

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

I PUT MY HOPES IN A BAG

Sometimes the best ideas – moments of genius – come when you least expect them. For Marie it came on a building site in Kigali, Rwanda.

Marie's husband died in 2007 and hard labour was her only choice to provide for her children. For many years she toiled, shifting bricks until her hands were red raw. But despite her efforts, Marie's six young children still went hungry.

'When I lost my husband, I was shocked and felt hopeless,' she says. 'I'd never had a job before – I relied on his income. I feared it was going to be the end of my life.'

Bag to the future

Her lifeline came when she looked around the building site, and noticed something for the first time. Marie started thinking about the thick rubble sacks. They were strong, made of woven material that kept its strength even when the sacks were no longer needed. Marie thought about how they could be used again...

But Marie's inspiration had begun long before that moment. It started three years ago when she joined a church self-help group supported by a Tearfund partner. Each group member saves RWF200 (20p) a week, so that – as the money increases – they can offer loans to start small businesses.

Marie took out a loan to buy a sewing machine, which she uses to stitch the sacks together to make reusable shopping bags. Her bag for life sales bring in RWF112,000 (£100) a month. With the money she saved, Marie has bought another sewing machine for one of her daughters.

Life sewn up

'I am no longer lonely,' Marie says. 'Jesus has done great things. I used to be extremely thin. Now I've started putting on weight and feel good about myself. I can afford to buy what I need – even good shoes. I used to wear dirty, torn flip-flops.'

Marie plans to buy an electric sewing machine and teach more women in her community to sew. Her innovation is a huge inspiration to her self-help group. They've been going house-

to-house to find the people in greatest need, giving them food, bedding and help with medical expenses. One local villager was particularly touched by their generosity: 'When I saw what the group were doing I got saved and joined their church,' he says.

News of its success has reached the local government. 'This group is helping people overcome poverty,' says one official. 'People are expanding their businesses. Paying health insurance was a problem before. Now it's not.'

'When people had problems they used to go to community leaders, but now they go to the church self-help groups. We are proud to see Marie's bags for life everywhere.'

PRAYER FOCUS:

- Thank God for Marie and how her life has been transformed, and how she is now encouraging others.
- Praise him for the impact of self-help groups and how they are helping many people in Rwanda to overcome poverty.
- Pray for the number of self-help groups to increase and for more resources to be available for this to become a reality.

A NOTE FROM...

'Shocking experiences, like Marie had losing her husband, can sink a person further into poverty. But when we're given a hand up, we can start to visualise a world beyond our affliction. When a person who thinks poverty is their only way of life starts thinking that it need not be, it's a great breakthrough. This is the church at its very best.'

Emmanuel Murangira, Tearfund's Country Representative for Rwanda

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: MYANMAR

To mark 50 years of Tearfund, we're sharing about 50 countries where we've worked, celebrating God's provision and power to transform, and praying for each of these nations. This week we're in Myanmar.

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia and is bordered by India, China, Laos and Thailand.

It's an incredibly diverse nation, with 135 official ethnic groups and 119 different languages. Sadly, this has often led to sectarian violence. Last year saw the exodus of hundreds of thousands of the Rohingya people to neighbouring Bangladesh, fleeing violence in Northern Rakhine State.

However, working through local churches, Tearfund is encouraging reconciliation between different groups.

Helping those in need

Thiri* is the pastor of a Baptist church in a rural village. There are just 30 Christian households in this otherwise Buddhist community of 130 families. Due to limited job

opportunities – resulting from climate change and the disappearing forest – many of the men have been forced to migrate in search of work.

In the past, relationships between the different faith groups have been strained, but this is changing. Pastor Thiri's church has opened an Early Childhood Development Centre, which is available to the whole community. Although a nominal fee is charged to cover the running costs, the church has been able to financially support those who are vulnerable.

Pastor Thiri recounts how there was a widow from the Buddhist community who was struggling. The church provided space for her child to attend the centre free of charge. Later she became ill, so the church helped her with some of the medical expenses.

'The Buddhist community began to wonder why the church was helping the family,' explains Pastor Thiri. 'Although they are not our relatives, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, so we must help.'

Hope and unity

Tearfund has been supporting local partner organisations in Myanmar since 1997. The work is varied, and includes everything from supporting faith groups addressing hidden issues such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), to encouraging key decision makers to address environmental issues and develop policies that favour the poorest.

We also support the church and local organisations to respond to the impact of natural disasters. Although the church is small and poor, there is great hope and unity. 'We know that we need to work together, and that God is with us,' says Pastor Thiri.

PLEASE PRAY:

- Pray that through our work, we will be able to shine a light on hidden issues such as SGBV.
- Pray for people affected by conflict; ask God to bring peace, restoration and reconciliation to this nation.
- Lift up Pastor Thiri and her church, that they will continue to build bridges within their community – and that this work will be reflected around all of Myanmar.

**Name has been changed for security purposes.*

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS EARTH OVERSHOOT DAY?

Wednesday 1 August was Earth Overshoot Day. It happens every year and it keeps getting earlier. So what is it? It's the day in the year when collectively the world's population have used up all the resources that nature can regenerate in one year.

This means that, as of 1 August, we are overusing the world's resources through overfishing, overharvesting forests and producing more carbon dioxide than our world can handle. We are using the equivalent of 1.7 planets to resource our global collective consumption.

What's the problem with that? Won't there be more resources next year anyway?

Well, it means that we are borrowing (although we are not actually giving it back) from future generations. Earth Overshoot Day is not fixed at 1 August; over the years, this day has shifted from the depths of winter and crept into the summer months.

This overborrowing from the world is already causing problems – it is making climate change and water shortages worse.

So what's the solution?

Ultimately, Earth Overshoot Day is a signal that we need to restore balance to our overextended world. Without wanting to oversimplify it, we can all take action to see Earth Overshoot Day move in the right direction. To achieve this, we need to act in our personal lives to cut down waste and overconsumption. For example, we could move Earth Overshoot Day back 11 days if we cut global food waste in half.

Alongside this, together we need to call on businesses, local councils, schools, organisations and our government to take action to help us shift the trajectory to a world where all people can flourish.

We could move the date to later in the year, if we all took action together.

Thank you so much for your support. Let's join together in prayer as we seek to be better stewards of God's creation:

Lord God,

Thank you for the beautiful gift of this Earth. Help each of us in our daily lives to treat your creation with the reverence and care it deserves. And move in the hearts of governments around the world, so that more action is taken to protect and restore the environment. Amen.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

-  Please lift up the people of Guatemala, who are trying to continue with their normal lives after a volcano eruption two months ago. Please pray for God's comfort for the families who lost loved ones as a result of the eruption. And pray for Tearfund partners as they respond to the needs of those in the affected area.
-  More than 38,000 people have been forced from their homes by violence in Plateau State, Nigeria. Many of these people now live in crowded camps with poor shelter and hygiene, and little access to food and safe water. Please pray for an end to the violence; that people's needs will be met; and that they will be able to return home safely.
-  Following the attacks in Southern Syria last week, the UN reported that over 270,000 people fled the region. The needs of those displaced as well as those returning to their communities remain severe. Please pray that aid will reach those most in need, and for a quick and peaceful resolution to the conflict.