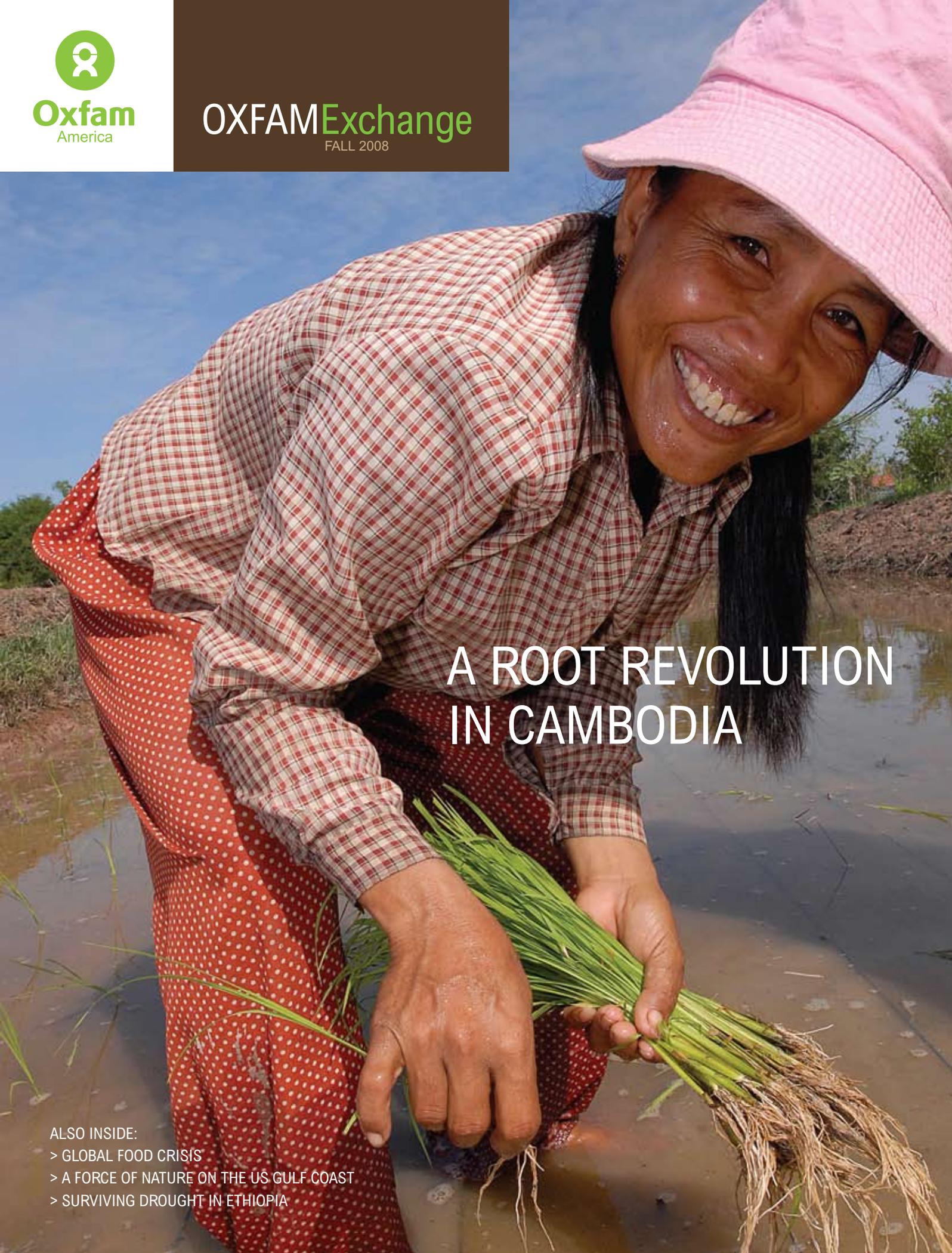




OXFAMExchange
FALL 2008

A woman wearing a pink bucket hat and a red and white checkered shirt is smiling broadly. She is holding a large bundle of green rice seedlings with roots. She is standing in a muddy field, likely a rice paddy. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees.

A ROOT REVOLUTION IN CAMBODIA

ALSO INSIDE:

- > GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS
- > A FORCE OF NATURE ON THE US GULF COAST
- > SURVIVING DROUGHT IN ETHIOPIA



Oxfam
America

Advocacy Fund

On the third anniversary of Katrina, 10-year-old Lyrit and her family were still living in a FEMA trailer. Despite government promises, after three long years many people on the US Gulf Coast still lack homes and jobs.

By supporting the Oxfam America Advocacy Fund, you enable us to work with lawmakers to ensure an equitable and complete Gulf Coast recovery. People in the region have been creative and hard-working in their efforts to restore their lives and communities. They deserve no less. To find out more about our advocacy efforts, go to www.oaaf.org.

Working together to end poverty and injustice.



STEVE THACKSTON / OXFAM AMERICA



Oxfam
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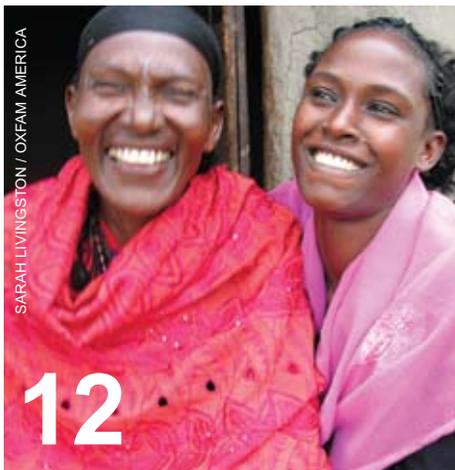
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COVER: So Sophal and her sisters have taken over much of the farming responsibility from their father, Mey Som, the first Cambodian to try the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). Yang Saing Koma, better known as "Dr. Koma," brought SRI to Cambodia and calls this revolutionary technique the "Root Revolution." *Isabelle Lesser / Oxfam America*

ABOVE (clockwise from left): Big, strong roots. That's the goal of SRI, which trains farmers in Cambodia to grow more and hardier rice using fewer seeds and less water. | Sharon Hanshaw leads Coastal Women for Change (CWC), a Biloxi, MS, grassroots organization formed with the support of Oxfam America. Her group helps locals speak out in the post-Hurricane Katrina recovery process. | Loko Dadacha (left) shares a laugh with Terefua Bagajo, a data collector for the drought early warning surveillance system in Ethiopia funded by Oxfam America.

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to editor@oxfamamerica.org or Editor, OXFAMExchange, 226 Causeway Street, 5th Floor, Boston MA 02114-2206.

Dear Friends,

Greetings! By the time this reaches you, the presidential election will be a week—maybe two—away.

Whatever the outcome in November, this race is one for the history books. As an organization striving for greater impact, Oxfam must engage the next president and members of his administration. Working to influence the agenda of this president and key decision makers is critical to successful advocacy efforts. So this year, for the first time in Oxfam's history, we had a presence at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

By visiting the candidates' Web sites, you can get information about their positions on basic issues. But since 40 percent of the people on our planet live in poverty and Oxfam is working to change that, it's our job to highlight issues that are often overlooked in US politics. In this issue of OXFAMExchange, we've included some information at the end of each article to help you think about how the lives of people around the world are affected by our political choices here. Oxfam is nonpartisan: we ask all the candidates to take concrete steps toward finding lasting solutions to poverty and social injustice.

I want to add one last important note. The incoming administration will assume responsibility for a country in crisis—fighting two wars and an economic recession. These are undeniably difficult times. It is all too easy to feel that real change is nothing more than a pipe dream. When cynicism or doubt gets the better of us, we must all remember: Oxfam has always and will always invest most heavily in people's efforts to transform their own communities. The people featured in this issue leave no doubt that determination and innovation can create change—with or without strong federal leadership. And these successes are what keep us all going—these and your shared commitment to the possibility of a world without poverty and injustice.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

Gates Foundation support

When the international microfinance institution FINCA did an evaluation of Oxfam America's Saving for Change program in Mali last year, the results were striking. Of the 239 members of Saving for Change groups interviewed, 95 percent were living on less than \$1 a day and 75 percent lived in rural areas. Saving for Change, which was launched in 2005 in Mali and Cambodia, was explicitly designed to reach the poorest of the poor in small villages who can't get capital from other sources. FINCA's study proved that Saving for Change was hitting the mark. Best of all, 100 percent of participants reported that they were satisfied with the program.

Results like this are part of why the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded Oxfam America an \$11.76 million grant for Saving for Change in June. These funds will help Saving for Change reach a half million members over the next three years, adding roughly 10,000 new members each month.

The grant will also fund assessments to determine if the program should expand in Latin America beyond a current pilot stage in El Salvador. "Our goal is to expand Saving for Change to reach 1 million women in 10 countries," says Jeffrey Ashe, director of the program. "This grant will also help us to assess our effectiveness in helping women save and manage their financial resources."

This past summer the Gates Foundation also contributed \$2 million for Oxfam's response to the severe drought and food crisis in Ethiopia. The grant will help Oxfam address the short-term needs of 250,000 Ethiopians in crisis and will also support longer-term projects to help communities reduce their vulnerability to future droughts and food shortages.

These are the third and fourth grants the Gates Foundation has awarded to Oxfam America since its first in 1999. In total, the foundation has supported Oxfam America with \$21.8 million. We are deeply grateful for the foundation's generosity.

See "Food on the table and savings on hand" on pages 4–8 for a story about pairing Saving for Change with another innovative program in Cambodia.



Election 2008 With November 4th rapidly approaching, Oxfam has been working to ensure that our priorities are national ones. Several of Oxfam's partners had interviews with print, TV, and radio reporters around the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. On August 26, a roundtable of experts, moderated by Ted Koppel and including Louisiana Senator Mary L. Landrieu, author Douglas Brinkley, and Oxfam America

President Raymond Offenheiser, met in the Denver Public Library to discuss the state of Gulf Coast recovery and Oxfam's report, "Mirror on America: How the state of Gulf Coast recovery reflects on us all." Public figures from Sean Penn to Ethel Kennedy attended. Stories were picked up by the Associated Press, US News & World Report, Congressional Quarterly, Le Monde, The Washington Post, The Biloxi Sun Herald, and The Times Picayune.

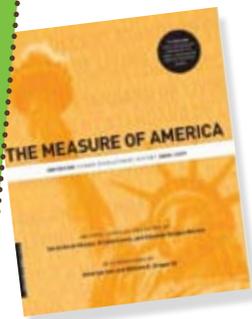
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Even as the new storm Gustav barrels toward the Gulf of Mexico, Oxfam America issues a report that is sharply critical of what the group calls the 'uneven and often incompetent recovery effort' in the three years since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast. Oxfam ... calls upon the next president to make this a 'national priority.' ”

—USNews.com on "Mirror on America," August 29, 2008

media hits

We need solutions—not fixes As the global food crisis continues, the US media have looked to Oxfam for commentary. Offenheiser appeared on CNN International's "Inside Africa" on August 16, explaining that although the US sends food aid to Ethiopia and other affected African nations, we're doing little to create lasting solutions to these problems. Offenheiser recommended that the US buy locally grown food in order to lower costs and boost slumping markets, and combine new agricultural technologies with an investment in local capacity.



America is not measuring up In July, Columbia University Press released the nonprofit American Human Development Project's "The Measure of America." Supported by Oxfam, the landmark study takes the social and economic tools used to analyze developing countries and applies them to one of the world's richest nations. Stark findings—for example, the US ranks 42nd in the world for life expectancy despite spending more on health care per person than any other country—elicited media interest with stories in outlets ranging from The Washington Times to BBC News.

Sustainability Award In September, Oxfam America received the 2008 Mohawk Windpower Partnership Award for our commitment to using environmentally sound papers produced using clean wind power. Mohawk's award was launched nationally in 2006 and is presented to leading designers, design firms, and corporations that voluntarily choose to take sustainable initiatives. Oxfam began working with Mohawk and sourcing much of our paper for our publications with Mohawk about five years ago, when it became the first paper mill in the US to use renewable, nonpolluting wind energy for manufacturing.



A convergence of factors has sent world food prices through the roof—and for millions of people, poverty is pushing even the most basic staples out of reach.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE:
GET INVOLVED

Global food crisis



GEOFF SAYER / OXFAM

> Learn

After years of remaining relatively stable, global food prices have risen high and fast—leading to a recent rise in world hunger, especially among people in developing countries.

Many of the world's poorest people already spend 50 to 80 percent of their income on food. They can't afford a near doubling in the price of soybeans, as has happened in Indonesia. Nor can the poorest in Kabul, Afghanistan, absorb a more than 90 percent increase in the price of bread over six months.

With the sharply increased cost of staples like rice, corn, and wheat, many people face hard choices as they struggle to feed their families. Rising prices may force them to sell important assets, like their animals or land, so they can buy food today—even as that choice undermines their future ability to make a living. Even US consumers, many of whom are accustomed to relative abundance, are finding some goods out of reach.

What's causing the crisis? A number of factors—including global climate change, rising energy costs, and an increased demand for biofuels, such as ethanol made from corn. Government mismanagement of food and agriculture policies, coupled with global underinvestment in agriculture, only adds to the problem.

The facts point to the need for urgent global action:

- Social unrest caused by the crisis could destabilize as many as 33 nations. In April 2008, for example, Haiti's government fell after more than a week of food riots.
- The world's wheat stocks are at 30-year lows, and global rice stocks will hit a 25-year low this year, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

- Worldwide, 854 million people already suffer from hunger. Since late 2007, as many as 100 million others—no longer able to afford the food they need—have joined the ranks of the hungry.
- The World Bank expects food crop prices to remain high through 2009.

Oxfam is working to address the crisis at many different levels. In our humanitarian response, we already employ a broad range of tools adapted to local conditions, including food distributions, cash or voucher handouts, the buying of food locally to stimulate struggling markets, and other interventions aimed at reducing people's vulnerability to changing food prices.

> Take action

RAISE AWARENESS Join the thousands annually who participate in Oxfam America *Hunger Banquet* events in schools, communities, faith congregations, and businesses. For more information and to order free materials, visit www.oxfamamerica.org/fast.

DONATE Using money raised at your Oxfam America *Hunger Banquet* event or other funds, contribute to Oxfam's Global Food Crisis Fund. Click on the "Donate" link at www.oxfamamerica.org/global_food_crisis.

Writer: Anna Kramer



Food on the table and savings on hand

An innovative agriculture technique is dramatically improving the lives of more than 80,000 farmers in Cambodia. With less water and fewer seeds, they are producing 50–150 percent more rice and increasing their incomes. Oxfam's [Andrea Perera](#) reports.

Rort Kea rolls up his pants and steps down into the rice paddy. Walking backward through the mud, he takes the biggest seedlings from his nursery and plants them in a row. Trained in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), Kea knows that by dividing the clump of seedlings and planting them farther apart, he can give the healthiest plants their best chance to thrive. But accustomed to using speed to carry out the task, he moves too quickly and winds up planting the seedlings too close together.

Standing on the dirt road above the paddy, Luy Pisey Rith watches the farmer as he works. A program officer in Oxfam America's East Asia office, he is skilled at observing a situation and determining the appropriate response. Rather than lecture Kea on the drawbacks of how Cambodian farmers have planted for generations, Rith simply walks around the perimeter, gathering scraps of wood. Crouching near the ground, he lashes the wood together, creating a grid. Then he demonstrates how to use the grid to mark off parallel lines for planting.

Kea laughs as he watches him. But soon he's accepted the homemade tool, carrying it with him as he moves.

This is the reality of changing minds, not just practices, in Cambodia. Eight years after Oxfam's partner brought SRI to the region, some farmers are following many but not all of its 12 practices. They immediately accept the easier steps, which save them money on the front end—such as weeding,

selecting fewer but higher-quality seeds, and collecting household manure to use as compost instead of buying chemical fertilizer. But when it comes to providing proper spacing for the seedlings or managing the irrigation of the paddies, they sometimes trip up.

This is where the proper balance of patience and persistence comes in. "We try to bring them to the method slowly," Rith says. "If we asked them to follow it 100 percent from the beginning, not everyone would. They need time to change."

Time to change, and the proper motivation to do so. After just one harvest using some of SRI's methods, Cambodian farmers experience immediate benefits, producing more than they did the year before. It's the job of Oxfam and our partner, the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture, or CEDAC, to educate farmers about how much more they could make. To respond to this kind of need, CEDAC started the SRI Secretariat, a permanent working group of local organizations providing training in SRI; the Secretariat is now a totally independent body housed in Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries.

Farmers who follow all of SRI's 12 steps can produce 50–150 percent more rice compared with conventional farming. They grow enough to feed their families and sell the surplus at the local market. They save money buying fewer seeds and time

collecting less water. The plants are bigger, hardier, and better able to withstand some pests, droughts, and floods. At a time when the poorest 40 percent of Cambodian people struggle to deal with rising food prices, spending as much as 70 percent of their income on food, it's these promises of more stability and security that move them.

"The increased yields and decreased inputs convince the farmers," Rith says.

Mey Som's legacy

Created in the 1980s by a Jesuit priest in Madagascar, SRI is flourishing in places—like China and Bangladesh—where rice is the staple of every meal and farming is the main occupation. Having learned of its success, CEDAC brought the method to Cambodia in 2000, choosing a farmer named Mey Som as the first trainee.





On their family farm in Kandal province, Cambodia, So Sophal and her sisters transplant rice seedlings. The standing water poses a challenge for Cambodian farmers, who often lack the infrastructure to properly drain their fields.

I first met Som almost two years ago at his home in Tro Paing Raing village. We'd come during the dry season, when all the fields were yellow, the rice plants dry and stalky. Back then, Som told me that he had seen

factory in Phnom Penh, a two-hour drive from their village in Kandal province. Now, Som's farm is so productive that his daughters quit the factory to run the day-to-day operations. Their father no longer depends

He began traveling around the country ... talking to other farmers about his experiences, explaining how a technique that requires less water and fewer seeds could actually produce more rice. It's all about the roots getting the right amount of water, sunlight, and nutrients, he told the farmers.

big changes with SRI just halfway through the first season; he'd noticed that his seedlings were growing bigger and stronger. The same plants that had once grown up to his knees were now growing past his head. Som was so encouraged by the results that he began traveling around the country with CEDAC, talking to other farmers about his experiences, explaining how a technique that requires less water and fewer seeds could actually produce more rice. It's all about the roots getting the right amount of water, sunlight, and nutrients, he told the farmers, a refrain I've heard from so many other farmers since then.

When Som, 68, farmed using conventional methods, he barely grew enough to feed his family. He still depended on his daughters' incomes; they were working at a garment

on their incomes; instead, he's teaching them to carry out SRI. Earlier this morning, we watched as the sisters used strands of wire to mark off straight lines in their paddy, planting each seedling in a neat, shallow row. One of Som's daughters, So Sophal, who is 37, said that following SRI meant putting more thought into the process. But that translated into less energy in the fields. When she plants fewer seedlings, she can cover the same area in half as much time. "We used to carry the seedlings by ox cart. Now we carry them by hand," she says. And "before, I used to hire labor from the village. Now just my relatives help."

Other farmers from Som's village admit that they struggled to convert from their traditional farming methods to all of SRI's practices in the beginning. It wasn't that they weren't

Left: So Sophal and her sister use strands of wire to mark off straight lines, which guide them as they transplant seedlings from their nursery. SRI requires that rice seedlings be given enough room for their roots to grow. Right: Following instructions from an Oxfam program officer, Oum Saing creates a wooden grid to create the proper spacing for transplanting his seedlings in Kompong Speu province. While some farmers prefer using wire, others like the grid because they can carry it with them as they move.



ISABELLE LESSER / OXFAM AMERICA

ISABELLE LESSER / OXFAM AMERICA



ISABELLE LESSER / OXFAM AMERICA

With support from Oxfam, many rice farmers in Cambodia—such as the young woman pictured—are participating in programs that train them how to produce more rice and put the extra money they earn into a village savings group.

interested in following the rules, Rith explains. Some steps are just harder to follow in Cambodia. For example, more developed countries like Vietnam have better infrastructure in place for irrigation and drainage. So it's easier for farmers to manage the water levels in their paddies. But the Cambodian farmers I spoke to say that they typically depend on rain for irrigation, and because of that, they keep whatever standing water that accumulates in their fields during the rainy season. It was only through their SRI training that they've learned how it's better for their rice to have shallow water soaking the roots.

This is one reason proper SRI training is so crucial; it takes these sorts of problems into account. For example, CEDAC trained Som's family and other farmers like them to build fish ponds near their rice paddies. During the wet season, farmers can use pumps to remove the excess water from the fields and use it to fill their ponds. During dry spells, they can use the water in the ponds as a backup supply to irrigate the fields.

In addition to the ponds, CEDAC teaches SRI farmers to cultivate vegetable gardens and fruit trees. By diversifying their liveli-

hoods, farmers can eat and sell other crops when changing weather patterns or insects (like brown plant hoppers) damage their rice. But they can also use the new crops to support SRI itself. For example, Som uses the pumpkins, papayas, and mangos he grows to make natural compost.

The new activities mean more to keep track of on the farm. But that can be a good problem to have, Som says.

"I'm busier, but I have more food to eat. I can sleep better because I don't worry."

Rice and microfinance

Perhaps the greatest attraction of SRI, particularly in poor countries like Cambodia, is that with just a bit of training and virtually no technology, farmers can earn big returns. This approach makes it the perfect partner for another Oxfam initiative, this one a microfinance program called Saving for Change.

In August 2005, Oxfam began providing funding and technical assistance to CEDAC, the same organization that trains farmers in SRI, to form savings groups in 14 provinces throughout Cambodia. Together, the savings group members focus primarily on their

financial well-being, pooling their money (a few dollars from each farmer each month) to provide loans to their neighbors. The groups set their own interest rates, with the understanding that all the interest earned goes back into the community fund. They use their monthly meetings to review the bookkeeping for financial transactions in their group and to handle any outstanding payments or collections.

But when that work is done, many farmers use the meetings as an outlet to exchange information about their experiences with SRI or any other issues in the community that they want to discuss.

"We have a monthly meeting, and we talk about our experiences in agriculture and other things," says Kea, the 37-year-old farmer who, thanks to Rith, is now using the homemade wooden grid to plant in Kompong Speu province's Prey Kdai village.

In a country where 75 percent of families lack access to financial services, particularly the more than 10.5 million people who live on less than \$2 a day, pairing SRI with community savings groups helps individual farmers. But because the money stays in



▲
Roeun Youn, a rice farmer from Kandal province, says that, thanks to SRI, she now earns enough to put away 2,000 riel (50 cents) per month in her village savings group.

the villages instead of going to outside lenders, the communities prosper as well.

In fact, some farmers say they don't even ask for loans for their own use. They make enough money selling rice to provide for their families, pay off their farming expenses, and leave what they've contributed within the savings group. These farmers allow their neighbors, who might not be as fortunate, to take out what they need to support their small businesses or pay for farm equipment, seeds, school fees, and medicine for their family members.

Roeun Youn, 47, a rice farmer from Som's village in Kandal province, says that, thanks to SRI, she now produces 1,600, or 50 percent, more pounds of rice per acre. She earns enough to put away 2,000 riel (50 cents) per month in her community fund.

"But I haven't borrowed any yet. I want the other villagers to be able to use the money," she says.

Oxfam is working to grow both our SRI work and our savings group work. Our partner, CEDAC, and others hope to teach the innovative agriculture method to farmers in 12,000 villages in Cambodia over the next

five years. And thanks to a new, nearly \$12 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—the largest single-purpose grant ever received by Oxfam America—our microfinance program is slated to grow to over half a million members worldwide over the next three years, or over 180,000 new members in Cambodia alone.

Building stronger communities

Having worked together to improve their understanding of farming techniques, manage each other's finances, and respond to family emergencies, Cambodian farmers who participate in SRI and the savings groups now say they feel a greater sense of solidarity and closeness with their neighbors. This is no small feat in a country still recovering from the ravages of the Khmer Rouge.

As neighbors learn to trust neighbors, these farmers build loyalties and relationships within their communities.

Last year, Sophal took out a loan for 50,000 riel (about \$12) to buy fingerlings, or young fish, for her family's pond. Knowing that her neighbors depended on her to pay back the loan as soon as possible so that the savings group fund could keep gaining interest, Sophal says, "I paid back the loan within six months—including the 3 percent interest."

As one of the Cambodian farmers participating in both the SRI and the savings group, Sophal's work is totally integrated and the benefits, ever expanding. She uses the water from the pond to irrigate her rice. She uses the fruits and vegetables to create compost to nurture the rice. The fish, vegetables, fruit, and rice feed her family. And the extra profits from selling those crops go into the savings group.

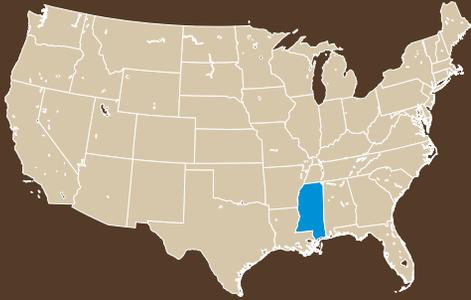
Her father, Som, summarizes it simply: "When I did conventional farming, we didn't have enough rice all year. We didn't have vegetables to eat. We didn't have enough water to bathe. Now we have a surplus."



Oxfam provides support to local organizations like CEDAC in Cambodia. Because our funding comes from individuals and foundations—not the US government—we can operate independently of a foreign aid system that is broken: only 5% of US aid goes to the poorest countries and 70% is spent buying US goods and services. We call on the presidential candidates to do the following:

- > Present plans that use foreign aid money to fight poverty.
- > Ensure that people in poor countries who need aid are central to the solution. Only policies that transfer power to the people that aid is meant to serve can create lasting change.

A force of nature



Three years after losing everything in Hurricane Katrina, one grassroots leader is harnessing the power of community. [Anna Kramer](#) reports from the US Gulf Coast.

“There it is; there’s my tree,” says Sharon Hanshaw, pointing to a spreading oak with a mossy, gnarled trunk. It clings to the edge of a gravel parking lot, stubborn roots sunk deep into the soil.

This tree once shaded Hanshaw’s driveway and mailbox—but now it marks the place where her house used to stand, before Hurricane Katrina struck Biloxi, MS.

As cars rumble past, Hanshaw maps out the landscape of memory. “That’s where we found my daughter’s bed, afterward,” she says, indicating a red SUV a few rows away. “This was my backyard. This was the front porch.”

Hanshaw was out of town on August 29, 2005, when Katrina’s winds drove the Gulf of Mexico into her neighborhood. Thirteen feet of water crashed through the streets that day, filling her house with mud, scattering her belongings, tearing the bumper off her car. The waters swept inland to downtown Biloxi, flooding the hairdressing business she’d run for 21 years. Months later, all the homes on Hanshaw’s block were bulldozed to build this parking lot for the Imperial Palace casino.

Hanshaw says the storm brought her not just destruction, however, but also transformation. As executive director of Oxfam



Sharon Hanshaw keeps a bullhorn in her home for election times, when she walks the streets of East Biloxi, MS, urging residents to vote. Hanshaw moved into a permanent home in early 2008, after nearly two years displaced by Hurricane Katrina.



“We need affordable housing—not projects, but homes that people can pay for on a living wage in Mississippi. But the message right now is, ‘if you’re not rich, get back.’”

America partner organization Coastal Women for Change (CWC), she has turned her losses into strength—by becoming an advocate and role model for others, her fellow survivors.

Speaking up for East Biloxi

“This is a left-behind community,” Hanshaw says emphatically of East Biloxi, the close-knit, predominantly African-American and Vietnamese neighborhood where she was born and raised.

You only have to walk the streets here to see what she means. Many houses in this once-vibrant neighborhood now stand abandoned, their boarded-up windows turning a blank face to the street. Some damaged homes, like Hanshaw’s, were razed after the storm, leaving behind only vacant lots. Others are flanked by boxy white trailers, where families live cramped together as

they await government grants, insurance settlements, or other resources they need to finish rebuilding.

Here and there, a restored house gleams with new paint, a “For Rent” sign propped up on the lawn. But rents have nearly doubled since the storm, and good jobs are hard to come by—so many displaced residents can’t afford to move back home.

“We need affordable housing—not projects, but homes that people can pay for on a living wage in Mississippi,” says Hanshaw. “But the message right now is, ‘if you’re not rich, get back.’”

She points out that Biloxi’s beachfront casinos and wealthier neighborhoods began rebuilding soon after the waters receded. But somehow those funds never reached this mostly low- and middle-income neighborhood.

Meanwhile, Hanshaw can recite a litany of things lost and not yet replaced: The public library. Funds for small businesses. Elder care programs. Playgrounds for low-income kids.

Her organization aims to give people the means to speak out about these and other



LILIANA RODRIGUEZ / OXFAM AMERICA

Hanshaw stands by “her tree” on the site of her former home, which suffered severe flood damage during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After the storm, all of the houses on her block were bulldozed to build a parking lot for the Imperial Palace (right), one of Biloxi’s many beachfront casinos.

pressing community needs. The group trains women, people of color, and low-income people to make their voices heard in the Gulf Coast recovery process. Soon after its founding in 2006, CWC convened a public forum to discuss rebuilding efforts with Biloxi’s mayor and city councilors. Several CWC members have since been appointed to the mayor’s planning commission.

CWC has also sent delegations to Jackson, MS, and Washington, DC, to urge legislators to provide more affordable housing for people left homeless by the hurricanes. Until they see results, Hanshaw says, they will continue to push for change at the local, state, and federal levels.

“This is our community,” she says. “We want it back the way it was—or better.”

Helping women exercise their power

Hanshaw’s personal transformation—“from cosmetologist to activist,” as she calls it—began three months after Katrina. She and two of her college-aged daughters were shuttling between relatives’ houses and a FEMA trailer, which gave off formaldehyde

fumes that made it hard to breathe. Though more people fled Biloxi every day, she says she couldn’t abandon her lifelong home.

Then a friend asked her to join local women who were meeting together wherever they could: a funeral home, the local NAACP headquarters, a church. The women talked about rebuilding, both their community and their lives. “Those meetings were part of our recovery, emotionally,” says Hanshaw.

Among the women was Oxfam’s community development specialist Safiya Daniels, who encouraged them to voice their concerns about the pace of recovery in East Biloxi. Equipped with training and startup funds from Oxfam’s Gulf Coast recovery program, the women formed CWC in early 2006.

Hanshaw originally volunteered to serve as the group’s secretary, but her boundless energy, as well as her talent for organizing others, made her a natural leader. Plus, she says with a smile, many women knew and trusted her from her days running the beauty salon. Soon she was appointed CWC’s executive director.

These days, about 20 core CWC members still come together at regular evening meetings. They still borrow space—a beige cinderblock room in the Church of the Redeemer, a few blocks from the waterfront—but their discussions now center on community outreach and upcoming advocacy opportunities. Members of Oxfam’s Gulf Coast staff often join in to provide advice.

Hanshaw, who leads the meetings, believes that all women in the community should be able to attend. With prices rising at the pump, and few options for public transit, she’ll even buy members gas cards so they can afford to drive over.

“I’m going to train you if it kills me,” she says, explaining her passion to empower those around her. “You’re all going to be powerful women.”

Creating homegrown solutions

Advocacy remains at the heart of CWC’s activities. But as the group evolved, members realized that in addition to advocating solutions, they had to create their own.

“We find ourselves still doing direct service,” Hanshaw says. “That’s not our mission, but we see there’s no housing going up here that’s affordable, no library, no activity center, or anything for the children. ... So I have to do what’s in my face right now.”

Among other activities, CWC founded its own in-home child care program to address the shortage of affordable day care in Biloxi. It sponsors senior appreciation dinners for East Biloxi’s elderly residents. And it’s taking steps to help seniors and families prepare for the next, inevitable storm.

Meanwhile, Hanshaw’s efforts are gaining increased public recognition. Women’s eNews recently honored her as one of 21 leaders for the 21st century. She speaks out about the fight against climate change in Oxfam’s “Sisters on the Planet,” a series of films profiling inspirational women around the world. She served as official timekeeper at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

But if you ask Hanshaw what she’s most proud of about her work, she’ll say that it’s “women stepping up,” whether in Biloxi city council meetings or on the national stage.

“Throughout this whole process,” she notes, “we’ve created more leaders.”

With additional reporting by Steve Greene.



As a nation, we have fallen short. By acting now, we can help the Gulf Coast recover and tackle the root causes of poverty that existed in this region long before the storms of 2005. We call on the presidential candidates to do the following:

- > Prioritize a just, equitable, and complete recovery for the Gulf Coast.
- > Devise plans to create affordable housing and access to quality jobs in the region.
- > Require transparency and accountability for the use of federal funds in rebuilding.



“How will I survive this drought?” The women know

Coco McCabe reports from Ethiopia on a life-saving enterprise—launched with help from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative—that couples hard science with rich local knowledge.



Loko Dadacha's ax is one of her most important possessions, and she swings it with ease. The wood she gathers and splits helps support her family. Four days a week, she heads out to hunt for pieces that she can either use for her cooking fire or sell. Some are the length of poles and intended for construction. She sells those for one birr each, or about 10 cents. The shorter pieces are for firewood. A bundle of four, split, goes for one birr also.

When daylight fades in her village in southern Ethiopia, Loko Dadacha, a widow, has no light in her hut to push back the night. So, before sleep comes, her family gathers in the darkness to talk and tell stories. One of her favorites is about a mother goat—a cautionary tale regarding the importance of self-restraint and the careful shepherding of resources in times of difficulty.

This is one of those times—and understanding its grip on families is the key to a new early warning system Oxfam America is now piloting.

Drought has crept across the country, leaving people hungry and deeper in poverty as they sell precious assets—like goats and cows—to buy the food they can't grow without rain. In June, the Ethiopian government announced that 4.6 million of its citizens needed emergency assistance and 75,000 children were suffering from acute malnutrition.

But using its new surveillance tool, Oxfam America has found a way to identify problems—and begin working on them—even before the government asks for help. Called DEWS, or drought early warning surveillance, the system allows Oxfam and the local organizations with which it works to track closely the ups and downs of villagers' lives and chart when shifts in well-being could indicate the beginning of longer-term troubles. By knowing in advance what the triggers are, Oxfam can work with communities to prevent hardship.

“This is something totally new. And it's not just new to Oxfam; it's new to the field,” says Miriam Aschkenasy, Oxfam America's public health specialist. “DEWS allows us to pick up more sensitive data—such as the number of meals people eat each day and the prevalence of sicknesses like diarrhea—and then allows a more specific response.”

A goat's fate and DEWS

In Dadacha's story, a family milks their goat in the morning and then sends her out to graze in a pasture. But there, the family's hungry children milk her again, drinking what should be saved for later. At home that night, the goat has hardly any milk left for her own hungry kids. Shocking the family, she speaks—in Oromifa, their tongue. “How will I survive this drought?” she asks, chastising them for taking her milk in the field and still expecting her to feed the baby goats on her return home.

“I am going to die in the middle of this,” warns the mother goat.

Dadacha pauses in her tale. She is a mother, too—of six children. Three of them still live at home and depend on her—her energy, her resourcefulness, her care—to provide all that they need. In times of drought, those needs can be hard to meet, requiring extra vigilance with precious resources like milk. Drought can kill the animals on which families of herders depend for both food and income. It wipes out the supplementary crops families plant. It steals their strength, leaving them with just one meal a day—and sometimes less.

All of that has happened to Dadacha's family. Finding ways to prevent that suffering is the ultimate goal of DEWS.

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, an academic and research center based at Harvard University and focused on the science and practice of humanitarian response, developed the system. Oxfam America and its local partner, the Gayo Pastoral Development Initiative, launched the project and have now completed its first year—a year dedicated to developing a baseline of data from which to initiate future responses.

Based in four rural areas outside of Moyale, a border town in southern Ethiopia, the program has been tracking 20 families—including Dadacha's. Once a month, four data collectors—all women—fan out to five households in each area, meeting one on one with the women who head them.

Women know, in detail, about the well-being of their families and the condition of their neighbors and community, too. And it's those details—the intimate ones about how many meals a family eats each day, if members of different families are suffering from diarrhea, how many children appear thin or malnourished—the data collectors need. Coupled with other facts about water availability, milk production, and harvests, the information paints a highly sensitive picture of the area's health and provides understanding about when it might need assistance.

Spending 20 to 30 minutes at each house, the data collectors plot the answers to 24 questions on a visual analog scale—a tool that gauges attitudes and perceptions that cannot be easily measured, and is particularly useful in gathering information from people who may not be able to read. Once the scale has been converted into a graph, trends become visible.

"Using scientific methodology to convert feelings into comparable data—that's what makes this cutting edge," says Aschkenasy.

What also sets DEWS apart is the degree to which the surveillance system involves the community—particularly women. Instead of having outside entities dictate solutions, this new tool gives women a central role in the data gathering, and then turns back to the community for ideas on what action to take to address the problems the data identify.

"We want to get away from the model where we swoop in and hand out aid," says Aschkenasy. "This creates space for communities to solve their own problems and participate in their development."

Education holds hope for future

In a pot propped on a small fire in Dadacha's hut, porridge is boiling: wheat, water, and a dash of salt. The slim meal—relief food provided by the government—is the only one her family will have that day, like many other days since their crops failed. And it will have to provide enough energy for Dadacha's children to stay alert in school and for her



to carry out the many physical tasks required for her family to survive.

Those chores include hauling water home from a nearby pond; hunting for wood and splitting it to sell; and tending to her fields of corn and a grain known as teff, both now growing unevenly from recent bursts of rain.

"The children adapt to this kind of life," says Dadacha, who has lived in Gutu Dobi, her village of 53 households, for many years. "Once they adapt, they don't complain."

But that doesn't mean Dadacha doesn't have dreams of better things for them. Education lies at the heart of all her hopes.

"I want to keep them in school," says Dadacha, who never had the chance to go herself.

But one of the unseen costs of drought—and one of the most destructive over time—is its effect on children's education. A sure sign of a drought's severity is the number

of students who drop out of high school when their parents can no longer afford the room, board, and materials fees that studying in Moyale—which has the nearest high school—requires.

When Oxfam staffers asked a gathering of women participating in DEWS what issues they would like to see addressed, school affordability was one of the top among them.

Paying school fees is not part of Oxfam's program. But for Emily Farr, Oxfam's humanitarian livelihoods specialist, the discussion planted the seed of a solution: If people had more reliable ways of earning money, they could afford their children's education. And supporting local livelihoods is something Oxfam can do—and may continue to expand as a result of the DEWS information.

"If our children get educated, we will have a better standard of living," says Dadacha. And with the resilience that would foster, droughts would no longer bring dread.



Increasingly, Ethiopia is experiencing erratic weather associated with climate change. And poor people—who have done the least to cause climate change—are being hit hardest. As the world's richest country, the US has the resources and responsibility to respond to this crisis. We call on the presidential candidates to do the following:

- > Help vulnerable communities deal with climate change.
- > Support low-income energy consumers in the US.
- > Promote clean energy and energy-efficient technologies internationally.
- > Present plans to reduce emissions to avoid a global temperature rise of 3.6°F—the point at which the world would experience huge shocks.



Make Oxfam a part of your tradition

This year, we invite you to make Oxfam part of your holiday tradition with one easy step: Skip a Meal for Oxfam. Often the simplest practices are the ones that touch us most.

The task is simple. On the Thursday before Thanksgiving—November 20th—or on another day of your choice, skip a meal to remember the more than 854 million people who are hungry. Then contribute the money saved to Oxfam America.

For more information on Skip a Meal or other personal ways to make a difference, visit Oxfam's *Fast for a World Harvest* at www.oxfamamerica.org/fast or contact Oxfam's *Fast* team at (800) 597-FAST or fast@oxfamamerica.org.



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