The Oxfam Business Advisory Service (OBAS) provides companies with advice and guidance on key issues and challenges in their sustainability strategies, with the aim of driving forward more positive business practices and contributing to a future where business plays a leading role in overcoming poverty, respecting human rights and empowering women.

OBAS has been established to build on Oxfam’s wealth of experience working with the private sector on social sustainability issues in which we:

• Campaign for change in corporate policy and practice when workers are unable to access their fundamental rights, or business is unintentionally harming the most vulnerable.

• Collaborate and work with companies to analyse issues and create lasting solutions to the underlying causes of poverty.

• Advocate for more progressive policies to enable businesses to achieve more responsible and inclusive outcomes.
OUR EXPERTISE:

We aim to further increase our impact and reach by enabling more companies to benefit from Oxfam’s expertise, offering advice, support and, where needed, stretch on the following areas of work:

• Human & Labour Rights for workers in global supply chains, supporting companies to go “beyond audit” to understand salient human rights risks and their root causes – enabling them to implement stronger and more robust responsible sourcing strategies.

• Improving the resilience, rights and livelihoods of smallholder farmers supplying key agricultural commodities in global supply chains.

• Addressing gender inequalities and women’s economic empowerment, with a strong focus on systemic challenges including arduous unpaid care responsibilities and the impact of damaging social norms, and how to change them.

• Measuring the social impact of a company’s existing sustainability strategies and frameworks through analysis and feedback.

• Advising on how to improve Monitoring & Evaluation processes to support on the above.

Our work supports many of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals - contributing to eliminating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and decent work, achieving clean water and sanitation for all, and reducing inequalities.

OUR APPROACH IS:

Focused on enabling you to have a greater understanding of your organisation’s social impact on the people throughout its value chain, from smallholder farmer to consumer.

Gender led as women constitute a large proportion of the global workforce, but are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and low pay (earning on average 25% less than men for the same work). However, with the right intervention, they have enormous potential to thrive and, in turn, help business to thrive.

Systems based – whilst providing advice on immediate issues, we also look at the broader context and the root causes behind these issues.

Global – Oxfam operates in over 90 countries so can offer “boots on the ground” presence, enabling us to bring local insight and presence to engagements at a country level. We have an understanding of, and links to, key stakeholders including national governments, local civil society organisations and business, critical to sensitive projects such as Human Rights Impacts Assessments.

Practical – drawing on a range of diagnostic tools, frameworks and guides developed by Oxfam, and adapted for business contexts.

Challenging – driving positive impact for poorer workers and producers in global supply chains is the primary goal of all our work and, where necessary, we will be a critical friend offering stretch and constructive challenge.

Rigorous – we bring a strong foundation of Monitoring and Evaluation processes to all we do, reporting and assessing against these frameworks.
HUMAN & LABOUR RIGHTS WORK:

We have worked with companies including Unilever, Marks & Spencer, Burberry, Mars and Finnish retailer, SOK, to advise them on key human rights challenges in their supply chains. Our work on human rights is guided by the conventions of the International Labour Organization, the Ethical Trading Initiative’s Base Code and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Working with companies, we identify the impacts of conventional purchasing practices on smallholder and factory workers’ lives, and then suggest interventions and different ways to working to improve these.

Supporting M&S to understand and further embed human rights in its supply chain

Oxfam has been working with M&S to help them develop a deeper understanding of the connection between its sourcing practices and human rights impacts, with research focusing on suppliers within its UK food supply chain and footwear suppliers in India. This research project focused on parts of their UK food suppliers and footwear suppliers in India, with Oxfam interviewing workers at a number of sites to develop a deeper understanding of how M&S could deliver its Plan A commitments on gender including empowering women in its supply chain, improving workers voice, and delivering a living wage.

SOK Group: Identifying opportunities to raise human rights performance

In 2018 Oxfam conducted a focused Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) of SOK Corporation’s Italian processed tomato supply chains to help the company move beyond audits. We assessed the company’s practices over six months, identifying current human rights impacts and opportunities for positive change within its tomato production in Italy, in line with the UNGPs. Importantly, we advised on best practice approaches to raising standards and SOK are now moving forward with some of the recommendations.

Supporting development of company sustainability strategies

We have experience of playing formal advisory roles and have fed into the development of sustainability strategies of leading companies including:

- IKEA’s People and Planet Positive strategy.
- M&S’ Plan A development.
- Burberry’s Impact Advisory Committee, advising on Burberry’s 2022 Responsibility Agenda.
- Unilever’s Sustainable Living Plan.
WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT WORK:

**Oxfam and Unilever We-Care:**

*Giving women power over their hours*

Oxfam has worked with Unilever at length to help it understand and address the challenge of Unpaid Care in its markets and operations. We recently worked together to create the Business Briefing on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work, which urges businesses to take action to address the heavy and unequal burden of unpaid care that women are faced with, and transform the way their employees, suppliers and consumers think about the role of women in society.

Our experts offer advice and support in a variety of formats including workshops, feedback and advice on company sustainability strategies, deep dive research reports on specific countries and supply chains, as well as Human Rights Impacts Assessments.

Fees paid to the Oxfam Business Advisory Service are fed back into Oxfam’s broader mission to end global poverty.

To find out more about how Oxfam can support you to improve the impact of your social sustainability strategy contact us at privatesector@oxfam.org.uk