

# "Drive Against Malaria" unites Africa for a malaria free future

By Precious Mwewa in Chipata

**MAXON Banda** is a three-week-old baby boy. He was found recuperating from a bout of malaria at Kapata first referral centre in Chipata district, Eastern Province.

Taken to the health centre by his mother after he developed difficulties in breathing and running a high temperature he was tested and diagnosed with malaria, Africa's number one killer disease.

Unlike many who do not report such cases to the hospital in time, Maxon was lucky to have had an early diagnosis as he was put on fansida to treat the malaria, which can be very fatal if not treated in time.

But the most important thing noted in Maxon's case was that he did not have an Insecticide Treated Net (ITN) that would have prevented him from being



• Paramount Chief Mpezeni welcomes David and wife Julia at his palace in Chipata Pic by Emma Nakapizye

Chipata District Commissioner (DC), Moses Nyirenda, indicated that of the 450,000 new cases of diseases reported to health centres in Chipata, over 200,000 of these were malaria cases and that 494 malaria-caused deaths

disease. Describing himself as an "English man on a mission to fight malaria" David Robertson's "Drive Against Malaria" is one of the activities that were lined up for this year's commemoration of Africa Malaria

"The biggest problem is lack of mosquito nets, in some countries they just do not exist even in capital cities. I believe that nets are the most effective way of fighting malaria and effects on children are devastating as on their developing

the continent to commemorate this year's Africa Malaria Day which fell on April 25.

He also noted that unfair trade policies between rich and poor countries was putting developing nations at a disadvantage and the process making Third World governments incapable of investing in their countries' healthcare systems.

Sponsored by Tropicare, a Dutch organisation which produces mosquito nets for travellers and Mobil Action, which is part of the Global Anti Malaria Partnership, Robertson also distributed over 500 mosquito nets along the way as he drove through Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi, into Zambia, giving priority to young families and vulnerable children and Malawi into Zambia.

He called on developed nations to invest in the health care of developing countries as a way

of ITNs is in line with one of government's intervention measures that emphasizes on the use of ITNs as one way of fighting malaria among others. This is in a bid to meet not just the Abuja targets of reducing malaria cases by half by the year 2010 but also as a way of meeting the United Nations (UN) initiated Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number five which aims at reducing the high morbidity and mortality rates due to malaria.

As Dr Salim Elias, District Director of Health at the Chipata District Health Management Board (DHMB) put it, "Mr Robertson's drive goes a long way to unite us in the fight against malaria and it also highlights the concept of partnership and also serves to highlight the need to increase our efforts to meet the Abuja targets and achieve the Millennium Develop-

ment goal. The situation in many households is the same as evidenced by the huge number of children being infected with the parasite that causes malaria and Maxon case is just, but one in a million other cases of malaria diagnosed across the continent every year. And children below the age of five and pregnant women are the most affected by malaria which is both preventable and curable.

According to Kapata referral centre sister-in-charge, Eunice Kabulubulu, the centre receives an average of 30 cases of malaria everyday, with over 50 percent of these being children below the age of five.

She explained that even though the disease could easily be prevented, malaria was, in most cases the reason for hospital visits and admissions in the area. "We receive over 30 cases of malaria everyday at this centre alone and the majority of those being brought in and admitted are children below the age of five," said Mrs Kabulubulu.

Augmenting Kabulubulu's statement,

000 of these were malaria cases and that 494 malaria-caused deaths were recorded in the same year in Chipata alone.

"United against malaria - together we can

beat malaria", read this year's theme and slogan for the annual Africa Malaria Day, held in the Southern Africa region for the first time.

And realizing the effect malaria has on both the economy and social status of the African society, and also in a bid to try and give children such as Maxon a future free of malaria, governments across the world have put efforts and resources together that aim at reducing incidents of malaria through prevention and increased access to effective treatment.

One such effort has been the commitment and determination of one man, though disabled, to drive across the world and draw global attention to issues of malaria and the vast needs in developing countries to curb the

that were lined up for this year's commemoration of Africa Malaria Day as a way of drawing attention to the importance of prevention through the use of Insecticide Treated Nets

"The biggest problem is lack of mosquito nets, in some countries they just do not exist even in capital cities. I believe that nets are the most effective way of fighting malaria," said Robertson.

(ITNs) especially for pregnant women, children below the age of five and orphaned and vulnerable children.

Robertson's mission was born after he was attacked by the malaria parasite transmitting mosquito while on holiday in Mombasa, Kenya at the age of 30 and he has ever since committed himself and directed his energy at the fight against the world's number one killer disease, despite the fact that he lost his leg and hand in an accident at the age of 18. A firm believer in prevention, Robertson, 46, believes that the biggest difficulty African countries face in the fight against malaria is lack of ITNs, adding that ITNs are the most effective tools to effectively fight malaria, especially in developing countries like Zambia.

malaria and effects on children are devastating as on their developing immunities, not strong enough to fight malaria," said Robertson in an interview with journalists on April 21 at

open nations to invest in the health care of developing countries as a way of recognizing malaria as a dangerous disease.

Accompanied by his wife Julia Samuel, Robertson started his campaign in 1998 and has since driven 133,000 kilometres across 57 countries with 27 of these being African countries and

efforts to meet the Abuja targets and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

But Julia believes that the contributing factor to attaining these targets is to have a global logo and a world malaria day included on the world's calendar.

"We need a global logo for malaria and a world malaria day, this is the only way malaria will get the attention it deserves," she said.

As South Africa's song bird, who is also United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) ambassador, Yvonne Chaka Chaka put it: "We need to stop talking about death and start talking about a new way to live. This war can and will be won."



• Wonderman, David poses for a photo beside the Land-Rover he drove from Uganda to Zambia through Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, Pic by Emma Nakapizye