

# Food Distribution in Southern Africa Helps Avoid Famine

"We have averted a famine in the Southern Africa region as a result of the global efforts of the international humanitarian community," reports Mark Janz, World Vision's associate director for emergency response. World Vision is the major partner of a consortium that worked to distribute food in the affected area.

Late last year, an estimated 15 million people in seven countries faced starvation. "Because of the timely receipt and distribution of food, people in need of food aid assistance were fed on a regular basis. We have been able to avoid a major catastrophe," summarizes Walter Middleton, international director of World Vision's Food Resources Management Group.

At the height of the recent food crisis, World Vision's response provided food to 2.4 million people in the Southern Africa Region.

"There have been major improvements in Zambia and Malawi, although the situation has deteriorated in Zimbabwe and Mozambique," according to Janz. "Some improvements also are evident in Angola, while food distribution continues in Swaziland and Lesotho.

"Where there has been significant rain, a wide distribution of seeds was made for the current planting season."

The primary thrust of World Vision's response has been food distribution that will continue to be complemented by efforts to provide agricultural recovery, health and nutrition, water and sanitation and asset protection.

Many of the ongoing activities of the consortium working in the area will help to increase the agricultural productivity in many of the areas where World Vision currently is operating in Southern Africa, according to Middleton. These activities include rehabilitation of feeder roads, simple irrigation schemes, flood and erosion control and promotion of crop diversification, conservation farming and seed multiplication.

"We have already seen some impact," says Middleton, "as the need for free food distribution has decreased in some of the countries."

When international relief and development organizations work in high risk communities such as those in Southern Africa, they face helping people through recurring cycles of good times and bad times.

World Vision has worked to develop a residual capacity in its national offices that will be helpful as future shocks to the food supply occur in the region. Each of the offices has developed increased capacity to maintain an effective response to future need, Janz says.

Also, ongoing sponsorship through World Vision of children living in the affected countries helps maintain adequate nutrition for them.

"However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region will handicap the population's ability to recover, as in some of these countries more than 30 percent of the 20 to 40-year-old working age

population is HIV positive," Janz reminds us.

Another of the great challenges in the present situation is to maintain the technical resources available in the region through the recovery process. A residual base of resources is needed for the kind of recovery now required in the affected area.

As new crises develop in other areas of Africa and other parts of the world, the same amount of available resources must be divided among more people now in need. Humanitarian agencies want to be able to allocate sufficient resources as needed over time throughout the recovery process.

"As the crisis begins to ease in one part of the world, such as in Southern Africa," Janz says, "it is difficult to maintain the public interest and support needed to enable the agencies to respond effectively over the years of time it takes to recover from such a shock to a region."

## New Handbook Focuses on Stress

Those who serve the poor, needy and disenfranchised increasingly find themselves working in dangerous environments, often in close proximity with active military units. Increasing political and religious polarization means aid workers around the world often become targets of violent acts.

The resulting trauma and stress affect the workers and their families and often lead to depression, sorrow and grief. Protection against the major impacts of traumatic stress is critical for all humanitarian and welfare agencies and their personnel.

For the last five years World Vision

International, the world's largest international Christian humanitarian organization, has been developing a comprehensive program to provide staff members with the support and care necessary to ensure continued health and safety.

The *Stress and Trauma Handbook*, scheduled for release this Fall, is part of World Vision's strategy for mitigating the impact of traumatic stress in the lives of humanitarian aid workers. This unique publication contains real stories, a series of checklists, stress indicators and burnout monitors. It offers hope.

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World Vision



## Reflections from Bryant Myers

# The poor and the ICT revolution — I

**T**hey began gathering on the side of the dusty road in the middle of the small town in northern Ghana. They chatted as they waited for the bus that would come when it came.

This morning there was a difference. A university student walked among them with a questionnaire.

"Where are you going?" the student asked, after making all the appropriate greetings. Then the real question: "Why are you going there?"

The answers were startling. Almost 40 percent were going somewhere to get a piece of information: crop prices, agricultural advice, financial information, funeral dates.

In some cases, the person traveling had been sent by his village or extended family.

Bottom line: They needed information, and it was not available locally.

The poor spend their time to get information.

We in the West spend money instead, buying a computer and linking ourselves to the Internet.

### Myths

There are two basic myths about the poor and their relationship to the information and communications revolution.

The first myth is that information and communications technology (ICT) comes after development. This is the way it happened in the West.

Your nation develops and only then does the power of information technology begin to seep into the lives of common folk.

The second myth is that the poor do not really know how to use infor-

mation anyway. They are illiterate and simple folk after all.

I am going to tell some stories of World Vision's recent experience with information and communications technology and let you decide how well these myths stand up.

### Learning

The World Bank's "World Links for Development" project works with developing world schools to set up computer centers.

Project workers teach local teachers how to access the many international, multilingual databases of Internet learning modules. The goal is enhanced learning.

The teachers love it, and the students are

keen. But the challenge is sustainability. The school is asked to pay the costs of the Internet connection, a phone bill of about \$200 a month.

In rural Uganda, the school and the government do not have this kind of money.

As part of the post-start-up evaluation, the students' academic performance is tracked. Initially, student scores went up and everyone was pleased.

Then about a year into the project, the scores began to decline. What was going on?

An investigation revealed the cause. As the parents listened to their children tell stories of the wonderful new world of the Internet, the parents began to ask their children if they could ask this strange source of information about nonacademic things, such as crop prices, weather forecasts, agri-

cultural advice and the like.

The children began spending so much time getting information for their parents that their schoolwork was suffering.

A bright school administrator put the two problems together and created an opportunity. He opened the computer center in the evenings for adults to use on a fee-for-service basis, thus providing a revenue stream to pay for the Internet connection, while also allowing the children to refocus on their academics.

### Investigating

I started with a story of student research in Ghana. One outcome was a decision to open a small Internet shop across from the bus station.

The shop had one computer with an Internet connection, a couple of telephones and a large bulletin board. It was a simple source for information exchange.

The local folks learned that before you buy a bus ticket, you first check to see if the former student in the information kiosk can find out your information and save you the trip.

Two very old Ghanaian cocoa farmers walked in one day.

"We want to talk to the man in London who sets the cocoa prices," they told the kiosk owner.

"What's his name?"

"We don't know. He lives in London."

"Where's London?" the amused former student asked.

"We don't know, but it's farther than Accra."

"Why do you want to talk to him?"

"You see that man over there by the truck? He just bought our cocoa crop. If we could find out what the cocoa price in London is, we'd know whether to thank that man or thump him."

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## Reflections (from page 3)

### Consulting

The rural doctor in northern Zambia was stumped. The symptoms of the man he was diagnosing looked a lot like cholera, but there were characteristics he had not seen before.

The doctor wrote a message describing what he was seeing and included the few simple lab results he had.

A simple radio uploaded the message onto a low-orbiting satellite provided by Volunteers for Technical Assistance (VITA), an American non-government organization.

Even though it means e-mail is available for only 45 minutes twice a day, it isn't bad for a place where telephones don't work.

Within 24 hours, a series of e-mails came back to him from other doctors linked to Satellife, a Web site and list server designed to support remote health professionals in the developing world.

One of them reported that this was indeed an unusual kind of cholera and described the treatment and prevention plan.

Hundreds of kilometers from the capital and almost as far from the nearest hospital, information and communications technology assisted an over-worked and under-resourced caregiver. A life was saved.

### Deciding

It was an old computer, very slow. The farmers stared at the screen, reading the graphical symbols that made it unnecessary for them to read or write very much.

They checked the picture of rice. They checked a picture that indicated the quality of the rice. They chose the picture that corresponded to what the local middleman was prepared to pay for their rice.

Finally, they chose the picture that corresponded to the cost of renting a truck to go to the capital.

Then they waited patiently.

After a few minutes, a picture of a truck was overridden by the internationally recognized symbol forbidding something.

The software in the computer had

used the Internet to access the market price of rice in the capital, run a cost benefit analysis and reported that it was better to sell their rice to the middleman than to hire a truck and sell their rice in the capital.

### Profiting

The GrameenPhone in Bangladesh works on a simple business model. Loan a poor Bengali woman the equivalent of \$400, which she uses to buy a cell phone and a service plan.

The woman becomes the "phone lady" in her village. She is the beneficiary of micro-credit. People pay her a few hundred taka to make calls.

The woman repays her loan, saves some money and has enough left to help her family.

Founded in 1997, GrameenPhone

“ The woman becomes the 'phone lady' in her village ”

now has more than 820,000 subscribers and a 70 percent market share. It was awarded the Bangladesh Best Business award for 2002.

This private company of thousands of women entrepreneurs is extending telephone coverage faster than the government of Bangladesh.

### Concluding

Clifford Geertz, a well-known anthropologist, once studied the informal economies among peasant societies. He concluded that information for the poor is "scarce, maldistributed, inefficiently communicated and intensely valued."

People would not pay to ride on a bus in order to get information if Geertz' claim were not true.

More on this in the next issue.

## Relationships (from page 1)

It will lead to intentional interdependence with churches. Without sacrificing the mandate to work with the total community, partnering with churches will not be negotiable.

Differing country contexts will invite a variety of strategies, but the guiding principle will be to link with churches as "indispensable partners" in our shared ministry with the poor.

In God's design, the church's presence and redemptive influence in communities is meant to be permanent; whereas World Vision's specialized ministry with the poor in their communities is intentionally designed to be temporary.

The sobering reality is that if the church does not remain as part of the ongoing redemptive influence, then holistic transformation will not be sustained.

### Partnerships that contribute

Acknowledging our need to clarify

our church commitments, the World Vision International Board also endorsed the Commission's recommendation to revise the church-related line in our mission statement. The future mission mandate is to work in "partnerships with churches that contribute to spiritual and social transformation."

The new mission statement extends beyond simply building relationships with churches. The call is to serve together, to pray and work together in addressing the spiritual and social needs of people. It is to enhance the holistic well-being of children, families and communities "on earth as it is in heaven."

When that happens, people in poverty will live with more opportunity and dignity, churches will be more vital, World Vision's mission will advance, and God's kingdom will come again and again.

✦ Don Posterski

## World Vision Reviews Way It Works With Churches

### World Vision believes it shares ministry mandate of the church to work with poor.

**H**ealthy organizations are a lot like healthy people. On their way to maturity, they go through ages and stages. They emerge out of their history and transition into their enhanced futures.

Understanding World Vision's need to reassess how we are working with churches around the world, the International Board established a Commission on the Church. The Commission's mandate was to "encourage positive attitudes and raise up strategies within the World Vision Partnership for engaging churches as allies in our shared ministry with the poor."

Alongside the research findings from a series of promising practices from diverse country contexts, the results of extensive interviews with church leaders and World Vision staff around the world are contained in the resulting report. The recommendations were formally adopted in September 2002. Let me refer to three specific observations.

#### **An expression of the church**

As a Christian development, relief and advocacy organization, World Vision defines itself as "an expression of the church," on special assignment with the poor. Without any desire to

substitute for or replace the church, World Vision understands itself to be a part of the church with a particular calling and ministry to serve the poor in the name of Christ.

The church's ministry mandate is broad and comprehensive. Churches aspire to minister to people from birth until death. They exist to enable people to encounter God in worship, to serve the sacraments and teach the Scriptures, to equip people for service and witness and to seek justice for all.

World Vision and other specialized ministries have a limited mandate. They focus on particular dimensions of Christ's mission within the church's broader mission.

For centuries the Roman Catholic Church has had many religious orders that express their particular ministries under the Catholic umbrella. Within the Protestant Christian family, numerous para-church agencies express their specialized ministries alongside organized churches.

Rather than self-defining itself as a "para-church" or an "alongside" Christian ministry, World Vision believes it shares the ministry mandate of the church to work with people in

poverty and to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

#### **Church as indispensable partner**

Another affirmation that emerged from the Commission's work was that "spiritual transformation is integral to transformational development and that the church is God's sustaining instrument in the world." Accordingly, "while continuing to engage the total community, World

Vision's commitment is to work with churches as indispensable partners."

One way of describing World Vision's history with churches is that in the first stage, it was dependent on churches. Churches were the infrastructure through which children and people living in poverty were served.

In the second stage, World Vision hired professional staff and went directly to people in their communities and collaborated around community development principles and practices. Although churches and their people were often invited to participate in the process as members of the community, the World Vision way became more independent.

The future strategy will be different. (continued on page 4)

“ World Vision's commitment is to work with churches as indispensable partners ”

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