

Voices from the field

2 testimonies and an interview on the occasion of the child survival campaign in Central African Republic

"This small net may change my life"

Interview with Ruth Mwero, 25, outside of Bossangoa Hospital, December 16, 2008

"My name is Ruth Mwero and today I waited in line at the health clinic in Bossangoa for three hours with my four children to receive vaccinations, soap and mosquito nets from UNICEF."



"I have three children who were vaccinated today. My oldest son, Dieudonne, who is eight years old, was too old, but he's been vaccinated by UNICEF several years ago."

"The soap will be all used-up in about two days but the measles vaccinations and mosquito nets will help the family for many years."

"Each child received a bed net but we need only one for now because the whole family sleeps in the same bed. It's the first mosquito net we've ever had and I think it will make a big improvement."

"Right now when we go to bed it's hard to sleep because we're being bitten by mosquitos all the time. I get bitten maybe thirty or forty times per night and so does the rest of the family but it's impossible to be sure."

"We all stay awake because we're all slapping each other to kill the mosquitoes all night. Two years ago my first baby died because of malaria and the other children have all been very sick before. I think they all get malaria maybe two or three times per year. For a couple weeks they're very weak but then God blesses them and they get better."

"When they're sick they spend all their time inside resting. They can't go to school or work or play with other children. It's like this everywhere in Bossangoa. Every week there's another child that dies."

"My husband and I also get sick often and then it's Dieudonne or one of his sisters who have to work and prepare the meals."

"The mosquito net won't help us when we are sitting outside in the evening but I think this small net may change our lives. The net was treated with toxins so we have to let it air for 24 hours but tomorrow night I hope we will all sleep very well."

Giving children a “normal life” through prevention and immunization

Interview with Benedicte Kafobeobona, 20, at health clinic near Bossangoa, Dec. 16 2008

“A week before the campaign started it was hard to ignore. Trucks with microphones and stereos on the back drove through the neighborhood telling people to take their children to the Health Center today.”



“I arrived early with my two children, a girl, Anastasie, who is 3 and my son, Michel, who is 4.5. When we arrived the line was so long they asked us to come back this afternoon. Now it’s five hours later and we’re still waiting in line. My children aren’t scared yet about being vaccinated because I tell them it’s good for their health. But each time a mother and her children leaves the center my children can see that all those children are crying and crying and my children start to get scared.”

“When they finally did get a vaccination they were so courageous and didn’t cry at all.”

“Some people say that the measles vaccinations aren’t important but I was vaccinated by UNICEF years ago and I think it helped me. UNICEF has a lot of programs here and they’re usually right about what children need. I think it’s a good idea to also give away soap and mosquito net because why only save children from one sickness when there are so many ways that children can get sick and die.”

“I used to think that children got sick because when there was a lot of wind there would be of dust everywhere, on the clothes and in the food. We thought this is what caused diarrhea but UNICEF says it’s because we don’t use soap enough. They say the children have to wash their hands each time after they go to the bathroom. This may be a good idea but they are only giving us one bar of soap and I think it will be gone in a day or two and soap is too expensive to buy.”

“I hope UNICEF does other campaigns here for other illnesses. Children get too sick and then they can’t live normal lives. A lot of my neighbors children die when they are very young and I hope this campaign helps end that.”

3. Interview with Dr. Eli Josoa Ramamonjisoa, Head of Health Section, UNICEF, Central African Republic

Largest Health Campaign Ever Targets About 800,000 Children Under-5

“The campaign lasts ten days in December but it took about a year to plan and coordinate. We’ve done vaccinations campaigns before but never like this, where we’re also giving children under 5 soap and mosquito nets. By giving them this we’re trying to motivate families to get their children vaccinated.”



“UNICEF can’t do this all alone. The Ministry of Health is an important partner and so are three international NGO’s among which Merlin, the International Medical Corp.

Together we've deployed and trained about 1,750 health volunteers who are administering the vaccinations and distributing the soap and mosquito nets. For these ten days we're operating at about 875 sites around the country."

"Our goal is to reduce the mortality rate of children under-5 years, which is Millennium Development Goal number 4. Since 2003 our work has already helped to decrease infant mortality by about 20%, from 220 out of each 1,000 children to 176. This is still the 15th worst rate in the world."

"The goal by 2015 is to decrease the level of deaths from the 1990 level, when 157 out of each 1,000 children died from preventable deaths. The way these numbers have changed in only 18 years, you can see this country has had a rocky history."

"Getting all the materials in place is a huge challenge but so is convincing families that it's important to get their children vaccinated and get them sleeping under mosquito nets and using soap regularly."

"We reached out to families around the country through text messages but in areas where not many people have cell phones we ran an information campaign with posters and hired trucks that drove around neighborhoods letting people know the campaign was coming. This way we try to get people to change their behaviors too."

"What's impressive about the campaign is that it addresses all at once three of the top five killers of young children in the Central African Republic."