more activists from 30 to 120

Possible goals for the activist strategy:

Goal 1

- a) 120 activists have completed an Activist Seminar
- b) 80 activists have participated in the annual Activist Assembly.
- c) 50% of our activists are using the available online courses, and find them to be relevant for their work.

Goal 2

- Campaigns, political influencing and activism are closely linked and we can show results and documented influence where our activists have played a crucial part, twice a year.
- At least 80% of our activists agree fully or largely that there is a close relation between the secretariat and the activists.
- 80% of the activists agree that they are involved in a meaningful way in our campaigns and political work.

Goal 3

- a) We have activist groups in all the big university cities; Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg, Odense and Roskilde.

We have managed to engage students from professional educations in our work and created a solid foundation for a stronger activist engagement amongst non-academic educations.

10% of our activists are studying or have a professional education.

- b) We manage to involve our members in offline activities at least twice a year.
- c) 80% of our activists use Discord as their main communication platform.