



**Oxfam**  
America



## Oxfam in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean

All across this diverse and beautiful territory, new faces of leadership are emerging. Women, rural communities, and small farmers are adding their voices to the political dialogue, calling on their governments: **Hear us now.**

Half the population of Central America lives in poverty. The chronically poor—women, small farmers, and those in rural communities—lack the access to government services, economic opportunity, and basic rights that could enable a secure existence. Since the 1980s, Oxfam America has supported promising community-driven organizations, helping their leaders and members develop skills and resources—and a voice to achieve their visions for a fairer, more prosperous future for all.

Our work in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean includes the following:

- Reducing vulnerability to disaster
- Preventing violence against women
- Expanding opportunities for small farmers and women entrepreneurs
- Protecting indigenous lands

### REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO DISASTER

Central America and the Caribbean are among the highest-risk areas for natural disasters in the world. In the last 10 years, hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, and drought have had a devastating impact, and poor communities have suffered the most.

A natural disaster, however, cannot be viewed as an all-powerful event over which we have no control. Deforestation, a lack of regulations to protect fragile areas, and substandard construction practices have dramatically increased the region's vulnerability.

Oxfam and its partners are reducing this vulnerability by creating strategies for how communities prepare for and respond to crises. Through grants and technical support, Oxfam is helping communities develop evacuation plans and emergency communications networks, reduce the impact of flooding and landslides, and advocate improved government policies for disaster prevention.

“A disaster is not just a physical event, but the effect of the phenomenon on a vulnerable community or society.... We cannot say that disasters are natural. Disasters are socio-natural events. If we can accept this, then we must accept that disasters can be prevented.”

Luis Romano, risk management specialist at the Humboldt Center, an Oxfam partner

## What is Oxfam?

Oxfam America is an international relief and development organization that creates lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Together with individuals and local groups around the world, Oxfam saves lives, helps people overcome poverty, and fights for social justice. To join our efforts or learn more, go to [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org).

We are a member of Oxfam International—a confederation of 13 Oxfam affiliates—working in more than 120 countries with as many as 3,000 local organizations. With many of the causes of poverty global in nature, the members of Oxfam International believe that we can achieve greater impact through our collective efforts.



### Women generate income—and independence

Celia Gonzáles Martínez is a member of a women's group that receives technical assistance for raising sheep, as well as training on gender equality and women's rights. "Today, we make the decisions about the production and selling of the Peligüey sheep," says Gonzales. "We involve the whole family, but we are the ones managing it all. That gives us economic space, so we don't depend so much on the men."

### Laws that save lives

With more than 30 years of disaster expertise, Oxfam recognizes that the communities with the best chance of survival are those that are prepared before disaster strikes to develop and implement solutions for themselves. Yet Salvadoran law did not consider a community's role in disaster preparedness—giving sole responsibility to the military to respond to disasters after they occurred.

With Oxfam's support, a group of partner organizations contributed to the drafting of a new law that recognizes a community's critical role in disaster preparedness. Though the law that was ultimately passed falls short of providing an integrated approach to disaster risk management, it marks an important step forward in engaging communities in preparedness. Today, partners like UNES, PROVIDA, and FUMA are working with communities to create emergency contingency plans. UNES also continues to lobby to address some of the law's shortcomings.

### PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As in many parts of the world, women in much of Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean struggle against systemic discrimination—a major cause of poverty.

Oxfam maintains that gender inequality cannot be treated as just a "women's problem." Rather, true equality requires a fundamental change in policies, practices, and beliefs. Working in the smallest villages, the capital cities, and everywhere in between, Oxfam's partners are training women leaders, educating elected officials, and campaigning for expanded legal protections for women. In all cases, both men and women are being engaged as advocates for women's rights.

### A safer city for women

In a region where violence against women is far too commonplace, El Salvador—a country of six million people—registers alarming statistics. Recent figures from the National Civil Police indicate more than one woman is murdered in El Salvador every day.

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### Sources of funding

Oxfam America raises more than 90 percent of program funds from individuals and institutions, such as foundations.

To maintain our independence, Oxfam America does not accept funds from the US government or from corporations working in industries that are the subject of our advocacy and campaign programs.

For more detailed financial information, visit our Web site:

**English:** [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)

**Español:** [www.oxfamamerica.org/es](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/es)



Santa Tecla, a pilot city in the Oxfam-funded and Oxfam-initiated Campaign for the Prevention of Gender Violence, is fulfilling its pledge to make the city a safer place for women with the help of six national nongovernment organizations supported by Oxfam. Today, the Casa de Mujeres serves as a support center for women affected by violence. Better lighting and surveillance have made conditions safer in El Cafetalón, an important city park. And training programs for city workers, teachers, police officers, and elected officials are helping to change a culture of violence to one of respect.

### EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL FARMERS AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

In an increasingly globalized economy, small farmers and entrepreneurs are vulnerable to international trade agreements. Treaties like the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) threaten to flood domestic markets with cheap foreign imports and goods produced with US and European government subsidies that other countries can't match—making it impossible for local producers to compete.

Meanwhile, small farmers and business owners are hard-pressed to access the credit they need to expand their farms and become more competitive.

Here's how Oxfam is tackling these challenges:

- **The community finance program** creates small loan groups for women entrepreneurs. Working together, women evaluate business opportunities and generate savings to pursue them. This self-help approach enables women to build financial and social capital, which directly benefits families and communities.
- **The agrarian policy and trade initiative** helps local organizations monitor and document the impact of international trade agreements. With proof in hand, they can develop strategies and actions to mobilize on behalf of fairer government policies for local farmers and workers.



### Expanding opportunities for coffee farmers

Jacobo Chávez is one of the 25 million coffee farmers worldwide struggling to earn a reliable income from his crop. For Chávez, security came in the form of the Oxfam-supported coffee cooperative in Sololá, Guatemala. "Some five years ago, I grew coffee, but I didn't have anyone to help me."

Through the cooperative, Chávez has learned how to grow coffee without using chemicals, allowing him to tap into lucrative—and expanding—international markets for organic and Fair Trade coffee. Key to his success is his commitment to producing high-quality coffee—an ethic the cooperative helps to enforce. "They'll come to see what you are doing—if it's good or wrong," says Chávez. The cooperative "helps us to improve the quality of our coffee."



## Working together to end poverty and injustice

### How Oxfam works

We call it *acompañamiento*, a word that describes how Oxfam works. We identify those local organizations best suited to create lasting solutions to poverty and injustice and offer them the support they need to thrive. In addition to funding, Oxfam assists with technical advice, networking opportunities, training, and legal aid. We aim to help our partners contribute to a stronger civil society.

### PROTECTING INDIGENOUS LANDS

Central America is rich in natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, and minerals—hot commodities for mining. But mining can destroy farmland, cause deforestation and erosion, and pollute waters. Too often, the negative environmental, societal, and cultural impacts exceed the financial gain.

Oxfam is supporting community organizations that are defending community rights to decide if, when, and how a mining project enters their lands. Together, these organizations are creating a broad movement that is helping local people get the information they need to manage their lands—and to negotiate for safeguards and adequate compensation. As a more permanent solution, Oxfam's partners are helping communities learn to develop proposals for the much-needed legal reform necessary for establishing lasting protections.

### Indigenous communities unite

Today, mining concessions cover 10 percent of Guatemala, concentrated in areas where indigenous people—largely Mayan—live. Almost 20 percent of the concessions are for open-pit mines, which can be particularly damaging. “The benefit of mining to Guatemala is about one percent of the earnings generated; only about half of that is for the municipality,” says Rodolfo Pocop, national coordinator for the National Indigenous and Peasant Council (CONIC), an Oxfam partner. “And after they are done, they will leave our lands, which will no longer be useful for agriculture.”

With Oxfam's support, CONIC is providing workshops for indigenous communities on the impacts of mining and the importance of preserving natural resources. Community leaders are learning to analyze mining proposals and to ensure that mining concessions respect community rights and Mayan culture.

Photos: Liliana Rodriguez (p. 1, p. 3 top, above left), Enayda Argueta (p. 2), Tjarda Muller (p. 3 right), James Rodriguez (above right)



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