

OXFAM CLOSEUP

FALL 2015

WOMEN: A WISE INVESTMENT

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- > THE HUMAN COST
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DEAR FRIENDS,

With headlines this fall carrying a near-constant stream of horrific news about conflict and hardship in our world, people sometimes ask me if working at Oxfam can be emotionally exhausting.

It's true that some problems, like the brutal fighting in Syria and the massive refugee crisis it has triggered, are profoundly challenging. Who can't feel for the families who have had to abandon everything, including homes and careers, while risking an often deadly journey just for a chance to live in safety? Talk about courage and indomitable spirit.

But that's what is so amazing about the people Oxfam works with—across all borders, in all situations: their drive to make a better life for themselves and their families. In this issue of *Closeup*, you'll get to meet some of them. Many are women.

Step by step, people like Sangita Thami, a Nepal earthquake survivor, are learning new skills they can use to improve their lives. In Guatemala, Ana Dominga Cuc Baquin, whose formal schooling ended in third grade, embraced the financial literacy classes we offered and is now working hard to grow her business with the help of an Oxfam-backed bank loan. And here, in the US, poultry workers are standing up and speaking out about the daily injustices they endure processing some of the 8.5 billion chickens we consume each year.

Hope, determination, fortitude: When I come to work each day, these are the stories I hear about, the quieter truths behind the headlines that never fail to inspire us—and you along with us—here at Oxfam.

Sincerely,



Raymond C. Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

OXFAM CLOSEUP

OXFAM AMERICA'S MEMBER MAGAZINE

FALL 2015 VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3

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COVER: Gloria Martina Chávez Mus is the recipient of a WISE loan, which she is using to help grow her shoe-making business. *Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America*

We welcome your feedback. Please direct letters to editor@oxfamamerica.org.



OUR 2015 ANNUAL REPORT IS ONLINE

Oxfam's mission depends on your generosity. For a review of the progress you helped us to make last year in the fight against poverty and injustice, please find our 2015 annual report at oxfamamerica.org/annual2015.

MEDIA MASHUP

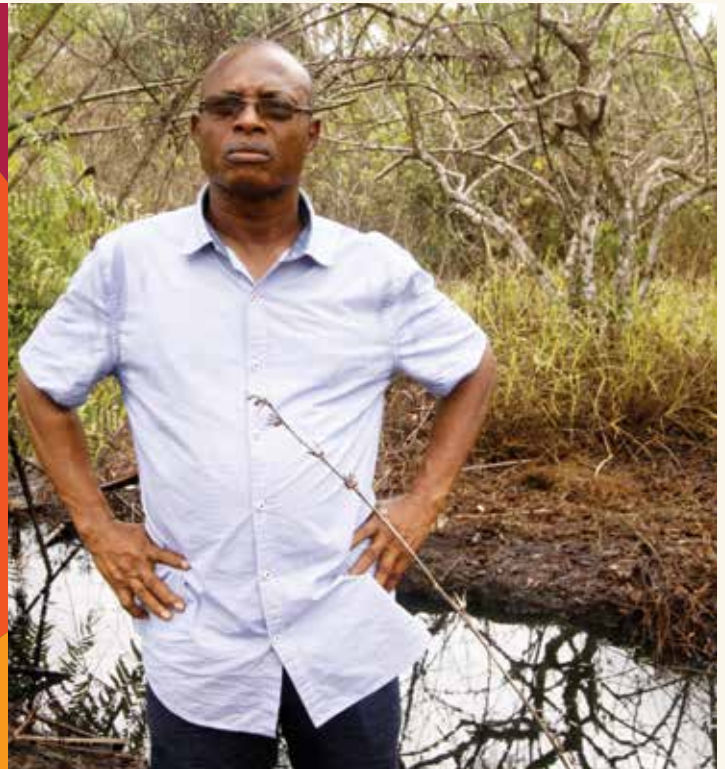
LOOK. WATCH. LISTEN. JOIN THE CONVERSATION.

IN THE NEWS

'A FINAL RULE'

In a Sept. 2 post on the *Risk & Compliance* blog for *The Wall Street Journal*, Samuel Rubinfeld chronicles Oxfam America's victory in court over the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). A federal judge ruled that the SEC has to publish an "expedited schedule" for issuing a rule mandating resource-extraction companies to disclose payments they make to foreign governments. He states, "A final rule would implement Section 1504 of the Dodd-Frank Act, which requires oil, gas and mining companies to disclose annually the payments they made to foreign governments for things such as licenses and permits needed for development. Those payments can be used to hide bribes and other illicit deal-making, activists say."

RIGHT: Paulinus Okoro, who works on community empowerment, shows visitors an oil spill that has polluted a spring in the Rumekepe community in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta. Despite producing most of Nigeria's oil, it's the most impoverished region.
Chris Hufstader / Oxfam America



WATCH

SEE HUNGER IN A NEW WAY

Looking for a way to help end poverty and hunger? Consider holding an *Oxfam America Hunger Banquet*. "Incredibly moving," "life-changing," and "a new perspective on what the statistics are really like" are just some of what participants say about the experience. See for yourself at oxfamamerica.org/hungerbanquet.

FROM THE BLOGS

PRAISED BE: POPE FRANCIS'S CALL TO ACTION ON CLIMATE

By Heather Coleman / June 18, 2015

"As we at Oxfam have highlighted for nearly a decade, climate change hits poor communities first and worst. It disproportionately affects those most vulnerable and least able to adapt to more frequent and more severe storms, droughts, and floods. ... Indeed, adapting to the reality of climate change means doing things differently than before. And that also means helping poor communities who are on the front lines to increase their resilience."

Read the rest of this blog at oxfamamerica.org/closeup-popeclimate.

// As an American working for Oxfam in Jordan, every day I speak with people who have fled their homes in Syria in search of things most people take for granted—safety, clean water, food, an education for their children. ... Each has a story that is more heart-breaking than the last. //

Oxfam policy adviser Alexandra Saieh, in a Sept. 11, 2015, online editorial for *Marie Claire* discussing her firsthand experiences with the Syrian refugee crisis



WHEN REALITY TV TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

WOMEN FARMERS IN TANZANIA GRAB THE LIMELIGHT, DELIGHTING—AND EDUCATING—MILLIONS OF VIEWERS.

Edna Kiogwe is not like most women farmers in Tanzania: she owns her own land, enough for her to grow corn, cassava, rice, and sugarcane. It was a gift from her forward-thinking father on her wedding day.

“I want to make agriculture something people value,” says Kiogwe. “It’s not the last alternative. I want to make it a first alternative.”

That drive to elevate the stature of farming, and particularly of the women who do much of it, is what made Kiogwe a perfect contestant in this season’s filming of *Mama Shujaa wa Chakula*, a hugely popular reality TV show shot in Tanzania in August and aired in five countries across east Africa. This year, about 14 million people tuned in. Sponsored by Oxfam, the show, now in its fifth year, celebrates the vital contributions women farmers make in feeding the planet, and highlights the challenges many encounter on a daily basis.

With an estimated population of just more than 51 million, Tanzania relies heavily on agriculture as its economic base with about 80 percent of the

workforce—many of them women—employed by it. Yet women have far less access than men to resources such as land, education, and credit. One study found that in 2010 just 8 percent of women in Tanzania were sole owners of land.

It’s those disparities—and the biases that feed them—to which this program aims to bring attention. The goals are broad and include:

- Recognizing the contribution of women in providing food for their families;
- Highlighting policy changes needed to ensure a more stable food supply and help women farmers; and
- Helping women farmers build a platform so they can speak for themselves to leaders and the public.

Through the show, also known by its English name *Female Food Heroes*, women are gaining a voice, and not just in Tanzania. Versions of the program are now being produced in Ethiopia and Nigeria, and some finalists have become involved in local, national, and even

global farmer advocacy. In Nigeria, the chairman of a local government council appointed one of the farmers to head a women’s unit on the council, and this year Oxfam invited Nigerian farmer Monica Maigari to represent women farmers at the World Food Prize events in Iowa and to meet with members of Congress in Washington, DC, for discussions on global food security legislation. Media acclaim is also growing as reporters from *theatlantic.com* to *Marie Claire* spread the word about the show, shedding light on the injustices women farmers struggle against.

“Women have to come out of their shells. Your voice has to be heard,” says Lydia Igarabuza, head of programming for East Africa TV, which helped create the show this year. “It’s bringing the female farmer to the discussion table.”

To find out more, visit oxfamamerica.org/closeup-tv hunger.

ABOVE: Women farmers participating in the reality TV show ham it up for the camera. *Coco McCabe / Oxfam America*



CHEAP CHICKEN: THE HUMAN COST

ACROSS RURAL AMERICA, INDUSTRIAL POULTRY PLANTS PROCESS 8.5 BILLION CHICKENS EVERY YEAR. BEHIND THE WALLS, WRITES **MARY BABIC**, ROUGHLY 250,000 WORKERS LABOR IN DANGEROUS CONDITIONS AND EARN POVERTY-LEVEL WAGES. WITH YOUR HELP, OXFAM IS LAUNCHING A NEW CAMPAIGN TO EXPOSE—AND CHANGE—THE WAY THE INDUSTRY TREATS THE WORKERS WHO PRODUCE THE MOST POPULAR MEAT IN AMERICA.

When Oxfam set out to research the poultry industry more than two years ago, we had some idea what we'd find—but we were still shocked by the reality. We traveled to Mississippi, North Carolina, and Arkansas to talk with some of the most vulnerable workers in the country—largely people of color, immigrants, and refugees.

In dozens of interviews with immigrants, we heard the same story: Hard-working women and men come to the US with the hope of making a better life. They find jobs in poultry plants and work long hours each week in cold, wet conditions.

However, the story often ends abruptly. Sometimes workers are injured or disabled. Sometimes they're fired in retribution for speaking out. Sometimes they're simply worn down. Usually, they have little recourse and scant support, and end up desperate and struggling to find work they can do.

Following are stories of two who worked as long as they could—until they were, essentially, used up. Isabella labored for nearly eight years trimming wings. Roberto hung live chickens. Both left with serious injuries. Like most of the workers we interviewed for this campaign, Isabella and Roberto asked that we use pseudonyms to protect them from retribution.

ISABELLA: OPENING HER EYES

Tucked back off a suburban North Carolina road sits a small house that feels like it could be in Central America. Chicken stew simmers in a giant pot in the yard, sending up steam and odors of corn and spices. Neighbors drop by. The house is crammed with great boxes of tomatoes, bags of potatoes, religious statuary, and knickknacks.

Isabella flavors the stew, and puts her two kids to work assembling meals: filling containers, packaging napkins and cutlery. They head out together to deliver to households in town.

Isabella worked hard to establish the food business, feeling an urgent need to supplement her full-time wages from the poultry plant. "I had to borrow pans and pots. My uncle lent me one, and my sister another," she notes, close to tears. Poultry workers earn low wages (averaging \$10 to \$11 an hour), have scant benefits, and rarely (if ever) get paid time off.

Eventually, selling meals became her only source of income: she left the poultry plant after she suffered an injury to her arm, learned about her rights, and "opened her eyes" to unnecessary abuses inflicted on workers.

At 38, a mother and grandmother, Isabella is now scrambling to support her family. As this magazine was about to go to press, we learned that, faced with almost no other choice, she felt compelled to return to the punishing conditions in the poultry plant.

THE HARSH NEW REALITY INSIDE THE PLANT

Isabella left Guatemala—"because of all the sufferings that crossed our path"—and joined her brothers in the US. But she soon discovered the poultry plant had its own misery: "I never imagined all the sufferings that my family endured here."

Isabella's job was to cut wings. For nearly eight years, she stood in the cold, snipping wings from stiff chicken carcasses: roughly 20,000 per day, 100,000 each week.

A petite woman, she speaks of the cold with a shiver: "I would wear leggings, a pair of pants, two pairs of socks and boots. It's just too cold," she says. The temperature hovers around 40 degrees, to reduce microbial growth.

It's not just cold—the plants are wet, smelly, and noisy. The birds produce blood, offal, and grease. Cleaning involves water, bleach, detergent.

WHAT'S WRONG?

The poultry industry treats some of the most vulnerable workers in the US as disposable commodities in a relentless race to churn out enough chicken to satisfy growing consumer demand.

WHAT'S OXFAM DOING?

Using campaign tools we have honed through years of practice, we are turning to you to help us send a loud and clear message to Big Poultry: Respect the rights of workers on the line, and improve the conditions in the plants.

Right the Wrong

BELOW: After nearly eight years of clipping wings off chicken carcasses, Isabella sustained a permanent shoulder injury. *Mary Babic / Oxfam America*

OPPOSITE: In his work hanging live chickens, Roberto was clawed and bitten—and severely injured by the thousands of repetitive motions. *Mary Babic / Oxfam America*

PREVIOUS PAGE: The processing line in a poultry plant is cold, wet, loud, and fast. *John D. Simmons / The Charlotte Observer*

Since the plant needs to process all the chickens delivered each day, the line runs relentlessly. Workers fit in as “perpetual motion machines,” says one expert. Isabella would use the same forceful motions hour after hour. When she asked to change her position, the answer was always no. “My job was becoming too much for me. I asked several times to be transferred, but they just said that that was the job that I was trained for,” she says.

While taking a break from the line is essential for stretching or visiting the bathroom, breaks are often denied. Any time a worker steps away, a line assistant needs to fill in. There are rarely enough assistants.

“There are 36 people on the line, starting with the coning process all the way to the tenders—and only one line assistant. It’s just not enough,” Isabella says. “People need to go to the restroom, others need to sharpen their knives, others with machine malfunctions. They all need help.”

Bathroom breaks are a huge issue for workers. “Even pregnant women don’t

get to go,” says Isabella. Nearly every worker has seen someone pee while standing on the line. Some reduce fluid intake and become dehydrated; others resort to wearing adult diapers.

Dolores, who worked at a poultry plant in Arkansas, says she began by wearing a sanitary napkin, but since it would fill up with urine too quickly, she turned to Pampers. “It was like having no worth. ... We would arrive at 5 in the morning ... [work] until 11 or 12 without using the bathroom. ... I was ashamed to tell them that I had to change my Pampers.”

ROBERTO: LOSING HOPE

A stocky man with muscled arms, Roberto moved from Mexico to Arkansas in order to support his aging mother and father. He chose the line job that pays the most: hanging live chickens. It is also one of the most arduous, and has grown more demanding as the birds have gotten larger: “They’re more like turkeys some days,” he says. The birds bite, claw, and defecate; the stench is overwhelming. But the hardest part is the endless, repetitive motions. Thousands of times a day, Roberto would lift birds off the conveyor and insert their feet into shackles.

The work eventually robbed him of his physical strength and dexterity.

Rates of injury and illness among poultry workers are much higher than among all workers in the US. Dangers include amputations, cuts and lacerations; slips, trips, and falls; respiratory hazards; and exposure to dangerous chemicals.

Most commonly, workers suffer musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, from the repetitive motions. In one survey, 86 percent of wing cutters reported hand and wrist pain, swelling, numbness, and tingling.

When Roberto sought medical attention, plant personnel just offered pain relievers and sent him back to the line. “They just kept prescribing more medicine, telling me to increase the dosage and use it more often.”

// I NEVER IMAGINED ALL THE SUFFERINGS THAT MY FAMILY ENDURED HERE. //

ISABELLA, POULTRY WORKER,
NORTH CAROLINA





Roberto finally saw a doctor who told him that because he'd been working so long without relief, he'd developed severe carpal tunnel syndrome—which meant pain, swelling, stiffness, and loss of grip. Still, he kept going to work, hoping to switch positions. "They said I needed to wait until they hired more hangers before I could leave the department. ... My hands and my back hurt so badly. The pain medication—even if I took a lot of it—wasn't having any effect."

While he wants to return to the plant, he's too weak. "I walk from one place to another looking to see what I can do, where they will accept me this way," says Roberto. "I'm desperate because I need to pay my bills. ... I need work, I want a job. I feel hopeless."

As he tells his story, Roberto struggles to hold back tears, jiggling his legs and rocking. He relies on churches and charities to survive, and agonizes about his mother. "My mother had three surgeries, and they are very costly. ... When I hear her asking for help and I can't do anything for her," he says quietly and pauses, "it hurts me a lot."

TREATING CHICKENS BETTER THAN PEOPLE

Since the poultry industry has difficulty retaining workers, it taps groups of people who are economically desperate and socially isolated. Many say that the

industry takes advantage of these vulnerable people by creating a climate of fear.

The poultry industry employs immigrants from all over the world; some are refugees from countries such as Burma, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia.

Isabella and Roberto endured terrible conditions because they believed they had no options. Isabella says, "The line is going too fast and we can't keep up with it. But if we don't try, then we lose our jobs. ... We don't want to lose our jobs since we all have families, bills to pay."

Roberto says, "The company tells us to treat the chickens well—and we do.

But they don't treat the workers well. I want them to value the workers—not to trample their rights."

As she heads back onto the line, Isabella has a simple plea: "I hope consumers look at our plight, and do something for those of us who make it possible for them to enjoy chicken."

***Editor's note:** As we were going to press, Tyson announced two new initiatives: an increase in hourly pay for a third of its workforce, and a pilot project to improve workers' safety. Both moves came after Oxfam met several times with Tyson—and just before we launched our campaign targeting the company.*

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Through our campaigns for change, Oxfam works to raise awareness about the practices that keep people trapped in poverty and to inspire people like you to take action.

Every day, poultry workers labor in a thriving industry. But they do not share in the bounty. Instead, they earn poverty-level wages, incur debilitating injuries, and experience a climate of fear.

It does not have to be this way. Tell Big Poultry to treat its workers right.

Visit oxfamamerica.org/livesontheline to learn more.

And sign the petition calling on the top four poultry companies—Tyson Foods, Pilgrim's, Perdue, and Sanderson—to offer fair pay and benefits, provide a safe working environment, and give their workers a voice.

DOING BUSINESS THE WISE WAY





HOW CAN WOMEN IN GUATEMALA GROW THEIR SMALL ENTERPRISES WHEN THE RULES ARE RIGGED AGAINST THEM? MIX FINANCIAL EDUCATION WITH ACCESS TO CREDIT AND YOU'VE GOT A RECIPE FOR EMPOWERMENT. COCO MCCABE REPORTS.

Ana Dominga Cuc Baquin doesn't have much patience for small talk. If she's going to pay school fees for her two children and help her husband put food on the family's table, there's work to be done, and plenty of it. Any time wasted on chatter is time she won't get back. In her line of labor-intensive work—the creation of traditional Guatemalan clothing—every minute is precious.

As her hands fly between pegs mounted on a board, Cuc Baquin describes how it can take a full two hours to twist together just one skein of thread used to make the *típica* blouses and skirts many women in Guatemala's department of Sololá favor. Each blouse requires about three skeins, and that's just the start. Then comes the weaving, stitching, and embroidering of these gorgeous pieces: flowers, birds, and geometric patterns dance across the yokes and tumble down the fronts of the *huipils*. For all this effort, carried out with the help of a team of local workers, Cuc Baquin earns between 200 and 300 quetzales—or \$26 to \$39—a day when she goes to the market with her goods.

It's a business model she's looking to sharpen and expand. And that's where WISE comes in.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

A new Oxfam America initiative that stands for Women in Small Enterprise, WISE aims to help women entrepreneurs grow their commercial efforts in a country that typically discourages them from aiming high. For women in Guatemala, barriers abound, from the machismo culture that dismisses their native abilities to their limited access to loans large enough to help them achieve their dreams. Through a program of intensive financial training, one-on-one business

coaching, and networking opportunities, WISE is helping women carve new paths for themselves while Oxfam staffers and partners work behind the scenes to educate bankers across Guatemala about the untapped potential businesswomen represent.

A key feature of this initiative is a \$900,000 guarantee fund established by Oxfam America that backs commercial loans in the range of \$3,000 to \$50,000 for women—the kind of cash they can rarely raise on their own. Banco G&T Continental is the first Guatemalan bank to partner with Oxfam in this effort, and Cuc Baquin is one of the first three women to receive a loan to grow her business.

"With WISE, we're trying to do two big things," says Mara Bolis, Oxfam's senior adviser on market systems. "One is to support the revaluing of women's economic contributions in Guatemala—to make the invisible visible, and demonstrate that women are already contributing a lot to their economies and societies and that it's going uncelebrated. And the second thing is to follow women through their work, learn where they encounter barriers, and then develop policy and advocacy efforts to support them in overcoming those hurdles."

In Guatemala, even though laws promote equal inheritance, women own less than 13 percent of the land, a fact that likely contributes to the challenges they face in getting loans from banks. Without collateral—such as land—it's not easy for women to borrow, especially when, based on reports from female business managers, banks are 15 percent more likely to demand that women, as opposed to men, cough it up for their businesses, and the collateral requirements for women are twice as large, Bolis says.



WHAT'S WRONG?

Women entrepreneurs in Guatemala face many barriers to growing their businesses not the least of which is getting access to loans large enough to help them achieve their dreams.

WHAT'S OXFAM DOING?

Through an initiative called WISE, or Women in Small Enterprise, Oxfam has set up a guarantee fund to back commercial loans while offering women business owners intensive financial training, one-on-one business coaching, and networking opportunities.

Right the Wrong

One woman put the problem in simpler terms: "If you go to a bank as a woman, they do not consider your request seriously," she told Oxfam.

WISE aims to help women change that attitude—and all the hardships that spin from it.

"This program is all about helping women to grow their power, decision-making ability, and leadership skills," says Bolis. "Economic empowerment is important in order for women to have a voice politically."

'CHANGE THEIR MINDS'

But there's more to economic empowerment than money. And that's why the WISE program takes women on a deep dive into some of the thornier questions about their lives and how their businesses figure in them. Along with that "life visioning," the first six sessions of the program include classroom time on topics such as business theory, costs, and marketing. Mixed in with the classroom experience are a series of peer sessions where the women work with each other, sharing their business problems and potential solutions. About a third of the way into all of this, the one-on-one coaching begins, with each trainee assigned an expert to help her analyze the condition of her

business—all in preparation for successfully managing a bigger loan.

In WISE's first graduating class in Sololá, 20 women made it through the rigors of the program. But only a handful of them opted to apply for a loan from Banco G&T Continental, understanding now—as they might not have before—the potential challenges in paying back a sizable sum. For fledgling entrepreneurs like Carmen Maria Can Pixabaj, a poultry producer whose enterprise has grown threefold since she adopted some of the strategies recommended by her WISE coach, smaller, self-funded steps seem to be the better way for her to continue her steady expansion—at least for now.

Her dream, however, is anything but small: it's to become "a big, successful businesswoman." In Guatemala, that's a daring vision, and one the WISE coaches work hard to promote among their clients.

"I think the hardest thing is feeling alone," says Maria Luisa Cruz, founder of IDEA ONG, Oxfam's local partner, which is providing the coaches. "Some people tell you, why are you making an enterprise? You should be getting married." A common sentiment in Guatemala, she adds, is that "business is for men." Her job is to turn that notion on its head.

"You have to teach people and change their minds and tell them they are capable," says Cruz.

Education is the heart of the WISE initiative, and not just for the women participants. Central to the success of the program is convincing bank officials to take a chance on these women and others like them. Earlier this year, the WISE team organized a training for 28 staffers at G&T Continental designed to help take a hard look at some of the barriers women face in accessing credit and to think about steps the bank could take to make it easier.

"Working with women is very different. They have to be considered differently,"

says Roxanna Lopez, who coordinated the training for the bank. “That was one of the main things we learned in this training: equity and justice.”

AT LAST—SOME CAPITAL

For Cuc Baquin, the maker of traditional clothes, a lack of capital has been the biggest hurdle she has faced in trying to expand her business in the 25 years she’s been working at it. Now, with the 25,000 quetzales, or \$3,255, she got from Banco G&T Continental in February—the first loan she has ever had—she has stocked a greater variety of raw materials, helping her to increase the styles and colors of the clothing she makes. Skeins of bright threads, red and orange, black, and green, fill the shelves lining the walls of Cuc Baquin’s workshop; more skeins are piled into containers on the floor.

With a 22 percent interest rate, the terms of her loan require that she pay it back over the course of two and a half years in monthly allotments of 1,153 quetzales, or \$150. While the interest is steep—particularly compared with what’s available in the US—it’s substantially lower than what’s offered in the microfinance markets typically available to Guatemalan women. According to one study of five institutions, interest rates on microfinance loans, which are often no bigger than \$3,000, can run as high as 36 percent. And without the guarantee from the WISE fund, the interest on Cuc Baquin’s loan could be almost double the WISE rate.

Still, Cuc Baquin, whose formal schooling ended when she finished third grade, is under no illusions about the responsibility she has undertaken.

“Receiving the money is easy,” she says. “But paying it back, that’s the difficult part.”

Not as difficult, though, as it might have been before she got her WISE training. Among the most important things Cuc Baquin learned from the classes and her coach is to keep careful track of



CARMEN MARIA CAN PIXABAJ IS A POULTRY PRODUCER WHOSE ENTERPRISE HAS GROWN THREEFOLD SINCE SHE ADOPTED SOME OF THE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDED BY HER WISE COACH.

her inventory and how to calculate her costs—“to see if I’m making money or losing money,” she says, reporting, happily, that she’s making it.

“I feel good,” Cuc Baquin says, when a visitor asks her if the experience with WISE and running her business has changed her in any way. “When I go to the market, I can take a lot of variety—so clients don’t go elsewhere.”

A CLOSER LOOK Q

To learn more about Carmen Maria Can Pixabaj’s poultry enterprise, go to oxfamamerica.org/closeup-chickenswise.

ABOVE: Carmen Maria Can Pixabaj, right, and her daughter stand in the doorway of their kitchen where they do some of the processing for Can Pixabaj’s poultry business.

OPPOSITE: WISE coach Carolina Moreira (left) and Maria Luisa Cruz, the founder of IDEA ONG, share a laugh as they talk about the challenges—and accomplishments—of women entrepreneurs in Guatemala.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Ana Dominga Cuc Baquin, who received a WISE loan, relies on a team of local workers to help weave and sew the traditional clothing that she sells.

ALL PHOTOS: *Ilene Perlman / Oxfam America*

REBUILDING IN NEPAL

WHEN OXFAM CAME TO THE ASSISTANCE OF QUAKE SURVIVORS IN NEPAL, WE MADE SURE TO LISTEN TO WOMEN.

Recovering from a 7.8-magnitude earthquake such as the one that hit Nepal near Kathmandu last April can be a slow progression of small steps. For Laxmi Tamang, a widowed mother of two young boys, moving from a communal shelter to one designed for a single family was a significant step, and a welcome surprise: “I didn’t expect anyone would build me a house,” she said.

Some of the crew members building the new structures are women themselves. They are working with Oxfam’s partner—Gramin Mahila Sirjansheel Pariwar—in the badly hit district of Sindhupalchok. Recently trained, 20 women in that district alone now have a new skill in a field traditionally dominated by men. Among them is 18-year-old Sangita Thami, whose team had already completed 26 improved dwellings by July.

“It’s a unique skill I have gathered,” said Thami. “I can construct a house whenever there’s a need.”

Across Nepal, the need is great—from housing to the recovery of lost livelihoods. But in the wake of disasters like this earthquake, the needs that women

and girls face are different from those of men. Attuned to those differences, Oxfam listens carefully to the concerns women have, and, with our partners, we’re committed to addressing those challenges.

In June, Oxfam and CARE jointly surveyed women and girls in earthquake-affected areas and found that females in overcrowded temporary shelters, where there is often no privacy, felt unsafe. Communal toilets and unlit areas were cited as insecure places.

Part of our emergency response has included the construction of separate latrines with bathing facilities for women. We are working closely with the Women for Human Rights organization in Nepal to help ensure women are safe, can get medical care, and benefit from recovery and reconstruction programs. We’ve set up focus groups to ensure women’s voices are heard. And as our shelter program has progressed, we’ve been giving priority to families headed by women like Tamang. She and her boys are one of more than 318,000 female-headed households in the areas affected, according to studies by the government of Nepal.

WHAT'S AHEAD

Oxfam has helped more than 445,000 people with emergency assistance in seven of the areas that were most severely affected by the earthquake, and we’ve distributed rice seed to farmers in some areas. We will soon turn to the longer-term recovery process. But the same rains that help farmers grow rice and other food bring the additional threat of landslides, washing out roads in areas that are already difficult to reach. The rains also threaten to spread cholera, which is endemic in Nepal. So part of our contingency planning has included prestocking chlorine tablets, tarps, and seeds and ensuring that people in isolated communities can have access to clean water, shelter, and the means to plant their fields.

The road to recovery in Nepal will not be an easy one, but with the right resources Oxfam and others will help the country to rebuild to a better standard—and be better prepared for any future disasters.

RIGHT: Sangita Thami, 18, learns to build an improved temporary shelter in Sindhupalchok district. Thami and her team have built 26 such shelters so far. She says she is very happy to have acquired vital skills. *Catherine Mahony / Oxfam*

A CLOSER LOOK


Learn more about Oxfam’s emergency response in Nepal at oxfamamerica.org/closeup-nepal.




HIGHLIGHTS FROM WHERE WE ARE WORKING

(as of Sept. 25, 2015)

GORKHA


 **10,591**
hygiene kits distributed

 **53,141**
people reached with
hygiene promotion


 **230**
emergency latrines
installed


DHADING

 **7,920**
emergency shelter kits
distributed

 **2,032**
hygiene kits distributed

KATHMANDU VALLEY

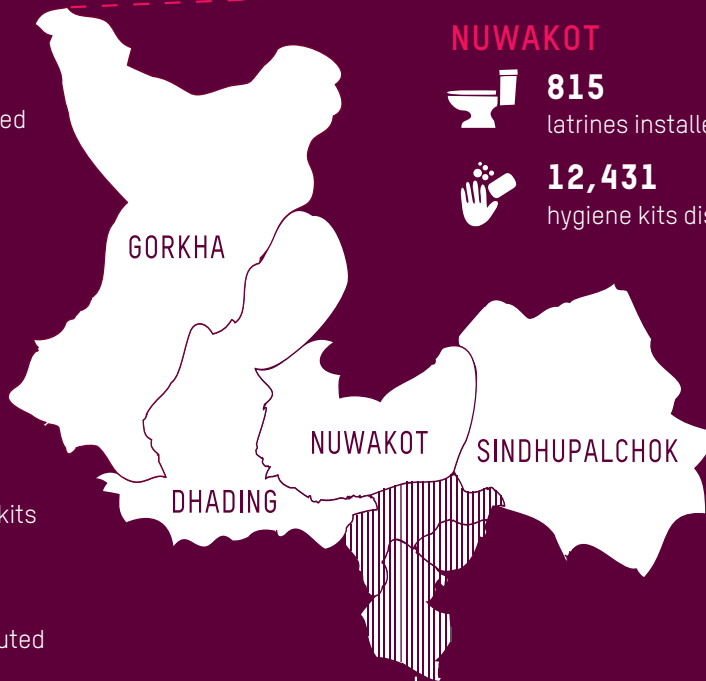
 **1,395**
latrines completed

 **10,220**
hygiene kits distributed

NUWAKOT

 **815**
latrines installed


 **12,431**
hygiene kits distributed




SINDHUPALCHOK

 **7,000**
households received
rice seeds to replace
lost stocks

 **14,487**
emergency shelter kits
distributed

 **5,267**
latrines completed

 **7**
community water points
rehabilitated

KATHMANDU VALLEY
(KATHMANDU, LALITPUR,
AND BHAKTAPUR)



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START THE NEW YEAR ON AN UPBEAT ...

... with an Oxfam Jam. Learn how to spotlight local artists and make a global impact at oxfamamerica.org/oxfamjam.



New York City-based rockers interrobang perform at their Oxfam Jam at Rockwood Music Hall in New York City earlier this year. *Sam Teichman Photo & Video*