

Basic rights and an end to poverty

Only 200 years ago people still felt able to argue that keeping other human beings as slaves was perfectly compatible with leading a good, moral life. Abolitionists argued that human beings are born with an inalienable right to personal liberty; they demanded that this right should be enjoyed by all human beings, regardless of where they had been born or the colour of their skin. They succeeded in their struggle because ultimately people were forced to admit the justice of their cause; and also because slavery was seen to be an inefficient and wasteful system.

The years since the end of the Second World War have seen a further broadening in awareness of what being human means, or should mean. The Depression of the 1930s and the rise of fascism, in particular, showed the terrible consequences of denying the full humanity of others; the end of that war found many people consumed by longing for a world in which each individual would have their humanity recognised, and be able to live as full a life as possible. Systems which deny people this over-arching right, and the basic rights which safeguard it, were recognised as both morally wrong, and wasteful of human talent and potential. Such systems were seen, too, as a threat not just to the people they deprived, but to everyone. The conflagration of 1939-45 proved that, in the end, the consequences of denying certain people their basic rights are likely to engulf us all.

These experiences led to a concern to formalise basic rights, to get them agreed, written down, and, most importantly, recognised by the world's governments. The charters, covenants, and agreements listed below are some of the most important to have been drawn up, but similar moral convictions underpin many other documents, including a number of regional agreements like the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Thus Oxfam's Global Basic Rights Charter draws on the definitions and perceptions which already form the basis for some of the most significant human rights instruments of the century.

International agreements on rights

- **The United Nations Charter (1945):** a treaty binding on all UN members, in other words, virtually all the world's states; concerned primarily with the maintenance of peace, but also includes the notion of the collective responsibility of all UN members for the promotion and safeguarding of human rights world-wide. Article 1 gives its aim as being "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

The Charter brings all human beings within the scope of human rights – for too long, only privileged people were seen as having an automatic entitlement to human rights. It emphasises the concept of equality or non-discrimination. It implies that concern about human rights is not limited by national boundaries, but is a matter of legitimate international concern.

The UN Charter does not define human rights. This task was left to the UN itself and it was decided that an International Bill of Human Rights should be drawn up. This includes the following three instruments:

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** enshrines the over-riding principle of non-discrimination, states that all people are entitled to the fulfilment of all human rights on an equal footing. (see page 107)
- **International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (1966)**
- **International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).**

All three confirm the notion already contained in the Charter that all persons are entitled to:

- civil and political rights, including the rights to life, integrity, liberty and security of the human person; administration of justice; privacy; freedom of religion or belief, and of opinion and expression; movement; assembly and association; political participation;
- economic, social, and cultural rights, including the rights to work; trade union membership and involvement; an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing, and housing; health care; education; participation in cultural life.

All persons are declared to be entitled to these rights without distinction of any kind, to be equal before the law, and entitled without any discrimination, to equal protection from the law.

- **Geneva Conventions (1949)**: aim to limit violence and protect the fundamental rights of the individual in time of armed conflict.
- **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (1966)**: seeks to prevent and combat racist doctrines and practices, in order to promote understanding between races.
- **International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979)**: is an expression of the international community's determination to adopt measures required for the elimination of discrimination against women in all its forms and manifestations.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**: sets out the rights of the child, and promotes the principle "in the best interests of the child".
- **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and Agenda 21 (1992)**: commit governments to safeguarding the global environment. The Rio Declaration is a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of states; Agenda 21 offers a comprehensive and far-reaching programme for sustainable development at an international, national, and local level.
- **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993)**: reaffirms the principle of universality, interdependence, and indivisibility of human rights; calls for concerted action to eradicate all forms of violence against women.
- **Cairo Declaration (1994)**: (from the International Conference on Population and Development) seeks to affirm women's rights to reproductive health and control of their own fertility.
- **Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action (1995)**: affirms the agreement of governments to take action aimed at promoting social justice, solidarity, and equality; defines poverty not simply as a lack of income resulting in hunger, ill health, homelessness, and limited access to education, but as being inextricably linked to a lack of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital, and social connections; states that the eradication of poverty "will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures to ensure access for all to resources".

(Many internationally agreed standards are not based on legally binding treaties, but there is an increasing reliance on declarations and statements of principles which not only represent important political commitments by governments, but also lay down the ground rules for international relations and the implementation of domestic policies.)

There have been attempts to depict some of these documents as utopian and unrealistic, to suggest that we cannot possibly hope to see *all* human beings realising their social and economic rights. Perhaps the best counter to such arguments is to look at what has been achieved in many parts of the world: the virtual eradication of cholera and other killer diseases by huge public sewage systems and comprehensive immunisation programmes, the introduction of universal free or nearly free education in so many countries, the resettlement and rehousing of all Europe's refugees after the Second World War.

Nor is it only rich countries which have achieved such miracles. Vietnam, a country crippled by decades of war, international isolation, and economic mismanagement, has literacy rates of over 90 per cent, and has managed to transform itself within a decade from a country gripped by near-famine to the world's third-largest rice exporter. Kerala is one of India's poorest states, but the state government has invested heavily in health care and education; as a result, infant mortality rates there are a quarter of the average for India, and virtually every Keralan child completes primary school. Mali, one of the world's poorest countries (155 out of 160 according to the UNDP), has transformed itself from a military dictatorship into a genuine democracy with a real commitment to protecting the rights of all its citizens, and to finding the mechanisms to resolve conflicts before they explode into violence.

Primary school in Ky Anh district, Vietnam.

photo: Sean Sprague



All these achievements, in both rich and poor areas, are vulnerable: all can be overturned. But they demonstrate clearly what can be achieved where there is a genuine will to tackle and solve even the most overwhelming problems.

Some commentators have tried to argue that civil and political rights are a luxury that poor nations cannot afford. They maintain that economic and social rights must take precedence, even if this means curtailing other rights. However, the “either/or” approach is misleading: there is, for example, plenty of evidence to suggest that an important factor in preventing famine from occurring when harvests fail is the existence of a free press.

The range of rights covered by international documents is a broad one, for no one right can exist in total isolation. Rights are interdependent, and realising one right makes it easier to realise others. The more years of education a woman has, the healthier she and her children are likely to be. When squatter settlers are able to exercise their democratic rights, they are more likely to obtain clean water and sanitation. A farmer with security of tenure is more likely to be able to send his or her children to school.

The following pages look at the ten rights listed in Oxfam’s Global Basic Rights Charter. They set out in more detail the status of those rights in international law, and the consequences for ordinary people when they are denied, and they look at some of the ways in which people — individuals, community groups, organisations like Oxfam, local government workers, and national governments — are working to turn these rights from theoretical concepts into solid everyday reality.

The right to enough to eat

recognised:

- The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living and “the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”.
- Signatories to the Covenant on the Rights of the Child have pledged themselves to combating malnutrition among children.
- The Geneva Conventions prohibit the use of starvation as an instrument of war, including in this the destruction of resources such as livestock and crops.

denied:

- 800 million people in the world are severely malnourished or starving.
- In Bangladesh malnutrition rates are three times higher among girls than among boys.

Even in a year of good rains, most families in Bweri, a village on the shores of Lake Victoria in north-west Tanzania, can grow food to last only three to five months each year. For the rest of the year they have to depend on casual labour on building sites, or petty trade in maize flour, fish, firewood, and charcoal.

A survey in 1992 showed that 38 per cent of all families were eating only one meal a day. About 6 per cent of all children were malnourished. The price of maize had doubled over the previous year, and many families were trying to survive on cassava, which is low in protein.

Ironically, Bweri is actually a major protein-exporter. Every month, over 80 tonnes of frozen Nile Perch fillets are

processed in the new Fishpak factory, for export to Holland, Spain, Germany, and the UK. Fishpak brings employment to Bweri, and hard currency to Tanzania, but the fish is being harvested and removed from a community already chronically deficient in protein.

The growth of the export business has increased local fish prices. In the 18 months after Fishpak started operating in Bweri, prices had increased six-fold. "We can buy the skeletons from Fishpak, for making soup," explains Bibie Usufu, "but we don't eat much fish now because it's scarce. The price is too high. All the fishermen sell to Fishpak. Prices have risen so much that fish has become almost unaffordable to local people."



The Fishpak factory.

photo: Geoff Sayer

- Large commercial Zimbabwean farmers, owners of the country's most fertile land, leave 40 per cent of that land uncultivated; one third of all children in Zimbabwe have symptoms of chronic malnutrition.
- Economic reforms in Peru in 1991 saw food prices rise by 2,500 per cent in one year, and the number of people living in extreme poverty double.

but possible:

"We've grown sorghum here since 1985," says Arakudi Apalla Lobe, of Kenya's drought-prone Turkana region. "We joined a training course on *bund* construction, and had a good harvest in that first year, just like this year's. The yield varies, but we've had a harvest every year — it's never failed, even during the drought years."

Arakudi has worked with the Lokitaung Pastoral Development Project to improve her small *shamba*, or sorghum patch. Her environment is a harsh one, many people would say an impossible one. But Arakudi has proved that even in the harshest of environments hunger does not have to be inevitable.

"Building the *bunds* was hard, but we've proved it's worthwhile. We all worked together, all the project members, for five weeks to raise the *bunds* for this *shamba*. We moved from *shamba* to *shamba* until they were all completed.

"Now we work with two other families who have *shambas* nearby. Because we're close to the harvest they're helping us now to keep birds off the sorghum. This year we'll harvest six to eight bags, in about ten days' time. Until then I stay here all day with my daughter, Napocho, to frighten off the birds, and my husband comes to spend the night, to guard the crop against thieves.

"We'll keep some of the sorghum to eat, but most we'll sell, so that we can buy another five goats, and pay off the credit we've taken from the project store. We lost 25 goats during the drought, and have 15 left, with their kids. Ten are in milk, and now



photo: Geoff Sayer

the rains have come we hope things will get better."

In such a precarious existence, running up a small debt can be the prelude to disaster. The Lokitaung project store keeps prices low, and gives its members credit through difficult times. "It's been a big help," explains Arakudi. "Just last week I bought sugar on credit. We have to eat when we're to do the hard work of cultivating the *shamba*. The store has helped us through every year; the credit has been especially valuable during the hard years, like 1992."

The right to clean water

recognised:

- The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights recognises the right to life, and requires governments to take measures to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics, in order to reduce infant mortality and increase life expectancy. The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. With approximately 80 per cent of diseases and over one-third of all deaths in the developing world caused by contaminated water, clearly the right to clean water is an essential component of these rights.
- The UN Conference on the Environment and Development (1992) recognises the obligation of individual states to safeguard minimum standards of water purity.
- The Geneva Conventions oblige warring parties to protect the natural environment, and prohibit the use of methods of warfare which are intended to contaminate water sources.
- The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 recognise the vital importance of safe water supplies and environmentally-sensitive sanitation for protecting the environment, improving health, and alleviating poverty.

denied:

- More than 1 billion people have no clean water or sanitation.
- 25,000 people — the equivalent of the population of Durham — die each day from water-borne disease.
- In Zambia over 22 per cent of the people in rural areas have to walk more than 1km to reach their nearest water source.
- In Lima, Peru, poor people pay up to \$3 for a cubic metre of contaminated water from a private vendor: middle-class households pay \$0.5 for the same amount of clean tap water.



In poor communities throughout the world it is women who bear the burden of collecting the day's water for their families. Many have to spend hours of every day walking to sources several miles away. Spinal problems and severe headaches are a common result of carrying containers of water weighing up to 22kg (40lb). What is more, sickness and death may be carried home, along with the water. Untreated water, possibly from a muddy water-hole shared with cattle, can be lethal, especially for young children.

Photo: John Ogle

but possible:

"Before we had to get water from a pool 2km away. The water was dirty and lots of us got ill. Now the health of the people here is better."

Oun Svey is head of Prey Veng village, in Thmar Puok, close to Cambodia's border with Thailand. Despite nominal government control, this is still Khmer Rouge country, and Thmar Puok is an area torn by violence and conflict. Armed bandits, warlords, and smugglers hold sway here as well.

And it is an area of great poverty, where water is a particular problem. "Either we have bad flooding," says Ros Monichot, Programme Supervisor for the Oxfam-funded Khmer Buddhist Association, "or near drought conditions. Because of this we have developed traditional ways of locating water sources.

"Termites show where there is water. If you see a small hill, that slowly gets bigger and bigger, this indicates that termites are there, a sure indication that there is water there too.

"Or find a tree. A hard variety, that we usually use for building houses. Look at its roots. Find out which way the roots are growing. Water will also be in that direction.

"We can also fish for water. We attach a cotton wool ball to a piece of string on a stick and search for water under the ground. You can tell the difference between shaking in the wind and the shaking which means that water is present.

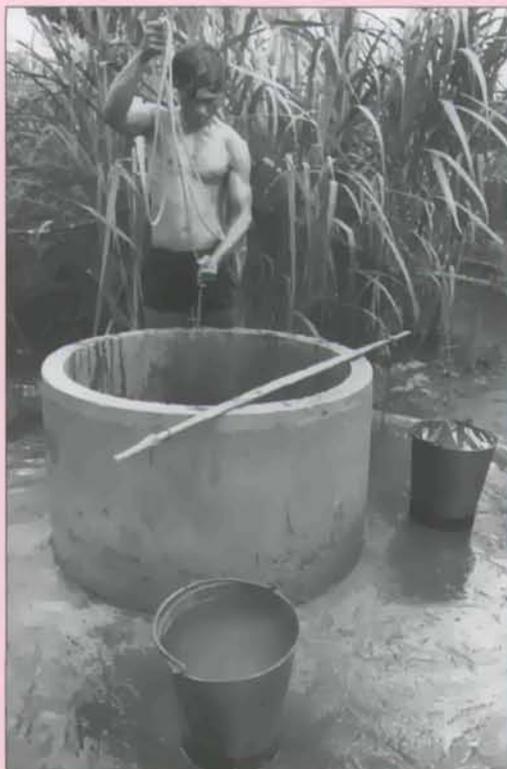
"But it's not enough just to find water. You then have to dig 30 to 40 centimetres down, put a lid over the top. If moisture rises up, you know there is definitely water there. After this you start digging a three-metre hole. If it is humid at three metres, you then dig down another ten metres. Here there will be good water."

War keeps people poor in Thmar Puok. It prevents them from putting down firm roots and investing time and energy in finding

long-term solutions to their problems. But even against such a bleak background, the Khmer Buddhist Association has been able to help people to claim their basic right to clean water. Prey Veng is one of ten villages where it has provided training and materials to enable villagers to locate water and then sink their own wells.

The well-digging has had other results. It has got people working together in a situation where trust does not come easily: "they have changed their way of looking at things," says Ros Monichot, "and they are now working together in the Buddhist way." And it has given women a new status and a new vision of what they can achieve: "Everything in society is decided by men," comments Ros Monichot, "and women are not asked. The wells project has changed things. More women are joining us than men. In Prey Veng six wells were dug by women."

photo: Nic Dunlop



The right to a livelihood

recognised:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the right to work.
- It also recognises the right to just and fair conditions of work, including the rights to work in safe and healthy conditions and to form and join a trade union.
- The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights recognises the right not to be subjected to slavery or forced labour.
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination articulate the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of gender or race in the realm of work.
- The 1995 Social Summit Declaration commits states planning development schemes, such as large dams, not to damage the livelihoods of those living in the area. It also commits governments to producing national poverty-eradication plans by 1996, and to drawing these plans up with the participation of people living in poverty.

denied:

- One in four of the world's people live in profound poverty, unable to meet their basic needs.
- Conservative estimates put the number of child prostitutes in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines at 500,000.
- Six million black Zimbabwean subsistence farmers depend for a living on 20 per cent of the land; the best 20 per cent is owned by 4,500, mostly white, commercial farmers; on average, commercial farms are 800 times larger than subsistence farms.
- In real terms, average wages in Zambia in 1991 were a quarter of their mid-1970s' level.
- In Britain around one-third of workers now earn less than 68 per cent of the national average wage, a 25 per cent increase since 1979.

In 1993 the privatisation of Zambia's maize marketing system, and a failure of private sector traders to fill the vacuum left by the state system, left women farmers in Eastern Province with bumper crops — and no way of selling them. Farmers in Chipata district are about 45km from the nearest maize marketing centre. Since there is no bus service, the only means of reaching it is on foot, and the women

cannot afford the lost labour time. Forced to sell their crops to a single local buyer, many eventually had to accept prices 25 per cent below what the crops were really worth. Many had to barter their crops for necessities — one woman sold a 15kg tin of maize for just two bars of soap, a quarter the value of the maize at the previous year's prices.



Oxfam-funded education campaign with seasonal agricultural workers.

Julio Etchart

“We are paid to work ten hours,” says Luisa Pina, a labourer in Chile’s Central Valley, “but during the harvest we work for at least 14 hours with no extra pay. Last year I became sick. It was after we were spraying Temick [a severely toxic pesticide] on the peas. I was told I would not be paid if I could not work, so I continued working. Many other women suffered from stomach complaints. But we all continued working ... we cannot live if we do not have work.”

Unemployment

| | % Unemployed | % Population in rural areas |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Nicaragua | 14 | 39 |
| Sudan | 13 | 76.8 |
| Sri Lanka | 14.1 | 78.6 |
| USA | 10.1 | 24.4 |

Source: *World Economic and Social Survey 1994*

The figures above are misleading: unemployment, as it is understood in industrialised countries, is a modern, largely urban phenomenon. It is a concept which cannot always easily be applied to the situation in developing countries, particularly ones which are predominantly rural.

It may be relevant for the few countries where the land is farmed by large commercial operations, employing a work-force in much

the same way as a factory might. In traditional agriculture, however, characterised by family units cultivating small plots, low productivity may be endemic, but unemployment is an unknown concept. Often marginal traditional farmers may have to spend at least part of the year as paid labourers, possibly on a larger farm, because the small family plot is not large enough for subsistence.

Fluid and informal systems like these make calculating employment rates almost impossible, particularly given the very complex working roles played by most women. In most African countries, for example, two-thirds or more of the population is still rural, and wage-earners are only a small proportion of the total labour force. In such a situation, official rural unemployment rates, and therefore unemployment rates for the whole country, are very low. This can give a completely misleading idea of the incidence of poverty in a given country, and can also mask very high rates of urban unemployment.



photo: Imam Hartoyo

but possible:

"We have a problem here, mostly economic, about how to send our children to school, and cope with daily life," says Ibu Rambu Otu, of the small Indonesian island of Sumba. "We had heard good things about Wahana from other groups, and thought they might be able to help."

Wahana, a local community organisation, began by organising workshops to discuss all the problems facing women in West Sumba, such as the shortage of drinking water, poor health, and their heavy workload.

At the heart of all these problems, the women recognised, was a lack of income. Wahana has helped the women in Ibu Otu's village to buy goats and rice seed, and to set up a village savings and credit scheme.

People there face regular "hungry times", because they finish the grain they have harvested several months before the next harvest is due. With Wahana's guidance the women have set up vegetable gardens to tide them over those months. They now have fresh produce to eat and sell, though they are nervous about taking their produce to market. "We're not sure if the vegetables will sell, and we're afraid about making the journey," explained the group's Treasurer, Korlina Kahilep. However, supported by Wahana and the other members of the women's group in their village, the women will shortly be trying out new markets for their produce.

The right to a home

recognised

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the right to adequate housing.
- Many other international agreements recognise the same right — which is seen as more than a right to a roof over one's head. Most agreements define it as a right to live somewhere in peace, security, and dignity. Most define adequate housing as:
 - having legal security of tenure
 - being affordable
 - providing sufficient space
 - providing adequate protection from cold, damp, heat or rain
 - allowing access to employment, health and education services, and social facilities
 - being appropriate to the culture of those living there.

denied:

- There are reckoned to be 11 million homeless people in the world.
- In the developing countries overall, as many as one person in three is homeless or in severely substandard housing.
- A third of the population in most Third World cities are squatters; at least 600 million people are living there in conditions which threaten their health and even lives.
- 37 million people have been driven from their homes by violence and armed conflict; over 80 per cent of them are women and children.
- If current trends continue, there will be more than 100 million refugees by 2000.
- One in every hundred Africans (over four million people) is a refugee.
- Between 1960 and 1982 an estimated 3.5 million black South Africans were forcibly moved from their homes: it will be many years before the new South Africa can hope to deal with the housing crisis which has resulted.

Poverty goes to town

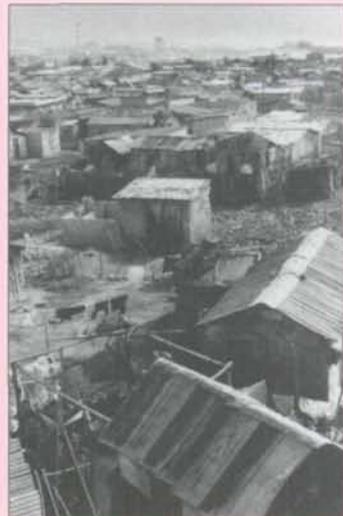
Some 2,300 million people, 43 per cent of the world's population, now lives in urban areas. In the developing world the urban population is rising by about 50 million each year. Currently about a third of all town dwellers in the Third World are squatters. In most cities, the housing supply and the demand for labour are unable to keep pace with the expansion of the urban population, so by the end of the century shanty-town dwellers are likely to make up half the total urban population in most developing countries.

Living space in the squatter settlements is usually cramped and insecure. Basic privacy, let alone a quiet space where children might do their homework, are unknown luxuries. Proper ventilation, adequate lighting, clean water supplies, and sanitation become particularly essential in the overcrowded conditions of the shanty towns; but they are likely to be non-existent. Though the casual work most people depend on provides incomes below the poverty line, much of their pay may go on travelling from peripheral squatter settlements to wherever they can find that work. In many areas, high crime rates are one indication that people have lost the security of old family and community ties.

In developing countries, the urban population is growing at a rate of at least 3.6 per cent each year. We are seeing a new trend: not just to an increasingly urbanised world, but to an urbanisation of poverty.

Port-au-Prince shanty town, Haiti.

photo: Jenny Matthews



but possible:

"It's very good to see the people coming back to Roosboom," says Mavis Sisane. "They were sent away unjustly, and now they have come back to their own land."

In 1976, under South Africa's apartheid laws, most of Mavis's neighbours were forced to leave their homes and land, and dumped in a distant township. For the next 15 years the exiled community continued to fight to be allowed to return to Roosboom, to the land they legally owned, and which had been in their families for generations. They lobbied the government, and put forward their case at public hearings. In 1990 some of them reoccupied their land, and started to rebuild their community. Finally, the whole community was given permission to return.

Throughout their struggle the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) helped them document their claim to their land, provided them with training, and publicised their case nationally.

Going home to Roosboom was the end of a struggle and the beginning of new challenges. Now that people have returned to their ancestral land, AFRA is helping them to develop it, to establish a communal farm, and build new homes, a new school and a new community.

Angel Nkosi was born and brought up during her community's exile in the township, and had never known rural life, but is happy to have returned to her ancestral land. "I like this place," she says. "If it's nice weather you can sleep with the doors and windows open. In the township I was scared to do this. I want to stay here in Roosboom, because it is the land of our great-great-grandmothers. They bought it a long time ago."

Agnes Sokhulu, aged 75, returned to Roosboom in 1990.

photo: Cedric Nunn



The right to an education

recognised:

- The International Covenant on Education, Social, and Cultural Rights obliges states to provide compulsory and free primary education for all.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child states further that individuals should be able to choose where they are educated and what sort of education they receive; and all states should take measures to eliminate indoctrination from the curriculum, and make sure that the education they provide meets the needs of minority groups.

denied:

- Nearly one in three people in the Third World has not learnt to read or write.
- Worldwide, in 1991 over 125 million children, between the ages of six and eleven, were not enrolled in school; at least two-thirds were girls.
- El Salvador publishes 1 book for every 1,000,000 of its inhabitants; Spain publishes 714.

Wangoi is ten; her brother Mwangi is fourteen. When Mwangi was in Standard Three at school, their father died. The small farm where they had grown up was not enough to support the family without the extra income that their father had brought in from labouring on other, larger, farms. Their mother had to leave, and took the family to Nairobi. Now they live in Kibera, an area of poor housing on the edge of the city.



photo: Geoff Sayer

"I don't go to school," says Mwangi, "because Mother can't afford it. We don't like Nairobi. We want to go back to our village, and go to school again. Mother says she will take us back when she has enough money, when she has saved enough. Most days I walk into town with my mother — she sells peanuts in the park. We beg there. Sometimes we get 20 shillings [35p] to take home."

Average for selected developed countries
182 books



Average for selected developing countries
1 book



Access to information: published books per 200,000 inhabitants in rich and poor countries

Source: UNESCO

but possible:

"We had been broadcasting for a few months," says Bourkary Tamboura, a presenter with Radio Daande Douentza (The Voice of Douentza), "when we decided to find out what people thought about the impact of the station. It came out that some women were so impressed by what we were broadcasting that they were fattening cattle especially to sell to buy a radio in order to follow our programmes." In fact, in the six months following the first broadcast of Douentza's only local radio station, the number of radios owned there leapt by 140 per cent.

The 168,000 people living in the Douentza region of eastern Mali are poor and mostly illiterate. Many years of low rainfall have contributed to increasing desertification, and farmers and herders now compete for land and water resources.

People here have little access to information, and health and education services are few and far between. There are no telephones, no newspapers, no postal services. Before Radio Daande Douentza went out on the air, the only radio programmes people could pick up were in languages which no one could understand.

In June 1992, the Near East Foundation, a local community organisation, took part in a training seminar on environmental degradation, and how to inform and educate people about the issue. One suggestion they came back with was to start their own radio station, broadcasting initially in Fulani, the language of commerce in Fountza, and understood by 85 per cent of the population.

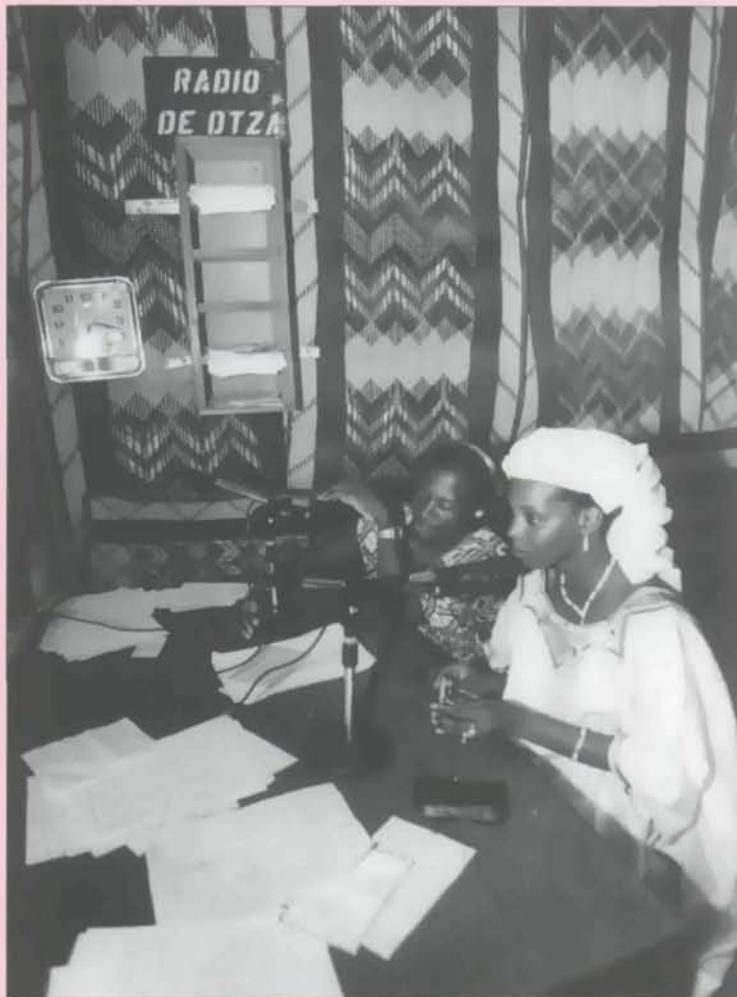
The station was an immediate success, partly because it was providing information not hitherto easily available to people, but also because for the first time the people of the region felt that they had gained a voice. Before long it had expanded its service to its current eight hours a day, seven days a week, mostly going out in the evening, when people have the time to listen. Opinion polls indicate that 86 per cent of its possible audience regularly listens to the station, which puts its annual running costs at just 25p per listener per year.

They are not passive listeners: 80 per cent claim to have responded in some way to what they have heard, to have changed the way they do things, or the way they think. Demand for literacy classes more than doubled in the station's first year, as has the number of children being brought for immunisation. A recent survey discovered that people in Fountza are far better informed about the causes and prevention of AIDS than people in any other region of Mali: most people interviewed claimed to have got this information from the radio and, in particular, from a series of seven programmes dealing specifically with the subject.

"People here are mainly involved in agriculture and cattle-breeding," says Yacouba Demme, of the Near East Foundation. "So there is a need for good technical advice. Also there are a lot of health problems, so advice on how to prevent or treat certain diseases is also required. There are almost no health services in the area, so many people live nowhere near a dispensary.

"In addition to these material needs, people have other needs which are just as important, such as information, civics education, and democratisation training. We avoid taking sides; we don't give support to any particular political party; we don't allow them air-time to voice their political ideas, except at election time, when we invite them all to come on air to present their manifestos.

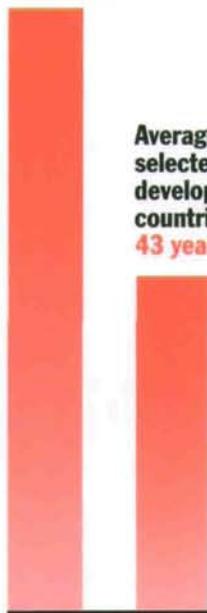
"The rest of our programmes deal with technical and legal matters. For example, the Constitution says that it is illegal to lock someone up for more than 48 hours without charge. If people are not aware of these rights, they may fall victim to corrupt local officials or even simple administrative mistakes."



Radio Daande Douentza goes on air.

photo: James Hawkins

Average for selected developed countries
77 years



Average for selected developing countries
43 years

Life expectancy at birth in rich and poor countries

Source: World Guide 1995

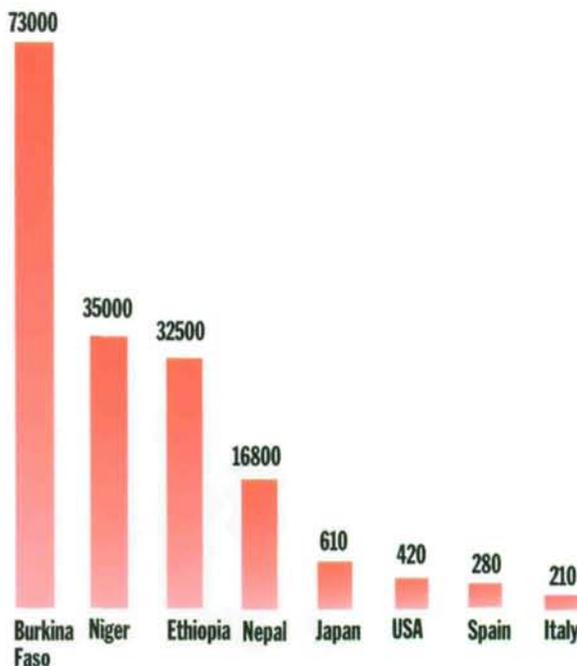
The right to health care

recognised:

- The International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural rights recognises the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States are committed, not just to providing curative health care, but also to avoiding measures which might damage people's health.

denied:

- Ten per cent of children in the Third World die before their fifth birthday.
- Every fortnight more children die from preventable diseases than were killed in the genocide in Rwanda.
- Half of all women in Africa and south Asia, and two-thirds of all pregnant women in both regions, are anaemic.
- In India, more women die from pregnancy and birth-related causes in one week, than in Europe in one year.
- One billion people never see a health professional.
- According to UNICEF, half the amount spent annually on cigarettes in Europe would save the lives of all the children who die from preventable diseases.
- Reproductive health services, including family planning, are available to only half of all women in south Asia, and one in ten women in sub-Saharan Africa.



Inhabitants per physician

Source: World Development Report 1995

Uganda is one of the world's most severely indebted countries. In 1994, the country was scheduled to pay \$162 million in debt service payments, which represents over four-fifths of the country's export earnings. This compares with the \$120 million which the government spends on health and education combined. More than one baby in ten there dies before it reaches its first birthday. Among children under five, the main killers are malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia, and malnutrition. All these illnesses could be prevented or cured with basic health care and adequate sanitation.

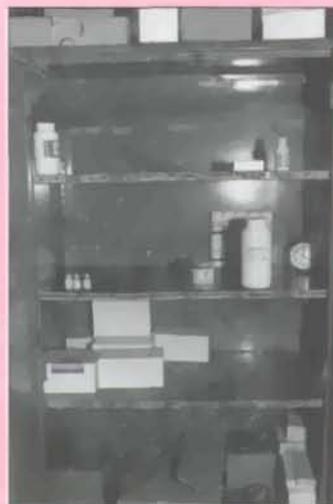
Women, too, are dying from lack of basic health care. When Enid Tusiime developed complications during labour, her mother-in-law, Geraldine Kagija, hesitated to send her into hospital. She knew that there would be fees to pay, and she had no money. Geraldine's land grows enough food for the family, but there is barely enough cash to buy salt and soap. Hospital fees were more or less out of the question.

After two days of labour, Enid did go into the hospital in Mbarara district. She reached it after a two-hour journey on a home-made stretcher carried by her family, but it was too late. Her child died and, after a month in intensive care, so did she.

Her family was left with a debt to the hospital of £55, which they have struggled to repay by selling one of their two cows, and working on the hospital's land in lieu of payment. The hospital would prefer cash, but the family has none.

This clinic dispensary near Mbale is virtually empty.

photo: Jenny Matthews



but possible:

"There's been a great change in Bowerbank," says Angela Cooke. "When I started there was a low percentage of kids, maybe a quarter, who were immunised. I asked the Ministry nurse to come in, and now 95 per cent are OK."

Bowerbank, in downtown Kingston, Jamaica, has a bad reputation. Violence and drugs are a major problem, and leaving school with a Bowerbank address does little for a youngster's job prospects. Half of Bowerbank is jobless, and the lure of the corner gangs is seductive for young people looking for excitement, money, and a way out of the ghetto.

But Bowerbank is changing. Jamaica has a long tradition of community organisation, led by women, which has its roots in the slave plantations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then, women came together for mutual support while the men worked in the fields. Now, Jamaica has one of the highest levels of female-headed households in the world, and the spirit of co-operation and action is still strong.

The women of Bowerbank got tired of the rubbish in their streets, the poor sanitation, and the lack of decent schools and health care. In 1989, with help from Oxfam, UNICEF, and the Jamaican Ministry of Health, they began to do something about it, starting with their children's health.

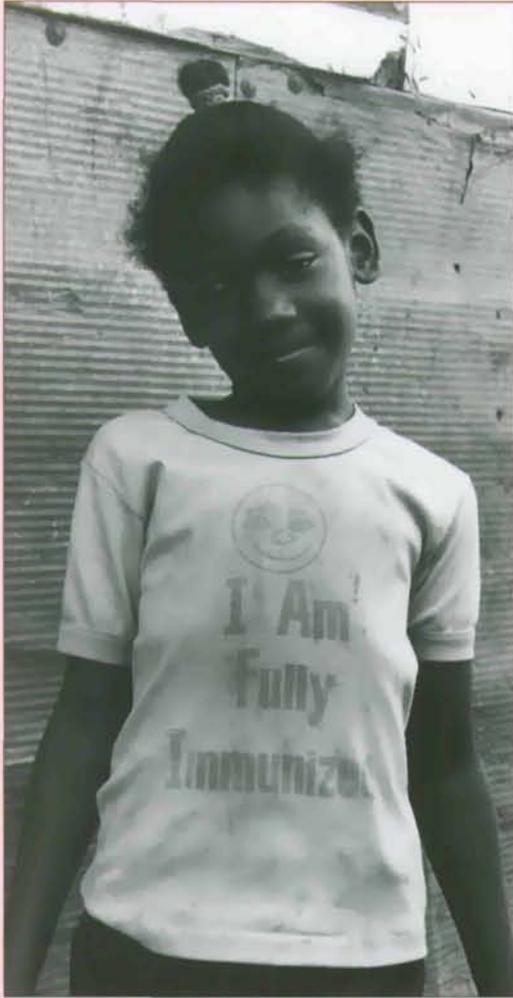


photo: John Barraclough

Angela Cooke was one of the first people to be trained to help the community get informed about their right to social security and other welfare payments. Today she works on community health and is responsible for immunisation and nutrition clinics.

The Ministry and UNICEF pay for the regular clinic, and children get a free "I've been fully immunised" T-shirt when they've had all their jabs. "There has also been a noticeable weight gain among the children, who are now average for their height," says Angela.

Between making house-to-house visits and chivvying mothers who have not had their children immunised, Angela offers nutrition training and gives out condoms. But there's more to the welfare of the community than clinics and contraception. Not short of confidence, the group are tackling their next problem: re-location.

The barrack-style houses of Bowerbank were always intended to be temporary, but most teenagers have lived most of their lives there. The city council has plans to move the residents to what they say is a better site on the outskirts of Kingston. The women are not convinced. They are using their new organisational and negotiating skills to make sure the new site is better than Bowerbank, and they have vowed to move only on their own terms.

The right to a safe environment

recognised:

- The Rio Declaration, and Agenda 21, declare that states have an obligation to protect the environment, not just for those alive today, but also for future generations, and that they should take pre-emptive action to avert any "serious or irreversible" damage to the environment.

denied:

- 25 billion tonnes of soil in Asia are currently being lost to erosion each year.
- A further 21 million hectares of land turns to barren desert each year.
- Each year 17-18 million hectares of forest and woodland are destroyed.
- Cattle ranchers in Latin America are burning the rain-forest at a rate of 2.5 million hectares a year.
- Many fish stocks in the industrialised world — including Atlantic cod and herring — have all but died out. To make up for this loss, catches are being increased off areas such as the west coast of Africa.

During the 1980s the consumption of shrimps doubled in the USA and Japan, leading to a huge increase in exports from south-east Asia. Shellfish farming is now one of the largest sources of foreign exchange for poor countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam. As a result, mangrove forests along the coasts of many tropical countries have been decimated, with disastrous consequences.

In the Philippines, mangrove swamps have been cleared at an average rate of 3,000 hectares a year to make way for large commercial prawn farms, most of them owned by Japanese companies producing for export to Japan. These swamps now

cover less than one-tenth of their original area. The destruction of the mangrove fish-breeding grounds means a progressive lowering of fish catches each year for local fishing communities. On current trends the Philippines' remaining mangrove swamps will be destroyed within a decade.

In Bangladesh the expansion of shrimp farming has been associated with the forcible eviction of small-holder farmers, often involving considerable violence. In addition, the demands of the shrimp industry for fresh water has severely depressed the water table in many areas, creating water shortages and adding to existing problems of salinity.



Fishermen bringing in their early morning catch, northern Luzon, Philippines.

photo: Tricia Spanner

but possible:

"Before the dykes were repaired," says a woman from Vietnam's Ky Anh district, "we would often have to escape to safety through floodwater up to our necks, carrying our children on our heads."

"Before the dykes were repaired," says Mr Lanh, Secretary of the Ky Anh Education Committee, "schools were damaged each year. Ky Tho school, for example, was flooded seven times. Children missed a lot of schooling. Classes had to be held in people's houses." When, that is, a house could be found that the floods had spared.

Ky Anh district is one of Vietnam's poorest: drought-prone during the dry season, but subject to huge seawater floods when typhoons sweep in off the South China Sea. Over 200 years people there gradually developed a 40-mile system of protective embankments, but in the late 1980s the system had fallen into disrepair. Many stretches had been bombed during the war with the USA. In the decade of desperate poverty which followed the war, people lacked the resources to repair and maintain the dykes, and they degenerated still further.

Without their protection, each year brought similar tragedies during the typhoon season: homes, schools, and clinics wrecked, crops

destroyed, the soil left salt-soaked and useless. "From my office," says Mr Tran, Chair of the Ky Anh People's Committee, "you would just have seen miles and miles of empty land, no one on the roads. Everywhere round here was barren. People looked weak and sad; they had no energy. They survived on edible roots for many months each year." The men left, to search for work abroad or in the south of the country: in 1990 Ky Tho village saw half its able-bodied men forced to leave.

When Oxfam mounted an emergency food programme in the district during the late 1980s, people were very clear about their longer-term needs: help with repairing the dykes. With the aid of an Oxfam food-for-work programme, they have now repaired nearly half the dyke system.

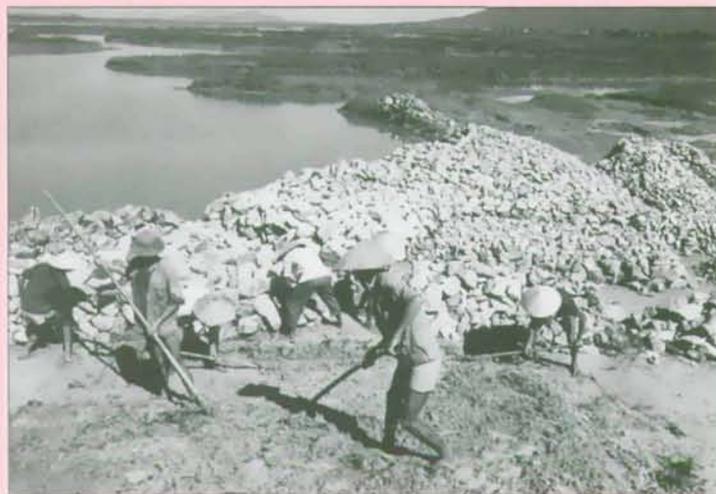
It has been an enormous community effort — one stretch alone took 380,000 person-hours to rebuild; there were often 5,000 local people working there. Cranes and heavy machinery are unavailable here, so tons of earth and rocks were transported by hand. Women planted 1.2 million mangrove tree seedlings on the seaward side of the dykes to protect them from wave damage.

Today life has returned to Ky Anh. Rice yields are already up by 15 per cent (it will take another five years to wash the salt from the soil), and the irrigated area has doubled in size.

The dykes have also made it possible once more to supplement incomes by rearing shrimp in specially constructed lagoons on the landward side, and to make salt. Most of the men are now back at least part of the year, the decades of disrupted schooling are over. Among the people of Ky Anh there is a new sense of optimism and confidence in the future.

Repairing the dykes.

photo: Keith Bernstein



The right to protection from violence

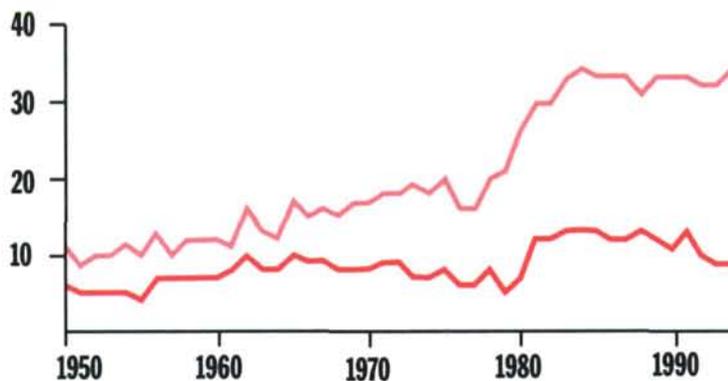
recognised:

- The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights guarantees the right to liberty and security, to life and to freedom from torture, or cruel, inhumane or degrading punishments.
- The Geneva Conventions forbid attacks or threats of violence against civilian populations, and rape.
- The Geneva Conventions prohibit ethnically-based massacres.
- The Inhumane Weapons Convention and Landmines Protocol governs the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines.
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1994, condemns violence against women.

denied:

- There are currently 82 recognised large-scale conflicts going on in the world.
- In 1994 up to a million people were murdered in Rwanda in the space of a month.
- In the USA a woman is badly beaten every 18 minutes.
- China's One-Child Policy is estimated to have resulted in the deaths of more than one million first-born baby girls.
- 2,000 men, women, and children are killed, blinded, or dismembered by landmines every month; there are about 100,000,000 scattered unexploded around the world. They can cost as little as \$3, but dismantling each one costs up to \$1,000.

Number of wars



- ~ Armed conflicts with more than 1000 deaths
- ~ Armed conflicts with more than 100,000 deaths

Wars since 1950

Source: Worldwatch

- The annual cost of the UN's whole emergency, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations is about the same as it costs to run the New York City Fire Department.
- Most of the victims of Angola's civil war were children; nearly 20 years of fighting have left the country so poor that one baby in three dies before its first birthday, usually from malnutrition, malaria, or measles.

Laying crosses on the steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, on the first anniversary of the massacres in Rwanda

photo: Jenny Matthews



"We were attacked by cattle raiders working for the government," remembers Amer Kuay, a 29-year-old Dinka woman from Sudan's Upper Nile District. "They took all our cattle. They burned our houses. They took all our belongings. We were left with no tools and hardly any seed, so we harvested very little. By February we started to starve.

"There were still attacks by Nuer raiders. So we decided to cross the Nile to Yirol District, where it was safer. We had to wait in the marshes for some time to get a fishing boat to take us across. We had no money to pay, so I had to give my daughters' clothes to the fisherman.

"Some of the people in our group were dying of hunger even as we started to walk from our village. Young children and old

people died. I lost my youngest girl. She was just two years old."

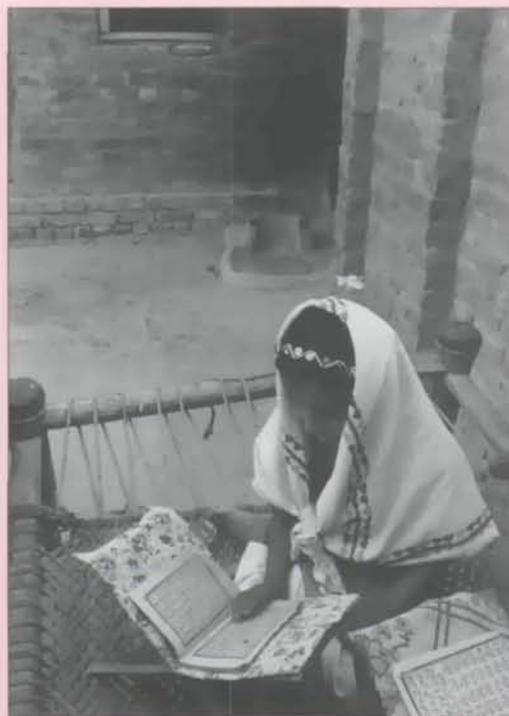
At least a million people have died in Sudan, and another 1.5 million have been driven from their homes into camps, across borders or into the bush. Long-standing tribal rivalries and disputes over cattle and grazing grounds, previously contained by traditional mechanisms for resolving conflicts, are being integrated into a wider conflict, Sudan's long-running civil war between north and south; and they are being settled by automatic weapons. Such atrocities are not new. What is new is the destructive capacity of all sides in the conflict, and their willingness to use that capacity ruthlessly.

but possible:

There are two mosques in the small Pakistani village of Goth Janano, one for Sunnis and one for Shias. Six Hindu families also live in the village. There is considerable potential for religious tensions, but local community leaders are dedicated to resolving any conflicts, and keeping communication open between people of different sects and faiths.

"In the last days of Muharram there's a lot of grief and sorrow," says Muhammad Ruksh, one of the village leaders. "This is when we relive the death of the grandson of the Prophet. During this time, we have a session of mourning every evening. At this time even the Hindus join us, which helps to bind the community together.

"I want to share a fear of mine with you: every Friday, outside speakers from the Shia and Sunni sects come to the village and talk at the mosques. I have encouraged a Shia and a Sunni to get elected on to our village committee, so that they have to work together and achieve positive things. I've organised other committees so that both sects have to work together, one on health, one on registering births and deaths, and so on. If we can't stop it [i.e. the divisions being created by outsiders] getting out of hand, things will get into a real mess. We're working to stem the tide.



A young girl studying the Koran.

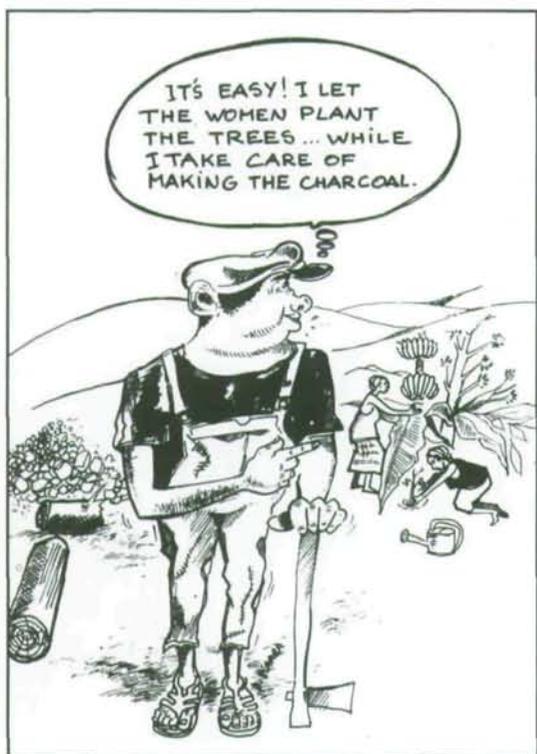
photo: Maryam Iqbal

"We are having a series of lectures in the village at the moment about human development: when people started living in communities, building houses, and so on. We would like some support from Oxfam, to help people understand that assistance isn't just about projects, but can be about opening your mind. That, I think, is just as important."

The right to equality of opportunity

recognised:

- The right to equality of opportunity is intrinsic to all other basic rights, and accepted as a basic norm.
- It is also specifically recognised by, among other documents, the International Covenant on Cultural and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all



Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

denied:

- Worldwide, women are paid on average 30-40 per cent less than men for the same jobs.
- One person in ten worldwide is disabled: in most countries they have fewer education and employment opportunities than other people in their society.
- Literacy rates in Vietnam are well over 90 per cent for the majority Kinh ethnic group; among the ethnic minority groups of the country's mountainous regions, the rate is more like 12 per cent.
- Spending on health for Israeli citizens is \$350; for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories it is \$35. Infant mortality rates are five times higher in the Occupied Territories than in Israel.

"I finished Primary Seven at the end of 1991," says Faith Muhindo Tembao, a cleaner at Uganda's Kagando Hospital. "I wanted to go to Bwera Secondary School — it was very important for me, but we didn't have enough money for the fees. My brother William was in Secondary Two at Bwera; now he's in Secondary Four and he'll want to continue to Secondary Six.

"Boys take most of the places in secondary school. Some girls don't have the money to go, some just don't want to go. At 14 and 15 and 16 they start thinking of marriage, but not me. I won't get married early. My parents had no schooling and they regret it.

"I've managed to save 20,000 shillings; my mother looks after it for me. It's to help my brother if he wants to continue after Secondary Four. Or I may need to help the others with primary school fees. I'd like to be at school myself, but I don't mind if I can't go. Without my help even the younger ones might have to stop. When William has a job he should be able to help. It is more difficult for girls ... more difficult to do what they want."



photo: Geoff Sayer



photo: Emma Gough

but possible:

Conservative estimates put the proportion of disabled people in El Salvador at 10 per cent. Given the country's recent bitter civil war, that is almost certainly an underestimate. They receive little assistance from the state, just the most basic of primary health care. Many disabled people receive no formal education at all, let alone any which recognises their particular needs. Their chances of finding a means of livelihood are slim.

Most of the 11 disabled people in the ceramics workshop run by ACOGIPRI are deaf. They have never attended school, never been taught to read or write, never even learnt to use sign language. As a result, most have lived for years locked in their own private world, unable to make themselves understood or understand the people round them. For most of their lives, they have been regarded as "unemployable".

The training provided by ACOGIPRI in ceramic production has given them the opportunity to discover abilities no-one ever believed they possessed, and learn a whole range of new skills. Working with furnaces that reach up to 1060°C, they produce beautiful, original ceramic pottery

and moulded stoneware, now selling well to the El Salvadorean middle classes. ACOGIPRI helps with administration and marketing, but all production is organised by the workers. Manuel Orillana, the production manager, is deaf himself.

After a special eight-month training from a Japanese designer, they branched confidently out into new styles, which made it possible for them to start thinking about reaching new markets. They now travel abroad to sell their wares at craft markets, and have established outlets in Guatemala and Honduras. In 1994 they hit the UK market, through the Oxfam mail-order catalogue.

ACOGIPRI, most of whose members are disabled themselves, tries to provide some of the opportunities which disabled people are denied by the society in which they live. As well as running the ceramics workshop, it provides courses in social skills, literacy, computer skills, marketing, and management, and special leadership training programmes for disabled women. It keeps up a constant campaign to have public buildings and areas made accessible to disabled people, and to overcome all the other obstacles which prevent them from playing a full part in the life of El Salvador.

The right to a say in their future

recognised:

- The International Covenant on Cultural and Political Rights recognises the right to a vote and to take part in public affairs, to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

denied:

- Only 48 per cent of the world's people live in multi-party democracies. Over 400 million (8 per cent of total population) live in countries under military rule.
- In 1993 there were only six female heads of government in the world.
- At the UN only six of the 184 member countries have a female permanent representative.
- Developing countries account for more than three-quarters of the IMF's membership, but they have only one-third of the voting share.
- Since 1967 Israeli authorities and settlers have confiscated over two-thirds of the land area in the West Bank, and 40 per cent of the land in the Gaza Strip, leaving Palestinians with little control over land, water sources, or employment opportunities.

Sabitri Devi thinks for a minute. It has been a long time since anyone asked her how old she is. She thinks she's 40, but when people around her laugh, she revises this upwards: 45. Eight children.

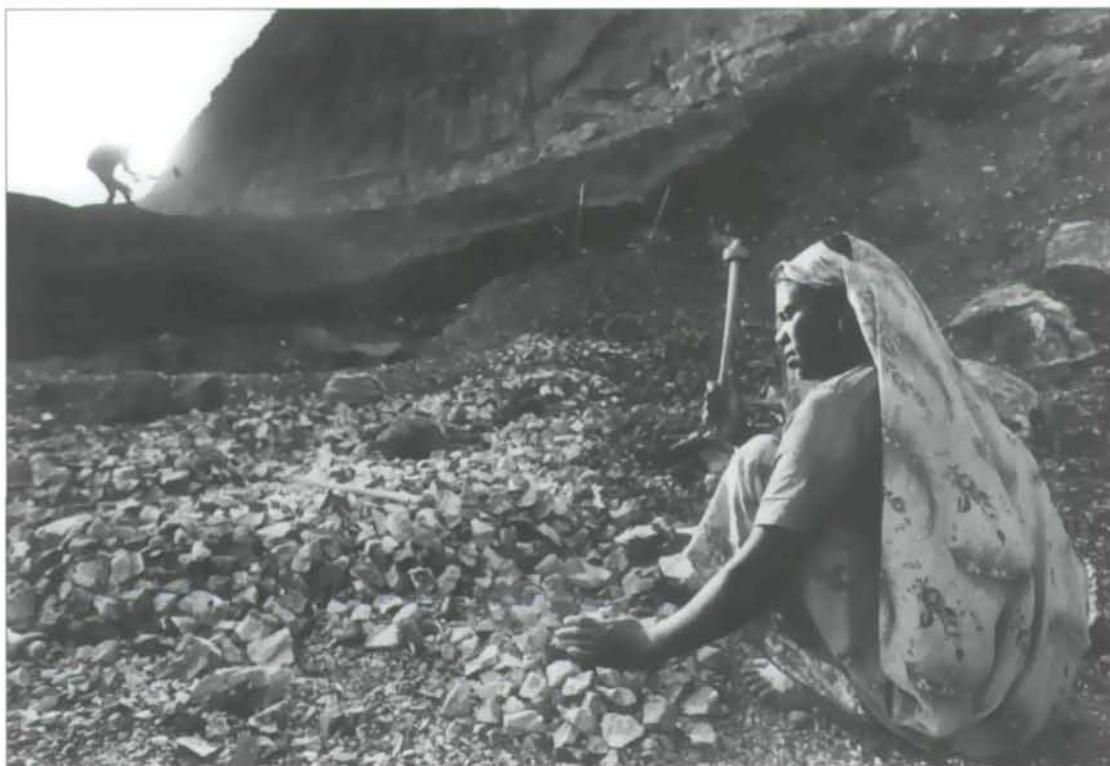
Not so long ago, people like Sabitri would not have spoken publicly about their lives. Being a Dalit (India's lowest possible caste, sometimes called Harijan, or Untouchable), Sabitri has lived her life being told she was the lowest of the low. And that her thoughts, her opinions, and her existence were of little consequence.

Dalits have been abused, raped, murdered, and thrown off land that is rightfully theirs. Despite "untouchability" being outlawed by the Constitution, Dalits are still treated like slaves by land-owners, and like criminals by the police. It was Gandhi who first called them "Harijans", meaning "the children of God", and called for greater equality. In Sabitri's state, Bihar,

however, the caste system is still very deeply entrenched.

The powerlessness into which Sabitri was born is mirrored by her present economic vulnerability. "We used to share-crop," Sabitri remembers. "We used to rent land from a landowner and pay for it with a share of the crops we grew. That was when we had the bullock to pull the plough. Without the bullock we can't farm the land."

The bullock went a few years ago, when Sabitri suddenly had to raise £40. Her daughter developed complications towards the end of a pregnancy, and needed an operation to save her life. The family had to borrow money to pay for the operation, and they are still paying interest on that debt. "The interest payments mean we'll probably have to sell the buffalo too," Sabitri says. Now landless, she and most of her family have to work as labourers, either on someone else's land, or at the local stone quarry.



Subitra Devi labouring in the quarry

photo: Achinto

but possible:

“Why have I joined this Association?” asks Nouhoum Coulibaly, a farmer from the Kelka zone, in Mali. “In one word — it has given me some *power*: power over our environment. Before, anyone could go to Mopti and get an official paper and come into our area to cut down wood. Helplessly, we watched outsiders cutting our wood, and there was nothing we could do. But now we have sat down with our local Forestry Commissioner, and agreed with him that outsiders will not be allowed to cut wood in our area. If they do try to, we can report them.”

By Malian law, land and resources belong to the state, and official permission to cut wood has to be obtained from the local authorities. The trouble in Kelka was that

anyone could get permission; there was no protection for local people’s livelihoods, and therefore no incentive for farmers to manage the forests and replant trees.

Walde Kelka is an association of 13 villages who have been involved in a pioneering scheme in which management of natural resources has been devolved to local community level. Under the Kelka “constitution” each village recognises the right of others to manage their lands, on condition of respecting free access and usage rights. Now that the villages see themselves as owners of the lands, they are prepared to put much more effort into forest management. What happens in Kelka is now the business of the Kelka villages: they are the ones who depend on the forest and who therefore concern themselves with its preservation.



Nouhoum Coulibaly.

Beverley McAlinsh

These developments in Kelka are indications of exciting new developments at national level in Mali, of new moves towards democracy and to devolving authority down to community level.

In 1991, violent conflicts in the streets of Mali's capital Bamako brought to an end 23 years of military dictatorship. When Alpha Oumar Konare became President the next year in the country's first democratic elections, he and his Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali (ADEMA) faced the task of introducing genuinely democratic forms of government to a country where all idea of consensus and involvement had virtually disappeared. The dictatorship had been preceded by six years of centrally planned "African Socialism". Before that had been 60 years of French rule. Old ways of letting people's voices be heard, of devolving power over local resources, had been destroyed. The political disengagement and physical isolation of the majority of people — Mali is a huge and sparsely populated country — were recognised as serious problems for the new regime.

Rhéal Drisdelle, Oxfam's Representative in Mali, describes the early days of restoring democracy to the country: "the transitional government convened a National Conference in July/August 1991. Every group was represented, from the intellectuals to the farmers. It was a huge meeting and lasted three weeks. It was a unique

moment in Malian history, a crossroads, at which people were asked 'What do you want? What is our collective vision for this country? Where should we go? How should we get there?'

"At that conference decentralisation very quickly became a major, major theme in discussions on the future direction of the country. It was agreed that decentralisation was the way to consolidate Malian democracy. This was how democracy would take hold within the communities, by having a decentralised government. They talk about 'the three Ds': democratisation, decentralisation, and development, which are seen as a whole."

Ousmane Sy, Head of the Decentralisation Mission, is the man charged with overseeing this process: "we're moving towards a system where local affairs will be controlled by elected local people. Today it is our duty to prepare all Malians for decentralisation — physically and intellectually. The state should act as a kind of referee to make sure that laws are not broken, but at the same time we need to create as wide an area of freedom and autonomy as possible."

Mali now has all the apparatus of a democracy: a dozen political parties, 25 small independent radio stations (one of them, in a particularly poor and remote area, funded by Oxfam), 40 independent newspapers, and an independent television station in the process of being set up.

"Yes," says Rhéal, "there will be corruption; yes, there will be mismanagement. You see, democratisation isn't something that happens at 9 o'clock one morning; it's a process that has to be visited again and again. But I think that the basic objective of bringing power out of a bunker in Bamako and into the communities will at least offer people — and especially the poorer people — the opportunity to play a role in the decisions which affect their lives."

Note: The newspaper, *Togona*, is produced by an Oxfam-funded community association in Mali.

