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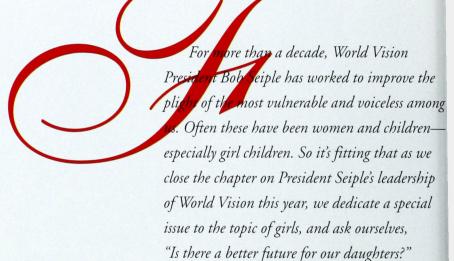
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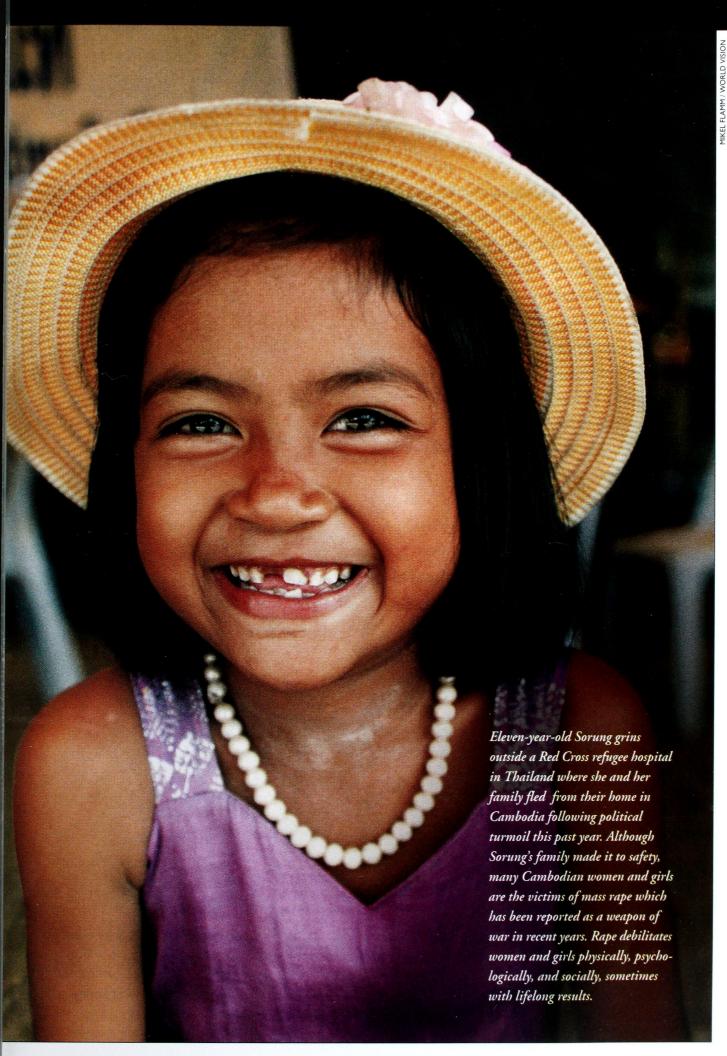


—THE EDITORS

NOT LONG AFTER I BECAME PRESIDENT

of World Vision, I flew to Kapoeta in southern Sudan. The region was in the midst of famine; 250,000 people already had starved to death. As is common in Africa, when we landed on the dusty runway families came from miles around to see who had arrived. They knew we were from an aid organization, so mothers held up their emaciated children to show us how much they needed our help.

It didn't take me long to notice the children's distended stomachs—a sure sign



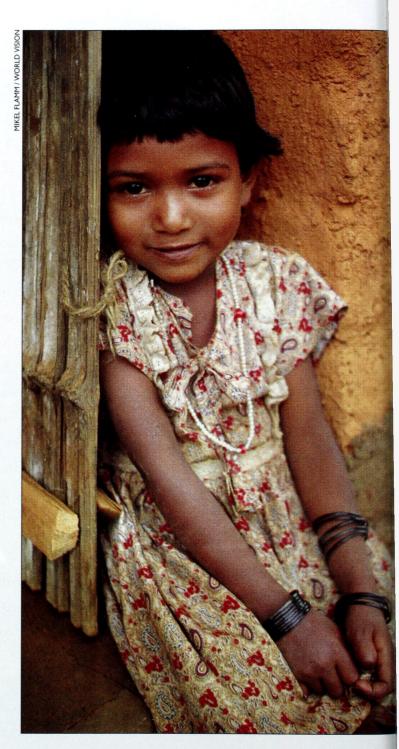
of malnutrition. But it was several minutes before I realized that in this sea of humanity, the mothers were only holding up sons; there were no daughters. In the familial hierarchy, girls were the last to be fed and the first to die. By the time we arrived, they were dead.

Did those parents mean for their daughters to die? I don't believe so. Those girls died from the impact of incessant hardships that visit this earth, and the desperate choices parents made in the face of those calamities.

Too often, when poor families face economic disaster, the answer is to sell a daughter into slavery. Sell a daughter into prostitution. Kill a baby girl. Rarely do they resort to such measures with their sons—generations of preferential treatment toward boys render that unthinkable. Of course, no parent should ever have to endanger or exploit a son or a daughter to survive. That they do indicates that something is terribly wrong.

Little girls are being used and abused in shameful ways, and in large numbers, worldwide. Girls are literally fighting for their lives. In China, India, and other places where a desperate preference for sons feeds a big market for the technology to learn the sex of an expected child, little girls are being aborted before they have a chance for a future. Those allowed to live face a future of poverty where education is curtailed and early marriages or prostitution are the options they must choose from.

As a father who provided my daughter with



Roof over her head: Five-year-old Sunitha in India has a new house, thanks to World Vision's Janaseva Project, which contributed tiling for the roof and encouraged community leaders to donate wood and labor. The project built homes for more than 100 families in Sunitha's community.

"God created man in his image, in the image of God be created him; male and female he created them"

Genesis 1:27).

he same opportunities for a college education is my sons, I find it difficult to comprehend when parents make other choices. But decisions become confusing when poverty threatens a family's survival. That desperation, combined with a value system turned upside down, leads to actions which we struggle to understand.

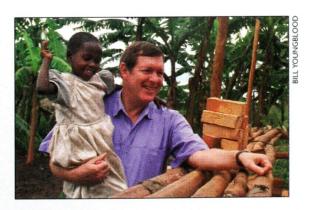
This issue of the magazine calls attention to the choices and attitudes that hurt girls worldwide. We highlight these issues not for shock value nor to denigrate the decision-makers, but because the world's treatment of girls tears at our humanity, and we must respond. Our future, our daughters' futures, and the future of the human family depends on it.

In the beginning, "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). And God pronounced his creation good. But a fall from his perfect plan necessitated the cloak of Christ to restore dignity to his children. To each child, and to the daughters of God who are often among the "least of these," we must also offer a cloak of dignity, a chance for life and life eternal. We can lift the burden of poverty so that

families can make different choices. Loans can help parents start a business instead of forcing their daughters to sell their bodies. Sponsorship ensures that girls as well as boys can go to school. Health workers can provide effective care for girls as well as boys in all communities.

Children—boys and girls—are central to World Vision's ministry. Jesus made that clear. "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Humans have attempted to make girls unimportant, lesser forms of life, or mere objects to be bought and sold. But given a chance to live and learn, a little girl can grow into the woman God intended her to be, and the balance of God's creation can be restored.



President Bob Seiple and 7-year-old Gertrude Nakagwa observe a building under construction in Uganda. By working with her community, World Vision built a new house for Gertrude and her brother Charles, 10, after their parents died of AIDS.



UNTOLO MILLIONS OF GIRL CHILDREN never got the chance to survive in the last decade—victims of abortion and infanticide. Ching with its history of a "one-child" policy and India where sons are highly valued, the killing of daughters is alarming.

Girls usually do not add to the family income in the same way as boys. In some Asian countries, expensive dowries mean that girls are actually a drain on family funds. For these reasons and because of cultural biases, daughters are viewed harshly. A mother in India relates: "The old women said, 'You have already given birth to two pottai naai [female dogs] and now you've had another.' So they convinced me to kill her."

In some countries, modern technology contributes to the elimination of girl babies. Prenatal tests can often determine a fetus' sex allowing parents the possibility of selective abortions.

Education provides a reason for hope. Research shows that the more education a woman receives, the less likely she is to express strong preferences for boys. Through sensitivity training and education, World Vision has started to help parents value their daughters as well as their sons. In the Usilampatti region of southern India, World Vision has helped to reduce female infanticide by 80 percent. 🧩





ATA BALOU, and her family in Sinje, Liberia, might have died without emergency food from relief workers. For several months in 1996, Tata survived on nothing but potato greens while Sinje was cut off from outside aid because of bloody skirmishes in the country's on-again, off-again civil war. In times of war or famine, girls, already the least fed, are often the first to succumb to hunger. But help from the World Food Program and World Vision saved this little girl in Liberia.

Photograph by Karen Homer

"In AN ERA OF INCREASING AFFLUENCE, we have witnessed a tragic decline in the investnent in women's health," declares Dr. Patricia Giles, Chairperson of the Global Commission on Women's Health.

In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, girls are often weaned off mothers' milk earlier, fed less, and taken to health clinics later than their brothers. "Boys rarely have serious illnesses because we treat them much better, making sure they get medical help before the illness becomes serious," says a woman in rural India.

Consequently, girls are more vulnerable to chronic disease, and their poor health interferes with learning. In developing countries, the vast majority of adolescent girls suffer from iron deficiency, and an estimated 45 million adult women are stunted as a result of malnourishment during childhood.

AIDS is on the increase for women and girls worldwide, who are more prone to internal fissures during sexual intercourse and thus more vulnerable to infection. In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, five times as many girls aged 15 to 19 are infected with HIV than boys.

In its health programs, World Vision gives special attention to maternal health issues, girls' nutrition, and AIDS awareness and prevention. 3

OF THE 130 MILLION CHILDREN not attending school in the developing world, 86 million are arls according to research from the Rockefeller Foundation. The causes are both economic and cultural. Free public education is rare in many developing regions, so it is often impossible for families to send all of their children to school. Boys receive priority for education in many families, especially when money is tight. Why invest in daughters, many parents reason, if they are to marry and leave the family?

Girls drop out of school because of early marriage, pregnancy, or to care for the family and home. Without educated mothers—and commonly, few female teachers—as role models, they never go back.

Yet education is vital to improving a woman's life—and her family's. The more education a woman receives, the more likely she is to bear healthier and fewer children, enhance her family's health, and ensure her own children are educated.

Many governments and organizations are developing formal and informal education programs so that girls have equal access to schooling. Women's literacy training also helps to break the generational cycle of poor education. "We used to be asleep and deaf," says a newly literate Kenyan woman. "Now that we have education, we have woken up, and our ears have opened."



OKHIN PHEUNG. 8, concentrates on her grade-two lesson in a rural Cambodian classroom. Without sponsorship, she wouldn't have that desk or notebook. But more importantly, she wouldn't have the educational opportunity denied her illiterate parents, who were teenagers when former dictator Pol Pot destroyed schools and forced the population to work on government farms. Sokhin enjoys learning math, geography, and the Khmer language. "When I grow up I want to be a teacher," she says, "because I want to teach my people how to read and write."

Photograph by Sanjay Sojwal





SOME 250 MILLION CHILDREN WORLDWIDE, a majority of them girls, miss the opportunity to attend school as they labor on farms or cultivate landlords' crops. Some children are forced into sweatshops, working long hours for substandard wages amidst dangerous conditions and abuse. The desire for cheap goods and high profits drives child labor, such as in garment factories in Latin America where girls earn as little as 38 cents an hour.

Poverty and a lack of alternatives can also drive girls to work in prostitution or pornography. The United Nations estimates that 4 million people worldwide are victims

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AGEENA, 9, used to work as long as 14 hours a day making *beedis*, local Indian cigarettes, to pay off a debt incurred by her parents. Forced to sit cross-legged, she rolled tobacco powder in leaves and tied each beedi with a small string. Health risks abound in such an environment; inhaling the tobacco

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A What Sugich Bob Seiple - President SOME 250 MILLION CHILDREN WORLDWIDE, a majority of them girls, miss the opportunity to attend school as they labor on farms or cultivate landlords' crops. Some children are forced into sweatshops, working long hours for substandard wages amidst dangerous conditions and abuse. The desire for cheap goods and high profits drives child labor, such as in garment factories in Latin America where girls earn as little as 38 cents an hour.

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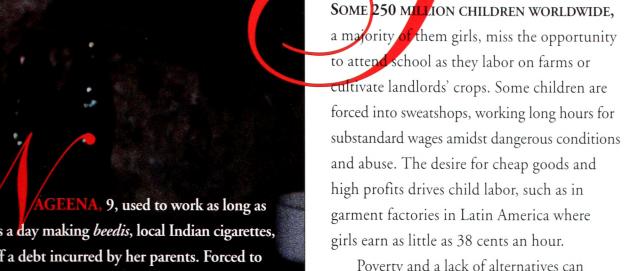
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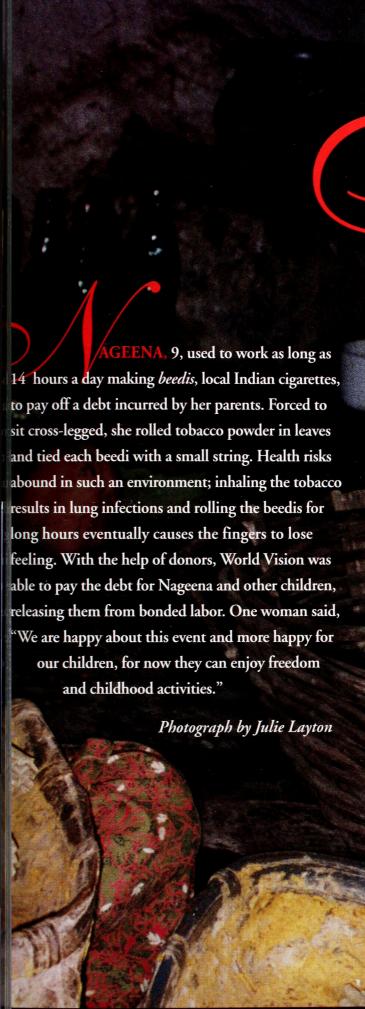
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WORLD VISION



Poverty and a lack of alternatives can also drive girls to work in prostitution or pornography. The United Nations estimates that 4 million people worldwide are victims of the multibillion dollar sex industry. And girl prostitutes are ever younger since customers mistakenly assume these girls are free of AIDS. A growing number of desperately impoverished women from Eastern Europe are fleeing to foreign countries only to find themselves trapped in brothels in Asia or the Middle East.

World Vision has joined the international community in speaking out against sexual exploitation of children and oppressive child labor practices. And World Vision consistently works with parents, helping them understand the importance of education for their daughters as well as their sons so that they will have the necessary skills for safe and meaningful employment.



"I HAD NO CHOICE but to please my mother. She mose my husband, and I could not say no," says Nasima, 15, from Bangladesh. In parts of Asia and Africa, girls are married at Nasima's age and younger, despite legal age limits of 18. The nuptials are usually arranged by parents, and the girls have little say in the matter.

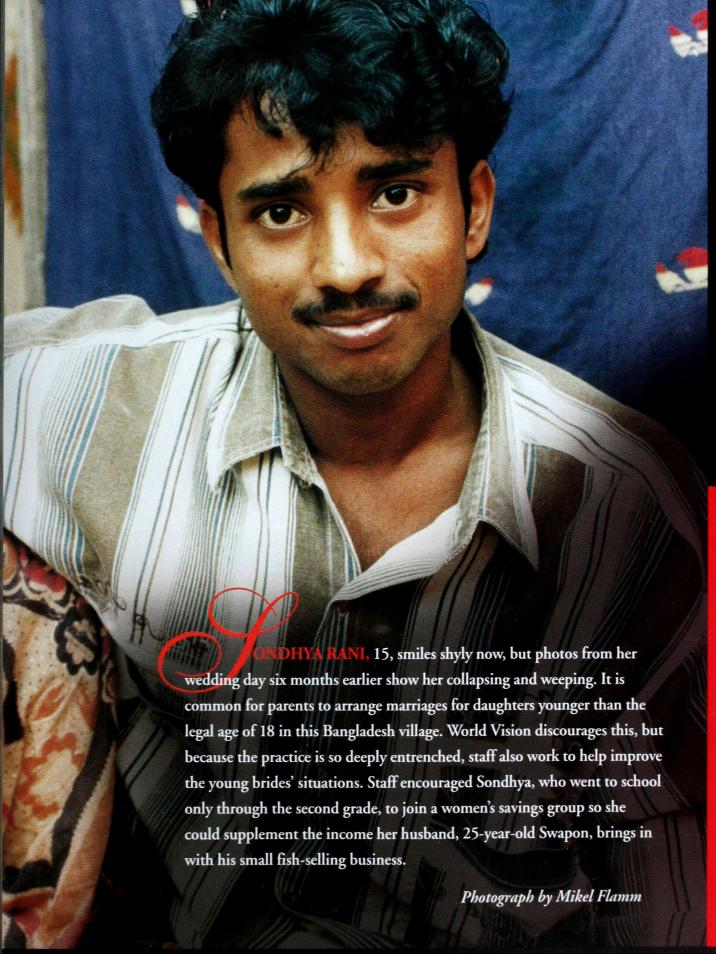
The reasons behind early marriages are often economic. The *lobola*, or bride price, in parts of Africa and the dowry system in parts of Asia have become important income sources for families, and daughters can become mere commodities to be bought and sold—the sooner the better.

The consequences, however, are psychological and physical. Destined for early marriage, girls often are not educated. Illiterate and unskilled young brides consider themselves "owned" by their husbands, and are utterly dependent on them. Still children themselves, the girls are encouraged to begin bearing children immediately. Worldwide, as many as 15 million adolescent girls become pregnant each year. Teenagers under age 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy or labor than women in their early 20s.

Along with other organizations, World Vision is pressing governments to enforce the legal age of consent for marriage. And programs such as sponsorship can ease the economic pressures that compel parents to arrange marriages for their young daughters.



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"I FEAR RAPE MORE THAN DEATH," says
Hawa Kallon, 14, who was sexually abused
when soldiers attacked her Sierra Leone village.
Women and girls are particularly vulnerable
in war zones, where mass rape is now common.
Girls also are forced to trade sex for food or
protection from soldiers, and girls are now
being trained to participate in combat. Of the
18 million refugees from recent conflicts,
75 percent are women and girls, many of them
traumatized from rape and violence.

Rape is not limited to the battlefield—or the developing world. Statistics vary, but a woman in the United States faces a one-infive chance that she will be raped in her lifetime, most likely by a family member or acquaintance.

Yearly, 2 million girls are forced to submit to the ancient African practice of female genital mutilation. Believed to ensure virginity, FGM involves cutting off all or part of a girl's genitalia and crudely stitching the remaining skin. "Circumcised" girls often later suffer infection, infertility, increased childbirth risks, and even death from blood loss and infection.

In many war-torn countries, World Vision provides transitional shelter and psycho-social counseling for victims of rape and war. And World Vision advocates ceasing all forms of violence against children, including FGM.

While GRLS IN THE UNITED STATES are economically better off than the majority of their developing world counterparts, they note the less struggle with their own unique pressures.

American teenagers have the highest pregnancy rates in the Western world, nearly 1 million births per year. Yet only one-third of pregnant teens receive adequate prenatal care. Babies of young mothers commonly suffer low birth weight and childhood health problems. Later, daughters of teens are likely to drop out of high school and become teen moms themselves.

While girls in the developing world starve without choice, American girls starve themselves. Here, the reason is also cultural—an idealized concept of beauty that few girls can and should attain. As young as age 10, girls begin diets that can lead to anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

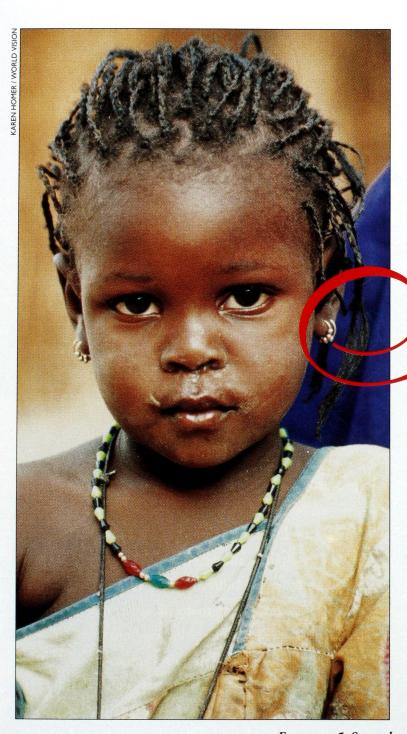
Teen girls are twice as likely as boys to report that they suffer from depression. And the gender gap is closing in crime; offenses committed by girls increased 125 percent from 1985 to 1994 compared to a 67 percent increase for boys.

World Vision offers a range of programs from tutoring to assistance to pregnant teens through community partnerships in urban centers such as Chicago, New York, the Twin Cities, Washington D. C., Los Angeles, and the Pacific Northwest.





an hove IIS Department of Health and Human Service



Fatou, age 5, Senegal

What You Can Do

IF IT'S ON YOUR HEART TO HELP A GIRL overseas or here in the United States, World Vision is among many groups working to improve the future for children—girls and boys.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- PRAY. Use the information and images on the previous pages to guide your prayers. Only God's tremendous power and grace can put right the injustices committed against girls.
- SPONSOR A GIRL. Elect to sponsor a girl in South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, where the needs are greatest. World Vision intentionally selects girls for sponsorship—at least half the number of children in a project—to demonstrate to communities the importance of health and educational opportunities for daughters as well as sons. But whether you sponsor a boy or girl, the benefits extend to the child's siblings, parents, and the whole community, helping to build a healthier, more equitable environment for all.

■ SUPPORT A GIRL-FOCUSED PROGRAM

(use the envelope in the center of this issue to send gifts):

In Guatemala, only one girl for every seven boys completes primary school. Guatemala's Girl Child Project provides weekend classes so that hundreds of girls in Guatemala's rural and marginalized urban communities can attend school as well as complete household chores.

Victory Outreach, a community ministry partner of Vision Los Angeles in San Fernando Valley, Calif., operates a World Vision-supported program called Gang Girls. Through weekly discussion groups and monthly seminars, staff work with female gang members ages 13 to 19 on building self-esteem and creating identities apart from violence and drugs. They also encourage the girls to stay in school or refer them to vocational training programs.

The Family Life Center in Allendale, Mich., provides transitional housing for up to five pregnant, unwed teenagers at a time for as long as a year after giving birth. World Vision's ministry partner, LOVE INC, refers girls to this home where they study the Bible and learn life skills, including budgeting and meal planning.

Child Survival: These community-based programs, targeting areas with high risk of infant mortality, work with local agencies to provide prenatal, maternal, and infant care and training.

South Africa Child Survival helps 19,000 children under age 5 and their mothers in a country where a black child is 10 times more likely to die before her first birthday than a white child, and a black woman is 70 times more likely to die in childbirth than a white mother. The Kean Svay Child Survival Project, with the Cambodian Ministry of Health, provides health and nutrition assistance for more than 43,000

children in a nation that lost most of its doctors during the brutal Pol Pot reign. And the Quang Nam Danang Child Project reduces death and illness among young children and mothers in Vietnam's impoverished Tien Phuoc



Phong Raksmey, age 3, Cambodia

and Hien districts, assisting 47,000 people, 8,000 of whom are children.

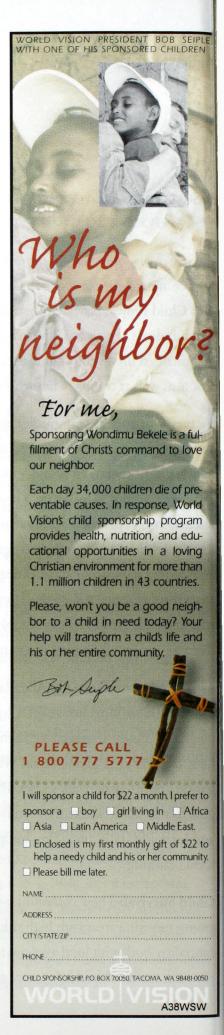
Senegal Water Development: Girls in Senegal spend many hours a week gathering water from distant sources, leaving little time for school. This year, World Vision will drill 22 new wells in communities, freeing girls to devote more of themselves to education. At project completion, 600 wells will provide safe water to more than 550 villages.

Mauritania's Nouakchott Literacy Project: UNICEF studies show that education for women has a proven impact on lowering infant mortality rates, increasing maternal health, and boosting a nation's gross national product. In this Mauritanian literacy program, 210 men and 886 women have learned to read.

In 30 communities throughout the United States, World Vision's LOVE For Children program mobilizes churches to assist more than 31,000 families in need. LOVE For Children works with the Women, Infant, and Children program and Headstart to help beneficiaries, many of them young, single mothers. Church volunteers assist in various ways—collecting baby furniture or reading to children at WIC offices while mothers are with counselors. Last year, the program involved 2,147 churches and 13,162 volunteers, and provided \$1.5 million in goods and services.

RESOURCES:

A 12-page booklet highlighting the major challenges girls face can be ordered for \$4 by calling World Vision's Institute for Global Engagement at (888) 552-1508 or via E-mail at ige@worldvision.org. This booklet features worldwide statistics on the plight of girls and case studies of World Vision's work with girls throughout the world. In addition, a reader and four-week study guide entitled "The Girl Child: Enhancing Life, Sustaining Hope" will be available from the Institute for Global Engagement in late September.



VORLD VISION

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WE REGRET THE ERROR!

Sharp reader John Hall was the t to E-mail us about an error in our b/March issue of World Vision magae. The first sentence of our feature icle on Bill Hybels began, "Two cenies ago, Jesus Christ turned his world I its social structure upside down." Il writes, "I'm sure you meant to say o thousand years ago.' I can't think of ignificant social event in 1798 attrited to the hands of Jesus." We can't her. Thanks for the correction of an or we regret.

—The Editors

THEPOWER OF ONE

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Marci and Joseph Palumbo Somerset New Jersey



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"We could wait until we establish our family and careers, or we can put the future of these children as one of our top priorities now. Once you are aware of the dire poverty, hunger and illiteracy, you know you must offer what you can.

If even one little child learns to read, becomes a good parent or community leader, that is our reward."



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"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Luke 12:34

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A series of donor profiles of those who know their gifts have the power to touch a life, that in turn can transform a family and even an entire community.

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ATY SÁEZ, 5, lives with her grandparents in southern Chile and yearns for the day when she is old enough to go to school. For now she spends her day riding her bicycle, playing with her dog, cooking, and caring for her dolls as if she were a mother. World Vision worked with Katy's village to install a water pump that provides clean water to Katy, her family, and to her whole community.

Photograph by Patricia Cuevas

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Gwen Bradley



For over forty years Gwen Bradley has supported the mission of World Vision through world-wide child sponsorships. And, she has seen first hand the remarkable achievement of their programs.

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"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth."

I John 3:18

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