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ZIMBABWE

‘Anything that improved the lives of people is technology’ Professor Carroll Khombe, Director of the Institute for Rural Technologies (IRT)

Christian Aid has recently partnered with IRT, who are working in Bulilima district in Matabele South. They



are passionate about fighting rural poverty. Young people in this area are leaving Zimbabwe to find work over the borders in Botswana and South Africa, so the economy is not growing and the gap is widening between the educated rich and the rural poor.

IRT encourages communities to be independent. Although drought and flooding sometimes lead to the need for emergency aid, the best approach is a long-term one – encouraging rural communities to develop their own income, so that they are not dependent on aid. The people there really understand this,

“People come with food, then they don’t come! You (IRT) come with hope for our future. This is long term hope.”

One of many initiatives, promoted by IRT is the village bank system, which enables money to be gathered, shared and used for small business initiatives. The difference between this and using national banks is that wealth remains in the community. Communities trust one another and are given the opportunity to work together.

Samukele Moyo is happy with life. She received a small loan from the village bank and started buying and selling second hand clothes just over the border in Botswana. Gradually, she expanded the business to sell items such as popcorn. Using the profit from this

she bought herself some broilers and eventually earned enough money to rent a shop space.

“All this gave me enough money to buy a shop. This has been beneficial to my family. There are always challenges and presently my stock is very low as I can’t get mealie meal.”

It is great to hear that Samukele’s original loan of US\$ 200 has been paid back and this makes her very happy.

Image: Samukele Moyo with her son outside her shop

BANGLADESH

Christian Aid’s advocacy work in Bangladesh has continued to be very active over the last 6 months. A continual effort has been made to develop the social enterprise skills of the poor, to increase their power in the market, and ensure their access to, and control over, productive resources. To support this, consistent monitoring of national policies and programmes has taken place in order to link them in with regional and global advocacy frameworks. Special emphasis has been given to policy and advocacy work on marginalised women’s rights over productive resources, the right to information, and the right to food for the poorest people. This might include:-

Issues such as implementation of the sustainable development goals, and energy security have been taken up for national level advocacy activities. In line with this, local people’s perceptions on these issues have been collected to collate a knowledge base.

Using this knowledge base, several national events and press conferences have been organised with government representatives present, to influence respective ministries and government departments. A significant development in the advocacy realm has been the Bangladesh programme allocating resources to participate in the Montreal Protocol Conference – the first time an NGO from Bangladesh has participated in this event.

Christian Aid Bangladesh is currently promoting the concept of women-led responses in humanitarian and development scenarios, and is mobilising organisations and government to get involved with such a movement. They are developing an advocacy platform from which to work together with other agencies to find a solution to the issue of waterlogging in the south-west part of the country.

Christian Aid and its partners have arranged a national consultation on Dalit human rights, in order to sensitise policy makers about this longstanding issue.

Commitment for Life has continued to fund the work of Christian Aid's partner Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh. CCDB remains one of the leading national NGOs in the country, with a vision to build a just and caring society where poor people live in peace, dignity and harmony with all God's creation. CCDB is currently working in the following districts of Bangladesh: Manikganj, Mymensingh, Jessore, Satkhira, Bagerhutt, Borguna, Barisal, Madaripur, Goplganj, Pabna, Naogaon, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Banderban, and Dhaka.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Up to 200,000 people attended celebrations to commemorate the life and work of Oscar Romero, former archbishop of San Salvador, who received



beatification on 23 May.

An outspoken critic of the military regime that beset El Salvador in 1980, Romero was martyred on 24 March, 1980 while offering Mass. To this day, he remains a symbol of hope and justice in a region that is still coming to terms with its brutal past.

Initially regarded as a conservative choice, Romero became an outspoken critic of the mass human rights violations that beset El Salvador in 1980. Following the murder of his close friend Father

Rutilio Grande, Romero called for an end to all political violence, condemning the notorious right-wing 'death squads' that plagued the country.

In his weekly sermons, broadcasted across El Salvador, Romero listed all known disappearances, tortures and murders often at risk to himself.

In the aftermath of Grande's death, Romero said: 'If they killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'

Romero's beatification represents a new and important chapter in El Salvador's history, and a chance to highlight ongoing injustices.

Berta Aguirre, Director of Christian Aid partner PROCARES, told us: 'Romero's beatification means a lot for this country and for the victims [of the Civil War]. It highlights the terrible situation of repression and injustice that many of us have lived with for years.'

Romero was a man of faith. His only sin was to preach the Gospel. As a great Jesuit once said: "With Romero, Jesus passed through El Salvador."

Many of the communities we work with were directly impacted by the war, and continue to suffer. Forced to flee to neighbouring countries until the Peace Accords of 1992, many returned to poor quality land which they struggled to live off. PROCARES, has assisted these communities to make a living through market initiatives such as shrimp farming. They transported members of these communities to the beatification celebrations in San Salvador.

Creation Time.

Many churches are celebrating the season of creation, a time to give thanks for God's creation, to pray and to commit to caring for the earth. For many this year, especially in the Caribbean, crops have been destroyed by destructive hurricanes. In Bangladesh and surrounding countries, 17 million people have been affected by severe flooding. An emergency appeal can be found here.

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/emergencies>

Stories for Change is produced by Commitment for Life: it seeks to inform and inspire. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the URC.