



Three Months On

A Report on Oxfam Hong Kong's

Response to the China Earthquake of

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1. Background

On 12 May 2008, a devastating 8-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan Province in China, with its epicenter recorded in Wenchuan County. According to government records, there were 69,207 dead, 18,222 missing, 374,176 injured, and up to 46.24 million individuals affected. Some 22,638 aftershocks have also been recorded, with the strongest - at 6.4-magnitude - occurring on 25 May in Qingchuan County, Sichuan.

Immediately after the earthquake, Oxfam Hong Kong began relief and rehabilitation projects; and three months on, these projects are ongoing in 20 cities and counties, including 125 townships and villages, in Sichuan, Gansu and Shaanxi Provinces. (See Annex 1)

As of 11 August, Oxfam Hong Kong raised HKD136,998,787.15 for its earthquake response.

In total, Oxfam Hong Kong has spent HKD20,138,057 (RMB18,142,394) on emergency relief work. Grants of HKD3,994,612.50 (RMB3,598,750) have been approved for rehabilitation projects. The total spent on relief and rehabilitation work is HKD24,132,669.84 (RMB21,741,144). (See Annexes 2 and 3)



Oxfam Hong Kong's projects have benefited 611,522 people: 516,487 in Sichuan, 84,971 in Gansu, and 10,064 in Shaanxi.

2. Oxfam Hong Kong's Rehabilitation and Future Relief Projects Plan

As the first phase of emergency relief has been completed, Oxfam Hong Kong has shifted its focus to assisting the affected groups restore their livelihoods, rebuild the communities and schools, recover from psychological trauma, and increase their disaster preparedness. An estimated total of HKD130 million will be spent on related work.

Oxfam Hong Kong set up a field Office in Chengdu in order to co-ordinate and monitor rehabilitation projects in Sichuan over the next five years. After an initial assessment, Oxfam has allocated over HKD108 million for rehabilitation and future relief projects in Qingchuan, Guangyuan, An, and Mao Counties. These allocations include:

- **Over HKD3,600,000 for building temporary schools**
- **Over HKD42,000,000 for rebuilding the infrastructure, including roads, water/irrigation systems, etc.**



- **Over HKD36,750,000 for assisting communities in restoring livelihoods**

Over HKD5,200,000 for working with local partners on long-term development livelihoods projects

- **Over HKD21,000,000 had been allocated for providing continuing humanitarian aid to people affected by the aftershocks**



In Gansu Province, Oxfam Hong Kong will invest HKD28 million in a three-year rehabilitation project in Wen County and Wudu Region in Longnan City, the two poorest counties seriously damaged by the earthquake. The work includes:

- **HKD 10 million for building 16 primary schools and education sites to meet higher anti-seismic requirements. These will benefit 2,400 students from villages, so that they are able to study in a safer environment. Lanzhou University, which has expertise in anti-seismic techniques, will work with Oxfam Hong Kong**



- **HKD18 million for rebuilding roads, water systems, and poultry farms (plus provision of seeds and fertilizers), in order to recover the productivity of local aquaculture and agriculture**

3. Oxfam Hong Kong's Relief and Rehabilitation Principles

- **Prioritise support for the disaster-affected people living in remote and seriously damaged areas**

Oxfam Hong Kong overcame problems in transportation, and is one of the international NGOs implementing relief work in the seriously affected regions of Wenchuan, Qingchuan and Mao Counties, regarded as the most seriously affected regions. Oxfam Hong Kong distributed RMB5.19 million worth of emergency relief items to over 168,696 people.

Oxfam Hong Kong is primarily concerned with the people in remote and poverty-stricken regions affected by the earthquake. Based on Oxfam's past experience, the poorest communities



suffer the most in a disaster. They do not have the resources to protect themselves and have little means to cope with the loss of homes and resources, especially when distribution of food relief is stopped. Poverty is one of the main causes of the devastating aftereffects of a disaster.

In addition, the media usually covers those areas that are more accessible; hence the situation of more remote and usually poorer areas is often neglected because of lack of access to information and poor transportation facilities. The affected people in these areas find it more difficult to get external support.



Because of the nature of the earthquake, seriously affected areas are spread widely across Gansu and Shaanxi Provinces. In Gansu, over 1 million houses were completely destroyed, and over 1,441,300 houses damaged. Up to 1,564,000 people required emergency shelter. In addition, 6,753 schools in the province were completely destroyed and 78,700 schools were severely damaged.

On 15 May, Oxfam Hong Kong visited Wen and Wudu Counties, two of the poorest counties in Gansu, to conduct a needs assessment and provide emergency relief. Oxfam Hong Kong distributed a total of HKD 3,424,780 worth of relief items in 45 towns and villages in eight counties in Gansu and Shaanxi Provinces, serving 95,035 people. Oxfam Hong Kong also plans to launch rehabilitation projects of up to HKD28 million.

- **Co-operate with different stakeholders and implement a participatory approach to rehabilitation**

In Oxfam Hong Kong's practice, the participation of beneficiaries is a crucial element throughout the relief and rehabilitation process. Oxfam Hong Kong staff encouraged local government officials and the beneficiaries to form working groups to decide how relief items should be distributed. They were also encouraged to send representatives to monitor the distribution process.



At the beginning of the rehabilitation stage, Oxfam staff visited the disaster-affected regions and invited representatives from the local government, local groups and the beneficiaries to work together in addressing their needs. This participatory approach also helped make the rehabilitation project more sensitive to local practices and needs.

- **Reduce the vulnerability of affected areas**

Oxfam Hong Kong believes that disaster mitigation refers to the capacity to forecast, manage and reduce the potential impact of natural threats. Many factors contribute to this capacity including social status, race, gender, age and experience. For highly vulnerable people, loss of life, disrupted livelihood activities and heavy damages in property erode their ability to recover even before another disaster hits their community.



Therefore, when Oxfam Hong Kong carries out relief work in the disaster affected areas, it focuses on the immediate needs of the people, the impact of the disaster, other potential threats, and how disasters can be mitigated. We aim to make our relief work responsive to the needs of the affected population; but at the same time, we also work with them in minimising future risks to the community. In the face of frequent aftershocks, mud-rock flows, barrier lakes and other geological threats, Oxfam Hong Kong staff made site visits and carried out risk assessments prior to implementing rehabilitation programmes.

The safety of our beneficiaries is always top priority and Oxfam Hong Kong has strict requirements in its rehabilitation projects.



For example, the temporary schools are built with materials that are able to withstand 7-magnitude earthquakes. Oxfam Hong Kong also follows building regulations from the Chinese government like constructing structural rehabilitation projects that could withstand 8-magnitude earthquakes.

At the same time, Oxfam Hong Kong works for the recovery of the local economy. The earthquake has affected the poorest townships and villages, as well as the better-off places. Unfortunately, some regions with improved economic conditions have become poor again due to the magnitude of the earthquake. This requires combining the rehabilitation of infrastructure such as roads, bridges and water systems, together with the recovery of aquaculture and agriculture sectors.

- **Help target groups resume their normal life**

Oxfam Hong Kong follows the two principles of "timeliness" and "swiftness" in both emergency response and rehabilitation. In order to save time and minimise the cost of operation, Oxfam tries to make purchases for emergency supplies as swift and as close to the affected areas as possible. For example, the materials for building temporary shelters and makeshift latrines were purchased from Guangzhou and Beijing, respectively.



It is estimated that at least two years are needed to complete the reconstruction of permanent school buildings. In the interim, however, there is still a need for places where students can continue learning. In order to enable students to resume school as quickly as possible, flexibility in planning is necessary. After consultations with the local authorities, Oxfam plans to construct temporary school buildings using shock-proof technology in four sites, namely Pengzhou City, Mianzhu City, Mao County and Li County. The project costs over HKD3.6 million in total and covers seven temporary schools that provide a safe learning environment for more than 3,000 students (see appendix 4 for details). Construction of the seven school buildings has been completed; and classes resumed in August.



- **Address the psychosocial needs of disaster affected groups**

The earthquake caused tremendous psychological trauma to survivors. Oxfam places high priority on the provision of counseling services to help people overcome their grief and other possible long-term effects caused by such a traumatic experience.



When Oxfam Hong Kong started emergency relief work, it supported Sichuan University Public Health School to provide counseling service in the emergency relief centre. Now, Oxfam Hong Kong has joined hands with local organisations with psychological counseling experience to attend to the needs of the disaster affected people. We launched psychological services in disaster affected regions, including villages and areas of ethnic groups where resources from the government are relatively limited.

- **Gender Equity**

For Oxfam Hong Kong, disaster management not only refers to providing emergency relief to people affected by disasters; it also contributes to building our knowledge about the vulnerability of a community to hazards and threats. Awareness about a community's vulnerability informs our work on disaster preparedness, disaster mitigation, and in developing risk-resilient livelihoods. A crucial element in disaster management is enhancing the opportunities for community participation in disaster management.



In past experiences, men usually dominate discussions and decisions with external parties, whereas women's suggestions are seldom heard, often resulting in inadequate and inappropriate emergency assistance.

Oxfam Hong Kong values the voices of both men and women. The suggestions from women have had a positive effect on the earthquake relief process. Mothers from affected groups voiced out the problem of their children being unable to sleep well. They requested Oxfam Hong Kong for mosquito nets, mosquito coils, and other insect repellants. In doing so, the mothers brought attention to a major public health issue. In Sichuan, endemic disease can easily spread through mosquitoes in the summer. It should be noted that the earthquake happened during the transition period when farmers shift from working in the wheat fields to the rice fields, and when mosquitoes breed quickly. Therefore, Oxfam Hong Kong immediately assessed the request and distributed mosquito nets and coils.

Also, as requested by the local women’s groups, Oxfam Hong Kong distributed sanitary pads in Sichuan and Gansu. A psychological service has also been provided for children and women.

- **Respect and protect the culture of ethnic groups**

At all times, Oxfam Hong Kong seeks to respect the local culture and religious beliefs. After the earthquake, Oxfam Hong Kong provided halal food to meet the needs of the Muslim population in the affected areas.

Oxfam Hong Kong will also launch rehabilitation projects in ethnic areas in Sichuan and Gansu Provinces. Local indigenous people will participate in project design and planning. Their ideas and comments will be thoroughly considered during the process. In addition, Oxfam Hong Kong has supported the rebuilding of Wudu Moba School in Wudu Region, Gansu Province, which will help the students from the Hui and Zang indigenous communities return to school shortly.



- **Accountability**

Oxfam Hong Kong has worked in accordance with the above-mentioned principles in humanitarian response. We hope to share our experiences with stakeholders, especially our donors. Apart from the release of our “One-Month-On – Review of Relief Work and Five-year Plan”, we also exercise transparency in our work by communicating to the public and donors how we use funds, through our website, emails, and even YouTube.

It is worth mentioning that in the relief and rehabilitation process, Oxfam Hong Kong requires all staff to provide three quotations prior to the procurement of resources. They need to ensure the quality of relief items, and monitor the implementation and distribution process so as to ensure that all relief resources reach affected groups, that the construction work is up to standard, and that donations are spent in the most effective way.

4. Public education

In order to sustain public concern for the disaster areas in Sichuan and Gansu Provinces, and to raise awareness of the public regarding the link between disaster and poverty, the Education Team of Oxfam Hong Kong arranged seminars for secondary schools, and organised interactive workshops in its “Interactive Education Center” in Hong Kong. Students from secondary and primary schools learned about disasters and reflected on the relation between disasters and poverty.

In addition, Oxfam Hong Kong joined hands with local schools to prepare greeting cards for students studying in the temporary schools supported by Oxfam Hong Kong. We hope that children in the earthquake-affected areas can feel the care and love from Hong Kong students.



**Annex 1: Oxfam Project Sites
(as of 11 August 2008)**

Sichuan Province: 12 cities and counties, 80 townships and villages

	County	Townships & Villages
Deyang City	Shifang	Bajiao Town, Hongbai Town, Yinghau Town, Luoshui Town, Qianchi Town (Shangyuan Village, Longjusi Village, Shungliu Village)
	Mianzhu	Guangji Town, Zhongxin Village, Hanwang Town, Jiulong Town, Tianchi Village, Qingping Village, Mianyuan Town, Zundao Town
Mingyang City	An County	XiuShui Town, Hongguang Village, Yingxin Village, Feishui Town, Xiaoba Town, Huangyang Village, Chaping Settlement Site, Sangzhao Town, Huisui Town, Gaochuan Village
	Jiangyou City	Majiao Village, Tongxiang Town, Liuhe Village, Jingyuan Village, Chonghua Town
Chengdu	Dujiangyan	Xiange Village, Zipingpu Town, Dujiang Village
	Pengzhou	Lichun Town, Xiaoyudong Village, Tongji Town
Aba Zang Qiang Autonomous Prefecture	Wenchuan	Weizhou Town, Wolong Town, Mianchi Village, Longxi Village, Caopo Village, Keku Village, Yanmen Village, Sanjiang Town, Yingxiu Town,
	Xiaojin	Rilong Town
	Li County	Shangmeng Village, Xiameng Village, Tonghau Village, Xiecheng Town, Muqia Village, Taoping Village, Zagunao Town, Puxi Village,
	Mao County	Kezhai Village in Fengyi Town, Shigu Village, Ledu Village, Chashan Village, Guangming Village, Dongxing Village, Weimen Village, Sanlong Village, Goukou Village, Baixi Village
Guangyuan City	Qingchuan County	Dayuan Village Suojia Village, Hauguo Village, Qiaolou Village, Qingxi Town, Guanzhuang Town (Guanshang Village, Magong Village, Suhe Village, Hongguang Village, Shiba Village), Qianjin Village, Quhe Village, Haoxi Village
	Lizhou District	Baizhao Village, Sandui Town,

Gansu Province: 7 counties, 35 townships and villages

County	Townships / Villages
Wen County in Longnan City	Bikou Town, Tielou Village, Zhongmiao Village, Liping Village
Tianshui Zhangjichuan County	Maguan Village, Liangshan Village, Zhangchuan Town, Huchuan Village, Longshan Town, Lianwu Village, Muhe Village, Dayang Village, Pingan Village, Zhangmian Village, Liubao Village, Chuanwang Village, Malu Village, Yanjia Village, Gongmen Town
Wudu Region	Anhua Town, Fengxiang Village, Maliu Village, Qiangjiawan Village, Guoping Village, Ganshuwan Village
Cheng County	Xiaochuan Town, Suochi Village, Shaba Town
Kang County	Chengguan Town, Changba Town
Dangchang County	Shawan Town, Guanting Town, Xinzhai Village
Li County	Chengguan Town, Baiguanpo Village

Shaanxi Province: 1 county, 10 villages

County	Townships / Villages
Ningqiang County	Dongba Village in Qingmuchuan Town, Guangpinghe Village in Guangping Town, Caojiagou Village, Shuiguanyin Village, Maozui Village, Damaoping Village, Houba Village, Jinshansi Village, Luoheizui Village, Wangjiahe Village

**Annex 2: Oxfam Hong Kong Relief and Rehabilitation Project Information
(as of 11 August 2008)**

Name of Project	Amount Approved (RMB)	Province
Project for Sichuan Earthquake Relief and Aid	10,000,000.00	Sichuan
Disease prevention project for disaster site in the Sichuan Earthquake	484,100.00	Sichuan
Sichuan “5.12” Earthquake Emergency Relief in Dujiangyan	122,700.00	Sichuan
Emergency Response in Wudu county and Wenxian county in Gansu Province	1,783,120.00	Gansu
Sichuan “5.12”Earthquake Emergency Relief -- Local Purchasing of Second Batch of Aid	150,000.00	Sichuan
Sichuan“5.12”Earthquake Emergency Relief -- Local Purchasing of the First Batch of Aid in Wen County, Gansu Province	180,000.00	Gansu
A Psychological Service Project for Earthquake Affected Groups in Wudu and Wenxian Counties, Gansu Province	56,648.00	Gansu
Emergency Response in Zhangjiachuan County, Tianshui in Gansu Province	829,520.00	Gansu
Emergency Response in Zundao Township of Mianzhu County in Sichuan Province	201,901.00	Sichuan
Provide 7 temporary schools to earthquake affected area in Sichuan	3,598,750.00	Sichuan
Emergency Response in Ningqiang County of Shaanxi Province	236,100.00	Shaanxi
Relief project to provide shelter for survivors of Sichuan Earthquake	3,160,000.00	Sichuan, Gansu
Relief aid to provide edible oil and rice for survivors of Sichuan “5.12” Earthquake	304,000.00	Sichuan
Community Recovery and Psychological Service for Earthquake Affected People in Suide Village Settlement Sites, Sichuan Province	194,100.00	Sichuan
Research on International Experience in Rehabilitation and Programme Planning after Wenchuan Earthquake	58,092.00	Sichuan, Gansu
Rehabilitation Needs Assessment and Advocacy on the Policy in the disasters regions of Gansu Province	72,665.00	Gansu
A Psychological Service Project for the Earthquake Affected Children and Women in Huating County, Pingliang City, Gansu Province	26,698.00	Gansu
Relief project to provide plastic fabric in Qingchuan County, Sichuan Province	282,750.00	Sichuan
Total	21,741,144.00	

**Annex 3: Supplies Distributed by Oxfam Hong Kong
(as of 11 August 2008)**

Emergency Relief Items	Quantity
Food:	
Rice	349 tons
Milk (250ml)	312,000 packs
Edible Oil (5L/bottle)	36,320 bottles
Flour	236 tons
Temporary Shelter and Related Items:	
Quilt	30,640 pieces
Bunk Bed	1,000
'Red-white-blue' woven plastic fabric (200m ² per roll, for temporary shelters)	8,259 rolls
Tent	2,750
Mosquito Net	13,000
Hygiene:	
Sanitary pads (day and night use)	9,560 packs
Woman Underpants	1,600
Soap	9,860 pieces
Washing Soap	1,500 pieces
Mosquito repellent	2,500 bottles
Mosquito coil incense	1,600 boxes
Florida Water (For mosquito repellent)	6,540 bottles
Others:	
Portable Toilet	64
Cookset	10,000 sets
Bags (For packing food)	110,000
Electricity generator	15
Emergency lighting	300
Torch	1,620
Battery	9,720

Annex 4: Details about the Approved School Projects in Sichuan

Name of School	No. of Classes	No. of Students	No. of Teachers	Gross Area (M ²)	Desks & Chairs for Students (sets)	Black-boards (no.)	Desks & Chairs for Teachers (sets)
Pengzhou City Beijunpring Primary School	18	932	45	994.83	922	15	40
Mianzhu City Chunyi Primary School	13	470	35	842.6	376	14	35
Mianzhu City Guangji Town Centre Primary School	12	258	25	944.8	270	13	25
Mianzhu City Guangji Town Qixiang Primary School (Replace the roof only)	8	204	12	1083.84	204	0	12
Mao County Nanxin Town Centre Primary School	16	789	68	2487.87	790	18	20
Li County Taoping Village Centre Primary School	8	263	28	1387.64	263	8	14
Li County Muqia Village Centre Primary School	7	175	20	976.62	175	7	10
Total :	82	3,091	233	8718.2	3000	75	156

Annex 5: Oxfam Hong Kong complies with the Code of Conduct and Standards in international humanitarian response**

Code of Conduct in Emergency Relief Work

As a member of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), Oxfam International abides by the “NGO Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief”. The principles of the Code are listed below.

1. **The humanitarian imperative comes first.**
2. **Aid is given regardless of the race, nationality or the suffering of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.**
3. **Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.**
4. **We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.**
5. **We shall respect culture and custom.**
6. **We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.**
7. **Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.**
8. **Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs.**
9. **We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.**
10. **In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.**

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project)

Apart from the above code of conduct, Oxfam Hong Kong also follows the Humanitarian Charter of the SPHERE Project, which was launched in 1997 by several international NGOs, including Oxfam International. SPHERE is based on two core beliefs. Firstly, all possible steps should be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of conflict and calamity. Secondly, those affected groups have a right to life with dignity and a right to assistance. Other minimum standards are as follows:

1. The right to life with dignity

Everyone has the right to life, to an adequate standard of living and to freedom from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The right to life also entails the right to have steps taken to preserve life where it is threatened, and a corresponding duty on others to take such steps. In addition, international humanitarian law makes specific provision for assistance to civilian populations during conflict, and the provision of humanitarian and impartial assistance when the civilian population lacks essential supplies.

2. The distinction between combatants and non-combatants

According to the distinction which underpins the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977, non-combatants are protected under international humanitarian law in international conflict. Civil war must not blind us to the need to distinguish between those actively engaged in hostilities, and civilians and others (including the sick, wounded and prisoners) who play no direct part. They are entitled to immunity from attack.

3. The principle of non-refoulement

No refugees shall be sent back to a country in which their life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion; or where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture.

Based on the above principles, Oxfam Hong Kong follows the minimum standards for relief and rehabilitation work, as below:

1. Participation

The disaster-affected population actively participates in the assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the assistance programme.

2. Initial Assessment

Assessments provide an understanding of the disaster situation and a clear analysis of threats to life, dignity, health and livelihoods to determine, in consultation with the relevant authorities, whether an external response is required and, if so, the nature of the response.

3. Response

A humanitarian response is required in situations where the relevant authorities are unable and/or unwilling to respond to the protection and assistance needs of the population on the territory over which they have control, and when assessment and analysis indicate that these needs are unmet.

4. Targeting

Humanitarian assistance or services are provided equitably and impartially, based on the

vulnerability and needs of individuals or groups affected by disaster.

5. Monitoring

The effectiveness of the programme in responding to problems is identified and changes in the broader context are continually monitored, with a view to improving the programme, or to phasing it out as required.

6. Evaluation

There is a systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action, intended to draw lessons to improve practice and policy and to enhance accountability.

7. Aid worker competencies and responsibilities

Aid workers possess appropriate qualifications, attitudes and experience to plan and effectively implement appropriate programmes.

8. Supervision, management and support of personnel

Aid workers receive supervision and support to ensure effective implementation of the humanitarian assistance programme.

**** Source:** 《不是天意—災害與貧窮》^{2nd} Edition, Oxfam Hong Kong, July 2008