



# Faith & Policy Watch

February 2012

## Empowering Rural Women

Half of the world's population lives in rural communities. The definition of 'rural' varies from country to country but the main characteristic is that a rural settlement has a lower concentration of inhabitants than an urban settlement.



At this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), governments will be discussing and forming agreements on empowering rural women. The 56<sup>th</sup> annual session of the CSW takes *'The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger alleviation, development and current challenges'* as its theme. Between 27<sup>th</sup> February and 9<sup>th</sup> March at the United Nations headquarters in New York, governments will report on their progress in improving equality between women and men and focus on the issues facing rural women in their countries.

- Currently 925 million people across the world are experiencing hunger. Out of those who are undernourished around 80% are thought to live in rural areas. It is also estimated that 60% of the chronically hungry are women and girls.
- Approximately 1000 women die each day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of whom die in the developing world. Maternal mortality is higher in rural areas, where women are less likely to receive adequate antenatal health care and more likely to be poor.
- Rural children are twice as likely to miss out on education as urban children and 31% of rural girls are out of school compared to 27% of rural boys. Rates vary globally but rural women are more likely than urban women to be illiterate.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Mothers' Union, Five Talents (partners in the Literacy and Financial Education Programme (LFEP)) and other Anglican organisations will also be attending the Commission to lobby governments on the agreements, to network and to share experiences and best practice through side events and workshops. This year Mothers' Union will be represented by Clementina Kiden Dragga, a Trainer for the LFEP in South Sudan, and Rachel Aston, Social Policy Officer from Mary Sumner House.

Clementina Kiden Dragga



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Mothers' Union is lobbying on three main areas, calling for governments to:

## I. Improve and expand local services and resources in rural areas

### a) *Health:*

- ⇒ Open more, sufficiently resourced, accessible healthcare facilities with trained doctors, nurses and midwives.
- ⇒ Improve treatment and awareness of HIV/AIDS and other common diseases.

### b) *Education:*

- ⇒ Continue working towards Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3.
- ⇒ Provide or fund quality, accessible adult education and skills training relevant to the rural and wider national context.

### c) *Work and income generation:*

- ⇒ Ensure the rights of women to own land and property.
- ⇒ Support and promote women's access to credit, enterprise and other resources.
- ⇒ Support the diversification of employment in rural areas.
- ⇒ Invest in quality, affordable childcare provision during and around working hours.

### d) *Ending violence against women:*

- ⇒ As a matter of priority, ensure the justice system is accessible to rural women.
- ⇒ Fund quality, accessible support services for victims of gender based violence.



## II. Invest in local and national infrastructures that underpin services

- a) Involve rural women in the planning and leadership of infrastructure development to ensure it will meet women's needs.
- b) Invest in sustainable transport networks with an affordable cost to rural service users.
- c) Invest in adequate water and sanitation systems.

## III. Tackle global inequalities

- a) Commit to fair and sustainable systems of international trade, particularly in relation to agriculture and food processing.
- b) Commit to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in rural areas.

*What can I do?*

**Whilst we have a long list of things that governments can do to improve life for rural women, it can be daunting to think how we as individuals can help make a difference. So here are a few simple ideas as to how you can get involved:**

- ⇒ **Buy Fairtrade food.** This is a normal practice for many of us now but there are always new Fairtrade food stuffs entering the market. It may mean spending more money on our groceries but we have to consider how our small sacrifice can help make a big difference to rural producers, many of whom are women, across the world. Don't forget Fairtrade Fortnight 27<sup>th</sup> February – 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012. For more details go to [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)
- ⇒ **Contact your political representative** in Parliament or the Dail to tell them about this year's UNCSW, particularly if you live in a rural area. Not all MPs or TDs are aware of this Commission and its work and the agreements apply just as much to the UK and Ireland as to the rest of the world. You could send them a copy of Mothers' Union's statement or leaflet *'The Empowerment of Rural Women'*.
- ⇒ **If you live in the UK, take part in our domestic violence consultation.** This consultation seeks views on whether to amend the definition of domestic violence to include those under 18. Please contact the Faith & Policy Unit for a copy of the consultation paper (deadline 2<sup>nd</sup> March).

Mothers' Union's statement to the UNCSW and other resources will be available on the website at [http://www.themothersunion.org/policy\\_international.aspx](http://www.themothersunion.org/policy_international.aspx) or you can contact the Faith & Policy Unit on 020 7222 5533 or [policy@themothersunion.org](mailto:policy@themothersunion.org)

## Bye Buy Childhood



7<sup>th</sup> February is **Safer Internet Day**, which is organised by Insafe each year to promote safer and more responsible use of online technology and mobile phones, especially amongst children and young people across the world. Did you know that across Europe:

- 12% of 9-16 year olds say they have been bothered or upset by something on the internet
- 56% of parents whose child has received nasty or hurtful messages online are not aware of this
- 48% of parents get internet safety advice first and foremost from family and friends.

This year's SID is themed 'Connecting generations and educating each other' and seeks to encourage families to work together to stay safe online. For further information and resources go to [www.saferinternetday.org](http://www.saferinternetday.org)

*What can I do?*

To tie in with Safer Internet Day, why not talk with your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews about the websites you both enjoy – maybe browse them together. (If you don't use the internet yourself maybe they could give you a tutorial). Talk about how you stay safe online, for example by not giving out personal details, not uploading embarrassing photos or videos of yourself on websites and by telling an adult if you are being bullied online. Use this opportunity to ensure that any computer and internet enabled devices that children have access to in the home have parental controls turned on.

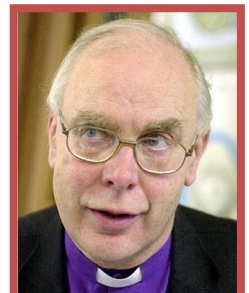
## Welfare Reform Bill

The Welfare Reform Bill made its way through the House of Lords in January and returns to the House of Commons for further amendments in February. The Bill seeks to:

- ⇒ Introduce a 'Universal Credit' to replace a range of existing means-tested benefits and tax credits for people of working age, starting from 2013
- ⇒ Introduce Personal Independence Payments (PIP) to replace the current Disability Living Allowance
- ⇒ Restrict Housing Benefit for social housing tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need
- ⇒ Up-rate Local Housing Allowance rates by the Consumer Price Index
- ⇒ Amend the statutory child maintenance scheme - introduce charges for using the Child Support Agency
- ⇒ Limit the payment of contributory Employment and Support Allowance to a 12-month period
- ⇒ Cap the total amount of benefit that can be claimed.

The House of Lords voted through an amendment on child maintenance tabled by Lord MacKay of Clashfern (Conservative) that charges would **not** be levied on parents with (primary) care for children who had taken reasonable steps to establish whether or not a private maintenance agreement would be possible or appropriate. Mothers' Union along with several other organisations such as Gingerbread, One Parent Families, Barnardo's, The Family and Parenting Institute, the Church of Scotland and Methodist Church in Scotland backed this amendment in a letter to the Government. The Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, the Rt. Rev John Packer, led the defeat to exclude Child Benefit from the total amount of benefit that can be claimed, in order to keep it as a non means-tested benefit.

The Government now intends to reverse these amendments as the Bill 'ping-pongs' between the two Houses this month.



Rt. Rev John Packer



Lord MacKay

## The Way – Film Review for Lent

Thomas Avery (Martin Sheen) is a wealthy American eye-doctor who goes to France after his adult son is killed in the Pyrenees during a storm while walking the pilgrimage route to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain, also known as *the Way of St. James*. Tom wants to retrieve his son's body. However, in a combination of grief and homage to his son, he decides to walk the same route where his son died and with his son's ashes, to understand him better.

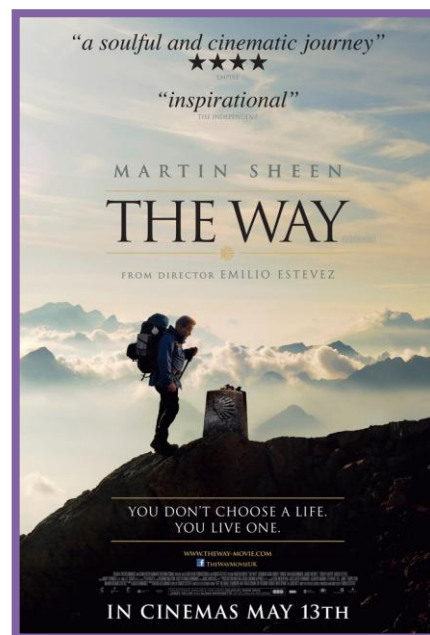


Tom meets other pilgrims looking for greater meaning in their lives. Three become his companions: Joost is an overweight Dutchman who says he is walking the route to lose weight to get ready for his brother's wedding and so that his wife will desire him again. He is a warm, extrovert who is the first to start walking with Tom and is marked by an unfailing kindness to all he meets. Sarah is a Canadian divorcee who has fled an abusive marriage and the loss of a child through abortion who says she is walking the pilgrimage to quit smoking. "Jack from Ireland" (James Nesbitt) is a travel writer who when younger had desires to be the next Yeats or Joyce but grew accustomed to the lucrative field of travel writing. He is suffering from writer's block.

The pilgrims travel through the breathtaking scenery of northern Spain continually meeting generosity in others, including from hotel keepers and Spanish Gypsies. Tom and the others have moments of crisis and healing that make them drop their masks and befriend each other. Through the pilgrimage, Tom discovers the meaning of one of the last things his son said (in a flashback): that there is a difference between people who 'live the life they chose', (a safe type of life) and those who choose to 'live life' (exploring, searching, not following a certain career path). By the end of the trip, the four have come to find some inner peace including respect for each other. All four are of the Christian faith.

As is often the case in such parables, it is the wise child who must teach his erring elder what life is really about.

Available on DVD.



## National Marriage Week 2012



Don't forget that National Marriage week runs from 7th-14th February. This year sets the '3 point challenge' which encourages couples to do take three steps over the week. For further information go to [www.marriage-week.org.uk](http://www.marriage-week.org.uk)

Available on Mothers' Union's website at the start of each month at [www.themothersunion.org/policy.aspx](http://www.themothersunion.org/policy.aspx)  
Contact us at [policy@themothersunion.org](mailto:policy@themothersunion.org)