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CENTRAL AMERICA

Christian Aid's Central America programme covers Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. They work with around 30 partner organisations, from community-based groups to larger organisations operating across the region and beyond. Our partners include indigenous communities, small farmers' associations, development organisations, research institutions and faith-based organisations. Christian Aid has excellent knowledge of the region and the expertise and capacity to deliver complex projects on resilient livelihoods, tax justice, violence prevention and human rights.

Over the last year, Central America has faced complex challenges both from a political and a human rights perspective. The region has witnessed profound social and political unrest that has brought together different sectors including the middle class, the social movement, and the private sector and made possible important progress in the fight against corruption and increased transparency, especially in Guatemala and Honduras.

As a result, in **Guatemala**, serious cases of corruption were discovered involving the president Otto Perez Molina and vice president Roxana Baldetti, and other government officers. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala and the Public Prosecutor unveiled a structure of corruption in the tax administration and health system.

In **Honduras**, the government came to a deal with the Organisation of American States to create the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, as a mechanism to tackle the corruption and impunity existing within the judicial system.

BANGLADESH

The People's Republic of Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated and disaster-prone countries in the world. The country has a population of over 160

million people, of which 80 percent live in rural areas and depend largely on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Christian Aid started working in Bangladesh in 1972, and they are currently working with 19 partners across the country. Partners range from national level policy and advocacy organisations that focus on climate change to partners that work in the field dealing with the issue of secure livelihoods and gender.

As the global climate changes, Bangladesh is likely to experience more than most, making it an 'impact hotspot.' Recent extreme temperatures before the 2015 monsoon demonstrated how average temperature rise can also increase the likelihood of dangerous heatwaves. Both average and extreme rainfall is projected to further increase, which will raise flood risks from the large rivers that meet in the country's floodplains.

This combination of increased flooding and moisture stress means that the 80% of Bangladeshis whose lives depend on agriculture will have to substantially increase their resilience. Despite this overwhelming set of contextual circumstances, over the last year, Christian Aid in Bangladesh has made strides in advancing and contributing towards 'positive change' and 'ending poverty.'

In total, 27,541 beneficiaries have been reached through Christian Aid's resilience livelihoods programmes over the last year. Beneficiaries have been able to increase their income considerably through adopting various new livelihood options including agriculture, fishing and poultry farming. Average household income has increased from BDT 89,502 in 2014/2015, to BDT 100,623 in 2015/2016, indicating progress towards escaping the cycle of poverty for the targeted households.

Christian Aid's work on inclusive markets has made considerable progress in Bangladesh over the last year with diversification in household income being made through activities such as block-batik dying, tailoring, crab fattening, vermin composting, new vegetable cultivation techniques, and cattle rearing for milk.

These new sources of income generation have helped vulnerable communities adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

In order to cope with the unprecedented impact of climate change, 7,728 community members, of which 5,573 are females, are now practising various climate change adaptation measures against various extreme climate events such as floods, droughts, cyclones, waterlogging, salinity intrusion and river erosion. These adaptation measures have included floating gardens, hanging vegetable gardens in water logging areas, saline tolerant rice varieties, saline tolerant maize and sunflowers and duck and lamb rearing. These have paved the way for increasing and diversifying crop and vegetable production amid extreme and uncertain weather patterns.

ZIMBABWE

Christian Aid's programme in Zimbabwe has faced a number of challenges over the last year or so. The political, economic and environmental situation has created an extremely difficult set of circumstances for our partners to carry out their work. That said, through sensitively building constructive relationships at the local government and authority level, Christian Aid has been able to continue implementing its programmes largely unimpeded over the reporting period.

Although not officially a failed state, Zimbabwe remains a country that is once again on the verge of total collapse. With extensive curbs in place on criticism or any attempts at political opposition, restrictions are in place to ensure no attempts are made to weaken the government's tight grip on power.

Simultaneously, the civil society space has seen renewed demonstrations of resistance and protest, with previously silenced voices, including the church, now gaining the courage and momentum to speak out. As such, a new wave of violent confrontation is anticipated over the forthcoming year. Beatings and the indiscriminate use of tear gas and water cannons have already been used over the last couple of

months, and in late August this year the police introduced a total ban on demonstrations: something that represents a direct violation of Zimbabwe's constitution.

Economic outlook

The economic outlook in Zimbabwe is currently gloomy, with prospects for recovery and stability currently looking bleak. The supply and availability of cash is progressively worsening, with people having to queue outside banks overnight in order to access their meagre salaries. When they do secure some cash, they are only allowed a maximum of \$50 per day, making life and business activities extremely challenging.

The government's proposed response to this is to introduce 'bond notes' in November, but many Zimbabweans predict these to become a new 'surrogate currency', something which will further erode the diminishing confidence people have in the current government. It is anticipated that this move to introduce bonds will fan the flames of protest, and increase the likelihood of violent confrontations.

In relation to Christian Aid's work on the ground, this cash crisis is having a direct effect on partners engaged in cash based interventions such as cash and voucher distributions. This is a key tool used in humanitarian responses, with the purpose of both meeting immediate human needs and boosting the local economy. The cash shortage means that the food insecure target households, identified by Christian Aid as part of its emergency response to drought in Zimbabwe, are now finding it difficult to access cash in order to buy food.

Change the Story

aims to challenge and change the way refugees and people seeking safety are portrayed in parts of the media. The negative and dehumanising language used creates an atmosphere which prevents the government from doing its fair share in response to the current crisis. Through Christian Aid's campaign people can write to their local newspaper to tell a story of welcome and challenge any dehumanising coverage. www.christian-aid.org

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