The West Africa Food Crisis

The Challenge

Irregular rains in 2009 have led to a severe lack of pasture, water and a poor harvest across West Africa. The worst affected country is Niger, where the harvest has declined by 30% compared with the previous year, and 7.1 million people have been placed in acute food need. This is nearly 50% of Niger’s population.

The Response

Oxfam and its partners in Niger are providing support to 220,000 of the poorest and most vulnerable people. Strategies include distributing food, buying weak and malnourished cattle at above market prices, providing animal feed, distributing vouchers to be spent in local markets and providing cash for work.

Oxfam has also worked with others to raise international awareness of the crisis and encourage a co-ordinated response by governments and donors. Taking journalists and broadcasters on visits to Niger helps to increase awareness of the crisis among the general public.

In the longer term Oxfam is developing sustainable solutions that tackle the root causes of food shortages, such as creating grain and animal-feed banks, promoting income diversity as well as education and literacy.

Oxfam campaigns for climate change adaptation aid to be funded at both a UK and international levels, and for new ways of raising cash for international aid, such as a ‘Robin Hood Tax’ on bank transactions.
Lack of Money to Tackle Poverty

The Challenge

10 million people die every year from hunger related diseases. 1 billion people still live in extreme poverty. Progress is being made but more money is needed.

On top of this the UN estimates an additional $500 billion is required every year to help developing countries adapt to the impact of climate change.

In the meantime governments are cutting back on both domestic budgets and aid commitments.

The Response

How about this for an idea? A tiny tax (of as little as 0.005%) on banks that would raise billions to tackle poverty and climate change, at home and abroad.

After all, the banks share a big responsibility for the recession.

In 2009 a group of charities, including Oxfam, decided to launch The ‘Robin Hood Tax’ Campaign with a funky website, celebrity endorsement and the backing of well respected economists.

The campaign now has 170,000 supporters on Facebook, every MP in the UK has been emailed about it at least five times, and 20,000 e-actions have been taken.

Partly due to the campaign, bank taxes are now firmly on the political agenda and the new UK government has agreed to tax the financial sector. The question now is how much and what for?
Hunger in Cambodia

The Challenge

Rising food prices are dragging 105 million people into poverty. People in developing countries spent an extra £324 billion on 2009 just to buy enough food to feed themselves. The world’s poor spend up to 80% of their incomes on food, so price increases hit them hard and set back progress on tackling global poverty. This is happening across the world. Cambodia is one example.

The Response

Oxfam is trying to help the villagers to find other sources of food and income. For example, some villages have fishing ponds. Oxfam is helping these villages to establish legal rights to the ponds so they cannot be fenced off and used by rich businesses.

Cambodia rice production used basic production methods compared with the neighbouring countries. For example, in Thailand, mechanisation, irrigation and modern growing techniques make each rice paddy as much as five times as productive. In Vietnam it’s possible to reap two or three crops a year, compared to Cambodia's one.

Oxfam is working on these issues, as well as the notion of exploiting the fact that, while Cambodia's rice farming is old fashioned, this also means it’s largely organic and with proper marketing Cambodian rice could be sold for a higher price.
Typhoons in the Philippines

The Challenge

Successive typhoons hit the Philippines in September and October 2009 resulting in devastating floods. One of the biggest was Typhoon Ketsana that hit the capital city Manila and dumped a month’s worth of rainfall in one day. This resulted in widespread floods, washing away homes and stranding people on rooftops. Hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands lost their homes and livelihoods. The typhoons affected 10 million people.

The response

Oxfam launched an emergency response. Over a six month period, Oxfam provided support to 125,000 of the most affected people.

Lack of clean water after an emergency is always a huge problem. Thousands of hygiene kits were distributed to provide people with items such as water storage containers, sleeping mats, soap, and clothes. Oxfam also supported household water treatment, built emergency communal latrines and washing areas, and constructed elevated walkways over the floodwaters.

To prevent disease and illness from dirty water a team of people worked together to distribute special hygiene leaflets and organised public health awareness sessions.

Distributions of small cash grants also helped affected families get back on their feet (see picture).

Women were protected from violence and assistance was often focussed on female-headed households, children, disabled people, and the elderly.
Flooding affecting farmers in Bolivia

The Challenge

Sustainable farming in the Amazonian communities of Bolivia is a challenge. Alternating seasons of floods and drought force farmers to resort to ‘slash and burn’ agriculture and this further damages the fragile ecosystem. Recent floods have been particularly severe.

The relationship between climate change, local weather patterns and the weather shocks being experienced with increasing severity in the Bolivian Amazon are not yet fully understood. However there is evidence that climate change is making weather shocks more frequent and intense.

The Response

Three thousand years ago people living in South America developed a sustainable method of agriculture to cope with seasonal droughts and floods. This included elevated seedbeds known locally as *camellones*. Now Oxfam is working with five local communities to put this ancient knowledge into action.

*Camellones*, or ‘camel humps’, are large, raised platforms of land, surrounded by water channels, on which crops are cultivated. *Camellones* improve soil quality, resulting in a better, longer-term supply of food. And because the land is raised, crops are protected during floods and seeds are preserved. Each *camellon* measures approximately 500 sq metres and varies in height between 50 cm and 2m.

Women are the main participants in the project and usually have leadership roles, reflecting their responsibility for providing the family’s food and improving their status.
Lack of help from the Government during floods - Philippines

The problem

In September and October 2009 two major typhoons hit the Philippines resulting in devastating floods and killing a total of 849 people. With almost 10 million people affected, the government needed to act fast....

Oxfam’s response

Oxfam developed a strategy to get the Philippines government to take action following the disaster. They helped the people affected by the typhoon by asking the government to improve its response.

Oxfam lobbied governments in the Philippines and around the world. They also lobbied for a tax to raise money so the government could help the people most in need.

Oxfam made sure the whole world knew what was happening by getting the media to report the problems that people in the Philippines were facing.

With all that attention the Philippines government had to do something. Oxfam made sure politicians couldn’t forget the promises they made. This led to people receiving clean water and toilet facilities, which stopped more people becoming sick.

Oxfam worked with other charities and groups to help those made homeless by the typhoons better equipped to deal with future disasters. Their work proved to the government how important it is to adapt to changes after a disaster and to changes in the climate.