

# **NO MORE**

## **INJUSTICE OF POVERTY**


**OXFAM IN LAOS**  
**COUNTRY STRATEGY**  
**2015-2019**



**OXFAM**



**ACCESS TO  
OPPORTUNITIES  
AND RESOURCES**



**A Laos in which all citizens, in particular women, marginalised and discriminated groups, are able to claim their right to access opportunities and resources to overcome all forms of poverty and injustice.**

## **OXFAM'S VISION**

With this vision, Oxfam in Laos will:

- Pursue a progressive agenda for lasting and positive changes. Oxfam will challenge and act on the root causes of poverty, vulnerability, inequality and injustice in Laos.
- Place gender equality at the centre of its programs, enabling women as well as marginalised and socially-excluded groups to gain power over their lives, and contribute actively to decision-making and change processes.
- Support empowerment and strengthen the voice of an emerging, representative, and progressive civil society promoting collective action of individuals and communities living in poverty, exclusion and discrimination, and challenging all forms of injustice.
- Support progressive agents and actors of change who seek changes in policies, practices, attitudes and beliefs, and hold duty bearers accountable.
- Leveraging its position as an international organisation, Oxfam will support global-local linkages and international action and solidarity.
- Renew its programming through building on key learning's, and focusing on innovative solutions that will address both old and new forms of poverty and injustice, and support people to claim their rights.
- Strengthen accountability to and participation of partners and beneficiaries in all its work.

## **PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE**





# CHALLENGE THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

## 1. PERSISTENT POVERTY AMIDST ECONOMIC GROWTH

### POVERTY & INJUSTICE IN LAO PDR

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a low-income country with a per capita GDP of USD 1,369 (2012), making it the poorest member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Poverty persists even as the country has experienced an annual average economic growth rate of 7% over the past decade, with per capita GDP doubling over the same period. Almost one third of the country's 6.8 million population still lives below the poverty line. Since 2000 the Government's aim is to graduate the Lao PDR from the ranks of the Least Developed Countries by 2020 while ensuring sustainable and equitable development.

Economic growth has been driven primarily by natural resource exploitation and exports, and foreign direct investment – mainly Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese – in hydropower, mining and plantation agriculture. This growth has had very little impact on the majority of poor people, who are mostly in the agricultural sector (comprising over 72% of workers, mainly subsistence farmers, gatherers of non-timber forest products, and fishers) and informal sector workers in the urban areas. Growth has in fact driven migration of rural population to urban areas, including Thailand. The lack of enforcement of labour standards creates increasingly exploitative, insecure, unprotected and most of all underpaid jobs. Women occupy the bulk of lower tier jobs.

In the early 1990s, Lao PDR embarked on transition and reform from a command economy to a modern, industrialised one. This development path, however, leans closely to a neoliberal model – growth-focused and driven mainly by capital-intensive, export-oriented industries and foreign investment, which is largely unregulated. The elite and foreign investors accumulate wealth at the expense of small enterprises, the majority of the people, and the natural environment. Communities and civil society are often not fully informed or consulted prior to investment, and are threatened and deprived of rights, decision-making power and voice to hold the corporate sector accountable. The focus on short-term economic gains does not necessarily support, even conflicts with, sustainable development.

Non-profit associations (NPAs) were officially permitted in Laos only in 2009, through the Decree on Associations. However, registration of NPAs has been extremely slow; and the majority of new registrations are at the provincial level, with the central level lagging behind. The few organisations and entities that currently constitute Lao civil society have very little capacity in political analysis and engagement, much less in functioning as an influential voice in the country. The role of civil society is still largely limited to service delivery and community development. Involvement in influencing policy and facilitating poor communities' voices in decision-making is at a very early stage of development. Access to information is still limited.

## **2. UNSUSTAINABLE GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT**

## **3. NASCENT CIVIL SOCIETY & INFLUENTIAL VOICES**

#### 4. GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS CRITICAL ISSUES

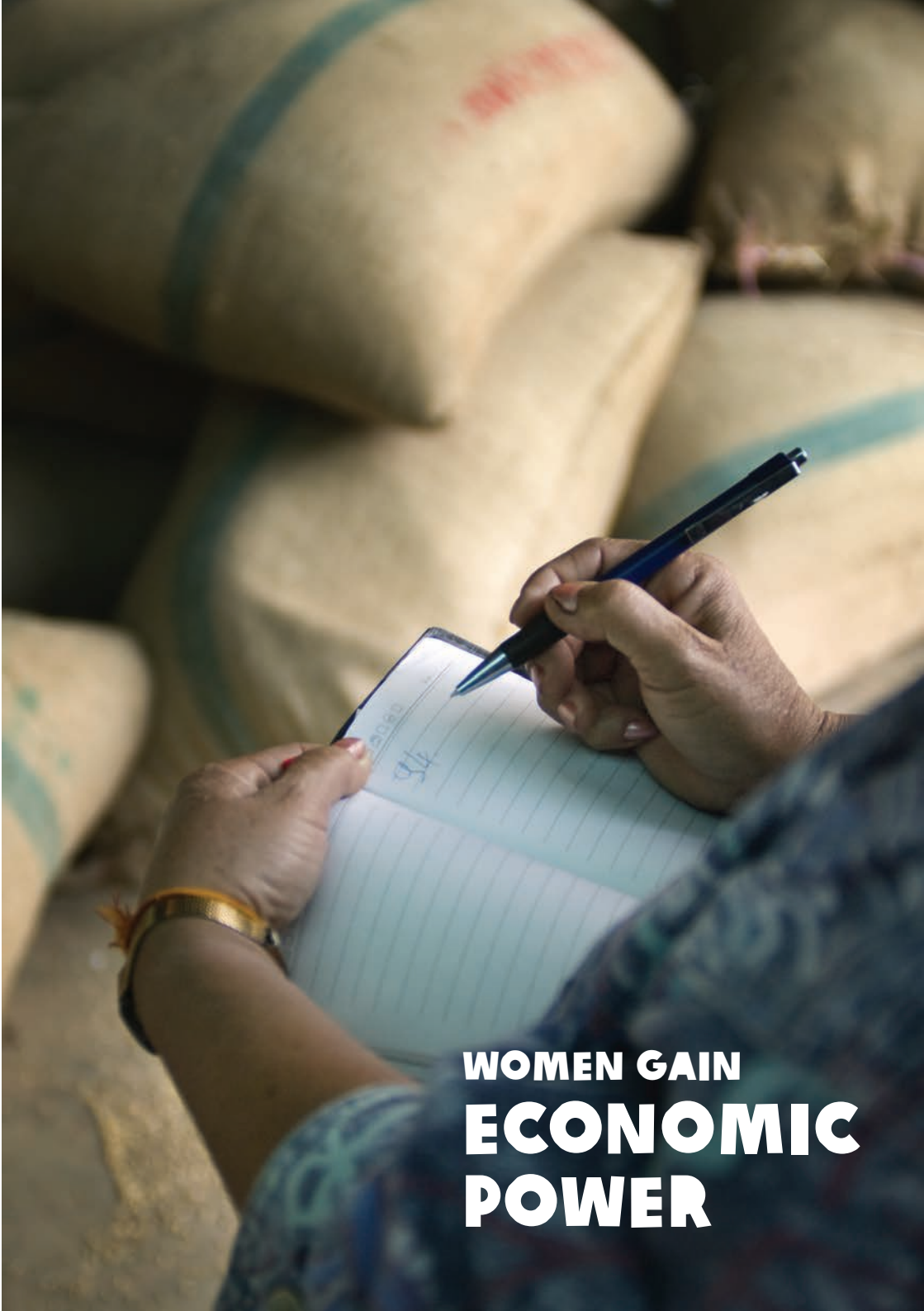
Women and girls remain the most disadvantaged in the country, as there is lack of significant progress in addressing women's rights, ensuring access to resources, participation in decision-making, and the enhancement of their political and economic leadership. Laws related to violence against women and girls are poorly enforced; and young people have limited access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health rights.

Women political empowerment remains a challenge at all levels; especially in the rural areas where only 2% of village heads are female. Women's economic empowerment is lacking despite a high rate of female participation in the labour force. Young women are particularly disadvantaged as they migrate to cities and neighbouring countries where they are at a high risk of exploitation and in low-paid or precarious jobs.

#### 5. VULNERABILITIES TO SHOCKS

Majority of the Lao PDR population live in the lowlands that are prone to floods, typhoons and droughts – the three main hazards that have caused an annual loss of about USD 30 million in infrastructure, properties and agricultural assets. Unexploded ordnances still affect 42 of the 46 poorest districts, causing food shortages and limiting agricultural and infrastructure development. Lao PDR is vulnerable to climate change-induced disasters due to its high dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and water and its low adaptive capacity associated with widespread poverty and weak technical and institutional capacity. Despite structural measures put in place by the government to address disaster issues, vulnerabilities persist.

Poor households, smallholders and informal workers, in particular ethnic minorities, are the most vulnerable groups. They are the most affected by economic investments that dispossess and displace communities, deplete community resources, and degrade the environment through unsustainable economic practices. They are also vulnerable to economic shocks triggered by regional and global factors.



**WOMEN GAIN  
ECONOMIC  
POWER**

# ADDRESSING A SITUATION OF POVERTY & INJUSTICE: OXFAM'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Oxfam's choices on how to address poverty and injustice in Lao PDR is founded on a theory of social change with the following key features:

## RECOGNITION OF PEOPLE'S BASIC RIGHTS

The recognition of poor people's basic rights is the foundation of positive social change. Oxfam is committed to building the capacity of poor people, especially women, to claim, enjoy and defend their basic rights.

## ACCOUNTABLE STATE & ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Sustainable and inclusive development is a common responsibility of the state – responsive, accountable and transparent – and an active citizenry acting together to amplify the voices of the poor, marginalised and excluded. A critical mass of the population, constituting a vibrant civil society, is a condition for holding the state accountable. This means active citizen action that demands genuinely participatory governance.

## STRUCTURAL & MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CHANGE

Poverty and injustice are multi-dimensional. They are driven by socio-economic and political dynamics occurring and intersecting at different levels – from the household and community, sub-national and national, to regional and global. Changing the lives of poor women and men requires linked and coherent action at all these levels.

## CHANGING POWER RELATIONS

Unequal power relations underpin an unjust social situation. Oxfam's work is therefore aimed at shifting power relations in favour of the poor.

## WOMEN AT THE CENTRE

Oxfam's analysis, strategic choices and action acknowledge the centrality of gender roles and women's rights. This requires gendered analysis, language and action and understanding of the differential impact of poverty drivers and development interventions on women.

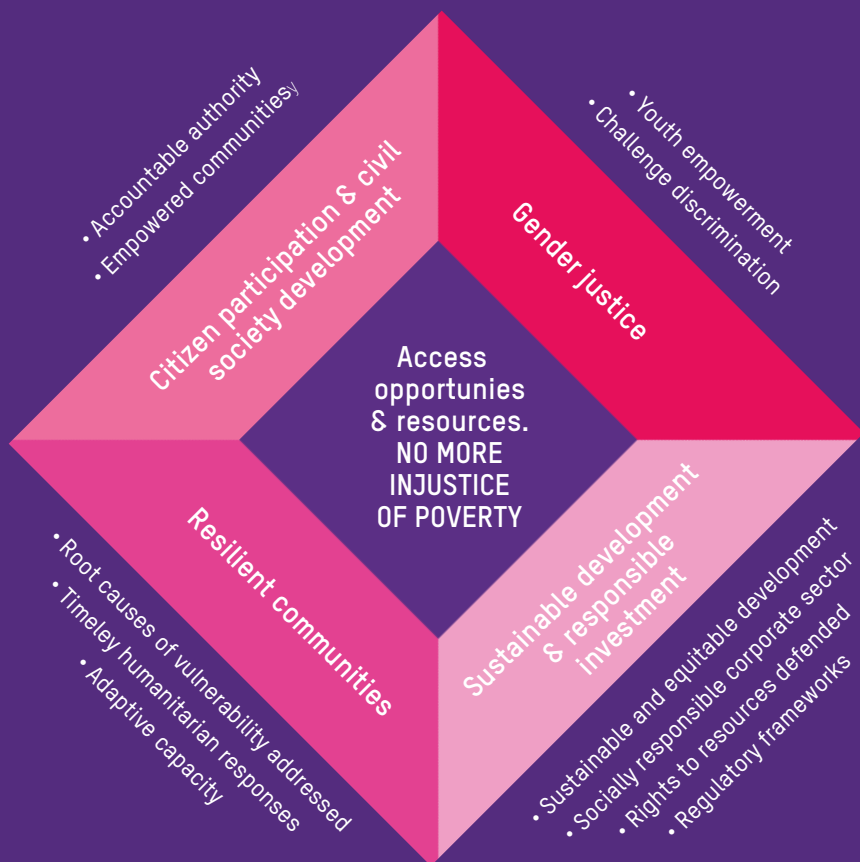
## LEARNING & COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE

Learning and accountability are essential if Oxfam is to be agile and adaptive in a situation of uncertainty and unpredictability. The multi-dimensional nature of change requires a mix of various strategies and a strong network of different actors at different levels working effectively with each other.



# STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES 2015-2019

Over the next five years, Oxfam in Lao PDR will seek to contribute towards realising substantive changes in the lives of poor women and men in the country through effective work on four interrelated strategic goals that put women in the centre of all our work:



We expect that our work on these strategic goals will contribute to the achievement of the global strategic goals of Oxfam International, i.e., the right to be heard, advancing gender justice, saving lives now and in the future, sustainable food, and fair sharing of natural resources.



## 1. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION & CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

### STRATEGIC GOAL:

Poor and marginalised women and men gain control over decisions affecting their own lives by exercising their right to freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly and protection of the law, take part in public policy and social and economic development processes both in their communities and nationally.

### Strategic Objectives:

1. Support a diverse, accountable and inclusive civil society that is better able to exercise its rights to organise, influence, access information, public participation, and equal justice
2. Support the empowerment of communities and representative organisations to demand transparency, fulfilment of the government's duties and responsibilities towards the poor, and respect for citizens' rights and the rule of law
3. Ensure more responsiveness and accountability from local and central authorities and corporate sector to the interests of the poor and marginalised and their representative organisations, and to increase their influence and benefits from policies and legislation of the government on resource allocation, and the policies and practices of the corporate sector



### **Key Strategies and Approaches:**

- Help build the capacity of communities and community-based organisations in critical analysis, engagement in sub-national decision-making processes on issues affecting their livelihoods, and influencing economic and investment policies.
- Support civil society organisations in building their capacity to engage and influence the government and corporate private sector at various in a manner that amplifies the voices of communities.
- Support the increase and intensification of civil society participation in relevant regional and global advocacy platforms, with priority on issues related to ASEAN economic integration.
- Contribute to increasing the government's and the National Assembly's ability and willingness to support participatory policy processes that enable poor rural communities, particularly ethnic minorities and women to influence planning processes.
- Support efforts to effect changes in the policy and legal framework around freedom of assembly and the fair implementation of the NPA decree and related legislation at the national, provincial and district levels.



## 2. GENDER JUSTICE

### STRATEGIC GOAL:

**Women and youth have the opportunity to organise collectively and mobilise around their specific needs and challenge their discrimination and denial of rights, and live free from violence.**

### Strategic Objectives:

1. More poor and marginalised women have secured greater and sustained access to, ownership, management, and control of productive resources, including natural resources, individually and collectively
2. More poor and marginalised women have the opportunity to organise and mobilise around their specific needs and challenge their discrimination and denial of rights and live free from violence
3. Youth, especially poor and marginalised young women, are empowered to raise their voices and claim their rights





### **Key Strategies and Approaches**

- Work towards women's economic empowerment and gender equitable livelihoods by enabling marginalised women and men to participate on an equal basis in formal economic decision-making processes and platforms and challenging/transforming existing economic power structures at the village level through critical engagement with district/provincial level authorities and relevant corporate sector entities.
- Enhance women's agency and political participation through gender and CEDAW capacity-building and promotion, strengthening legal platforms for addressing gender-based violence, and protecting women's labour and reproductive health rights.
- Mainstream gender in institutions and development processes and interventions and hold to account institutions that are responsible for dispensing and ensuring justice, protecting civilians and guaranteeing and protecting the rights of citizens.



### 3. RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

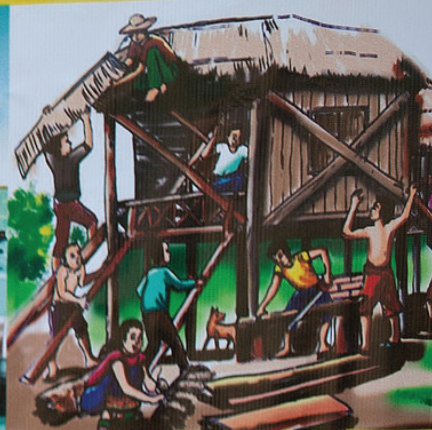
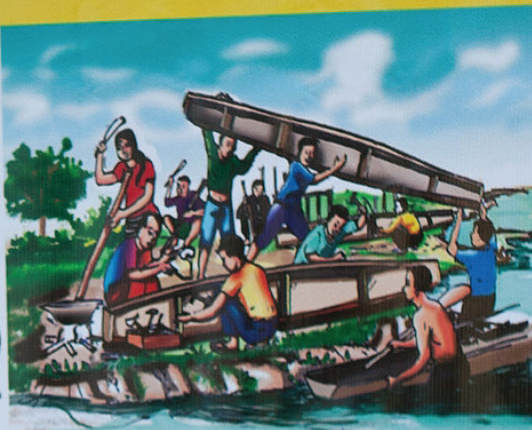
#### STRATEGIC GOAL:

Poor people, especially women, living in disaster prone areas are less affected by shocks, stresses and uncertainties, and thrive in the face of them.

#### Strategic Objectives:

1. To implement with partners high quality and timely humanitarian response that meet disaster affected people's (especially women) immediate needs and recovery needs whilst supporting their future preparedness and resilience
2. To support poor women and men in rural and urban communities to build their adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change, natural and man-made disasters
3. To influence the GOL, local governments, INGOs, the corporate sector, and international organisations towards more strategic disaster response that addresses root causes of vulnerability and builds poor people's resilience





ບັກກສະບຽງອາຫານ  
ແລະ ຊັບສິນທີ່ມີຄ່າ

ກະກຽມພາຫະນະຕ່າງໆ  
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ສາງເຮືອນໃຫຍ່ແຫນ້ນໜູນ  
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ໃຫ້ລະວັງແມງໄມ້ ແລະ າກັດຕຽມ

### Key Strategies and Approaches:

- Ensure high-quality humanitarian response by building capacity of partners, local government and other actors to undertake coordinated emergency responses that adhere to SPHERE standards, with particular emphasis on the promotion of women's participation and leadership.
- Support the development of resilient communities through appropriate and adapted disaster risk reduction planning and collaborative approaches linked to the government Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP).
- Support efforts towards greater and more effective learning and coordination across the UN system, disaster management working groups, corporate sector, and government networks towards better information and resource sharing, programming, and humanitarian response.



## 4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

### STRATEGIC GOAL:

Poor women and men of all ethnic groups benefit equitably from accountable, inclusive, sustainable development strategy and corporate sector investment in agriculture, natural resources and other relevant sectors, especially in the rural areas of the country.

### Strategic Objectives:

1. Women and men of all ethnic groups will have greater control of and capacity to defend their rights to land water and other resources, and gain greater voice and power to ensure that investment projects are transparent, accountable, responsible and supportive of the poor's right to sustainable livelihoods and overall wellbeing.
2. The GOL, from the central to the local level, will create an enabling environment for responsible and sustainable investment, including a coherent and comprehensive regulatory framework and effective governance, to ensure that the corporate sector is held to account on the legal framework and voluntary standards.
3. Corporate sector investment in agribusiness and other natural resources sectors will increasingly adopt and implement codes of conduct and other practices that meet international standards, national legal frameworks, and corporate social responsibility, responsible investment, and human rights, among others.





4. Alternative models of sustainable and equitable development, where smallholder farmers control and manage their own productive resources with improved access to markets, are supported and advocated by active citizens and civil society organisations.

**Key Strategies and Approaches:**

- Support the enhancement of civil society and community participation in decision-making, especially in building representative organisations, exploring and piloting sustainable development models that can serve as bases for advocating mainstream approaches and public policies, and the promotion of multi-stakeholder dialogues on development options.
- Raise partners and general public awareness on sustainable development models to foster a critical debate about choices and alternatives for development.
- Advocate with government for enabling pro-poor regulatory and policy environment for sustainable investments, anchored on evidence-based work and promoting a new mind-set on development.
- Encourage and advocate for inclusive and responsible investment initiatives through positive and critical engagement with local and central government authorities and the corporate sector towards increased investment in alternative models of development.
- With pioneer private companies, support sustainable initiatives of inclusive and responsible investment and use learning from those initiatives in the broader influencing work on alternative development models.

## OXFAM'S WAYS OF WORKING

Oxfam's primary role is that of a catalyst: influencing, facilitating, building bridges, brokering relationships, opening spaces for dialogue, engagement and negotiations among different stakeholders to empower and support the primacy of local agents of change.

As such, Oxfam's work will be informed by the following general approaches:

- Working with local partners as change agents to build capacity and enable, not to occupy their spaces
- Engaging in advocacy for both policy change and policy enforcement, ensuring linkages across community-local-national levels
- An integrated, "one-program approach" that links the work across the domains of change; at the heart of this "one-programme approach" is the commitment to put women at the centre
- A premium on learning and accountability through knowledge development, information sharing, and learning platforms
- A commitment to cost-effectiveness and responsible stewardship of limited resources in an increasingly resource-constrained world

Oxfam in Laos will work towards becoming One Oxfam in the country. This will entail changes in its programming, organisation, and learning and accountability towards greater commonality and coherence in management and systems.

## PARTNER- SHIPS

Oxfam will continue to work with existing partners that are relevant to its strategic objectives: In addition, Oxfam will develop a new strategic portfolio of partners, including corporate sector actors, academics, members of the National Assembly, and trade unions.

Partnerships will be with a range of government and civil society organisations, and at levels most appropriate to the strategies - whether at the community level, provincial, national, or even regional levels. Oxfam will also pilot work with new farmers' networks at the provincial level with a value-chain and food security focus in order to participate in dialogues with corporate sector actors and related government bodies

# WORKING WITH **LOCAL PARTNERS** AND CHANGE AGENTS



# WE CAN MAKE IT



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