



WINTER STORY

By Gillian Southey, CWS communications coordinator.

Sangeetha wants to give her children the skills they need for the future. Credit: Rob Wayne



CREATING A PATH FOR A NEW FUTURE.

Most mothers want their daughters to do well in life. Sangeetha is no exception. She has worked hard to raise her family and protect them from the dangers of the forest and the outside world. Her daughter, Jivitha will learn different skills that she hopes will guarantee freedom from hunger and the violence she has known.

When she was a child, Sangeetha knew only the forest. For generations the forest had been her people's home. Its pathways were her roads and she knew to look out for its hidden dangers like wild animals and poisonous plants. She has always gathered its rich resources. Today she earns money for schooling and other needs from the sale of a lichen used in curry, wild grasses for brooms, a nut used for making leather, coffee and cardamom.

Confined to a smaller area of their forest by government policy, the Tribal people have had to change their ways. Two decades ago they asked the Women Development Resource Centre for help. They could no longer support themselves as well as they once could. WDRC guided them through the maze of government rules and people who often exploited them.

With WDRC they stood up to middlemen who paid them in rice rather than money, established an address and therefore identification cards, and successfully argued for government entitlements like housing and schooling. WDRC has been firm in their commitment to empower the Tribals to achieve their own priorities.

In April, International Programmes Working Group member Rob Wayne took the off road track through the hills to meet the community. He was impressed by Sangeetha's confidence and the community's commitment to its young. The leader of the women's *sangam* or association, Sangeetha told him about the difficulties they face sending their children to school.



Sangeetha explains children need transport to school because of the wild animals living in their neighbourhood. Credit: Rob Wayne

They petitioned the government, but there is a dispute between government departments and no one will fix their rough road. Each month families pay NZ\$15 per child for private transport, but if the driver gets a better offer, he will take it, meaning the children stay home. Each year they miss 20-30 days of schooling. So determined are some parents for education that children as young as five are sent to boarding school.





Jivitha enjoys school. She is in standard 5. Sangeetha (right) shows the coffee she collected in the forest that day. Credit: Rob Wayne

TRIBAL PEOPLE FACE HUNGER AND UNCERTAINTY

India's 573 Scheduled Tribes make up 8.6% of its population. Indigenous, they have always looked out for their people and kept their distance from urban life. It is harder to sustain their traditional lives when government and industry take their land and the resources of their forests.

WDRRC has helped some of the Tribal people around Madurai and Kodaikanal make the transition to the edge of the forest. Thanks to WDRRC their children are no longer bonded as child labourers, chasing small animals from the fields or performing menial tasks. The Tribals have learned about government housing and education schemes. WDRRC's goal is always to empower the people to make the changes they want to make.

Sangeetha wants to prepare Jivitha for the new life with a high school education and make sure she is not married at a young age. Your support will enable WDRRC to give Tribal people the support they want and need.



Some homes in Tonga are waiting repair. Other families are living in makeshift shelters made from materials they salvaged from houses destroyed in the cyclone. Credit: Trish Murray

MUCH TO RECOVER IN TONGA

CWS is grateful for support after February's Tropical Cyclone Gita caused extensive damage on the islands of Tongatapu and 'Eua. Donations have topped \$100,000 making sure more families can repair or replace damaged rainwater systems and reestablish gardens. The New Zealand Government contributed \$164,000 for this work.

International Programmes Coordinator Trish Murray found the distribution of relief resources had been very uneven when she visited Tonga in June. "Oh we received a water bottle in the first distribution," one woman told Trish. Another older woman told her that they were sick of *palangi* food – rice and bread – and were missing taro, which is expensive and in short supply. It will be 6 months before the first crops are ready.

Ama Takiloa has systematically visited households on both islands to find out who most needs help. Visiting is something the women do well Trish said. She found many of the poorest people are around Nukualofa. They live in collapsed houses with no land to grow food and little money. Trish says they are likely to be among the first beneficiaries of the work to restore livelihoods.

"Five months after the cyclone, I found many people living in marginal conditions. Your donations are giving families food, safe water and real encouragement. Without your support for Ama Takiloa's work, life would be more difficult," she concluded.

YES, I WANT TO GIVE PEOPLE THE SUPPORT THEY WANT AND NEED

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