

ONE VOICE

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

A stitch in time

Joel Lines came on a Tearfund Go placement to lend a hand at a school in a remote South African village. His team noticed something was holding the girls back from their learning though. It was a simple problem and together they worked out a simple solution.

'After a while it became obvious that something was wrong. I was on a three-month placement with Tearfund Go and the Government-funded International Citizen Service, or ICS. We were helping to teach in a high school in Mavele village, in the Limpopo Province. The young people were keen to learn; it was their way out of poverty, especially if they could get to university. However, we noticed that many of the teenage girls would disappear for days at a time with no explanation.

Life on hold

'When we asked why, we discovered they didn't have access or funds to buy sanitary products, so when their periods arrived, the girls would just skip school. This would lead to them missing school for the best part of one week in four. It was clearly affecting their learning and ability to pass exams. In turn, it was going to be harder for the girls to find employment, and the poverty in the village would not be eradicated by this new generation.

'The five of us on our team worked with our host partner, Choice Trust, to come up with a simple solution. Together we developed a template for making washable, reusable, sanitary towels. They could be made from any spare materials the families had: old t-shirts and cleaning cloths for instance. They were then stuffed with old shredded newspaper.

A stitch in time

'We set about making some of these ourselves. It was a struggle for the volunteers like me, who hadn't quite mastered sewing; for everyone else the towels were easy to put together.

'The Choice Trust caregivers organised a session between us and 20 or so of the girls from Mavele village outside in one of the fields. We shared our templates with them, helped them put together their first sanitary towel. I have to say, they did a much better job making the pads than we had!

The girls were plainly delighted with this simple fix. Meanwhile, the grandmothers or 'Gogos', who head the households, were really enthusiastic too, as they could sew lots of the towels for their families.

To be able to pass the project onto the next team arriving in the village was exciting. However, the girls were already spreading the word and passing on what they had learned to others. They had truly become empowered and this simple fix was effectively giving them back a week of their lives.

PRAY FOR OUR WORK:

- Praise God for the way that this simple design has transformed the grades and even the future for dozens of the girls.
- Pray for all those responding to this very simple problem that is affecting girls across Africa.

A NOTE FROM...

'Seeing our volunteers get so passionately involved in projects that make a difference to the people they are visiting, is the reason we do what we do. With your continued prayer we hope to send even more people overseas in 2018.' **Anna Taylor, Global Volunteering Team**

Tearfund ICS is a volunteer programme, run in collaboration with VSO and fully funded by the UK Government (visit www.tearfund.org/ics for more information). It gives anyone aged 18-25 a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend 12 weeks volunteering abroad in Bangladesh or South Africa.

Over 25? **Tearfund Go** have opportunities for anyone to volunteer overseas (visit www.tearfund.org/go).

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES

Welcome to a new year. This year is particularly special for us, as it marks 50 years of Tearfund!

In our 50 years of following Jesus where the need is greatest, we've seen millions of lives transformed, with hope restored and potential released. We've been humbled and amazed by the dedicated prayer and financial support from churches and from individuals like you. And we've been blown away by God's awe-inspiring faithfulness. We have so much to be thankful for.

From 1968...

The 1960s saw a surge in the number of people around the world being displaced by disaster and conflict, at a time when Christians across the nation were grappling with how to live out their faith more practically. In response to the compassion flowing from the UK Church, the Evangelical Alliance formed Tearfund – originally named the Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund – in 1968.

Tearfund's first official act was a £250 grant towards flood relief in Argentina, in October 1968. In the coming months and years this was followed by, among many others, funds for an orphanage in India, a clinic in Rwanda and the launch of 'Albarka', a floating operating theatre serving the people of Lake Chad. Its first patient was a Muslim imam who had suffered abdominal pain for 18 years.

Through to 2018

From these early days Tearfund has grown, reaching into more countries as God has opened doors. And we have responded to disasters all over the world, whether natural or man-made. As in the early days, we are astounded time and again by the phenomenal generosity of God's people.

Over the next year, to mark 50 years of Tearfund, we'll be sharing about 50 countries where we have worked, celebrating God's provision and power to transform, and praying for each of these nations. We'll cover one in every weekly issue of One Voice.

Thank you for being a crucial part of this amazing journey, and for continuing to pray with us for God's breakthrough of hope where the need is greatest.

Father God,

Thank you that you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Your love never changes. Work in our hearts in this new year, we pray, and teach all of us how to serve you, and one another, better.

In your precious name, amen

SOUTH ASIA FLOODS: GREEN SHOOTS OF HOPE

The floods of August 2017 caused devastation on a massive scale across South Asia. Media attention may have moved on, but the rebuilding effort will last for years to come. However, thanks to the hard work of our partners and the tenacity of local people like Nazir*, the signs of recovery are slowly starting to appear.

Nazir lives with his wife and four children in a small village in rural Bangladesh. To support his family he relies on growing crops, horse cart driving and sometimes seasonal work in different towns.

The floods wiped out everything. Thousands of houses, crops, roads, schools, wells and latrines were destroyed or seriously damaged. At least 1.7 million people were forced from their homes.

Turned away

'I'm a small scale farmer, and don't have much land,' Nazir tells us. 'This year in early August I planted rice, but the flood washed out all the seedlings. I was shocked and couldn't do anything. I had no money to buy saplings for re-cultivation.

'I talked to several microfinance organisations, but none of them provided loans for us. I even begged for a loan to the money lenders, but I was turned away as I had no money for a deposit. I became hopeless.'

Rice cultivation across the region was completely ruined. Communication systems with district towns were also disrupted. Along with the government, many humanitarian organisations came forward to help those affected. Local Tearfund partners went to work, providing relief and rehabilitation for the people most in need.

God willing

'One time, when I was sitting in a local tea stall, some people were discussing that [Tearfund partner] Lamb Hospital were distributing beluga lentil seeds among the small scale farmers. Immediately, I went back home and discussed this with my wife. The next day I got in touch with their staff and received 2kg of beluga lentil seeds.'

Nazir's land is now lush and green – covered with beluga lentil plants. 'Immediately after receiving the seed, I spread all of them onto my land, where previously I had planted rice-paddy saplings that were ruined by the floods,' he says.

'With a big smiling face I looked at the blue sky and said, "God willing, after 15 to 20 days I will harvest this crop." I am grateful for the seeds and subsequent support.'

But Nazir still has anxieties. His family lives close to the river bank that was so recently overwhelmed. 'If the erosion continues like this, I may not be able to live here anymore. The land may go under the river – here everything is uncertain. No one knows what will happen.'

As long as there is need in communities such as Nazir's, Tearfund and our partners will be there. Please continue to pray for this work.

*Name changed to protect identity

PRAY FOR THE WORK:

- Pray for all those who lost livelihoods and loved ones in these floods. Ask that God will be with them as they go through the difficult rebuilding process.
- Lift up our partners working across Nepal, India and Bangladesh as they strive to help those most in need.
- Thank God that Nazir and his family have been able to make a new start, and pray that, despite the challenges that they're facing, they will have a bright future.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

-  With elections coming up in a number of countries throughout Asia, please ask God to raise up servant-hearted leaders who represent all those in their constituencies impartially.

-  In January (8-20), Tearfund's church and community transformation trainers from West and Central Africa will be gathering in Abidjan for a two-week event. Please pray that this would be a fruitful time of learning, connecting and encouraging one another, and that this work would be strengthened across the region.

-  The Government of Pakistan informed 21 international NGOs that their applications to continue working in the country have been rejected, and that they must leave within 60 days. Please pray that the INGO regulations are softened so that these organisations can continue their much needed work.