

# Anti-malaria anthem for bed net campaign

Senegal-born singer Youssou Ndour is raising his highly recognisable voice to amplify the fight against malaria in his home country. His song *Xeex Sibbiru* – “fight malaria” – a collaboration with *Malaria No More*, raises awareness about malaria prevention and treatment in Senegal as part of a mass distribution of mosquito nets.

The Youssou Ndour Foundation and *Malaria No More* recently launched *Surround Sound: Senegal*, a campaign to activate key sectors of society – entertainment, sport, faith, local business and government – to encourage people to use mosquito nets and seek treatment. The singer is not only the most popular artist in west Africa, but also one of Senegal’s

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biggest media owners, besides being a board member of *Malaria No More*, and an ambassador for the Roll Back Malaria Partnership. Ndour is focused on engaging families across the country in a common effort against malaria, which can be defeated with simple tools like mosquito nets and effective medicines.

“Malaria has plagued Senegal for too long,” said Ndour, “I wrote *Xeex Sibbiru* because I am tired of seeing my country suffer needlessly from this preventable and treatable disease. It’s up to each of us to do our part. I am honoured to use my music to help families in Senegal learn how to protect themselves from malaria and make a happier and healthier future for their children.”

*Surround Sound: Senegal* was launched as Senegal’s Ministry of Health and National Malaria Control Programme (PNLP), with international partners, prepared to distribute two million long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets to cover every child under five in Senegal by the end of 2010.

Youssou Ndour collaborated with fellow Senegalese artists to write *Xeex Sibbiru*, telling the story of a young man who gets malaria and misses out on life and encouraging him and all Senegalese to sleep under a mosquito net. This song, along with radio messages from Ndour himself, has been airing across national radio stations and from 1,300 health huts and net distribution points throughout the country.

“In order to reach our goal of ending malaria deaths in Africa by 2015, we need to make sure that every family is equipped with the tools and the knowledge of how to protect themselves,” said Scott Case, CEO of *Malaria No More*. □

Download *Xeex Sibbiru* at [www.malarianomore.org/surroundsound](http://www.malarianomore.org/surroundsound)

## ECO-DISASTER ISLAND BECOMES PARK

The once blighted Samar Island in the Philippines has been transformed by the creation of a natural park. In the late 1980s much of the landscape of this island was blighted through deforestation and mining of large bauxite deposits. Because of this promoted soil erosion and flooding, the national government imposed a logging moratorium in 1989, indefinitely extended by then president Corazon Aquino. The island was then declared a forest reserve. But islanders still needed to make a living, so the UN Global Environment Fund (GEF) and the Philippines government created a Samar Island biodiversity project, focusing on the sustainable management of natural resources and providing alternative livelihoods, such as eco-tourism. This has been promoted by the creation of a 450,000 hectare Samar Island Natural Park, home to 38 mammal species, 215 bird species, 51 reptile species, 26 amphibian species, and more than 1,000 species of plants. □

## SOLAR POWER SPOTLIGHTS HOMEWORK

Dutch electronics corporation Philips is working with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) to bring sustainable energy to African villages, where an estimated 560 million people are left in darkness after nightfall. As part of World Environment Day 2010, Philips Lighting Africa donated 250 home solar systems to rural Rwandan villages without electricity, with the aim of helping school-children finish their homework and improve their education.

“Philips is committed to making affordable, high-quality, energy efficient lighting available to areas where it is most needed,” said Philips Lighting Africa CEO Mr DP Smedema. “Solar-powered lighting solutions can make a true difference for the people in Rwanda.” Another 50 systems will be given to the Rubaya village, Gichumbi district, a pilot community village where UNEP and the Rwandan government are trying to combine poverty reduction and environmental improvement measures. □





### WHEAT DISEASE UNDER SURVEILLANCE

A 'rust spore' website has been launched by the UN Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to track Ug99, a devastating strain of wheat stem rust disease, carried by wind – and on people's clothes. Scientists fear it is spreading across Africa and could infect south Asia. "Emergence of the Ug99 races in east Africa [discovered in Uganda in 1999] transformed stem rust from a disease largely under control into a significant global threat," said David Hodson of the FAO. "This year millions of dollars in crop losses are likely because of yellow rust outbreaks in the Middle East, central Asia, the Caucasus and north Africa." The 'Rust Spore' site will deliver information on the disease's status, monitor new strains and offer reliable data on a global scale. **D**

More information [www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/rust/stem/en/](http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/rust/stem/en/)

### TEA GROWERS URGED TO 'DRINK UP'

The UN Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is advising tea-exporting countries to stimulate demand in their domestic markets, because major growing sales are unlikely in traditional importers of black tea, such as Britain and Russia. "In countries where tea is produced per capita consumption is much lower [than foreign markets] and so there is a lot more market potential," said Kaison Chang, secretary of FAO's inter-governmental group on tea. Tea-producing country consumers drink 10% of the tea drunk in mature import markets. China is the world's largest tea exporter, followed by Kenya, Sri Lanka and India. **D**

### TRADITIONAL WEAVERS MEET HIGH FASHION

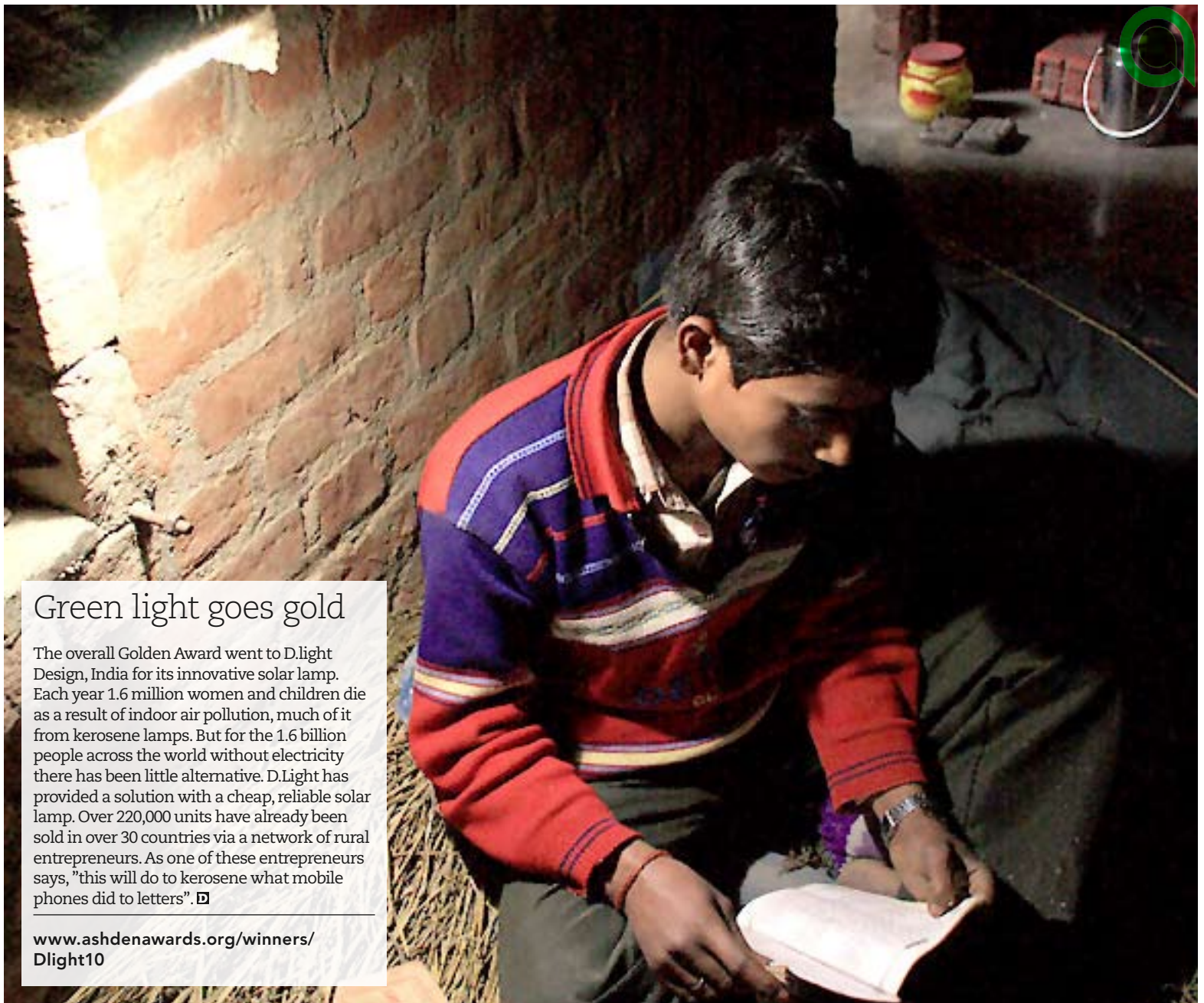
Bangladesh-born Bibi Russell, the international model, has been working with tribal women in Assam, India, to commercialise their traditional woven garments, and provide them with financial independence. Teaming up with the UNDP, she has been helping Bodo women blend traditional weaving techniques with high fashion design, production and marketing. The programme is being coordinated by local clothing business Weaving Destination, which preserves traditional Bodo motifs and weaving. The company's staff of more than 40 women include HIV sufferers, human trafficking survivors and female migrant returnees who are, says UNDP, "highly vulnerable to re-trafficking, social exclusion, and impoverishment." The company also operates a vocational training centre for Bodo communities.

"Women need support to develop skills that will help them to be economically independent and socially confident," said Bibi Russell. "What they need is self esteem, human dignity and empowerment for better livelihoods and sustainable income." **D**

# 'Green medals' illuminate global innovation

The 2010 Ashden Awards for sustainable energy took place earlier in the summer, with £140,000 going to groups who have saved thousands of tonnes of CO2 through the sustainable energy technologies.

"These award-winners are champions at delivering practical ways of protecting our planet and its precious biodiversity through the use of sustainable energy," said TV broadcaster Sir David Attenborough at the awards ceremony. "They are reducing carbon emissions and protecting local ecosystems, while improving the lives of the people they touch. They greatly deserve to be celebrated for their important role in tackling both climate change and poverty."




## Green light goes gold

The overall Golden Award went to D.light Design, India for its innovative solar lamp. Each year 1.6 million women and children die as a result of indoor air pollution, much of it from kerosene lamps. But for the 1.6 billion people across the world without electricity there has been little alternative. D.Light has provided a solution with a cheap, reliable solar lamp. Over 220,000 units have already been sold in over 30 countries via a network of rural entrepreneurs. As one of these entrepreneurs says, "this will do to kerosene what mobile phones did to letters".

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/Dlight10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/Dlight10)




## Electricity you can rely on


In Brazil, energy cooperative CRELUZ has built six micro hydro plants which supply electricity to an area of 12,000 sq km, benefiting over 80,000 people. Reliable electricity is critical to the sustainability of rural communities – offering greater opportunity for income generation and less migration to cities. It also reduces deforestation as locals are no longer stripping the local forests for fuel. Indeed, in its commitment to sustainability, CRELUZ has begun a complementary programme of reforestation. 

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/CRELUZ10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/CRELUZ10)

## TREES FOR PAPER FIGHT POVERTY

India's largest pulp and paper company wants to fight poverty and improve the environment by ensuring its supply chain includes poor small farmers in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Ballarpur Industries is providing smallholders with access to finance to purchase seeds for pulpwood trees, whose wood they can sell to the company through a guaranteed buy-back programme. It is also offering guidance on growing pulpwood and a rain-fed tree variety that does not require additional irrigation. Ballarpur Industries is also supplying training in livestock husbandry so that growers can make more of their plots. They predict that by 2015, participating farmers will earn six times more per acre of degraded land than other farmers. 

## PAKISTANI WOMEN LEARN VET SKILLS

A Pakistan university has been working with the UNDP to spread veterinary skills among rural women, especially in the Punjab, where women traditionally care for livestock. The goal of the month-long training programme operated by Lahore's University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences (UVAS) is to enable women to earn a living caring for village livestock, generating wealth and animal health simultaneously. "Engaging and training women as livestock managers not only empowers women but enables the government to extend livestock services to the most remote areas," said Faiza Effendi, chief of the poverty reduction unit at UNDP Pakistan. "This is a key lynchpin to the livestock development policy in Pakistan." More than 850 'Lady Livestock Workers', as they are called, have now qualified, with 60% earning a living from the work, earning on average 3,000 Pakistan rupees a month (\$34), a reasonable income in the Punjabi countryside. They are now providing veterinary services in 280 villages. The project has been backed by Nestlé Pakistan, Engro Food Pakistan and UKaid from DFID. 



## Here comes the sun

“I like to see the excitement on people’s faces when they can turn on a light. I feel I am making people happy,” says a TECNOSOL installer of solar systems in rural Nicaragua. Here, the company has developed a range of solar-driven systems that are providing critical power for schools, health centres, and businesses, not to mention the 40,000 systems sold to homes across the country. With 17 branches across Nicaragua, TECNOSOL is now spreading its message and products across the continent. [Q](#)

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/TECNOSOL10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/TECNOSOL10)



## Waste not, want not

Deforestation is ravaging rural Kenya as people strip forests for vital cooking fuel. Yet biogas, produced from animal and human waste, is a viable alternative – if only there was the training and awareness to make it happen. Sky Link provides both through a network of local entrepreneurs. Two hundred domestic biogas plants and six large-scale ones in schools and a prison have been sold, benefiting at least 5,200 people. As a result, wood use has been cut by 800 tonnes a year, reducing carbon emissions by around 1,100 tonnes a year. [Q](#)

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/Skylink10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/Skylink10)

## Africa lights up

More than 70% of sub-Saharan Africa has no access to electricity. In rural areas this rises above 95%. The Rural Energy Foundation (REF) has met this need by turning local communities on to solar. Recognising that the products are nothing without the local enthusiasm to promote and install them, REF has trained local networks of budding entrepreneurs. As a result, in only three years 300,000 people in nine countries have gained access to solar energy. Better quality light gives opportunities for study, income-generation and leisure activities as well as vital access to radio and mobile phones. 

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/REF10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/REF10)




## When problems become opportunities

The Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and the Dutch aid agency SNV faced the twin problems of dangerous cooking practices and huge amounts of untreated animal waste. Turning the problem into an opportunity, they worked out how to convert the waste to energy using biogas digesters, which produced clean, reliable energy for cooking and heating. At the same time, they reduced the health and environmental problems associated with wood fuels, not to mention the animal waste. Over 78,000 systems have been installed, benefiting more than 390,000 people, and saving around 167,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. 

[www.ashdenawards.org/winners/MARD10](http://www.ashdenawards.org/winners/MARD10)



## SAMOANS TRACK CLIMATE CHANGE ON FILM

Samoans are embracing video as an increasingly effective way to highlight concerns about climate change. Eight community groups from within the Pacific archipelago have participated in film-making workshops sponsored by the UNDP's Global Environment Facility initiative. They interviewed fellow residents to demonstrate the impact climate change is having on their lives: how climate change-related phenomena such as extreme weather and rising sea levels have swallowed villages and changed food-gathering habits. A woman remembered how she used to dry coconuts on a beach that no longer exists. A fisherman said: "Severe cyclones force the fish out deep into the ocean. It's hard for people to find fish for their daily meals." These 'participatory videos' are made by the people they aim to benefit. "Participatory videos and photo stories with narrations have become a powerful tool for development, particularly in remote rural villages and indigenous communities," said Terence Hay-Edie, a biodiversity expert working with the programme. Samoans, he said, were also keen on "capturing their traditional, oral culture in the participatory video, which overcomes language or literacy barriers." 

## Ashden calls for 2011 entries

The Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy are seeking entries from inspirational and innovative local sustainable energy programmes from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Entry is free, and up to six winners will receive £20,000 each in prize money for programme development, with one winner receiving a gold award of £40,000. The awards will be presented at a VIP ceremony in London in June 2011.

For 2011 they are particularly interested in applications from Latin America and China, and are keen to hear from organisations who are working to reduce deforestation.

They look for schemes that are technically rigorous, have an element of innovation and – most importantly – make a genuine difference to local peoples' lives, both socially and economically.

For information and an application form:  
[http://www.ashdenawards.org/int\\_awards](http://www.ashdenawards.org/int_awards)

# 1 ZIMBABWE/RHODESIA Nervous Conditions

Tsitsi Dangarembga

*The Women's Press, 1988;*  
*Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004.*

The opening of Dangarembga's contemporary classic – "I was not sorry when my brother died" – defiantly announces the birth of southern Africa's most memorable female protagonist. *Nervous Conditions* is the coming-of-age story of farm girl, Tambu, and her English-educated cousin, Nyasha, against a backdrop of traditional and colonial pressures and restrictions. The setting is late 1960s Rhodesia but the focus is on individual minds and bodies rather than the popular uprising of that period. In the long-awaited sequel, *The Book of Not* (2006), national independence provides no easy solutions.

# 2 NIGERIA Half of a Yellow Sun

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

*Fourth Estate, 2006; Harper Perennial 2007.*

In her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Nigerian-born Adichie paid her dues to compatriot Chinua Achebe and to fellow African Tsitsi Dangarembga: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room". In 'Half of a Yellow Sun', she moves into relatively uncharted territory. Set amidst the temporary establishment of Biafra and ensuing inter-ethnic bloodbath, the novel follows houseboy Ugwu, his employer Olanna, and an Englishman, Richard, in love with Olanna's sister. This compelling novel sets itself against divisive grand narratives of ethnicity, gender and class and has a telling twist in its tail.

# 3 EGYPT The Yacoubian Building

Alaa Al Aswany,

Translated by Humphrey Davies.

*Harper Perennial, 2007.*

*First published in Arabic, 2002.*

A bestseller in the Arab world, spawning a box-office hit movie and a 'cleaned up' television series, Al Aswany's dark comedy is also an indictment of corruption and its effects in post-Nasserite Egypt. In the business spaces, splendidly dilapidated apartments and rooftop shacks of the (real art deco) Yacoubian Building on Suleiman Basha street, we encounter a closeted homosexual, a wealthy businessman-turned-politician, an opportunistic sister, an aspiring young woman, a Christian tailor, an ageing playboy and a budding Islamic militant. Something will have to give. The legacy of Egypt's literary giant, Naguib Mahfouz, resonates through this vivisection of contemporary Cairo life.

# TEN BEST READS

Too often in popular media, developing countries are stereotyped as poor and struggling, while the work of their world-class artists, performers, musicians and writers is overlooked. **Lindsey Moore** offers a taster menu of the cream of contemporary world literature.

## 4 PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES I Saw Ramallah

Mourid Barghouti,

Translated by Ahdaf Soueif.  
Introduction by Edward Said.

American University in Cairo Press, 2000;  
Bloomsbury, 2005.

First published in Arabic, 1997.

From a magisterial opening scene that has the author crossing back into occupied Palestine, this fragmented yet intense memoir demonstrates that “the displaced person becomes a stranger to his memories and so he tries to cling to them”. As Said suggests, a “life-affirming poetic texture” gives the stamp of authenticity to a narrative of (ultimately impossible) return. Barghouti keeps nostalgia at bay, aware that the Israeli occupation “did not deprive us of the clay ovens of yesterday, but of the mystery of what we would invent tomorrow”. This is a vital contribution to Palestinian literature by one of its most accomplished diaspora poets.

## 5 AFGHANISTAN The Wasted Vigil

Nadeem Aslam

Faber & Faber, 2008.

Pakistani-born Aslam surpasses expectations with his stunning third novel. Set in contemporary Afghanistan, *The Wasted Vigil* reflects the potential for wonder even in times of terror. On interlocking quests or in search of refuge, a white British Muslim widower, a Russian, an American secret agent, a local and an Islamist gather in an old perfume factory by a lake. “On the wide ceiling are hundreds of books, each held in place by an iron nail hammered through it.” Recalling Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, this is an elegy to the casualties of a multilayered history that has all but eviscerated a nation.

## 6 INDIA The God of Small Things

Arundhati Roy

Flamingo, 1997; Harper Perennial, 2004.

“She sensed that a pact had been forged between her Dream and the World. And that the midwives of that pact were, or would be, her sawdust coated two-egg twins.” This international bestseller and cause célèbre in Kerala, India, where it is set, is the only novel by activist Roy, and it is as stylistically exuberant as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Rebellious Ammu’s liaison with the ‘untouchable’ Velutha is pulled into the vortex of regional tensions. But the novel insists upon the “small things”: the unpredictability of desire, and two children’s unwitting complicity in the beautiful, destructive fate of the two adults they love.

## 7 VIETNAM Paradise of the Blind

Duong Thu Huong

Translated by Phan Huy Duong  
and Nina McPherson.

Harper Perennial, 2002.

First published in Vietnamese, 1988.

Hang, a Vietnamese “exported worker” recalls her life over the course of a train journey across Russia. Her story of a lost father, his powerful sister, a mother worn down by family duty and her corrupt, parasitic brother powerfully evokes the experience of two generations struggling under communism. Memory as “the purest balm and the most overpowering poison” is beautifully rendered in this fine translation, in which melancholy is leavened by the sensual texture of rural Vietnam and the gastronomic wonders of the Hanoi slums. The novel was banned in Vietnam and its author, formerly a Party member, briefly imprisoned.

Melancholy is leavened by the sensual texture of rural Vietnam and the gastronomic wonders of the Hanoi slums.



# 8 SAMOA They Who Do Not Grieve

Sia Figiel

Chatto & Windus, 2000; Vintage, 2001.

Sia Figiel's second novel is a vivid portrait of the artist as a young outsider for whom the alphabet "spilled, running wild through the spaces between my fingers". The narrative interleaves two matrilineal Samoan family stories ruptured by silences, moving between reality, dream and myth, and deferring closure until the final pages. As young Malu learns to transcend her legacy as a "fallen" woman and an "exotic Islander", the novel moves towards a "line drawn beyond the green horizon, connecting the past, the present, the future, that she alone saw". Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* makes a not incidental appearance.

# 9 HAITI Heading South

Dany Laferrière

Translated by Wayne Grady.

Grasset, 2006; Douglas & McIntyre, 2010.

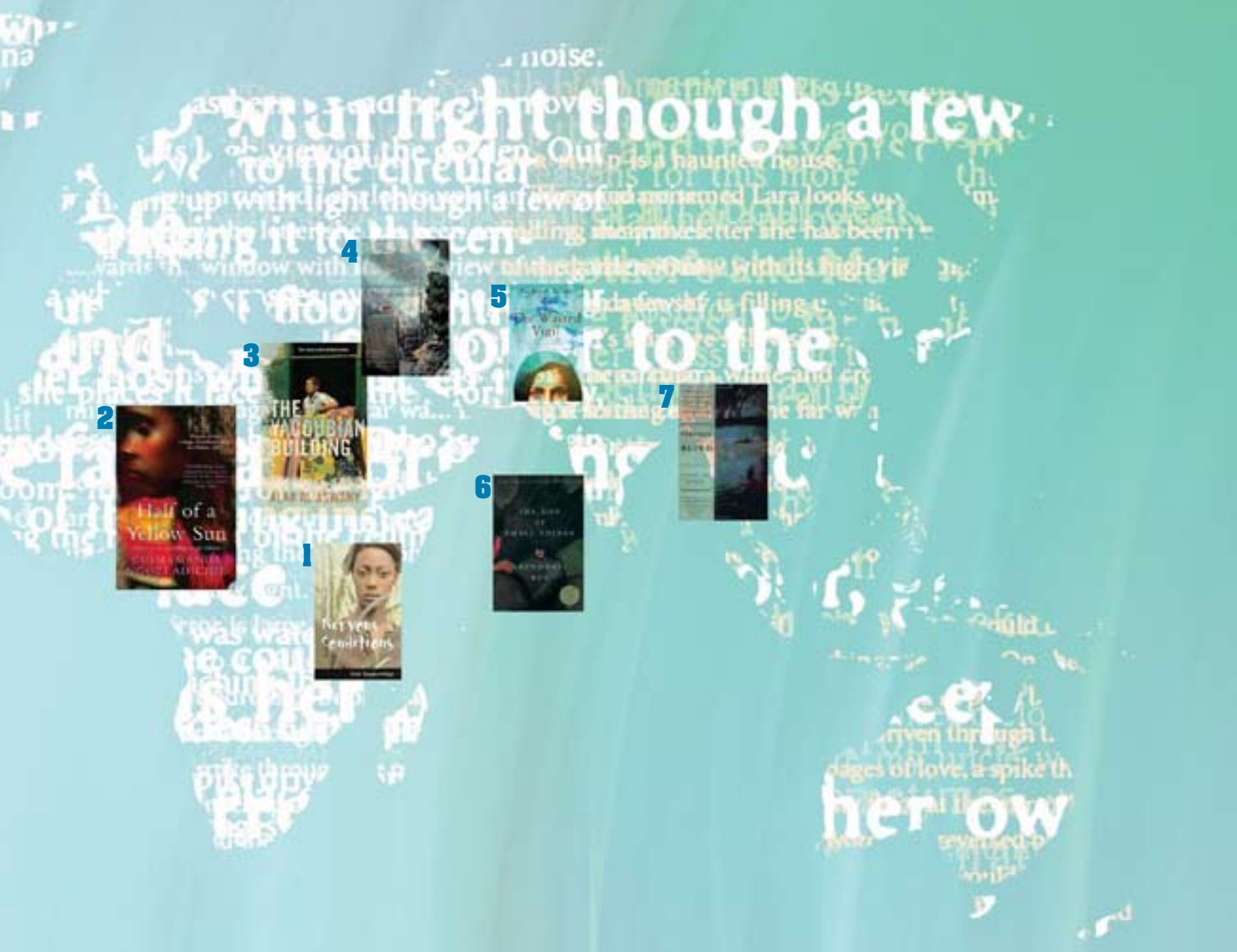
An enfant terrible of the Francophone literary scene, Laferrière interlaces individual and collective struggles to survive in Haiti, under the infamous 'Baby Doc' Duvalier regime of the 1970s. The lens widens from the ambivalent power relations that underpin the procuring of young black bodies by white female sexual tourists – the focus of Laurent Cantet's 2005 film version of the novel (*Vers le sud*) – to the experience of artists, musicians, ideologues and hustlers on Haiti's backstreets. This is a compelling, disturbing exploration, by a consistently edgy writer, of the trade-offs involved in upward mobility and sexual and artistic emancipation.

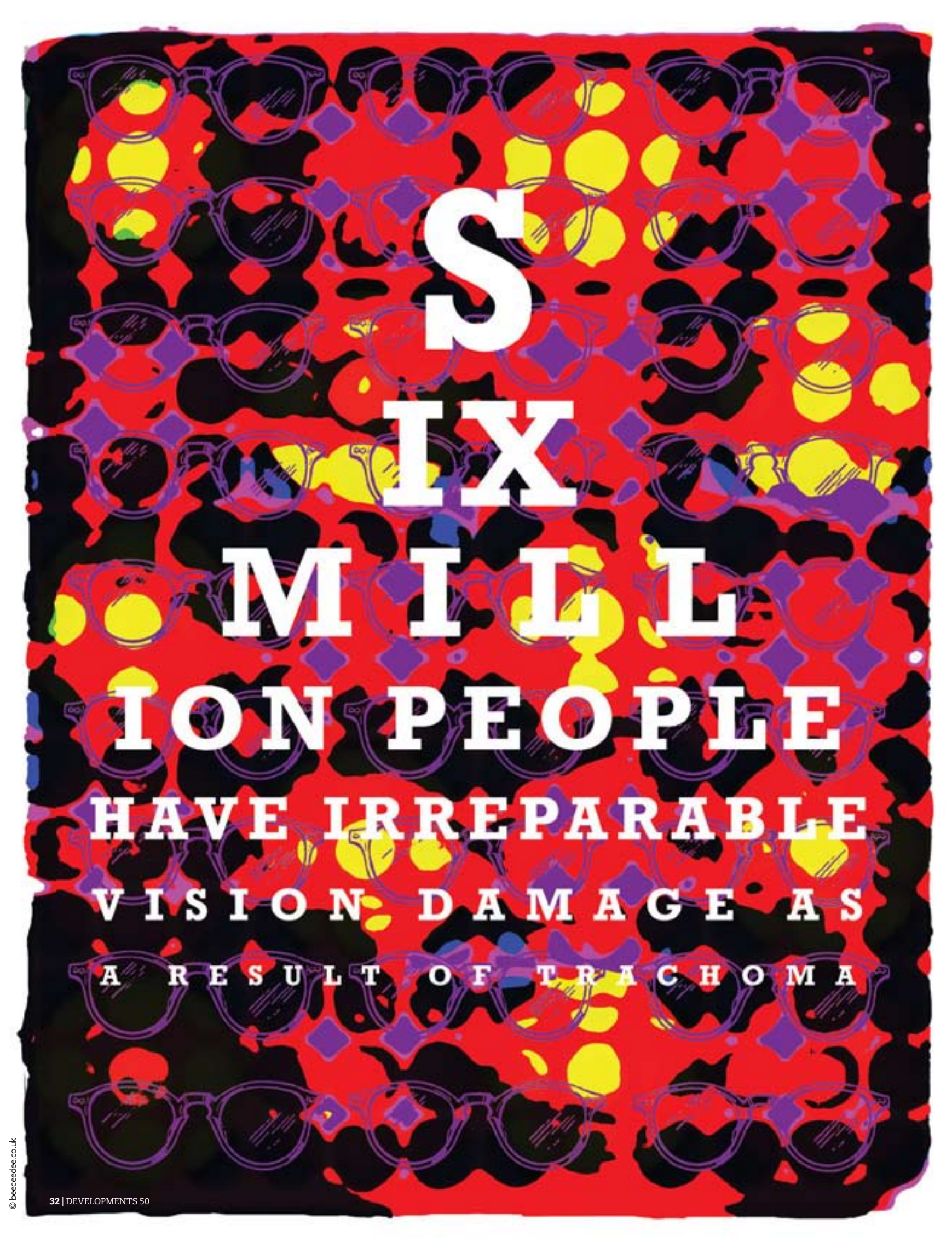
# 10 GUYANA Disappearance

David Dabydeen

Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1993; Peepal Tree Press, 2005.

Guyanese novelist and poet Dabydeen undermines notions of fixed and enduring identity, emphasising cultures as multi-layered, and humanity as essentially fragile. When a "West-Indian of African ancestry, trained in the science and technology of Great Britain" comes to construct a sea wall on the Kent coast, his encounters with Englishness disinter personal memories of Guyana, and a longer 'Black Atlantic' history. Individual and national identities are revealed as masks; stories and monuments as fragments shored up against an inevitable transience. An intelligent debunking of imperial nostalgia, *Disappearance* also portrays the irreducible complexity of Caribbean identity.





**SIX  
MILLION  
PEOPLE  
HAVE IRREPARABLE  
VISION DAMAGE AS  
A RESULT OF TRACHOMA**

# THE RIGHT GLASSES

**Andrew Chambers** – a finalist in the 2010 Guardian International Development Journalism competition – examines the visible impact of the global initiative Vision 2020, which is transforming lives for visually impaired people across the developing world.

“I’m very happy,” says John with a broad grin, “because many things I couldn’t see I can now.” Perched on his nose is a new pair of thick oval lenses. Costing only a few dollars they have completely transformed this Malawian teenager’s life. Unable to see the board, he had struggled at school and had been kept down a year. “I was very interested in school but when I had my eye problems it was difficult for me to improve,” he explains. Following an outreach programme by Sightsavers and ICEE, many children in his school in Limbe have now been fitted with glasses. It’s a simple intervention, but one which will make a massive difference to these children’s education and to their future.

Distributing glasses through the developing world is just one of the strategies employed by Vision 2020. Over a 20-year period, this global initiative has a target of eliminating avoidable blindness and limiting the number of people affected by visual impairments. The project, launched in 1999, is a collaborative effort between the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for Preventable Blindness. But with so many charities competing for attention, with so many challenges facing the developing world, should vision problems be an aid priority?

There are more than 250 million people with visual impairments in the developing world, whilst blindness affects 45 million people. These conditions have a massive impact on the individual, on the economy and on carers. This manifests itself in terms of lost income, reduced educational opportunities, a reduced quality of life and premature death. Yet remarkably the vast majority of these cases could be avoided. With an aging population it is estimated that visual impairments will double between 1990 and 2020. Therefore this is a growing problem for developing countries.

Vision problems receive only a tiny fraction of the attention and funding directed towards other health needs, and yet there is strong evidence of their importance in international development. A cost-benefit analysis by Professor Cook looked at the annual costs for vision treatment programmes relative to the annual economic loss of vision impairment. The research demonstrated that this was an exceptionally cost-effective way of providing aid. In Botswana for example a \$3.6m program would effectively save the country \$41m.

Such programmes require collaborative working between different NGOs, national health ministries and local professionals.

As such they can also provide a catalyst for health reform in developing countries and leave a long-term legacy of improved health care. One such scheme run by ORBIS uses a specially fitted plane called the Flying Eye Hospital – which contains both an operating room and a 48-seat classroom. The plane flies to different locations in the developing world, and is used both as an educational tool and as a desperately needed provider of eye surgery. Local healthcare professionals gather for lectures and can even watch live broadcasts of surgery in progress. Through this emphasis on education and local partnership, good practice can continue long after the visit.

Lasoi’s story is testament to the benefits of vision treatment. The 40-year-old mother of seven is from Koora village, South Kenya. She is a splash of colour amidst the dusty desert plains, wrapped in a polka dot blue shawl and orange skirt. Brightly coloured beads hang from her ears, jangling when she moves her head. She has just made the nine-mile trek from her village to Kachori market where she will sell her homemade beads. She was one of an estimated

10.6 million people suffering with in-turned eyelashes. “I knew that I would eventually go blind if I had not had an operation,” she says.

Trachoma is a horrible infectious disease, which causes the eyelashes to turn in on themselves, causing ever greater irritation and eventual blindness. It is the most prevalent infectious cause of blindness – 6 million people have irreparable vision damage as a result of trachoma. All of these cases could have been avoided with earlier intervention. Women are disproportionately affected due to their carer responsibilities, which leave them more vulnerable to infection.

“I had so much pain in my eyes,” Lasoi says. “I used to get a friend to pull my eye-lashes out.” Her suffering was so great that she had to stop making beads to sell at the local market and her children dropped out of school to help look after her. “I could no longer afford to buy food for my family,” she adds. However, following a Sightsavers operation she is pain free, and no longer at risk of going blind. “I am now able to get back to my life,” she says. Her children have returned to school and she is able to sell her beads again. “Life is better now,” she concludes.

The World Bank uses a concept of ‘disability adjusted life years’ (DALYs) to measure the time lived with a disability and its effect on premature mortality. This then allows an objective comparison between different health treatments based on the cost per DALY saved. Using this metric, both surgical and non-surgical trachoma treatments are described in the Vision 2020 action plan as “amongst the most cost-effective measures for controlling blindness.” Meanwhile cataract surgery ranks as one of the most cost-effective of all health interventions. Such treatments offer the potential for massive improvements in quality of life for a relatively low cost.

Lasoi’s case demonstrates how there needs to be a greater emphasis on vision problems in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction. Vision impairment creates a poverty trap of fewer educational opportunities and lower productivity. There is therefore an overwhelming cost benefit of providing relatively cheap treatment programmes that both improve national economic productivity and significantly improve people’s quality of life. Back in Malawi, John has shown a massive improvement at school since receiving his pair of glasses. He is now able to attend the local secondary school and hopes to become an engineer. “My life has changed,” he says. “In class I have improved because now I can see.” **D**

## ABOUT THE GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM COMPETITION

The competition aims to highlight crucial issues facing the developing world which are overlooked or underrepresented by the media. The intention is to discover enthusiastic writers who want to demonstrate their journalistic abilities by examining these issues.

The competition has been running in partnership with a number of organisations – principally Marie Stopes International, GlaxoSmithKline and the Department for International Development.

The challenge was to write a feature of 650 to 1,000 words, between 6 March and 30 April 2010, on an aspect of global poverty that deserves greater media exposure. The 16 best writers (eight amateur, eight professional) were selected from a longlist of around 40 entrants, all of whom have had their articles published online at [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk). Andrew Chambers was one of the finalists in the professional category.

The eight shortlisted contestants are sent on an assignment to Africa and Asia in September and October to write a final piece. The winner is announced in November 2010.

More information [www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition)