



## CAMEROON

### **Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus cases in Cameroon are diminishing thanks to UNICEF supported mass campaigns.**

**Tiben village**, 50 kilometers from Bamenda, the capital city of the Cameroon northwestern region, Bridget Apum, a 45 years old grandmother, is sadly sitting by her late granddaughter's small grave behind her kitchen. Late Eyah passed away just 15 days after delivery. She explained:

*"Eyah was born at home. My daughter started labour at night, there was no vehicle to take her to the hospital. I called a matron who used to assist delivery women in the village. She came and everything went well. The newborn and the mother were doing fine for the first 6 days, and then the child started developing continuous spasm and neck stick. He was rushed to Tiben district hospital." In the hospital, tetanus was diagnosed on the newborn and he died 9 days after.*

Bridget Apum and her family have always lived in Ofen village, a hilly area where the most common means of transportation is motor bicycle. Her daughter had never heard of tetanus vaccine and has never taken it either prior to the death of her son. However, she has now learned the importance of tetanus vaccinations and since then has been vaccinated to protect her future children. Bridget's daughter is currently healthy and hopes to have more children in the future.

Bridget's family case is not isolated in Cameroon. Despite the routine immunization and several campaigns against maternal and neonatal tetanus organized in the country since 2002, a number of women of childbearing age are systematically missed.

All the same, many women have been kept aware of the campaigns thanks to a strong social mobilization, which spontaneously get them to health centers and vaccination points for their vaccination. Nafti Unity Nkuyok, a 27 year-old woman we met in Mbengwi Integrated Health Center salutes the organization of these campaigns. *"They are very helpful, she said, because sudden death of mother or child after delivery will stop."* The Fon of Bafut (a traditional chief), is hosting a vaccination post in his palace. He is supportive of such campaigns that are important for people in his constituency.

With the support of partners and UNICEF, since 2002, Cameroon Government has elaborated a long-term plan for the elimination of MNT through the implementation of vaccination campaigns targeting women aged 15-49 years in 102 high-risk health districts out of the 174 in the country. Three sets of campaign have been organized so far (in 2002-2003; 2006-2007 and 2008-2009). UNICEF is the main supporting agency for these campaigns. Its support includes the purchase of vaccines and the provision of vaccination logistics and operational costs. It goes to the 50 high-risk health districts, i.e. health districts where the coverage of the second dose of tetanus is less than 60%.

To be completely protected against this scourge and avoid transmission from mother to her newborn, a woman need to take 5 doses of tetanus vaccine during her life and this can be done in 3 years.

Dr Belyse Halmata Ngum, Immunization Officer in UNICEF Cameroon country Office says: *"UNICEF has been very instrumental in the elimination of MNT in Cameroon. Results obtained so far are very*

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*encouraging. The campaigns organized so far, have been partially funded by diaper sales. Cameroon is also benefiting from P&G -Pampers funding. If the current momentum is sustained, MNT claiming many mothers and newborns' live will very soon become a forgotten story in the country."*

In 2008, a number of 48 cases of tetanus were diagnosed in the country with 25 deaths. The number of cases dropped to 39 in 2009, with no death registered.

The weight of neonatal mortality (children 0 - 28 days) in infant's mortality is important (more than 30 %). This is due to difficulties of accessibility, availability, continuity and quality of health services. Though cases of MNT are under-notified, the occurrence of a case of maternal or neonatal tetanus represents a triple failure from a public health perspective at the level of routine immunization activities, Antenatal care and hygiene conditions during childbirth, including care for the umbilical cord.

Cameroon is one of the 40 countries that have not yet reached the MNT elimination objectives in the year 2000 and where the vaccination coverage of pregnant women against tetanus remains below 80 %, threshold required for controlling the disease.



Figure 1:  
Bridget Apum sits at the grave of her granddaughter Eyah who died from tetanus on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009. She is buried behind the family home in the village of Ofen .She was 15 days old.

Photo Credit: UNICEF Cameroon/2010/Hearfield



Figure 2:  
Bridget in the room where Eyah was born and died. When her 17 year old daughter Irene went into labour it was the middle of the night and as they had no transport to get to the nearest hospital 5 kms away, they had to call the local midwife . "She used a razor blade to cut the cord and tied it with hair braiding

string . She then bandaged the cord.”

Photo Credit: UNICEF Cameroon/2010/Hearfield



Figure 3:  
Bridget Apum in her living room. After a few days Eyahs’ neck became very stiff and could not breast feed . They took her to the local hospital where she was diagnosed with tetanus. After a week in hospital the mother decided to take her home where she died 2 days later. “Since the baby died my daughter hasn’t stopped crying. Now she’s in hospital and they say she has epilepsy. I don’t understand why.”

Photo Credit: UNICEF Cameroon/2010/Hearfield



Figure 4:  
Nafti Unity Nkuyok receiving a vaccination.  
Photo Credit: UNICEF Cameroon/2010/Hearfield



Figure 5:  
Nafti Unity Nkuyok and her child at the health center.  
Photo Credit: UNICEF Cameroon/2010/Hearfield