

DRIVE AGAINST MALARIA

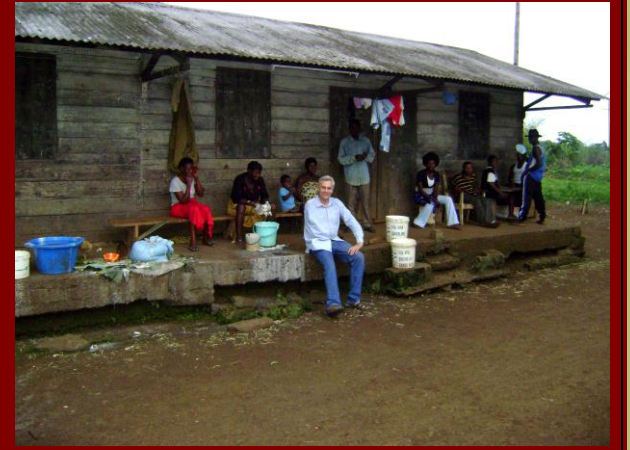
AVRO TV's 'Finger on the Pulse' documents Drive Against Malaria in Bimbia Camp 1, Cameroon

Bimbia Camp 1 lies at the foot of a mountain range in the coastal territory of South-western Cameroon. The territory is currently experiencing an alarming increase in malaria.

By: Stephen Johnston



The people in Bimbia Camp 1 live in shutter-less, dilapidated wooden huts pocketed with holes and cracks, giving Anopheles mosquitoes easy entry. They know all too well about malaria and its tragic consequences.



They do all they can...and it is not enough

In 2005, the World Health Organization introduced and strongly recommended the use of Long Lasting Nets – mosquito nets impregnated with a long-lasting repellent. Nobody here knows about the existence of these nets. Some people do sleep under mosquito nets, but many of these are torn and damaged. In any case, they were all bought years ago, and their 8-month preventive treatment has long since worn off. The end result is that despite a desperate attempt to fend off malaria as best they can, the disease-carrying Anopheles mosquito freely attacks the inhabitants of Bimbria Camp 1 at will.

Daily tragedies are all too common

Julia Samuël: “The first woman we spoke to looked pretty badly off, and she told us that she had been infected with malaria. TV presenter Pia Dijkstra was standing next to us, and I felt it was very important that she witness this woman’s situation. These tragedies are the all too common experiences that Drive Against Malaria faces each and every day.



They have no access to proper nets or effective treatment

I asked the sick woman if she had access to the right medication. Her reply was one that we had heard far too many times before: the hospital in Limbe had provided her with Chloroquine – a medication with almost no beneficial value due to the resistance that has built up against it. She had never heard of Artemisinin Combination Therapy – a highly effective treatment that is, like the Long Lasting Nets, strongly recommended by the World Health Organization.



The children are at risk

The woman told us that she slept under a mosquito net, so we went to her hut to see for ourselves what the problem was. The answer was immediately clear. Her net was full of enormous holes and was not impregnated.

It was not her fault. This poor woman had made every possible effort to do what she could to prevent malaria, but her lack of knowledge and her limited access to inferior supplies made it almost certain that she would contract this awful disease.

We soon found out that her situation was even worse than we had imagined – she slept under this same net with all four of her children. It is only a question of time before they, too, contracted malaria.

We made a thorough examination of all the huts. It was the same story in all of them. We immediately decided to organize the distribution of strong, Long Lasting Nets in this area to protect the people for up to 5 years.



Net distribution can result in positive social change

We went to Devine, the head of the town, for a list with the names of mothers with children and pregnant women. Each net was personally distributed, and all of the mothers signed for their nets to ensure that nobody slipped through the cracks.

In this case, we were distributing large, circular nets, and some training was required. We asked everybody to adjust their nets on the spot. This activity had the wonderful side effect of increasing solidarity. People were helping each other, and everybody was talking about the nets.

It is standard practice when distributing nets to provide recipients with a clear explanation about malaria prevention and the use of the nets, and this distribution effort was no different.



Hanging nets can be intimidating for some people

Some mothers came to us because they weren't sure how to hang their net properly. Our task was to look at the situation in the hut. If they had hung the net correctly, we were quick with our praise, and this made the mothers so proud that you could see it in their faces – after all, it meant that they were protecting their own children. If the net hadn't been hung properly, we worked with the woman to correct it, explaining what we were doing as we went. After a few days, we went back to see if the net was still hanging in the right way.



Reassuring explanation is vital

Nets are often a new product for many people, so we make sure to show everybody how to hang them above their beds. We also tell them that during the first week, the treatment on the nets can cause some minor irritation, which can cause anxiety. Because of this, some people believe that the nets are dangerous to them, their families, and even the entire community. It is therefore essential to explain net impregnation very clearly, with an emphasis on how safe the nets really are.

Once everything was explained, the people here were tremendously grateful. Some of the mothers even gave Julia letters of thanks. It was a very touching moment.



We monitor the situation to ensure success

Our first round of monitoring established that all of the nets we distributed were hanging above the beds. Some people complained of a burning sensation on their skin, and asked how long it would last. We assured them that it would dissipate with time, and showed them how they could prevent the sensation in the meantime.

We also organized a special information evening (most people work in the fields in the daytime) during which we showed an educational film. This film clearly demonstrated how malaria is transmitted, what the consequences are and what precautions you need to take to prevent it. Drive Against Malaria was assisted by Jerry, a nurse from the French Military Base who gave us a helping hand and translated the story.



We even find a moment of laughter

Of course, people were encouraged to ask questions, most of which were about the behaviour of the Anopheles mosquito. Nobody knew that this mosquito was a nocturnal insect far different from the mosquitoes normally seen during the day. It never fails to bring a few moments of laughter when we inform people that the wrongdoer is always a female. After all the nets had been distributed, we recovered all of the packaging and returned it to our Land Rover – the last thing we wanted to do was leave their village strewn with plastic.



Drive Against Malaria increases its efforts

We always register the names of people who receive a net, as well as the date that the net is distributed. This allows us to distribute as many nets to as many people as possible, and to make sure that the nets are kept up to date. This first step in the village of Bimbia Camp 1 protected everybody there against malaria.

During the future, Drive Against Malaria will expand the number of nets distributed throughout the region, and will provide an ACT program, repeated educational activities and malaria diagnosis for the whole community.



The Finger on the Pulse (Vinger Aan De Pols) program about Julia Samuël and her efforts with Drive Against Malaria will be broadcast on AVRO on July 8 at 9:10 pm. on Netherlands 1.

Drive Against Malaria in 2008

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We thank you for joining us, and our many volunteers in our fight against Malaria

'Drive Against Malaria' is a campaign of Transparent World Foundation

www.driveagainstmalaria.org

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