



Oxfam

WINTER 2006

# Exchange

## A YEAR OF DISASTERS

- A RACE AGAINST TIME IN SOUTH ASIA
- TSUNAMI SURVIVORS—ONE YEAR OUT
- A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE GULF COAST?
- NOT ALL DISASTERS ARE NATURAL:  
TRADE UPDATE



“We’re all in it together, and we all have to work to get out of it.”

—Bill Stallworth, Biloxi Ward 2 Councilor, on the devastation faced by Derek Pride Sr. (left) and other East Biloxi residents



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America

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**It's Not Too Late to Shop and Support a Good Cause**

At the end of a year in which rural livelihoods have been pounded by storms and earthquakes, never has there been a better time to make your holiday shopping count. When you buy your gifts from Oxfam's partners and other community producers—from Mississippi, Guatemala, Pakistan, and beyond—you are supporting local solutions to poverty.

Visit Oxfam's Holiday Gift Center at [oxfamamerica.org/exchange\\_winter06](http://oxfamamerica.org/exchange_winter06). Here you can order Fair Trade coffee, chocolate, and crafts, or peruse an assortment of jellies, hams, and salsas from small-scale farmers and cooperatives.

Please make your purchases right away to ensure they can be processed and shipped in time for the holidays!

**Write to us!**

*We welcome readers' comments and ideas. Please include your name and address and mail to: Editor, Oxfam Exchange, Oxfam America, 26 West Street, Boston, MA 02111-1206*

*Send email to [editor@oxfamamerica.org](mailto:editor@oxfamamerica.org) or fax to 617-728-2596. We will print as many letters as possible, but reserve the right to edit for space and clarity.*

**COVER:** Though Hurricane Katrina destroyed his house and just about everything that was in it, Derek Pride Sr. says he wants to rebuild here on Elmer Street in East Biloxi. The house has been in his family since 1932. In this tight-knit neighborhood, residents say what they would like more than anything else is a chance to pick up the pieces and get on with their lives right where they are.

## Going Home to a New South

*For Alabama-raised Minor Sinclair, Oxfam America's US program director, the Gulf Coast hurricanes hit close to home.*

These days, I often hear victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita talk about their home and what that loss means. For those whose homes were swept away or submerged underwater for weeks, they have lost everything—their assets, family treasures, place in the world.

Home, family, and communities have long defined the South, where people's sense of identity is tied to geography. I am convinced the exile of most of those uprooted by the storms is temporary. The question is, what will home look like when they return?

Growing up in Alabama, my world was officially desegregated—unofficially, not at all. Train tracks literally split my town between whites and African Americans. Privilege, on the one hand, and lack of opportunities, on the other, divided us further. I went to a private university and then to work internationally, while many of my classmates, more often black, moved into low-paying, dead-end jobs.

As Oxfam has seen throughout the world, the lack of access to resources, too often rooted in latent—or blatant—discrimination, breeds poverty. When we started our US program almost 15 years ago, it was no coincidence we began in the South, where high unemployment, few job protections, a negligible tax base, and a chronic lack of investment in education and health have kept people poor.

Now, for all the devastation and misery the hurricanes inflicted, they may also have wedged open a window of opportunity. The status quo is no longer an option.

I can feel a change—the simmering of a new social movement—when I walk into the East Biloxi Coordination & Relief Center. Oxfam helped community leaders set up this center after Katrina to help when federal assistance was late and lacking. Through the center, thousands have been fed and housed in local churches, and 500 homes have been cleaned by volunteers. Today, the center is the first stop for outside relief officials to get marching orders on what needs to be done in East Biloxi.

This is a moment to seize opportunities. For the first time in a generation, communities are voicing what they need: low-income home ownership, good jobs, high quality services, and economic development for towns and rural communities. Newer communities, namely Latinos and Vietnamese immigrants, are also asserting their rights to protection and inclusion.

Forty years ago, actions like registering to vote and refusing to yield a seat in the front of the bus changed this country forever. It is a terrible irony, but the devastation wrought by Katrina and Rita offers a chance of a lifetime. Washed away, alongside family treasures, are the excuses for why the Old South could not do better. As people go home, they should count on the nation's support to build it back better.



*Minor Sinclair is leading the agency's recovery efforts on the Gulf Coast. "The tarpaper shacks may be gone, but the systematic denial of opportunity and sharp differences in wealth persist."*

## A Final Chance for Fairness?

*Capping off a year of high-level global talks, this month's World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting could determine the fate of more than a billion people living in poverty.*

Not all disasters are natural. Today, man-made problems like developing country debt, insufficient foreign aid, and most of all, unfair trade inflict devastation on as many as 1.2 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day. This month's WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong presents a chance for real reform. Or a colossal missed opportunity.

Currently, rich countries massively subsidize agricultural products. For example, the US pays corporate farms \$24 billion a year to overproduce crops. These farms then flood international markets, causing prices to drop and making it impossible for small-scale farmers—in both the US and developing countries—to earn a living. Oxfam is calling for a cap to these subsidies, among other reforms.



*Dressed up as world leaders, protesters at the G8 summit in Edinburgh, Scotland, called for an end to poverty.*

*For the latest updates on the WTO Ministerial, visit [oxfamamerica.org](http://oxfamamerica.org).*

### GREATER AWARENESS, STILL NOT ENOUGH LEADERSHIP

This year, the global spotlight focused on the plight of developing countries, anchored by the G8 meeting in July and the World Summit in September. How did leaders perform? Although they delivered some welcome relief for the world's poorest people, progress has fallen far short of what was needed. See the chart below for details.

A couple of notable victories emerged, however: The G8 committed to canceling the debt of the 18 poorest countries, a victory that was then approved by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Additionally, UN members took a major step forward in confronting the ever-present threat of genocide by signing the "Responsibility to Protect" Declaration. This commitment requires countries to intervene, by force if necessary, to protect civilians when their own governments fail to do so.

	WHAT POOR COUNTRIES NEED	WHAT WORLD LEADERS DECIDED	
		G8* (July 2005)	World Summit (September 2005)
<b>Aid</b>	An additional \$50 billion a year—effective immediately. Also a fulfillment of the promise by rich countries to spend 0.7% of GDP on aid by 2010.	Pledged \$50 billion a year by 2010—a delay which leaves a \$100 billion hole in aid budgets in the near term.	Failed to reaffirm the 0.7% goal.
<b>Debt</b>	Debt cancellation for 60 of the world's poorest countries.	Committed to cancel the debt of the 18 poorest countries. However, excluded other desperately poor countries, such as Sri Lanka and Kenya.	Confirmed the G8 commitments, but failed to take the opportunity to improve them.
<b>Trade</b>	Significant reform of US and EU agriculture subsidies—especially for cotton—and meaningful increases in market access. Plus the space to decide if, when, and how quickly to open up their markets.	Failed to kick-start trade talks and stopped short of setting a date for scrapping damaging subsidies.	Trade was not on the agenda.

\* The members of the G8 are the US, United Kingdom, France, Canada, Japan, Russia, Germany, and Italy.



JIM HOLMES/OXFAM AMERICA

# TIME TO BUILD IT BACK **BETTER**

It was a year of feeling vulnerable. The tsunami. Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. An earthquake in Pakistan. A triple blow of hurricanes, landslides, and volcanic eruption for Central America. Conflict in Sudan. Food shortages in Ethiopia and West Africa. The fact of so many emergencies does not diminish the magnitude of any one of them.

It was also a year in which the global community could no longer ignore poverty. The planet's poorest citizens—here in the US and around the world—suffered the most. When a storm hits, impoverished communities are the last to receive aid. When an earthquake strikes, they are the least prepared to withstand it. And when conflict is waged, they have the fewest resources with which to recover. According to the Red Cross, seven times as many people die per disaster in a poor country as in a rich one.

Throughout 2005, the Oxfam community responded—knowing that, as crises mount, our responsibility to act is heightened. For this, we thank you.

As we set our sights on 2006, we recognize that now is the time. The time to not simply rebuild what was—but to construct a better future for all.

*Mangroves hold promise for the future. Oxfam is helping villagers in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, to plant mangroves, which will provide habitat for edible shellfish and a natural protective barrier against ocean storms and floods.*

## In Pakistan and India— Regions Face Grim Winter after Devastating Quake

In the days after an October 8 earthquake killed an estimated 87,000 people in Pakistan, India, and Kashmir, snow fell in some remote areas of this mountainous region, foretelling a grim future for those who survived the devastating temblor.

With more than three million people left homeless by the earthquake which registered 7.6 on the Richter scale, the need for shelter has quickly become a top priority: Winter in the Himalayas is unsparing.

But getting aid to villagers scattered throughout this rugged terrain has proven extremely difficult. Not even helicopters can reach some of the locations.

“Aid is now getting through, but this is one of the most challenging emergencies we have ever worked in,” said Oxfam America President Raymond C. Offenheiser in the week following the disaster. “This isn’t a logistical headache, it’s a nightmare scenario. Not only did the earthquake happen in an inaccessible and remote area, it happened just before winter, when snow cuts off huge areas and temperatures are dangerously low.”

### INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Oxfam Great Britain and Oxfam Netherlands, two of the 12 Oxfam affiliates, have taken the lead in distributing aid. They began rushing tents, blankets, and other supplies to survivors soon after the quake struck. To reach some of the more remote areas, Oxfam has been using helicopters that can carry up to four tons of relief goods as well as 22 aid workers per flight. Oxfam and the local organizations with which it partners plan to help



*Collapsed buildings littered towns and villages in northern Pakistan and India following a devastating earthquake on October 8 that killed an estimated 87,000 people.*

300,000 people in Pakistan and at least 20,000 people in India.

Contributing to the distribution challenges has been a critical shortage of tents. Hundreds of thousands of them are needed, and Pakistan’s 44 tent factories are unable to keep up with the demand.

“The lack of easily available tents means we have to think of new ways of doing things fast,” said Offenheiser. “We’re integrating the production and distribution of tents that will protect people from the cold.”

For example, in India, Oxfam has worked out a design for well-insulated shelters that can be constructed from locally available materials, such as felt insulation and plastic sheeting, and assembled by ordinary people. Five years in development, the shelters have been tested in wind tunnels and cold storage warehouses. Each costs about \$140 and can sleep a family of six people.

“These temporary shelters could house thousands and make the difference between life and death,” said Oxfam

aid worker Ashok Prasad. “What makes these shelters so good is that they are easy to assemble, low in cost, and most of all they are warm. We’ve already shared these designs with local people, other aid agencies, and local officials and the response has been universally positive. The shelter challenge is massive and we’re going to have to continue to innovate to overcome all the challenges.”

### A LOOK AHEAD

While the need for shelter is immediate, devastated communities face longer-term issues that will also require a great deal of attention and resources in the months ahead.

“Oxfam is committed not only to help people survive the winter, but to rebuild,” said Emilie Parry, Oxfam America’s deputy director of humanitarian response, noting that the emotional trauma for many people has been profound. “The earthquake is going to have implications on people’s ability to function in their communities and in their economies.”



*A livestock buy-back program has proven to be a successful strategy in Niger. Oxfam purchased emaciated animals for the price of healthy ones, thereby providing local herders with money to feed both their families and their remaining livestock.*

## In West Africa—Rebuilding Livelihoods

Koumba Yocouba’s family once owned a magnificent herd of cows, 200 head strong. But by midsummer—after limited rains and ravenous locusts had taken their toll on Niger’s pastureland—just three cows remained. The demise of the herd had plunged the family into a downward spiral of hunger.

It’s a story heard time and again across West Africa where countless people have been struggling daily, precariously balanced between unpredictable weather and limited natural resources. The UN issued an urgent plea for help in Niger in May—the same month Oxfam sent in an assessment team.

But simply providing the millions of poor and hungry people in Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso with food is not a lasting answer to the problem. Helping them improve their means of making a living is critical.

“There are very limited natural resources and they are being used in a way that’s unsustainable,” said Oxfam’s Kelly Crothers. “These work projects could have a long-term effect in changing habits and making livelihoods sustainable.”

For example, with local partner Association de Revigoration d’Elevage au Niger, Oxfam provided 131,000 people with vouchers so they could buy their own food from local traders. In exchange, people worked on projects that benefit the environment that supports them—such as constructing small reservoirs to store rainwater and planting trees.



*There is still much work to be done in the wake of Hurricane Stan, which left as many as 150,000 homeless in El Salvador and Guatemala. Oxfam is now assisting more than 60,000 in both countries with food, blankets, hygiene items, clean water, medicine, and tools.*

## In Central America—Preparedness Saves Lives

When Hurricane Stan hit El Salvador in September, the flood waters rose fast. “People insisted that we leave, that it would be dangerous if we stayed,” said Elisa Azucena, a teenager from El Angel who was one of thousands of people successfully evacuated. “They came with tractors because normal cars couldn’t get through anymore.”

Having people available to help in an emergency is usually something only a relatively wealthy country can afford. But El Angel and more than 500 other villages across El Salvador demonstrated what well organized communities can do to save lives in an emergency—even in a poor country. Hurricane Stan killed 738 people in El Salvador and Guatemala (a death toll that does not account for 844 people still missing). But no one was killed in low-lying Bajo Lempa, one area in which Oxfam partners are focusing their efforts.

Chief among those partners is the Foundation for Reconstruction and Development (REDES), a leader in disaster preparedness in El Salvador. Since 2001, Oxfam grants have helped REDES train local groups to analyze risks, design evacuation routes, develop communication networks for early warning, and provide emergency assistance in disasters. “Every year, they do a dry run,” said Oxfam program officer René Ramos. “It’s a continuous learning and training process.”

REDES is a key participant in an Oxfam-funded preparedness network that spans Central America and the Caribbean to facilitate regional coordination in and around emergencies.



JULIA CHENG/OXFAM AMERICA

## AFTER THE HURRICANES

### A Chance for a New South?

by Coco McCabe

*As the victims of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma anticipate the reconstruction of their communities, Oxfam partners weigh in on racial and economic disparities, jobs, housing, fairness for immigrants, and the place some folks will always call home. All are key considerations if the hurricanes are going to offer a chance for a new beginning—for everyone.*

Mud and mold sandwich homes in a toxic mix. Heaps of splintered buildings clog neighborhood streets. And scattered everywhere across Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi is the detritus of hundreds of thousands of lives horribly interrupted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

That was the picture in the days after the back-to-back storms tore through the Gulf Coast states at the end of the summer, soaking and shredding whole communities in their path. But in that swath of destruction lies a rare chance to begin fixing what has long been broken: a social order that has shoved millions of Americans to the edge of their

communities, condemning them to lives of deprivation and disenfranchisement.

“We’ve seen around the world, time and again, how natural disasters can trigger positive social transformation,” said Minor Sinclair, Oxfam’s US program director. “After a major earthquake in Guatemala, indigenous people began to stand up for their rights. More recently the tsunami helped quell military conflicts in Aceh and Sri Lanka. The irony is that all of the destruction that Katrina and Rita have wrought can provoke the region to deal with the underlying disparities that have troubled the South for centuries.”

*“I’m going to stay because this is home, no matter how you look at it,” said Donna Naquin of Dulac, Louisiana. She has lived in the community her entire life—44 years—and has weathered other hurricanes. “It’s not the first, and it won’t be the last. I’m getting expert at cleaning up.”*

In Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi alone poverty stalks more than 4.5 million people. They have no safety net to tumble into. Now is the time to weave one.

“We need to end poverty instead of endlessly servicing it,” said Lorna Bourg, executive director of the Southern Mutual Help Association, one of Oxfam America’s longtime partners in southern Louisiana. “We need to help families grow their wealth.”

### A NEW POLITICAL VOICE

The multibillion-dollar reconstruction of the Gulf Coast offers a good place to start, as long as the opportunities it brings are available to everyone. As long as residents of the Gulf Coast states find a voice and get active in community affairs.

That's where Oxfam can help—by working with partners to empower the poor who suffered most from the storms. Their voices will be essential in coming months as the first decisions get made about the future of Mississippi and Louisiana.

“Make sure our communities are included in the reconstruction process, and that it doesn't only take place for affluent and business communities,” urged Derrick Johnson, state president of the Mississippi chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Oxfam America is helping the chapter to repair its damaged offices in Gulfport and Biloxi, and to hire staffers to work on advocacy and public awareness about issues concerning the African-American community.

“Participation is a vital piece,” said Biloxi Ward 2 Councilor Bill Stallworth. “The challenge is to get people not typically empowered in the past to have a say in rebuilding their homes and community. They are part of it physically. Now, they have an opportunity to be part of it politically.”

And that political involvement starts at home.

“Reconstruction is too important a job to leave to someone else,” said Oxfam's Sinclair. “East Biloxi residents need to be heard. From city hall all the way to Washington, the local voice should be a voice of authority.”

Oxfam is making it our role to support and strengthen these local voices that are emerging.

### MAKING A LIVING AT FARMING

“To rebuild the agriculture sector might take two to three years,” predicted Ben Burkett, state coordinator of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, another Oxfam America partner.

It's a large part of the state's economy. Nearly 30 percent of the Mississippi



*Derrick Johnson, President of the Mississippi NAACP, briefs Oxfam America staff: President Raymond Offenheiser, US Program Director Minor Sinclair, Vice President of Programs John Ambler, and Rights Specialist for Gulf Coast Emergency Alejandro Rosales.*

**“We've seen around the world, time and again, how natural disasters can trigger positive social transformation.”**

**—Minor Sinclair, Oxfam's US program director**

workforce has jobs in agriculture or related industries. Katrina walloped farmers of all stripes. Timber losses alone could climb higher than \$2 billion, and that says nothing about the 2,400 poultry houses that suffered damage. Catfish farmers have lost valuable markets, and dairy farmers had to dump milk when the power went out and there was no way to keep the milk cool.

But entrenched social and economic patterns may make it even harder for some people to recover their losses.

“Blacks own very little land compared to what we used to own,” said Burkett. “No businesses. No banks. No grocery stores.” According to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, which analyzed data from the US agriculture census, the amount of farmland owned by African Americans declined in the last century from 15 million acres in 1910 to just 2.4 million in 1997.

The economic divisions remain stark, and for that to change, it will require strong local leadership, added Burkett. In many small southern towns, one or two families, with roots that stretch back to the days of slavery, represent the power base in those communities.

“If you want anything, you've got to go to them,” he said. “It's the way every little town is. If you know the right family, you can get what you want. But if you don't know the family, it's tough.”

What does his dream for the perfect post-hurricane community look like?

“We'd have a community where everybody had a nice home, a good school system, and those who want to farm could farm and make a living and those who want to work could earn a decent wage,” said Burkett. “Minimum wage, you're working to be poor.”

*continued >>*



*"It's the immigrant community rebuilding the South, and what's going to happen to them?" asked Victoria Cintra of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance.*



*Calling home, a Latino worker uses a free telephone set up by Bell South outside the Biloxi Civic Center in Mississippi. Contractors brought workers to Biloxi with the promise of shelter, which didn't materialize.*

### **JOBS, JOBS, JOBS**

Job creation is one of the items near the top of Sarah Walker's wish list for Biloxi as it shovels away the rubble and begins to rebuild itself. Walker is the executive director of Visions of Hope, a new Oxfam America partner and a Biloxi-based social service agency.

"That is something that needs to happen," she said. "We lost a whole lot of businesses. Right now, I'm not sure what businesses plan to remain in the area."

Added Councilman Stallworth: "We envision trying to make sure everyone who wants to work in the community has the opportunity and availability of a job. You provide jobs for the community, and you start stimulating the economy."

No discussion about employment opportunities strays far from the topic of the casinos and the multibillion-dollar gambling industry that has brought thousands of jobs to the state. In the Gulf Coast area alone, casinos employed about 14,000 workers before the storms. Statewide, casinos pumped more than \$330 million in tax revenues into Mississippi each year.

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**"So many people have been told for years they didn't need flood insurance—they weren't in the flood plain. Now they've lost everything."**

**—The Rev. Paddy Mockler, Our Lady of Fatima Church, Biloxi**

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But with the state legislature recently voting to allow casinos to move off the water and onto the shore, property rights—ensuring that small lot owners aren't forced out by big developers with deep pockets—remains one of the sensitive issues of coastal reconstruction. Some Biloxi city councilors have promised to introduce a resolution guaranteeing that the city would not take private property by eminent domain for the benefit of the casinos.

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Linked closely to the issue of property rights is the question about insurance and whether companies will reimburse people for the massive damages so many homes suffered. Those who have insurance to cover the losses caused by Katrina's wind may now find insurance companies unwilling to pay for the destruction caused by flooding from the storm surge whipped up by the wind.

Many people did not have flood insurance. That could potentially lead to significant changes in the kinds of new buildings that communities will construct and a reduction in the amount of affordable housing available.

"If Hurricane Katrina is defined as a flood, they won't be able to rebuild if they don't get compensation for their buildings. They'll be vulnerable to land developers," warned Bill Chandler, president of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance (MIRA). "You have a lot of low-income neighborhoods that are in the path of development."

Small local property owners need to be alert to these issues, Chandler added.

"The goal is to ensure there are an adequate number of affordable homes in the areas that they previously existed (in)," said the NAACP's Johnson. "The Mississippi coast is fast developing



*“Everybody’s traumatized. Everybody’s wondering where do we go from here,” said shrimp fisherman Steve McDaniel. But he is determined to remain optimistic, and activity on the nearby waterway fueled that. “Today, we’re seeing numerous amounts of boats—the shrimpers. That’s a good sign,” he added.*



*“People know now that things is not what matters,” said Beulah Wright, a member of Biloxi’s Main Street Missionary Baptist Church. “It’s people that matter.”*

into a resort area. It’s prime property. We must ensure that homeowner’s rights are protected.”

### **FAIRNESS FOR IMMIGRANTS**

As big a concern for Oxfam America are worker rights, especially among the immigrant community, with which Oxfam has been working for 12 years. Those who are undocumented are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

The 2000 US Census reports that there are 39,569 people of Hispanic or Latino origin in Mississippi, but immigrant rights advocates estimate the population is more than three times that figure. They say about 130,000 Latino immigrants work in the state, drawn by jobs in the hospitality and casino industries along the coast as well as in food processing plants. Now, many of those immigrants are hard at work piecing together the tatters of coastal communities.

“You look around anywhere on the coast where there’s rebuilding. You’ll see white Anglo contractors in their big pickups with 20 immigrant workers on the rooftop,” said Victoria Cintra, the Gulf Coast outreach organizer for MIRA. One of Oxfam America’s newest

partners, MIRA has a mission to provide assistance and advocacy for immigrant workers across the state. But there’s an element of hypocrisy in this latest employment trend that worries Cintra.

“It’s the immigrant community rebuilding the South, and what’s going to happen to them?” asked Cintra. “Basically, you’re using us while you need us. That’s the gist I get from the immigrant community. When there wasn’t a lot of work, they were looked upon as intruders.

“The only way it could change is if the people who came to help rebuild were given short-term or long-term amnesty to work legally here,” added Cintra.

Amnesty isn’t all that advocates are worrying about. There are more immediate concerns. Living conditions can be deplorable for workers on large reconstruction projects. Cintra tells of workers living in tents without access to running water or electricity while putting in 12-hour days.

*continued >>*

## **Poverty in the US**

- Nearly 13% of Americans—approximately 37 million adults and children—live below the federal poverty line (\$19,157 for a family of four).
- With an average poverty rate of more than 14%, the South has the highest percentage of its population living in poverty of any region in the US.
- Mississippi (at 21.6%) and Louisiana (at 19.4%) rank #1 and #2 respectively as the states with the highest poverty rates in 2004.\*
- Poverty rates among American Indians and Alaska Natives (24.4%), African Americans (24.6%), and Hispanics (22.2%) are more than double those of either white Americans (8.4%) or Asians (10.8%).

*Source: Unless otherwise noted, all information is from the US Census Bureau’s Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004.*

*\* From the US Census Bureau’s 2004 American Community Survey*

For the Rev. Paddy Mockler of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Biloxi, there's an obvious solution to that problem: Contractors should do the right thing. A few weeks after Katrina hit, he received a call from a woman who asked if the church could house some immigrant workers laboring in Gulfport.

"I said, why don't you rent a hotel and provide decent accommodations," recalled Mockler. "She hung up on me."

Mockler's church, the only one in all of Biloxi to offer Mass in Spanish, has also partnered with Oxfam in providing necessary prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines for a broad Latino community.

### HOME IS WHERE THEY WANT TO BE

Many folks in Biloxi say there is nowhere else they would rather be. Despite the threat of repeated hurricanes, Biloxi is home. And across the southern parishes of Louisiana, where floodwaters severely damaged many communities, the sentiment is the same: There is no place like home.

That urge to return and rebuild has fostered a resilience that is helping some residents weather the worst that Mother Nature can bring—and find some good in it, too.

"Biloxi will be better because of the storm," said Beulah Wright, a member of the Main Street Missionary Baptist Church, an Oxfam partner. "People know now that things is not what matters. It's people that matter. We had so much, and to go from that to nothing—it was hard. But once it sinks in, you start to rebuild and know what's important."

Standing in front of a heap of ruined household belongings in her front yard, Donna Naquin said she had no intention of leaving Dulac, Louisiana.

"I'm going to stay because this is home no matter how you look at it," she said.

## Oxfam Puts Decades of Disaster Experience to Work on the Gulf Coast



ALL PHOTOS: JULIA CHENG/OXFAM AMERICA

*From public health outreach to the coordination of relief services, Oxfam America and its partners are helping people in the Gulf Coast states recover from a string of devastating hurricanes.*

When Hurricane Katrina left the Gulf Coast reeling, Oxfam did something it had never done before. Answering the urgent call of longtime partners in the South, it launched its first direct relief operation in the US.

In the days after Katrina, Oxfam issued a first round of grants to existing partners in the region. And when two more hurricanes—Rita and Wilma—hit, the agency was already building new partnerships with organizations ranging from social service and advocacy groups to churches—the civic backbone of the South. For example:

- **In southern Louisiana**, Oxfam sent public health experts in to examine the impact environmental contamination could have on returning residents. The agency helped assemble cleanup and recovery kits, complete with hazardous material suits, for homeowners intent on salvaging what they could.
- **In Mississippi**, Oxfam funded a new coordination center in East Biloxi to help with relief and recovery services. And through a mobile advocacy unit, the agency is making sure immigrants understand their rights.
- **In southern Florida**, where Hurricane Wilma caused extensive damage to crops, Oxfam and its partners immediately began assessing the damage and developing recovery plans.

*For more on Oxfam's ongoing Gulf Coast recovery work, visit [oxfamamerica.org](http://oxfamamerica.org).*

### Following are the local organizations with which Oxfam has partnered in Mississippi and Louisiana:

- East Biloxi Coordination & Relief Center
- Federation of Southern Cooperatives
- Louisiana Environmental Action Network
- Main Street Missionary Baptist Church
- Mercy Housing and Human Development
- Mississippi Association of Cooperatives
- Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Our Lady of Fatima Parish—Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
- Southern Mutual Help Association
- Terrebone Readiness and Assistance Coalition
- Visions of Hope



## TSUNAMI SURVIVORS REBUILD

by Elizabeth Stevens

*Stronger homes. Protected shorelines. More secure livelihoods. A year after the tsunami, building it back better means all these things—and something more.*

From the outset, Oxfam understood that the tsunami, horrific as it was, presented an important opportunity to address the chronic and widespread poverty that plagues Southeast Asia. Even as we delivered emergency water and sanitation supplies to hundreds of thousands of people who had lost their homes, loved ones, and livelihoods, we were hopeful that someday they might know a better future.

One year into what Oxfam now expects to be a three-year program, tsunami survivors are starting to share our hope. Better yet, as we lay the physical groundwork for stronger communities, the very process of rebuilding is yielding some unexpected—and exciting—benefits.

### FOR SHAMALI KODIKARA— EQUALITY

The toll of the tsunami on women was enormous. In some villages, more than three-quarters of those who died were female. And in the aftermath of the disaster, women and girls were exposed to new hazards, such as a lack of security in the camps.

But among the painful losses and upheavals, opportunities have risen to the surface. The rebuilding process—with so much work to be done—has presented an opportunity for women to participate as equal contributors and to play a stronger role in their communities.

Shamali Kodikara, a 36-year-old mother from Matara, Sri Lanka, helped construct her own home through an

*Fifty-year-old Parvathy helps construct shelters near Ampara, Sri Lanka. Oxfam is helping survivors to build shelters by providing materials, training, and equal pay for women and men.*

Oxfam cash-for-work program. Oxfam provided training, materials, and wages to help her carry out the job.

“My husband and I worked together ...with Oxfam and neighbors. There was no difference between men and women,” she said. “I enjoyed it very much.”

For Oxfam, equality means that we encourage women to join our cash-for-work projects and pay them wages equal to men. That we support and finance not only the most visible trades and businesses like fishing and masonry, but also traditional women’s work like lace making and tailoring. And that we offer women a chance to learn non-traditional trades, as well.

The effect has been liberating. “I am a free woman and have earned money for my family when we needed it,” Kodikara said. “I am very proud of myself and everything I have done.”

*continued >>*

## FOR PALANIAMMA— A BETTER LIVING

Many people want to get back to the work they were doing before the tsunami, but struggle to make a living at it. Others want a shot at something better. In a region where poverty was extreme before the tsunami hit, Oxfam is looking for—and finding—ways to help people make long-term improvements to their incomes.

In Sri Lanka, for example, Oxfam has provided refrigerator trucks to a fishing association, boosting the incomes of 3,500 families by helping their products reach more profitable markets in Colombo. And throughout the region, we are funding revolving loans for villagers who want to start small businesses.

Palaniamma, from Parangipettai, India, used a loan from Oxfam to set up a coconut-fiber business. Before the tsunami, she worked for a contractor at a construction site where, she says, “I felt like a bonded laborer. Now, I can take care of my family and at the same time earn my income—besides providing employment to seven other people.”

For people who have known few opportunities until now, a small boost can make a big difference. By offering financing to those who might otherwise be denied a dignified living and by helping small producers gain access to better markets, Oxfam is empowering people to realize more secure livelihoods.



*Oxfam is helping craftspeople and small-scale merchants reestablish their businesses throughout the region. “Oxfam’s assistance has enabled me to think positively and to believe in myself—that I am in control of my future destiny,” said Gayani Amarasinghe, an artisan from Weligama, Sri Lanka.*

## FOR OXFAM’S MICHAEL DELANEY—HOPE FOR STRONGER COMMUNITY VOICES

Community participation has always been central to Oxfam’s programs, and the tsunami response is no exception. We are following the lead of communities on what and how to carry out the reconstruction of their villages. We are seeking guidance from women on how to make camps safer for them at night. We are soliciting input into the design of shelters from the people who are going to live in them.

All that participation is helping make our rehabilitation programs effective, but as Oxfam America’s Director of Humanitarian Assistance Michael Delaney points out, it has another

function as well: Consultation gives groups that are chronically underrepresented in decision-making a place at the table.

And it is with an eye to the future that Oxfam is working to strengthen local organizations, such as those that advocate for the rights of women and other vulnerable populations.

“The presence of the international aid agencies will fade over time, and the eyes of the world will look elsewhere. People will be left to work within their government structures,” says Delaney. “Part of Oxfam’s goal is to leave them ready to defend their rights and engage in strengthening their societies long into the future.”

## A Story of Aid Done Right

In fact, the disaster inflicted by the tsunami could have been worse. Much worse. The sudden displacement of 1.6 million people could have been the prelude to a second wave of crises, as deadly waterborne diseases swept through crowded tent camps. Yet, thanks to a massive public health effort on the part of aid providers, there were no epidemics. Oxfam alone reached hundreds of thousands of survivors with clean water, latrines, and crucial health information.

In a July 24th editorial, *The New York Times* acknowledged the success of the safe water campaign conducted by Oxfam and others, calling it “a story of aid done right.”

*“Six months later, there has been no spike in diarrheal disease, cholera, giardiasis, and dysentery... In many places, tsunami survivors living in camps have suffered less from waterborne disease than countrymen in comparable areas who were not affected... People worldwide who gave generously to help the victims of the tsunami can be satisfied their money saved lives, and will go on saving them.”*

# EXCHANGE ONLINE

Oxfam and our partners are working to save lives, build communities, and campaign for change. With so much activity, there are far more stories to share than space in this magazine. But you can read more online at [oxfamamerica.org/exchange\\_winter06](http://oxfamamerica.org/exchange_winter06). Here's a preview of some of the stories you'll find:

## Innovative Classrooms Change Lives in Mali



Soulyemane Sarr, founder of the Youth Action Association (AJA) in Mali, says his organization has a simple mission: "To create a Mali without unemployment."

It's a significant challenge. Unemployment is high

among young people in the capital Bamako, and few have the necessary skills to secure decent employment. Read about how AJA has pioneered a new style of vocational training and practical education—one that helps young people learn a craft they can use to support themselves.

Pictured above is AJA's *valise du savoir*, one of the alternative tools AJA has developed for teaching apprentices to read. Each case is customized to teach literacy skills for a specific trade, such as brick-laying or sewing.

## Fighting HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa With Women's Rights



On December 1, World AIDS Day, our thoughts turned to Southern Africa—home to just two percent of the world's population, but 30 percent of the people in the world living with HIV and AIDS. In the most heavily infected 15-24 age group, roughly 80 percent

are women. Denied the same rights and opportunities as men—through both current laws and traditional practices—young women have been forced to endure sexual exploitation. Learn more about Oxfam's new initiative to confront discrimination against women by helping local organizations advocate for new laws and new attitudes.

## Native American Communities Confront Mining



Western Shoshone grandmother Carrie Dann believes the earth, air, and water give people instructions on life. That's why she is insisting that mining companies allow indigenous people to decide if, when, and how they operate on ancestral grounds. In the face of

powerful opposition, Dann and her organization, the Western Shoshone Defense Project, are voicing compelling arguments. The question is, can they get the mining industry and the US government to listen? Tribal leaders have launched a massive signature-gathering effort to build support for their case, which a UN commission will review in February.

## Fair Trade Movement Finds New Allies



How can fair trade transform the global marketplace? One important step, say Oxfam's campaigners, is to recruit new allies—and new shoppers. That is exactly what they are doing.

In Chicago, Oxfam helped build a new coalition for fair trade by linking faith groups—fair trade's traditional base—and labor rights groups. Both share the vision of better wages and working conditions for farmers and artisans around the world. And in Boston, a Guatemalan coffee cooperative, Oxfam partner Manos Campesinas, has encouraged the Latino community to buy fair trade coffee to help alleviate poverty in Central America.

### Correction

In the Fall 2005 Exchange, we incorrectly mentioned that Putumayo CDs are sold at Starbucks. Putumayo music is available at Ten Thousand Villages and other gift and record stores. A portion of the proceeds from Putumayo's "Mali," "Latin Lounge," and "Asian Lounge" CDs benefits Oxfam's work. For more information, visit [putumayo.com](http://putumayo.com).



RYAN SPENCER / OXFAM

## Commit to a Stronger Future.

This year, disasters have exposed unchecked poverty around the world and right here in our own backyard. **Now is the time to address the conditions that make people vulnerable** to hurricanes, earthquakes, conflict, and hunger—before the next emergency strikes. Now is the time to become an Oxfam Pledge Partner.

**Pledge Partners make small monthly contributions—\$10 or more a month—which help fund Oxfam’s everyday work in poor communities.**

This steady stream of income ensures that we can respond immediately to save lives when an emergency occurs, while continuing our long-term work to strengthen communities and create lasting change.

To join, visit [oxfamamerica.org](http://oxfamamerica.org) and click “Donate.” Then choose “Make a Monthly Gift.” Or fill out the enclosed gift envelope. You can also contact us at [pledge@oxfamamerica.org](mailto:pledge@oxfamamerica.org) or (800) 77-OXFAM.

## Pledge to End Poverty.

*Peace has yet to come to Darfur in western Sudan. More than two years of conflict has left untold numbers of people dead and forced more than two million from their homes. Many of them, like this child, fled to neighboring Chad, where Oxfam has been working in seven camps, equipping them with water and sanitation services.*



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