

ONE VOICE

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

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FGM

Warning: this story contains mentions of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and associated health problems.

'It [FGM] is a tradition here and we are proud of it,' says Anita*, a mother of three from Mali. This is a view that's all too common in the many countries around the world where FGM is still practiced.

However, while people like Anita know that FGM is a tradition, they can lack the knowledge to make an informed decision as to whether it is a healthy tradition.

In reality, not only is FGM a frightening and traumatic experience for many girls and women, it can have many negative consequences on their health: pain when urinating, recurring infection, fistulas (a hole between the vagina and rectum) and life-threatening complications during childbirth to name just a few.

Bringing knowledge

Tearfund partner Association Protestante pour la Santé au Mali (APSM) is working to raise awareness among communities, running workshops to make sure people know the facts about FGM, and inspiring them to join the fight against it. Anita herself attended one of these workshops, and changed her view completely as a result.

'I never knew the consequences of FGM could be so terrible,' said Anita after the workshop, tears in her eyes. 'We were told before that it was good, but never that it was bad. Today, I have left my ignorance behind. I will not subject any more of my daughters to this.'

Bringing healing

For those who have already suffered as a result of FGM, life can be lonely. Their resulting health problems, such as fistulas, can mean they are rejected by their communities. In some places, there is a stigma attached to speaking out against FGM.

To help women affected in this way, our staff are running support groups where survivors can talk openly and build supportive relationships, providing them with long-term fellowship as well as the strength to heal emotionally and speak out.

'I am so happy for this opportunity to be with everyone,' says Pauline*, one of the women to benefit from these sessions. 'We have danced, we have cried, it really feels like everyone here knows me. I already feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.'

PLEASE PRAY:

- Tuesday 6 February is the International Day for Zero Tolerance for FGM. Pray that this will be a powerful week in the fight against FGM, with new ground gained against this practice.
- Pray for God's love and protection to surround Anita, Pauline and all those women and girls affected by FGM today.
- Praise God and pray for APSM and the many other Tearfund partners doing all they can to tackle FGM and reach out to those affected. Pray that the global church will be moved to wake up to this issue, and fulfil its potential to help bring about an end to FGM.

*All names have been changed to protect identities.

A NOTE FROM...

'As this story shows, Tearfund's staff and partners are committed to playing our part in preventing and responding to FGM. Thank you for joining us in prayer. Your support makes a huge difference to us.'

Sabine Nkusi, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Team

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: BOLIVIA

Bolivia is one of South America's poorest countries and it is the indigenous people groups, who comprise almost 60 per cent of the population that are most impacted. Indigenous communities are less likely to have access to education, health services, and water.

Many Bolivians are subsistence farmers, scratching a living from a land that is becoming more and more challenging – and water is crucial.

Carmelo and Virginia Agreda live in the village of Tipa Tipa in Bolivia's Mizque province, which is facing this challenge. 'The more water we have... the more we can plant and produce,' says Virginia. 'Instead, every year, we get less and less rain.'

In the 1970s, Carmelo's father joined some other villagers and worked tirelessly to build a channel to bring water into the area. This boosted local farming production and brought new life to the village, but by the turn of the century declining rainfall meant the channel was not bringing enough water, and there was no longer clean enough to drink.

A new water tank was needed.

Power of community

Tearfund's partner, Unión Cristiana Evangélica (UCE), was working with the church in Tipa Tipa, encouraging them to work with their community to tackle their challenges. Having identified the need for a new tank, UCE helped the community leaders to find a solution.

For many poor communities, their own resources are limited. But UCE showed the Tipa Tipa community how to also identify and access local government resources. So, they approached the mayor in Mizque, the capital of the province.

'We went to him and said we needed a water tank,' says Carmelo. 'He said there wasn't budget but, if we provided labour, he would get funding. So that's how we did it. And the church and the community are very happy.'

The water tank brings hope to the community. And the church has also grown, as people in the community have seen that the church is concerned for their material needs as well as their spiritual ones.

Victor Vaca, President of UCE, adds, 'The authorities now value the church, and the activities and work carried out by the church. That fills us with joy, because the church lives out through this a testimony to glorify God.'

The church holds the answer

In a country where almost half the population live in extreme poverty, the church has a vital role to play in creating flourishing and resilient, unlocking their God-given potential.

Bolivia faces a range of other challenges as well. Tearfund partners are tackling the high rates of child labour and human trafficking, supporting and protecting children and adolescents at risk. Our partners are training parents and teachers to prevent youngsters dropping out of school, improve the quality of education and train teenagers in crucial life-skills.

We are also supporting women in communities that have destructive gender attitudes, and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence. Our partners teach communities about healthy relationships within the home, raise awareness and seek to improve laws to protect women and children from violence.

These are all areas of great need, but we know that the church holds the answer. Please keep praying with us for Bolivia.

- Praise God for the church in Bolivia and for the leaders engaging with us to transform their communities. Pray for courage and perseverance as they seek solutions to the challenges their communities face.
- There are 850,000 child labourers working in Bolivia. Please pray for our partners tackling this huge problem and for the children caught up in situations of child labour.
- Pray for effectiveness in challenging gender attitudes and teaching about healthy relationships. Pray also for the work being done to provide spiritual and psychological support as well as a safe refuge for girls who have been abused.

*Last year The Guardian shared the story of the Tipa Tipa community. You can find it at...
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2017/feb/06/bolivia-villagers-drought-tipa-tipa-in-pictures>*

GARDENERS' QUESTIONS: MYANMAR EDITION

With the refugee crisis dominating Western media, there aren't many good news stories coming from Myanmar. Yet, in the communities that Tearfund supports, some amazing things are happening. In one small community, people's lives have been transformed by some simple advice on growing tomatoes...

Ah Wah, a 52-year-old farmer, lives in a tiny village in the Northern Shan State, Myanmar. There are roughly 30 households, most of whom survive by growing rice and corn.

Tearfund partner World Concern started working in the village in 2015, offering training in agriculture, livelihoods and health.

'Everyone depends on this land for food,' Ah Wah tells us. 'The training made me think about how we need to consider protecting our land for future generations too.'

Seeds of an idea

Ah Wah recounts how, ten years ago, a school teacher assigned to the village grew tomatoes. 'No one was interested at the time, so we didn't grow anything in the winter or summer seasons, when we could have been growing tomatoes.'

However, World Concern's training sparked the memory in Ah Wah, and an idea was born. He told two of his friends and they started to grow tomatoes on a small plot of land.

They managed to make a small profit, but experienced some problems with growing techniques, and they quickly realised that there was a lot more that they needed to learn about growing tomatoes.

Question time

To build his knowledge, Ah Wah went along to some home gardening training provided by World Concern. 'We gained more knowledge and techniques,' he says. 'We also requested help from the technician, who came to our farm and gave lots of suggestions.'

'At first, we thought that bearing as much as fruit as possible would be good. One tomato plant can bear up to 3.2 kg of fruits, but the technician suggested that 2.4 kg of fruits will be the ideal weight per plant. He also gave us advice on how to space the plants out. To start with, we found it hard to accept the suggestions, but we tried them out and we found that our crops improved.'

'We also learnt how to protect our tomato plants from insects and fungus, how to make natural pesticides, and natural fertilisers and compost. All these things have really boosted our yield, and we have been able to handle them with little expense and easily available materials.'

Organic growth

Two years on from the training, Ah Wah and his friends have increased their plot to 2.5 acres and are making a good profit. In the past, they had to transport their tomatoes 15 km to the nearest market – but now the traders come to them.

Gradually, through our partner's support and the example of Ah Wah and his friends, other people in the village have become interested in home gardening. Ah Wah has plans for further expansion, and is now learning about rotating crops and growing potatoes and chives.

'We hope that our village will produce many organic products in the future,' he says. 'We faced many difficulties, but we are overcoming them with the help of World Concern.'

A prayer for Myanmar:

Father God,

We lift up the nation of Myanmar. Thank you for the work you are doing there, and for the people there who are spreading your transformational love.

We pray for all those there who are suffering due to political unrest, conflict and poverty. We pray in particular for the Rohingya community, hundreds of thousands of whom have been forced from their homes. Please lay your hand of comfort and protection upon them.

Thank you for Ah Wah and his community; we pray you continue to enrich their lives and lift them out of poverty. Thank you also for World Concern – please strengthen their staff and multiply their work.

Lord, let there be peace and prosperity in Myanmar, and let your kingdom come.

In Jesus' name, Amen

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Praise God that Zambia's cholera outbreak is starting to be contained. Since October, 78 people have died, but the government says numbers of infections are now reducing.



Following the disputed election and subsequent inauguration of president Hernández on 27 January, there have been widespread protests in Honduras. Please pray for the protection of our colleagues and partners there, and pray that the political crisis will be resolved peacefully.



Please continue to pray for the Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh. Pray specifically for protection during the upcoming monsoon season.