NEW YEAR, NEW ASPIRATIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES

Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India talks about the year gone by and future plans for Oxfam India in an interview with Aparna Apte Gupta, Communications Manager, Oxfam India.

What have been the most memorable moments and challenges in Oxfam India’s journey in 2013?

One of the biggest accomplishments this year has been our humanitarian work. In 2013 we responded to four disasters simultaneously. Our humanitarian team not only responded to the big natural disasters in Uttarakhand and Odisha, but also extended their support in two conflict affected areas – Kokrajhar and Chirang in Assam and Muzzaffarnagar in UP. These are four of Oxfam India’s focus states. We extended our support beyond immediate relief to aid the recovery efforts for people facing challenging situations in the area.

Conflict areas are harder to handle since there is a lot of pain, suffering, anger and also security issues for our staff and partners. Oxfam India’s humanitarian team handled it really professionally and we are extremely proud of them.

Another big achievement of 2013 has been our Close the Gap campaign launched on 8th March coinciding with Women’s Day. Our attempt is to link our programme work at the grassroots level to our advocacy work with the government and try to influence policies and systems that perpetuate inequality. We also work on changing peoples’ attitudes to bring about social change. Our vision is to reduce inequality between not just men and women but also the rich and poor, and the people belonging to different castes, religions and all the divisions that exist in our country. Through this campaign, using both traditional methods of mobilizing people on ground and newer methods like digital media, helpline numbers and community radio, we managed to engage 5 lakh people across Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and in some of the most remote parts of India and asked them how they could bring about change in their own society.

The third area that I must mention is Fundraising. One of the many ways we are trying to engage people, is our marquee event – Trailwalker in which teams of 4 come and walk a 100 kms within 48 hours. The participants not only become our fundraisers, but also raise awareness about our causes. Our 2013 Bengaluru edition of Trailwalker was hugely successful and six months later we launched yet another addition of Trailwalker in Mumbai. The response has been so encouraging that we hope to build this further and engage corporate employees and the average Indian middle class person into becoming keen supporters and fundraisers for Oxfam India.

Oxfam India has completed five years as an Indian NGO. What are your learnings in these years?

Oxfam India is now a member of Indian civil society and we see ourselves as a catalyst for change. We are trying to ensure that every single human being has the right to a life of dignity and is able to realize that right. We believe that each and every person in India can make a difference. But the challenge is how do we encourage each person to take on an active role? Our biggest learning is that change is very hard. But the silver lining is that we have a very young population – 50% are under the age of 30 – and changing hearts, minds and attitudes of the youth is easier which gives us a real opportunity for change. We also have a critical mass of the middle class who is now waking up to fight for its rights. The anti-corruption movement, people coming out and marching on the streets after the gang-rape in Delhi, the recent Delhi elections are signs of something different beginning to happen in India. Oxfam India wants to build on this mood and energy.

Campaigning today is much easier than it was 5 years ago when we went door to door spreading our message; whereas now with the use of technology we can reach out to millions of people with greater ease and align them to our causes. I believe it is a very good moment to be in India playing the role of a catalyst to bring about social change.

What are the priorities of Oxfam India for the year 2014?

2014 is a special year in India because the national elections are coming up. Oxfam India would like to see poor peoples’ priorities reflected in the election manifestos for the next election.

We recently carried out the “My World” survey which went to 12,000 poor and marginalized households and gave them 16 issues to rank to get an understanding of their priorities. Not surprisingly, the top three priorities for the poor are quality education for all, jobs and healthcare. Hence these are the three things Oxfam India would like all governments in power to promise for India. Despite double digit growth, India has reduced poverty at a very slow rate than the others. We believe we have a great opportunity to shape the next five years by influencing the election manifestos and have a very critical six months ahead of us.

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CLOSE THE GAP LAUNCH
A three-year program 'Close the Gap' that focuses on bridging the divide between the rich and the poor, and between rural Bharat and urban India, was launched in March 2013. The campaign challenges inequality and urges both society and government to radically change the way they treat marginalized groups including tribals, women, Muslims and Dalits.

INEQUALITY TOWNHALL
Oxfam India organized a townhall to deliberate on the vision of creating an equal opportunity land. The public was invited to discuss inequality related issues with an influential panel of eminent people from diverse backgrounds. 400 people attended the Inequality Townhall in person and 1.2 million people across the world were engaged through Twitter.

REBUILDING LIVES
We responded to four big disasters – Uttarakhand, Odisha, Muzaffarnagar and Assam. We reached out to over 2,00,000 people through our humanitarian team. We provided safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, emergency shelter, dry food ration, hygiene kits and did cash transfers for livelihoods.

DEMANDING RIGHT TO EDUCATION
An initiative “Making Right to Education Work” for tribal and girl children was launched in Odisha. Through this initiative, children in 32 villages are gaining primary education.

TRIBALS GAIN ACCESS TO FOREST LAND
Tribal communities in 34 villages of Chhattisgarh gained legal access to their own land under the Forest Rights Act. Chief Minister distributed Community Forest Rights (CFR) titles to these villages. These rights become vital for the communities in order to save their land from getting diverted for development projects.

GIVE WOMEN THEIR SHARE
As part of the national campaign, 3000 women farmers participated in a convention held in Patna to demand their right to be recognized as a farmer. A month-long national campaign was launched in October to raise the rights of women over property in India.

FREE MEDICINE CAMPAIGN
We launched a campaign to push for distribution of free medicines through Government hospitals and health centers. Over 35,000 people called in to raise their voice for demanding free medicines. Over 1,000 telegrams and 26,000 post cards were sent to the Prime Minister to fulfill his promise of providing free medicines at public health centres.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM
We campaigned during 16 Days of Activism to create awareness on ending violence against women. Rallys and runs were organized in Jharkhand, UP, Bihar and Delhi to mobilize women and men to take a stand against violence. Oxfam India also staged a play by Nandita Das and Subodh Maskara in Delhi on inequality in relationships. Over 1300 individuals attended the play and joined the debate on gender equality.

TRAILWALKER
The 2nd Bengaluru Trailwalker in January 2013 raised INR 2.5 crores with 164 teams participating on a picturesque trail starting from Pearl Valley in Anekal, and ending at Bidadi.

Oxfam India also made a debut of Trailwalker in Mumbai in November 2013. It saw 70 teams walk the pristine and stunning trail, nestled in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Western Ghats.

REACHED 60,000 people in Odisha with emergency shelter and other basic need items. Supported 40,000 people in Uttarakhand.

The initiative covers 32 villages of 8 Gram Panchayats in Odisha.

The campaign mobilized over 3000 women farmers in Patna.

Kits flying in Lucknow to spread awareness on ending violence against women.

Over 1,000 telegrams and 26,000 post cards were sent to the Prime Minister.
In the current world politics scenario with India coming up as an emerging super-power, where does Oxfam India stand as a voice in Oxfam International?

Oxfam GB was set up in Great Britain in 1942 and it still remains the largest of all the 17 Oxfams. Even now 15 of the 17 affiliates are northern and there are only Oxfam Mexico and Oxfam India that represent what we call the global south. A very interesting feature is that the large middle income countries are now home both to 80% of the world’s poor and to global power. The world has moved from a G8 world to a G20 world which is much more multi-polar. Today, without India, China, Mexico or Brazil, you cannot get a WTO deal, or a deal on climate change or on any other global issue. Oxfam International has realised the need to really move from being a club of northern Oxfams to being truly representative of this new global balance by expanding our membership so that we have many more southern voices around the table. By 2020 we will expand from the current 17 to 25 affiliates with the new eight from the southern voices. 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What is your New Year message to all Oxfam India staff?

We’ve had a very busy 2013 completing 5 years of being Oxfam India and completing the alignment of our programmes to the strategy we had laid for ourselves. The last two big changes we made in 2013 were relocating the Mumbai and Hyderabad offices and moving them to Chhattisgarh and Bhubaneswar respectively. Now finally, all our resources, energy and efforts are focused on the 7 focus states that we picked, which are the poorest 7 states of India. We can now expect to see a big difference in the way we’ll proceed in 2014. Campaigning will be very important to bring about social change. We are now in the process of stock-taking of how well we’ve done so far, but also designing the strategy for 2015 – 2020. I expect that to be a very energizing experience that should pull us all together to think about how we can move forward as a team and maximize impact. I am confident that everybody will contribute to that exercise and I believe that every idea is important. We need to shape Oxfam India together for the next five years.

BECOME A ‘FRIEND OF OXFAM’!

Donate Monthly to empower the lives of poor and marginalised and bring a lasting change. Your monthly contribution will help us continue in our mission to create a more equal, just, and sustainable world.

Enclosed is my first monthly donation of

Rs. 500 Provide coaching support to lagging children
Rs. 800 Create awareness to reduce acceptance of violence against women
Rs. 500 Create Awareness on health and hygiene in disaster prone areas.

I wish to donate by Credit Card
☐ Visa ☐ Master Card

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I wish to donate by ECS

Please contact our Loyalty Programme Team at +91 (0) 11 4653 8000 Ext. 118/ 140 between 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM from Monday to Friday to sign up your monthly pledge and become a ‘Friend of Oxfam’.

All donations are 50% tax deductible U/S 80G of IT Act, 1961. All donations in favour of Humanitarian Response and Disaster Risk Reduction are 100% tax deductible U/S 35AC of IT Act, 1961.

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