

ONE VOICE

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

COUNTING THE COST OF FIVE YEARS OF CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN

A personal reflection from Andrew Horton who visited South Sudan in March 2017.

She stopped and looked away from the translator – she didn't want to tell him how hunger was destroying her life. She wanted to tell me.

I like to think I'm a pretty hardened interviewer. But when a woman who has barely anything to eat looks you in the eye and shows you how little flesh she has on her arms, it's difficult not to be taken aback.

There was no longer a language barrier. I had to pause the interview and gather myself. Mary wanted my attention, and I know why.

A bitter crisis

Millions of people in South Sudan are caught up in a humanitarian crisis, instigated by a bitter conflict which began on 15 December 2013.

Five years later the numbers tell a tragic story:

- More than 6 million people are struggling to find enough food.
- 1.91 million people have fled their homes to live in other parts of the country.
- More than 2 million people have fled to neighbouring countries (Uganda has over 1 million South Sudanese refugees).
- 383,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the conflict and a huge number of women subjected to rape.
- South Sudan remains the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers, with 113 having been killed during the conflict.

When I visited the country in March 2017, famine had been declared in some counties just a few weeks earlier. It was a privilege to be reporting on the crisis for Tearfund's East Africa Appeal.

Peace first

I asked the Tearfund team in Panyagor what they would like supporters in the UK to pray for the most. I was expecting them to say 'food', but the answer was unanimously 'peace'. Peace has to

come first. Peace means farmers can farm, livelihoods can be restored and people can hope again.

In September 2018 two of the country's rival leaders, President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar, agreed and shook hands on what they called a 'final, final' peace agreement.

But violent clashes have continued. Now the dry season is starting, cattle raiding is at its peak, with violent attacks increasing. Last month more than 150 women and girls in the northern area of Bentiu came forward to seek help after they were raped or suffered other forms of sexual violence. This shows the brutal reality that remains for many in South Sudan.

While the hope is that lasting peace will come, expectations are low for many people in South Sudan, because of the number of failed peace agreements and the ongoing violence. And yet for people like Mary, we will continue to be there – to help build peace and to pray continually.

Let's pray

Father God,
You have told us how good peace is:
'How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!'
We pray for this unity – this peace – to come to South Sudan.
For five long years conflict has reigned.
But we ask for your peace –
for people to feel safe, for the hungry to be fed,
for weapons of war to be replaced with tools for transforming lives.
Lord, hear our plea to you today.
In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

A NOTE FROM...

'Generations of South Sudanese have grown up in conflict. While the situation remains fraught and people continue to struggle, the new peace deal brings some hope to the world's youngest nation. We pray that the leaders of South Sudan will have wisdom, understanding and humility as they work to implement this new agreement.' **Sabrina Derham, South Sudan Team**

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: ZIMBABWE

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 Zimbabwe.

Since gaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has faced some serious challenges. Years of erratic rainfall have led to both droughts and flooding, hampering food production and damaging homes and property.

Major economic problems, including hyper-inflation and deflation, have discouraged investment in the country. Industry in Zimbabwe has crumbled – making the problem of poverty even worse.

Meanwhile, HIV is a huge and persistent problem, and has left the nation with the highest rate of orphans anywhere in the world.

Tearfund has worked in Zimbabwe for more than three decades. We operate through several partner organisations and local churches, including ZOE (Zimbabwe Orphans through Extended Hands), who have helped nearly 14,000 orphans over the years .

Stepping in to help

Traditionally, orphans would be cared for by their extended family. However, the difficult economic and social conditions in Zimbabwe have left relatives struggling to cope. ZOE believes local churches have a vital role to play.

Often, these churches have a desire to care for orphans, but do not know how to help. This is where ZOE steps in.

When a church leader approaches ZOE for help with caring for orphans, they first ask the pastor to gather all the church leaders in the area. ZOE staff then envision the leaders together about the biblical message to care for orphans.

The leaders go back to their churches and share the vision. They ask those in their congregations who have a heart for orphans to become volunteers. ZOE then trains these church volunteers to visit and support families who are caring for orphans.

A more secure future

Churches and community members are also encouraged to speak up and advocate for orphans, for example protecting orphan families' inheritance rights, and helping orphans get the birth certificates they need for accessing other services.

ZOE also helps orphans and caregivers find ways to make a living. They provide them with small livestock (for example goats, chickens or rabbits) and train family members in animal management.

They also train caregiving families to grow crops and offer vocational training to orphans in a trade of their choice, setting them up for a more secure future.

PLEASE PRAY:

- Pray for the church leaders of Zimbabwe – that they would have courage and wisdom in their work. Pray for servant leadership, for God to reign over the nation and for every Zimbabwean to play their part in rebuilding the country.
- Lift up orphans across Zimbabwe and pray for God's comfort and protection for them.
- Give thanks for our partners as they seek to strengthen the church and the role it plays in a challenging situation. Pray God will encourage them to support the needs of the most vulnerable.

Missed articles in this series? Find them at www.tearfund.org/pray

RAINBOW EDUCATION

Apartheid ended nearly 25 years ago, but South Africa is still a deeply divided nation. A couple of church ministers have a plan that could truly unite the country.

When South Africa had its first multi-racial elections in 1994, Desmond Tutu proudly declared it to be a 'rainbow nation' – a multitude of races and peoples living together in peace. While this is still true, it's also a nation seriously divided. This was brought home to Phil and Rachel Bowyer, when they tried to get fibre broadband for their home.

'The guy in the shop showed us the map of where it was available,' says Phil. 'On one side of the freeway, it was fibre city, on the other side, nobody got fibre. And of course, on one side, that's where the people with wealth, largely white, lived. We joked that it was like a "fibre Apartheid." And that's kind of how it is with so many things in South Africa – so much more than broadband.'

For the nation to close the continuing divide and move forward, Phil and his wife Rachel believe the next generation need to step out of their ghettos and get their heads and hearts together. And they've got a plan for how that can happen...

Phil and Rachel are both church ministers. Phil was working for Tearfund in the UK when he heard the calling for the two of them and their child to go overseas.

Stepping out

'I really felt God was challenging me to stop speaking about poverty and justice and actually go and do something,' says Phil. 'I said, "Well, I'm not prepared to go unless you tell me where." And within three minutes, somebody approached me about this opportunity in South Africa. So I hadn't really got a leg to stand on after that.'

It was a clear instruction. However when they asked for further guidance, God just seemed to say 'don't do anything.' As they settled into their new home, north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, it became clearer what this meant.

'God was actually saying "Don't do anything new. Go and find out what Christians are already doing in the city. Then it'll become clear what I want you to do." So that was what we did. So for eight months we just went and found out what God was doing for individuals in the city.

'Almost everybody we met, that was doing important work, said to us, "We're the only people doing this kind of stuff in the city and we're ready to give up." So we were able to say to them "trust me: you're not the only people doing this." And it was at that point when God said "Right, get those people in the same room, and I'll do the rest".'

'So for the last ten years, we've been gathering people together to share their knowledge, their skills, to learn from one another, as adults.' Together, they founded Soul Action, getting the change-makers in the region to work together and achieve more. However, Phil and Rachel have

got a vision for something larger still...

Across the great divide

'Living in South Africa, it doesn't take long to work out we're an incredibly segregated society,' says Phil. 'People of a certain economic background still live in certain areas, in government-built housing or shacks. White South Africans often live in gated estates with barbed wire fences or electric fences. So our homes are segregated.'

'Something is broken here: we're not together,' says Rachel. 'That division starts at school. We are the product of our education system, and our education system is divided.'

And so, a couple of years ago, Phil and Rachel started hatching a vision for a new kind of 'rainbow' schooling for the rainbow nation.

'We were chatting to some friends, one of them from Northern Ireland,' remembers Rachel. 'They have also had experience of a segregated society. And we started asking, "What would it be like if we had a school which was integrated and inclusive and where diversity was actually celebrated?"' The couple decided to find out. They travelled around the world to find some examples of a more inclusive way of doing school.

'We've travelled the world, and looked at models of education, ways of doing school that are bringing freedom in areas like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem – where they're bringing together Jews, Muslims and Christians. We saw what a rich culture can be developed when we begin to appreciate one another's faiths, and celebrate each other's perspectives.'

With a world of great examples under their belt, they launched an organisation called Gamechangers. 'Starting with three-year-olds, we are in the process of establishing a 'game-changing' school where children from a whole range of diverse cultural, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds can come together to fulfil their potential.'

One for all

Rather than seeing the children from poorer backgrounds 'holding back' the more privileged kids, Phil and Rachel believe the diversity will actually enrich everyone's education.

'We believe a 'trans-cultural' school will foster collaboration, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, innovation and intelligence,' says Rachel, a trained teacher. And it seems that the couple are not alone in wanting something like this.

'Since we've shared this, parents have been weeping,' says Phil. 'They've been saying things like "Why has nobody thought of this before?"'

One issue was the cost for poorer families: most schools in South Africa are fee-paying, keeping the poorer children out of the better-funded schools. Phil and Rachel's answer was a sliding scale of fees, with richer families paying more and effectively subsidising the others.

'Not one single parent in all of those 200 stakeholders has questioned the idea of paying more,' says Phil. 'They have more resources; why wouldn't they pay more?'

As well as enthusiastic interest from parents, they have had offers of land for the first school to be built on, along with plenty of other promises of support. Now it's a matter of bringing their incredible dream into the realms of reality. They have big plans, but not just for the school. 'My ultimate vision would be that we would no longer be known as the most consistently unequal country in the world,' says Phil. 'We would be equal, and integrated. That's what I believe God wants for South Africa. And education is the way to begin that.'

'I think the adults haven't made a great job of it,' he adds. 'So let's give the kids a go. And that's what Jesus talks about; unless you become like children, the kingdom of God isn't going to happen. Unless you start thinking and imagining the world like children do, then his kingdom won't come.'

Let's pray

Thank you God for the peace there is between races and peoples in South Africa. Please bless the work of Phil and Rachel, and others like them who are seeking to bring the country together more fully, to become a true 'rainbow nation'.

Amen

Phil and Rachel Bowyer are part of Tearfund's Inspired Individuals programme, which develops and connects new leaders who are aspiring to live like Jesus and whose dreams have the potential to transform some of the most needy places and people in the world.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Thank you for praying for the recent Yemen peace talks held in Sweden. A ceasefire has just been agreed for the port city of Hodeidah, a main lifeline for two-thirds of people in Yemen. Praise God for this, and pray that the ceasefire will hold, as this would be a crucial first step in improving access to food and medical supplies for many Yemenis.



This week saw the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Lift up all those who are not treated with the dignity that human life deserves. Pray for more of God's kingdom to come, so that people the world over can enjoy a life in which they're able to thrive.



Give thanks for this week's COP 24 climate talks in Poland. Our team was there to make sure the needs of vulnerable communities are not only remembered, but prioritised. Pray that those in power will follow through on their promises to limit climate change.