

ONE VOICE

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

NEXT TO GODLINESS

Some people are never without their fitness trackers. Zargul from rural Afghanistan has a 'wellness tracker' and she keeps it in her pocket.

'I carry soap with me. I wash my hands three times: before eating, before cooking and after using the outhouse. I wash the dishes with dish soap and cover them afterwards while they dry.'

Only a few months ago it was a very different story – Zargul kept falling ill.

She lives with her husband and children in Yoghin, rural Afghanistan. Every couple of days she would go down with diarrhoea and nausea. Nobody in the village could tell her what was wrong.

They would tell her 'you ate too much' or 'you ate too fast'. Sometimes they would even tell her it was the jinn (evil spirits) that were making her so weak. Actually, the problem was a lot more down to earth than that.

Zargul works as a shepherd. At the end of the day her hands would be caked in dirt and blood. You'd think she would want to wash her hands before she started eating, but she didn't: 'I was told I would lose the blessing of our Mullah if I did.'

Clean break

When one of Tearfund's Afghan partner organisations came to town to teach basic hygiene, she discovered something that has changed her life: there wasn't anything spiritual about not washing her hands. Far from being a blessing, it was the reason for the terrible stomach upsets that followed when she ingested all the germs.

Worse still, she had nearly lost her son to a similar bout of sickness. As he weakened, she withheld food and drink as she was told to do by fellow villagers. It was only when she offered him a little boiled water as a 'sawab' – a spiritual reward to help the dying – that he started to recover. She learned a lesson and nursed him back to life.

The three days of training were a revelation to Zargul. It has turned her and her family's lives upside down.

'Before I used to go to the bathroom anywhere if there wasn't a latrine. Now I know to bury my poo. My husband worked very hard to build an outhouse. I put water and soap in there for handwashing.

'I thank God I am alive.'

PLEASE PRAY

If you have the gift of hands, hold them out with your palms open.
Think of all the years you've been able to keep your hands clean and well looked-after.
Thank God for resources and knowledge that have made this possible.
Take another look at your hands and pray for all the good you are able to do with them – how you can help friends and strangers, and how you are able to help so many others around the world like Zargul.

A NOTE FROM...

'Every time I am in Afghanistan, I am amazed at the work Tearfund's partner organisations do alongside local communities, supporting health and hygiene transformation such as described by Zargul. I am so thankful to our supporters for their giving and praying for Afghanistan.'

Bruce Clark, Head of Tearfund's work in Afghanistan

WANT BETTER DECISION MAKING? INVITE THE WOMEN

How Bible studies transformed long-held beliefs in a village in Chad – with impressive results.

Ignekalbo is a farmer from Makeure, a small village in the south west of Chad. He's amazed at the transformation he's seen.

'Before the introduction of [the Bible studies] in our village, collaboration was a nightmare and the villagers' social life was a mess. It was difficult for the population to work in mixed groups of men and women and different faiths,' says Ignekalbo.

He adds: 'People used to hate each other so it wasn't easy to organise community meetings. This meant we weren't able to reflect together on the state of the village and decide on joint actions for its development.'

Existing community groups were categorised by gender, age and religion and each group initiated projects alone. There was no room for women to integrate with men's groups because of tradition. Women were neglected and viewed as 'second-class people with no intelligence'.

Building relationships

A few years ago, Pastor Parmenas started to encourage his church in Makeure to spend more time on Bible studies. These have been written by Tearfund to help bring about transformation in communities like Makeure.

The Bible studies have helped the congregation to become better aware of the value of women, and the importance of building relationships with all community members – irrespective of gender, age and beliefs.

'Once we internalised the word of God, we decided to allow women to join in with decision making,' says Ignekalbo. 'The men created space for women and welcomed them. Once the women felt accepted, valued and respected, they began to take an active part alongside men.'

The achievements have been many: drilling a borehole that provides drinking water to the population all year round; setting up a community school and building classrooms; re-planting trees; using community farms to provide income to support village projects and many more.

Today, women and men in the church are elected as equals at a decision making level. And women actively participate in group discussions where they often challenge men.

A good example

When other women in the village saw what had happened with the church, they gained confidence and started to follow the example of the Christian women.

Now men and women from different backgrounds work together, as well as Christians and non-Christians. People from all walks of life occupy important positions of responsibility.

'As we work together with non-Christians, some of them have started to gradually come to church, whereas before, they hated Christians and did not want to hear about the church,' says Ignekalbo.

'The Christians also used to hate non-Christians and did not want to approach them. Now the situation has completely changed and suddenly the relationships have greatly improved. Everyone works together well for the development of the village. We are very grateful to God for that.'

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for the village of Makeure, Chad. Ask God to continue to strengthen relationships across traditional divides.
- Pray that the success of these Bible studies will continue to have an impact across Chad and beyond, and for Tearfund's staff and partners as they share them.
- Pray for the attitudes of people here in the UK. Pray that barriers of gender, race, social background and beliefs will be brought down.

A version of this article originally appeared on Tearfund Learn – a platform for sharing our learning and resources around the world. Find out more at learn.tearfund.org

BREAKING THE LIE

In the Cambodian city of Poipet, extreme poverty can have a terrible hidden cost. Human trafficking offers families the false promise of prosperity if they, or their loved ones, journey across the border to Thailand with the traffickers. The truth of what really happens is very different.

Grace Merriweather is working alongside Tearfund partner Cambodian Hope Organisation (CHO) in Poipet – she's volunteering for six months with Tearfund Go. Together they are helping educate families in Poipet about the lies that traffickers tell.

Smiling faces

'I arrive at the small school run by CHO to a welcome like no other. Surrounded by a sea of smiles my limbs go heavy, weighed down by all the children clinging to me. I crouch down and meet a pair of large dark eyes. These eyes, brimming with joy and paired with a beautiful smile, belong to a young girl in a cheerful blue uniform.

'The little girl is happy and secure – things could so easily be different for her. The children at this school are the silver lining that exists on the edge of a very dark cloud in Poipet – the cloud of trafficking.'

Selling a lie

'Education is precious for the children enrolled at CHO's schools. It can lead to skilled employment, higher wages and a future that can lift whole families out of terrible poverty.

'In Poipet, jobs are poorly paid and often insecure. For a struggling family, children can become a valuable commodity. Human traffickers claim that selling their child will lift the whole family out of poverty – their child will get to live a better life too, across the border.

'But the reality is that the money they receive only lasts so long, and they often never hear from their children again. They never learn about the work conditions or hours, the mistreatment or the nature of the work their young children are doing.'

'They think they have freed their child from poverty. The reality is that they have sold their child into even greater poverty – not only are they unlikely to earn any money of their own, they are also likely to lose their freedom, health and wellbeing. The staff at CHO are determined to break this terrible cycle.'

Breaking the cycle

'CHO work hard to protect vulnerable communities from the threat of trafficking. Through education and training, they offer families the chance to gain good, lasting livelihoods and brighter futures. Nobody has to leave their families out of sheer desperation.

'“What’s your name?” I ask the little girl. Her smile remains unwavering, but her eyes give her away. They dart around looking to each of her friends momentarily, but none of them can help her as this isn’t a question that they have learned in class. Eventually her eyes find me again, the look of searching replaced with a steely determination. “Yes,” she replies with a nod of conviction.'

'I pull my face into an exaggerated, quizzical expression. A murmured giggle begins in the crowd and quickly showers over the whole group like a fountain, before erupting into a wave of full blown laughter. I realise that I am laughing too. Their joy is so infectious that it lights up whoever it comes into contact with, as strong as the sun, blazing down from above.

'This little girl is living at home and she has a bright future. This is how it should be for everyone in Poipet.'

PLEASE PRAY

Dear Father God,

I can barely imagine how a parent must feel when they hand over their child to a stranger, out of poverty and desperation. And I can't conceive of how much your heart is broken, each time a child is taken by a trafficker.

In your mercy, please raise up many others like the team at CHO – to reverse this terrible trend. Let the light of truth and hope triumph over the evil of trafficking.

Amen.

Want to learn more about volunteering overseas? Visit tearfund.org/go for upcoming placements.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

 Please continue to pray for communities impacted by Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our staff and partners held an event this week to build relationships between local people, medics, leaders and others to strengthen efforts to halt the spread of the virus. Please pray this will be a success.

 Praise God that more than 11,000 people at Big Church Day Out signed our petition calling on companies to take responsibility for their plastic waste in developing countries! And please pray that the rest of the events we're at this summer go just as well.

 Pray for people in north west Nigeria, where violence has resulted in 20,000 people fleeing over the border to Niger in the last couple of months. Pray for those affected, and for the crucial peace building work of our church partners in Nigeria.