WHERE WE WORK

In Kachin, Northern and Southern Shan, Oxfam works with local partners to improve the rights of rural communities to land and forests, investment practices on land and agriculture, and farmer’s access to quality seeds—some of the key factors that impact on food security for people in Myanmar. Oxfam and local partners also work to empower women and men economically and build their power in markets.

THE CHALLENGE WE ARE FACING

As Myanmar transforms into an economy with growing large-scale agriculture investment, people’s land rights, livelihoods and food security are increasingly threatened. Outdated laws, poorly implemented policies, and decades of conflict are affecting land and forestry rights and livelihoods of local communities in the ethnic areas of Myanmar, threatening the traditional rights of small scale farmers who don’t have legally recognized land titles. Women are often the most vulnerable because they have less access to important assets like land than their male counterparts, and face greater challenges in establishing their land rights.

Many farmers in Myanmar face difficulties in accessing good quality seeds – key to ensuring they can generate a sustainable livelihood from farming. Because of unregulated investments in high value crops, there is a heavy loss in seed varieties and their availability for small scale farmers. Private companies are also increasing small scale farmers’ dependence on their seeds, leading to a rapid extinction of traditional seeds suitable to local conditions. Stronger legal frameworks are needed to ensure that farmers’ and indigenous peoples’ rights over seeds are preserved.

While public investment in agriculture remains low, land-based private investments into Kachin and Shan state is growing, which can result in conflicts with local rural communities whose rights to land are unprotected. Weak laws and policies, and weak progress on sustainability within the private sector, have opened the door to exploitative investment practices and land grabs, threatening the livelihoods of rural subsistence farmers.

THE CHANGE WE WANT

The work on land rights and sustainable agriculture is part of Oxfam’s wider Economic Justice programme in Myanmar. It aims to raise awareness among women and men in affected communities so that they can raise their voices, claim their rights, and influence policy makers to address the challenges they are facing now, in relation to policies and legislation on land, and small scale farmers. At the same time, it promotes the economic empowerment of women, and helps build the power of local communities in markets.

Private sector actors investing in land and agriculture need to understand and implement international standards that improve their investment practices, but getting their involvement and cooperation can be a challenge.

Communities and government need to better manage risks related to private sector investment into land and agriculture, and improve rules and practices so that increased investment brings benefits for local communities.
LAND RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

THE PEOPLE WE WANT TO REACH

Marginalized communities and the civil society organisations and networks which support them, as well as private sector investors, government officials, members of parliament and policy makers.

WHAT WE DO

We work with local and national NGOs, the private sector and Government to develop evidence, raise awareness on these rights and investment challenges and how to mitigate them, and develop the capacity of local actors to advocate for change.

At village level, Oxfam and partners work to deepen understanding of communities and their leaders on land rights, raise awareness on land, forest, seed and agriculture policy and build skills to help communities influence decision makers in Government, Ethnic Administrations and private sector.

Communities are also supported in identifying and responding to gender challenges, and women are supported with small grants and saving schemes to improve access to finance, and income generation.

At township level, Oxfam partners are supporting engagement between community representatives and local and state government on farmland and related issues.

At state and national level, partners and Oxfam work together to reinforce the efforts of local and national alliances, to address policy and practice issues related to land and agriculture with influential stakeholders, including government, members of parliament and private sector.

OUR PARTNERS

Kachin Conservation Working Group; Alin Bannmaw Local Development Foundation; Metta Development Foundation.

OUR DONORS

Oxfam Hong Kong, Oxfam Novib and the Mekong Regional Land Governance Project.

The power of people against poverty

Members of community forest user group, working in nursery plantation, Kachin. Photo by: David Hempenstall/ Oxfam