



Heart for the Poor : 16 March 2010 : Children, the best investment : Richard Barter

After many years of procrastination, the acquisition of some technology to do mortise and tenon joints and a summer holiday relatively free of demands, I have all but completed making 8 kauri dining chairs. Sanding and oiling brought home to me that old tradesman's maxim "put time and care in at the beginning of a job and finishing it will be easy". Not a professional, I am spending a lot of time removing dents and dealing with inaccuracies in the machining and assembly of the chair parts.

Cleaning glue joints allows one to reflect while working. I was reminded of the many occasions when my daughter as a toddler would sit on my work bench drilling and banging away at bits of wood copying what I was doing. Grown up now, she still bosses us all around, but is a healthy and self motivated professional. I can only be grateful that she was able to receive the essentials every child needs, a great mother, good nutrition, health and a safe environment to grow up in.

So it was with a heavy heart that I came across a report by the World Health Organisation estimating that malnutrition causes half the 9 million deaths among children under 5 each year in the developing world (WHO, 1999). While it is a terrible thing to lose a child, survivors of malnutrition suffer as adults with diminished intellectual performance, low work capacity and health problems that will shorten their lives (Martorell, 1999)¹. Achieving adequate growth and development during early childhood will result in healthier, more productive adults. Investing in a child can be viewed as a long-term economic strategy.

TEAR Fund's [Child Survival Programme](#) assists pregnant women, at-risk infants and their mothers by providing medical assistance, pre and post-natal care and nutritious food. The programme also helps with advice on how to provide a safe home environment, income generating skills and discipleship in order that they might develop a real and meaningful relationship with Jesus.

Children had a special place in Jesus' heart revealed in Luke 18:16 when Jesus said "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these*". What better way to build the Kingdom of God than to ensure at risk children can develop to the full potential God placed within them? I really thought I was so being careful when shaping

and gluing up those chairs. Fortunately the results of my bloopers are repairable, children are not. But the good news is that we do have the opportunity to give them a hope and a future.

Prayer: Father God, we acknowledge the trust you extend to us as caregivers to future generations. We acknowledge that poverty will prevent some providing their children with an essential start to life. We acknowledge our role in journeying with these parents that we might together offer their children to you whole and pleasing in your sight. Amen.

ⁱ **The nature of child malnutrition and its long-term implications, *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 3 © 1999, The United Nations University**