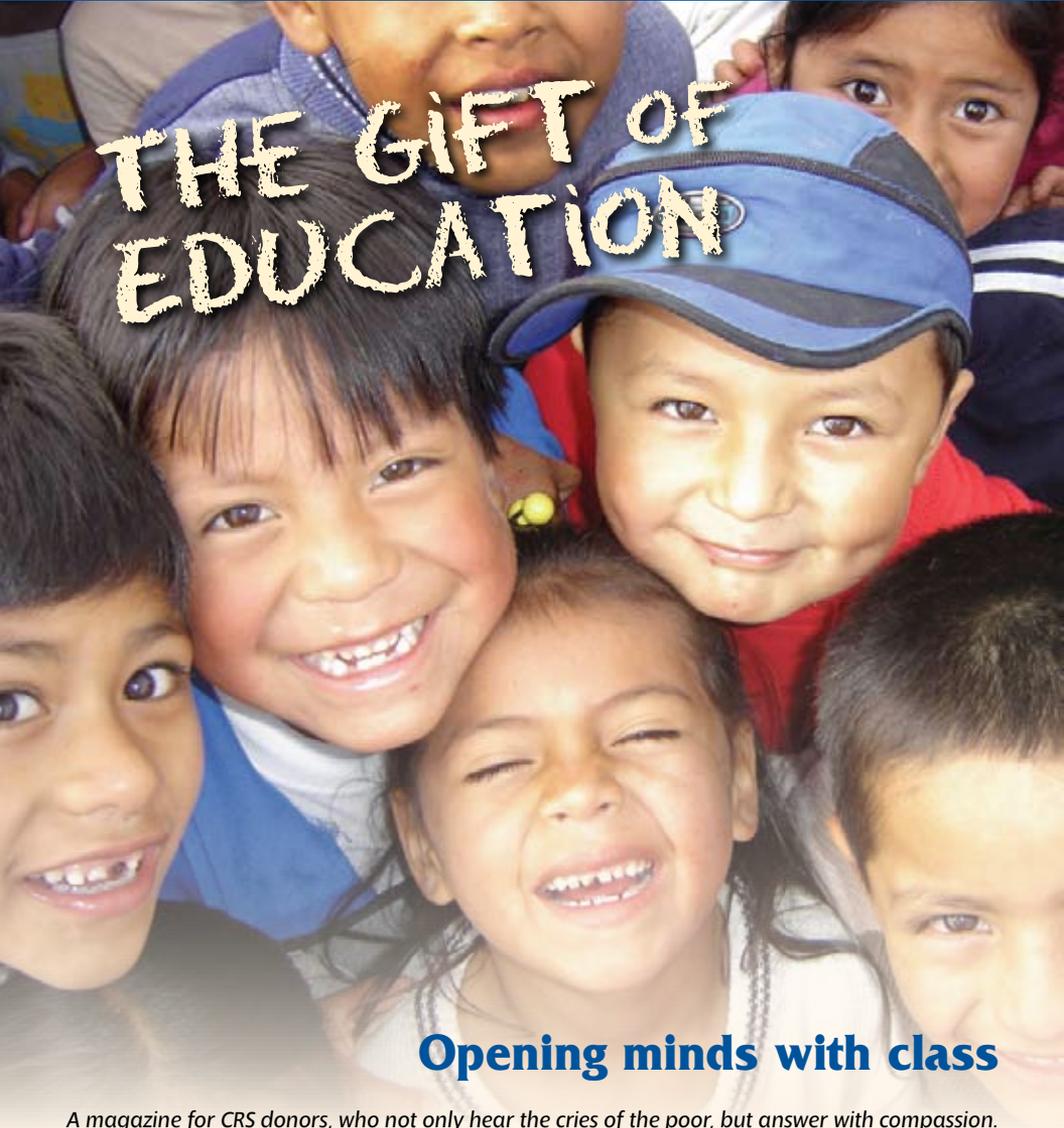




Nobody hears the cries of the poor, or the sound of a wooden bell. ~Haitian proverb



THE GIFT OF EDUCATION

Opening minds with class

A magazine for CRS donors, who not only hear the cries of the poor, but answer with compassion.

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with a circle of friends
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The Gift of Education

By Debbie DeVoe

The Wooden Bell is published five times a year to keep our donors informed about the lifesaving work of Catholic Relief Services.

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Ayen Deng is a 17-year-old attending her third year at a school built with Catholic Relief Services' assistance in a remote village in South Sudan. Even though most families across the country send their daughters to spend their days in the fields and cooking huts, Ayen's parents value education. Somehow they found the money for the mattress, washtub, cup, plate, spoon and personal items Ayen needed to attend Anyidi Girls' School. The education itself is free, with the government of South Sudan covering the salaries of the nine teachers and CRS providing food donated by the U.S. government for meals.

Ayen, who is just starting sixth grade, says, "I love going to school so much because my future is my choice. If I wasn't in school I would just dig in the garden and cook. Now I'm reading and getting an education."



Photo by David Snyder for CRS



These children benefit from a CRS project that works to eradicate child labor and promote education throughout Ecuador.

Photo by CRS staff



Right: Photo by David Snyder for CRS



Even though most families in Sudan relegate their daughters to the fields and cooking huts, Ayen's parents value education.

Photo by Debbie DeVoe/CRS

Ayen stays in school even though the village of Anyidi is threatened by men raiding cattle and even kidnapping children to care for the cows. "They cannot take me because I am so big, but they can take the small ones or kill the teachers," Ayen explains. "At night we must stay quietly. We cannot play."

Her desire for knowledge is stronger than these fears. In a country where few women are literate and most are expected to tend to their families, Ayen is thankful for the opportunity to receive an education. Catholic Relief Services is now building its third boarding school in Bor county, where Anyidi is located, to offer additional girls this chance.

For Ayen and poor, vulnerable children all over the world, education is a precious gift. CRS is committed to giving that gift to as many impoverished children overseas as possible. CRS believes access to a quality education is a human right. ■

Debbie DeVoe is CRS' regional information officer in East Africa based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Challenges We Face

According to the United Nations, 75 million children of primary school age are not in school. Girls are at a particular disadvantage: Education opportunities for boys far exceed those for girls in much of southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

What CRS is Doing

CRS supports education programs in more than 60 countries worldwide in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Every day, more than 1 million children around the world attend a school supported by CRS.

We promote and support access to quality basic education for all. ■



Education is a Dream

By Art Wigchers

I had the rare opportunity to travel to Pakistan with Catholic Relief Services earlier this year. Because of growing violence that forced a million people to flee their homes, the Swat Valley was just starting to make headlines after my return to the United States. We traveled throughout a valley adjacent to Swat, but you would have never known what was brewing next door.

It was there in remote villages where I witnessed cause for celebration.

I saw the pride of parents as their children arrived for their first day of school. I am not talking about the first day of the school year. I mean their first day of school, ever.

The Pakistani children were overwhelmed with excitement, wearing their best and holding their new books.

For the girls, it was a special milestone: In the area, only 2 percent of women are literate.

Education is a dream for parents and children alike. Unfortunately, many families could not afford to send their children to school, or the nearest school was still too far away. With CRS support to build schools, train teachers, provide materials and collaborate with the ministry of education, this dream is within reach.

I was welcomed by tribal and religious leaders who profusely thanked me and Catholic Relief Services for supporting education. Pakistani women have said that becoming literate is like putting on glasses for the first time. Their gratitude was heartfelt and humbling.

I am pleased to share my visit and I am honored to represent you, the staff and the generous donors to Catholic Relief Services. On behalf of a grateful and proud Pakistani people, I wish to thank you. ■

Art Wigchers is vice chairman of Zilber Ltd. and a member of the board of the Catholic Relief Services Foundation.



In Pakistan, a teacher helps a student with her reading lesson in a tent provided by CRS after an earthquake destroyed the school building.

Photo by Jim Stipe for CRS

A Circle of Friends Makes a Difference



Yen Mo Tu is one of several schools in Vietnam where children with disabilities receive an education.

Photo by Sean Sprague for CRS

Catholic Relief Services champions every child's place in school. Children with disabilities are no exception. We encourage not only parents and teachers, but entire communities to be supportive and actively engaged with the students and in the schools. This means a more welcoming environment for children with disabilities. CRS promotes the idea that whole communities can become enthusiastic stakeholders in the success of their children.

One shining example of CRS' commitment to improve the lives of vulnerable people is in Vietnam. The Inclusion of Vietnamese with Disabilities project has improved understanding about disabilities from individual families to policymakers at the national level. In the provinces where CRS has concentrated our work, at least 70 percent of children with disabilities are in school, compared with 25 percent nationally.

Every child deserves an education.

The agency also started the Circle of Friends: a peer group of high-achieving students who live close to their fellow students with disabilities. These student volunteers help with assignments inside as well as outside of the classroom. By working together, these Circles of Friends help children with disabilities succeed in school and break down barriers to their full participation in the community.

Speaking from her experience at her own school, Vu Thi Xuan, the director of Phuong Dong Preschool, revealed the secret of the project's success: "We had to work very hard to get the parents of nondisabled children to understand why children with disabilities needed to be included in the classroom. Once they understood how beneficial it was for not only the children with disabilities, but for their own children, they actively supported the program." ■

Global Update

✓ Afghanistan

Catching Up on Classes

In a nation ravaged by conflict, it is not uncommon to find many who have missed out on the opportunity to go to school. Fortunately, the international community is increasingly recognizing how vital education is to children and youth, even during emergencies and the early reconstruction periods that follow them.



CRS works with Afghan communities to establish schools, train teachers and increase basic education opportunities for children.

Photo by Martin Lueders for CRS

Improving access to education for people who have very little voice in their community is a CRS priority. Since 2002 in Afghanistan, CRS has supported an accelerated learning program for rural children and youth who had previously missed out on schooling.

The program establishes classes in rural villages where there is no formal school. This is most important for young children and girls who often cannot walk long distances to attend school because of safety concerns and the need to work at home.



Children in Ecuador participate in a CRS project that aims to keep them in school and out of the labor force.

Photo by CRS staff

✓ Ecuador

'School Should Come First'

Ecuador has one of Latin America's highest percentages of child laborers. Many young people who work do attend school, but their grades suffer until, discouraged and failing their classes, they drop out at a young age and begin working full-time.

CRS recently completed a project that kept working children and adolescents in school by providing them with uniforms and school

supplies so they could afford to attend. They also received necessary medical services, such as immunizations, which improved their chances of staying in school.

One student remarked, “Going back to school has changed me a lot. At first, my life was only work, work and more work, it was the same routine. Studying isn’t the same as working. Studying is a stage where we get better prepared. It is important that everybody knows that school should come first.”

Palestinian Territories

Agents of Peace

Throughout the Palestinian territories, children and youth are showing a high incidence of stress-related disorders. Young people feel little control over their environment and their future.

A CRS education project worked with nearly 1,500 students—as well as school administrators, teachers, parents and community members—to teach democratic citizenship, social responsibility, justice and peace. Youth learned nonviolent ways to manage the anger and isolation they often feel as a result of their environment, which is brimming with conflict.

According to Ghaida Rahil, who managed the project for CRS, “Palestinian children live in a culture of violence now. By giving them these skills, we can change the society from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.”



CRS' youth programs in Gaza and the West Bank engage young Palestinian men and women as a force for positive change in society.

Photo by Paul Jeffrey for CRS

Beating the Odds

Educating Niger's Nomad Children

By Lane Hartill



Fatchima, left, pounds millet for dinner. She takes care of her two sisters, Saadi, right, and Narba.

Photo by Lane Hartill/CRS

In the back of the class, there's a girl with a secret. Fatchima's mother died a year ago. Since then Fatchima's done her best to take her place.

But here in class, surrounded by her friends and a caring teacher, the 13-year-old can forget about acting as a mom to her two sisters for a few hours. Fatchima has radar-lock on the chalkboard. She's a learning sponge. That's what she does best.

For many kids in this region of Niger, childhood is fleeting and strenuous, a taxing mix of labor and monotony. Some children are forced to tend animals for long periods of time. Others work in mines or quarries, breaking rocks all day.

In 2004, in an attempt to combat exploitative child labor, Catholic Relief Services and partners furnished more than 7,000 students with school supplies. We also trained teachers, set up school management committees, and provided skills training for children unable to attend school. Thanks to the program, the

overall school enrollment numbers—which was just over 20,000—jumped by more than 13,000 students.

Fatchima's father, Ruwa, is a believer in school. One thing is not an option: pulling Fatchima out of school. CRS sent out field agents to explain to nomadic farmers why they should send their kids to school. Did they want their children spending the rest of their lives looking for pasture? Didn't they want their children to learn how to read and do math?

"It's important to enroll Fatchima there," he says. Fatchima is thankful to be in school, and when the family situation is settled, she'd like to spend her free time studying math—her favorite subject.

For now, school is what grounds her. It's a place where she can be Fatchima, a 13-year-old with a future. ■

Lane Hartill is CRS' West Africa regional information officer based in Dakar, Senegal.