

# DRIVE AGAINST MALARIA

## REPORT FROM AN EYE WITNESS

### SHOCKING CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE PYGMIES IN CAMEROON

2008

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Julia Samuel: " I would like to take you to South East Cameroon. To Bosquet.

I write: Cameroon, April 2008

Bosquet is a small village in the middle of the forest, close to neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central Africa Republic.

This was Drive Against Malaria's first visit, and a good opportunity to monitor the situation. The circumstance here was shocking.

## Deforestation

The population consists mainly of Baka Pygmies, who are extremely poor and live FAR under the poverty level.

The Baka are exploited. Many of them know little to nothing about cash money, and are hired at meagre wages by - for example - logging companies.



Logging companies tell us that they work together with the Pygmies. The truth is far different. The pygmies are forced to work. They have no choice. To make matters worse, much of this work consists of deforestation and land reclamation-projects, in the very areas, in which they live. They are being forced to destroy their own habitat. This means that the plants and animals, on which they depend, are vanishing. They are virtually eliminating their traditional way of life – and their own survival.

## Urgent need for help

The Baka have now been FORCED to leave their natural residential area in the woods. They have been pushed aside. They settle now along the forest roads, living in a so-called “relationship of dependency”. The result is that they are not only enslaved and displaced – they are now also despised and considered primitive and inferior. I call this system slavery.

As we look at the malaria situation in the whole of Cameroon, we see that the people in the south-east are at the highest risk for malaria.

This area can be called ‘endemic’ – the risk for transmission here isn’t seasonal, it lasts all year long.

Malaria is therefore the largest health problem in this area.



The area is also difficult to reach due to the bad infrastructure, muddy roads and heavy, frequent rains. It's a two day drive from the capital Yaounde. A good four-wheel drive vehicle, is an absolute necessity here. Unbelievably, and despite the incredibly urgent need for help, not a single humanitarian organization is present in this region, to support the Baka. We did find a single a Catholic mission – two aging nuns who were doing everything they could with what little they had. The people here have no access to nets, no effective medication to treat malaria and no diagnosis material.





### Children were dying

I talked with people in the village to listen to their stories and find out how bad the situation really was. I encountered the same heartbreaking situation over, and over, and over again.

Mothers approached us, and asked us to look at their sick babies and children.

They were all desperate – they knew their children were dying, and they knew that the consultation and medication they needed was far too expensive for them.

What do I mean when I say that the medication is too expensive for them?

Some of the poorest people in Africa have to get by on as little as 35 US dollars a year. Here, among the Pygmies, the story is even worse. Many of these families have absolutely no money at all. They have absolutely nothing. These people are too poor to take their sick children to the hospital during the early stages of malaria.



### Overwhelming financial debt

They simply cannot pay for a diagnostic blood test (1000 CFA = € 01,50), a consultation (600 CFA) or the medication.

EVEN if they were able to afford the treatment, the closest hospital is 35 kilometres away. For you and I this seems like nothing, but when you have to make your way there on foot, with sick children in your arms, it is an almost impossible challenge. This means that parents first try to cure malaria with alternative medicines and treatments, that they can find in the forest. However, these home remedies have little to no effect at all, especially among the weaker, pregnant women, babies and young children. The malaria parasite multiplies furiously fast in the body.

By the time parents realize the danger of the situation, and beg or borrow as much money as they can, from friends, family and even strangers, it is too late. The tragedy then multiplies. Even if they do manage to get to a hospital, with the right treatment, the child often dies. The survivors are not just left with sorrow and sadness in their lives – they are also left with overwhelming financial debt. Obviously, the people here cannot afford treated mosquito nets. But prevention, especially in this area, is essential. How are the nuns coping with this problem?



I listened to their stories. Sister Anne told me: "We're standing with our backs against the wall. This small village has 800 inhabitants, but we see more than 50 children with malaria each month."

“They pay however they can. Sometimes it’s 100, 300 CFAs. A 100 CFA is 10 pence. Sometimes they pay with mushrooms, a chicken, an egg, bananas, honey, firewood or baskets.”

### Their positive attitude

The nuns buy the baskets, and sell them 35 kilometres away. These baskets are strong and popular, and can earn up to 7 Euros a piece. But the nuns don’t have what the people here, really need: protective nets, diagnose material and combination therapy. Despite – or maybe because of – their living conditions, the people here are happy to see us. They wave, greet us warmly, and give us an enormous smile. I always ask them how they are. “Ca va bien, madame...merci,” is their answer. Of course, everywhere we go, they ask us for nets and medication.



Sometimes I wonder where they get their energy, their positive attitude, their zeal for life. Why aren’t they bitter? Don’t they know, what a desperate situation they are in? Yes they do. But they have to cope with it to survive the next day. After a long day providing extensive education about malaria, and malaria prevention, we began working on distribution. Children brought their parents along. Each day, we had 150 Pygmies in the class.





We distributed nets from door to door.  
On each door we wrote – in permanent marker – the date that the net had been hung.  
When we do a distribution like this, we always prefer to do it, on the basis of a vaccination card from the Ministry of Public Health, describing the person's medical status.



But here, in Bosquet, the Pygmies are so marginalized, that they have not received cards like these.

For this reason, the nuns have manufactured cards themselves, recording family health status and history. I read one. It was so shocking and appalling that I had to sit down.

Many mothers have lost more than one or two baby's as a consequence of contracting malaria during pregnancy.



A mother lost 6 of her children. One of these mothers sat next to me, and smiled broadly when she heard that we would be able to give her a free net to protect the rest of her family. "Merci, Madame, merci beaucoup," she whispered. This is an everyday tragedy. This is the daily reality among the poorest people in Africa. This is why, every day that the DRIVE AGAINST MALARIA spends doing this work, is of vital importance.

The mission post has received our supply of ACT's. And they have put the medication to immediate use. Every day, we save children with malaria. This year over half a million nets during the FIRST world malaria day were given. In November, continue to provide more diagnose sets and ACT's, as well as thousands of nets for all of Baka AND Bosquet and other neighbouring settlements.



## FACTS & RESULTS



The Catholic nuns treat over 50 children malaria cases with Kinine. Modern LLIN's, ACT and diagnose material is not available.  
Bosquet remain under the wings of the nuns in partnership with DAM.

### Results first half 2008:

- After first monitoring DAM distributed over 300 LLIN,s
- In the school malaria prevention programme
- Thermometers for Mission Post
- ACT's for Missie Post, enough stock until October/November 2008 ◀

### Plan's November/December 2008 & January 2009

LLINs for several Pygmee villages as: Bosquet Carriere, Payo, Eschiambo  
Proper counting of the population  
More LLITN distribution  
Follow Up Education  
Follow Up monitoring  
RDS for Mission Post  
ACT's for Mission Post

D-Worming  
Impregnate curtains

**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

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