

## Oxfam and the Darfur crisis

### February 2009

It is now nearly six years since the crisis in Darfur broke out – yet the suffering continues. The start of 2009 has seen some of the worst violence in Darfur for at least a year. Fighting around the town of Muhajeriya in South Darfur has forced around 30,000 civilians to flee – some of whom have arrived in camps where Oxfam works, in urgent need of aid. Over 2.5 million Darfuris have now fled their homes due to the conflict, and nearly 5 million people are in need of assistance.

Oxfam is currently providing aid to over 400,000 people in Darfur. Most are living in the vast, crowded camps, but Oxfam also works with conflict-affected people in villages, towns and rural areas wherever possible. However, Darfur is increasingly dangerous for aid workers as well as civilians, with daily hijackings and robberies of aid vehicles and offices, limiting our ability to reach many areas of need.

Oxfam's work in Darfur is designed not only to keep people healthy and reduce disease, but also to help people maintain their basic human dignity:

#### **Providing clean, safe water**

Lack of clean water is one of the biggest and most dangerous problems facing displaced people. Oxfam engineers deliver clean drinking water to 400,000 Darfuris, by drilling hundreds of boreholes, and constructing pumps and tap-stands that communities can easily operate and maintain themselves.

#### **Improving sanitation**

Disease can rapidly spread when thousands of families live in basic, cramped conditions. Oxfam builds safe latrines and washing facilities; distributes soap, buckets and jerry cans for storing clean water; and organises community clean-up campaigns to get rid of waste. In January Oxfam distributed over 20,000 jerry cans to people in Abu Shouk and Al Salaam camps alone.

#### **Promoting public health**

Sanitation facilities are only useful if people know how and why to use them. Oxfam's public health teams make thousands of visits a month to mosques, schools and homes, to educate people on how diseases spread, and how they can be prevented – such as ensuring children wash their hands to prevent diarrhoea. Music and drama festivals are used to raise awareness of health issues, and hundreds of community volunteers have been trained to spread the messages and ensure latrines are kept clean



Oxfam water point in rural North Darfur



Oxfam staff use singing, drama, and public events to spread health messages

#### **History of Oxfam in Darfur**

Oxfam has a long history in Darfur, having worked in the region for 25 years. We first responded to the devastating drought in the mid-1980s, and remained to work with local communities on livelihood, health and development projects. When the current conflict broke out in 2003, we scaled up our work in the region by providing emergency assistance such as water and sanitation to people affected by the violence.



Every morning for the past five years, Hawa has woken up in Kalma camp, and begun the daily struggle to support her children. It wasn't always like this – she and her family used to live in a village in South Darfur, before it was attacked, her friends and neighbours killed, and she fled with her children to Kalma with only the clothes on their backs. Hawa dreams of being at home again, but like most of the 2.5 million people displaced by the violence, she expects to be stuck in the camp for the foreseeable future. "It's not safe outside," she says.

Most people in the camps feel trapped – unable to return home and with limited access to economic opportunities. Even leaving the camp to go to market or collect firewood immediately exposes people to danger. The majority of people in the camps are women and children. Many of the young children have now spent most of their lives there.

### **Rebuilding livelihoods**

Many traditional livelihoods of agriculture and trade have been largely destroyed by the conflict. Effectively trapped in camps, people risk attack when trying to access fields and markets. Oxfam is working to provide people with skills and opportunities to gain an income and reduce the dependency on external aid. For example, by training plumbers, welders, vets and carpenters; distributing seeds, tools and ploughs; and providing donkeys and other animals.

### **Distributing emergency aid**

The violence in Darfur continues to force people to flee their homes – often having to leave all their possessions behind. New fighting in January resulted in hundreds of families arriving in Shangil Tobai and camps in North Darfur, where Oxfam distributed emergency supplies such as blankets, plastic sheeting to make shelters, soap and cooking kits.

### **Managing scarce natural resources**

When tens of thousands of people gather in camps, it puts enormous strain on the local environment. Water sources are limited in Darfur, and Oxfam is working to make sure that our programmes are sustainable for years to come, by monitoring water tables and encouraging sensible use of water.

### **Advocating for change**

Oxfam's humanitarian work has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Darfur, but a real end to the suffering can only come through a sustainable peace. Oxfam is calling for all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities, respect international humanitarian law, and return to

peace negotiations. We also call on the international community to provide immediate protection for civilians, by strengthening the "UNAMID" peacekeeping force that has so far failed to make Darfuris feel safer.



Oxfam staff meet refugees in West Darfur



Drilling for water in North Darfur

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **How many staff does Oxfam have in Darfur, and what do they do?**

We currently have about 400 staff – 95% of whom are local Sudanese. These include engineers, health workers, logisticians, livelihoods experts, project managers, accountants, drivers and security guards. We also have 25 international staff, who come from all over the world, including: Bangladesh, Chile, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Pakistan, the Philippines, Uganda, the USA, the UK and Zimbabwe.

### **Where in Darfur does Oxfam work?**

Oxfam is one of the few aid agencies working in all three Darfur states. In North Darfur we work in the camps of Abu Shouk and Al Salaam around El Fasher, in Kebkabiya town and the surrounding villages, and in the camps near Shangil Tobai town. In South Darfur we work in Kalma camp, and in Kass town; while in West Darfur we work in and around the town of Um Dukhun.

### **Does Oxfam work elsewhere in Sudan?**

Although Darfur is our largest programme, Oxfam works extensively in other parts of the country as well. In the big cities of Khartoum and Port Sudan, we provide small loans to help poor families start up businesses to improve their livelihoods, and support schools in impoverished communities. In Red Sea State – the marginalised and remote eastern part of Sudan – we provide clean water and projects to improve people's income and access to markets. In southern Sudan – one of the least developed regions in the world and only just emerging from decades of brutal war – Oxfam provides safe water, health expertise to combat outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and malaria, and supports community agriculture projects.

### **How much does Oxfam spend in Sudan?**

Our annual budget for our work in Darfur is about GBP £6.5 million. This provides vital emergency aid to over 400,000 people. Across all of Sudan, Oxfam's budget is GBP £10m.

### **Where does this money come from?**

Oxfam's work in Darfur is supported by a range of donors, including supporters and the general public all over the world. We also receive funds from institutional donors such as the UK Department for International Development (DfID), the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), and Oxfam International affiliates around the world.

### **Where can I find out more about Oxfam's work?**

Try the following websites to find photos, case studies and more information about our work in Darfur and the rest of Sudan:

[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam\\_in\\_action/emergencies/darfur\\_chad.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/emergencies/darfur_chad.html)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/oxfamsudan/sets/>



Oxfam has trained carpenters to help people improve their livelihoods



Children learn how to wash their hands to prevent diarrhoea



Constructing new latrines