

# OXFAM CLOSEUP



## < WHAT IF THIS COULD RESTORE HAITI?

WINTER 2013 / ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:  
TRACKING THE MONEY  
FROM FISH TO FRESH VEGGIES



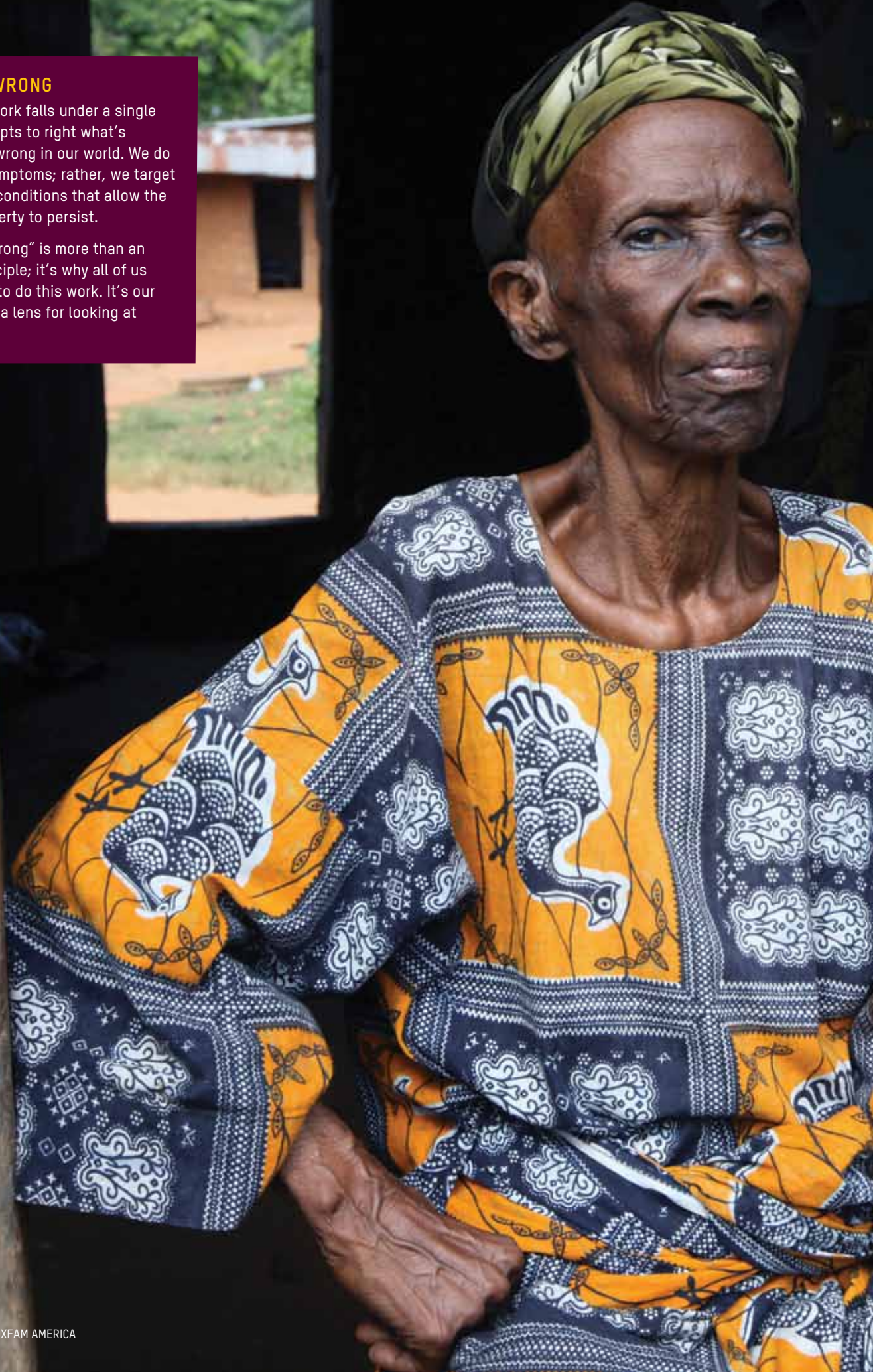
Right the Wrong **OXFAM**  
America



## RIGHT THE WRONG

All of Oxfam's work falls under a single umbrella: attempts to right what's fundamentally wrong in our world. We do not focus on symptoms; rather, we target the underlying conditions that allow the injustice of poverty to persist.

"Righting the wrong" is more than an organizing principle; it's why all of us come together to do this work. It's our rallying cry and a lens for looking at the world.







# IT'S A QUESTION OF RIGHT & WRONG

## A MANIFESTO







NEARLY ONE OUT OF EVERY THREE OF US LIVES IN POVERTY.  
BUT WE SEE A FUTURE IN WHICH NO ONE DOES.

THE WAY WE SEE IT, POVERTY IS SOLVABLE—  
A PROBLEM ROOTED IN INJUSTICE.  
ELIMINATE INJUSTICE AND YOU CAN ELIMINATE POVERTY.  
WE'RE NOT SAYING IT WILL BE QUICK OR EASY,  
BUT IT CAN BE DONE.  
WE WON'T PATCH A PROBLEM AND THEN DISAPPEAR.  
WE WON'T STAND BY SILENTLY AND WATCH OTHERS SUFFER.

INSTEAD, WE STAND TOGETHER AGAINST INJUSTICE.  
WE RECOGNIZE OUR RESPONSIBILITY  
TO HOLD THE POWERFUL ACCOUNTABLE.  
WE SEE PEOPLE'S POWER TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES.

IT DISTURBS US THAT IN A WORLD AS RICH AS OURS,  
MANY OF US GO HUNGRY OR DON'T HAVE CLEAN WATER.  
MANY OF US CAN'T CLAIM OUR HUMAN RIGHTS.

IT'S WRONG.  
AND TOGETHER WE AIM TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT.  
OXFAM AMERICA. RIGHT THE WRONG.

**STUDENTS**   
**TEACHERS**   
**PARENTS**   
**CHILDREN**   
**THINKERS**   
**DOERS**   
**DREAMERS**   
**PLANNERS**   
**LEADERS** 

**OXFAM**  **YOU**

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, YOU ARE CRUCIAL TO OUR EFFORTS.  
SO TAKE YOUR PLACE IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY: RENEW YOUR  
2013 OXFAM AMERICA MEMBERSHIP, OR BECOME A MEMBER  
TODAY, AT [OXFAMAMERICA.ORG/RENEW](http://OXFAMAMERICA.ORG/RENEW).



## DEAR FRIENDS,

We're at the start of a new year—always a time of hope and expectation when we renew our dedication to addressing the injustices of national and global poverty. At Oxfam, we're kicking the year off with a new name for our member magazine: *Closeup*. We believe this name reflects our intention to help readers gain a deeper understanding of the people with whom we work and of the enterprise, drive, and dignity that define their lives—even as many face terrible hardship.

But hardship is only part of the story. Coupled with it, almost always, is a determination that can carry a region far. On page 7, you'll read about civil society groups in Ghana that are working to ensure that the natural wealth of their country—oil and gold—benefits its poorest citizens. Ghanaians are pushing their government and oil and mining companies to be more transparent about where the money from extractive industries goes. It's painstaking but essential work, with the potential to make a significant difference in the fight against poverty.

That same purposefulness is beginning to transform the lives of some of Haiti's poorest citizens—farmers in the lush Artibonite Valley where they have struggled to keep producing rice in the face of a flood of cheaper imports, mainly from the US. January marks three years since an earthquake destroyed much of Haiti's capital where many of the country's rural residents had flocked in preceding years for greater economic opportunities. Now, change is afoot in the valley. On page 4, we'll update you on how Oxfam is helping revitalize the rice industry. As one farmer said, "We were hungry, but that is getting better all the time."

*Better all the time:* That is what we will keep striving for throughout 2013. With vision and steady, deliberate steps—and your continued commitment to our mission—I am confident we can make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people around the globe.

Sincerely,



Raymond C. Offenheiser  
President, Oxfam America

## OXFAM CLOSEUP

OXFAM AMERICA'S MEMBER MAGAZINE



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### OXFAMCloseup WINTER 2013

**EDITOR** Coco McCabe

**WRITERS** Chris Hufstader,  
Anna Kramer, Elizabeth Stevens

**DESIGNERS** Jessica Erickson,  
Emily Drees

**PRODUCTION LEAD** Carl M. Soares

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**ABOVE: (Left)** "This mill was sent from heaven," says rice farmer Deranie Jeune. Oxfam is finding ways to help rice farmers in Haiti's Artibonite Valley compete in the global marketplace. *Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America* **(Top right)** In Ghana's Western Region, Fostene Debang serves on a citizen monitoring committee that tracks how mineral royalties are used. *Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America* **(Bottom right)** Rows of newly planted seedlings in a backyard greenhouse in New Orleans' Village de l'Est neighborhood are now helping Vietnamese families affected by the BP oil spill earn a living. *Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America*

**COVER:** Rice is a staple of the Haitian diet and could play a key role in ending rural poverty. *Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America*

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to [editor@oxfamamerica.org](mailto:editor@oxfamamerica.org).

### 2012 MATCHING GIFT CAMPAIGN

Our remarkable 2012 matching gift challenge essentially doubled every dollar you donated, reaching \$1.8 million. Thank you to our leadership group of supporters who pledged to the matching gift fund and to those whose generous gifts had twice the impact on Oxfam's efforts to save lives and help people overcome poverty.

# SOWING THE SEEDS OF A BETTER FUTURE

FROM HAITI'S LUSH ARTIBONITE VALLEY, OXFAM'S ELIZABETH STEVENS REPORTS THAT COMBATING HUNGER AND RURAL POVERTY MAY COME DOWN TO A FOUR-LETTER WORD: RICE.

A few hours north of Port-au-Prince, in a beautiful valley where the Artibonite River winds gently between two mountain ranges, there is a landscape perfectly suited to growing rice. The people who live there have farmed rice for generations. But in 1995 there was a flood. Not the kind where the river rises and a few days later recedes. This was a flood triggered by powerful business interests: a sudden and drastic reduction in customs tariffs—the second in less than a decade—that enabled cheap imported rice to overwhelm the Haitian market. Eighteen years later, it shows no signs of relenting. The result has been stagnation and poverty, and a steep drop in the market share of locally grown rice.

## WHAT'S WRONG?

Decades of environmental degradation, poor governance, and unfair trade have crippled rice production in Haiti—a country where hundreds of thousands of people don't have enough to eat.

## WHAT'S OXFAM DOING?

Oxfam is helping rice farmers improve their yields and profits while tackling the policies that are preventing rice agriculture in Haiti from flourishing.

**Right the Wrong**

When the earthquake of 2010 struck Haiti, the disaster shone a spotlight on the vulnerability of a country that has traditionally focused its resources on the capital city and left the countryside to fend for itself. Haiti had long since become dependent on imported food, and when hundreds of thousands of people returned to their home villages after the quake, they faced a future of deep rural poverty.

So, Oxfam joined forces with farmers' associations, women's groups, and local government authorities to help revive the rice economy for 5,000 farmers in the lower Artibonite Valley—to make rice farming viable again by systematically addressing the points in production where Haitian rice has lost its ability to compete in the globalized marketplace.

With Oxfam's support, many farmers are now practicing a method of growing rice that is more than doubling yields while reducing the use of seeds, water, and chemical inputs. Farmers have access to new processing equipment that is lowering costs while improving the quality of the final product, and to motorized cultivators to prepare their land for planting. And in a region where mechanics for farming equipment are in short supply, dozens of young men and women are training to become professional agricultural mechanics. Through cash-for-work programs, farming communities are clearing irrigation channels of debris, sediment, and

weeds, and in the process have brought 4,700 acres of land back under cultivation. Those hit hard by recent hurricanes are getting relief. Women rice farmers in the valley are gaining access to low-interest loans so they can become more successful entrepreneurs. And Oxfam is advocating with the national government, US policy makers, and the international banking and development communities for policies that support rather than undermine Haitian rice farmers.

Together, Oxfam and our partners are beginning to weave together the tattered fabric of the rice economy into a coherent whole, and soon the effects may extend throughout Artibonite and beyond.

The relief in the communities is palpable. Farmer Augustin Miradieu lives in the village of Dubuisson, where irrigation has been restored to 370 acres of land. "We were hungry, but that is getting better all the time," he says. "Now, we have the irrigation we need to farm, so we have food to eat."



1. **RICE** "Rice is what the country produces and what the country eats," says Eslik Saint Paul of Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite. Many Haitians eat rice for every meal of every day.

2. **IRRIGATION CHANNELS** Well-maintained irrigation channels enable farmers to control the flow of water to their crops; clogged channels are a menace, especially during heavy rains. Oxfam has supported communities and partners to clear more than 60 miles of channel in the Artibonite Valley.

3. **A NEW RICE MILL** Thanks to a new processing center built by an Oxfam partner, local farmers are now spending less time and money transporting their grain, and it costs less per sack to mill it. But the gains don't end there. "The private mills break the grains, so the quality isn't as good," says customer Wilnie Désir. "Rice from this mill is prettier, so it sells faster."

4. **GATHERING RICE SEED** In Haiti's struggling rice economy, improving yields is vital, so Oxfam and our partners have introduced farmers in the Artibonite Valley to a method of growing rice called the System of Rice Intensification, or SRI. The early results have been impressive, according to Isnard Louis, president of a farmers' association. "It's like a miracle that you have to see with your own eyes."

PHOTOS: Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America







**/// I USED TO GO TO PEOPLE FOR CREDIT WHO WERE VERBALLY ABUSIVE. BUT WE DON'T TAKE ABUSE ANYMORE. ///**

LORMICIA CHARLOT RENÉ, MEMBER OF A PARTNER ORGANIZATION THAT PROVIDES LOW-INTEREST LOANS, ALLOWING WOMEN TO AVOID HUMILIATION

**1. IMPORTED RICE** When Haiti dropped its tariffs from 50 percent to 3 percent, the national rice industry collapsed. Now, more than 80 percent of the rice consumed in Haiti is imported. But in a country where nearly 40 percent of the population struggles with food insecurity, and where nearly 90 percent of people who reside in the countryside are living on less than \$2 a day, reviving the rice industry is crucial. *Elizabeth Stevens / Oxfam America*

**2. MECHANIC IN TRAINING** "I want to help farmers in our area and also help myself," says Soeurette Charles, who has joined a two-year program—led by a partner—to become a specialist in fixing agricultural equipment. She adds, "If a woman or young girl growing up sees women like us doing mechanics, they'll see that women have the potential to learn any skill, any job." *Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America*

**3. SELLING RICE IN THE MARKET** Single mother Ifide Dorvil sells rice in the Pont Sondé market in Artibonite. With three microloans from an Oxfam partner, she has been able to build her business and support her family—and save money as well. "The credit helps women be independent," she says. *Elizabeth Stevens / Oxfam America*

Read more about Oxfam's rice program in Artibonite at [oxfamamerica.org/haitirice](http://oxfamamerica.org/haitirice).



# FINDING A PATH TO PROSPERITY

GHANAIS ARE LEARNING HOW TO TRACK THE MONEY THEIR GOVERNMENT RECEIVES FROM MINING COMPANIES. BUT AS OXFAM'S CHRIS HUFSTADER REPORTS, A NEW OIL BOOM WILL REQUIRE EVEN GREATER VIGILANCE TO ENSURE POOR COMMUNITIES GET THEIR FAIR SHARE.

It's hard to imagine, because Kwabena Otoo is not an angry man by nature, but he says that when he occasionally travels from his home in Ghana to Johannesburg, the financial center of South Africa, he tends to lose his temper.

"I get angry," he says. "I cast my mind back to Obuasi, where most of Ghana's gold has been dug, and I know something went wrong," he says, explaining that many of the communities near Obuasi are beset by pollution, unemployment, and poverty.

To be fair, Johannesburg has its share of poverty and inequality, but it is also a major, modern world-class city built by gold. It makes Otoo wonder where Ghana went wrong. "Something doesn't add up," he says.

When Ghana discovered oil in 2007, Otoo says people saw an opportunity, this time, to ensure that their country's natural wealth would do more for the development of the nation. With help from Oxfam, more than 100 organizations formed the Ghana Civil Society Platform on Oil and Gas, which helped write and advocate for the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (passed in 2011). The platform's goal is to ensure

that oil revenues are used to improve the country's roads, build schools and hospitals, and fight poverty. The law's aim is transparency: it requires the government to disclose exactly how much oil is produced, how much money the government receives for it, and how that money is allocated. The law also established the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC)—composed of women's groups, journalists, religious leaders, and others—to monitor uses of the oil revenues and compliance with the act.

Otoo is the research director of the Ghana Trade Union Congress, an umbrella organization of 18 labor unions and one of Oxfam America's partners in Ghana. He serves on the PIAC, which he says works well but needs to do more. "We need to track the revenues, not just look at the budgets and see which road is being constructed. We want to check to see if that road is being built, and if the quality matches the amount of money allocated." The problem, he says, is that the PIAC is not adequately funded, and it is hard to find someone in the government to pay for travel. "Those doing the stealing," he says simply, "will not fund you to check."

## WHAT'S WRONG?

Many people in resource-rich countries in Africa live in poverty, despite the royalties that oil, gas, and mining companies pay to local governments.

## WHAT'S OXFAM DOING?

Oxfam is working with organizations in Ghana to help them find out where the money goes so people can hold the government accountable for their fair share.

## Right the Wrong



ABOVE: Aisha Mohammed is a field officer for SEND-Ghana, Oxfam's partner coordinating local-level monitoring in collaboration with the District Assembly. She says that getting people involved in the budget process at the District Assembly helps ensure government spending does more: "We have more prioritized projects in the right places," she says. "They actually benefit the community."

RIGHT: A newly constructed community market area in Simpa sits just outside the mining center Tarkwa in Ghana's Western Region. Volunteers working with the local District Assembly legislature verified that the construction costs for the market came from royalties paid by mining companies to the central government's Mineral Development Fund.

PHOTOS: Anna Fawcus / Oxfam America

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The citizens of Ghana are now demanding more from their government. They want to see how their valuable resources are being used, and if they are worth the cost: mining (mostly gold) generated \$4.7 billion in 2011 (a 25 percent increase from the previous year, thanks to high gold prices), but only about 5 percent of that goes to the government. Meanwhile, thousands of farmers have been pushed off fields that are now mine pits and waste dumps. Mining is also destroying forests and polluting water, while providing only about 0.2 percent of non-agricultural jobs, mostly in highly skilled positions.

Oil production in Ghana is proving slow to get going, contributing about \$400 million, or just 1 percent, to the GDP last year, with just a fraction of that supporting social projects around the country. However, when the offshore oil fields reach full production, the government expects to bring in a total of \$20 billion between now and 2030. But environmentalists fear spills from the offshore rigs. And the livelihoods of local fishermen could also be affected as the government and companies ban fishing near their rigs.

With a strong transparency law, active watchdog groups, and an independent media, the country is making progress, and not just at the national level, where the PIAC is trying to find its way. Oxfam is also helping to train and fund local-level monitors who are committed to ensuring that gold and oil money fights poverty.

## FOLLOWING THE MONEY

Tarkwa is a mining center in Ghana's Western Region. It is a bustling, gritty town, and people here are well aware of the social costs of mining. Several international companies are digging for gold in areas expropriated from farming villages. Displaced farmers have claimed that some of these land transfers were carried out without their consent and without adequate compensation, provoking conflicts.

Oxfam is working with the Social Enterprise Development Foundation-Ghana (known as SEND-Ghana) to train local people to watch how their elected officials in the Tarkwa District Assembly use money from

the government's Mineral Development Fund (MDF) for public works. Companies pay a royalty of 5 percent of the value of the gold they mine, and the government dedicates 10 percent of that to the fund. SEND-Ghana is recruiting people from farmers' associations, women and youth organizations, churches and mosques, and the District Assembly itself, and the foundation trains them in the district budgeting process. These people are learning how to watch where the District Assembly allocates money, and they are advocating for projects like schools, roads, and public facilities such as toilets.

On one hot afternoon, about a dozen members of Tarkwa's district monitoring committee are in the District Assembly hall going over a list of 24 projects. Some are recently completed. Others are under way. Among them are schools, water and sanitation facilities, electricity, and government buildings. Eleven are being at least partly funded by the Mineral Development Fund.

The monitoring committee members show visitors two classroom buildings at the nearby public Methodist Junior High School. Assistant Headmaster Thomas Aidoo says the buildings collapsed in heavy rains and winds a few years ago, but that the District Assembly allocated about \$50,000 of MDF and other funds to rebuild. "Since we are in a mining area, we're happy there are mining company royalties available to help the community to operate," Aidoo says in the doorway of the yellow building, a beehive of students coming in and out, working on homework, and talking to visitors.

In the village of Simpa outside Tarkwa, monitoring committee members check a market built just off the main road. It has 20 stalls and is paved, ready for traders to move in and start selling. All it needs is a sign indicating it was built with MDF funding. "Mining is gradually taking away the backbone of the people—that's agriculture," says Fostene Debang, a member of the monitoring committee who runs the Community Rights and Development Association in Tarkwa. "So it's important for people to know how monies from the mining sector are put to use."





## // MINING IS GRADUALLY TAKING AWAY THE BACKBONE OF THE PEOPLE—THAT’S AGRICULTURE. SO IT’S IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW HOW MONIES FROM THE MINING SECTOR ARE PUT TO USE. //

Farther to the west, James Bogoloh, a District Assembly member in the western Jomoro district, says that community monitors there are promoting an awareness of “transparency and accountability.” However, he says, there are still challenges. “We know that mineral resources are issued to village chiefs, but we don’t know what [the money] goes to,” he says, standing on a dirt road under construction near his village, Takinta. “It’s hard to track information here, but we should know how much we gain from the MDF, how much goes to chiefs, and what happens to it.”

Oxfam’s partners Friends of the Nation and SEND-Ghana have trained more than 200 community monitors in this pilot project. Fostene Debang says the monitors “previously did not have the idea that they had the right to see what projects were being

implemented for them.” He says they think of themselves as more than just taxpayers who occasionally vote, but as partners with the District Assembly in defining development priorities.

Ghana has made good strides to improve the use of mining revenues and put in place a transparent system for oil revenues. “Transparency is one thing, but accountability is quite another,” says Ian Gary, Oxfam’s senior policy manager for extractive industries and an expert on Ghana. “With a new oil-led resource boom under way, now is the time to build up the abilities of people to hold the government responsible for the use of royalties. With more and more wealth available to the country, Ghana’s citizens know they will need to be ever vigilant to ensure it is not lost again.”

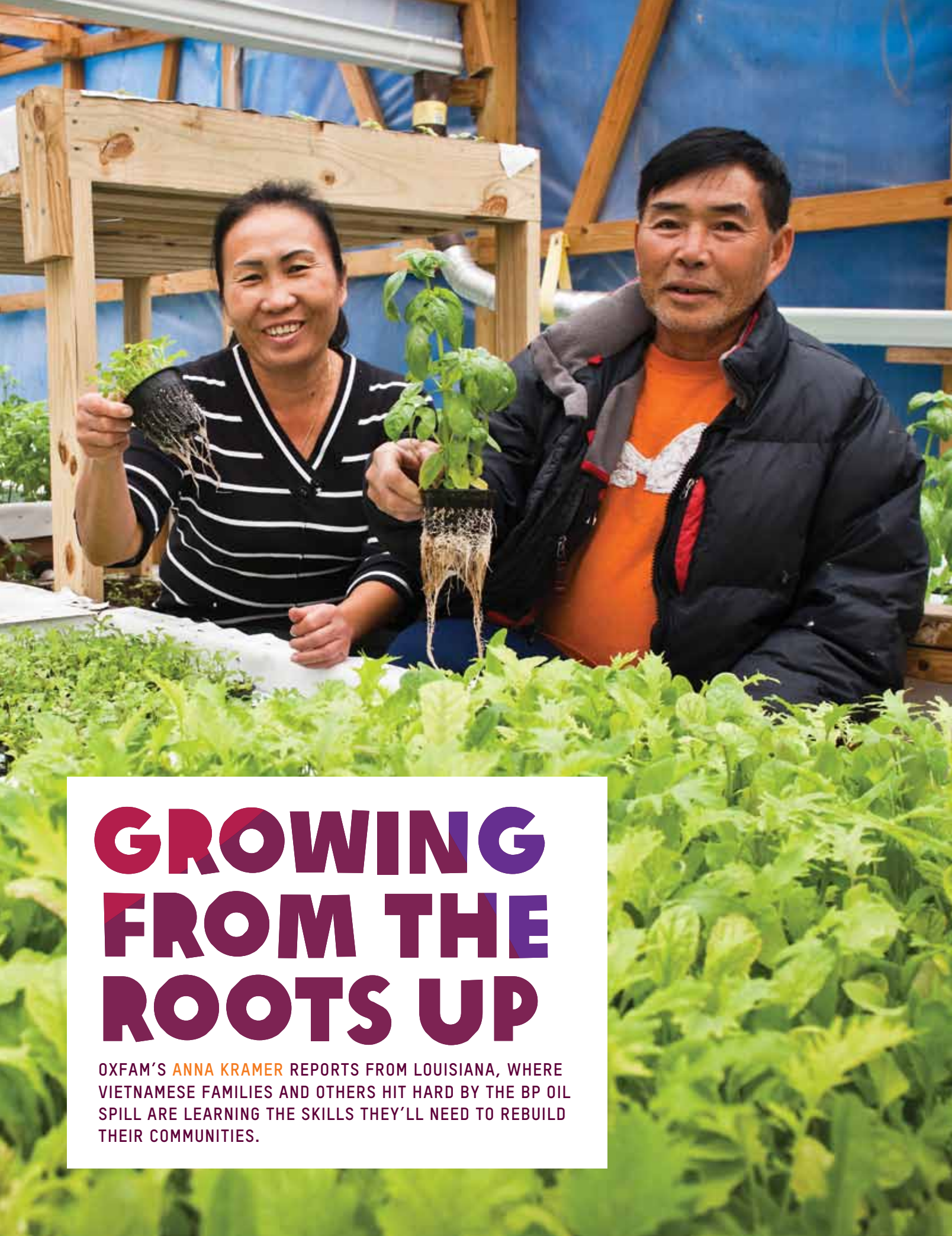
## JOIN THE FIGHT FOR TRANSPARENCY

### TELL BIG OIL COMPANIES: STOP FIGHTING TRANSPARENCY RULES

Right now the American Petroleum Institute is suing the Securities and Exchange Commission to block new regulations that require companies to report payments they make to governments. The regulations are part of the 2010 Dodd Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Oxfam is calling on Chevron, Exxon Mobil, and Conoco Phillips to drop their support for the lawsuit. You can help put a stop to secret payments by taking online action at [oxfamamerica.org/rules](http://oxfamamerica.org/rules)

*For the latest on this campaign, “like” us: [facebook.com/RightToKnowRightToDecide](https://facebook.com/RightToKnowRightToDecide).*





# GROWING FROM THE ROOTS UP

OXFAM'S **ANNA KRAMER** REPORTS FROM LOUISIANA, WHERE VIETNAMESE FAMILIES AND OTHERS HIT HARD BY THE BP OIL SPILL ARE LEARNING THE SKILLS THEY'LL NEED TO REBUILD THEIR COMMUNITIES.



Although he's been a shrimp fisherman in Louisiana for more than 30 years, today Sang Ho is more concerned with a different type of aquatic life: koi, the silver and orange fish usually found flitting through ornamental ponds.

Sang's koi are not just decorative. They're a source of fertilizer—the fuel that powers an innovative growing system called aquaponics (a combination of aquaculture, or raising fish, and hydroponics, or growing plants in water). Nitrate-rich water from Sang's two massive fish tanks flows outward through a network of pipes, where it nourishes the roots of the plants growing in his greenhouse. The water then cycles back into the fish tanks, and the process begins again.

On a gray day in November, hundreds of seedlings—mesclun mix, aloe, herbs—were lined up neatly in Sang's greenhouse under a roof of milky plastic tarps. The damp air carried the tangy scents of basil and mint.

"The produce grown in this kind of system stays fresh longer," said Sang, 60, lifting one plant to show the long, trailing roots. "When you harvest it, it regrows more quickly."

As a participant in a pilot project led by Oxfam's local partner the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVN), Sang is one of the first in his New Orleans neighborhood to try aquaponics. And this initiative, in turn, is just one component of Oxfam's Gulf Coast recovery effort, which helps people like Sang rebuild their lives and livelihoods in the wake of disasters.

#### WHAT'S WRONG?

The US Gulf Coast is home to several states with high rates of poverty, including Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation. In these areas, lower-income communities are the most affected by disasters like the BP oil spill, but have the fewest resources for recovery.

#### WHAT'S OXFAM DOING?

Oxfam and partners are advocating for policies to strengthen vulnerable communities, while ensuring that local people have the skills and opportunities they need to rebuild.

**Right the Wrong**



#### JOBS LOST AND JOBS REGAINED

In the seven years since Hurricane Katrina swept across the Gulf Coast states, Oxfam's initial response to the storm has grown into a multimillion-dollar program, which partners with grassroots organizations to support the region's most vulnerable people.

These efforts took on new urgency in April 2010, when the worst environmental disaster in US history—the BP oil spill—devastated Mississippi and Louisiana's coastal communities. Fishing families found themselves out of work, and seafood enterprises were hobbled.

Throughout 2011, Oxfam, local partners, and supporters advocated for communities struggling to get back to work. Their efforts helped pass the RESTORE the Gulf Coast Act, a federal bill that will send 80 percent of civil fines from BP (which could total as much as \$20 billion) back to the Gulf Coast. The funds will go toward restoring the damaged coastline while creating up to 74,000 new jobs.

"[The RESTORE Act] offers a chance to reduce the risks of vulnerable communities, and to create new economic opportunities for low-income and disadvantaged working families," said Oxfam America President Raymond C. Offenheiser when the bill was signed into law in July 2012.

Meanwhile, Oxfam is working with partner organizations in Mississippi and Louisiana to make this "restoration economy" a reality. That means building the infrastructure to create these new jobs, training people on the skills they'll need, and, where necessary, helping families affected by the oil spill find new ways of earning a living.

Sang and his wife, Tuyet, are one such family. They live in Village de l'Est, a Vietnamese neighborhood of about 8,000 people on the eastern edge of New Orleans. Like many of their neighbors, they came to the US seeking refuge from Vietnam's civil war in the 1970s.

Even before the oil spill, poverty rates in Village de l'Est were nearly three times the national average. Those who lost jobs or income after the spill included not only fishers and shrimpers like Sang, but hundreds of others who worked at the nearby seafood processing factories and shipyards. Many of these workers didn't speak English fluently and had little formal education, making it difficult for them to find other employment.

"The BP oil spill hit us even harder than Hurricane Katrina," said Khai Nguyen, who grew up in Village de l'Est and now works for MQVN. "After Katrina, even if people here lost their houses, they were able to rebuild in six months. Two years after the oil spill, we're still hurting financially."

LEFT: Tuyet Ho and Sang Ho show off the healthy roots of the plants growing in their greenhouse. As members of a farmers' cooperative founded by Oxfam's partner organization, MQVN, the couple earns extra income selling their produce to local restaurants.

ABOVE: "Whatever I don't sell, I eat myself, or give to neighbors," said cooperative member Nguyen Thanh, 70, who uses his aquaponics system to grow basil, mesclun mix, and oak leaf lettuce.

PHOTOS: Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America



## // THE BP OIL SPILL HIT US EVEN HARDER THAN HURRICANE KATRINA. ... TWO YEARS AFTER THE OIL SPILL, WE'RE STILL HURTING FINANCIALLY. //

ABOVE: Khai Nguyen, left, of Oxfam's partner the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVN), talks with Adam Huynh, the newest member of MQVN's farmers' cooperative. Nguyen said the organization now has a waiting list of local families interested in the project. *Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America*

MQVN helped more than 500 Vietnamese-speaking families file compensation claims with BP. Some of those claimants told the organization that they were also having trouble accessing food, especially fresh produce. (Village de l'Est is classified by the US Department of Agriculture as a "food desert," meaning most of the population is low income and lives more than four miles from a supermarket.)

When community members asked MQVN to help them find a way to earn income from agriculture, the organization researched a number of ideas. Locals ultimately chose aquaponics, which drew on both their skills as fishers and their knowledge of gardening in the similar climate of southern Vietnam.

Laura Inouye, deputy director of Oxfam's US program, said Oxfam agreed to support the pilot project as a model for future community-led rebuilding efforts. "That's always been our approach, whether in the US or elsewhere in the world," said Inouye. "Not to come in and impose solutions, but to listen to local people. ... What are their perspectives, their issues? What are their solutions?"

### A DIFFERENT KIND OF FARMERS' COOPERATIVE

In 2011, Oxfam and MQVN made microgrants to six financially insecure households, including Sang's, to help them build and

install backyard aquaponics systems. (Other families paid for systems using their own funds.) MQVN also teamed up with a local community college to teach growers the technical skills they needed to maintain the systems on their own.

Nowadays, a truck owned by the Village de l'Est Green Growers Initiative (VEGGI)—the farmers' cooperative created by MQVN to help the growers earn a living—pulls up in front of Sang's house twice a week to collect his fresh herbs and salad greens.

"We call local restaurants to find out what chefs need, then pick it up, process it, and deliver it," said Nguyen. VEGGI counts farmers' markets as well as restaurants like Emeril's among its clientele. Eighty percent of its profits go directly back to growers.

Nguyen said the cooperative model also puts growers in control of everything from the quality of the produce to the prices they set. "One of the things we're most proud of is giving people part ownership of their own businesses," he said.

The pilot project still reaches only a few people, and the cost of installing a backyard aquaponics system remains relatively high. But MQVN is optimistic about the future. With a new \$80,000 grant from Oxfam, the organization plans to expand the 20-member cooperative, purchase land for growers, and teach high school students about sustainable agriculture. Along with other Oxfam partners across the Gulf Coast, MQVN will also begin offering training and career services to help people access the new jobs created by the RESTORE Act.

For now, Sang and Tuyet are earning a few hundred dollars a week from their produce. Sang said it's not as much as he made as a fisherman, but it's enough to supplement uncertain income.

"We're earning money that we can use to buy food ... [and] we eat this [produce] ourselves, too," he explained.

Although Sang still works as a fisherman, lately he finds himself out on the water less and less frequently. "If there are no shrimp, I don't fish," he said. "These days, there are a lot fewer shrimp, or no shrimp at all."



# MEDIA MASHUP

LOOK. WATCH. LISTEN. JOIN THE CONVERSATION.

## DON'T DUCK RESPONSIBILITY

Congress has been back for just a few hours and already the hijinks have resumed. Wednesday's projected nuttiness: Oxfam America is posting a giant inflatable duck outside of the Capitol and slipping lawmakers sweet little reminders to not be "lame" the rest of this session.

The international aid organization wants members to keep foreign assistance in mind as they renew efforts to circumvent the looming sequestration before the end of the year.

—Excerpt from a post by Warren Rojas on Roll Call's "Heard on the Hill" blog, Nov. 13, 2012



## FROM THE BLOGS AMID ELECTIONS AND HURRICANES, LISTENING FOR A FEW HONEST WORDS

By Bob Ferguson / Nov. 2, 2012

Longtime Oxfam supporter and cellist Ben Sollee released a new video today for his very timely song, "A Few Honest Words." Filmed at the Lincoln Memorial, the song is Ben's call for our leaders to just be honest, and the lyrics are as basic and clear as he wishes politicians would be ...

"Like nearly everyone," explained Ben, "my attention this week has been focused on [Hurricane] Sandy and all of her devastating effects. ... There are so many people dealing with fundamental challenges in their lives at this moment: food, shelter, clean water, etc. These are things that are not debatable or points of policy; they are human needs."

Watch the video for "A Few Honest Words" at [oxfamamerica.org/bensollee](http://oxfamamerica.org/bensollee).



## IN THE NEWS SUPPORT FOR HAITIAN FARMERS

From *The New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2012

"It is not just a matter of more investment, as imperative as that is. The Haitian government needs to ensure a coordinated approach, so that all actors engaged in agricultural development are working to advance a coherent strategy."

—Excerpt from "Helping Haiti's Farmers," a letter to the editor by Yolette Etienne, Oxfam America's country director for Haiti

"Climate change is and will be a truly global challenge and we cannot think we can tackle it—either its causes or its consequences—by ourselves. It requires a global response of proportions equal to the historical threat it poses."

Raymond C. Offenheiser, president, Oxfam America, and Timothy E. Wirth, president, United Nations Foundation and the Better World Fund, writing in *Politico*, Dec. 6, 2012



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