

ONE VOICE

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

OUR 700,000 NEW NEIGHBOURS

Tearfund's Peter Shaw recently returned from a visit to Bangladesh, where he witnessed first-hand the effects of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

It's been six months since almost 700,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (Rohingya refugees) started to flee violence in Myanmar and flood into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Today, it hosts what is effectively the world's largest site for displaced people, made up of nearly one million Myanmar nationals from the Rohingya ethnic group – both established and recent arrivals. While the world's focus has understandably been on the plight of the fleeing families from Myanmar, little attention has been paid to the impact on the 270,000 local Bangladeshis.

Families in Cox's Bazar – the host community – have had to deal with a huge disturbance to their daily lives. Many people who live in extreme poverty themselves are coping with the impact of hundreds of thousands more people living in their neighbourhood.

Firewood is becoming very scarce as displaced Myanmar families chop down and uproot trees to collect wood to cook with. The influx of people has also contributed to significant price rises for food and other daily essentials. Various community buildings have been co-opted by the Bangladeshi army to coordinate the emergency relief effort.

Loving our neighbours

When a group of Myanmar nationals arrived in her village on the outskirts of Cox's Bazar last year, Kamala* and her community welcomed the desperate families. 'We gave them shelter, food, clothes – everything they needed,' she says.

But without permanent provision for the forcibly displaced families, it started to become more difficult for the community. Helped by local people, the Myanmar nationals built a large makeshift shelter with flimsy partitions to separate family groups in cramped conditions. In January, all the displaced people were moved to the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site alongside the other thousands of Myanmar nationals.

Kamala would like the Myanmar nationals to return home, but only when it is safe, they are given citizenship and their rights are guaranteed. 'They should return with dignity to their country,' says Kamala. 'And I think the organisations that have come here should help the local community as well as the guest community.'

Providing for Bangladeshi families

Tearfund's partner Coastal Association for Social Transformation (COAST) Trust have been reaching out to poor communities in Cox's Bazar for many years – long before the recent flood of Myanmar nationals. To support the indigenous population they are giving Bangladeshi families eco-friendly stoves, alongside stoves for displaced families from Myanmar.

As well as being more efficient than traditional Bangladeshi stoves (mud cylinders, built out of the ground), they are not washed away during the monsoon rains and can be used if the ground is flooded. COAST are also encouraging families to burn compressed rice husks (a waste plant product from the cultivation of rice) rather than wood from trees.

Kamala's family have been selected and will soon be given an eco-friendly stove. 'I am very happy as it will mean we will not need to collect so much wood,' she says. 'It will also be helpful for Rohingya families to have stoves too.'

PLEASE PRAY:

- For the host community in Bangladesh who are suffering because of the influx of Myanmar nationals into their neighbourhood who are using the natural resources and driving up food prices
- Pray that international attention will also focus on Bangladeshi families who were the first to respond with generosity to fleeing families, so that tensions are reduced
- Give thanks for Tearfund partner COAST Trust who are meeting the needs of poor Bangladeshi families alongside the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals

**Name changed to protect identity*

A NOTE FROM...

'While it's essential we reach out and support the forcibly displaced Myanmar Rohingya families, my visit to the camps near Cox's Bazar last month convinced me that we must also support local Bangladeshi communities suffering immensely as a result of the huge influx of people: dwarfing them four to one. Please continue to pray for this important work.' **Peter Shaw, Tearfund**

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: CAMBODIA

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 Cambodia.

Before Kosal* enrolled in the vocational skill training course run by Tearfund partner, Cambodia Hope Organisation (CHO), he struggled to make enough money to provide for his elderly parents and five younger siblings.

Three million people in Cambodia live on less than £1.45 a day. The lack of education, skills and opportunity in rural communities in northwest Cambodia, where Kosal lives, forces many of them to seek work in Thailand.

Tearfund first began working with Cambodians in the 1980s, in refugee camps in Thailand where they had fled the civil war. From the early nineties we worked inside the country, with partners helping to rebuild the country. From initial basic rehabilitation and relief work, our programme moved on to focus on HIV and AIDS and child exploitation, but now the main focus is transforming communities through the local church.

Building a business

Before he received training, Kosal relied on irregular, low-paid jobs as a building labourer to make money. The work was exhausting and paid very little. 'Construction labour is a gruelling job and I had to do this every day,' he says. 'Sometimes I had no energy and couldn't go to work.'

In search of better income, Kosal took up the offer of a job in Thailand. But after working there for five months his employer refused to pay him and Kosal was forced to come back to Cambodia with nothing.

He was offered a lifeline when he heard about CHO's programme offering free training in motorbike mechanics. He successfully completed the training and was provided with a loan to open his own motorbike repair shop.

'Now I am repairing for a lot of customers and saving around \$5-\$10 (£4 to £8) each day,' he remarks happily. 'I have repaid my loan and I can pay for my siblings to go to school and support my parents.'

Transforming futures

The local church is at the heart of this work – uniquely placed to help release people from physical and spiritual poverty. Tearfund staff and local partners like CHO have been equipping hundreds of churches to help communities become more resilient to potential poverty traps and challenges – things such as disasters, debt and addictions.

We are also ensuring essential services such as health, education, water, social security, protection and infrastructure are available to communities, by encouraging self-provision or advocating local government provision.

Our hope is that in focusing on a change to mindsets and worldviews, and helping with practical skills, the poorest will have the tools they need to transform their futures in the way they want. For many, their desire is an education and a future for their children, enough food on the table, and a voice in their communities.

Kosal's training has given him new capabilities and purpose, improving his self-esteem, and allowing him to support others. His family are now looking forward to a more secure future.

PLEASE PRAY:

- Praise God for the skills training and savings initiatives that are breaking the cycle of low-income jobs, unemployment and poverty.
- Pray for ongoing relationships with the village and local church leaders involved with local planning. Pray for wisdom as they help guide the CHO projects to the communities most in need.
- A third of children in Cambodia work as child labour and there is a high risk of child-trafficking. Please pray for protection over these children and for a change in the cultural and social circumstances leading to this terrible situation.

* Name changed to protect identity

Kosal's story was originally shared in our impact report: [Inspiring Change](#) (for more information on our work in Cambodia go to page 25)

TRAUMATISED COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER TO DENOUNCE VIOLENCE IN THE DRC

'I fled with my seven children – we watched our house burning from distance,' says Dorcas*, from a village in the Djugu territory in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). 'We were running, my husband went one way and we went another... I don't know what has happened to him.'

But Dorcas felt relieved to reach the relative calm of Telega village with her children. Many thousands of families in eastern DRC have fled and not all have found safety – many have been robbed and some killed.

'My children and I ran through bushes to reach Telega. We feared using the roads. We slept out in dangerous places. We don't have any food because we left everything behind.'

A history of tension

The Ituri province of eastern DRC has seen a huge escalation of violence over the past few weeks. The local Lendu and Hema ethnic groups have a longstanding dispute over who owns the land.

These tensions flared into conflict in 1972, 1985 and 1996. The bloodiest period took place between 1999 and 2003, where 60,000 people were killed and 400,000 fled their homes.

In February this year the attacks started again. Hundreds of people were killed and chaos ensued. Local radio reported that 1,300 children suffered machete wounds. Djugu hospitals struggled to provide beds and medicines for such a huge number of injured people.

Tearfund's partner Action Entraide reports that more than 25,000 displaced people arrived in Tchomia, a village on the shores of Lake Albert, in February. Families have been crossing in boats without life jackets – seeking safety across the lake in Uganda.

Last week, the Tearfund team in DRC visited the area to find out the needs of the people there and plan for how best to respond. They sought out villages hosting displaced families to assess the impact of the crisis.

Seeking to build peace

Action Entraide and Tearfund have also been reaching out across the ethnic divides, inviting leaders from nearby Hema, Lendu and Bira groups to reflect on the escalation of tensions, and seek solutions. The meeting also welcomed representatives from the army, local police and the United Nations peacekeepers.

More than 150 people met in Bogoro, starting with a talk from a local pastor who said, 'We have to discourage division and hate but rather stand together to stop the spread of this evil in our homes, our community and our nation.'

'Nobody wins when we fight each other,' responded one Hema leader. 'We are all losers in the end. Some lose their cattle, some their houses. Others family members, friends and relatives. What is the point of fighting each other?'

A Lendu leader agreed: 'The last war caused us a lot of suffering, nothing good came out of it. We don't want to go back to that!'

Crying out to God

David Mcallister, Tearfund DRC Country Director, encouraged the group to consider St Paul's message in Romans 10:12: 'For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.'

'We have to get down on our knees and humbly cry to God to forgive us,' David said. 'Because God the Father sees no distinction between Hema, Lendu or Bira.'

'Together, we say no to division and call for peace,' agreed Njangusi, a widow from the Lendu community who supports vulnerable women in her church. In the previous conflict her house was burnt down and Njangusi lost all her belongings.


Alongside these declarations of unity, the leaders of the ethnic groups voiced concerns that young people with limited education, poor job prospects and often drug users are particularly susceptible to being drawn into violent groups. Action Entraide believes that engaging with and supporting vulnerable young people is key to preventing further violence, and is looking to scale up its work with young people.


PLEASE PRAY:


- For families like Dorcas's who have suffered so much and experienced trauma – particularly for those who have lost or been separated from loved ones.
- For Action Entraide to continue its peace and reconciliation work, bringing community leaders together in unity to denounce violence.
- For young people to be supported so that they chose not to take part in or incite violence, and for those who have perpetrated the atrocities to choose a path of forgiveness and peace.

**Name changed to protect identity*

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

 An influx of Venezuelan migrants into Brazil and Colombia is challenging already stretched resources. Please pray that the migrants will receive opportunities of employment and a safe place to stay. Also pray for our partner CORSOC in Colombia and Asas do Socorro in Brazil, as they are preparing for emergency projects with Venezuelan families.

 In Iraq, over 2 million people who fled the conflict are now returning home. They, and the communities they are returning to, are in need of protection, shelter and cash to pay for food, healthcare and rent. Please pray for Tearfund's staff and partners working with these vulnerable communities in challenging circumstances. (Please do not share this prayer point online).

 New research indicates that, at current rates, no single country in Africa is set to end childhood malnutrition by 2030 – one of the key targets of the UN's Sustainable Development goals. Please pray for children suffering from malnutrition, and pray that this research will help galvanise governments into greater action.