

Abused Women in Developing Countries Get Aid

The Women of Hope radio program reaches the 10/40 Window region with a mix of biblical truth and practical advice

As women in Third World countries are increasingly neglected, abused and even maimed for no other reason than their gender, a handful of female believers are trying to intercede. The Project Hannah Women of Hope broadcast is Trans World Radio's outreach to women who live behind walls of discrimination, fear and despair.

Project Hannah currently has five transmitters that blanket the Asia-Pacific region from northern China to Papua New Guinea. The broadcasts reach women in the privacy of their homes, an especially important factor in societies where active evangelism is prohibited.

"Many women in these areas are allowed to have radios," said Jennifer Hayden, Women of Hope's executive producer. "A radio is a personal companion. It's something that people take with them. It's cheap, portable—it has all the elements of being a very good friend.

"That's what we want to be to them. We want them to be able to count on us to be there every week for them."

Executive director and founder Marli Spieker chose the project's name from the biblical character Hannah, who suffered gender abuse in her society.

“Hannah was loved by her husband but was mocked by others because she was barren,” Hayden said. “She went into the temple and poured out her heart to God answered her prayer, and she went from someone who was desperate to someone who had hope. If you don’t have hope, you don’t have anything.”

No stranger to outreach work, Spieker, a 32-year veteran of missions, stresses that the backbone of the Women of Hope ministry is the prayer support of women and men in more than 45 nations.

“Before the program goes on the air in a particular country, we have to have the prayer movement established there,” Spieker said. “If we cannot have the prayer movement in the country, we have some prayer groups in that language from that particular country praying for them.”

Women of Hope is broadcast in a magazine-style format, designed to appeal to women. “It’s for women by women,” Hayden said. “The tone of it is not preachy—it’s not teachy. It’s conversational. It’s in a friendly, acceptance-oriented manner, without compromising the gospel of Christ. We try to give them what they need spiritually and, hopefully, some practical info to help them get through their day.”

The first element of the program is “Lessons for Your Life”—practical information on subjects that people in developed countries take for granted, such as breast self-examinations, nutrition, germs, depression and stressors that affect women. The second is “Lessons for Your Soul,” which consists of spiritual truths that can give them hope beyond their circumstances.

The program primarily targets women who live in the so-called 10/40 Window, a geographical rectangle that stretches from West Africa to eastern Asia between the latitude lines of 10 degrees and 40 degrees north. Missions experts estimate that approximately two-thirds of the world's population—and the majority of the world's Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus—live within its boundaries.

Many women in these areas are born into cultures that oppress them. In some, the birth of a baby boy is celebrated, but baby girls are killed.

Girls who manage to survive until adulthood are viewed as property, barred from the workplace, schools and, consequently, from hearing the gospel.

"We have legal and political boundaries—religions that really would be against this," Hayden said. "But the beauty of radio is that it can go beyond political boundaries, it can go through the walls of houses, it can even go beyond the veil—the burqa—that a woman is forced to wear, straight into her ears and into her heart."

Since its first broadcast, Women of Hope has expanded to 11 languages, with more on the way. Having moved from its original home on Guam, the international English version is now being produced at Trans World Radio's Miami Ministry Center in Florida.

Project Hannah continues to flourish in Asia, and while it has expanded its presence in the Americas with Spanish broadcasts, the ministry hopes to reach out to more women in this hemisphere by eventually broadcasting a Western version of

Women of Hope to North America, South America, Europe and Australia.

—J. Gary Walker