

ONE VOICE

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

THE BOY WHO BEAT MALNUTRITION IN SOUTH SUDAN

'When I grow up, I want to work for Tearfund! They took care of me when I was sick,' says four-year-old Bul from South Sudan. This is his dream after surviving a serious case of malnutrition.

Bul was born during a time of conflict, poverty and hunger. He's being raised by his great aunt, Monica, who bakes and sells bread to make ends meet. But heavy rainfall and flooding in 2019 damaged many roads so she can no longer get the supplies needed to bake bread.

That's when Bul became sick. 'With no money, it was very difficult to provide nutrients for a small child,' says Monica. 'When I took him to the health clinic, they discovered he had severe malnutrition and he was admitted to the feeding centre.'

Getting better

Bul was given medicine and food. He was monitored regularly by the centre until he recovered. 'We praise God that he is healed,' says Monica.

A lack of enough nutritious food is the main cause of malnutrition. Conflict and the climate crisis mean that less food is being produced, forcing people to rely more on expensive imports. In South Sudan, infant mortality is very high. Many children don't reach their fifth birthday and malnutrition is the cause of more than a third of children's deaths.

At Tearfund's feeding centres, we are helping children under five – as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women – to prevent and fight malnutrition. We provide support, nutrition education and food.

Future dreams

Monica hopes God will continue to protect Bul, and bring peace to South Sudan so she can develop her business.

'The floods damaged a lot of things. People lost their crops and there were a lot of diseases so many people died. The climate has been hard on us – first it was the drought, then it's floods... but when there is peace, you can move around and earn a good living.'

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Bul and other children in South Sudan to have a happy and healthy future.
- Lift up Monica and all parents and guardians who are concerned about providing for their children in such challenging circumstances.
- As South Sudan continues to live in the midst of conflict and the climate crisis, pray for lasting peace, and protection from extreme and unpredictable weather.

A NOTE FROM...

'When raising a child, you always want what's best for them. But for people like Maria, good health is often a more regular and urgent prayer request for the children they look after. Tearfund is determined to end hunger. It robs children of their childhood – they're too ill to play and attend school. Keep praying for children like Bul – that they can dream big and achieve their God-given potential in life – free from hunger and the restrictions of poverty.' **Peter Shaw, Tear Times Editor**

CLEAN HANDS AND A PURE HEART

'Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart...' (Psalm 24:3-4)

Who may go anywhere during coronavirus times? Hopefully he/she who has soaped their hands thoroughly.

Through Jesus, spiritually clean hands and a pure heart are quite straightforward. The cleansing has already been completed on the cross for us. It's the ultimate one-time-washes-all blood sacrifice that we only have to accept in order for it to be eternally effective.

Cleaning actual hands is a little trickier. They need to be washed well and often with soap and water.

For Bernadette in the Central African Republic (CAR), soap was about to be her lifeline. She didn't realise it might literally be saving lives too.

Washed out

Bernadette is 43. She's a mum of seven and a farmer. That's more than enough to keep anyone busy and Bernadette was struggling. Her husband is out of a job and though she worked hard, they just weren't making enough money to support the family. It was so frustrating.

Then Bernadette joined a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA).

These groups are supported by some of Tearfund's UK Aid Match funding and we run them in partnership with another Christian non-profit organisation. Their goal is to give 10,000 vulnerable women in CAR the skills and power to make changes in their circumstances.

In the groups, the women receive literacy, numeracy and career and business training, helping increase their ability to earn money and support themselves and their families. Through this, livelihoods are being restored and hope is being built where conflict and generations of poverty have stolen them.

Apart from the financial benefits, empowering these women is a vital tool for challenging underlying cultural discrimination – giving them a voice where they may not traditionally have had one.

Scrubbing up well

At first, Bernadette took a small loan to start a business selling cassava, but she soon realised that it wasn't going to work. Too many other people were doing exactly the same thing and the market wasn't big enough to provide her with a decent income.

The business training group encouraged her to look for new opportunities and gaps where there might be a demand for something she could supply.

'I had to think how I could make more money,' says Bernadette. 'Then, I decided to start a different business of making and selling soap.'

Clean break

Bernadette didn't know anything about making soap, but her friend Synthia had learnt exactly that skill from a course Tearfund had run. Bernadette took another loan from the business group, bought all the ingredients she needed and, after a few demonstrations from her friend, started producing soap and selling it at her local market.

'I got enough money to repay my loan,' says Bernadette, 'and I will be able to feed my family, pay school fees for my children and pay for medicines [if they are needed]!'

Not only is Bernadette able to afford the things she needs, but in a world full of the fear of coronavirus, Bernadette's new skill is providing a product that is essential for the saving of lives.

In Tearfund's coronavirus response in CAR, plans are being made for us to begin purchasing soap from women like Bernadette who have set up businesses through our programmes. It will then form part of what we distribute to schools and other public places, where washing hands properly is a huge weapon in the fight against the spread of the virus.

Bernadette says her hope has increased. 'I once thought I was lost,' she says, but now she thanks God for her life, her family, for the Tearfund project which provided training and a loan... and for the support of her good friend.

PLEASE PRAY

- For Bernadette and her family – that they will all be healthy, that her business will continue to grow, and that using the soap she makes will help protect people from getting ill.
- Lift up women who are being empowered to start small businesses and earn an income in the Central African Republic. Ask God that their voices will be heard.
- For all people in CAR as the threat of coronavirus grows. Ask God for his comfort in the face of fear and for his mercy that the outbreak would be halted.

IMAN AND THE MESSAGE OF HOPE

Iman* lost her home, her job and her baby daughter. For her, amidst grief and struggle, receiving help with food and rent was a practical answer to her children's hunger and her family's fear of having nowhere to live, but it also brought a message of hope. It said to her: 'You are not alone.'

It wasn't only food and rent, it was other kinds of assistance too. Each of them designed to meet the needs of a mother and her family. Each of them a weapon against the hopelessness that conflict had brought to them.

Iman and her husband used to live in Lebanon. They were well-educated and had good jobs. He baked sweets for a living and she was an assistant nurse for twelve years – the type of person the world is currently applauding for their essential service. The couple had a small son and when Iman was due with their second child, they returned home to Syria for the birth. They weren't to know that war would trap them there for five years.

They were stuck. Their village became unsafe and they were forced to live on the move in the region – seeking safety from camp to camp. At one stage, Iman's husband was captured and imprisoned for two and a half months before he managed to escape.

Life was difficult and terrifying.

In Syria, Iman fell pregnant a third time and gave birth to another daughter. Sadly, this baby girl was born with spinal muscular atrophy. This is a genetic disease affecting the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement. It meant that Iman's tiny daughter often needed to be hospitalised, which was extremely hard as many hospitals in Syria had been bombed and doctors were scarce.

Feeling helpless and hopeless

'It was not easy trying to move her from one place to another,' says Iman. '[I felt] helpless when she needed hospital and desperate to make her feel better.'

It broke Iman's heart to see her daughter in pain.

Eventually, the family managed to escape the conflict in Syria. 'Reaching [Lebanon] was not easy; we had nothing and we knew no one,' says Iman. They had safety and there were hospitals for her small child, but there were still challenges. 'While trying to treat my daughter, it was difficult to have her admitted to a hospital even though the UN helped a lot. Not all expenses were covered and we struggled to find money to pay the hospital bills.'

Iman and her husband battled to find work. They both tried really hard, but they couldn't even afford bread and their children cried all night from hunger.

Fortunately, Iman and her family were not alone.

A hope...

'It all started when my neighbour heard my children crying at three in the morning, and [they] did not stop until sunrise,' says Iman. 'She came to my house and saw that I had no food, not even bread, to feed my children. She went to [Tearfund's partner] to ask them to help my family...

'The social worker immediately visited our home, and after seeing our life conditions and learning about my sick daughter, [Tearfund's partner] did all in their power to help.'

Sadly, in spite of accessing medical help through our partner, Iman's baby died. She was just two years old.

'Finally,' Iman says, 'after my daughter's death, I also became part of an emotional support group for women [through Tearfund's partner].'

...and a future

They grieve the loss of their tiny daughter and finances are still really tough, but Iman says, 'Now I am able to hope for a better life, especially for my children.' She takes comfort knowing that there is food in the house for her children.

Through our partner, her seven-year-old son is finally receiving some education for the first time and spending time with other children his age – which Iman says has made him so much happier. Her five-year-old daughter is able to take part in activities with other children too. And the help with rent removes the fear that used to hang over Iman and her husband of being homeless at the end of the month.

Iman dreams of being able to return to her country, to her home and the life she had. She and her husband long for jobs for themselves and good education and opportunities for their children. But they have found some comfort.

'The help I received... made me realise something very important,' says Iman. 'I am not alone... [Tearfund's partner] have brought hope back into my life, with a promise of a better future.'

In a time where so many things in life seem uncertain, a promise of a better future is the thing we all need to cling to right now. Christ is our hope and our sustenance – the well where we draw our courage to keep reaching out, following Jesus where the need is great so that people like Iman, her husband and their children are not alone.

PLEASE PRAY

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that we are not alone and that you never leave us or abandon us. Please will you help Iman and her family. Keep them safe and healthy. Comfort them in their grief. Protect our partners as they respond to the growing coronavirus crisis in Lebanon and around the world. Please help us to be able to continue to meet the needs of those we serve. In Jesus name, Amen.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

This article references events that took place before the coronavirus crisis.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



It's cocoa harvesting season in the Ivory Coast. There are concerns that the lockdown – which has forced schools to close and have left many without a way to provide for their families – could lead to an increase in child labour. Pray that vulnerable children will be protected and for an end to slavery.



In Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania heavy rainfall has forced families to abandon their flooded homes and businesses. It is spreading waterborne diseases such as cholera. Lift up families that have lost everything; pray for their health and safety and for opportunities to rebuild their lives. Heavy storms are expected throughout May; pray for less rainfall, and that it won't cause further damage.



Lockdown measures in India have led to thousands of migrant workers being stranded in cities without food and housing, unable to return home. Families across the country are being pushed further into poverty as they cannot go to work. Pray for God's protection and provision. And that Tearfund is able to safely support those in need.