



OXFAM AMERICA HUNGER BANQUET® SCRIPT

Agriculture and Trade

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Oxfam America Hunger Banquet. We are here today because more than 1 billion people live in poverty.

[PAUSE]

850 million people suffer from chronic hunger.

[PAUSE]

A child dies from hunger or a preventable disease every 2.9 seconds. That's 30,000 children a day.

[PAUSE]

You may think hunger is about too many people and too little food. That is not the case. Our rich and bountiful planet produces enough food to feed every woman, man, and child on earth. Hunger is about power. Its roots lie in inequalities in access to education and resources. The results are illiteracy, poverty, war, and the inability of families to grow or buy food. Today, you join Oxfam's fight against hunger and poverty.

There are solutions. Altering the current system of trade so that it benefits all countries, rich and poor, will help reverse many inequalities that currently keep people poor.

For example, if the poorest regions of the world increased their share of world exports by just 1%, they could lift 128 million people out of poverty.

Instead, poor countries are forced to open up their markets to floods of cheap imports; if they don't, vital aid dollars will be cut off. Yet for every dollar given to poor countries in aid, \$2 is lost because of unfair trade barriers against their exports.

More than 40% of the world's population lives in low income countries—yet these countries account for only 3% of world trade. Today's rules of trade make so-called "free trade" very profitable for rich countries but hinder poor country's access to a better life for its citizens.

US and European countries also spend billions on agricultural subsidies, mostly to large and wealthy agribusiness, putting farmers in poor countries AND in the US out of business, or driving down their incomes, and furthering the demise of small farmers globally.

Oxfam believes that human rights are not contingent on our country of origin, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or the money we have or need. Rather, human rights are fundamental and nonnegotiable.

Over the more than 35 years of Oxfam America's work, millions of dollars have been raised to support human rights and an end to poverty. Millions of people have participated in Oxfam America Hunger Banquets or skipped meals to acknowledge the plight of the world's hungry.

While the proportion of the world's population living in hunger has decreased, hunger endures for millions of people. In 46 countries, people are poorer today than they were in 1990.

Your presence here today shows that you are concerned. You want to learn more. You want to make a difference.

Since 1970, Oxfam America has been making a difference. We continue to promote change "from the bottom up" through hundreds of grassroots organizations around the world. Oxfam doesn't impose solutions. We believe that people have the power, the right, and the understanding to create solutions for their own communities. Oxfam provides financial and moral support and networking assistance to enable communities to control their own futures. Let me give you an example:

Cotton farmers from across Africa convened in Maputo, Mozambique June 30 to join the global movement to stop agriculture policies that are depressing world cotton prices. The event marked the start of a new regional campaign led by Oxfam America and its partners in Mozambique.

"Cotton is at the heart of our lives. Our families are entirely dependent on cotton," said Alberto Malico, a cotton farmer from the northern province of Nampula, in Mozambique, at a meeting to launch the Mozambique cotton campaign. "Over the years the price of cotton has continued to drop and we know why this is so. We demand a fair deal in the trading of cotton."

There are as many as 300,000 farmers growing cotton in Mozambique, and another 25,000 laborers depending on the crop for their living. They form the backbone of Oxfam America's cotton trade campaign in southern Africa. In addition to pushing for changes in subsidy policies for cotton growers in the US, Oxfam America is also helping farmers in cotton growing regions in Mozambique to make a better living and participate in policy decisions that affect their lives, such as the setting of cotton prices paid to growers.

This will lead to better prices and policies, as well as training for farmers to help improve the quality of their cotton and protect the environment.

This is one example among many to demonstrate the sustainable solutions Oxfam America and its partners are able to achieve.

Oxfam also supports other groups, including:

- Small-scale farmers in the US who are forming cooperatives to sell their organic produce;
- Indigenous people in Central and South America who are working to overcome discrimination and exclusion;
- Women participating in savings groups and starting their own micro enterprises in Africa and East Asia; and
- More than a million survivors of the 2004 tsunami who are rebuilding their communities on stronger footing and finding ways to move forward.

Altogether, Oxfam America supports some 236 partners in more than 26 countries. While Oxfam is committed to our community-based work, we have found that there are also larger barriers that keep people from thriving. Our community work forms the basis for our policy and advocacy work, through which we challenge the national and international laws and policies that reinforce poverty. We also educate the US public on hunger and poverty issues, which is what this Oxfam America Hunger Banquet is all about.

This Oxfam America Hunger Banquet is a metaphor for how food and other resources are inequitably distributed in the world. As such, an Oxfam America Hunger Banquet can only touch upon the issues. We cannot recreate the many complex ways poverty manifests itself. We will not have time to go into all the problems associated with lack of access to health care, education, and employment opportunities, and the realities of the day-to-day struggle for survival.

The one thing I would like you to remember is this: Everyone on earth has the same basic needs; it is only our circumstances—where we live and the culture into which we are born—that differ.

Some are born into relative prosperity and security, while millions—through no choice of their own—are born into poverty.

As each of us walked in the door here today, we drew our lot, at random. Look around, and you can see that equality and balance don't exist here.

Please note: No one section of this room represents a single country. While the US is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, almost 36 million Americans live in poverty. Stark inequalities prevail everywhere.

Now I would like to introduce you to the three segments of this world. But remember—it's too easy to measure this world purely in economic terms. It is really about each person's ability to achieve a sense of security and to access resources.

[MOVE NEAR HIGH-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting over here, you represent the 15 percent of the world's population with a per capita income of \$9,076 or more. You are fortunate enough to be able to afford a nutritious daily diet. Since many of you exceed your daily requirement of calories, you are likely to face health problems such as heart disease and diabetes.

But most of you don't worry about getting health care. You have access to the best medical care in the world. It's a given that your children will attend school; the only uncertainty is how many years they will study after high school. Access to credit? You turn down more offers than you can count. You and your family live in a comfortable and secure home. You own at least one car and probably two televisions. When you take your annual two-week vacation, you don't worry about your job disappearing in your absence.

You have access to virtually everything you need and the security to enjoy it.

[MOVE NEAR MIDDLE-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting here, you represent roughly 25 percent of the world's population. You earn between \$912 and \$9,075 a year. The levels of access and security you enjoy vary greatly. You live on the edge. For many, it would take losing only one harvest to drought or a serious illness to throw you into poverty. You probably own no land and may work as a day laborer, a job that pays a paltry amount—but it's better than nothing. Your small income allows for some use of electricity and a few years of schooling for your children—especially if they are boys.

Alternatively, you may have left your family to go work in the city because subsidies paid to farmers of rich countries have caused them to dump cheap rice, corn or wheat on your country.

The market price has fallen well below the cost of production, making your harvest virtually worthless. You hope that the money you earn from your less-than-minimum-wage job as domestic help or a sweatshop worker will eventually allow you to move back home and make a better life for your family.

Let me put a real name to a person in this middle-income group: Romeo Ramirez. In an effort to support his struggling family, Romeo left his home in Guatemala when he was 13 to find farm work in Mexico. Two years later, he made the difficult journey to the US to chase the American dream. But the promises of this dream were unattainable.

Instead, Romeo toiled in the fields of Florida, where he needed to pick nearly two tons of tomatoes each day to make just \$50.

[MOVE NEAR LOW-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting on the floor, you represent the majority of the world's population—roughly 60 percent. Your average income is less than \$911 a year—about \$2.50 a day—although many of you earn much less.

Every day is a struggle to meet your family's basic needs. Finding food, water, and shelter can consume your entire day. For many of you women, it would not be uncommon to have to walk five to 10 miles every day to get water, spend several more hours working in the fields, and of course, take care of the children.

Many of you are frequently hungry. It is quite likely that you don't get the minimum number of calories your hardworking life requires. Many of you are homeless or living in structures so flimsy that a hard rain or strong wind could cause a major catastrophe.

Even though education is the single most powerful weapon against poverty, school is a luxury few of your children will ever experience. Most girls don't even bother to dream about school.

Adequate health care is out of the question for many of you in this group. For most of you, early death is all too familiar, with many mothers expecting to lose one or two children before they turn five.

If you are lucky enough to work, you are probably a tenant farmer who must give your landowner 75 percent of your harvest. Or you may get occasional work as a day laborer at a large plantation growing bananas, sugar, or coffee for export. You reap few benefits from these crops; you'd prefer to grow food your children could eat.

The rigged rules and double standards of international trade prevent your countries from reaping the benefits of trade that would help so many of you. For example, just a 5 % increase in poor country's share of world exports would result in \$350 billion, which is seven times greater than you currently receive in aid.

Meet Adis Gemada. Adis lives in the Rift Valley of Ethiopia, which has been plagued by chronic drought. Her husband died and left her with seven children. In good times, they eat one meal a day. Her children have suffered from malaria and from illnesses related to the shortage of food. Adis had three goats but was forced to sell them in an attempt to feed her children and overcome these problems. "I have nothing left to sell," she says.

MOVE UP/DOWN SCENARIOS

Now, I have some news that will affect several of you. As we've said, no one can choose the circumstances into which they are born. Some people have the good fortune to change their lives for the better, but for most the circumstances of life are determined by factors outside of their control.

[ASK ANY SIX PEOPLE FROM MIDDLE-INCOME GROUP TO STAND]

These six people live in Haiti. (Address the 6 people from the middle income group) Your families have cultivated rice for as long as you can remember. You go to the market each week to sell rice, but lately, cheap, subsidized rice is flooding the market place. You notice that the bags are marked "US Rice: from the port of Miami". You cannot compete with the low prices, and you cannot blame your fellow Haitians for buying the cheaper, imported rice. What you don't know is that the only reason the US can afford to sell the rice so cheaply, is because the US government spends billions each year subsidizing rice in the US. This causes rice farmers in the US to produce too much, which they then "dump" right into your small market place.

Do ordinary people in the US know how this is devastating your family? Would they care if they did?

I ask that the 6 of you take a seat on the floor.

This following scenario can be acted out by someone in your group who has rehearsed this beforehand; you can also have them dress up as a "cotton" farmer:

"My name is Amadou Doumbia. I live in Mali, West Africa, in the village where my people have farmed cotton for three generations. In good times, my father and I easily supported our extended family. But now, times are far from good. For a decade, the price of cotton has been so low, I barely make a profit. I am waiting for the cotton buyer with my heart in my throat."

Emcee: "I am sorry I don't have better news for you. The US and European cotton farmers have dumped their excess product on the world market, driving the price of cotton to its lowest since you began farming. You will only make enough money to last three months. But let me explain this injustice to you: rich countries are actually paying their cotton farmers to grow more cotton, up to 4 billion dollars a year in the US alone! Even though cotton farmers in Mali can produce cotton more cheaply, they just can't compete with the subsidies that rich country cotton farmers get."

Amadou Doumbia: "How is this a "level playing field"? Every member of my family is out in the fields seven days a week, and still I struggle to put food on the table. My whole life, all I've wanted is to grow cotton. But farming is keeping us poor and hungry. Something has to change."

[TURN BACK TO ADDRESS ENTIRE ROOM]

This is just a small slice of life as it plays out each day around the globe.

Now, we invite you to eat.

Those of you in the high-income group will be served a nutritious meal [MAY MENTION MEAL]. Those in the middle-income group may proceed to the buffet tables where rice and beans, [(IF THIS IS THE CASE)] are available. People in the low-income group seated on the floor, help yourselves to rice and water. [(YOU CAN ALSO SERVE RICE IN LARGE BOWLS PLACED ON THE FLOOR AND HAVE PEOPLE SERVE EACH OTHER)]. Bon appetit!

[PLAY MUSIC OR SLIDE SHOW DURING MEAL. AT THE END OF THE MEAL, TURN OFF AUDIO AND/OR VIDEO]

Please join me in a moment of silence to reflect on our experience here today.

[MOMENT OF SILENCE]

[SHARING PERIOD: MC WALKS AMONG AUDIENCE MEMBERS, ASKING PEOPLE HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT BEING IN WHICHEVER GROUP THEY ARE IN.]

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT AN OXFAM AMERICA HUNGER BANQUET

Young audiences:

- Do you think it's fair that the world is divided this way? Why or why not?
- Do you think that the people who got the big meal should help the others? Why or why not?
- Do you think people in the low-income group are there because they don't work hard? Or why do you think the people in the low-income group are there? Older audiences:
- Would anyone like to share any of the thoughts they have on what has taken place here?
- Has anyone witnessed poverty in the US or in a visit to a poor country that they would like to share?
- Does anyone have any ideas on how the personal choices we as Americans make affect this unequal distribution?
- What might we all do to bring about a fairer distribution of resources? If people are only focused on the dynamics of the banquet itself, remind participants that this is a simulation, not reality for most of us. Challenge the audience to discuss what this represents in the real world and ask what can be done to change things for the better.

CONCLUSION

Here's a new version of an old story:

-give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day

-teach a man to fish, he'll eat for a life time

-but we must also ask ourselves, who controls the river?

Who controls the river is an important question because there may well be a company whose factory is polluting upstream. A government or international institution could be planning to build a dam, displacing thousands of villagers. One large fishing company may be over fishing, placing the entire livelihood of ordinary fishers at risk.

Who controls the river?

Oxfam's mission is one that is quite ambitious: we want to end hunger, poverty and injustice. And Oxfam believes the question of injustice-- whether it be social, economic, or political injustice-- goes to the heart of the question, who controls the river?

To illustrate this better, and to make more concrete the link between hunger, poverty and trade, I want to show a short video. These video clips are powerful illustrations of why we need to make trade fair, and I hope, will inspire you to become part of our campaign.

View "Together, We Can End Poverty" (9 minutes)

(This DVD can be ordered or downloaded at www.oxfamamerica.org/fast)

(After video):

Who controls the river?

I think the reason why the Oxfam Hunger Banquet is such a powerful event, is because every person on this earth understands, at a most basic level, why it is important for people to have food. We all have to eat.

We are probably here today because we believe that everyone has the right to eat, the right to NOT go hungry. But if we really want to solve world hunger, we must ask why are so many people hungry, when the world has such an abundant harvest? As we learned at the opening of this banquet, there is enough food to feed everyone.

Who controls the river?

Hunger is not really about food.(pause) Hunger is NOT about food. (pause) Hunger is about power, and the fact that millions do not have access to what they need to survive. Access to things like land; markets to sell their goods; a decent job; credit; education; peace; political freedom.

Hunger is about power. Which means that if we really want to end hunger, we need to deal with the hard questions about root causes; we need to find out who controls the river, and become active in re-creating society. We need to use our own power to transform the existing power structures that currently, are creating a world of hunger amidst a world of plenty.

So what can we do?

Firstly, we can educate ourselves and others about these issues. Oxfam has many campaigns that we need your help on, and they are all interlinked: one is our Fast campaign, two others are our fair trade coffee and no dirty gold campaigns; the last, and the one that I am going to ask you help on right now, is the make trade fair campaign.

Secondly, it is important to seek out like-minded individuals, be they other students, professors, family or friends. This will give you a needed support network and also allow you to have fun—something very vital when doing this important work!

Lastly, think about what ways you can get actively involved in creating real change—whether it's about buying fair trade products and getting them at your school, supermarkets and place of worship, doing this Hunger Banquet yourselves, lobbying your local and state representatives on changing trade rules, or other creative things you might invent. Oxfam has toolkits, action guides, and all other kinds of free resources to help you out. Use Oxfam as a resource! If you sign the post card handed to you when you came in, you will get updates from Oxfam about important work we need your help with.

As we end this banquet, let me read some of the text from this postcard we are asking you to sign. (Read selected text from the Make Trade Fair postcard) [Check with Natasha Kallay at nkallay@oxfamamerica.org for the appropriate card].

And to end the banquet, let me show you one last short video clip. Over the past few US concert tours, Chris Martin of Coldplay (British musician who is helping to promote our campaign to make trade fair) let us show this. We are asking people to sign a Make Trade Fair card that supports farm subsidy reform here in the US. This card calls on our elected officials to protect family farmers, the environment, and to stop unfair trade policies. Please help us with our current action to stop dumping of US rice, cotton, corn, and other products and sign the postcard being handed out.

You can order more by contacting Natasha Kallay or by visiting our website at: www.oxfamamerica.org/agriculture. I hope this will inspire you to join this campaign and to become part of this important work to end hunger, poverty and injustice.

Together we can make a difference.

Thank you for coming.

(End with Coldplay clip, making sure the music is really loud and ideally, you are projecting it onto a very large screen. Have volunteers going around to collect the cards during the banquet or as people leave the venue. Offer extra pens).

Video can be downloaded at:

http://www.oxfamamerica.org/resources/files/What_If_-_US_version.mpg

END