



Oxfam

FALL 2004

Exchange

TROUBLED WATERS

→ EMERGENCY WATER ON THE GO

→ BREAKTHROUGH! CHINESE
DAM DELAYED

Upriver Construction & the
Downstream Effect

→ OIL AND WATER IN ECUADOR'S AMAZON

→ DROUGHT IN CUBA: A DOWNHILL BATTLE





Oxfam
America

OXFAM EXCHANGE

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BUY FRESH

BUY LOCAL



Why buy that pepper from halfway around the world when the very best produce is right in your own backyard?

Even if you don't keep your own vegetable patch, right now the freshest, tastiest tomatoes, squash, potatoes, and cucumbers are being grown in your neighborhood.

Visit your local apple orchard, berry patch, or farmer's market. Or look for the signs in your grocery store that advertise locally-produced foods. For specific information on places to buy local produce, visit the US Department of Agriculture website at www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets.

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 or fax to 617-728-2596. We will print as many letters as possible, but reserve the right to edit for space and clarity.

The Other Faces of Iraq

As the struggle for stability in Iraq wears on, Oxfam remembers the 16,000 Iraqi civilians who have lost their lives during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Even before the US invaded Iraq, Oxfam America raised concerns over the safety of Iraqi civilians with US government officials and policy makers. We concluded the best way to protect Iraqi civilians was to avoid war in the first place. Then, as the war began, Oxfam advocated for combat to be conducted in strict accordance with international humanitarian law to limit the impact on civilians.

Over a year later, approximately 16,000 Iraqi civilians have died in the ongoing conflict. In April of this year alone, 1,000 civilians were killed and thousands more injured in clashes between Coalition forces and insurgents. Tragically, this toll was predictable: according to the International Red Cross, civilians constitute 90 percent of all casualties in armed conflict today. And yet, for a conflict that has dominated the media, the realities of daily life for Iraq's civilians have been largely overlooked.

One of the only instances of close media focus on the human costs of the war was the scandal at Abu Ghraib. Ironically, the torture of Iraqi prisoners made the news right before the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the dedication of the World War II memorial in Washington, D.C. In response, Oxfam launched a petition calling on President Bush to rededicate the US to the Geneva Conventions, one of the most important legacies of World War II protecting prisoners from ill-treatment. This petition garnered 14,000 signatures.

Meanwhile, human realities remain the substance of Oxfam's work. Through our financial support to the All Our Children coalition of aid agencies, Oxfam is providing beds, food, medical supplies, hygiene kits, wheelchairs, and blankets to hospitals that specifically treat children. Additionally, following the Coalition invasion, Oxfam improved water access for more than 185,000 Iraqi people.

But there is more to human existence than food, beds, and water. To raise awareness about the human face of the war, Oxfam is working with the Education for Peace in Iraq Center on two traveling photo exhibits entitled "The Other Faces of Iraq." Conveying the hope, pain, determination, and hardship of daily life, the photos offer a glimpse into Iraq's social, political, and economic realities, uncovering a new picture of Iraq, a nation struggling for peace.

If Operation Iraqi Freedom is truly about freedom and democracy, then it is time to recognize the civilians who not only suffered under Saddam Hussein's regime, but who are now caught in crisis. With the new freedom in Iraq, Oxfam urges a greater focus on the protection of civilians and the human rights of the Iraqi people.



Children in the Al Jumariya neighborhood, Basrah, before the war began. This photo is part of "The Other Faces of Iraq" exhibit Oxfam is co-sponsoring with the Education for Peace in Iraq Center. For details on where you can see the exhibit this fall, visit www.facesofiraq.org.

Oxfam Rapidly Expanding Operations in Sudan and Chad

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in Darfur, western Sudan, where one million people have been forced to leave their homes, fleeing a government-backed militia.

The situation is urgent: the flow of people into camps in Darfur and across the border into Chad exceeds the speed with which refugee services can be provided. People are running out of food, and water is scarce. As is the case in many Saharan countries, there are few naturally occurring supplies of water available to support large concentrations of people. In addition to suffering from dehydration, a recent nutritional survey showed that malnutrition rates in camps in Sudan are among the worst in the world.

Oxfam is scaling up its efforts in both Sudan and Chad. In Sudan, Oxfam is constructing latrines and providing clean drinking water and washing facilities for more than 138,000 people. In Chad, Oxfam is supporting more than 97,000 refugees in seven camps in the middle of the desert, where current temperatures are up to 120 degrees. In both locations, Oxfam is helping people maintain clean living conditions and limit the spread of disease.

Beyond our response on the ground, Oxfam is calling on the government of Sudan and all armed groups to ensure civilian safety. Oxfam is also urging involved parties to recognize the impartiality of humanitarian workers, guaranteeing both their safety and access to people in need.

Oxfam will be increasing its commitment to aid the people of Darfur in the months to come. Efforts will include the immediate deployment of additional water engineers and emergency equipment to the region.

IN THE NEWS

“Up to 30,000 people have been killed in the uprising, and the U.S. Agency for International Development predicts the number could surge to 300,000 if aid doesn’t reach the estimated 2 million in desperate need. Aid workers say Darfur has become the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

“What matters now is the implementation,” said Jasmine Whitbread, international director of Oxfam. “Time is running out.”

—Associated Press, July 5, 2004



REUTERS/ANTHONY NJUGUNA. COURTESY WWW.ALERTNET.ORG

Oxfam has raised more than \$1.8 million for its efforts in Sudan and Chad, including a \$1 million gift from eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife, Pamela, through their fund at the Peninsula Community Foundation. We estimate we will need more than \$25 million to meet the basic needs in the region over the next 12 months.

Oxfam Responds to Floods in Haiti

In the wake of the February ousting of former President Aristide, thousands of Haitians suffered from shortages of food, water, and other basic services due to civil unrest. Oxfam responded with water supplies for some of the poorest neighborhoods in Cap Haitien. So when floods began at the end of May, Oxfam's humanitarian operations in Haiti were already well-established, and we could respond immediately to the crisis.

By mid-June, over 8,500 gallons of water had been delivered to victims of this natural disaster. Oxfam continues to support more than 1.5 million Haitians throughout the country by providing clean water, medical aid, sanitation, and food relief to communities in need.

To assist Haiti beyond the floods, it is important the international community make a commitment to Haiti's economic future once and for all and support the long-term sustainable development of the country.

IN THE NEWS

"Yvette Etienne, Oxfam's coordinator in Haiti, said: 'We can use mules to reach the most affected people in the countryside. We will truck water to Fond Verrettes,' the second-hardest-hit town in Haiti, 'and use the mules to take it to the little villages.'"

—New York Times, June 5, 2004

Easing Tensions in Gambella

Ethiopia's Gambella region, located along the border with Sudan, is in the midst of a bloody clash that has claimed hundreds of lives since December 2003. The conflict is being fought between the Anuak, an indigenous people who have always lived in Gambella, and the highlanders, a local term used to describe a mix of Ethiopian peoples who have moved there. The Ethiopian government estimates more than a quarter of Gambella's 200,000 people have lost or fled from their homes.

Oxfam America is the only international aid agency assisting in Gambella. In addition to providing emergency food, shelter, and farming equipment, Oxfam is also supporting the Gambella Peace and Development Council (GPDC). GPDC is organizing community workshops to build peace by strengthening lines of communication among all the ethnic groups in Gambella.

Such peacebuilding initiatives are a trademark of Oxfam's humanitarian program. In May, *New York Times* correspondent Marc Lacey traveled with Oxfam America staff and witnessed first-hand our innovative efforts to ease tensions in Gambella.

IN THE NEWS

"Soldiers stop Daniel [a highlander raised by the Anuak] when he walks around with Anuak boys, suspecting some mischief is afoot, harassment that angers his father. 'When a light-colored boy is moving with the dark boys, it ought to be seen as a sign of peace,' Mr. Omot said.

"[Mr. Omot] is chairman of the local peace council, an interethnic group sponsored by Oxfam America that is trying to help unity triumph over strife."

—New York Times, June 15, 2004



Four Anuak boys look out from a ruined house in Ommingah neighborhood in Gambella town, Gambella, Ethiopia. The neighborhood was destroyed during fighting in December of last year. Oxfam America is supporting community workshops to build peace among the ethnic groups in Gambella.



WATER PRESSURE

SHAILAN PARKER/OXFAM

Today, more than one billion people worldwide lack access to a safe water supply—and that number is growing rapidly. This is an issue that concerns all of us, for we all rely on water to stay alive. But it is an issue of particular immediacy for those who live and work in rural areas, where water is used not just for drinking and sanitation, but also for irrigating fields, putting fish on the table, and generating income. When water supplies are threatened, rural communities are often the most affected—and have the most to lose.

From flooding in Haiti to drought in Ethiopia, water has long been central to Oxfam's work. Our emergency water systems are a hallmark of our agency. And our efforts to help communities access water for farming and fishing enable people to realize security.

But in recent decades, some extraordinary water pressures have emerged, as water resources are being swallowed up by dams, mining, and other commercial projects. The result is that, for the villages along the rivers, in the watersheds, and on the floodplains of East Asia being swamped or dried up by dams...for the indigenous people and farmers of South America whose rivers, lakes, and wells have been destroyed by mining...water is quickly becoming a major issue—and a major issue for Oxfam.

HAVE WATER, WILL TRAVEL

When emergency strikes and people are displaced, there's no greater danger than water-borne disease—and no greater need for Oxfam.

By Cynthia M. Phoel

Perhaps Oxfam is best recognized for its efforts to help communities realize unique, individualized solutions to poverty. But there is one area of our work in which we take a more uniform approach: water and sanitation.

For more than 20 years, Oxfam has set the standard for the quick and expert delivery of clean water, showers, and latrines in the wake of disaster. Oxfam's range of fail-proof packages—pipes, pumps, taps, and tanks—can be trucked or flown in to assist in any situation in under 48 hours. So reliable and adaptable are Oxfam's systems, they are used by the United Nations, Red Cross, and other agencies.

"There isn't an environment where we can't do water with our kits," says Paul Sherlock, Senior Humanitarian Representative for Oxfam and a pioneering engineer of Oxfam's water technology. "Even if there are a million people, we can still do it."

Having worked in refugee camps for 28 years, Sherlock has had ample opportunity to see the effect Oxfam water supplies have on refugee camps. "Even if it's very depressing and even if people are dying...when the water starts to flow, the atmosphere at the camp changes. You get a lot of satisfaction suddenly seeing kids screaming and shouting and waving their hands and chucking water over themselves, even though you may not have much water to spare."

Oxfam maintains an ongoing humanitarian presence in approximately 70 countries, including Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and other hotspots. We have provided water and sanitation to almost every major group of displaced people in the last 15 years.

SIGNATURE EXCELLENCE



ENGINEERS

Oxfam's approximately 50 international technical staff, including Senior Humanitarian Representative Paul Sherlock, are mechanical and civil engineers and hydrologists by trade. In emergencies, Oxfam recruits additional staff, such as the 1,800 local staff who assisted one million refugees during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.



TANKS

One Oxfam water tank holds and purifies 70,000 liters—enough to provide daily water for 4,666 people. These "bladders" can be flown in and set up in a matter of hours, while truckloads of water are being driven to the scene.



BUCKETS

Used to distribute water, the Oxfam bucket has a built-in cap and spigot to keep water clean. The bucket also contains a standard hygiene kit with cooking utensils, detergent, and disinfectant soap. While the molding process leaves a bump on the bottom of normal buckets, this bump is removed from the Oxfam bucket so loads can be carried on the head.

Recent Interventions

Oxfam responds to every major refugee crisis—amounting to an average of two to four large-scale emergencies each year. In the past 18 months, Oxfam has assisted more than 500,000 people displaced by conflict. Additionally, Oxfam has responded to smaller emergencies in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Iran, and other crisis spots.

PRESENT

SUDAN

Oxfam is currently providing water to more than 235,000 refugees in the desert regions of western Sudan and Chad.

SUMMER '03

LIBERIA

Operating under near-constant gunfire, Oxfam's staff of 25 Liberians converted a Monrovia soccer stadium into a safe haven where they facilitated the delivery and distribution of 56,000 liters of water per day. All told, Oxfam assisted 80,000 displaced people.

SUMMER '03

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

When civil conflict erupted, Oxfam staff provided water and sanitation for approximately 10,000 displaced people and completely prevented the outbreak of waterborne disease.

SPRING '03

IRAQ

Following the Coalition invasion, Oxfam restored water and waste removal services to the urban areas of southern Iraq, improving water access for more than 185,000 people and decreasing the prevalence of cholera.

BARGAINING POWER

As hydropower dams strain the rivers of East Asia, Oxfam's network of partners is building an energy of its own.

by Cynthia M. Phoel

On April 1, 2004, the Chinese government delayed a plan for a series of 13 dams to be built on the Nu (Salween) River in Yunnan, China. In support of his decision, Premier Wen Jiabao, the second highest government official in China, cited great contradictions between what proponents and opponents claimed would be the environmental impacts of the dam and a need for further review.

For Oxfam partner Green Watershed, a pioneering NGO in China that has been battling threats to watersheds in

POWER STRUGGLE

It would be easy for people to feel powerless against the governments and institutions eager to develop East Asia's waters for hydropower generation. Facing rapid population growth and swept up in a surge of economic development, many governments are looking at ways of harnessing the economic potential of the regions' rivers.

Meanwhile, more than 75 percent of the populations in Cambodia and Lao PDR live in rural areas and rely on water for fishing and farming. Even

Commission on Dams, a World Bank-funded project that established international criteria for dam development (criteria that have been largely ignored). Locally, Oxfam has served as a sounding board for partners figuring out how to broach the dam projects that arise in their communities.

But increasingly Oxfam has understood that the power struggle on East Asia's waterways cannot be navigated in isolation. Individually, local NGOs are no match for the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and country governments. What's more, dam projects simply are not isolated: a dam in China profoundly affects not only Chinese villages, but also villages in Burma, Thailand, and beyond.

To this end, Oxfam has been building a coalition of 15 partners in China, Burma, Thailand, and Lao PDR to work together on dam issues throughout the region. In addition to funding the individual partners, Oxfam facilitates exchanges among the groups, including an annual gathering of dam-affected people. We also have enabled specific strategic visits, including an idea-sharing visit from seasoned Thai partner Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN) to Green Watershed in 2003.

Such coalition connections, maintained by regular email and listservs, have helped Green Watershed open a dialogue around dams where previously there was none. In January 2004, under coalition guidance, Green Watershed organized a meeting in Beijing on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of dams. This meeting garnered the attendance of 150 governmental,

“They only think how to modernize by role of infrastructure. We need to help them understand there are many ways to develop.”

— Dr. Yu Xiao Gang, Executive Director, Green Watershed

Yunnan province since the organization's inception in 2002, the delay marks significant progress in an ongoing struggle against China's aggressive dam development. In a country where dams have been an extremely sensitive topic, the open discussions now emerging are a major breakthrough.

For other Oxfam partners struggling to be heard over the infrastructure development that resounds throughout the Mekong region, the decision is affirmation: proof positive that though the dam projects are huge and countless and daunting, there is an important role for opponents, however small, in stemming the tide of destruction.

Thailand, the most urbanized Mekong country, still has large fishing and farming communities.

To date, the struggle between those who see dams as primary to development and those who are destroyed by them has been largely one-sided. Too often, when a dam goes up miles and even countries away, downstream communities are all but swallowed up by the deluge of water from upriver.

RIGHTING THE IMBALANCE

For more than seven years, Oxfam has been an authoritative voice on behalf of poor people affected by rapid development in the Mekong region. In 1997, Oxfam participated in the World

PRESSURE POINTS

Nu River Dams, Yunnan, China

In January 2004, Green Watershed organized the first dams meeting in Beijing, paving the way for the Chinese government's recent decision to stall construction of 13 dams on the Nu River until environmental impacts can be fully assessed.

Nam Theun 2 Dam, Lao PDR

Oxfam partner International Rivers Network successfully lobbied the World Bank to stall construction of the largest planned dam in Lao PDR. The ensuing delay has allowed for more extensive research on the dam's potential effects and garnered significant media attention.

Chinese Navigation Project, Mekong River, Thailand

In 2002, the Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN) pressured the Thai government for a new assessment of the environmental impacts of a Chinese project to remove some reefs. SEARIN managed to stall the process, allowing Oxfam, partners, and communities to conduct further research and to demonstrate the project's damaging effects. (See following page for story.)

Pak Mun Dam, Thailand

SEARIN coordinated research efforts of 200 people in 65 villages to demonstrate the dam's impact on communities. Findings convinced the Thai government to open the dam gates in 2001. Today, dam gates are open and water flows freely from July to October each year.

Yali Falls Dam, Vietnam

Since 2002, Oxfam-founded Se San Protection Network has united 59 villages in northeast Cambodia to protest the Yali Falls Dam, the second largest dam in Vietnam. In 2003, the World Bank responded to community pressure by sending a delegation to listen to affected communities. So far, the situation remains unchanged.

non-governmental, and academic institutions and inspired several international journalists to visit Yunnan and to raise the issue in the media. The coalition also helped collect the signatures of 76 international organizations on a letter petitioning Chinese President Hu Jintao to suspend infrastructure project plans.

VOICES OF REASON, VOICES OF POWER

Given that the coalition is advocating for people who have everything to lose, it's striking that the collective voice that's emerged is a voice of reason. "It is not that the local villagers oppose the development of the country," says Niwat Roy Kaew of Oxfam partner Chiang Khong Conservation Group in Thailand. "But they want the government to listen to them, and they want the debate to be based on knowledge, logic, and reason."

In China, Dr. Yu Xiao Gang, Executive Director of Green Watershed, understands that the people of Yunnan are not "against this dam or that dam" but a mindset for economic development. "They only think how to modernize by role of infrastructure," says Dr. Yu. "We need to help them understand there are many ways to develop."

Creating this understanding is no easy feat, especially in China, where until now there has been little space for a community voice. But Premier Wen's decision underscores what Oxfam has long believed: that in the race to harvest electricity from East Asia's waters, the local perspective *is* important. And that an informed, reasonable community voice *is* a voice of power.

DAMS SLATED TO BE BUILT BY 2015

Burma	14
Cambodia	1
China	22
Indonesia	1
Japan	7
Korea	12
Lao PDR	3
Malaysia	2
Philippines	6
Thailand	7
Vietnam	14

Total 89

Source: Rivers Watch East and Southeast Asia, 2001

THE OTHER END OF THE BARGAIN

What exactly happens when construction begins upriver?

By Cynthia M. Phoel

Pak Ing village lies at the rich intersection of the Ing and Mekong Rivers in northern Thailand. “This was once the best place to fish in the area,” says village headmaster, Boonkong Boonwart. “This was a famous spot among fisherfolk.”

But in just two years, the tide has shifted dramatically for Pak Ing. Fish stocks are down by 60 percent, river-bank gardens have disappeared, and a one-kilometer stretch of the bank has been pushed back by 50 meters. Erratic water fluctuation has made the wet and dry seasons indistinguishable and the river dangerous for villagers to use.

This time, it’s not a dam, but a Chinese navigation project, located upriver and designed to deepen and widen a 331-kilometer stretch of the Mekong. Phase One of this massive endeavor, scheduled to finish this year, includes the removal of 21 major

rapids and reefs to permit vessels of 100-150 tons to travel the river. Two subsequent phases are planned to remove an additional 50 rapids and shoals and to install a canal, ultimately accommodating vessels of up to 500 tons.

WAYS TO STAY AFLOAT

Faced with the probability of being washed away, communities are fighting to stay afloat. To this end, one Oxfam partner, the Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN), has devised a powerful research scheme. “Thai Baan” research involves defining various areas of impact, such as flora and fauna and social/cultural impact. Village-based research assistants study the effects in their communities, placing special emphasis on getting village elders to share their knowledge.

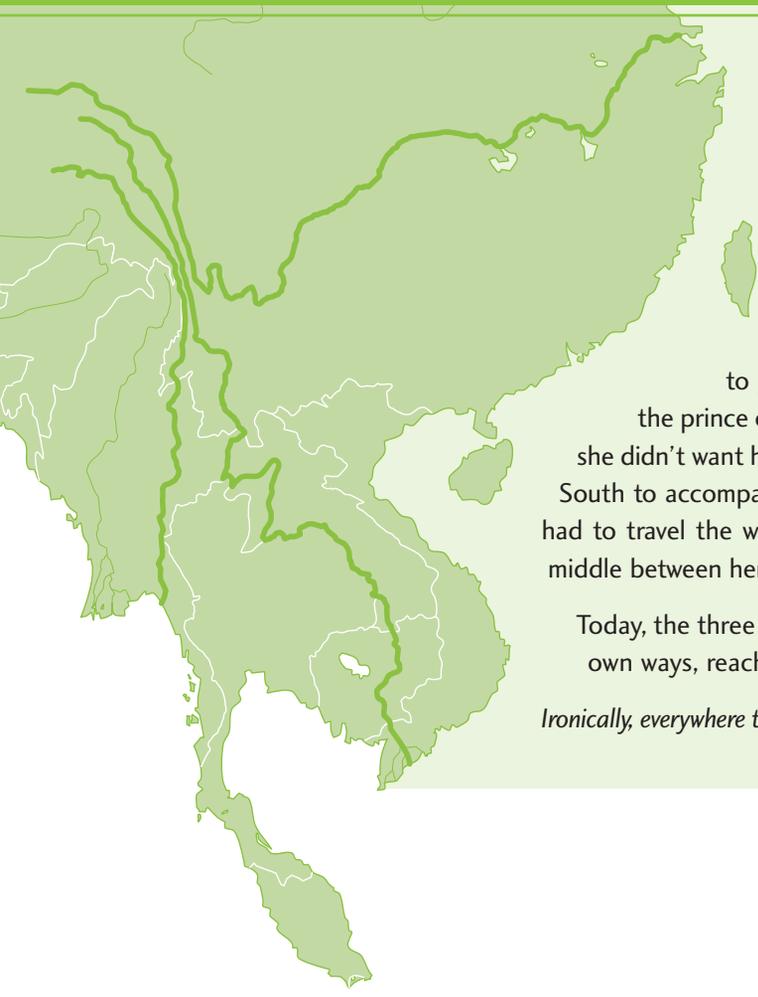
The results are convincing: SEARIN’s detailed, fact-based findings have already influenced the course of another

major development project in northern Thailand. Currently, SEARIN has managed to stall the navigation project, insisting that the Thai government more thoroughly assess the impact of the blasting. Meanwhile, this tenacious organization is orchestrating the efforts of 53 people in 5 villages to research the effects on their communities.

While the research is being conducted, people must find ways to get by. To help, two other Oxfam partners, the Chiang Khong Conservation Group and the Project for River and Community, are working with Pak Ing and 17 other villages to establish conservation zones to revitalize depleted fish stocks.

In just the first phase of what promises to be a long and destructive project, the situation is bleak in Pak Ing. Extensive damage has already been done. Nevertheless, villagers reserve hope that their research might turn the tide back in their favor.





The Three Rivers' Tale

From Yunnan Province, China

The three rivers, Nu (Salween), Lancang (Mekong), and Jingsha (Yangtze), are sisters. They grew up on the Tibetan Plateau. Their mother told them to go to the sea to the East. The eldest sister, Jingsha, was very obedient and went to the East as directed. But the youngest sister, Nu, wanted to go South through Burma, because she had fallen in love with the prince of Burma. Lancang was very worried about the younger sister—she didn't want her to go to the South alone. Lancang asked Jingsha to go to the South to accompany Nu, their stubborn sister. But Jingsha refused. She said she had to travel the way their mother instructed. So Lancang decided to go in the middle between her two sisters.

Today, the three rivers run in parallel in Yunnan province. But then they go their own ways, reaching seas very far from each other and in different directions.

Ironically, everywhere they've turned, the three sisters have met the same fate: being dammed.

Facing, left: With the Chinese expanding the Mekong to accommodate larger vessels, small fisher folk are feeling the squeeze.

Facing, right: Pak Ing village headmaster Boonkong Boonwart. As Pak Ing gets washed away, a fretful Boonwart wonders how he will keep his community together.

Below: Villager Narongrit Bootdee beside his house. Bootdee expects to lose his home due to erosion from to rapid Mekong currents any day now. With all the land in the village taken, Bootdee will have to look for a new village to call home.





COCO LASO/OXFAM AMERICA

WHEN THERE IS NO CLEAN WATER

Twenty years of Texaco oil activity have left 30,000 people in Ecuador's northeast Amazon region with no clean water. Today, well-organized communities are holding the company responsible in court.

by Chris Hufstader

The town of San Carlos is a lush, green place of abundant rainfall and many rivers—all contaminated by oil. Ten-year cancer survivor and mother of six, Maria Garafalo, blames the water she drinks from a nearby stream for her illness. “I got sick, so I went and talked to the doctor,” Garafalo explained. “He did a water analysis and said, ‘Please don’t drink this water.’”

Garafalo is just one of some 30,000 people affected by decades of oil exploitation in northeast Ecuador who are suing ChevronTexaco. Leading the fight is Oxfam partner the Amazon Defense Front (FDA), which charges the company with leaving behind 600 waste pits of crude oil and polluted water. The FDA first filed the suit against Texaco in 1993; more than a decade later, it is still on the case.

Texaco’s responsibility is not the issue here. The company does not deny it spilled 16.8 million gallons of oil over 20 years. This is six million gallons more than the amount spilled by the Exxon Valdez tanker in Alaska in 1989. But ChevronTexaco claims it complied with the few environmental rules on Ecuador’s books at the time and cleaned up its fair share of the damage—about 35 percent of the waste sites. The company maintains it is up to Ecuador to clean up the rest.

In many other impoverished places, this would have been the end of the discussion. But with the help of Oxfam and the FDA, San Carlos and 99 other towns are not backing down. The FDA suit alleges that during its operations, ChevronTexaco used obsolete and harmful technologies and waste disposal

methods, dumping highly toxic crude oil and waste waters directly into streams and waterways. What’s more, a 2001 environmental study shows many of the sites ChevronTexaco claims it cleaned up continue to leak oil.

At the end of the day, more than 20 years after the oil was spilled, many of the affected communities still have no clean water. The effects of the prolonged contamination are profound: a 1999 University of London medical study reported that the people of San Carlos experience up to 30 times the normal incidence of certain types of cancer. For them, this is not merely a legal dispute, but a struggle for their lives and their future.

Children play on an oil pipeline in front of their home near Coca, Ecuador. While the pipeline contributes to the country’s \$1.8 billion in oil exports each year, the families that live nearby and suffer waters polluted by oil receive none of these riches. Nine-year-old Lupe (far right) says her family can’t afford to pay the fees to send her to school.

Texaco spilled 16.8 million gallons of oil in Ecuador over 20 years. This is six million gallons more than the amount spilled by the Exxon Valdez oil tanker in Alaska in 1989.

THE OIL CURSE

Despite being the source of nearly a billion dollars a year in oil revenues, the Amazon region is the poorest in Ecuador. The communities are isolated. Many people are illiterate and unaware of their rights.

The search for clean water further taxes the region's farmers and native communities. People have turned from polluted streams to wells, but these, too, are at risk of contamination from hundreds of unlined waste pits. Even rain water can be contaminated by ashes from gas flares near oil pumping stations. The pollution threatens the very existence of native communities, including the dwindling populations of Secoya, Siona, Cofan, Quechua, and Huaorani, over 7,000 of whom are part of the suit.

Economists call it "the resource curse." In the short-term, a mine or oil well might bring low-paying jobs, paved roads, and better schools into a community. In the long-term, it's likely to make a developing country corrupt, polluted, and poor.

This curse is hardly isolated to Ecuador. Oxfam is supporting 33 partners working with people affected by oil, gas, and mining in the US, West Africa, Central America, and South America. While these industries may be a major source of export revenue for governments, little benefit goes to local communities, particularly the indigenous people who are routinely denied their right to be consulted about mines and energy projects on their lands.

THE CASE AGAINST CHEVRONTEXACO

Since 1998, Oxfam America has assisted the FDA in organizing northeast

Amazon communities, educating people about their rights, and sharing information about the ChevronTexaco lawsuit. First filed in New York, the case worked its way through US courts for 10 years before it was sent to Ecuador in 2003 to be heard in the Superior Court of Nueva Loja. The judge plans to make a decision in the next year.

What's remarkable in this case is that the communities have not given up. The plaintiffs represent 100 towns spread out over two provinces that cover 27,000 square miles and constitute a diverse group of Spanish-speaking settlers and indigenous peoples.

To maintain the unity needed during the long legal process, in 2000 Oxfam funded an FDA-organized Assembly of Delegates to represent all 100 towns involved in the suit. FDA founding president, Luis Yanza, worked with the plaintiffs to create a democratic body

that runs by consensus—an innovative way to keep the legal strategy in line with community priorities. Any decision, such as whether to accept any out-of-court settlement Texaco may offer, will be considered by the entire Assembly.

THE RIGHT TO WATER

Ermelinda Montenegro, another woman from San Carlos, said that before the FDA began visiting communities, they didn't fully comprehend the danger they faced. "Many people were dying here, but we didn't know this was unusual," she explained. "Now we understand that the companies need to respect our rights, and we know we have to fight for a real clean up. We want pure water and a hospital that will help all of us."

At this point, it's impossible to anticipate what the judge's decision will be. But regardless of the outcome, the communities' new understanding of their rights and determination to defend themselves is a victory in itself.

 [Read more about how Oxfam is supporting communities affected by oil pollution in Ecuador at www.oxfamamerica.org/exchange_fall04.](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/exchange_fall04)



Maria Garafalo, 36, recovering from cancer, was advised by her physician not to drink the water from the stream near her home. "My health has improved," Garafalo says, "but many others are still suffering."

COCO LASO, OXFAM AMERICA

THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT

Faced with the worst drought in Cuban history, farmers in the mountain village of El Descanso are tapping into new water resources using one source of energy that's in ready supply.

By Cynthia M. Phoel

El Descanso means “The Resting Place,” a hopeful name for a quiet community nestled in Cuba’s rugged Sierra Mountains. But for the past 15 years, there’s been little rest for El Descanso’s 65 families, who are among the nearly four million people afflicted by a prolonged drought that, today, covers nearly half of Cuba.

In the last five months, no province in Cuba has received even 60 percent of its average rainfall. But the eastern provinces have been particularly devastated. In the current “rainy season,” an estimated 90 cows are dying each day.

And yet, in 2004, El Descanso hasn’t lost even one of its 1,400 cows. With the help of Oxfam partner, the Cuban Association of Animal Husbandry (ACPA), El Descanso has tapped into a new water supply that’s not only keeping people and animals alive, but also irrigating fields. Fueled by gravity, this smart water system leverages one natural force that, in a remote mountain village, is in endless supply.

GOING WITH THE FLOW

The concept is straightforward. Gravity irrigation distributes water not by pumps, but by a simple downward flow. In El Descanso, engineers established a pipeline from a natural spring at the top of the mountain which drains water into a holding tank in the town. From there, the water is distributed for use by people, animals, and farms.

Critical to the system’s success is controlling the speed of water distribution. In designing the system, engineers made sure they didn’t deplete the water source. Thus, the residents of El Descanso know that if they conserve their usage, they will have a continuous water source.

KEEPING THE WATER FLOWING

The emphasis on sustainability is key. Cuba, which once relied heavily on expensive inputs from the Soviet Union, was badly burned when the Soviet Union collapsed and annual fuel imports plummeted from 13 million tons to three million tons overnight.

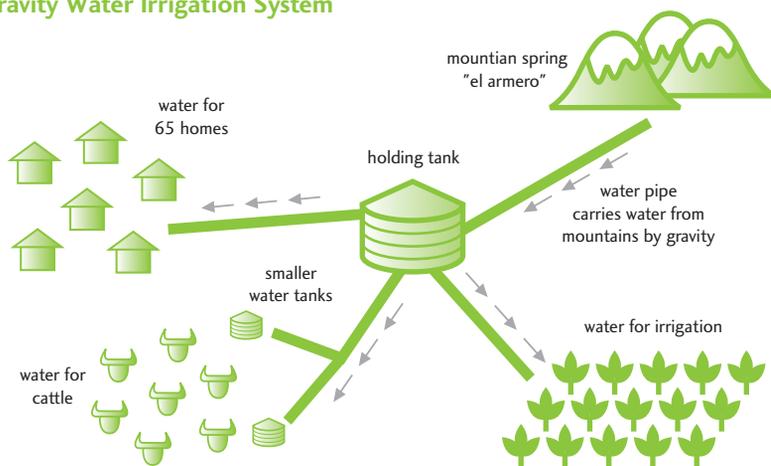
Agricultural production halted, and food systems were thrown into crisis.

Cuba has spent the past decade reforming its agricultural systems, shifting to smaller, more efficient farms. In support of this new direction, Oxfam has funded ACPA’s work to introduce new, sustainable technologies to small farmers since 1998. Oxfam also supports two other partners promoting sustainable techniques, such as greenhouses and worm beds. The success of these methods has meant that, even as Cuba’s fuel imports rebound, farmers are choosing not to return to their old methods.

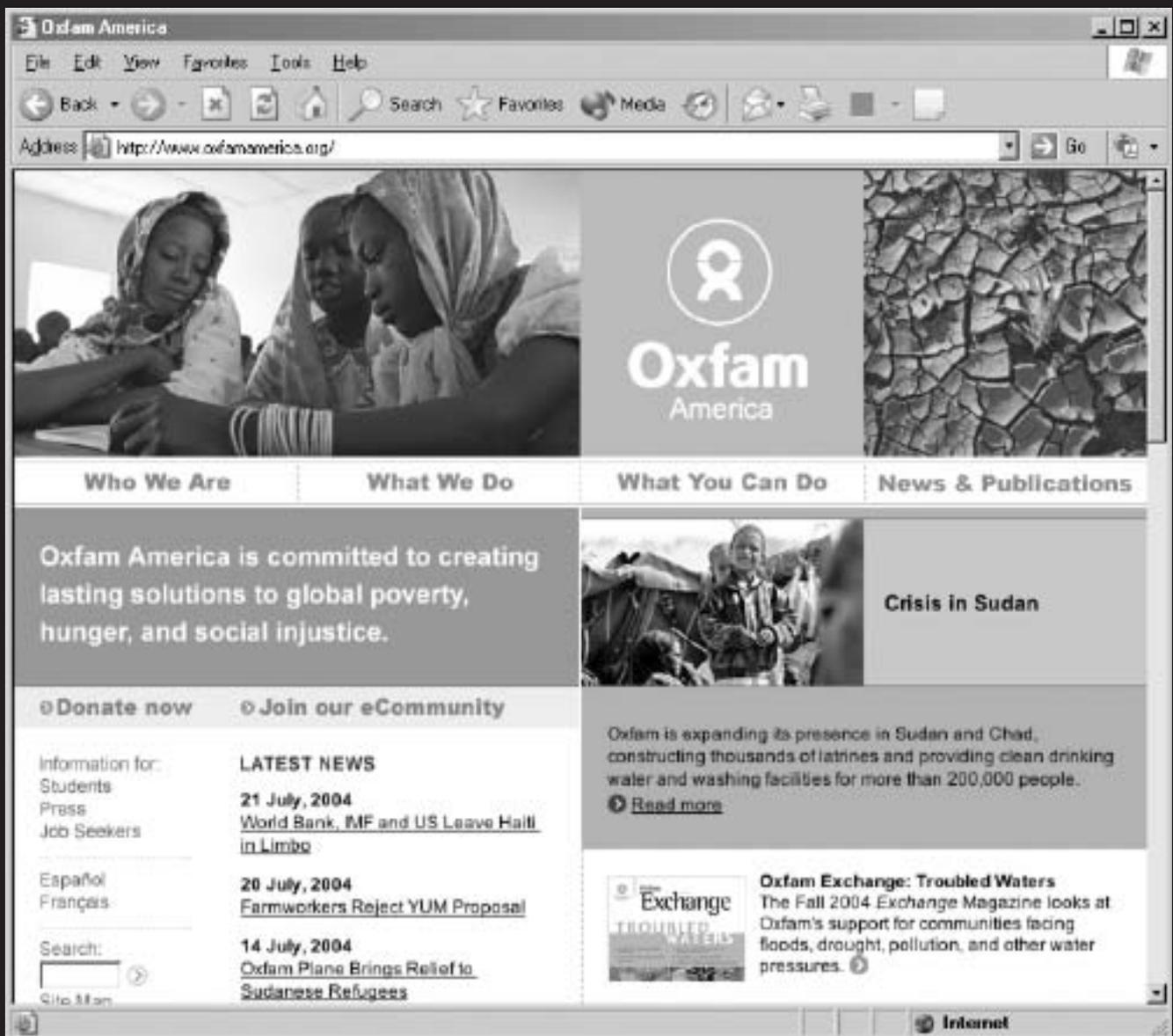
With the gravity irrigation system in El Descanso, ACPA has introduced a vital new technology to small farms in the eastern provinces. Currently, Oxfam is supporting two such projects. As we expand our work in the eastern provinces, water will be a central issue.

Even with the water flowing in El Descanso, people can’t rest yet. While the irrigation system is keeping animals alive, the community is waiting to see if their crops will succeed. Still, a steady trickle of water brings reassurance to villagers, whose arid, rugged mountains have provided a creative solution to their needs.

Gravity Water Irrigation System



ACPA Program Coordinator Rene Rico surveys the construction of the holding tank for the new gravity irrigation system in El Descanso, Cuba. This innovative system takes full advantage of eastern Cuba’s mountainous terrain to supply water to a village suffering prolonged drought.



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