

Oxfam México's Humanitarian Action Facing the September 2017 Earthquakes: Alliances and Influence from an Inequality Standpoint

Mexico has faced one of the greatest challenges in recent times. On September 7th and 19th of 2017, two strong earthquakes seriously affected the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Morelos, Puebla and Guerrero. Official numbers indicate that 250,000 people have been affected throughout the country.

Thirty-two years earlier, exactly on September 19th of 1985, Mexico City was struck by the earthquake that marked the collective memory and saw the birth of a civil society that got organized in the face of a disaster. Both events would forever change our course.

Today, Mexico is better prepared to face this sort of disaster, but there still are great challenges in coordination between authorities, the use of resources, the transparency in government decision-making and the corruption that permeates the response. The exclusions from 32 years ago still persist today: aid does not equally reach women, indigenous people, the elderly or rural communities and remote places. Structural inequalities are seen at the time of the disaster.

What has not changed is the tenacity with which the Mexican society has risen and united. Today, like then, the energy of people living in this country is visible.

Oxfam México lived these times with fear and frustration; but also with great strength, commitment and a lot of responsibility. This did not happen somewhere far from our eyes, our minds. This happened in our offices, in our neighborhoods, in our homes, to our friends, families, allies and colleagues.

Our organization has shown its resilience and capacity for action. We sent out evaluation teams to Oaxaca, Morelos and Puebla, and we have started implementing our response strategy, which will last 18 months.

Our response actions focus on three areas:

1.- Contribute to a coordinated response based on humanitarian principles in Oaxaca, Morelos and Puebla

2.- Promote active citizens and the empowerment of local actors, particularly women, so they become an integral part of the response, recovery and preparation of Oaxaca, Morelos and Puebla

3.- Support vulnerable families in their basic water and sanitation needs in Puebla and Morelos

These are some of the actions we carry out in each area:

1.- Contribute to a coordinated response based on humanitarian principles in Oaxaca, Morelos and Puebla

- Comprehensive evaluations of the needs of people who were affected, response strategy and distribution of funds to promote progress, inclusion and non-discrimination
- In-depth analysis with a gender perspective to ensure that the data are disaggregated by sex and age, and to have information on how to get humanitarian assistance, assets and resources, and participation in response-related decisions
- Analysis of possible situations of exclusion, violence / coercion and discrimination; and driving factors in order to design advocacy actions that contribute to preventing them in future disasters
- Train local and municipal authorities on basic humanitarian principles and standards
- Spread information on the rights of people affected and the obligations of authorities
- Help affected people to demand their rights, e.g. legal advice, support for transportation

2.- Promote active citizens and the empowerment of local actors, particularly women, so they become an integral part of the response, recovery and preparation of Oaxaca, Morelos and Puebla

- Spaces for public dialogue between authorities and communities in order to promote community participation in the response and recovery, and to ensure access to information for women, girls, men and boys in the communities
- Facilitate workshops and briefings on key issues (e.g. gender, protection, monitoring, human rights) in order to promote active citizens
- Awareness campaigns and distribution of informative materials

- Identify local partners, including women's organizations, in order to encourage their participation in response and recovery efforts, identify their opportunities for improvement and implement skill development plans
- Community skill development for prevention, such as risk analysis, risk maps, early warning systems, training and humanitarian impact, and public policy advocacy

3.- Support vulnerable families in their basic water and sanitation needs in Puebla and Morelos

- Analysis of water and sanitation needs in communities with temporary shelters in order to understand local practices
- Installation of provisional toilets for people who are sleeping in their backyards or in temporary shelters
- Installation of rainwater collection and storage systems in temporary shelters
- Building or rehabilitation of solid waste management, e.g. ecological toilets
- Promoting hygiene habits and distribution of hygiene kits if necessary
- Monitoring and feedback to ensure that water and sanitation facilities are used, and early detection of possible negative effects
- Support households in the installation of water and sanitation systems in new or repaired constructions

It is very important to understand that Mexico is, on the one hand, a medium-high income country with great capabilities and resources; but, on the other hand, it is one of the most unequal countries in the most unequal region of the world. It is also a country where women, the indigenous population and people with darker skin are still very discriminated against, which also means that disasters affect them more. Mexico also faces serious problems of corruption and impunity. All these factors combine to determine structural vulnerabilities to disasters that require a long-term approach.

In this context, loyal to our Humanitarian Action Program, our response is focused on influence so that aid reaches those who need it, following criteria of progressiveness; and to monitor how public and private institutions act at various levels. Monitoring closely how aid from the government and civil society is being distributed is urgently needed to ensure that people who have less of a voice and influence are not left behind. This is not something that many organizations with Oxfam's humanitarian experience and influence can do correctly, which is why we are focusing our efforts here.

We will work on the humanitarian response for the next 18 months together with local allies, national advocacy organizations, allies in the media and the general public. We will continue to report on the progress of our response as well as the donations that we have generously received from thousands of people in Mexico and other countries.

More information:

- [Response Strategy](#)
- [Press release: Inadequate and insufficient response from all three government levels to earthquake disaster in Oaxaca: NGOs](#)

- [Press release: Oxfam México and the humanitarian response: 7.1 earthquake in Mexico](#)
- [Positioning: Diagnosis and recommendations from Oxfam México facing the emergency due to the earthquakes](#)
- [#Epicentro. Guidelines for authorities, companies and private trusts for reconstruction with social, gender and human rights perspectives](#)
- [Oxfam México participates in #Epicenter as part of actions in response to the earthquakes](#)
- [#Epicentro. Coordinated reconstruction with no financial secrets](#)