

Newsletter

Spring 2024

As spring rains bring refreshment to many parts of the United States, Help a Child continues to support children and families in communities where water is part of a daily struggle for survival. As Pastor Alex Uwizeye, of Help a Child Rwanda, points out: *“I strongly believe that Christians have a key role to play here... because we are called upon to reach out to people in vulnerable situations.”* Read on to learn about two ways your gifts are changing lives through the work of Help a Child.

Kitui - Kenya Staying Resilient When Water Runs Out

She looks like the daughter of the house, young and petite. But looks can be deceiving. This is 32-year-old Jennefer, who has been working hard for two years to change the lives of her family. This area of Kenya is experiencing severe drought. “Now is the time for suffering. We’ve run out of rainwater.”

Can you tell us what your daily life looks like? What are your biggest challenges?

“My life is one big challenge and water is the biggest problem. I try to grow some crops and fruit, but there is not enough rain and therefore the harvest fails every time...I’ll show you at the fruit blooms, the fruits are not well developed at all. Do you see it? They are completely dried out. To survive we really need food and so we need water.”

What have you tried so far?

“I tried to plant different crops to see what could grow. I have already planted my small vegetable garden for the second time... the vegetable garden needs much more water to grow. I also made an attempt to grow bananas. That seems to be working now. I planted a banana tree behind the drain of the shower. Now the tree gets the water that flows away when we shower. And now it’s growing! I didn’t know this at first, but I learned thanks to the project of Help a Child.”



You have to get water every day. Is there a well nearby?

“I have to walk ten kilometers to get water. And it’s not even healthy, pure water. Here in Kitui, all the water is salty. In the morning, I leave for the river at eight o’clock and then I won’t be back until four o’clock. I have a donkey that can carry four jerry cans of water. The next day the jerry cans are empty again and I have to go on the road again. You have to leave early, otherwise it will be so crowded by the river that you will have to wait in line. You’ll be back way too late.”

You have two children aged seven and two. What is it like for a mother to have no water and suffer like this?

“It’s so hard. Brian and Kevin are too young to understand that there is not enough water. So when they’re thirsty, they want water. Children in Kitui can’t grow up strong. Brian has lived with a lot of challenges since birth. If you only have tea in the morning and no bread, it makes children weak. Brian eats little because there is little. If you compare him to children from other areas in Kenya, seven-year-olds are usually taller.

What keeps you hopeful and moving forward in this situation?

“Before the project started, I was having a very hard time. Getting money was difficult. My husband is a day laborer and that means that one day you have a job and the next day you don’t...When this project started, my life changed completely. I can bring about change myself. In the self-help group, I learned to make bags to sell. Hereby it is possible to save some money and borrow an amount from the group. In addition, as a group, we make liquid soap for sale. Everyone in the group tries to save

twenty shillings (0.14 cents) every week. We use part of it to make the materials for the bags and soap. And that's not all. We now also have chickens at home. Chickens lay eggs that we can eat so that we get protein. If I have several chickens, I want to sell a few in the long run so that I can buy a goat. In this way, I am building my own herd."

When we come back in five years, what will we see here?

"I have a lot of plans! You've seen my house. It's small and has only one room. There is a bed and it is full. I would love to build a bigger house with a tank in which I can collect rainwater. Because the water we have is salty, but we could drink rainwater. That way, my children can...get a better life. Another plan is that I want to save up for a cow so that I have milk for the boys. This is what they need to feel good and to develop. I am convinced that my plans will succeed. I am already so happy and motivated because I see what I have achieved in two years.

What do you think of the method of Help a Child?

"We used to have other organizations here that helped us, but AICCAD [local partner of Help a Child] has a completely different style. The organizations that came first fed us, but when the project was finished, we had



nothing left. This organization brings self-reliance, which is good. You need this to ensure that your income improves. I see and hear that people are happy with this."

What is your dream for your children?

My children are still young, but I really want them to have the opportunity to learn and to be able to go to school...I want my children to have a better life. I myself have not had sufficient education. But if you have been to school and have knowledge, then you can achieve more... So I make sure they have water, food and that they can go to school."

"This organization brings self-reliance"

Purnea – India An Unlivable Home

For some families it is a curse, for others a blessing: the annual floods in Purnea in the state of Bihar. When rivers burst their banks, entire areas are flooded from July until well into September.

The projects of Help a Child in Purnea are spread over 13 villages in the north of India on the border with Nepal. The meltwater from the Himalayas feeds rivers such as the Ganges, which flows through Bihar. In combination with the large amount of rainwater during the monsoon, this causes severe flooding in the area. This natural disaster affects many families every year. Some live a little higher up, where their house is safe, and the farmland is extra fertile because of all the water. These people see opportunity: they can grow maize or makhana, a seed that is quite rare in India. It grows in water lilies and is sold as food. And if you have money for a boat, you can fish.

Not all families have these kinds of opportunities. The inhabitants of low-lying areas are hit hard by the floods. Their house becomes uninhabitable, and the harvest is destroyed. Poisonous snakes swim in the water and end up in homes. If you are bitten, it is impossible to get to a hospital because roads have become impassable. Stagnant or contaminated water also spreads disease. Families from these areas flee every year to other places where it is dry. Here they work as day laborers for a few months to earn some money. Children are also put to work. They miss school for months and fall behind in their learning.



Looking for a solution

Help a Child, in conjunction with the local Indian government, is training young adults on emergency aid and response. They learn how to prevent drowning, provide medical assistance in flooded areas, and about safety measures like wearing life jackets, protecting themselves from snakes and insects, and making stretchers from local materials like coconut husks and water bottles.

In the children's centers of the village program, children get help with schoolwork so that they can catch up as much as possible. In this safe environment, they can begin to make plans. Eight-year-old Sundali, who comes to the children's center every day, dreams out loud: "Later, I'm going to be a police officer!"

These are great steps, but we are not there yet. It is clear that in a place like Bihar, these challenges will continue to hit the population hard. Help a Child is committed to working with families to provide information, education, and lobbying to support affected communities.