



# INNOVATION. COLLABORATION. DELIVERY.

Oxfam's Humanitarian Work



**OXFAM**



# EMERGENCY FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS



OXFAM

Through its emergency food security and livelihoods work, Oxfam aims to meet people's immediate food and survival needs, contribute to the longer-term economic recovery of affected people and increase their resilience to future shocks.

If people are to survive disasters and recover from them, it is vital that they have access to sufficient food, and that they have the resources (income and other assets) to rebuild their livelihoods to ensure their future wellbeing.

## FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

**'Food security' exists when all people at all times have access to food of a sufficient quality and quantity for a healthy and active life.**

**A 'livelihood' refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living.**

### The importance of markets

Markets are the lifeline of most of the world's people, and responses must be based on a good understanding of key markets or they risk undermining livelihoods in the longer term. Market analysis is a critical part of Oxfam's emergency response. Understanding the key constraints (environmental, legal or logistical) and opportunities in those markets allows us to determine which range of response options will strengthen market systems for the future. Oxfam has also played a key role in the wider sector through its work developing tools for market support in emergencies.

Oxfam's approach is fundamentally market-based, delivering immediate aid through market structures, while supporting and strengthening markets more generally, assisting the development of enterprise or financial services, or rehabilitating infrastructure.

The options available range from cash transfers to in-kind responses such as food aid, and from agricultural support to social protection, depending on the context. Over the last few years, market based interventions have become one of Oxfam's most widely-used response mechanisms, often in the form of cash transfers. Through these market-based programmes, Oxfam seeks to increase the resilience of vulnerable people and the markets they depend upon. Oxfam works closely with traders and other market actors in an aim to strengthen local economies and ensure responses are more sustainable.

In addition to directly implementing programmes, Oxfam uses its experience and analysis to advocate for appropriate and timely responses which contribute to economic recovery, and to influence key humanitarian actors to ensure long-term solutions to food crises.

## FOOD AID AND 'DOING NO HARM'

**Food aid programmes can be of immediate benefit in preventing life-threatening malnutrition. However, food crises often happen not because there is insufficient food available but because the most vulnerable people cannot access it.**

**If by giving food aid we undermine an existing local economy, we could do more harm than good. Other interventions – cash or voucher distributions, supporting agricultural production, or long-term payments to vulnerable people – may be more appropriate and effective.**



MR DAHLANI RECEIVED AN OXFAM GRANT FOR HIS SWEET SHOP, FOLLOWING THE TSUNAMI IN ACEH, INDONESIA. PHOTO: JIM HOLMES



## Cash transfer and market-based programmes

The vast majority of economies are now cash-based; people receive an income, buy their goods, and invest in their future. Giving cash gives greater choice to households, along with dignity, empowerment, flexibility and improved support to economic recovery. When markets are functioning, cash-based responses can help stimulate markets and improve people's chances of recovering their livelihoods.

## EMERGENCY MARKET MAPPING ANALYSIS

The Emergency Market Mapping Analysis (EMMA) toolkit, developed by Oxfam and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), has been designed to provide a rapid and realistic analysis in sudden-onset crises. The EMMA combines gap analysis (people's outstanding needs) and market system analysis (e.g. supply chains, infrastructure, supporting services, and prevailing environment) to offer a comprehensive understanding of the constraints and capacity of existing market systems. An EMMA helps agencies take into account which areas of the market need support, leading to interventions that can strengthen the market systems in the longer term.

Since 2010, EMMA has helped to design responses in countries and crises as diverse as Haiti (earthquake), Pakistan (floods), Kyrgyzstan (civil unrest) and Liberia (influx of refugees). Based on their success, EMMA is now being used to help design more effective water and shelter programmes as well.

Oxfam is one of the leading organisations in emergency cash and voucher transfer programming, and a founding member of the Cash and Learning Partnership (CaLP) which is building momentum among key actors across several humanitarian sectors that are beginning to recognise the benefits of market-based programmes, including cash transfer programming.

Oxfam is leading on a number of innovative programmes using new technology, such as mobile phones and smart cards, to transfer cash payments (Kenya, Somalia, Niger, Pakistan and Haiti).

In some cases, the market analysis shows that other programme options are more appropriate than cash, or, as is most often the case, that a combination of cash and in-kind interventions would be most effective. Some of Oxfam's other programme activities are:

**Food aid programmes.** When food is unavailable and markets are not functioning, a general food aid distribution can save lives.

**Agricultural and livestock programmes.** These include seeds, tools, or fodder distributions, de-stocking and re-stocking of livestock, provision of animal care, agricultural extension services, or business skills training.

**Social protection.** In places affected by recurring crises, vulnerable populations can become poorer and poorer year after year as repeated disasters erode their assets and coping mechanisms. Social protection refers to initiatives that aim to protect people from the effects of chronic poverty or sudden shocks – these initiatives are primarily the responsibility of the state. But in countries where the government is fragile, organisations like Oxfam can step in with 'safety nets', providing regular transfers of cash, food or other resources. Other forms of social protection can include insurance (working with private sector partners) and advocacy for policy and legislation to ensure that social protection is seen as a right.

## CASE STUDY: KENYA URBAN CASH TRANSFERS

The rise in global food prices in 2008 hugely increased the cost of staple food items in Kenya. Poor urban households were worst affected, dependent on purchased food to meet their needs. Oxfam's assessments found that poor households in slums in Nairobi were adopting high-risk strategies to survive (e.g. sex work, crime, sending children to work).

A two-year safety net programme was developed to provide relief from high prices and to persuade the government of the need for social protection for the urban poor. Initially, 5,000 households received cash monthly for eight months. The programme was designed by Oxfam in collaboration with the government, using the existing M-PESA mobile phone money transfer service (used to deliver pensions). This system, which relies on SIM cards and M-PESA agents, allowed for safe and convenient transfers in the insecure slum environment. In following phases, cash-for-work activities were introduced as well as skills training. At the end of the first phase, around 3,400 households were able to save enough from the transfers to invest in starting a new business or diversifying their existing business, and voluntarily agreed to move out of the programme.

Following the success of this programme, the Kenyan government has developed a similar social protection programme in Mombasa, another urban area with vulnerable populations in informal settlements, using the same model.



# PROTECTION: IMPROVING THE SAFETY OF CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT AND DISASTERS



OXFAM

In conflict and disasters people have a wide range of urgent needs including basic necessities such as clean water, food and shelter, but also safety from the violence and abuse that can flourish in such situations.

Oxfam's protection work aims to improve the safety of civilians in the face of the threats that commonly occur in the chaos of war and disaster, such as targeted killings, rape and other sexual violence, torture, forced labour, forced recruitment into armed groups, illegal detentions, destruction of civilian homes and crops, and extortion or demands for 'protection money'.

In such situations it is the state that has the primary responsibility to protect people falling under its jurisdiction. Some governments strive to meet these protection obligations in good faith. However, others choose to offer protection selectively or not at all, or even become the primary perpetrators, deliberately sponsoring violence, coercing sections of the population, and depriving people of their basic rights.

A number of international actors, such as the Red Cross and some UN agencies, have formal mandates in protection and their work is complemented by non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam. Oxfam's protection approach draws on its vast experience in community-based work to develop very practical and tangible actions that reduce people's vulnerability to violence and abuse, and helps them cope with its impact when it does occur. This is

## CASE STUDY: EVACUATION CENTRE MANAGEMENT, PHILIPPINES TYPHOON KETSANA, SEPT 2009

Drawing on its experience in conflict zones, Oxfam set up 29 community-based Quick Response Teams to provide a forum for displaced people in the aftermath of Typhoon Ketsana. These teams facilitated dialogue between vulnerable people (women in particular) and local government officials, identifying issues and negotiating for their attention and resolution. In several villages these teams drafted 'People's Plans' which identified options for the relocation of communities from high-risk areas.

They were also able to influence local government units on a range of issues, including extending the stay of evacuees in temporary relocation sites, preventing the closure of evacuation sites, identification of alternative relocation sites, and distribution of shelter repair materials.



PEOPLE WADE THROUGH FLOODWATERS CARRYING HYGIENE KITS DISTRIBUTED BY OXFAM IN ANGONO, PHILIPPINES. THE KITS INCLUDE ITEMS SUCH AS SLEEPING MATS, SOAP AND SANITARY TOWELS AS WELL AS JERRY CANS FOR COLLECTING AND STORING WATER. PHOTO: JERRY CARREON

strategically combined with advocacy and campaigning to hold the state to account for its protection role and to encourage international actors to support and promote the protection of all those in need.

Oxfam has been carrying out protection field work since the late 1990s, using humanitarian action to improve the safety of civilians, reduce their vulnerability to danger and build resilience, whilst ensuring that humanitarian action does not expose civilians to further risks. This is achieved using three complementary approaches:

**1. Specific protection activities and programmes:** Oxfam's field protection work has been building up a body of activities and projects specifically to improve the safety of civilians. Since 2001 Oxfam has run major protection programmes in the Philippines, Indonesia, Liberia, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Jordan and Lebanon. Actions Oxfam undertakes may include:

- Creating a collective voice for vulnerable people by setting up local Protection Committees that provide a forum to negotiate with the police, military or other authorities.
- Helping communities at risk develop emergency protection plans for when attacks take place. For example, establishing meeting points in case people have to flee their homes, and systems for children to contact their parents if they get separated.
- Providing practical assistance and impartial information to help people understand their rights, options for resettlement or return,

or entitlement to services; enabling people to avoid danger, make informed decisions and helping them to access essential services (such as post-rape care). Protection committees and volunteers disseminate this information using a variety of approaches, such as participatory theatre, radio, leaflets, focus group discussions, banners and posters, and SMS messages.

- Building the capacities of authorities to understand their responsibilities to protect people, by setting up consulting committees and training, e.g. in the DRC local police have been trained in national law and human rights.

**2. Safe programming:** This ensures that all humanitarian activities do not inadvertently create greater risk to those they are trying to reach and do not exacerbate conflict. It may include working with public health engineers to ensure that latrines and water points are not near potential danger spots, or the distribution of fuel-efficient stoves so women are less exposed to violence or assault when out collecting firewood.

**3. Advocacy and campaigning:** Oxfam uses advocacy and campaigning to hold relevant authorities to account on protection. Globally, Oxfam also carries out campaigning to build an environment in which people are better protected from harm, receive remedial care, and have access to justice.

Oxfam's combination of international advocacy and community-based field activities is widely regarded as its specific strength in protection work, and when strategically combined has resulted in Oxfam's most effective protection work.

#### CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY COMMITTEES IN DRC

Oxfam staff in conflict zones in eastern DRC were repeatedly told that people do not know where to go for help if they have been attacked or abused. In response, Oxfam and local organisations set up a series of Protection Committees to ensure that people had accurate, relevant and up-to-date information on who could help them, where, and how. Information is disseminated through posters, radio, and using theatre and dance. Trained volunteers provide specific information about services such as medical, psychosocial and legal clinics – their locations, the services they provide, opening times, contact details and so forth.

In a huge country with little transport and communication infrastructure, where people have little money and journeys can be difficult and arduous, it is important that people are able to arrive at services at a time when they can be seen and treated. This is particularly important given the short time windows for medical assistance such as emergency contraception or treatment to reduce the risk of HIV infection. Committees monitor how well services function and give feedback to the service providers on any problems, and in some cases provide a small amount of funding for transport.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO. OXFAM PROTECTION ASSISTANT, DANIEL KAWAYA, LEADS A DISCUSSION ON PROTECTION ISSUES FACING THE COMMUNITY. PHOTO: CAROLINE GLUCK



# SANITATION IN EMERGENCIES



**Sanitation provision deals with excreta disposal, solid waste management, drainage, and vector control (vectors being insects, rats etc. which transmit diseases).**

## Pioneering designs

Oxfam's pioneering designs for sanitation facilities include the plastic squatting latrine slab – the first ever self-supporting slab of its size in the world, now widely used by other public health practitioners. Other additions include repurposing the diaphragm pumps found on boats to use for emptying latrines, designing a lightweight latrine superstructure, and developing specialised latrine features to accommodate disabled people (all available in Oxfam's Equipment Catalogue).

Sanitation has the potential to save millions of lives around the world, yet an estimated 2.6 billion people (over one-third of the world's population) still lack access to adequate sanitation facilities. Every year more than 800,000 children die from diarrhoea caused by poor sanitation and unsafe water. Inadequate sanitation is an immediate threat to life in emergency situations, but is also known to have a significant effect on the long-term health and economic potential of whole communities.

Over the last 70 years, Oxfam has played a major role improving sanitation after disasters. The urgent challenge is to stem the spread of disease, but the prevailing culture, physical

environment, and availability of equipment are important considerations which influence how this is done. Oxfam is a sanitation specialist, working with government authorities, private companies and local organisations to provide direct assistance to those in need and raise the profile of sanitation issues.

## CASE STUDY: 'URINE DIVERSION' DRY TOILETS IN ETHIOPIA

Heloweyn refugee camp in Dolo Ado, south-east Ethiopia, is home to more than 30,000 refugees from Somalia. The exceptionally hard rock underneath Heloweyn requires specialised heavy machinery to excavate latrine pits, which is prohibitively expensive and difficult to transport to the area. This makes providing safe sanitation facilities for the population extremely difficult.

A solution has been found in raised urine diversion dry toilets. With a soakaway for urine and alternate chambers for faeces, the system allows continual use while giving faecal matter time to break down in a dry environment. Raised above ground, the latrine chambers are accessible for emptying and do not require expensive construction machinery. This has proved to be a real breakthrough for meeting the demands of large numbers of people in a harsh, challenging environment.



A FLOATING LATRINE, SOUTH-WEST BANGLADESH. PHOTO: GOLAM RABBAN

## Challenges faced

Emergency situations vary, from floods to droughts, from cities to rural settings, temporary camps to permanent settlements. Oxfam's sanitation engineers are known for the way they adapt solutions to specific situations, according to the availability and cost of materials, local geology, and the ease of disposing of human waste. User preferences must be appreciated and issues of privacy and dignity given primary attention.

While short-term solutions may contribute to saving lives immediately after a disaster, the long-term needs of communities must be safeguarded. Oxfam concentrates much effort on ensuring sustainability of sanitation services, with special emphasis on self-maintenance by communities – including ways to recover energy from waste, generating fertiliser or biogas to directly benefit local communities. In recognition that the state has primary responsibility for the health and wellbeing of its population, Oxfam engages and develops the skills and resources of local authorities and private companies to provide, improve and maintain sanitation services into the future wherever possible.



CONSTRUCTION TEAMS DIG LATRINE PITS, MANSEHRA, PAKISTAN. PHOTO: ANDY BASTABLE

### CASE STUDY: BIODEGRADABLE BAGS IN HAITI

After the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 more than one million people were displaced into hundreds of spontaneous camps around the capital, Port au Prince. In many of these, the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion (WASH) teams were unable to dig pit latrines due to the concrete surfaces of urban areas, high water tables, or prevention by landowners. In some locations, Oxfam was able to construct raised latrines over plastic water tanks. These, however, had to be desludged once a week – a costly exercise, with access for desludging tankers often restricted.

Working with Swedish company Peepoople, Oxfam trialled the first ever use of biodegradable bags as a toilet substitute in an emergency. Used bags are collected in a central waste bin and taken away for composting. The trial concluded that the bags are effective, especially where digging pit latrines is not permitted or access for desludging is limited. Oxfam has since included 'Peepoo' bags as a stock item in its Equipment Catalogue, and is promoting them as a useful short-term measure in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, providing safe sanitation until more sustainable alternatives can be found.

### Future developments

In 2012 Oxfam set up the 'Emergency Sanitation Project' with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Dutch organisation WASTE, to carry out research and development with a special focus on providing facilities in difficult conditions, such as heavy flooding, areas of hard rock, or congested urban settings. This consortium will result in new equipment and approaches which should add to the options currently available for providing emergency sanitation services in the future.

Oxfam is continually striving to find new and innovative ways to address challenges in sanitation and waste disposal. After extensive laboratory trials at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, Oxfam is trying a prototype 'Tiger Worm Toilet' in Liberia and Ethiopia. This is a flushing sanitation system which treats liquid and solid waste using composting tiger worms. Tiger worms feed on faecal matter, reducing the need for emptying latrines and the build-up of disease-carrying pathogens. Smaller than a septic tank, another benefit of this system is that it generates waste that is safer and easier to handle. Oxfam believes this technology has the potential to provide the sanitation sector with a much-needed breakthrough in finding a sustainable solution to waste disposal.



A URINE DIVERSION LATRINE IN CONSTRUCTION, SOUTH SUDAN. PHOTO: ANGUS McBRIDE

### CASE STUDY: ECO SAN IN BANGLADESH

Oxfam has been involved in some very successful 'eco-san' trials in Bangladesh, incorporating the needs of local agriculture into its sanitation programme.

The high water table in Bangladesh means traditional latrines regularly flood and have a short life-span. Meanwhile poor farming communities struggle to afford commercial fertiliser. Combining these two issues, Oxfam piloted composting toilets in five flood-prone communities, aiming to improve the durability of the pit latrines while collecting urine and faeces for agriculture. The results of the community field trial were stark, with the healthiest crops those which were fertilised with both urine and faeces compost. The Ministry of Agriculture has shown interest in repeating the trial in other areas, based on the tangible economic benefits it could bring.



# WATER IN EMERGENCIES



**Oxfam is widely recognised as one of the leading organisations helping people meet their needs for clean water, safe sanitation and hygiene advice/materials (collectively known as WASH) after a disaster.**

From our early work drilling wells for Palestinian refugees in Jordan in 1962 to the present day, Oxfam has been at the forefront of WASH responses in emergencies throughout the world. While the number of people who have benefited from Oxfam's WASH work since 1962 is hard to estimate, in recent years we have been helping five to six million people every year, through direct assistance and support to local providers.



AN OXFAM WATER TANK SUPPLYING TO CAMP AERO, BUNIA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO. PHOTO: CAROLINE GLUCK

## Global leadership on water provision

Oxfam's approach to ensuring safe water for survival, health, and economic activity has changed significantly over the decades. The organisation grew its expertise and reputation for successfully supplying water to hundreds of thousands of people in huge camps, such as those of the Ethiopia famine, the Rwanda genocide, the Balkans crisis, and the conflict in Darfur, Sudan. While camps illustrate one aspect of homelessness, for decades now Oxfam has been adapting its public health work to support people sheltering in schools or in host families' homes, or in small spontaneous settlements that people consider safe when fleeing more localised disasters like flooding, hurricanes, or earthquakes.

Oxfam continues to adapt to new situations and changing realities. The huge growth of cities over the last 50 years has brought new challenges – congestion, poor building standards, complex land ownership, people dependent on markets for everything they need, and more stakeholders to consult – which have all necessitated new ways of working and new organisations to work with. Rather than simply supplying water to people directly in every situation, Oxfam is just as likely in some situations to work alongside existing water-supply structures and processes because it will be more sustainable in the long run. This might lead

## CASE STUDY: FAST AND EFFECTIVE WATER PROVISION IN HAITI

In 2010 a huge earthquake hit Haiti, destroying large parts of the capital, Port au Prince, causing death, displacement, and damage on a massive scale. Oxfam staff successfully released emergency equipment from our heavily damaged warehouse and began supplying clean water to more than 50,000 displaced people within two days of the disaster. Oxfam also mobilised the private sector in Haiti to provide water tankering to people within 72 hours of the earthquake. These companies collected their supply at private water points and delivered the water to Oxfam storage tanks, where much-needed water was treated and distributed to the population. Oxfam's earthquake response lasted for over 24 months, during which time we consistently supplied sufficient clean water to 500,000 homeless people.

to distributing cash or vouchers rather than water, for example, if people are accustomed to paying for water.

As no single agency can address the water needs for the millions of people affected by crisis every year, Oxfam has increased its leadership role within the humanitarian water sector as a whole. In 1984, Oxfam provided financial and advisory support to the first global register of engineering specialists, the London-based Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief (RedR). And in 1997, Oxfam's expertise was heavily drawn on to create the first set of internationally-agreed technical standards for humanitarian



REFUGEES IN THE VILLAGE OF BAWAYDEE, LIBERIA COLLECT WATER FROM TAPS INSTALLED BY OXFAM. PHOTO: CAROLINE GLUCK





responses – the SPHERE Project. In 2004, Oxfam became a leading member of the interagency WASH cluster with UNICEF, where it remains an influential leader. Together with its extensive research and development work, these efforts have made Oxfam an acknowledged world authority on water in emergencies.

### Pioneering designs for improving delivery

Oxfam has combined field experience, technical expertise, organisational capacity, and innovative thinking to design versatile equipment suited to delivering clean water wherever in the world an emergency hits.

In the 1980s Oxfam developed the “T” tanks – light, rigid, easily assembled tanks with varying storage capacities up to 90,000 litres, where water can be settled, purified, and distributed via pipeline to community tapstands. At household level, Oxfam is known for its 14-litre water container (the Oxfam Bucket), developed in the 1990s after extensive consultation with women in particular, in durable UV-treated plastic with removable tight-fitting lid, option for a tap fitting, stackable for mass transportation, and curved at the base for ease of cleaning. Large stocks of Oxfam-designed equipment are pre-packaged in a warehouse in Oxfordshire ready to be shipped and delivered anywhere in the world within days.

Oxfam has a long history of working with universities and companies to develop new technologies for use in the field. Oxfam specialist staff were instrumental in the development of the Delagua Kit by the University of Surrey. This portable water quality testing kit is now used by the majority of water agencies around the world. Oxfam’s field experiments with water treatment have led to a whole variety of methods from sand filters to upflow clarifiers and pressure filters, providing the right water treatment for any emergency situation.

Work continues on improving rapid response technologies and approaches in challenging situations. Oxfam’s current emphasis is on developing in-country ideas identified by staff and local organisations working at field level; encouraging a culture of innovation among field staff with a focus on promoting sustainable, resilient water and sanitation facilities; and promoting behavioural change for a healthy environment which is appropriate to context. The agency specifically supports trials of new methods which can be replicated elsewhere or adopted by governments, institutions, and the wider sector.

### CASE STUDY: EARLY WARNING OF WATER SHORTAGES

In the Horn of Africa, the most common challenges encountered when a drought hits are: delays in responding; maintenance and sustainability of water points after engineers finish the hardware work and leave; and weak partnerships and coordination with governments, private sector, and other agencies. Oxfam has come up with an innovative project to try to tackle these concerns. In collaboration with the private sector, UN, government, and other WASH agencies, Oxfam has set up a real-time monitoring system of a number of water points across the region using mobile technology.

Water monitors collect key drought indicators on their phones and transmit this to a shared public website where it is mapped. This provides key data relating to trends in water supply and demand, which can in turn trigger drought-response activities by both agencies and communities before the situation becomes critical.

# OXFAM IN EMERGENCIES



**Oxfam has a distinctive competence in responding to emergencies, dating back to the 1940s. We have a global reputation for speed, scale, and efficiency.**

Disasters happen all over the world. Some are cyclical and regular (hurricanes, monsoon floods etc.); others, such as conflict, may or may not be predictable; while a few happen very suddenly and present major unplanned catastrophes. Many disasters are on the increase because of environmental degradation, climate change and price volatility, and while fewer people are now known to die in emergencies, increasing levels of poverty and population density mean the numbers of people exposed to floods and tropical cyclones have doubled and tripled respectively since 1970 (UN estimate).

## Delivering aid

Oxfam is one of the world's leading providers of humanitarian aid in emergencies, with well-recognised technical expertise in several fields. These are clean water, sanitation, public health, food security, and the protection of civilians, with a strong reputation for scale, speed, and innovation. Oxfam responds directly wherever there is a widespread threat to life, health, and livelihoods, with which it is beyond people's capacity to cope, and where it can make a positive difference.

Oxfam's help is:

- **Impartial:** for every person according to their needs, without discrimination because of race, gender, religion, age or anything else.
- **Independent:** without influence from any interest group or political group.

Oxfam's local offices, particularly those in disaster-prone countries, are well prepared for emergencies and are in the front line of early response. In addition, the organisation keeps a large team of expert

staff on permanent standby to set up or boost operations anywhere in the world, as well as a warehouse of ready-packaged emergency equipment. These resources, alongside its existing offices of mostly local staff in 70 countries, put Oxfam in a strong position to respond to any emergency within hours or days.

## IMPARTIALITY

**Impartiality does not mean that Oxfam believes every party to violence is always equally to blame. In this sense Oxfam is not neutral; we take a stand on the causes of humanitarian need, and propose policy changes to solve them – based on our experience, values, and international humanitarian law.**

Today, recognising that local organisations are best-placed to deliver quick, appropriate assistance hours after a crisis, Oxfam is working more and more through partners. These may include local communities, civil society groups, other international organisations, governments, or private companies. The partnership approach is recognised as essential for maximising collective efforts to achieve more, and where local organisations are concerned, for building strong, sustainable capacity in-country. Oxfam offers different support to partners according to what they need, whether this be funding, seconding staff, training or advice.

## Listening and learning

Responses are always most effective when designed and run in collaboration with the people who will be benefiting. It makes it more likely that they will meet people's real needs, it improves







people's sense of ownership, it supports their self-reliance and dignity, and reduces the risk of fraud or of funds being used inefficiently. Talking and listening to affected communities is vital, from the earliest days of a response, throughout its entire duration, to its final evaluation.

Oxfam sets a high standard for keeping crisis-affected people at the very heart of what we do. The ability to develop and maintain collaborative relationships are core skills that all programme staff must demonstrate. Feedback from crisis-affected people is incorporated into initial programme designs, and mechanisms for two-way communication with beneficiaries are put in place early on in any response. Oxfam staff specialise in consulting local communities closely on everything which will affect them – matters such as the siting of wells, how to prioritise which families should receive cash grants, or the most appropriate contents of hygiene kits, for example. Additionally, we actively seek their feedback on what they think of our work and how we might improve it.

### Reducing the risks of disasters

Oxfam believes that the crucial factor making people vulnerable to disasters is their underlying poverty. People with precarious livelihoods, few economic buffers, living in the most dangerous or marginal places, always suffer most and longest from a disaster. And within this, women bear a disproportionate burden. It is therefore vital that, in addition to supporting people immediately after a disaster, we make efforts to reduce the risks that disasters pose. This kind of preventative action addresses the underlying causes of risk as opposed to the symptoms alone, and generally is very cost effective (for example, a study in northern Kenya found that it was three times more expensive to restock a core herd than to keep animals alive through supplementary feeding).

There are various tactics for reducing people's vulnerability to crises. It might be helping communities adapt to permanent changes, such as increasing drought, with training in new business skills. It might be strengthening measures to prevent disasters having such a serious effect, for example by raising flood-prone houses or building sea defences and earthquake-proof buildings.

Or it might be improving early warning systems through education or technology. Ultimately, when communities can work together with their governments and influence international policy, they have the best chance of reducing their vulnerability in the longer term.

### International influence

With its conviction that people have a right to humanitarian assistance, as well as its reputation for excellence in its specialist fields, Oxfam campaigns energetically for the rights of individuals to be recognised and protected. Its global campaign for people's Rights in Crisis seeks to address and ultimately remedy the political root causes of people's vulnerability, on the understanding that there is no such thing as a 'natural' disaster, only a failure by states to properly prepare and respond. Oxfam also campaigns for strict controls on the global trade in arms, and has been influential in the development of an international Arms Trade Treaty under the auspices of the UN.

#### CASE STUDY: HELPING DISASTER-AFFECTED PEOPLE CLAIM ASSISTANCE

In Pakistan, at least 400,000 rural homes were damaged or destroyed after a huge earthquake in 2005. The government offered survivors money to rebuild homes, but stipulated that only cement and steel could be used, rather than wood. This raised the cost of approved materials, as well as the risk that houses would be built unsafely.

Oxfam responded to requests to help communities negotiate with the government. It organised an advocacy group of concerned NGOs and drafted a set of recommendations, combined with a media campaign about people's shelter needs, to raise awareness and influence officials. The Pakistani government subsequently changed its reconstruction strategy, relaxing its rules on eligible building materials. As a result of this effort, the vast majority of affected families were able to receive official support to build safer, more resilient homes.

# PUBLIC HEALTH PROMOTION



OXFAM

**Recognising the need to involve affected populations more in the way water and sanitation services were designed and delivered, Oxfam introduced Public Health Promotion (PHP) in the early 1990s as a vital part of its emergency response. We use this term to describe a strategy for listening to and involving women, men and children in our emergency interventions.**

Oxfam is well known for work in water and sanitation, but evidence shows that the provision of clean water and safe facilities does not automatically lead to improvements in health. Toilets, for example, are only effective if they are used and maintained, and they will only be used if they are culturally acceptable and accessible. PHP is a crucial part of our water and sanitation response, ensuring that the hardware facilities we provide are used effectively and that affected people have a say in how things are done.



Oxfam's Public Health Promoters (PHPs) focus primarily on helping communities prevent diseases related to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Vector control and malaria prevention activities are also part of their remit where these pose serious risks to people's health. Where there is a high risk of child malnutrition, Public Health Promoters include infant and young child feeding practices in their community outreach and education work.

## Emergency response: what we do

In emergencies, people's lives are disrupted and they may face new or increased risks to their health, dignity and general wellbeing. They are often living in overcrowded and unfamiliar

environments, without access to adequate facilities and their usual means to maintain good hygiene practices. Oxfam's PHPs are involved from the beginning of a crisis, working in collaboration with engineers and food security specialists to assess the public health risks in a disaster or conflict affected area. Using a combination of group discussions, mapping, interviews and observation, they identify the needs and capacities of affected populations, ensuring that vulnerable groups or individuals are sought out and consulted. Understanding local norms and customs is vital to engaging communities in the response.

Items necessary for meeting immediate health and hygiene needs, such as water containers, soap, water purification tablets and materials for menstrual hygiene, are distributed. Then key information, such as how water can be kept clean, how human waste can be safely disposed of, and the importance of hand washing with soap to prevent diarrhoea and respiratory infections, is communicated. Once WASH facilities are made available, communities are trained and mobilised to use and manage them effectively.

## Listening to people affected by emergencies

Involving the affected community from the outset is vital for understanding the cultural, psychological, gender, and practical contexts particular to each situation. Oxfam's inclusive approach focuses on encouraging people to identify feasible actions they can take to protect the health of their families and neighbours. Staff consult local leaders and work in collaboration with communities and partner organisations. Local volunteers are mobilised wherever possible to encourage people's willingness and capacity to do things for themselves. An important part of the PHPs' role is to

## CASE STUDY: UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CUSTOMS

During a serious cholera epidemic in West Papua, our public health adviser noticed that funeral rituals (where people touched the bodies before eating a funeral meal) were likely to be spreading cholera. Rather than attempting to stop the ritual, the adviser consulted the local church leaders, and together they successfully introduced an additional practice – hand washing with water and wood ash – between the paying of last respects and eating the funeral meal. Soap was not available locally and would have been expensive and unsustainable to import. The number of new cholera patients admitted to the treatment centre declined quickly and dramatically, and was linked with the result of this single intervention.

## WASH ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2010, Oxfam was funded by the WASH Cluster to help cluster members improve their ability to work in an accountable way with their beneficiaries. After extensive consultation with diverse agencies, a WASH Accountability Resource Pack containing case studies, locally-adaptable leaflets, and a simple checklist to help individuals and agencies assess their own level of accountability, was produced and widely disseminated.



### CASE STUDY: MASS COMMUNICATION IN DRC

In response to cholera in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Oxfam teamed up with a partner called 'Search for Common Ground' which was working with a variety of local radio stations. An agreement was made to broadcast a soap opera, radio discussions and radio spots focusing on preventing cholera. These programmes were broadcast in various languages and used to reach large audiences across the capital, Kinshasa. The broadcasts reinforced the work of local community health workers who were doing more direct work with communities, giving health advice and distributing cholera kits in particularly high-risk areas.

ensure that the different needs of women, men, and children are met, and their daily presence in the community lets them monitor the often rapidly-evolving situation and adapt programme activities as necessary.



### Research and advocacy

Oxfam has developed a number of initiatives to address the practical challenges facing communities in emergencies, including hand-washing devices, managing children's excreta, new designs for insecticide-treated bed nets, and the use of mobile phones to transmit health-related information. Through relationships with academic institutions such as the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Centre for Communicable Diseases and the Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), Oxfam works

to develop the evidence that helps us prioritise our interventions. We have been active in several interagency forums, playing an influential role in the international Emergency Environmental Health Forum where learning is shared and programme quality issues are debated. By establishing and managing an online hygiene promotion forum, we are contributing to a community of practice which coordinates feedback from the wider sector to the global WASH Cluster. Oxfam has been involved in developing a variety of influential in-house and interagency materials for public health promotion, including guidelines on malaria, cholera and mainstreaming HIV prevention in public health programmes.

### The importance of hand washing

Evidence shows that hand washing with soap is the single most effective way to prevent diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections (more so than water treatment or safe sanitation), so Oxfam has introduced a series of minimum standards in all public health programmes, which include making hand-washing facilities widely available at latrines, and motivating and monitoring the uptake of hand-washing practice. In collaboration with Oxfam engineers and a commercial manufacturer, the PHP team has designed and piloted a portable water-dispensing device that has been used to improve hand-washing rates – even in areas of water scarcity.

### Communication innovation

Understanding the specific motivators and barriers to change in every situation is a vital part of working with communities, and Oxfam communicates in various ways to influence behaviour change. Mass communication (through radio, street theatre, puppet shows, and songs composed by local musicians) is used to provide basic information to help people protect themselves and their families. More interactive work with targeted communities follows to encourage practical action and motivate change.

The advent of mobile phone technology is transforming communication on every continent at a time when direct access to vulnerable communities is becoming more difficult. In Somalia in 2011/12 we reached about 100,000 people in camps in Mogadishu using interactive SMS software developed by the public health team. Working with local partners, we delivered interactive text messages in the local language on cholera prevention, creating a health-messaging campaign which was positively endorsed by women and men, and rated as 'cool' by local youth.

### CASE STUDY: PLAYING A LEAD ROLE IN THE WASH SECTOR

In 2006, WASH Cluster members identified more effective hygiene promotion as a priority for improving public health in emergencies. Oxfam managed a three-year interagency WASH Cluster Hygiene Promotion Project which produced guidance drawn from best practice in the sector and resulted in the production of comprehensive training and resource materials which are widely used by many agencies. In 2012, Oxfam led the development of an interactive e-learning module on information, education and communication in WASH emergencies, for developing the community skills of field workers.

# GENDER EQUALITY IN EMERGENCIES



**Good emergency responses are ones in which everyone's voices have been heard, their opinions have been taken into account, and their expressed needs have been met.**

Women, men, girls, and boys all suffer differently in emergencies, and to widely different degrees. Gender can have a significant influence over how individuals will experience a disaster – not just in terms of who survives and who dies, but in terms of their entitlements or ability to access goods and services in the aftermath. Gender – the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women – is therefore a vital consideration during an emergency response. For any action to be effective, it must take into account prevailing gender roles and tailor all activities towards meeting the different needs of women and men in a way that promotes equality between them.

Data shows a clear gender dimension to the way disasters affect the sexes. While women have been shown to be the primary victims of natural disasters, young men are more often the primary victims during armed conflict. Physical displacement frequently means men and boys lose their economic roles as household providers. But women and girls are almost always disproportionately affected after crises because of their subordinate position in almost every society. They hold less power, they make fewer decisions, control fewer resources, have less education, have more limited mobility, shoulder the burden of unpaid caring work, and are more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

## Meeting Needs

Oxfam focuses very purposefully on ensuring that all support is given according to need, and needs are likely to be very different even in situations where people are affected similarly. It is therefore vital that the different needs and interests of women, girls, men, and boys are identified and individually taken into account, and that a population is not treated as a homogenous mass. Oxfam has designed a set of Minimum Standards for ensuring gender is taken into account at every step in a humanitarian response, from promoting gender equality in its internal practices through to active measures to ensure all

---

### WHAT IS 'GENDER JUSTICE' IN AN EMERGENCY?

It means recognising the different risks faced by women, men, girls, and boys in an emergency situation, and adapting everything Oxfam does to ensure:

- their different needs are met
  - both sexes are heard, and benefit equally
  - neither are put at further risk, of violence,
- 



groups are listened to and get what they need to keep them safe.

It is a priority after a disaster to ensure the equal participation of women and men from the early stages of an assessment right through to designing programme activities. Oxfam's Minimum Standards insist on an assessment and analysis of gender differences from the outset, using thorough consultation to design culturally appropriate programmes which address different needs fairly. None of the areas Oxfam specialises in (public health, access to food, recovery of livelihoods, protection) are areas where one solution will fit everyone. While it is often easier to talk to men because they generally have a more public role in communities, women's active engagement in the shaping of emergency responses is essential to ensure their concerns and perspectives are included. The Minimum Standards also cover gender based violence and the protection of beneficiaries from sexual exploitation or abuse.

---

### OXFAM'S MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GENDER

These are a set of 16 Standards for people doing humanitarian work to guide their behaviour and practice. They cover how to assess a situation to determine different needs, and how to design programmes that meet those needs. They include ways to ensure active, meaningful participation by all gender groups, and that specific matters relating to dignity are addressed. They advise people working in emergency situations how to identify risks of gender-based violence sexual exploitation and what to do to ensure vulnerable people feel safe and have access to medical, psychological, or legal services where possible. They are designed to be used by all staff whether managers or technical experts, expatriate or national, to help them put gender equality at the heart of their work.

---



## The need for Dignity

Both women and men have specific practical needs in emergencies, and meeting these will promote their dignity. Attention must be given to finding out the more particular requirements of menstruating, pregnant, and lactating women, in the understanding that these will differ according to different cultural norms. Simple measures, such as early consultation and quick provision of appropriate hygiene kits, sanitary items, and underwear and clothing, has been proven time and time again to reduce stress levels and improve the wellbeing of everyone, even in situations of crisis

## Addressing Women's Rights in Emergencies

Disasters create new risks and exacerbate existing inequalities, but they can also provide opportunities for change. Sometimes the social upheaval caused by a disaster opens up the possibility for men and women to adopt more progressive gender roles, e.g. men sharing caring responsibilities, women earning money or adopting more prominent leadership roles in their communities. Seizing these opportunities to reduce inequality can lead to longer term, transformational changes in the balance of power between men and women. Sometimes change is a necessity – for example, in crises where many men have died and the surviving women have no existing right to own land, urgent changes to the law are needed to give them any sort of future life with security for their children.

Oxfam takes great care not to inadvertently reinforce women's low status or low paid roles. Instead it actively encourages women to take on paid jobs wherever they feel safe doing this, at the same paid rate as men. Oxfam also works with individual women and women's groups to promote their capability of making decisions and leading others in their communities. As part of the organisation's renewed commitment to gender justice and women's rights it is investing in working with women's rights organisations, because of the understanding they have of women's longer term strategic needs. A practical example is a woman's legal right to own land, which, after the death of a husband or father, may be essential to ensuring that woman's livelihood.

Emergencies are times of upheaval and it may not always be a good time to change existing power relationships. There is a risk that men will feel alienated by an approach that only appears to consider women. But Oxfam believes that by working with both women and men it is possible to address prevailing gender inequalities in ways which benefit their whole societies.

A WOMEN'S GROUP IN PAKISTAN, ONE OF A NUMBER WHO BENEFITED FROM OXFAM'S PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE PAID WORK. PHOTO: JANE BEESLEY



### CASE STUDY: OPPORTUNITY FOR LONGER TERM CHANGE?

After the Pakistan floods in 2010, Oxfam paid 807 women to make shawls, quilts or knit jumpers. The aim was to give women paid work which didn't force them to leave their shelters, while increasing the supply of winter items to distribute to homeless people. Women in this part of Pakistan did not usually seek paid work and traditionally had a low status compared with men.

Said Haya Begum: "We are very happy with the programme. Now we are in the habit! We would like to earn money again because we have no other opportunities and we need to earn more money. I used the money to pay school fees and to buy uniforms. I have four children. I was the decision maker! It was the first time. It made me feel that I was in power. I felt that because I earned the money I was the person to spend the money. I had that right and no one could ask me about how I spent it. I felt the power of my money and I was not answerable to anyone else. With my husband's money I have to account for everything I spend. All my life I've seen myself as a receptacle for cooking and cleaning, but I've realised there is more to me. Being able to work has given me the confidence to speak out in the community."



WORK BRINGS RESPECT - OXFAM PAYS MEN AND WOMEN THE SAME DAILY WAGE TO HELP CLEAR-UP OPERATIONS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI. PHOTO: JANE BEESLEY