Nisha Agrawal, Chief Executive Officer, Oxfam India, looks back on the year gone by and talks about the fresh challenges that the New Year is going to bring in an interview with Priyanka Gupta, Communications Officer, Oxfam India.

What do you think were some of the biggest achievements for Oxfam India in 2012?

I would like to start by saying how deeply shocked and saddened all of us at Oxfam India are by the brutal death of the young student in Delhi last week. We salute her strength and courage. Our prayers are with her near and dear ones in these difficult times. Oxfam India has a huge program on violence against women and we will continue our work to end violence and discrimination against women and girls in India (see accompanying article). Hopefully this young student’s death will be a turning point for the nation.

Coming back to Oxfam India, we got formed on September 1, 2008 and so are now a little over four years old. In these four years, we have achieved a lot. Firstly, we have a clear strategy in place on how to support the struggles of the most marginalized and dispossessed people in India, especially those living in the most lagging states of India. Secondly, after a period of transition, we have about 180 partners and a strong grassroots program that is finally almost fully aligned to the strategy. Thirdly, in 2012, for the first time, we have built our capacity for undertaking research so that our policy work is based largely on evidence from the grassroots work. We have also been able to articulate some important policy positions for Oxfam India such as on the proposed Mining Law, the proposed Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Recompensation (LARR) Law, the policy on universal access to health care, the implementation of the Domestic Violence Law, and so on. Fourthly, in our humanitarian response work, for the first time since Oxfam India was formed, we responded to the consequences of both a natural disaster (floods) as well as a conflict in Assam. Fifthly, we have continued to build strong financial management systems so that we have had a clean audit every single year of our being. Sixthly, we have a very distinguished and engaged board and very strong governance systems in place. And last, but not the least, we have just put in place a sound fundraising strategy that will help us build a stronger and more sustainable fundraising base in the future.

What are the challenges to local fund raising and how do you think Oxfam India can move forward to be sustainable in the future?

Becoming financially sustainable is the major challenge and the major focus for Oxfam India in 2013 and in the medium term. Since India is now a middle income country, aid to India has fallen off, with even DFID (UK) announcing that they will withdraw aid to India. Yet India is still the home to 456 million poor people, with 42 percent of its children malnourished and with poor performance on most social indicators, including especially on women’s empowerment.

The Indian rich individuals and the corporate sector have yet to step in to fill this gap of funding to civil society that used to come from traditional aid donors, and so all of civil society is currently struggling for funding. The trends, however, are promising and...
Countdown to Oxfam India Trailwalker 2013

Less than a month to go for our mega event – Oxfam India Trailwalker 2013 and everyone in the Bangalore office are in high spirits! We are getting charged by numbers every day. We have already registered 165 teams, over Rs 40 lakh has already been raised and 9 teams have qualified for the fundraising awards by raising over Rs 1 lakh. In addition, over 26 teams have already crossed the minimum fundraising target.

Two thirds of our teams this year are Bangalore based but we also have participants from 10 nationalities. Majority of the teams are mixed-teams and 8 are all-women teams. Participants from over 24 corporates have registered. Many corporates this year are also matching the funds that their employees are raising which will significantly increase the money we can infuse in the 6 Oxfam India projects that are identified.

With all this enthusiasm and buzz, we are hoping to cross 175 teams by the closing date of registration – January 1, 2013.

With all the logistics arrangements now in the process of being put in place, the next big day would be the Briefing Night on January 18. Teams will be able to check-in from January 18 to avoid last day rush at the start point.
Oxfam India strongly condemns the brutal sexual assault and subsequent death of a young woman in Delhi and calls for immediate systemic response to the increasing trend of violence against women in the country. It also calls for broader reforms around women’s empowerment through concrete measures including the long pending bill on Women’s Reservation in the Parliament.

The widespread anger of the past two weeks following the brutal sexual assault of a young woman in Delhi and her subsequent death is symbolic of all the violence women continue to face in the country. “Violence is an endemic part of a woman in India during her entire life cycle, from womb to tomb”, said Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India. The situation is worse for women from the Scheduled Caste communities as is indicated in the 19 rape cases against dalit women in Haryana in one month alone in the recent past. As more women come to occupy public spaces, which were hitherto male dominated, such incidents act as an unstated message that women are not welcome in public life. It is alarming that violence against women has increased 873 percent in the past 40 years (National Crime Records Bureau, 2011) while the conviction rate for rape has plummeted from 46 per cent in 1971 to 26 per cent in 2010. Deeply-entrenched gender biases in our laws, our police force, our judiciary and other state institutions continue to act as deterrents for women survivors to seek justice. “Widespread attitudes in society that, until recently, accepted such violence as a routine matter without expressing any outrage also continue to lead to the high levels of violence that we witness today”, reiterates Nisha.

It is time to change both these. Oxfam India would like to see the following:

- Stronger implementation of the existing laws including Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act and its adequate financing;
- Immediate passage of the pending bill on Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace by the Rajya Sabha, already passed by the Lok Sabha in September this year;
- Passage of the Women’s Reservation Bill in the next session of the Parliament. The Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha on the 9th of March 2010. It will be a fitting tribute to pass it in the Lok Sabha before the International Women’s Day, celebrated on 8th March every year;
- Adequate representation of women in other government structures like judiciary and police at all levels through affirmative action;
- A larger effort to challenge and change patriarchal mindsets and attitudes. Oxfam India’s ongoing campaign “We Can” calls upon all the citizens of this country to undertake a pledge that they will neither tolerate nor encourage violence against women under any circumstance.

Oxfam India pledges to reinvigorate its campaign on ending violence against women, while calling for the economic, social and political empowerment of women. Ending on an optimistic note Nisha feels, “This brutal incident is definitely a turning point for the citizens of India. At the beginning of 2013, we hope the government will give us an opportunity to celebrate by ensuring concrete actions towards the realization of every woman’s right to a violence-free life. It is also worth celebrating that the citizens of India are recognizing their own responsibility for creating such a hostile environment for women and girls in India and are willing to take steps to ensure an end to this violence.”

julie@oxfamindia.org
Enclosed is my first donation of

Rs. 6000/- towards providing learning material for 5 children.

Rs. 4000/- towards empowerment of 5 women belonging to poor and marginalised communities and to ensure a violence free lives for them.

Rs. 3000/- to provide emergency survival material and rehabilitation to 3 families affected by a natural calamity.

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