

Restoring Lives

SPEAKER NOTES

A life transformed



'Before we got help with growing vegetables, I could not separate the good days from the bad. We were so poor, and worked so hard for little money.'

'One day, I felt really sick, and I had no food to eat, and no income to pay for medical care. That was the day I really had no hope.'

Mother-of-four Nari Yan knows how it feels to go without. Day after day after day. While her husband struggled to grow food on their land, she would travel into neighbouring Thailand to work illegally as a farm hand, harvesting potatoes and cutting sugar cane. It was never enough to make ends meet, and the children would go long periods without any schooling because Nari couldn't pay the fees. Her eldest children, now aged 20 and 17, didn't finish their education because they had to get work as labourers.

But then Tearfund's partner – Cambodian Hope Organisation (CHO) – started a three-year programme in Nari's village, Soriya. Nari and her husband were among a number of families who started learning how and when to plant the right crops, and how to look after them with fertiliser and homemade compost. They received tools such as a hoe and watering cans. As a result, Nari's home garden is flourishing today, and the family's income has more than doubled.

Photo: Will Baxter/Tearfund.

'Before CHO gave me seeds and taught me how to maintain the garden, I sank a lot of money into trying to grow food, without good results,' says Nari.

'I would have to get up at 4am to go and work in someone else's fields, far from home, and there was no one to take care of my children when they were small. They wouldn't have any food to eat after they finished school at 11am. There was no one to answer their questions when they did their homework.'

Vibol Keo, CHO's agriculture teacher, says, 'Before we started supporting this family, there was not enough food to eat and the children were very thin.'

'Now they do not have to worry about having enough food to eat. They even have money to save, and the children are healthy.'

The youngest boys – Veaha, aged 13, and Chamreoun, aged 10 – are back at primary school, and working hard to pass their exams, and move on to secondary school. When they come home from school, they help their mother by tilling the soil and feeding the chickens.

The future is full of hope – and 43-year-old Nari wakes up each day with a sense of anticipation that life can only get better from here on in. She adds, 'With our savings, I would like to build a new house because, in the rainy season, the water comes right in, and that's very difficult at night. So far, I've saved up £600 towards a new wooden house and a toilet.'

And by being around the staff at CHO, Nari has witnessed Christian love in action, and has been keen to learn about Jesus' saving love. 'Before I believed in Jesus, I had no confidence in myself, and I had no hope. Now, every time I face trouble, I know God will answer my prayers. Every day, I pray to God to help me in my business and I know He will give me more success.'



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A new business



Ratha Nguy felt he had run out of options when he left his family in Cambodia and travelled to Thailand in search of work. For months, he had been sinking more and more money into his family's rice fields, with very little chance of seeing any profit from the ever-diminishing harvests.

For a year, Ratha worked in Thailand and sent money home to his wife and son. He was desperate to return – so he leapt at the chance of joining a programme run by Tearfund's partner, Cambodian Hope Organisation (CHO). Ratha took up the offer of a loan of pigs, and went to CHO workshops to learn how to look after them and breed them successfully.

'Now, I can send my son to school, and I have happiness in my family and peace in my heart. CHO staff show love to me and they are always telling me about Jesus. I give thanks to God for sending the CHO staff to my village.'

Ratha's annual earnings have doubled since he took up the loan from CHO. 'I know how to keep pigs, and I also know how to protect my crops from being destroyed by insects, and about using natural fertiliser, and saving seeds for the next planting.'

And he has big plans for the future. 'I want to expand my business and have about 40 pigs in the future.'



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Photos: Will Baxter/Tearfund.

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Dignity and hope



When Maly* was 16, she went to Thailand to work as a housemaid. Those two months were the longest of her life: she was abused and made to work long hours, and she didn't receive a penny.

She returned penniless and traumatised.

But the future started to look a little brighter for her when a friend told her about Tearfund's partner, Cambodian Hope Organisation (CHO), and the work they were doing to support poor families in the Poipet region.

Maly got in touch with them, and was delighted when she was accepted onto the programme, to learn sewing skills and receive a loan of about £90 to buy a sewing machine.

'CHO trained me for six months, and then they found a sewing shop where I could store my sewing machine and get work,' she says.

'I earn about £40 a month sewing jeans and denim jackets that are exported to Thailand. I use that money to pay back the loan, pay for food and rent, and send a little back to my family to help my parents look after my three brothers and sister.

'I have never dared to dream before, because my home town is very poor, with no power or water supply. But now, my future goal is to be a professional tailor. I love this job.'

*Her name has been changed to protect her identity.

Photos: Will Baxter/Tearfund.



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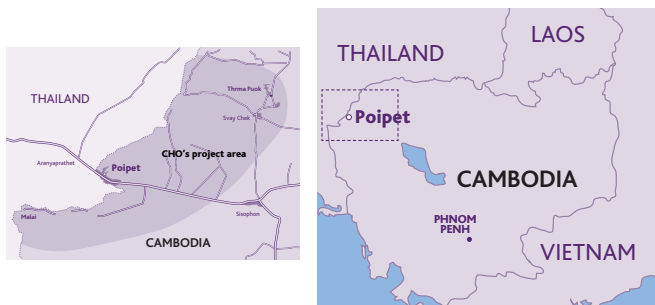
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Background notes

This harvest, we have an opportunity to invest in the work of Tearfund's partner, Cambodian Hope Organisation (CHO), as part of our diocesan focus, *Living God's Love*. As we seek to live God's way and discover new things about God, ourselves and the world, we have the chance to connect with CHO – to Transform Communities and Make New Disciples.

Where the project is



In the Poipet region of north-west Cambodia, on the border with Thailand, most families are desperately poor – earning less than £1 a day.

They face a daily struggle to put food on the table – to provide just one meal a day. Paying for essentials such as schooling and healthcare is simply out of the question.

Malnutrition is rife in this part of Cambodia, and agricultural knowledge about growing vegetables and fruit is scant. As a result, many communities here don't grow enough to support themselves and have to import produce from Thailand at a high cost.

Many parents find themselves tempted to abandon their children or traffic them into Thailand as they simply have too many mouths to feed and not enough food to go round.

And it's hard for young people to escape this cycle of poverty, when they're entering adulthood with no education, job skills or employment opportunities.

In recent years, casinos have opened in Cambodia because gambling is illegal in Thailand. While the gambling industry has created jobs, it has also increased the level of prostitution and trafficking.

Life is precarious in Poipet. But there is a beacon of hope. And it's the church.

Transforming Communities

Since 2002, CHO has been working with communities to encourage and enable people to develop the skills they need to earn a living – so they are not forced into precarious situations in order to survive.

In the Poipet region, CHO supports 120 families to run profitable agricultural businesses at their homes, and rear pigs and chickens as a way of making a living.

Doung Ratana, the head of CHO's home gardens programme, says, 'We move from village to village to help families who cannot send their children to school, because they cannot afford the fees, or because they need the children to work in Thailand.'

'We ask God to direct us, and show us where we are needed most, and I am really proud of what we have been able to do with God's help.'

Making New Disciples

CHO's work extends beyond providing families with practical help.

The organisation has also helped 25 local churches get established, by providing annual training for ministers and team leaders.

This local church network is now equipped to continue CHO's work – to support more families by setting up home gardens, animal breeding programmes and micro loans once CHO's three-year direct involvement in the community comes to an end.

This makes CHO's work sustainable, because they can start up programmes in new areas, secure in the knowledge that communities they have already supported will continue to get the help they need – from local church members who will mentor the families and encourage them to study the Bible and pray together.



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Sermon themes 2 PAGES

I Kings 17 w 8-16

This is a very poignant story of faith 'on the edge'. It would later be appealed to by Jesus to demonstrate to his sceptical neighbours that God was concerned for those outside Israel too (Luke 4 w 25-26).

The widow is called upon to put an amazing amount of trust in the words of this strange emissary of the God of Israel. And yet she does so and thus unlocks a wonderful redemption for her family.

Tragically, the trust of the rural poor of Cambodia has been greatly abused by self-styled saviours in the past. They could easily be cynical about the endeavours of Tearfund's local church-based partners to lead the community where they are working, out of barely sufficient subsistence farming into something more hopeful.

Yet people are responding positively and, at the same time, the church is growing. Doubtless there will be ups and downs in the future, as there were with the widow in I Kings 17, but if you want a modern parallel to this very old biblical story then the work of CHO in Cambodia is hard to beat.

Ezekiel 37 w 1-14

It is not hard to catch the chilling resonance between Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones and Cambodia's all too real experience of a generation ago. One particularly shocking scene from the film *The Killing Fields* comes forcefully to mind.

But it would be a shame if it was only those very negative associations that are re-called in the context of this passage. Fundamentally this is a passage about hope; hope in the wake of very painful recent historical experience and in the face of the understandable scepticism of the people themselves. It is a hope not simply for individual salvation but for nothing less than national re-birth and redemption, within the confines of history itself. And of course it can apply to the church as well, not simply in places like Cambodia, where the church has come through such terrible suffering but also in places like our own country, where hope for the church is often in short supply.

Joel 2 w 21-7 esp. v 25

The promise of verse 25 in this passage to restore what the locusts have destroyed is a well known and poignant picture of redemption in the Old Testament. The suffering that God's people have endured in this context has been as a result of their own sin, which may not be true of economic and agricultural disasters more generally. But the picture of abundance coming in the wake of disaster and scarcity is an attractive one and it fits well with the location and nature of this year's Harvest Appeal. Sin is not absent as a factor here. The most recent difficulties of rice farmers in parts of rural Cambodia have a lot to do with climate change, which has been caused in part by sinful human activity and attitudes in connection with the environment. But we in the West have been bigger sinners in this regard than the Cambodians.

Matthew 13 w 31-35

The little parable of the mustard seed is probably quite a popular one in Harvest talks in any year. But it is particularly appropriate for this year's Harvest Appeal, when one considers the size of the church in Cambodia and the grass-roots nature of the development work being done there. This parable carries within it the promise of exponential growth and a benefit to significant outsiders (the birds in the story), when the Kingdom is involved. The following parable of the yeast nicely follows this up with the suggestion that Kingdom actions and values can have a redemptive impact on an entire community – even extending to a whole country and this outcome can be at the centre of our prayers, as we are involved in this Harvest Appeal.

Continued...



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John 10 vv 7-18

This passage has no obvious link to harvest but then those passages that do have become rather well worn over the years – hence the inclusion of these verses from John’s Gospel in this selection.

Jesus’ harsh words of judgment on those who had presumed to lead and save his people in the (presumably recent) past (vv 8, 10) are almost in danger of understatement, if applied to those who have got their hands on Cambodia within living memory. Perhaps the wolves in the passage provide us with a more helpful way of thinking about the latter. Be that as it may, at the centre of this passage is the wonderful declaration of verse 10b, which embraces both people’s physical well-being and their spiritual health: the sort of holistic mission, which this year’s Harvest Appeal is promoting.

Revelation 21 v 22- 22 v 5

Amidst the strange symbolic language of the Book of Revelation, there is a picture of a harvest in this passage (22 v 2) – a harvest of the tree of life, that adorns the banks of the river in the heavenly city. The leaves of the tree are said to be ‘for the healing of the nations’. At the end of the previous chapter, it has been prophesied that ‘the glory and the honour’ of the nations will be brought into the heavenly city.

It’s easy to overlook these hopeful notes in the Book of Revelation and assume that it’s simply a story of judgment. It is also easy to assume in our modern world that some troubled countries are simply beyond healing. This passage reminds us that this is not so. And the healing of the nations can begin now.



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