South Africa is affected by unequal health care, poor education, disease and discrimination

Oxfam’s work in South Africa began in 1956 with a grant of £250 to feed poor children in the country. These feeding programmes continued throughout the 1960s, with more than £90,000 allocated to various agencies involved in a number of feeding projects. The programme gradually expanded as we established a network of contacts, mainly with church representatives, and included a range of development activities in townships and rural areas.

Today we work with partners and allies to campaign and advocate for poor and marginalised people’s rights to be recognised and enforced.

We work very closely with South African civil society organisations, helping them make their voices heard. It’s vital for Oxfam to allow local civil society to drive the agenda, identifying the important issues and how change needs to happen.

Oxfam also provides financial support to a number of partner organisations in the country. These organisations work with communities and groups to:

• secure immigrants’ rights
• achieve equitable health care for all South Africans
• promote dignity and support for people affected by HIV and AIDS
• ensure equality for all women and men
• improve poor people’s ability to contribute to the growing economy and reap the benefits

Photo: Kaya Ngwenya

HOW OXFAM IS HELPING

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IN NUMBERS *

An Oxfam supported peer educator who carries out life skills sessions educating children about how to protect themselves against HIV and AIDS.

South Africa is a country of vast contrasts, with the second most unequal distribution of income in the world.

• World-class health care systems cater for only 16% of the population, while most people have to rely on an under-funded, under-resourced and inefficient state health care system.

• The education system is failing learners, with less than 50% of students passing their final year in school.

• The country is experiencing an influx of refugees (estimated at 5 million people, or about 10% of the national population), mainly from other African countries. These illegal immigrants hope to eke out a living in the economic engine of Africa, only to be shunned by society and ignored by state institutions, leading to violent xenophobic attacks.

• One in every four people in the country is HIV-positive

• Gender-based violence cripples the social fabric of the society.

Although South Africa is classified as a middle-income country, more than 47% of its population lives below the poverty line. Most people of the “Rainbow Nation” are excluded from reaping the benefits of a land endowed with vast natural resources, world-class legislation, and a democracy that should be protecting the poor and vulnerable.

3,500 total people directly helped

*Direct beneficiary figures for the period 2010-11
We focus on two areas: gender-based violence, and women’s political and economic leadership. We especially focus on women’s rights, and aim to ensure that women are at the centre of all Oxfam’s work.

We support civil society work that focuses on providing health services and support to victims of gender-based violence, engages with the criminal justice system, and tries to improve rates of reporting. We also support civil society work to address deeply rooted and culturally ingrained beliefs about violence against women – to provide opportunities for long-term sustainable change at individual, institutional and societal levels.

We aim to ensure that women are able to exercise critical leadership in processes, issues and structures that further their needs and interests, and address unequal power relations between women and men. We focus on ensuring that women have the urgency and ability to access and exercise the rights available to them.

Elphina Ngubane, a volunteer for the Sibambisene Community Centre, at an Oxfam-supported garden project

We aim to ensure that people living in poverty – particularly women and marginalised groups – can realise their rights to essential services and live dignified lives. Government delivery of essential services is key to South Africa’s achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and engages policymakers and political leaders to implement their development commitments in line with the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We promote universal access to efficient public health services in response to South Africa’s high disease rates – particularly HIV and AIDS – and rising maternal and child mortality rates. In partnership with a broad range of civil society actors, we work to develop national health campaigns and advocacy initiatives that empower citizens, to demand their constitutional right to health and to participate in democratic health policy making.

We’re working closely with CORMSA to improve security for non-nationals living in South Africa.

We’re also working with partners to explore opportunities to campaign and lobby the South African Government on its wider role in peace and security issues in Africa and beyond – including its role in global and continental peacekeeping processes, particularly in Zimbabwe, DRC, Sudan, and other countries where there is conflict or crisis, as well as at the African Union and United Nations levels.

A volunteer HIV and AIDS peer educator with Oxfam’s partner organisation TzAAAP waves condoms and sings safer sex messages to raise awareness about the virus.

We focus on South Africa’s role in conflict prevention and humanitarian relief, in the country and elsewhere in Africa. We meet emergency humanitarian needs when duty bearers fail to respond.

We help build organisations’ capacity and strengthen the voices of the most vulnerable people, particularly people living with HIV.

We work with other Oxfam affiliates and offices in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and on the continent, to influence South Africa to play a more effective role in dealing with people’s movement across borders. With our partner CORMSA (the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa), we’re lobbying the Government to deal internally with the human security issues of migrants and refugees, and to act as a key regional player, engaging with SADC and the African Union.

To maximise its effectiveness, we will explore the possibility of linking our work around human security issues with other Oxfam regional and international advocacy and campaign initiatives.

Photo: Matthew Willman/Oxfam Australia

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We also link grassroots health-based work by South African partners and social movements to Pan-African and global campaigns, including Oxfam’s Health and Education For All campaign and its Fair Play for Africa campaign, to urge governments to reach their health Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015, and to allocate an increased proportion of their national budgets to health care provision so that health for all becomes a reality.

Photo: Paul Weinberg/Oxfam Australia

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ENSURING PEOPLE HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

We aim to ensure that poor people can access the resources they need to escape poverty. We work closely with local NGOs and civil society organisations to identify the key economic barriers and collectively engage with the Government and the private sector to determine what can be done to overcome these issues. We look at two main areas: land and water, and access to markets.

We promote women’s and men’s rights to the support they need to make an economic success of their land. And we examine the impact of large-scale government initiatives on people’s ability to access land and water.

South Africa has many good laws and policies aimed at helping small-scale producers, yet little progress has been made to improve the conditions within which they operate. The South African retail sector also plays an interesting role in providing access to markets for small-scale producers, both within South Africa, and in other African countries where South African retailers operate.

We also work on climate change. We believe that those who will be affected most by climate change are people with poor access to resources, and small-scale producers who depend heavily on the weather for the production of food.

We focus on these vulnerable people’s ability to adapt to a changing world. We work with NGOs and community-based organisations to understand the potential impact of climate change on their livelihoods, and what they are already doing to try to cope with these stresses.

With our partners we engage with policymakers to raise awareness that tackling climate change is not only about a reduction in emissions, but is also vital in helping to overcome poverty.