GUARDIANS OF THE MEKONG

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Five years ago, Svay Mon—pictured here with her grandson—joined a community savings group that Oxfam helped to organize in her village in southern Cambodia. Thanks to her savings and small loans from the group, she has since gone from working as a subsistence-level rice farmer to being an entrepreneur with a successful vegetable-growing business.

Patrick Brown / Panos for Oxfam America
DEAR FRIENDS,

In the coming weeks, you may begin to hear a lot about South Sudan, a new nation now in the grip of a terrible food crisis. I was there just a few weeks ago meeting with some of the 1.5 million displaced people who are struggling to survive, most of them outside the relative security of camps protected by UN peacekeepers. Conflict that erupted one and a half years ago has driven countless families from their homes, triggering widespread hunger as people are unable to work their fields or get to their jobs.

Food prices are skyrocketing; in some places, such as Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei states, the price of some grains has exploded by 300 percent. Already, one in three South Sudanese children is malnourished, and the situation is likely to worsen. Food experts are predicting that by June, 3.5 million people in this country will be facing severe hunger.

Numbers that big are hard to imagine, but the frightening reality each person faces is not: “There is no employment here and no money,” Nyabet Machar told Voice of America recently. “We get very little support, so I will survive on what I can get from the forest: wild fruit and leaves.”

Unlike other crises brought on by events beyond our control, such as droughts or floods, this one is man-made, and we have a collective responsibility to act now.

Oxfam is helping more than 480,000 South Sudanese with clean water, sanitation services, food, fuel, and income support. But we need you to stand with us as we continue to provide emergency assistance while urging the US government to take a more active role in ending the fighting and laying the groundwork for a lasting peace.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

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Thanks to remarkable supporters like you, our 2014 matching gift challenge was a huge success—raising $1.8 million to fight hunger, poverty, and injustice throughout the world. We couldn’t have done it without the leadership group of supporters who pledged to the matching gift fund and those whose generous gifts had twice the impact on Oxfam’s efforts to save lives and help people overcome poverty. To participate in the 2015 matching gift campaign, please visit www.oxfamamerica.org/match.

COVER: Villagers from Samphin patrol the Mekong to prevent illegal fishing in Kratie province in northern Cambodia. Patrick Brown / Panos for Oxfam America

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to editor@oxfamamerica.org.
MEDIA MASHUP
LOOK. WATCH. LISTEN. JOIN THE CONVERSATION.

EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL
As this magazine was going to press, a major earthquake struck Nepal, affecting millions of people in Nepal and northern India. Thousands died in the April 25 earthquake, and more than two million suddenly found themselves living in the open, struggling to find food, water, and protection from the heavy rains.

Oxfam has been working in Nepal for more than 20 years. In the hours and days after the earthquake, we and our partner organizations moved quickly into action—providing families with clean water, latrines, and emergency shelter. Meanwhile, thousands of generous donors like you contributed to the relief effort. We thank you for your support.

For the latest information about the earthquake in Nepal and Oxfam’s response, go to oxfamamerica.org/closeup-nepal.

RIGHT: Saim draws water from a supply provided by Oxfam following the earthquake in Nepal. Pablo Tosco / Oxfam

IN THE NEWS
PEE POWER
In a March 5 online article for Mashable, Blathnaid Healy explored a prototype toilet being developed by the University of West England (UWE) in partnership with Oxfam. It uses urine, fed to stacks of microbial fuel cells, to generate electricity to light the toilet stall. “The goal is to roll pee-powered toilets out to refugee camps in disaster zones where unlit toilets leave people at risk of being abused or attacked,” wrote Healy.

IN THE NEWS
SOMALIA’S LIFELINE
In an article for US News & World Report on Feb. 19, writer Teresa Welsh interviewed Oxfam’s Scott Paul on the threat Somali families face as some of the $1.3 billion the Somali diaspora sends home each year could get cut off. “When remittances get cut off to many countries, it can precipitate a huge development problem. In Somalia if remittances get cut off, it’s a humanitarian crisis,” said Paul. More than 40 percent of Somalis rely on those remittances to meet many of their basic needs. But US banks, trying to comply with US regulations on money laundering and anti-terrorism, have been shutting the accounts of many money transfer operators who send the money for Somalis.

“// I love the fact that Oxfam goes to all these rural communities that are hit by hunger, poverty, and injustice.... Teaching them how to farm more effectively. Turning that ... into a business that is not only supporting their families, but other people in the communities too. ///

Celebrity chef and longtime Oxfam supporter Aarti Sequeira in a March 4 interview in The Boston Globe
What happened to Marcelo Rivera tells you a great deal about what’s at stake in El Salvador, where a company wants to start mining for gold and is now suing the country for more than $300 million.

An environmental activist and ardent critic of Pacific Rim’s plan to build a gold mine in El Salvador’s northern region of Cabañas, Rivera disappeared in June 2009. Twelve days later, his body, horribly mutilated, was found at the bottom of a well.

“This was to send a message—to silence us,” said a friend of Rivera’s.

But the people of Cabañas will not be silenced, not when the quality of the water they depend on and their means of making a living are at stake. They fear that a mine could pollute the Rio Titihuapa, which flows into the Rio Lempa, El Salvador’s main source of drinking water.

When the government of El Salvador did not issue a mining permit, citing lack of compliance with legal requirements and concern for the country’s water supply, Pacific Rim sued the country for $77 million, and then sold its interests to an Australian company. The new owner, OceanaGold, is now pursuing the suit for $301 million in a special tribunal at the World Bank.

El Salvador and its people have the right to decide whether or not they want this gold mine in their country—and their decision needs to be respected. You can help elevate their voices.

Widespread opposition to mining for metals in El Salvador has led Salvadorans to question what sort of economic development their country should pursue—and to recognize that not all forms of investment are necessarily good for the nation. The International Allies Against Mining in El Salvador, a coalition that includes Oxfam, has said the stakes for Salvadorans in this case are high.

“A democratically elected government should not be punished for standing up for the common good,” said the coalition in a statement last year.

That’s where you come in.

Tell the World Bank tribunal to side with the people of El Salvador at oxfamamerica.org/closeup-tribunal.

ABOVE: Daysi Carrillo, an anti-mining activist, wades through a tributary of the Titihuapa River, which some residents fear will become polluted if a gold mine is built in their region. James Rodriguez / Oxfam America
Where does the strength to survive a crisis come from? Is it innate and individual, drawn from a reserve within each of us? Or is it communal and teachable—something that, through our words and actions, we can nurture in each other?

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), decades of bad governance and disputes over resources have cost millions of lives. Poverty and hunger are widespread. More than two million of the country’s estimated 77 million citizens are displaced and living in temporary camps. The average life expectancy is just over 56 years old.

But some women in DRC have found a way to protect and strengthen one another, even in the midst of extreme hardships. With support from Oxfam partner organizations like Solidarité pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix (SOPROP), women and men in North and South Kivu provinces are creating protection forums—community groups that stand up for women’s safety. Members vote on the issues they deem most urgent, from inheritance rights to sexual violence and forced marriage. In the words of protection officer Odette Blitsitsi, “They are a voice for those who don’t have a voice.”

Listening to these voices could help DRC build a more peaceful future. In November 2013, the Congolese army and UN forces defeated the armed group M23. Afterward, there seemed to be a shift away from the cycles of violence. New initiatives, greater political engagement, and increased security promised to help people move toward resolving years of conflict.

Even so, a recent Oxfam report found that civilians—especially women and girls—remain at high risk of violence from armed groups and even government officials. Women still face discrimination, and are underrepresented in the legal system and government; 15 out of 16 villages surveyed had no women among their leaders.

The protection forums give women a means to address problems head on and to negotiate collectively with local authorities. “When people meet, brainstorm, and collaborate to solve problems they have immense power,” said Adél Sasvári, manager of Oxfam’s protection program in South Kivu. “We do a food distribution once and it is eaten; these community changes last.”

Oxfam has been working in DRC for many years, providing clean water, sanitation services, and other much-needed aid while advocating for civilians’ rights and an end to violence.

This work continues today, but the protection forums reflect the potential
for long-term change. Although organizations like Oxfam may always be needed to assist in major humanitarian crises, the truth is that trained citizens and responsible governments can be the most effective first responders, and deserve to lead the way on recovery when disaster strikes. In settings like DRC, training vulnerable people to protect themselves and to take the lead in solving their own problems is both pragmatic and forward-thinking.

“Our new approach is to support the local population to better manage their [lives] and cope with uncertainty,” said Sasvári. “We work with them to make the most of the services that are available.

We link them with psychological and health care and train them to stand up for their rights. Oxfam simply backs up their efforts because it’s not us who will bring the change—it’s them.”

On the following pages, three women taking part in the protection forums share in their own words why they are bringing that change.

ABOVE: Louise Nyiranolozi attends an Oxfam-supported women’s protection forum in North Kivu province. Read her story on the next page.

RIGHT: Oxfam is providing water to the Buporo camp in North Kivu where Nyiranolozi is now living.

ALL PHOTOS: Eleanor Farmer / Oxfam
“YES, IT’S HARD, BUT IT’S POSSIBLE TO SURVIVE”
Louise Nyiranolizi, pictured on the previous page, is 42 and lives in Buporo camp in North Kivu. She is a member of the women’s protection forum in Buporo and head of a committee that oversees hygiene and sanitation in the camp. Below, she talks about the losses her family experienced while fleeing violence in their home region.

“The fighting ended when we were living on the mountain. We were just hiding ourselves. You can’t even build a simple house like this because the rebels would see it. If you cook, you have to cook late in the night. You have to make sure your children don’t cry because if the rebels hear any voice, they will find you and kill you.

“There were no services to help us—there was nothing there at all. It’s on the mountain that my family died. My firstborn died on Monday, the second on Tuesday, the third on Thursday, and my husband on Sunday. They got sick and we didn’t know what it was. We just saw a rash on their body and then they died. ... Even though life may be hard (in the camp), I thank God that I have not yet lost any of my family members here. ... If I can talk about getting better, it’s seeing my family around me. But losing four family members in a week was the worst.

“I have learned a lot with the women’s forum, and the women trust me and listen to me. There are women from the community and from the camp. My friend Sylvie is an orphan and a widow. ... She is young and has been through the same things as me. I tell her, ‘Yes, it’s hard, but it’s possible to survive.’

“Working for others is my talent and my nature. What would be the purpose of keeping the hatred within me? I have to live in peace with everyone because when I don’t have something, they help me. I believe you do something good today and ... tomorrow it will come back to you.”

“I WORK FOR THE GOOD OF MY COMMUNITY”
Clotilde Nsengujunva, pictured below, is 27 and works for Oxfam’s partner organization SOPROP in North Kivu. The daughter of teachers, she holds two university degrees and is married with two children.

“My job is to work with all the committees in the area. We teach the women’s forums how to address problems they face and how to solve them. We can’t solve all the problems, but we can certainly help them cope better.

“Oxfam is very supportive. They train us so we can train other people. The manual we are using was printed by Oxfam. They help with transport and food for workshops.

“The main problem women are facing here is gender-based violence. Women can’t speak out against it because mostly men are head of the house and decide what to do and when. Women are hurting inside.

//MANY WOMEN ARE DESTROYED INSIDE AND CAN’T DO MUCH ABOUT IT. I OPEN UP MYSELF TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO THE SAME. //

CLOTILDE NSENGUJUNVA
“Meetings of the women’s forum, when we are talking together, are often the only times women can express themselves freely. It’s a great opportunity for them to speak out [about] what has been hidden in their hearts because mostly they stay silent and accept their condition. Many women are destroyed inside and can’t do much about it.

“I open up myself to encourage them to do the same. The women think if I talk, so can they. A member of the forum told me, ‘I can easily express myself when I’m with women.’ She said, ‘This is another me.’ It’s easy to talk when they’re amongst themselves.

“I work for the good of my community. Even though I will not benefit personally, I keep going for the good of my village and for the good of the children’s future. I will keep doing this for them.”

“MY PRIORITY IS THAT WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE RESPECTED”

Neem Mibimba, pictured to the right, is 28 and president of the women’s forum in Kaliba, South Kivu, where she settled in 1997 after she and her family fled violence in their hometown. Married with two young children, Mibimba works as a teacher and farms cassava on land that she rents from a sugar factory.

“I began to participate in the [forums] because they advocate for women’s rights. It’s important work because there are so many people who don’t know they have rights.

“In Kibabi [camp], women were not respected by their husbands. They were beaten. [They] didn’t get money for food. They were neglected. Husbands were looking for other women.

“My priority is that women’s rights are respected. I would love to work for an NGO. If women’s rights are respected, people can go freely to cultivate their lands. People can work in the fields.

“One woman was really suffering working alone on the land and now her husband helps her. She came to the women’s forum to say thank you and encourage us to continue in our work.

“It’s important we women work as a team because unity is strength. When we are many, we can share the weight and do a lot of work together. I want to see change in our community. I want to see our problems end because women had big problems before.”

With reporting from the Democratic Republic of Congo by Anna Ridout.

“A CLOSER LOOK”

Read and watch more about Louise Nyiranololzi’s dramatic story of survival at oxfamamerica.org/closeup-louise.
Van Chea is a powerful man. When he heaves his heavy fishing net into the Mekong River, it explodes into a ragged circle before it splashes down and into the sparkling water. He demonstrates his technique several times, but when he hauls the net back in there are no fish. This is troubling. Chea says he used to be able to put a pot of water on the fire, walk down to the river, and “catch a kilo or two of fish” for soup before the water boiled.

“Now it is very hard to catch fish,” he says. Not only are there more people fishing, they sometimes use destructive methods like fine-mesh nets and explosives. In addition, clearing forests for logs and agriculture is also affecting the environment and fish population. And the situation could get worse. Villagers hear rumors of a proposed hydroelectric dam for an area near Chea’s village of Samphin. Its construction could have a direct impact on both the fish population and fishing families.

REGISTERING THEIR RESOURCE
Fishermen in Samphin have recently taken steps to protect the source of their livelihoods. Oxfam has been working with an organization called Northeastern Rural Development (NRD) to help the village, and others like it, learn how to register as a community fishery. This designation allows villages to set aside exclusive

WHAT’S WRONG?
Fishing communities are catching less fish due to illegal fishing, deforestation, and climate change, while the government struggles to enforce environmental regulations.

WHAT’S OXFAM DOING?
Oxfam is helping villages become registered fishing communities, with the right to enforce regulations that will preserve fish populations. Villagers are also learning to work with local officials to find ways to reduce illegal fishing.

Right the Wrong

PHOTO: A fisherman checks his net on the Mekong. Savann Oeurm / Oxfam America
fishing areas they can use and manage. Samphin has filed for its registration. In the meantime, citizens have set up a committee to patrol their designated area, keeping outsiders away while enforcing regulations that prohibit illegal fishing methods.

**SAVING AND ORGANIZING**

But creating change doesn’t happen overnight. Villages seeking a community fishery registration have to be organized: It takes a lot of commitment, patience, and time to deal with government bureaucracy in Cambodia, and not all small villages can sustain such a time-consuming process.

NRD is helping communities meet this challenge using an approach Oxfam has introduced to hundreds of thousands of people around the world: Saving for Change groups. The groups not only help people save money and learn how to invest it and earn more, they also convene people to talk about important village matters.

In Samphin, which sits on the 40-kilometer-long Rogniev island in the middle of the Mekong, fishing is the focus of a great deal of discussion among savings group members. And as it becomes even harder to make a living from the Mekong, participation in the groups also helps people make ends meet. Typically, members in the Samphin group save between one and six dollars a month. They can then borrow money to invest in fishing equipment, livestock, or growing rice. Most families in Samphin do all three.

**RAISING THEIR VOICES**

Savings groups are also giving people a voice.

“NRD creates and trains the groups, and trains members on SRI [System of Rice Intensification] and gender, fishery laws, and other policies related to fisheries,” says Sovann Sam, director of NRD. “We train young people in public speaking and how to influence public officials on fishery matters.”

When NRD hosts special district and province-wide meetings open to all Samphin villagers, members of the savings groups are well-prepared to discuss fishery issues with government representatives. That deeper understanding and the confidence to speak out may be particularly useful in the future, especially if the hydroelectric dam is built.

“Dams can make costly changes in currents, and change the depth, degree of sedimentation, and affect fish habitat and spawning areas,” says Seam Kin, director of the Provincial Fishery Office. He says a dam could displace 5,000 families.

Hom Sokorn, 34, has been fishing in Samphin most of his life, as his parents did before him. He volunteered to help gather data for a fishery research project, because he wants to do what he can to help understand the state of fish stocks. Each day at the same time he heads out onto a small area of the river where he casts his net and then documents the catch. On this day he yields a half dozen small fish, which he measures and records.

He says the registration of Samphin as a fishery community was an essential step for the village. “Registration helps us prevent illegal fishing in this area. It gives us the authority to protect our fishing lot,” he says.

Tep Srey Neang, secretary of Samphin’s Saving for Change group, is hopeful the fishery patrol and the savings group together will improve life in Samphin. “I want more money to be saved for members to borrow, and I hope my family will have a better life and the fish [population] will increase,” she says.

**A CLOSER LOOK**

Read how Oxfam is helping other communities in northern Cambodia learn to better manage their resources: oxfamamerica.org/closeup-radio.
In the Guatemalan hills, the municipality of Chinique de las Flores is known as “the capital of cordiality.” Everyone in this community of pastel-colored houses and three-wheeled tuk-tuks is friendly, it seems—even the street dogs.

But life here has not always been so idyllic. In 2009, dirty water began to flow through the community’s pipes, and in their push to get answers about it, a handful of local residents unearthed an ugly truth.

This is their story—a universal tale about how everyday citizens, when armed with knowledge, can stand up for their rights, demand that government work for the people, and finally, see that justice is done.

It all began with their frustration with the mayor at the time: Ambrosio Luis Lopez Chamorro. He wouldn’t address their concerns about the water, they said. “The water came in and looked like chocolate,” said Catalina Pelico Luna de Roda who, together with a group of other women, went to the municipal offices to complain.

“He made many mistakes,” said Damian Arevalo, 76, Chinique’s mayor in the 1970s and again in the 1980s. “He would not talk with people.”

Rebuffed at every turn, the residents finally sought help from the Advocacy and Legal Advice Center, or ALAC, run by Acción Ciudadana, the Guatemalan chapter of Transparency International.

In a campaign to show how communities are fighting back against corruption, Oxfam has produced a series of global stories highlighting engaged citizens who are standing up for accountability, making demands of their government, and getting results. This is one of those stories.

Right the Wrong

When word spreads about corruption in developing countries, that news threatens the aid dollars that are so vital to helping communities thrive.

WHAT’S OXFAM DOING?

PROBING BIGGER PROBLEMS

With guidance from ALAC, Chinique’s truth seekers quickly realized dirty water and Chamorro’s reluctance to answer questions about it weren’t their community’s only problems. Soon, they were probing questionable road improvement projects, too.

“Whatever we accomplished was because of them [ALAC],” said Tereso de Jesús Granados.

Digging into a public database run by the government, Chinique’s residents found enough evidence of irregularities in the construction projects to file a complaint with the national comptroller’s office. What particularly galled Chinique’s citizens was a payroll listing people allegedly hired to work on the municipal projects: At least one was a dead man.

But it wasn’t until August 2011, almost a year and a half after Chinique residents first filed the complaint, that the comptroller’s office released a detailed review of the case, said Gabriela Ayerdi, a lawyer and member of the ALAC team. Only then
did they learn that the attorney general, a few months before, had filed a formal complaint that named Chamorro and requested an investigation into the alleged mishandling of municipal funds. The news came too late: Chamorro was gearing up to run for re-election as mayor, and the ballots had already been printed, Ayerdi said. Chamorro’s name was on them, and the vote was set for Sept. 11, 2011.

But the results of that election will never be known. The night the ballots were being counted, trouble broke out when word spread that Chamorro had a substantial lead over the other candidates—a lead some suspected was due to outsiders being bused in to cast illegal votes. A number of the ballot boxes wound up tossed into a bonfire, calling into doubt the outcome of the race and, in the end, blocking another term for Chamorro.

**A MARCH IN SANTA CRUZ**

A few days later, townspeople began pushing for a repeat election. The time allowed for an appeal, they knew, was short.

“We could lose everything,” said Sindy Celeste Rodas Carbonell, a lawyer.

Tereso de Jesús Granados, Gabriela Ayerdi, and Damian Arevalo were among a group of truth seekers in Chinique de las Flores who helped shine a light in the darker corners of municipal affairs.

ALL PHOTOS: Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America
"We would have lost our right to elect our authorities. And we would have lost, above all, our image of a municipality where people think before acting."

In just three days, activists gathered 1,600 signatures demanding a new election. They corralled trucks, buses—anything with wheels—to ferry hundreds of residents into the regional capital, Santa Cruz, to deliver the petition.

"There were women, farmers, professionals, teachers," said Carbonell. "I believe it was the first time Chinique took to the streets and expressed its discomfort."

Their activism worked. A new election would take place in a few weeks. Chinique’s activists were jubilant, but they were also fearful.

"The mayor threatened that things were not going to remain [as they had]," said Carbonell, "because the election had been stolen from him."

Still, the activists developed a plan for the day of the new election to check IDs and ensure that outsiders could not cast ballots. Later that night came welcome news: Ebert Alexander Muñoz Juárez would be Chinique’s new mayor.

"Not all the people voted for him ... [but] everyone knew we had all won," said Carbonell. "The people rose and the authorities made justice."

‘THERE WERE ONLY RUMORS’

On a late afternoon in February, Chamorro, 51, stood alone outside his house. Golden sunlight washed the quiet residential neighborhood as he agreed to sit down on the curb for a talk.

Chamorro, a former nurse with the Ministry of Public Health for 22 years, has lived in Chinique his entire life. The uprising that election night almost four years ago seemed to rile him still.

"Unfortunately, in Guatemala there is a lot of injustice," he said with no hint of irony about his own history. Charged with taking money intended for public purposes, he was sentenced to four years of prison (or the payment of 25 quetzales a day) and fined 5,000 quetzales. He said he served six months.

His view: “When they noticed we were winning, they burned the ballots.”
example, fulfilling promises, not lying to the population. These are the acts that help us recover people’s trust.”

Water was a good place to start. “When we came in, we realized the majority of the problem was the springs,” said Juárez. The pipe network around some of them needed repair, and the municipality also needed to invest in buying some new ones. Juárez’s administration has bought seven, bringing the town total to 28, with plans to add 14 more.

“With these springs, we are going to solve the water problem,” said Juárez. In the meantime, Chinique is steadily climbing in the public’s esteem. In 2013, based on judging by the Ministry of Finance, it won a national prize for being among the 10 most transparent municipalities, said Juárez.

For Ayerdi, the ALAC team member and one of Chinique’s biggest champions, the happy ending to this long tale is due, in large part, to the citizens who were determined to do what was right for their town.

And in that determination is a lesson for every community that wants to fight corruption. What’s the most important thing in that struggle?

Ayerdi responds calmly and confidently: “People power.”

THE NEW CHINIQUE

Wendy Ixell Rodas Carbonell, a lawyer and sister of Sindy, said the outcome of all of this for her community is a new way of seeing things.

“It has allowed [us] to change (our) mind-set, so we can realize we have rights and demand them,” she said. “It is satisfying.”

There were times, admitted Tereso de Jesús Granados, that his pursuit of the truth unnerved his wife, but he was confident about the rightness of what he was doing.

“I tell her it’s a benefit for the town so others will follow the example and don’t do what this man did,” said Granados. “I tell her I’m not doing anything wrong. Many people have congratulated us because we had the courage to do this.”

And for Juárez, the man elected to succeed Chamorro, and those who come after him, the new standard for public service has been set high and firmly.

“Future mayors ... will think about what they are doing and put the money to good use—the money the government sends,” said Damian Arevalo.

Today, water is still near the top of the list of Chinique’s needs—a supply that’s clean and clear, much like citizens expect their local government to be, too.

“The population has a great expectation that corruption is not found at the municipality now,” said Juárez. “I have always said trust is won over with
RUN A GREAT RACE FOR A GREAT CAUSE.

Apply now to join Oxfam’s team in the 2015 TCS New York City Marathon: oxfamamerica.org/running.

Patricia Veevers-Carter after running for Oxfam in the 2013 ING New York City Marathon. Oxfam America