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OXFAMExchange

SPRING 2012

WHEN WE LISTEN, SOLUTIONS FOLLOW

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SMALL FARMERS TACKLE GLOBAL HUNGER

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OXFAMExchange Spring 2012

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Editor

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Production lead

ABOVE: (Left) A rice farmer in eastern Senegal visits her parched field, awaiting the seasonal rains due—with any luck—in May or June. *Brett Eloff / Oxfam America* **(Top right)** "I'm happy because I can do good while doing what I love," says Melvin Elías, who, with Oxfam's support, helped his Salvadoran community prepare for and survive a major flood**.** *René Figueroa / Oxfam America* **(Bottom right)** Wearing traditional Kichwa dress, women in Aviación, Peru, tend to their shared garden. *Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America*

COVER: Luz Sinarahua, of Chirikyacu, Peru, spreads out red beans to dry in the sun. Sinarahua leads a group of 18 women who work together to grow these and other crops both for food and for sale. *Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America*

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to **editor@oxfamamerica.org**.

Note to our readers | 2011 marked our final Nov. 1-Oct. 31 fiscal year. In November, we initiated a five-month period to transition to our new fiscal year, which will now end on March 31. We made the move to align with other Oxfam affiliates. Look for our next annual report this fall.

Dear Friends,

As I write this, spring has come to Boston. We welcome it, of course, but sometimes the most beautiful things can also be unsettling, and this spring is one of them. March, usually so raw in New England, produced a week of summerlike days here and proved to be the warmest March in the contiguous US since record keeping started in 1895.

The unseasonal warmth was a stark reminder that for many people on our planet, increasingly unpredictable weather is leading to life-threatening problems. In West Africa, 18.4 million people are now at risk of a serious food crisis created in part by erratic weather. In East Africa, drought—in some places the worst in 60 years—helped trigger a crisis in the middle of last year that affected more than 13 million people. Together, that's over 31 million people on one continent alone confronted with profound struggles, and that's just in the past 12 months.

Such evidence of a global climate crisis can send development experts into a tailspin, as they search for answers. But solutions may not be as hard to find as we imagine.

We can start by listening.

Listening to local people and learning from the deep knowledge they have about their communities, natural resources, and history lies at the heart of smart development. It's the first step in empowering people to make the systemic changes that will allow them to build their resilience and ensure a better future for themselves and their families.

For Maribel Cachique and a group of other young mothers working in the Peruvian Amazon (see page 8), a garden of ancestral crops thriving deep in the forest may hold one of the answers to their battle with climate change. Their garden and others like it grew out of conversations fellow Kichwa women had about their need for food security. Hearing their concerns, Oxfam helped launch the pilot project. And now, Cachique's determination and advice to the other growers offers inspiration to us all: Bit by bit, she says, the Kichwa women are going to move forward.

Sometimes charting a new path is not about leading. Our job here at Oxfam, and yours, is to heed the advice of leaders like Cachique—and to follow.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

media mashup > look. watch. listen. join the conversation.

IN THE NEWS: OXFAM ON THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

From The New Yorker, *March 26, 2012*


NABIL ELDERKIN / OXFAM

As the article notes, selling arms in war zones is not necessarily illegal. I hope that that will change when countries gather at the U.N. this summer to negotiate an Arms Trade Treaty. Such a treaty could require, for the first time, that countries adopt laws governing the flow of weapons across their borders, and criminalize illegal arms dealing. Countries—including the United States—must work toward a strong treaty that prevents weapons from reaching the hands of war criminals, human-rights abusers, and terrorists.

—Excerpt from "Re: Disarming Viktor Bout," a letter to the editor by Raymond C. Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America

"

Just having clean drinking water or having water at all [is] something we never even think about at home. … [In Ethiopia there is] no water for the livestock who plow the fields for vegetables and food. It's an ugly cycle.

—Larry Fitzgerald, wide receiver for the NFL's Arizona Cardinals, from ESPN.com, March 29, 2012. Fitzgerald and former teammate Anquan Boldin traveled to Ethiopia with Oxfam to raise awareness about the drought and food crisis in East Africa.


PERCY RAMIREZ / OXFAM AMERICA

WATCH > The women who wouldn't keep silent by Anna Kramer

"Many [children in La Oroya] have just started to recover from high levels of lead in their blood, and what happens now will be critical for them," said Elizabeth Rojas, above. "Always, the most vulnerable population is the poorest."

Meet Rojas and the other women who are defending public health and the environment in La Oroya, Peru, a city that's been called one of the most polluted places on earth. While legislators and CEOs debate the future of the Doe Run Peru lead smelter in La Oroya, these women continue their efforts to protect the community—even when it means putting their own safety at risk.

View the Flickr slide show in English and Spanish at **oxfamamerica.org/laoroya**

FOOD CRISIS IN WEST AFRICA: 18.4 million people at risk

As a food crisis intensifies across the semi-arid Sahel region of West Africa, millions of farming and herding families are struggling to get enough to eat.

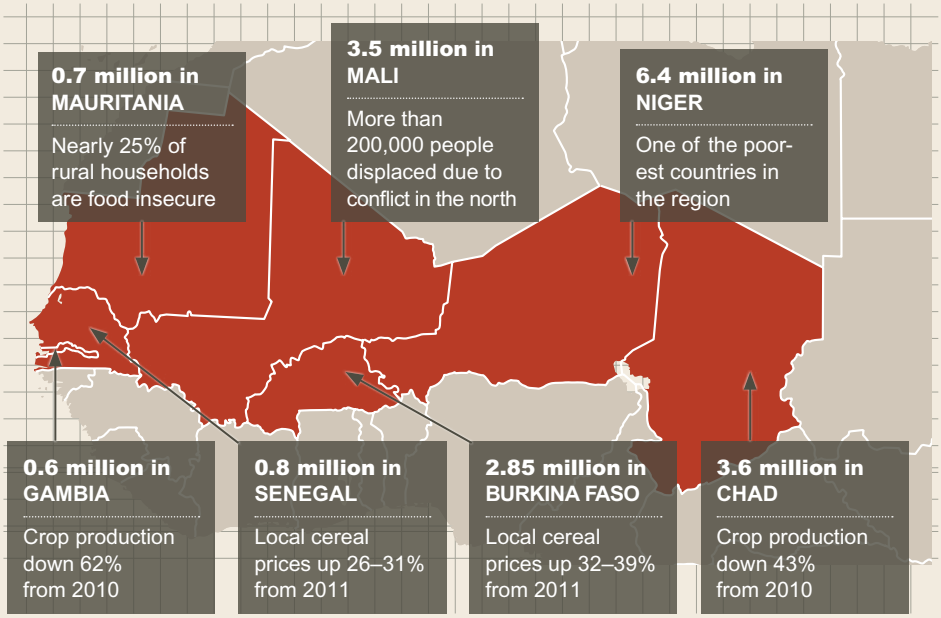
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FAMILIES CAN'T GET FOOD?

- 1 million children at risk of acute malnutrition
- Parents forced to sell essential tools and livestock in order to feed their families

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

- Erratic rains
- Meager harvests
- Diminished pastures
- Increased food prices
- Lingering effects of 2010 food crisis

WHO'S AT RISK?



HOW IS OXFAM RESPONDING?

Governments and aid organizations like Oxfam are mobilizing resources to help people and the animals they depend on. Here's how Oxfam will respond:

Water & sanitation
Construction and repair of wells, promototion of hygiene to reduce illness

Food
Cash-for-work programs so that people can earn income, cash transfers so people can buy food locally, restoration of cereal banks, food distribution

Livestock & crops
Fodder for animals, vaccinations, improved water sources for animals, seed distribution

> "Of course, I feel very hungry. I feel hungry until I become weak. When I'm hungry, if possible, I prepare a broth for myself and my kids, otherwise, we drink some water and we sleep."
>
> —Adjitti Mahamat, 40
> *Mangalme region of Chad*

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Join the GROW campaign.
Address the root causes of hunger and advocate for millions of small-scale farmers around the world:
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Data current as of April 2012. Sources include World Food Programme and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. For complete source information, please contact editor@oxfamamerica.org

As rain pounded on the roof through the night, floodwater quietly slipped into the home of Milagro González. She sensed rather than heard it arrive. “One somehow knows,” she says.

González lives in the tiny fishing village of El Botoncillo near the mouth of the Paz—the river that defines El Salvador’s western border with Guatemala. It was here in the state of Ahuachapán, where in October 2011 the Paz and its tributaries first washed over their banks, that an extraordinary emergency began to unfold.

Five feet of rain

The name of the storm was forgettable: Tropical Depression 12-E. But for the people who lived through the deluge, the memories will be hard to shake. Drifting in from the Pacific, the slow-moving cyclone settled over El Salvador for nine days, dumping an unbelievable five feet of rain. The downpour triggered countless landslides and turned rivers and streams into deep and deadly torrents. Roads, bridges, and homes were swept away, and more than 430,000 acres of crops were destroyed. In all, more than half a million Salvadorans were affected. The intensity of the rains recalled Hurricane Mitch of 1998, which caused vast destruction and drove hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans from their homes, but the rainfall from the tropical depression far outstripped the infamous hurricane.

But if the flooding in 2011 surpassed Mitch, so too did the quality of the emergency response, and the capacity of El Salvador’s communities, government, and aid providers to take care of their own.

Over the past 10 years, Oxfam partners have played key roles in strengthening the country’s capacity to manage disasters: first by forming a coalition that lobbied successfully for a comprehensive new civil-protection law—enacted in 2005—that focuses not only on disaster response but also on preparedness and prevention. Equally important, the law casts community members not as victims but as vital, active participants in saving lives.

Oxfam and its partners have also built a dynamic new team of experts in the cluster of specialties called WASH—water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion. Known as the national WASH team, its members are trained to protect public health in the chaotic environment of humanitarian emergencies.

The team is independent of the government and its civil-protection system, but in emergencies, says Oxfam humanitarian program officer Karina Copen, “we coordinate with the national civil-protection system from the start and at all levels.”

As the October disaster unfolded, citizens across the country sprang into action and put their training to work on behalf of their communities.

The most valuable asset to live

In El Botoncillo, the water rose quickly. “The road was flooded up to our necks, so cars couldn’t come in and we couldn’t get out of this place,” says González’s neighbor María Carmen de Sarceno. “We were hungry and wet, and we had no dry clothes.”

And while the floods swirled around them, finding clean water was nearly impossible. “We received some from the rain,” says González, “but there was only enough to drink. We couldn’t cook,” which meant they had barely anything to eat.

But help was coming.

In a nearby town, WASH team members had gathered for a weeklong workshop, but their eyes were on the rain, and their minds on the looming disaster. Four years of training and practice had prepared them for this moment. By now they had the skills and experience to assess people’s needs, install water tanks and emergency latrines, and ensure that water was safe to drink. They had a warehouse—funded by Oxfam—that contained all the equipment and supplies they would need to launch the response. And—through members who live in vulnerable communities around the country—they had reliable eyes and ears on the ground to guide them to locations where their help was needed most.

On Oct. 12 the call arrived that set their response in motion. Team member Virginia Corado, a health promoter who lives in a village near El Botoncillo, had been monitoring the rising water in her town; when it was clear this was no ordinary flood, she notified her colleagues, and water technician Rafael Cea was quickly deployed to the zone.

Cea made his way to the area by whatever transport would get him there. “There were places where a car could travel, and people gave me rides. There were places where I could travel by boat,” he says, “and there were places where I had to walk with water up to my chest.”

He laughs when someone mentions St. Joseph, the affectionate nickname he earned from villagers when he made his rounds in the rain with his beard and staff. But he is serious when he recalls what he

We worked in the rain, day and night

In El Salvador, earthquakes and hurricanes are facts of life. There was a time when waiting for outside aid was also inevitable, but as Elizabeth Stevens reports, after Oxfam's decade-long investment in partners and communities, Salvadorans have the tools and knowledge to take care of their own.

Doris Escobar, coordinator of the national WASH team, checks drinking water quality in a flood-affected village of El Salvador. Members of the group have a deep commitment to the well-being of the communities, she says. "Working with the team is a beautiful experience." *René Figueroa / Oxfam America*

saw. “People in the area lost all their crops. They lost their animals, too, and many of their belongings. But the most valuable asset to live is clean water, and there was no clean water.”

Back in San Salvador, Oxfam staffers listened to Cea and Corado’s assessment and quickly authorized release of materials from the warehouse.

“As soon as vehicles were able to come in, a water tank arrived,” says de Sarceno. “The same day, they filled it with clean water.”

Soon, Salvadoran WASH technicians were loading water tanks, tap stands, and emergency supplies onto trucks and delivering them to shelters and communities like El Botoncillo around the country. Within two days, the WASH team reached more than 4,000 people with aid; within a month they had delivered urgent supplies and services to nearly 50,000 people across the country.

> “… and there were places where I had to walk with water up to my chest.

Skills, knowledge, and passion

The national WASH team was the brainchild of Oxfam humanitarian specialist Enrique García and a group of colleagues from Salvadoran nongovernmental organizations. In the wake of a major earthquake in 2001, says García, international aid providers poured into El Salvador. “I saw that they had good knowledge, but they didn’t know the country or the culture, and at the end of two to six months, they left. All the big humanitarian institutions worked the same way. I realized that we needed to build our own capacity here.”

So Oxfam and our partners gathered together a group of 17 Salvadoran volunteers and set about training them in the theory and practice of emergency WASH—knowledge often considered the domain of professional humanitarian aid providers. Some of the team members were drawn from our partner organizations, some are medical professionals, and some are day laborers; more than half are women. In the first two years of the program, the technicians, as they are called, attended countless workshops—then turned to 150 at-risk communities around the country and for the next two years trained village volunteers in the same knowledge and practice.

Trainings alone might not have guaranteed success, but the WASH team had a magic ingredient.

“I think that if you were able to interview each member of the WASH team, you could see the passion in each one of them,” says Doris Escobar, who works for a partner organization and coordinates the group.

Passion is not too strong a word.

In the teeth of the storm, the team worked through the days and long into the nights. “It was intense from the start of the emergency,” says member Felicita Escobar (no relation to Doris). “We worked in the rain, day and night. We would eat on the road—often just a piece of bread.”

And the bonds they’ve formed with one another suggest that this is a team with staying power. “On the WASH team,” says Nixon Mejía, who lives in a coastal community in La Libertad, “we are a family.”

The importance of neighbors

Mejía was 9 when he performed his first rescue. Spotting a man in the ocean in the deadly grip of a rip current, he stuffed a soccer ball under his shirt and swam out to give him a hand. He persuaded the man to stop flailing and hang on, letting the current pull them out to sea and the waves draw them safely back to land.

More than 20 years later, he is still performing rescues, only he no longer has to do it alone.

In addition to his role on the WASH team, Mejía now works in his coastal hometown of Playa San Diego as the civil-protection coordinator—authorized by the municipal authorities to play a key leadership role in his community as part of the national system. Although the civil-protection law has always been drastically underfunded (aid agencies still need to provide much of the training, for example), it provided a framework that enabled community members like Mejía to carry out successful evacuations all across the country.

As the tropical depression hovered over El Salvador, he and his team monitored the water level near the village until it reached the agreed threshold.

"The five of us started in different places, stationed from one end of the community to the other near the river," says Mejía. "We communicated by flashlight. Two long flashes mean the water is rising; one short flash means evacuate. We don't rely on phones because they can stop working if they get wet."

The evacuation was completed in an hour, but the team didn't rest until the chickens and other farm animals—key to the subsistence of rural families—had also been rescued and carried to higher ground.

"The role of community members in disasters deserves acknowledgment and support," says García. "It's hard to overestimate the importance of neighbors."

"We communicated by flashlight. Two long flashes mean the water is rising; one short flash means evacuate.

An ethic of deep commitment

From the grassroots to city hall to the national legislature, Oxfam partners are changing the face of humanitarian response in El Salvador—building on the skills that Salvadorans are eager to employ on behalf of communities at risk. Their years of hard work are making a difference, and their efforts have almost certainly saved lives: 239 people died in El Salvador in Hurricane Mitch; in the tropical depression of 2011, which was much more severe, the death toll was 35.

"Organizations like Oxfam and their partners are close to the communities," says Arnoldo Cruz, who works for El Salvador's Ministry of Health. "They have credibility. They have an ethic of deep commitment to the communities. Thinking about … what they have done to respond, I do not think there are weaknesses there. They had good coordination. They were involved from the first moment. They were organized. They even built infrastructure in preparation for future emergencies."

Community members like Francisco Henríquez from the village of La Pelota, who has struggled through floods for 30 years, echo his appreciation: "The aid we received this year was the best. The government and everyone—everyone was excellent."

And the WASH team is stronger and more passionate than ever. The team, says Mejía, "prepares you for life and helps you and others survive. It unites you to your community. I was poor, but I am not poor now. I'm rich in life."

Left: "When it floods, the river unites with the lake," says Juan Prudencio, whose village is perched between the two bodies of water. With support from Oxfam and partners, he is clearing debris from the channel to reduce the risk of future floods. *René Figueroa / Oxfam America*

Above: As people fled their homes for the safety of shelters, the WASH team was able to quickly install emergency latrines. *Edgar Orellana / Oxfam America*

Read | Learn | Change the world
To learn about how the WASH team promotes gender equity, go to **oxfamamerica.org/WASH**

“WE CAN’T IGNORE WHO WE ARE

When the women spoke, Oxfam listened. And as Anna Kramer reports, their gardens in Peru's Amazon are now helping Kichwa communities reclaim traditional agricultural methods that could stand the test of climate change.

The day I met her, March 27, was Maribel Cachique's last day as president. As of that afternoon, the 24-year-old mother of one son would no longer lead the women's group in her community of Aviación, Peru.

One of Cachique's final duties was to guide us, her visitors, to the shared garden at the heart of the women's efforts. She carried a blue notebook, full of schedules for planting and harvesting their three-acre plot deep in the forest of San Martin. Like many of the other women walking with me, she didn't wear shoes, but her feet were sure and steady on the slick, muddy slopes.

Everything these 35 women grow, Cachique told me, is unique to the Peruvian Amazon —crops that their people, the Kichwa, had cultivated for generations, but were in danger of being forgotten. Now, thanks to the women's efforts and support from Oxfam, this knowledge from the past could help address climate change, hunger, and other pressing problems of today.

The life of the forest

"This garden is a tradition, something indigenous people have done for a long time," said Cachique. "[We do the work] because it's beautiful, and because we can't ignore who we are."

It was a concept I'd hear often during my visit to Peru's northeastern San Martin region: for the Kichwa and other indigenous people in this area, the land itself is essential to their identity. "The forest is our life," said Walter Sangama, coordinator for the regional Kichwa indigenous peoples organization that works with Oxfam's partner, the Asociación Interétnica Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP). "It's a source of clean air, of food, of medicine. Without the forest, we don't have anything."

This region is one of the most biodiverse in the world, with every hue and size of leaf and petal bursting forth from deep valleys under fast-moving clouds. It's the kind of place where you'll see two rainbows in one day, and glimpse unfamiliar vines twining out from between the cracks in the earth.

Today, though, that abundance is endangered. Changes in the climate, deforestation, and increased migration to the area all threaten the forests that make up indigenous peoples' ancestral territories. Foreign companies, operating with the Peruvian government's support, have started to extract valuable timber and other resources. Throughout San Martin, Oxfam and partners have been working with local leaders and the government to ensure that communities have a say in how their land is developed, and can shape the policies that affect them (see page 10).

In the past, government policies haven't always respected the traditions of the people who live here. An agriculture program, for example, encouraged Kichwa communities to switch from cultivating diverse crops to a single export-friendly cash crop, like coffee or cacao. "Many indigenous communities participated [in this initiative] in order to improve their economic situation, but the results weren't what they expected," said Victor Cachique (no relation to Maribel), coordinator of the Office for Indigenous People in the regional government of San Martin.

Instead, the change undermined what he called people's "food sovereignty": their ability to produce much of what they needed on their own land. Once farmers stopped growing their staple foods, they had to buy them from outside; and once they started buying, their income couldn't keep up with rising food prices, putting them at risk of hunger.

The shift from diverse crops to a single cash crop also left growers more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Previously, said Cachique, the way communities grew year-round worked in harmony with the environment. With only one harvest a year, a single season of too much or too little rain—which has been happening more frequently—can wipe out a family's entire livelihood.

Left: "All of the crops we grow are important, because they are at risk of being forgotten," said Maribel Cachique, 24, of the traditional Kichwa garden that she and other women cultivate in Aviación. *Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America*

Above: Women in Chirikyacu take turns using machetes to clear the brush from their plants. The women asked Oxfam and AIDESEP to help them connect with buyers so they can sell their crops and purchase additional tools and seeds. *Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America*

The power of tradition to shape Peru's future

There are two ways to help indigenous people in Peru overcome poverty and discrimination, said Arturo Ramos, program officer for Oxfam's partner organization Paz y Esperanza. One is to provide direct aid. The other is to give people the tools to solve problems themselves. "The latter way is more difficult, but it's also more sustainable," he said.

Community-driven projects like the traditional gardens are part of this effort. And so is the work of groups like Paz y Esperanza, which help indigenous people increase their participation in government—a space where they have long been underrepresented and unheard. San Martin's new regional Office for Indigenous People, for example, headed by Victor Cachique, is the only one of its kind in Peru.

Much of Paz y Esperanza's work involves training indigenous leaders to become effective advocates while still keeping their culture and values intact. In San Martin, these leaders are helping to shape a regional law that guarantees indigenous people the right to be consulted before companies or the government begin logging, construction, or other activities that could affect their territories.

This right to consultation is important in Peru because it can protect not only indigenous people's land, but also their agricultural, political, and cultural activities. Oxfam and partners helped pass a similar national-level consultation law in 2011, though AIDESEP and other organizations say that law now needs to be strengthened to give indigenous people greater decision-making power.

By asserting their right to develop their territories on their own terms, "communities have learned to believe in themselves," said Ramos. "The Peruvian state has always diminished traditional knowledge. But now [the people] have proved that this traditional knowledge can help them survive."

Listening to women

One idea for a solution came, appropriately enough, from listening to the Kichwa themselves—specifically to women.

"Indigenous women play a really important role, both in communities and in their families," said Oxfam program officer Lorena Del Carpio. But indigenous women in Peru's rural areas still have fewer opportunities than men to get an education, hold government office, or earn a living wage.

Since 2010, Oxfam and AIDESEP have organized women-led workshops in the Amazon region to train indigenous women on their basic rights, and to build their skills as leaders and advocates. It was at these workshops that women told AIDESEP about the loss of their traditional crops. Because of the shift to single cash crops, they said, many varieties were disappearing, along with the traditional Kichwa ways of planting and growing throughout the year.

> "The forest is our life. It's a source of clean air, of food, of medicine. Without the forest, we don't have anything.

Hearing the women's concerns, AIDESEP and Oxfam decided to fund a pilot project through which Kichwa people could grow their ancestral crops as a way to adapt to changes in the climate. These crops could potentially provide an additional food source for families, a means of extra income, and, perhaps equally important, proof that the traditional ways of growing can be valuable—even at a time when many are leaving those ways behind.

AIDESEP worked with local leaders to select five communities for the pilot project, and helped people purchase seeds and supplies to get started. Because men often spend the day away from home working on commercial crops, it would be women—already organized into informal mothers' groups—who'd be in charge of making the gardens grow.

The taste of *ruhinde*

As we followed Maribel Cachique to the garden in Aviación, the wind fluttered the ribbons many women wore in their hair; the traditional Kichwa headdress represents the bright hues of the jungle flowers. Some of the women carried infants in handwoven striped shawls tied over their shoulders. A few held machetes to chop away the wiry roots that snake over their plants. Without enough tools to go around, they sometimes do this work with their bare hands.

In Aviación, the garden is about 20 minutes' walk from the women's homes, a journey up and down the wooded hills. They had to plant here because it was the only communally owned land that was still available; the other closer plots had all been claimed for growing commercial crops.

To make the most of their time there, Cachique said that the women schedule one to two days each month when they visit the garden as a group. On those days, "we work together to clear brush, maintain [the plants], and harvest," she said. Different plants are harvested according to the season and the phases of the moon.

The women in Aviación grow local varieties of potato and beans, along with other, less familiar crops: *majambo,* a pale yellow gourd that's served mashed with cilantro and garlic; *michuxe,* a pepper variety; and *daledale,* a root vegetable with broad green leaves. In Chirikyacu, a nearby community also participating in the project, the garden yields massive ears of Amazon corn, bright red beans, and *ruhinde*—a seedpod like a giant green pea, filled with a white fiber that's surprisingly sweet.

Both Cachique and Luz Sinarahua, president of the women's group in Chirikyacu, spoke the names of their crops with quiet pride. It was clear they saw these plants not just as a source of food, but as a kind of cultural treasury, a reminder of who they were and where they were going.

"We purchased the seeds from elders in our community … and we'd like for our children to continue growing these gardens," Sinarahua said.

Moving forward, little by little

In the future, AIDESEP hopes to expand the project and help other communities start traditional gardens. But for now, Oxfam and AIDESEP are still listening to local women to find out what they need to support their efforts. An initial plan to build reservoirs for water storage, for example, may not be carried out in Aviación, where women said they had enough water from rainfall. Instead, they wanted to purchase additional seeds and start raising animals, like chickens, to further increase their incomes. In Chirikyacu, women said they not only wanted more seeds but more opportunities to sell them.

The women believe economic opportunities are especially important. Besides food, Cachique said, they also need money to buy clothes, shoes, garden tools, and school supplies for their children. "The garden gives [food], but not every day," she explained. "We cultivate, but we need to be able to sell, and to earn."

In Aviación, the women have already sold some crops, and have created a group fund divided equally among the members. This fall, AIDESEP plans to organize a sellers' fair where women from different towns will be able to exchange seeds and connect with potential buyers from the region.

Meanwhile, women like Cachique are already rewriting the future of their communities. "We hope these women will stay active in different efforts, not just the gardens," said Del Carpio. "It's important for them to have these spaces, and to contribute to the decision-making process."

Later, back in Aviación, Cachique performed her final duty as president: she and the young *apu,* or elected leader of the community, led a swearing-in ceremony in the village meeting hall for the group's new leaders. Together, four young mothers raised their right hands and promised to work faithfully on the garden in the months ahead.

Cachique congratulated them. And then she added some words of cautious encouragement. "In the future, we're going to move forward," she said, "little by little."

Above: Once or twice a month, women in Aviación make a group journey to their garden, which lies deep in the forest—about 20 minutes' walk from their homes. *Percy Ramirez / Oxfam America*

Read | Learn | Change the world
For more photos and stories from Aviación and Chirikyacu, go to **oxfamamerica.org/perugardens**

TWO WOMEN & A GLOBAL REVOLUTION

If women farmers had the resources they needed to invest in their fields, the ripple effects could be far reaching: food, education, independence, and a new foundation for the next generation. Women are now planting those seeds.

Tanzania's Anna Oloshuro Okaro and Massachusetts' Jennifer Hashley may live on opposite sides of the earth, but as farmers and advocates in their communities they share a deep understanding of the role women play in ensuring we all have enough food. This spring, Oxfam brought them and other women leaders together to answer a key question: By working together can women around the world find solutions to global hunger?

Anna Oloshuro Okaro
Parakuyo, Tanzania

"I think of myself as an ordinary woman," says Anna Oloshuro Okaro. Despite her modesty, the challenges she's overcome—and the chain of events that brought her to Boston for Oxfam's International Women's Day celebration in March—are anything but typical.

Growing up in Tanzania, Oloshuro followed local tradition and married young to a man who already had five wives. When her husband failed to provide for her and her four children, she started a small business selling snacks and sodas, breaking a cultural taboo against women earning income of their own.

After her husband learned about her business, he divorced her. "My brothers and husband colluded to take all of my assets, including my children," Oloshuro recalls. "My family called me an outcast."

Undaunted, Oloshuro brought her case to the elders in her community and asked them to intervene on her behalf. "I have a right to live, a right to an income, a right to basic work to help me survive," Oloshuro told them. The elders took her side, and Oloshuro was able to keep her business. With her earnings, "I built a house. I sent my kids to school. I now have a farm … and I've been a champion of other women," Oloshuro says.

One of the ways she supports women is by encouraging them to start farms of their own. Climate change has had a profound impact on her people, the Maasai, a traditional herding community. With changes in rainfall, men are going farther away to find fertile grazing area for their cattle. So, women need to become the breadwinners for their families.

"Farming will be a revolution for women—if they engage in farming, they can generate their own income," she says. "If they don't farm, they depend on men for food and money; they have no alternative."

Oloshuro says there are still big challenges ahead for Maasai women who farm. Few own their land, and most rely on rainfall to irrigate their crops. But her belief in the possibility of change helped her win second place in Tanzania's Female Food Hero Initiative, a nationwide contest launched by Oxfam's GROW campaign to raise the profile of women food producers. Approximately 10,000 Tanzanians voted via mobile phones for the winners of the contest, whose stories the media shared nationwide.

For Oloshuro, who won a solar panel as her prize, the award is just one more step toward an extraordinary goal. "It's important for women to have their own income. Then they can be decision makers," she says. "It will give them confidence to stand up for what they believe is right."

Jennifer Hashley
Concord, Massachusetts, US

Raised in the US, it wasn't until Jennifer Hashley joined the Peace Corps in a small Honduran village that she had an epiphany about what it meant for a community to be food secure—for its people to have access to the food they needed.

She saw how close to the land families lived—tilling the soil, tending to livestock—and how hard they worked, especially women, just to ensure there was enough to eat. Out of necessity, agriculture dominated their lives. They had no choice: if they didn't farm, they would go hungry. For most of the world, Hashley realized, that's the reality behind food security.

"It changed my life," she says.

Back home, she chose to become a farmer and farming advocate. She serves as the director of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project at Tufts University. Its goal is to help launch new farmers with limited resources in Massachusetts and to support the sustainability of the region's agriculture. Since the program started in 1998, more than half of its participants have been women.

Keeping farming alive is Hashley's passion. And for a good reason.

"We're losing the knowledge of farming and food production," she says. "It's the most fundamental thing to every human being: eating food. But less than 2 percent of the US population grows the food that the other 98 percent relies on."

Along with her market garden, Hashley runs a business raising chickens, rabbits, sheep, and pigs with her husband, an assistant farm manager in charge of the organic produce at a large vegetable farm just outside of Boston. Most of what they eat they produce themselves—a way of life that connects Hashley with the experience of countless women around the world, like Oloshuro, and their day-to-day hurdles.

Farming is hard work and many of the challenges small producers face are universal, says Hashley, as are the requirements for success: perseverance and passion.

But for women, who often lack access to basic resources, like land and training that would allow them to be so much more productive, the challenges are even greater. Addressing them could go a long way toward ensuring there is enough food for everyone.

"Investing in women gets right to the center of who is pulling weight in a community, of who is contributing to the cultivating of food, of family. Once we give women the resources they need to contribute to that cultivation, it has significant ripple effects," says Hashley, listing improved household nutrition and educational opportunities for children among those benefits. "Women are on the front line of the family unit. They are producing and caring for the next generation."

Writers: Anna Kramer, Coco McCabe

A day to support women and fight hunger

Today, 925 million people on our planet, or about one in seven of us, live in hunger—an injustice brought into sharp relief during a series of events organized by Oxfam to mark International Women's Day 2012 and draw attention to the global problem and its effects on women worldwide.

"When you're hungry," said Kesha Ram, recalling the words of a Sudanese friend who had lived in a refugee camp in Kenya, "you don't have the opportunity to be anything else. You're robbed of your childhood. You can't be a boy or a girl or a mother or a father. You can't think about what your future looks like."

A member of the Vermont House of Representatives and one of Oxfam's Sisters on the Planet Ambassadors, Ram joined Anna Oloshuro Okaro, Jennifer Hashley, and dozens of powerful women from the US and around the world for the March gatherings in Washington, DC, and Boston. Their goal: support women through efforts like Oxfam's GROW campaign, which calls for an investment in the women farmers who are on the front lines of the hunger crisis.

The keynote speaker at the Washington summit was Valerie Jarrett, senior adviser to President Obama and chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls. "Over the last three years, our work with organizations like Oxfam has resulted in more international support for food security, more game-changing innovations, and most importantly, more people living without hunger," wrote Jarrett on the White House blog. "However, we have much more work to do."

Left: Anna Oloshuro Okaro, left, and Jennifer Hashley. *Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America (Oloshuro), Coco McCabe / Oxfam America (Hashley)*

Read. Learn. Change the world.
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