

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THEORY OF CHANGE

MEETING URGENT NEEDS TO SAVE LIVES



WASH stands are placed by every block of toilets to encourage people to wash their hands after using the toilet and prevent the spread of disease. This one is located in Bulengo, one of four Internally Displaced Persons camps on the outskirts of Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo credit: Suzi O'Keefe/Oxfam.



OXFAM
Canada

This resource outlines Oxfam Canada's Theory of Change for its Humanitarian Assistance programming. A theory of change shows how we expect outcomes to occur over the short, medium, and longer term as a result of our work. In this document we outline how we understand Humanitarian Assistance; why we focus on Humanitarian Assistance; the ultimate aim of our Humanitarian programming; our Theory of Change for our work in this area; and highlights and best practices stemming from our Humanitarian Assistance programming.

WHAT IS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE?

Humanitarian assistance is the delivery of emergency response services to people and communities affected by crisis, conflict and disaster. Disasters happen all over the world. Some are cyclical and regular (hurricanes, monsoons, floods etc.); others, such as conflict, may or may not be predictable and can end up being more protracted in nature; while a few happen suddenly and present major unplanned catastrophes. Many disasters are on the increase because of environmental degradation and climate change.

A key component of Oxfam's work is that we deliver activities through safe programming. Safe programming is fundamental to all good-quality humanitarian work and requires humanitarian actors take proactive measures when designing and delivering interventions to ensure that they do not put affected populations in further danger, do not create or exacerbate conflict, and where possible enhance civilian safety, including mitigating the risks of gender-based violence (GBV).

Humanitarian Assistance encompasses a number of sectors including Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), Emergency Food Security and Vulnerable Livelihoods (EFSVL), and Protection: Improving the safety of those affected by conflict and disasters. In the delivery of humanitarian services, these sectors can be delivered in parallel or in compliment to one another as a 'multi-sectoral' response. The needs of communities and delivery of services is based on up-to-date needs assessments that are conducted in the given operational context, with inputs from affected communities and local actors. Integrating Gender in Emergencies is a central aim across each of these sectors.

Canada has adopted a Feminist International Assistance Policy to reduce poverty and build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world. Canada knows that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective way to achieve this goal. Canada's feminist approach is human rights-based and inclusive. It is strategic and focused, transformative and activist, and evidence-based and accountable.

In terms of humanitarian assistance, this means that Canada supports gender-responsive humanitarian action, which is needed to address the specific needs and priorities of people in vulnerable situations, particularly women and girls, to support their empowerment and to ensure that our aid has a greater and more lasting impact. By adopting a feminist approach, Canada is thus determined to respect humanitarian principles in the delivery of its humanitarian assistance by ensuring that this assistance appropriately meets the specific needs of people affected by a crisis. Canada knows that adopting a gender-responsive approach to humanitarian assistance also strengthens our entire humanitarian response.

Global Affairs Canada, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

Catarina is a Government Agriculture Technical Worker in the village of Chissinguana in Mozambique where Oxfam provided humanitarian assistance following Cyclone Idai.

Photo credit: Caroline Leal/
Oxfam Canada



GENDER IN EMERGENCIES: SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES TO SHIFT POWER DYNAMICS

Wherever a crisis occurs, pre-existing socio-political structures and socio-economic conditions that men and women experience, determine how they are affected. Along with differences such as age, class, religion, race, and ethnicity, gender is one of the major factors determining the impact a humanitarian crisis can have on individuals. The underlying reasons for women and girls' disadvantaged positions in humanitarian crises include the fact that women usually enjoy a lower, less powerful, status in society and have less opportunity than men do, to make the decisions that shape or control their lives. Women and youth also carry a disproportionate share of the burden of humanitarian response.

The meaningful and targeted inclusion of gender within emergency response can allow for more lives to be saved, more communities to be reached, and sustainability for communities to be realized. Women's participation and leadership can be encouraged within humanitarian response activities, and women can then be empowered to act as agents of change and take advantage of opportunities to demand that power holders reflect on the limitations that women's marginalization poses in local communities' recovery process. Emergencies thus present a significant opportunity to shift power dynamics at national, local, and household levels. Transforming these relationships is a project of generations but, in moments of crisis, this transformation can be jump-started, supported, and invigorated, while also forming part of the holistic response process.

WHY DOES OXFAM CANADA WORK ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE?

Oxfam believes that the crucial factor making people vulnerable to crisis, conflicts, and disasters is their underlying poverty. People with precarious livelihoods, few economic buffers, and living in the most dangerous or marginal places always suffer most and longest. Women and youth carry a disproportionate share of the burden of response. Oxfam therefore underscores the importance of addressing gender inequality issues in humanitarian initiatives.

In many contexts, women’s traditional role as community and family caregivers translate into a reality where, when a humanitarian crisis strikes, women also carry the load of immediate response and the provision of assistance and support to others in their families and communities. Humanitarian assistance can either reinforce or challenge pre-existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities and traditional gender stereotypes or roles. It is therefore vital that, in addition to supporting people immediately after a disaster, we make efforts to reduce the risks that crisis, conflicts, and disasters pose to women and girls. In addition, acknowledging and working with the differences experienced by women, girls, men, and boys results in a more effective response – better targeting, more appropriate assistance, and more lives saved.

Oxfam believes that strong humanitarian responses can create enabling environments where women and girls can expand their agency through building on opportunities offered by the social upheaval caused by disasters to support them in taking on new social, economic, and political roles, including taking on leadership positions, and thereby helping to ‘build back better’² in terms of power relations between women and men. Yet despite evidence of the above, and the existence of a plethora of gender mainstreaming tools, the differential impact of disasters on women, girls, men, and boys is still often overlooked. There is a humanitarian imperative to address gender inequality issues in emergency work: it saves lives and livelihoods. To ignore this poses a threat to the effectiveness of humanitarian response.

“Aid is not just an issue of humanitarian empathy. It is enshrined in law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1966, states that every person on Earth has a right to social security, freedom from hunger and the highest attainable standard of health. This applies before, during and after a disaster. The entitlement to human rights cannot be suspended.

Nonetheless, the gulf between the global need for aid and the resources deployed for this purpose keeps widening. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) provisionally puts the need for humanitarian aid at \$ 25 billion in 2018 (see interview with Mark Lowcock). At the same time, the number of people who depend on humanitarian aid is said to be five percent higher than in 2017. Incidentally, only around \$ 13 billion of the \$ 22.2 billion called for last year were actually pledged.”¹

1 Hendrik Slusarenka, ‘Aid in itself is not enough’, DSC Development and Cooperation, e-paper no. 6, 2018, p. 29. Available online at: <https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/transformational-emergency-aid-takes-account-long-term-social-justice>

2 United Nations. 2016, ‘Build Back Better (BBB): The use of the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases after a disaster to increase the resilience of nations and communities through integrating disaster risk reduction measures into the restoration of physical infrastructure and societal systems, and into the revitalization of livelihoods, economies, and the environment.’ New York: United Nations General Assembly.

OXFAM'S MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GENDER

These are a set of 16 Standards for people doing humanitarian work to guide their behaviour and practice. They cover how to assess a situation to determine different needs, and how to design programs that meet those needs. They include ways to ensure active, meaningful participation by all gender groups, and that specific matters relating to dignity are addressed. They advise people working in emergency situations how to identify risks of gender-based violence sexual exploitation and what to do to ensure vulnerable people feel safe and have access to medical, psychological, or legal services where possible. They are designed to be used by all staff whether managers or technical experts, expatriate or national, to help them put gender equality at the heart of their work. Available online at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/minimum-standards-gender-emergencies>

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE AIM OF OUR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMING?

Oxfam seeks to ensure that individuals affected by crisis, conflict, or disaster, including host populations, can meet their basic needs and continue to live a life underscored by dignity and gender equality. We seek to do this by working closely with local partners and women’s rights organizations and providing essential services in a safe and empowering way for both staff and those affected.

In emergencies, we meet urgent needs to save lives and restore dignity to those impacted, but also look at long-term solutions to restoring women’s livelihoods, health, safety, and leadership.

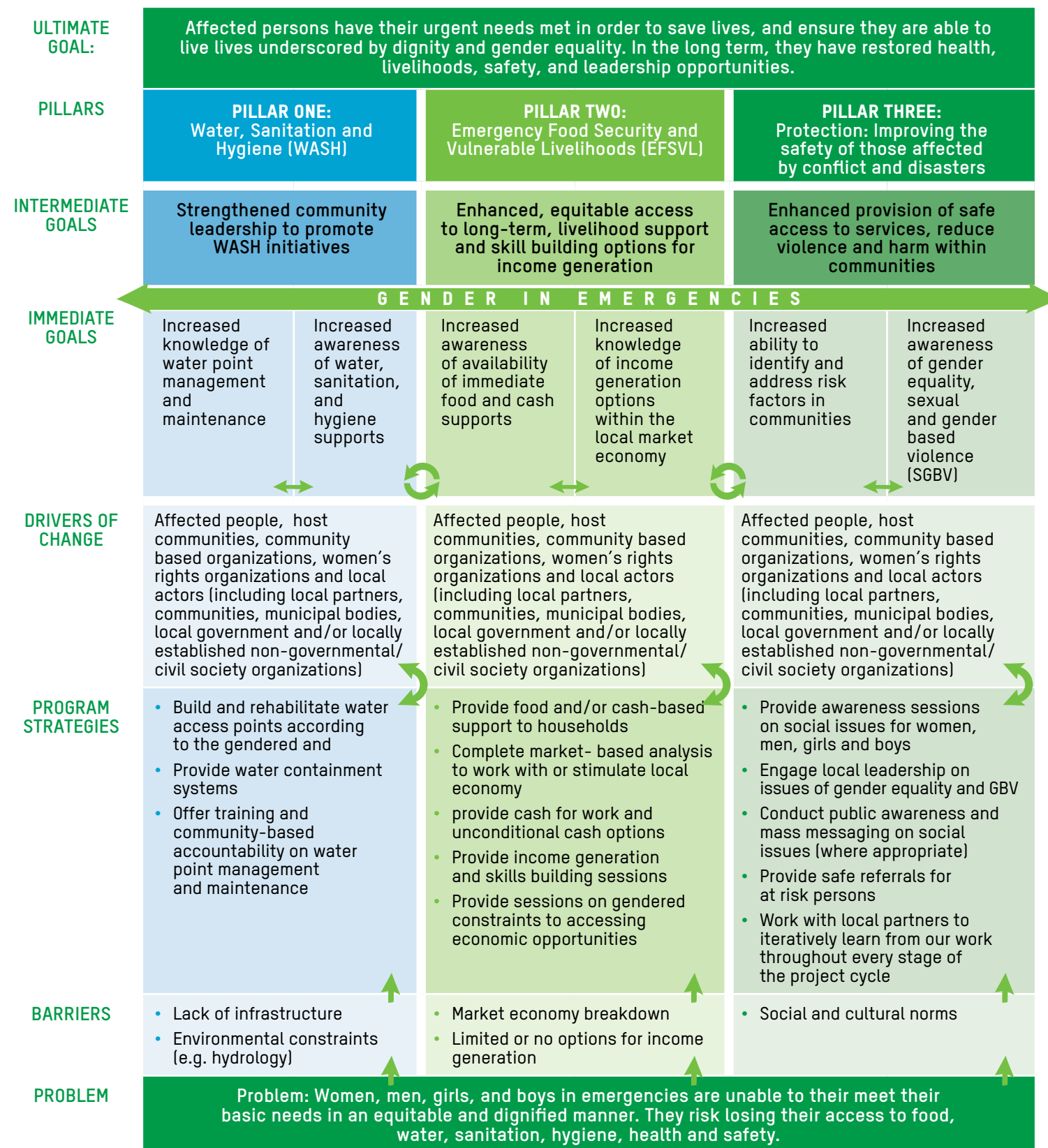
WHAT IS OXFAM CANADA'S THEORY OF CHANGE FOR ITS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMING?

To reach our ultimate aim, our Humanitarian programming is informed by the following overarching Theory of Change comprised of three interconnected, mutually reinforcing pillars of work. Gender in emergencies is a cross cutting theme across all three pillars.

PILLARS OF WORK



OXFAM CANADA'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THEORY OF CHANGE



Veronica is a Gender Officer with OJOAGA, one of Oxfam's partners in providing assistance to those affected by Cyclone Idai in Mozambique.

Photo credit: Caroline Leal/Oxfam Canada



HOW DOES OXFAM CANADA IMPLEMENT ITS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THEORY OF CHANGE?

Our Humanitarian Theory of Change takes an integrated and multi-faceted approach, acting on multiple levels (individual, community, institutional and societal) with diverse actors. We strive to achieve our ultimate goal through program strategies undertaken with key actors and influencers (which can include those who are directly involved in the funding, design, and delivery of a humanitarian response), also known as drivers of change, informed by the following assumptions:

PILLAR 1	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building and rehabilitating water access points Providing water containment systems Offering training and community-based accountability on water point management and maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That the environment provides sufficient water to be harnessed That providing physical access enables increased water usage by those affected That improved water access will lead to better hygiene at household level and decrease negative impacts of poor sanitation improving health (and lifespans) of individuals That cultural and gender-based barriers inhibiting access to water points can be overcome by through gender programming That communities with knowledge and skills will have time to and want to maintain infrastructure

PILLAR 1 IN ACTION

In the midst of an ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, Oxfam Canada increased access to safe water for 135,750 people over a two year period. This included constructing new water supply facilities, rehabilitating existing facilities, operation and maintenance of motorized boreholes, and training and support for water management committees and hand pump caretakers.

PILLAR 2	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods (EFSVL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide food and/or cash based support to households Complete market based analysis to work with/stimulate local economy Provide cash for work and unconditional cash options Provide income generation and skill building sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That provision of food or cash-based support at household level will be distributed adequately within the household provided programming is gender responsive. That host governments and authorities allow and support cash for work and cash programming interventions That women and men who have care responsibilities that impede their participation in income generation can be engaged if care work and other responsibilities are accounted for

PILLAR 2 IN ACTION

Following a flood in Mulanje, Malawi, Oxfam provided 5000 households with agricultural inputs to ensure the livelihoods of the community. Ninety-five percent of the households planted and harvested maize to supplement their food. Some households were even able to sell some of their harvest to earn money and address some of their most important material needs such as clothes and bedding.

PILLAR 3	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Protection: Improving the safety of those affected by conflict and disasters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide awareness sessions on social issues for women, men, girls and boys Engage local leadership on issues of gender equality and GBV Conduct public awareness and mass messaging on social issues (where appropriate) Provide safe referrals for at risk persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That those engaged want to improve gender equality after becoming aware That awareness and messaging can change behaviors and perceptions That there are sufficient support services available for at risk persons

PILLAR 3 IN ACTION

In the midst of fighting in Kunduz Province between the Afghan National Security Forces and the Taliban, rapid movement of people created large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons. These IDPs lacked access to clean water, sanitation, and livelihoods. In addition, women and girls were especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, despite being granted rights under the Constitution and Sharia Law. In response to this, Oxfam provided training to 177 Community District Committee members on protection issues, including gender-based violence. Forty-two community dialogues were held with 2100 participants taking part. And six media broadcasts on women's and girls' roles and rights, sexual and gender-based violence risks, mitigation and referral pathways were conducted in local languages



Since 25 August 2017, more than 626,000 Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Myanmar to cross over to Bangladesh's south-eastern districts, resulting in a massive humanitarian crisis. Oxfam has reached 185,000 people with clean drinking water, toilets, and water pumps and is planning to help 200,000 people in total.

Photo credit: Kamila Stepień/Oxfam.

Oxfam Canada works collaboratively with Southern-based, grassroots CSOs – especially WROs and youth-led organizations – to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects. These partner organizations are key agents of change in realizing visions of gender justice in their contexts. We will measure our success in achieving our ultimate aim, by assessing whether there is:

- Improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene
- Enhanced food security and livelihoods,
- Improved safety of those affected by conflicts and disasters.



In November 2020, two strong hurricanes hit Central America one after the other. Eta and Iota affected more than 7 million people, more than 250,000 houses were damaged, and more than 380,000 people displaced in shelters. The region was already in crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic, prolonged droughts, and high levels of food insecurity. Along with partner organizations, Oxfam is delivering water, emergency food, hygiene kits, personal protective equipment to prevent Covid-19, tools to move rubble and equipping humanitarian shelters. We have reached more than 45,000 people.

Photo: Wilmer López / Oxfam



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For more information on our Hums programming, visit:

<https://www.oxfam.ca/what-we-do/issues-we-work-on/gender-in-emergencies/>



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