

Food for Thought

A World Vision program helps Afghan girls go to school.

by Kari Costanza



MARY KATE MACISAAC / WORLD VISION

Off to class

In Qala-i-Naw, Afghanistan, the morning rush to school is underway. Birds sing and motorbikes scatter dust into the sunlight as hundreds of girls bounce down the road, their bookbags slung over their shoulders.

Thousands of girls attend Naswan Girls School, where World Vision assists students through the Food for Education program, supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Every few months, parents line up outside the school to collect oil, rice, and lentils.

Since World Vision started the program in Qala-i-Naw, attendance has skyrocketed from about 500 to 2,700. With so many hungry people, the

food serves as a powerful incentive to get children to school—especially girls, who were denied education under the Taliban.

The food helps 13-year-old Najiba, whose father is unemployed. After school, she joins her mother and sister to shell pistachios one by one. Afghanistan exports \$130 million in pistachios every year thanks to the tedious work of women and children.

Najiba knows that an education is all that separates her from a lifetime of pistachios. “My family told me, ‘Please go to school. World Vision gives you things,’ ” she says. “If there wasn’t anything from World Vision, I would have to stay home.” ■



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World Vision

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Loans Protect Life

by Reena T. Samuel



REENA SAMUEL/WORLD VISION

Kalaivani

When Kalaivani was born six years ago in Kadayampatty, India, her mother, Yashoda, was very worried. This was the third time she had given birth to a girl—the third time she would be viewed as

(continued on page 7)



Afghanistan has the lowest female literacy rate in the world, between 9 and 18 percent.

WORLD BANK

'Thank Heaven for Little Girls'

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. —GENESIS 1:27

The lyrics to Maurice Chevalier's most enduring song describe an idyllic view of little girls and the women they become. There is much in our art and literature that romanticizes girls and women and the role they play in our culture. But sadly, in our world today, being female often means being sentenced to a life of poverty, abuse, exploitation, and deprivation.

Compared to her male counterpart, a girl growing up in the developing world is more likely to die before her fifth birthday and less likely to go to school. She is less likely to receive adequate food or health care, less likely to receive economic opportunities, more likely to be forced to marry before the age of 16, and more likely to be the victim of sexual and domestic abuse.

Girls are forced to stay home from school to work. Two-thirds of the nearly 800 million illiterate people in the world are women. Five hundred thousand women die every day from childbirth complications—that's one woman every minute. Girl babies are even killed in countries where males are considered more valuable.

Being female, in much of our world, is not "heavenly."

And yet, in my opinion, the single-most significant thing that can be done to "cure" extreme poverty is this: protect, educate, and nurture girls and women and provide them

with equal rights and opportunities—educationally, economically, and socially. This one thing can do more to address extreme poverty than food, shelter, health care, economic development, or increased foreign assistance.

There is a saying in Ghana: "If you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation." When a girl is educated, her income potential increases, maternal and infant mortality is reduced, her children are more likely to be immunized, the birth rate decreases, and HIV infection rates (especially in Africa) are lowered. Educating girls pays dividend after dividend to the whole community.

This year I visited a village in northern Ghana called Gbum Gbum. Women and girls once had to walk five hours each day to fetch water. World Vision drilled a well, and now the women are investing their time making shea butter, which is exported to the U.S. And the girls are now in school.

In this issue you will learn much more about the challenges that girls and women face. But you will also see that the key to overcoming poverty lies in the hands and hearts of women and girls. ■




JON WARREN/WORLD VISION

Rich in Gbum Gbum

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Getting Past Grief

World Vision helps widows support their children.

by Marie Bettings

Damayanthi's eyes fill with tears as she recalls the day her life changed. Two years ago, during the tsunami, a 30-foot wave overtook the taxi her husband was driving in their coastal suburb of Dickwalle, Sri Lanka. Damayanthi was left alone with a daughter, Eruni, and another child on the way.

Her grief is still fresh. But twice a month, she finds comfort in the company of 27 other widows. "We have experienced the same loss," she says.

Damayanthi participates in the widow's support network, part of World Vision's economic recovery program in tsunami-affected Sri Lanka. In addition to fostering emotional support, the network helps women provide for their children. Damayanthi didn't work before the tsunami; now, with a sewing machine World Vision gave her, she sews saris to sell.

"The sewing machine motivates me when I walk past it in the morning, to keep trying," she says. "Everything I make goes to Eruni's education. She is such a motivated student."



Eruni and Damithu

As if on cue, 8-year-old Eruni bounces in, carrying her 18-month-old brother, Damithu. She doesn't skip a beat when asked what she wants to do when she grows up: "I want to make money so that I can take care of my mother and brother."

Eruni doesn't know that her father is dead; she believes he is working in another country. Damayanthi wonders when she'll have the strength to tell her the truth.

"These families have been highly

traumatized," says World Vision's Piyaratne Rajapakse, who helps organize the widows' group. "There is a sense of strength and safety that these women receive from each other."

A smile flickers across Damayanthi's face as she watches Eruni and Damithu play on a swing. Then she returns to her sewing machine, finding comfort in the knowledge that she's taking care of her children. ■

BULLETIN BOARD

U.S. UNITES IN PRAYER » National Day of Prayer is May 3, 2007. This year the theme is "America, Unite in Prayer," based on 2 Chronicles 7:14. For more information, visit www.nationaldayofprayer.org.

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more information or to apply, call (866) 893-2484 or visit www.courageousleadershipaward.com. Deadline is March 31, 2007.

The Way Back to Hope

A young woman heals from sexual exploitation.

by Heillen Sanchez



When they arrived, none of the couple's promises materialized. Instead, she was forced to take drugs and become a prostitute. Maria couldn't escape—"I didn't have any papers," she says. "I did not know anything, not even the way back home."

Two years ago, police raided the home, looking for the couple operating the sex trafficking network. They found Maria and brought her to the Friendly Hands Home, a Christian shelter supported by World Vision that cares for victims of sexual abuse.

At first, Maria would tell her story in third person as if nothing had happened directly to her. Gradually, she began healing from her experiences.

Today, Maria is preparing to return home to her mother in Nicaragua. She credits her new self-confidence to her relationship with God. "It is because he gave me strength that I was able to face anything," she says. ■

Maria's recent birthday was the happiest in many years. At 18, she is a different person—no longer a frightened girl forced into sex trafficking.

When Maria (not her real name) was a child in Nicaragua, her father died. She had to help her mother earn an income. While working in a woman's house, she met a couple who offered her a better job and an education in Costa Rica. Naïvely, Maria agreed.

"I was hidden in the car all the way to Costa Rica," she says. "I was not allowed to move or make any noise."



An estimated 2 million children, mainly girls, are enslaved in the global commercial sex trade. UNICEF

About World Vision

WHO WE ARE | World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to helping children, families, and their communities worldwide reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

WHOM WE SERVE | Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, we serve alongside the poor—regardless of a person's religion, race, ethnicity, or gender—as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people.

WHY WE SERVE | Our passion is for the world's poorest children whose suffering breaks the heart of God. To help secure a better future for each child, we focus on lasting, community-based transformation. We partner with individuals and communities, empowering them to develop sustainable access to clean water, food supplies, health care, education, and economic opportunities.

HOW WE SERVE | Since 1950, World Vision has helped millions of children and families by providing emergency assistance to those affected by natural disasters and civil conflict, developing long-term solutions within communities to alleviate poverty, and advocating for justice on behalf of the poor.

YOU CAN HELP | Partnering with World Vision provides tangible ways to honor God and put faith into action. By working together, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families who are struggling to overcome poverty. To find out how you can help, refer to the back cover or the envelope attached here, or visit www.worldvision.org.

World Vision



YOU CAN HELP

See the attached envelope to find out how you can help girls recover from the sex trade.

First in Class

A girl starts a new family trend by going to school.

by Samuel Chunga

When I grow up, I want to go as far as the university and become a teacher, to help others become knowledgeable,” says Zalesi, 7, a second-grader in Lilongwe, Malawi.

This is a relatively new dream for Zalesi, who initially did not want to go to school. She changed her mind after a World Vision worker chatted with her about the importance of education.

“Given the family’s history of illiteracy, I could understand why Zalesi was not interested in going to

school,” says Ivinesi, Zalesi’s mother, who admits that she never went to school. In Malawi and around the world, statistics show, literate mothers are more likely to make sure their children are educated.

Ivinesi is very appreciative of the World Vision worker who introduced her daughter to education. “I am also touched that she not only pleaded for Zalesi’s enrollment in school but also frequently visits us and encourages my daughter, who has become polite and eager to help with some household chores.”

Zalesi is also showing signs of academic ambition. Her favorite subjects are arithmetic and Chichewa (the local language). She never misses a class, and she tackles her schoolwork with determination.

“These days, good education is key to a great future,” says Ivinesi. “I believe my daughter is now on her way to a successful future.” ■



Zalesi



World Vision worker visits Zalesi and her mother

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



WORLD VISION STAFF

IN MANY COUNTRIES, women and girls are treated like second-class citizens, denied proper care, education, and the opportunity to use the gifts God gave them. Recognizing the inherent value of girls and the critical role of women in their families and communities, World Vision works sensitively to equip and encourage them around the world.

Some highlights of World Vision’s work with women and girls:

- In Napo County, China, where educating daughters is not a high priority, World Vision is assisting 1,000 female students to complete primary school or junior high school.
- In war-torn Darfur, Sudan, seven women’s centers are providing some 4,000 women with hygiene and AIDS education, vocational skills training, and emotional support.
- In World Vision’s microlending programs around the world, 66 percent of the loan clients are women, and their loan repayment rate is 98 percent. ■

Something to Offer

How homeless women in Seattle celebrated World AIDS Day.

by Ryan Smith

Braxton, 4, enthusiastically loaded towels, soap, and other items into plastic containers—World Vision caregiver kits. “We’re helping sick people in Africa,” she announced.

When Braxton finished one, she pulled her mom back to the front of the line to assemble more. “She’s put together at least 12 containers,” her mother, Jamie, said with a proud smile.

On World AIDS Day—Dec. 1, 2006—women at the Union Gospel Mission Women and Children’s Shelter in Seattle, Wash., put together 500 kits for caregivers across the world. The supplies in the kits are basic: notebooks, pens, soap, towels, gloves, and flashlights. But their impact on the quality of care for rural AIDS sufferers is profound.

“I knew the women would love to do this, because they love to connect with people,” said Gloria Hall, the director of the shelter.

The shelter houses up to 90 people, providing short-term care and long-term rehabilitation for women and children in Seattle. “We try to create a safe environment for the women to heal and get back their dignity,” Gloria said.

The caregiver kit project reminded the women that they have something to offer. One resident, Nancy, said, “I used to work with

Alzheimer’s patients, and it’s been a long time since I’ve been able to help people.” Making what she called the “gift boxes” was a good way to do that again.

When the supplies ran out, residents asked for another opportunity to make caregiver kits. “These women, even though they’re in poverty, are the most giving people,” Gloria said. ■



Braxton

IN THE NEWS

CAMBODIA: STOPPING SEX PREDATORS »

A new project to reduce sexual exploitation of children has been launched by World Vision and Save the Children. The project, which



CAMBODIA

will operate in several provinces, will teach children how to protect themselves and educate community leaders in how to safeguard children from predators.

KENYA: GIRLS REJECT “CIRCUMCISION” »



KENYA

About 150 Maasai girls publicly declared their opposition to “female circumcision,” also known as female genital mutilation (FGM), during an alternate rite-of-passage ceremony organized by World Vision’s Maasai Anti-FGM project. Member of Parliament Linah Kilimo, who attended the ceremony, said the cultural practice was a “monster” that destroyed opportunities for girls. The procedure can cause infertility and death.



REENA SAMUEL/WORLD VISION (2)

Yashoda in her store

a disappointment for failing to produce a boy. Fearing being driven out of her home with her three young daughters, Yashoda came to the agonizing decision that her newborn girl should die.

Without timely intervention, Kalaivani would have become another victim of infanticide—not uncommon in this part of India where boys are valued more highly than girls. World Vision staff suspected that Yashoda was at risk of killing her daughter, so they visited her after Kalaivani’s birth, counseling her and her husband and offering financial support for the child’s care.

Through World Vision, Yashoda also joined a women’s group that pools their resources and takes out loans. She and her husband used loans to start a small grocery store.

“I worked as a daily wage laborer before. Feeding the children and looking after the children was so difficult,” Yashoda says. “Once we had the shop, I could stay home, look after the children, cook for the children. With more income, we are able to send our children to school.”

Yashoda has learned the business



Kalaivani and her mother, Yashoda

fast; she runs the shop when her husband is away. Previously, women in her village weren’t allowed to travel, but now Yashoda makes a weekly trip to the city to buy wholesale items to sell.

The impact of the loans has been more than financial for Yashoda. It has given her and the other women in her group the confidence to make a better future for themselves—and set a good example for their daughters. ■

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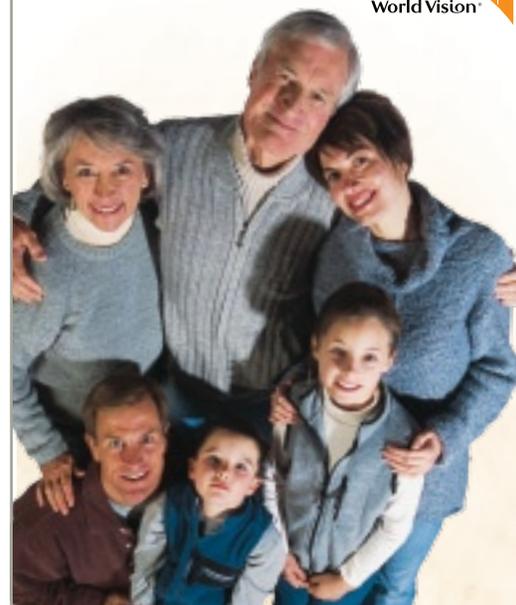
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