



Global campaign presses food and beverage companies to respect land rights

Oxfam's global *Behind the Brands* campaign harnesses consumer, public, and investor pressure to change the way the ten largest food and beverage companies do business. These companies have enormous power over their supply chains and can move the agricultural industry toward greater respect for human rights and the environment. Oxfam ranked the ten companies – including Coca-Cola and PepsiCo – on their public commitments and sourcing policies around seven themes, one of which land. By 2014, several of the ten companies had made far-reaching commitments on land rights. Now, Oxfam is looking at how they are being implemented.

PRINCIPAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Oxfam International, Oxfam affiliates

Location

Global

Timeline of the case

2013 – current

TARGET AUDIENCE

Food and beverage companies; consumer organisations; advocacy-based NGOs

KEYWORDS

multi-nationals, accountability, transparency, corporate responsibility, land grabbing

Good practices

towards making land governance more people-centred

This case study is part of the ILC's Database of Good Practices, an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting **people-centred land governance**, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members. Further information at www.landcoalition.org/news/antigua-declaration-ilc-members

This case study supports people-centred land governance as it contributes to:

- Commitment 1 Respect, protect, and strengthen the land rights of women and men living in poverty
- Commitment 2 ensure equitable land distribution and public investment that supports small-scale farming systems
- Commitment 7 ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive
- Commitment 8 ensure transparency and accountability
- Commitment 9 prevent and remedy land grabbing

Case description

Background and issues

Most poor people in the world – seventy-five percent, according to the World Bank – live in rural areas (World Bank, 2015). Many depend on their land for food and their livelihoods, and land is often closely tied to communities' cultural and spiritual life. Today, smallholder farmers grow significant portions of world's food, including up to 80 percent of the food supply in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (FAO, 2012).

Yet their livelihoods are at risk. Since 2001, millions of hectares of land have been sold or leased to international investors, according to research by the Land Matrix Partnership, much of it for agribusiness. The international investors are the primary beneficiaries of these transactions, while the local communities are often dispossessed of their resources (Oxfam, 2011). Affected communities often lack the means and resources to protect themselves against the powerful forces, often an alliance between governments and companies, driving the trade. They are left with little to support themselves and their families.

Food and beverage companies are not usually direct land holders, but they are major buyers of commodities grown on large plantations, often in countries plagued by land rights violations. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights make clear that companies have a responsibility to respect human rights throughout their supply chains. Though there is no human right to land, land rights are closely linked to other rights, such as the rights to food and self-determination. This means that food and beverage companies have a responsibility to help remedy adverse impacts on communities' land rights that their suppliers have caused or contributed to, and to take steps to mitigate risk of future harms. Companies haven't always acknowledged this responsibility.

Solution

As food and beverage companies care about their brand, Oxfam recognised an opportunity to help the companies take their responsibilities. In 2013 Oxfam launched *Behind the Brands*, a public campaign ranking ten of the world's largest food and beverage companies (the 'Big 10') on seven key human rights, social, and environmental issues in their supply chains. Land is one of these themes. The idea was this: public, consumer, and investor pressure can push food and beverage companies to improve their sourcing policies, as they don't want their brand associated with adverse human rights impacts. Since many food and beverage companies are competitors, Oxfam can cultivate a 'race to the top' toward responsible sourcing by ranking them against each other. As companies make new commitments, their suppliers will have to change how they do business to ensure they're adhering to their customers' higher standards. And this leads to greater respect for communities' land and human rights in the agricultural sector. Oxfam took this idea to Associated British Foods (ABF), Coca-Cola, Danone, General Mills, Kellogg, Mars, Mondelez International (previously Kraft Foods), Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever, assessing their policies on seven themes: land, women, small-scale farmers, farm workers, water, climate change, and transparency.

Periodically, Oxfam, through *Behind the Brands*, has focused its attention on how specific companies have contributed to specific human rights violations. These targeted campaigns are meant to push certain companies to adopt far-reaching policies on one of the themes over which they have particular leverage. Oxfam targeted Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Associated British Foods on land rights in sugar sourcing in 2013.

Activities

Prior to the 2013: Activities undertaken in preparation of the *Behind the Brands* campaign launch

The first step was planning and research. After coming up with the concept, Oxfam selected the companies to target, based on data for global revenue, as well as position in the Forbes 2000 annual rankings. Oxfam spent 18 months conducting research and engaging with the companies on the issues and their responsible sourcing policies.

Oxfam developed indicators for a scorecard. Except for those under the 'Transparency' theme, it grouped the scorecard indicators into four categories (each worth one quarter of the score available for that theme): (i) awareness; (ii) knowledge; (iii) commitments; and (iv) supply chain management. The transparency theme has a broader focus and evaluates companies for their disclosure on cross-cutting and corporate level issues. Companies' scores focus exclusively on publicly available policies and commitments.

February 2013: Launch of the *Behind the Brands* campaign

Oxfam went live with *Behind the Brands* in February 2013. It published a report on its findings, released the scorecard, and engaged supporters around the world. Six months into the campaign, more than 350,000 people had engaged with the campaign, 114,000 people signed the petition, 323,000 people visited the *Behind the Brands* website, and there were over 1,1 million page views.

At the beginning, all ten companies earned low scores on land rights. Most companies denied that land rights issues were of relevance to their businesses, as they don't directly own or purchase the land. That was soon to change.

October 2013: Exposing land grabs within the sugar supply chain

In October 2013, through *Behind the Brands*, Oxfam launched a targeted campaign on land. It released a report called *Sugar Rush* explaining the link between food and beverage companies and land rights violations in the sugar industry, and highlighting land conflicts in Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Associated British Foods' supply chains (Oxfam, 2013). Oxfam asked the companies to commit to: (1) "know and show" the risks and impacts they have on communities' land rights (by disclosing the top three suppliers and top sourcing countries and undertaking and publishing impact assessments); (2) commit to "zero tolerance for land grabbing" and ensure suppliers adhere to principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC); and (3) become a public champion and advocate for land rights towards suppliers, traders, other food and beverage companies, governments, and within sector initiatives.

Hundreds of stories in media outlets like the New York Times, the BBC, CNN and national news outlets from Brazil to the Netherlands highlighted cases of land grabs in these brands' supply chains. Nearly 270,000 people took action including signing petitions, posting messages to company Facebook and Twitter pages, and protesting outside company headquarters and at industry events around the world, sending a powerful message that companies could not ignore. In November, weeks after the launch of the spike, Coca-Cola adopted a new land rights policy. PepsiCo and other companies made similar commitments several months later. As a result, their land scores shot up in Oxfam's scorecard.

What's next?

Oxfam recognises that food and beverage companies' commitments to respect land rights is an important first step. Now, Oxfam is tracking how these companies are taking their policies from paper to practice. Oxfam will be continuing to engage with the companies on land issues, advising them when possible, and watching closely to make sure they follow through on their commitments.

Importance of the case for people-centred land governance

Food and beverage companies have a responsibility to respect the rights of those living and working in and along their agricultural supply chains. Oxfam has brought the land grabs to the attention of food and beverage companies. Many of which, as a result of *Behind the Brands*, have made far-reaching commitments to respect communities' land rights.

"Our community was so happy to hear about the Coca-Cola Company's promise to not tolerate land grabs in its supply chain [...] We have suffered so much at the hands of Coke's supplier, Mitr Phol. We are waiting for Coca-Cola to help end our hardship."

Hoy Mai, evicted from her home and farmland in Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia, in 2009.

Changes

Baseline

When Oxfam first scored the companies in 2013, seven of the ten companies earned the lowest possible score on land. None of the companies had committed to zero tolerance for land grabs, nor to adhere to the principles of FPIC for all communities.

Achievements

Today, four of the *Behind the Brands* companies – Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Unilever, and Nestlé – have made far-reaching commitments on land, including a zero tolerance for land grabs. Eight of the ten companies have committed to adhering to FPIC.

When Coca-Cola and PepsiCo made their commitments, they disclosed their top sugar suppliers, a helpful first step to increase transparency in opaque supply chains. Greater transparency opens the space for civil society and governments to engage sugar companies on land issues. Coca-Cola and PepsiCo's policies have also created a domino effect, influencing other companies, such as major intermediary producers and traders to turn their attention to land. Some *Behind the Brands* companies have committed to advocate for responsible land governance. Oxfam is looking into opportunities where companies can promote responsible land practices by using their influence among governments in sourcing countries, and in global forums like the Food and Agricultural Organisation and World Bank.

Evidence

Companies' land rights commitments are all public, and can be found on their websites. Additionally, Oxfam updates the *Behind the Brands* Scorecard periodically, most recently in October 2014, to account for companies' new commitments. Oxfam is tracking Coca-Cola and PepsiCo's progress toward implementing their land rights commitments against public roadmaps on the Oxfam website.

Lessons learned

Lessons for civil society

A strong campaign utilises a diverse toolkit

Oxfam combined various advocacy strategies in *Behind the Brands*, including (i) traditional print media and public stunts; (ii) creative and effective use of social media; (iii) strong research; (iv) collaboration with communities and partners on the ground; (v) investor engagements; and (vi) active engagement with target companies using evidence-based advocacy.

No company is too big not to listen to its customers

Organised public campaigns can play a critical role in pushing companies to make progress in changing their policies and practices – and brand-sensitivity plays a key role here.

Vocal consumers and forward-looking investors are a powerful force for change

Organised and committed people can push companies toward more responsible policies and practices. Indeed, companies do respond – and can do so quickly, and to great effect – when consumers take an active role in pushing them to commit to more responsible methods of production, precisely because of brand-sensitivity.

Constructive engagement starts with strong data and effective communication

Campaign asks must be clearly articulated, based on easily understandable messages grounded in fact and evidence.

Constructive but persistent dialogue can pay off

Putting strong public pressure on companies is important, and so is continuous engagement and dialogue with the targeted companies.

Lessons for policy makers

There are new opportunities to influence companies

The rise of new media, progressive investors and North-South NGO coalitions offer new opportunities to influence companies, particularly consumer-facing brands.

Companies work in wider contexts

It is not enough to ask companies to change their own operations; campaigns must look to the broader sphere of corporate influence, including (a) suppliers at all levels, and (b) relationships with industry groups, governments, and others. Organisations can find new ways to use corporate and investor influence to promote pro-poor ends.

Challenges

The campaign and advocacy asks were based on solid research and analysis, requiring a substantial investment in time and human resources. This was important to ensure credibility.

Another technical challenge was maintaining consistent messaging across countries, organisations, affiliates, and supporters.

Follow-up

Today, *Behind the Brands* continues to exert pressure on the big 10 companies. Oxfam updates the scorecard regularly to show progress, stasis or regression, and through the life of the campaign, goes through a yearly process of reviewing and improving the scorecard indicators. This process involves working with a range of stakeholders (including with companies), paying particular attention to new approaches to addressing supply chain issues.

Oxfam recognises companies' public commitments are just the first step. The next challenge is ensuring these new policies translate into substantive changes on the ground. As a next step to ensure respect for land rights, Oxfam created roadmaps, highlighting deadlines for Coca-Cola and PepsiCo based on their own commitments. Oxfam is tracking their progress against these roadmaps, and working to help the companies think through the many challenges they face implementing them. Notably, Oxfam is continuing to engage in the land grab cases it raised in its sugar report, working with and supporting partner organisations that are helping communities struggling for justice.

Supporting material

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Oxfam Land Roadmaps <http://www.behindthebrands.org/en/campaign-news/land-roadmap>

Contacts

Oxfam International

Suite 20, 266 Banbury Road

Oxford OX2 7DL

United Kingdom

Web: www.oxfam.org/en/research/behind-brands



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The [International Land Coalition \(ILC\)](#) is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to promote secure and equitable access to and control over land for poor women and men through advocacy, dialogue and capacity building.

The opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily constitute an official position of the International Land Coalition, nor of its members or donors.

Authors: Kate Geary (Oxfam International), Chloe Christman (Oxfam America) and Stefania Battistelli (ILC Secretariat). Last updated: February 2015. Printed on recycled/FSC paper.

International Land Coalition Secretariat

Via Paolo di Dono 44 , 00142 - Rome, Italy tel. +39 06 5459 2445 fax +39 06 5459 3445

info@landcoalition.org | www.landcoalition.org