

Oxfam celebrates 75 years of giving

A Pre-reading activities

1. Who gives how much money to charities? Take a guess.

	1	2	3
a) What percentage of the world population donates money to charities regularly?	5%	17%	30%
b) Which country's inhabitants give most often to charities?	Australia	Germany	Sweden
c) What percentage of Germany's population donates money to charities regularly?	30%	50%	70%
d) To which cause do British people donate most?	animal suffering	poverty alleviation	medical research
e) How much do German people donate on average per year?	€130	€300	€500

2. The motto on Oxfam's website states "We will always act, we will speak out, and we won't live with poverty." Before you read the article celebrating Oxfam's 75th anniversary, discuss these questions with a partner:

- What kind of work does Oxfam do?
- What are the basic human rights?
- What is an NGO?
- What exactly is a fair trade product?
- What criticism might be aimed at an international non-government charity like Oxfam?



B Now read the text and answer the questions at the end.

The Oxfam difference

"One child dies of hunger every ten seconds." (*Enough Food for Everyone IF* campaign, 2013)

Oxfam is one of the big international charities working to fight hunger and the other effects of poverty around the world. Last year the organisation helped 5.4 million people to access clean water and another 270,000 people to improve their crops and to increase other sources of income.

How it all began

In 1942, the Second World War was still raging, food production around the world was lower than usual and transporting food across battle lines to where it was needed was often impossible. In Greece, the people were suffering more than in many other European countries. At that time Greece was occupied by the plundering German and Italian armies and consequently Britain and the Allies blocked supply lines into Greece. After the Great Famine in the winter of 1941 when tens of thousands of Greeks died of hunger, a movement started in Britain to persuade the government

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to allow food across the Allied blockade. A group of people in Oxford, England, including Quakers and academics from the university, formed the *Oxford Committee for Famine Relief* to add their voices to the calls for food relief. From this time the charity has expanded to fight hunger and poverty in other parts of the world. In 1965 the name was shortened to Oxfam. Oxfam has grown into an international association of charities in countries all over the world.

Examples of Oxfam's work

Today Oxfam's work is aimed at poverty relief around the world. Its mission is to help people living in poverty to "exercise their human rights". These include the right to life, the right to social services and the right to be heard. Oxfam tries to work with local organisations in poverty-stricken areas but will also work with people suffering from poverty or injustice directly.



One example of the agency's work is in Cambodia, where almost half of the population lacks access to clean drinking water and a large percentage live in poverty, although the country is actually quite rich in resources. One problem has been that poorer people have had no legal access to the land and to the natural resources. Therefore, as well as helping to provide clean drinking water, Oxfam has been educating people about their rights and about improving labour processes to provide them with a better income.

While concentrating on poverty reduction, Oxfam has also become more political over the last 75 years. It campaigned against apartheid in South Africa and is working to improve the quality of life in Palestine, where poverty is caused mostly by the continual conflict with Israel. This non-governmental organisation (NGO) also works on issues like health education, gender equality and climate change.

Unique donations

More than 500,000 people in the UK donate money to Oxfam regularly, but the charity also makes millions of pounds every year through its shops. In 2008, for example, over £17 million were made by Oxfam's shops in the UK alone. The first Oxfam shop was opened in 1948 in Oxford. Local residents donated unwanted items which were then bought for reasonable prices by more needy people. The number of shops slowly increased and currently there are 750 shops in the UK, 52 in Germany and over 1200 around the world. Today, alongside the donated books and clothes, the shops also sell fair trade products, for example chocolate and coffee, from Africa, Asia or South America, making sure that the farmers and manufacturers are paid fairly for their work. A third source of income is from single donations like from sponsored events or through "Oxfam Unwrapped," a website which sells chicks for Easter, donkeys for birthdays and pairs of goats for wedding presents, for example. Shoppers can choose a present which then goes somewhere it can be used, whilst the friend or relative receives a fridge magnet and a card explaining how their present is improving somebody's life.

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Criticism

When somebody donates to a charitable organisation, their first questions have to be: how much of this money will actually go to help people and will the donation achieve any positive results? Oxfam states on its website that of every pound donated, 82 pence go directly to help people in need, 10 pence cover the costs of running the organisation and 8 pence are spent on advertising. However, one journalist who used to work for Oxfam said that the charity puts too much effort and money into supporting itself. One reason for this is that all international organisations need a big body of paid full-time staff to coordinate and run themselves. Oxfam, for example, has its own research department which helps decide how and where money should be spent. Some critics point out that Oxfam's figures are unreliable and therefore misleading. One report stated that Oxfam and other NGO aid agencies have difficulty effectively evaluating how beneficial their work has been.



Oxfam has reacted to these critical reports by becoming more transparent and setting up a project along with other agencies to achieve improved evaluation.

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- Where does the name Oxfam come from?
 - Where does the money come from which makes Oxfam's work possible?
 - Apart from its charity work, what else does Oxfam spend the donations on?

C Class Discussion.

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Experts argue that foreign aid does little if nothing to relieve poverty. In the past, charitable foreign agencies have tried to assist farmers, for example, in Brazil by supporting them and encouraging them to grow crops which increased their income for a very short time but made their land worthless in the long run. The aid was detrimental rather than beneficial. Some believe that people should not try to ease their consciences by donating money but should rather work to achieve political solutions.

Discuss the pros and cons of charities.

D Mission Statements.

Oxfam's mission statement is “Working with thousands of local partner organisations, we work with people living in poverty striving to exercise their human rights, assert their dignity as full citizens and take control of their lives.”

Write a mission statement for yourself.

Teacher's page

A Pre-reading activities

As there are no dependable official statistics on worldwide charitable giving, the numbers in this section should be taken only as approximations. The numbers come mostly from consumer surveys and vary from year to year.

Solutions:

1.

a) 3; b) 1; c) 2; d) 3; e) 1

2.

a) What work does Oxfam do?

Oxfam works to reduce poverty and support human rights around the world.

b) What are the basic human rights?

The complete list can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> 

or in an abbreviated form:

http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-5/8_udhr-abbr.htm 

Those mentioned in the text include right to life, the right to social services and the right to be heard.

c) What is an NGO?

An NGO is **non-governmental organisation** which is independent of national or international governments. They are usually understood to be non-profit organisations.

d) What exactly is a fair trade product?

A fair trade product is an item which has been produced or grown in a developing country and for which the people who made or grew it receive a fair price.

e) What criticism might be aimed at an international non-government charity like Oxfam?

Oxfam has been criticised for spending too much money on the running of the organisation; using unreliable figures when giving information on what it has achieved, and for not evaluating the effects which its work has on the beneficiaries.

B Questions

a) Where does the name Oxfam come from?

Oxfam comes from the original name: **O**xford committee for **f**amine relief.

b) Where does the money come from which makes Oxfam's work possible?

The money comes mainly from three sources: regular private donations, Oxfam's shops and single donations which are often made through its website Oxfam Unwrapped.

c) Apart from its charity work, what else does Oxfam spend the donations on?

Oxfam spends 10% of donations on running the organisation, for example, paying its employees, and another 8% on advertising costs.