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- DARFUR: BUILDING PEACE
- MOZAMBIQUE UPDATE
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When a devastating earthquake hit Nepal in April 2015, the only thing Mamata Karki could think of as she watched buildings tumble and dust rise from her village was the fate of her son. It wasn’t until she saw him safely with her father-in-law that she could put her anxiety to rest. Kieran Doherty/Oxfam
DEAR FRIENDS,

When I joined Oxfam in June, human suffering was behind a raft of headlines that made the news that month: hunger sweeping parts of Africa, cholera in Yemen, war in Syria. They are all emergencies that, together with you, we have been focusing enormous attention on. In the pages ahead, you’ll read more about how Oxfam is tackling the poverty that stokes many of our global challenges. It’s a long, slow fight that requires deep commitment. That’s why our CHANGE initiative, featured here, is so essential.

Each year since 2000, we have invited college students to join us for a year-long program focusing on leadership and advocacy to promote social change. Across more than 340 campuses, a new generation of activists—we call them CHANGE Leaders—has been born.

“My devotion to activism stems from a desire to carry the torch of preceding generations into a new era,” says Kelechukwu Isibor, one of this year’s CHANGE Leaders who is from South Africa by way of Nigeria. “My ancestors fought for rights I am reaping the benefits of, and I want to fight for a more just world.”

What strikes me particularly about these highly focused students is that their dreams and aspirations are not so different from another group you’ll also meet in our story: the young Iraqis striving to overcome hardship after years of war. In these difficult times, it gives me great hope to witness the energy and dedication with which young people are confronting challenges in their own lives and the broader injustices around them. And they remind me, again, of the urgency we face in addressing the root causes of poverty.

Sincerely,

Abby Maxman
President & CEO, Oxfam America

Oxfam CloseUp FALL 2017
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COVER: Syndon Samakute shares some fortified porridge with his son Charles, 2, as his wife Loice Chideye looks on. They participated in a nutrition training program together and say they have completely changed the way they produce food and feed their family.

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to editor@oxfamamerica.org.
What appears to be plain porridge quickly takes on a new twist outside the home of Syndon Samakute on a hill looking over the lush Honde Valley in eastern Zimbabwe’s Manicaland province.

It starts out as regular corn meal, but Samakute mixes in a raw egg for protein. Then he adds a bit of butternut squash, and two small scoops of peanut butter. “It’s easy to cook and very nutritious,” he says. The result is quite tasty. The peanut butter and squash combine with the porridge for a sweet, buttery flavor.

Samakute took up cooking when his wife, Loice Chideye, invited him to a workshop on nutrition organized by a consortium of groups Oxfam is involved with called INSPIRE. Through the consortium, Oxfam is working in communities to promote gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. Oxfam has a long tradition of tackling gender issues in Zimbabwe, from legal reforms to challenging harmful cultural practices.

The workshop is part of a program, run by the UN and funded by the British government, designed in part to improve food production and reduce persistent malnutrition among children in Manicaland. Samakute was the only husband in the area man enough to attend the all-woman training.

INSPIRE encourages couples to re-examine the gender roles they play in their families through an initiative called Gender Action Learning, or GAL. Cooking is now just one of the household duties Samakute and his wife share, a rare thing in rural Zimbabwe, where patriarchal attitudes run deep.

“[Men] consider themselves the head of the household, and they don’t cook,” Samakute says. “I see men fighting new ideas, but their attitudes only lead us to underdevelopment. Men need to work with their wives.”

“We have lost these old views,” he adds firmly. “And we’re happy. Our children are healthy.”

TRANSFORMING FAMILIES
The GAL program stretches across Zimbabwe and has reached 25,000 farmers. One of them is Cremio Kausiyo. When he first heard about GAL, he was suspicious. “We thought they wanted to come and change some of our behavior, and what we are as men in our culture,” he says, standing next to his wife, Deliwe Kakumura, on a windy, gray morning outside their home in northern Zimbabwe where they grow tobacco and corn.

But he also saw an opportunity: If men and women can have the same goals, and trust each other, they are likely to have fewer conflicts. He took the plunge, and signed up for the training. It opened his eyes.

“I sat down with her (Kakumura) and discussed what we had learned together,” Kausiyo says. “That was the first time that I understood what my wife wanted and the things she did not want. And she understood what I wanted and did not want.”

They made a plan for the year, which they drew in a notebook: They achieved their objective to acquire another cow, and a cart. The plan for 2017 is to enlarge their small home.

Kakumura says her husband has changed. Before, she says, “he kept his
money in his pocket,” never trusting her with any. Now that they have shared dreams, “I am the one who keeps the money, I am the one who does the budget and plans what the household needs,” she says. “Even when we sell our agricultural products, I am the one who goes to the market and he is the one who can stay here and take care of the family.”

**CAN CULTURE CHANGE?**

In many households in Africa, the father is powerful. He typically makes all the decisions, and expresses little emotion. All responsibility for the welfare of the family rests with him alone. For many fathers, it’s a lonely and stressful life.

For Kausiyo and Kakumura, things are different now. On this morning, after Kausiyo has swept the yard, they both grab blue buckets and set off for the village well. Kausiyo pumps the water while Kakumura fills the buckets. Then they each hoist one on their heads and turn for home.

“It’s a rare thing in my community, for a man to do these things,” Kakumura says.

Can men like Samakute and Kausiyo actually change African male culture? Kausiyo says, “About three quarters of the men in this community have gone through GAL training,” but not all are applying it at home. “The households that are working together are progressing more than the households that are not working together. That is attracting a lot of members of the community.”

**A CLOSER LOOK**

Check out this video about Jane Chiganga, another farmer in Zimbabwe working effectively with her husband to improve their crop production and family nutrition. oxfamamerica.org/closeup-farmer.
TIME FOR

CHANGE
Young people in the US get a bad rap. Those born between 1982 and 2000 are accused of being lazy, self-centered, and entitled. As a Millennial myself, when I hear these criticisms, I know they’re unfounded. According to the 2017 Millennial Impact Report, which studies social engagement, Millennials’ activism is driven by the desire to promote the greater good. Much like Oxfam, we stand for equity, equality, and opportunity.

Oxfam has long encouraged the next generation of activists. Through our 12-month CHANGE Initiative, we coach college students in leadership and advocacy, with hands-on workshops on topics including campaign strategy, branding, and lobbying. Since 2000, we have educated over 870 student leaders from more than 350 schools. Every summer, up to 50 CHANGE Leaders descend on Boston for a weeklong training. I caught up with four leaders to find out what’s motivating them. As we talked, I realized they are not so different from another group Oxfam is working with: youth in a war-ravaged community in Iraq. They may be continents apart, but these young adults have similar aspirations: to live in peace, to continue their educations, and to make a difference in their communities. In this crazy world, that unspoken connection is heartening.

CHECKING IN WITH OXFAM’S CHANGE LEADERS, DIVYA AMLADI LEARNS THAT THIS NEXT GENERATION OF COLLEGE-BASED ACTIVISTS HAS THE SAME ASPIRATIONS AS A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE OXFAM IS WORKING WITH IN WAR-TORN IRAQ. WITH REPORTING BY AMY CHRISTIAN.

KELECHUKWU (KELE) ISIBOR, 20
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY, TX.

“My devotion to activism stems from a desire to carry the torch of preceding generations into a new era,” says Isibor, who is from Thohoyandou, South Africa, by way of Nigeria. The 2016 election made an impression on the international studies major, who became a US citizen last year. “It’s brought a lot of strife,” she says. “I echo the sentiments Oxfam has made about holding the powerful accountable. This election has also been a platform for everyone to raise their voice, and be more vigilant about the way they express themselves.”

PRAKHYAT SUNUWAR, 23
WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY, MA.

Sunuwar, originally from Nepal, inherited his interest in social justice from his father, who works for a refugee aid organization. Sunuwar volunteered there himself while in high school, helping refugees find jobs, editing resumes, and offering translation services.

The biology student aspires to go into medicine, and is currently shadowing a clinician in Worcester, Mass, who treats refugees from Bhutan, Iraq, and Somalia. “I have seen first-hand the limitations of our healthcare system,” Sunuwar says. “It’s not fair that their status affects the way they are treated.”
IRAQI YOUTH REBUILD THEIR DREAMS

Across the globe, in Qayyarah, Iraq—an ISIS stronghold until October 2016—youth who were stripped of basic rights under Islamic State (ISIS) rule are clamoring for a chance at a brighter future.

In Iraq, 61 percent of the population is below age 24. Turmoil and loss shape their collective memory. Under ISIS, citizens were robbed of basic services, such as education, health care, and electricity. Youth were particularly hard hit: their schooling was cut short, young women lost their autonomy, and boys were recruited to armed groups.

Oxfam has been working in Qayyarah since September 2016. We recently rehabiliated a school, and are planning programs to address the needs of youth. Despite the odds, the young people we’ve encountered display extraordinary resilience. They’re starting to rebuild their lives and dream about the future. To ensure their security in a place that has seen so much violence, we have changed their names.

HAZAM IBRAHIM, 22

Before ISIS took Qayyarah, Ibrahim’s family relied on his father’s police salary. Back then, he says, “I was only worried about good grades and being successful at school.”

After ISIS looted the police station, his father lost his salary. The stress, coupled with years of smoking, caused him to die from heart failure. Ibrahim stopped going to school because he wasn’t sure his education would count. “Those two years felt like 10 years,” he says. “I could see my future fade before my eyes.”

“Now I want to go to university and get a job,” he says. “Then I will feel like my efforts did not go to waste. Education strengthens you and makes you more confident in life.”

YACINE (MALIKA) BAI, 20
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK, MD.

“Coming to this country, we were seeking political asylum,” says Bai, whose family fled the Ivory Coast. “I’ve always wanted to help others back home.” The public health student is minoring in global poverty and intends to give back by working at an international organization like Oxfam.

Of the CHANGE program she says, “It feels like we’re part of something. It’s so inspirational and I feel like there’s so much more we can do on campus. When you think about it, college students are the best people to get involved because we’re up and coming.”
TALA ACHI, 20  
UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE, CA.

Born in the United Arab Emirates and partially raised in Syria, Achi and her family settled in Southern California. Most of her extended family is back in Damascus. The political science major and president of her school’s College Democrats pushed an initiative to get unisex restrooms installed on campus. She volunteers at homeless shelters and with refugee families. Of her volunteer work, she says, “We need to help people and provide resources. Homeless people, refugees, these are our brothers and sisters.”

When she read about CHANGE, she says, it felt like she had found her calling. “It’s important for Millennials to get involved. Every generation has its issues.”

MALAK OBEED KHADR, 15

“Before ISIS, I was feeling 100 percent safe,” says Khadr. But once they took over, girls were not allowed to go outside without a male chaperone and even then, were required to be fully covered.

“They told my father that in order for me to go to school, we had to pay,” she says. “ISIS destroyed my future, they stopped my education.”

Khadr—who lost her mother and sister when a mortar hit their house—says with ISIS gone, she finally feels free. She aspires to become a doctor or an engineer. “If I could wake up and all my dreams had come true, we would have a new house, better conditions, more money, and a new life where everything is safe,” she says.

ODAI SAED, 15

After Saed’s father escaped ISIS, he and a cousin hatched a plan to flee. They made it 62 miles before getting hit by a rocket. A piece of shrapnel took off his arm and his cousin’s leg. But Saed didn’t give up. Two days after undergoing an operation, he made one final attempt to get away—and succeeded.

Saed is now the man of the house, taking care of his mother and sisters. He looks forward to finishing school so he can enroll in the military academy.

“If I was in charge, the first thing I would do is rebuild all of the buildings ISIS destroyed, like the hospitals and schools,” he says. “I would bring back services and buy books for all the schools.”
Not long ago in the village of Birka Saira in North Darfur, four young men setting out to make bricks dug a shallow well for their water supply. They neglected to put a fence around it, and four calves slipped into the water and drowned. The nomadic herders who owned the animals—armed and bent on revenge—went after the young men, who managed to escape without injury.

In a volatile environment like Darfur, Sudan, where more than a decade of armed conflict has divided groups that once coexisted more or less peacefully, incidents like this can escalate quickly into prolonged and violent clashes.

But Darfur has an ancient system of justice that sometimes comes to the rescue. It is known as Ajaweed, and it is a form of arbitration. Tradition and social pressure help bring disputing parties to the table, where they are judged by a body of respected citizens, and the threat of censure—rather than jail time—help ensure that everyone abides by the decisions that emerge from the process. Sudan has a modern criminal justice system, but many people prefer to put their cases before an Ajaweed body.

“When someone gets shot, we sit down with the two parties,” says Eltaib Abbakora, the key Ajaweed leader for the town of Kebkabiya and villages for miles around. “We listen to the history of how these two groups have resolved problems in the past. If guilty parties usually pay blood money, we ask them to do that. They might pay in cows or camels or cash. Some tribes just forgive.”

Oxfam and our partners have seen Ajaweed in action and appreciate its strengths. But its weaknesses are significant, so in an area of Darfur that’s particularly fraught with tension, Oxfam and partner KSCS, the Kebkabiya Smallholders Charitable Society, offered to help 10 communities develop a better method of resolving conflict and building peace. KSCS is a strong local organization that has a deep history of aiding people in need during the armed conflict, so the communities trust them and welcomed their intervention.

With Oxfam’s support as funder and technical adviser on peacebuilding, KSCS first helped the communities reshape their Ajaweed bodies—known locally as peace committees—to be more inclusive. Now, they include women and youth, for example. KSCS provided the committees with training on how to analyze a problem and negotiate a solution. And it suggested an approach more like mediation than arbitration. Why? Because imposing a punishment that both sides haven’t agreed is fair can set the stage for future conflict.

So, when the peace committee of Birka Saira heard of the incident at the well, its members sat down with the herders and the young men separately to hear their stories. They judged the young men to be at fault but—unlike in a court of law or some Ajaweed bodies—they adapted their punishment to fit the youth’s financial reality. The young men would need to fence the well, and pay the herders what they could afford, which was half the cost of the animals. The families involved and the peace committee itself pitched
in funds to make it work. “We were able to negotiate a solution that was affordable,” said Farima Haroon, who leads the women on the committee. “A fine that was too high could have resulted in further tensions.”

The new peace committees have been up and running since July of 2016, and already they can point to scores of conflicts they’ve succeeded in resolving, from theft and bullying to farmer–herder disputes to domestic violence to murder.

To put this into perspective, Yousif Mohammed, who leads a peacebuilding committee in the village of Gara Elzawia, points to fighting that broke out in nearby Jebel Amir in 2013 in which more than 800 people died and around 150,000 were displaced. It began, he said, when someone threw a stone that hit a man in the head. “If we had been there,” he says, “the conflict might not have exploded.”

The forces at work in Jebel Amir, where the profits and ownership of a gold mine were at stake, might have defied a local solution, but still—if local peacebuilders were so effective and so persuasive that it was hard to convince anyone to take up arms, life in Darfur would be transformed.

The peace committees are proud of their work, and they understand its significance. “We can help put out a spark,” says Farima Haroon, “before it becomes a fire.”

A CLOSER LOOK

To learn more about Oxfam’s work with local partner KSCS, visit oxfamamerica.org/closeup-KSCS.

ABOVE: Local peace committees developed with the help of an Oxfam partner are helping diffuse tensions in North Darfur, Sudan. Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America
In 2006 I went to Mozambique. It was about a year after the president signed the Family Law, legislation designed to help end discrimination against women and girls. I wanted to talk with women about how this law was helping them, and maybe even changing their lives for the better.

It was on a busy street in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, that I met Leona. She had just come out of a meeting with an attorney at the office of one of Oxfam’s partners. “My husband died,” Leona told me, holding her 10-month-old son in her arms as buses roared by. “A week later I was leaving flowers at his grave, and his relatives showed up and chased me away.” These same relatives told her to get out of her house, saying she was never legally married, and blaming her for her husband’s death from AIDS.

“I have been told I have the right to inherit the house and property,” Leona said to me, citing new provisions in the Family Law that require couples who have been together for more than a year to share their assets if they break up, whether formally married or not. Her husband never had another wife, Leona told me, so she had the right to their possessions “no matter what his relatives say.”

BUILDING RESPECT FOR LAW AND WOMEN
Over the years Oxfam has trained a coalition of women’s organizations in Mozambique to advocate in Parliament for the Family Law, as well as others like the 1997 Land Law and a 2009 Domestic Violence Law, all with the intent of strengthening the rights of women. Without those rights, women face increased poverty and become more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Leona, who is HIV-positive, was a good example: She could have been thrown out on the street with her five children.

In March, I went back to Mozambique to ask how things had changed in the 12 years since the first piece of legislation was adopted. It turns out that passing new laws may be easier than implementing them.

“We have approved a lot of laws. They look good, but the government does not spend a cent to help their representatives enforce them,” says Maria Jose Arthur, an anthropologist who works for Women in Law in Southern Africa, an Oxfam partner.
MAKING A LAW REAL

Since the Family Law’s passage, Oxfam has been working with local organizations to spread the word about it.

“Oxfam helped us train activists and disseminate the law using simplified leaflets translated into local languages,” says Graça Julio, who works for Forum Mulher, a member of the women’s coalition. Her group focused on village chiefs, traditional healers, and other religious leaders to build awareness of the new law.

But resistance is not unusual.

“If you go to a training for police and think they are going to uphold the [Family] Law, that (assumption) is a big mistake. They don’t agree with it,” says Arthur. “In Africa in general, when you discuss women’s rights and children’s rights, people use the argument about culture and tradition to stop changes... Sometimes we have to challenge the idea that culture defines us.”

But Julio knows that changing attitudes and behaviors doesn’t happen overnight: it requires a long-term commitment.

“That’s why we’re investing in programs in schools, working with youth, both boys and girls,” she says. “We believe working with them at an early age will help them develop a different frame of mind.”

ENDING VIOLENCE

The frustration she might feel at the pace of change doesn’t deter Dulce Narçiso, who was trained by Oxfam to become a paralegal advisor for women. She works for an organization called AMUDEIA, a Portuguese acronym for the Association of Vulnerable Women.

“The law says gender-based violence is a crime,” she says, “but the police release perpetrators and then their victims come here [to AMUDEIA] to complain. We help them take these cases to court.”

And sometimes, they get relief—like the woman who recently came to AMUDEIA to report multiple beatings by her husband and the complete indifference of the police. They sent her home—to more brutality. Narçiso notes that AMUDEIA reports such incidents to the attorney general’s office, and in this particular case the attorney general himself investigated and brought a disciplinary charge against the police officer, who happened to be a woman.

“When laws are enforced we see progress,” says Narçiso. “When we can raise awareness about the Domestic Violence Law, it’s positive. But the work is slow, and difficult.”

A CLOSER LOOK

For more stories on Oxfam’s work to defend the rights of women and girls, visit oxfamamerica.org/closeup-women.

ABOVE: Dulce Narçiso coordinates assistance for survivors of domestic violence at the Association for Vulnerable Women, just north of Maputo in Mozambique. She says she sees slow progress in recognizing the rights of women, but it’s a struggle to get the police to enforce laws.

OPPOSITE: Children and their teacher play at a day care program provided by the Association for Vulnerable Women, which also helps women survivors of violence.

PHOTOS: Brett Eloff/Oxfam America
UGANDA IS NOW SHELTERING MORE THAN ONE MILLION SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES WHO HAVE FLED WAR IN THEIR COUNTRY. BUT FOR MANY FAMILIES, THE DECISION TO LEAVE HOME FOR A LIFE OF UNCERTAINTY IS NOT MADE LIGHTLY. AND THE JOURNEY—OFTEN ON FOOT—CAN BE FULL OF DANGER. COCO MCCABE REPORTS.

At the Imvepi refugee settlement in Uganda, rows of benches line the dark earth in the shade of a lulu tree just beginning to bristle with fruit. This is the outdoor church of Pastor Richard, 34, and the benches, assembled from rough logs cradled low to the ground, speak volumes about the make-do lives of more than 119,000 people now sheltering at Imvepi.

They fled from South Sudan, a country devastated by civil war and hunger, where the price of a cup of beans has skyrocketed more than tenfold, and where people are running from their homes with only the few things they can carry. They are among the million South Sudanese refugees who have now crossed the border seeking security in Uganda, where a liberal refugee policy makes it more welcoming than many other places: It now hosts more refugees than any other African nation. And they are just some of 22.5 million refugees seeking safety globally—the highest number since the aftermath of World War II and part of a broad displacement crisis that Oxfam is tackling on many fronts.

“Uganda is a peaceful country,” explained a local man named John who was looking for work at Imvepi. “Any person, regardless of their color, their tribe, and so on, really are welcome.”

Testament to that is the explosive growth of Bidibidi a few miles from Imvepi. In just months, between August and November of 2016, Bidibidi grew to become the largest refugee settlement in the world with 272,000 people. Across four refugee settlements in Uganda, Oxfam and its local partners are reaching more than 283,000 people with help that includes clean drinking water, sanitation services, hygiene promotion, and some skills training to help people earn an income.

HARD DECISIONS

For Richard, the decision to uproot his family and head to Uganda was not easy. Who would readily trade home for a life of dependence and uncertainty in a country that is not your own? What would you do for work there? How would your family get enough to eat? Where would your children go to school? All of these questions weigh heavily on South Sudanese—even as they find relief in being free of the fear and violence that filled their days.

Richard resisted the urge to flee when gunshots first sounded. He held on through the arrests of people in his community, through the nighttime killings, and even through the targeting of religious leaders. What he couldn’t bear was when his children began to suffer because the only food his family had to eat was sweet potatoes.

“My young girl fell sick and was suffering from anemia seriously,” said Richard, speaking in English. “The elder sister—even the same. In the morning you see their feet are swelling. So in all this, I actually made my decision to move out.”

But that choice meant leaving most of his household goods behind.

“You know, the Bible says food, dressing, and drink are useless, but life is more important,” said Richard. “I decided to rescue my own life—leave the property that can be got at any time. If God wills, I will gain them back.”

And so began a perilous week of walking from his village toward the border. Besides Richard, there were seven others in his group: his three children, his wife, and three orphans the family was caring for.

“Crossing Juba Road is like entering hell,” he recalled. But the danger of running into conflict wasn’t all he had to worry about: water and food were equal concerns.
“When you see the water we were drinking ... green, red, brown, even pink because the wild animals are also drinking from there,” said Richard. After three days their food ran out, leaving them to forage for a wild plant called “lobutoro”—a leaf with a bitter taste. “This kind of plant gives you energy when you’re hungry,” said Richard. “You have a lot of appetite for eating any kind of food that comes.”

In June, settled safely at Imvepi with his family, Richard had not stopped worrying about food: The previous month, the World Food Programme, $60 million short on funds, cut the grain ration in half for South Sudanese refugees—a terrible blow.

A HUNGER FOR SCHOOLING

But a shortage of rations isn’t Richard’s only concern. What gnaws at him just as keenly is the future of his children and the additional orphans now in his care. All told, his household numbers 16. A teacher himself, he fears the children won’t have access to the education that is so vital to their success. Among his parishioners are several teachers, and they have discussed a plan for offering classes, but they lack teaching materials. “They’re our future generation,” said Richard of the children. “They’re the leaders of tomorrow.”

Despite all the hardship and uncertainty he and his family—and countless others—have endured, Richard is sure that tomorrow will be brighter. “I convince myself biblically that there’s a time for everything. We suffered, but there’s a time we shall also enjoy life,” he said. “We shall get the peace back to South Sudan.”
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