

# ONE VOICE

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

## **THE RESTORING LOVE OF GOD**

**Lent is just around the corner, and at Tearfund we've been reflecting on the theme of restoration – how God takes the ashes of our brokenness and forges a crown of beauty. There are few places in the world where brokenness is more apparent than in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).**

It's a country of cruel contrast: it's one of the wealthiest nations on the planet, with an abundance of gold, diamonds, copper and oil; yet, because of unjust exploitation, ethnic conflict and corruption, most of the population live in abject poverty.

Deep in the dense forest that covers most of the country, live the Mbuti pygmies – an ethnic group so marginalised that even some development agencies have abandoned them.

'The modern day pygmy has gone through generations of being victimised, oppressed and degraded,' says David McAllister, Tearfund's Country Director for the DRC. Their relationships with other people groups in the DRC are in desperate need of restoration; many consider them to be subhuman.

### **Paid in poison**

For Matunda, a mother of three, the only way to get any food is to work on a nearby farm. She toils in the intense heat, but doesn't get a share of the produce. She is paid in scraps – a handful of cassava leaves and yams.

Her young family only eat one small meal a day. It's barely enough to survive.

The harsh diet of boiled yams and cassava leaves is not good for the family's health. Eating too much cassava can result in severe illness, as it contains trace amounts of poison.

'We don't have the tools to cultivate our land,' Matunda explains. 'I feel incredibly sad when I don't have anything to give the children, but I don't know where to get more food.'

### **True value**

But there is hope, because the church is here, bringing God's restoring love with them.

'We need to work with people to change mentalities, and for that reason we work with the church,' says David McAllister. We know at Tearfund that, as well as helping people with their physical needs, it's just as important to restore spiritual fullness.

Through the local church, we're reaching out to Matunda and the other pygmy families – helping them acquire the tools and skills they need to grow their own food. And, throughout this process, we'll be helping them understand their true value as loved and created by God.

There is so much that needs to be done to help restore the lives of the Mbuti pygmies. But we know that, through the relentless love of God, all things are possible. Please continue to pray for this work.

### **PLEASE PRAY:**

- Pray that attitudes towards the Mbuti pygmies in the DRC will change, and that all will begin to see them as God sees them. Pray that the love that the church is bringing will break through.
- Pray for the success of the projects aiming to end hunger among the Mbuti pygmies. Pray for Matunda and other families like hers; ask for God to comfort and strengthen them.
- Pray for the DRC as a whole: that there will be a total end to the corruption and conflict that has blighted it for so long, and that all who live there will be able to share in its wealth.

*Based on a story first published in **Tear Times**.*

Thank you for your prayers. If you feel led, there are a number of other ways you can join with us this Lent. We have a series of Lent devotionals at [\*\*www.tearfund.org/lent\*\*](http://www.tearfund.org/lent) on the theme of restoration, or you could take on the Mean Bean Challenge at [\*\*www.tearfund.org/meanbean\*\*](http://www.tearfund.org/meanbean), eating nothing but rice and beans for five days to raise funds to support people like Matunda. Or, if you feel moved to support us financially, you can donate to our Lent appeal at [\*\*www.tearfund.org/pieces\*\*](http://www.tearfund.org/pieces) Thank you.

### **A NOTE FROM...**

'It's difficult for us even to imagine the hardship that people like Matunda go through. All she wants is a good life for her family. Thanks to the church – and your prayers – this might finally become a possibility.' **Kerena Sheath, Global Fundraising Team**

## **FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: BRAZIL**

*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 Brazil.*

**Brazil is the largest country in South America, with 196 million people, and is one of the world's largest economies. Yet it exhibits extremes of wealth and poverty that make it one of the most unequal countries in the world.**

Tearfund has been supporting projects in Brazil for more than 30 years. During the 1990s, much of the work centred around children at risk, but our main focus in recent years is north-east Brazil, where severe drought intensifies hardships and encourages migration.

'This is the poorest part of our country,' says Serguem Silva, who leads Tearfund's work in Brazil. 'And we support the poorest people there.'

### **Empowering women**

Often those impacted the most by poverty are women. Not only are conditions tough, but women traditionally have few opportunities for earning an income or having a voice.

Tearfund's partner Diaconia set up a project to help some women in this area achieve economic success and become more empowered socially and politically, by mobilising women to come together in women's community groups.

Project staff trained the women in new sustainable and environmentally friendly ways of farming. They also taught them how to add value to their produce by making fruit pulps, sweets, cakes and bread. They helped the women set up community businesses, giving thorough training in business management, production and marketing, as well as helping them gain access to markets.

### **Baking a difference**

Alina and her community in Carnaíba, Pernambuco state, have seen an amazing change in their situation.

'Visitors came from other community associations and challenged us. They explained how we could improve our situation and earn our own income,' she explains.

Suitably inspired, Alina and her fellow residents decided to set up a bakery. With help from Diaconia, the business took off. 'This practical help has given us confidence that we can be successful,' says Alina.

Young mother Lucinete, 22, is part of the bakery team. 'My husband Joaias is away in São Paulo working as a mason's assistant because of the drought,' she says. 'Baking means a lot to us

now.' She proudly recounts that people in Carnaíba wait for them to arrive each morning with freshly baked bread.

The team produces on average an impressive 250 loaves a day.

### **Relationships transformed**

These projects have enabled women to increase their income significantly, and some families have been able to buy items such as fridges and motorbikes. A few have been able to pay for their children to access higher education.

The fact that women are now contributing to the household income has changed relationships within families. As the men saw the benefits to their family, they began to support their wives in their new ventures.

Serguem gets excited about the stories of individuals whose lives have been turned around when circumstances seemed impossible. 'Our work impacts all areas of life and as we impact one life, that impacts family life and community life,' he says. 'My passion is to involve others – the local church, the local community, donors. I encourage all to transform the poorest lives. We can all be part of the solution.'

### **Let's join Serguem and our staff and partners in praying for Brazil.**

- There are 20 million people living in absolute poverty in Brazil. Praise God for every person and family that has received training and help to move out of poverty and pray for Tearfund and our partners as we work with communities.
- Economic inequality is often associated with violence and in Brazil there are nearly 60,000 murders every year. Please pray for Brazilians living with this reality, pray for those who have experienced violence and loss and for those working to bring hope in these communities.
- Issues of corruption within the Brazilian congress and government have far-reaching implications for the country. Pray for political and economic stability in Brazil. Pray also for the church in Brazil to speak out on behalf of the poor.

## **MALAWI'S FARMERS BATTLE CROP-EATING PEST**

**The spread of the Fall Armyworm is threatening to destroy the staple food for more than 200 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa. But innovative farming methods being introduced by Tearfund and its partners are helping to fight back.**

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that almost all of the 35 million hectares of maize grown by smallholders is now infested or at risk of infestation.

The African Armyworm has ravaged maize crops across Africa for many years, although farmers had developed a way to control it. In contrast, the Fall Armyworm, first detected in Nigeria and believed to originate in Latin America, has spread across western and central African countries. In 2017 Ghana declared a state of emergency because of it.

### **Appetite for destruction**

Unlike the African Armyworm, which just eats maize, the Fall Armyworm eats through practically anything the farmers grow. The females lay thousands of eggs in their short lifetime, and the moths can fly up to 100 km a day. It is also resistant to common pesticides.

Another reason it spreads and is hard to control is that many smallholders use traditional techniques, such as tilling the land. Thankfully, the introduction of Foundations for Farming techniques, pioneered in Malawi through Self Help Groups (SHGs) is proving to be a strong weapon in the fight against the Fall Armyworm.

### **Fighting back**

Vincent Moyo is Tearfund's Country Director for Malawi. He says that even though climate change is the biggest concern, with an extremely dry rainy season, the Fall Armyworm is a serious problem in Malawi. 'Our partners have responded in different ways with Tearfund support,' he says. 'There are some who have managed to overcome the worm through Foundations for Farming. In areas where farmers have managed to cover their land with mulch, the worm has not been as destructive.'

'Other farmers have overcome the problem by boiling small fishes locally known as usipa and using the soup to spray their crops. The fish soup attracts ants in large numbers, which in turn feed on the Fall Armyworm – saving the crops.'

'We are currently doing research on methods to tackle the Fall Armyworm with our partner SOLDEV. This is with funding from the Scottish Government.'

On 19 January, Malawi's President Peter Mutharika called on government officials to lead prayers for rain. He had previously declared it a national disaster, after it was discovered the pest had spread to 20 of Malawi's 28 districts.

### **PRAYER FOCUS:**

- Pray for Malawi and other nations affected by the spread of the Fall Armyworm, that they would be able to halt its spread.
- Thank God for Foundations for Farming techniques which are proving to be a strong weapon in the fight against the pest.
- Pray for much-needed rains to fall in Malawi and Sub-Saharan Africa, which has been feeling the worst effects of a changing climate.

## PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Conflict has been ongoing in South Sudan since 2013, resulting in more than 4 million people displaced from their homes, and thousands killed. Pray for progress in the crucial peacebuilding talks taking place this week. Pray also for those lacking food, amid warnings that 1.5 million people in South Sudan are on the brink of famine



Last week, we celebrated the completion of our house-building projects in Nepal, following two terrible earthquakes in 2015. Praise God for the success of this work, and pray for strength and wisdom for our team as they move on to other development initiatives.



The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the world's worst, with 22.2 million in need of help. Please pray that aid will reach those who need it most. Pray also for improved access for imports such as food, fuel and medicines. And please pray for lasting peace. (Please do not share this prayer point online.)