

Mozambique: A better chance of survival?

Beating one of the world's highest infant mortality rates

Five year old Daniel looks exhausted as he walks around the health centre carrying his sister in a cloth strapped around his shoulder. He gazes down at her frail body, her hollow eyes blank with fever. Daniel has skipped school to help his mother care for his twin sisters. He trekked on foot for two hours with his mother, Christina, to the health centre in Homoine in the southern province of Inhambane, Mozambique. They have already been at the rural health centre for four days where the twins are receiving quinine intravenously for severe malaria.

The twins' malaria is complicated by anaemia and, like their mother, they have just tested HIV positive. Christina, a mother of five, has already lost three children. The main cause of child death is malaria, but AIDS is emerging as another significant threat. It is estimated that by 2010, some 121,000 children will be HIV positive in Mozambique.

Christina's twins have benefited from improved diagnostic techniques and better treatment for both malaria and HIV/AIDS. All professional health staff in the province have recently participated in training activities run by the Ministry of Health on the better management of a range of illnesses, including malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The twins are responding positively to the malaria treatment. "They are looking much better than they did when they first arrived," says Dr. Stela Langa, who works at the Homione health centre.

As well as improving the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with malaria and HIV/AIDS, in recent years the government and its partners have stepped up prevention programmes for these two diseases.

Pregnant women suffering from malaria now receive three doses of intermittent preventive treatment (IPT) during the second and third trimesters. This prevents them from passing on the infection to their baby (congenital malaria). They also receive a long lasting insecticidal net.



A nurse reassures Christina that her twins are responding well to their malaria treatment

**In Mozambique,
115 out of every 1,000
children do not live to
see their first birthday**

Through its Irish Aid funded CLOVER project, Malaria Consortium has been able to help improve delivery of information on malaria and other diseases through specially trained volunteers in many communities in Inhambane. Volunteers have also been trained in malaria diagnosis and treatment through use of rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) and artemisinin based combination therapy.

“With RDTs, it is possible to establish if the patient has malaria or not in only 15 minutes”, said Dr Sualei Sualei of Malaria Consortium Mozambique. “If malaria is ruled out, the health professional looks at other causes of the symptoms and is able to provide proper treatment instead of first trying to cure malaria that is not present.”

“Just a few years ago there was almost no hope for a HIV positive infant who had succumbed to malaria,” says Dr. Albert Kilian, Director for Monitoring and Evaluation at Malaria Consortium. “Now that diagnosis, treatment and care have improved dramatically, there is a real chance of survival for the children despite the fact that there is a chronic lack of skilled health personnel. However training needs to continue and research must be ongoing.”

Despite an increase in the availability of preventative measures, some women, like Christina, slip through the cracks. She could not explain why, but says she only had one dose of IPT and she did not enrol in the Preventing Mother to Child Transmission HIV/AIDS programme.

Dr Langa explains that the main problems are the poor conditions mothers live in and the distance they have to travel, often on foot, to get to the health centre. Christina’s living conditions show all too well the challenges. She lives two hours away from the centre and is a single parent struggling to feed her five children. She also lives with her parents and her two sisters, growing beans and cassava. As there is no surplus to sell, Christina works on other people’s plots to earn money. “The money is not enough to satisfy our hunger,” she says simply.

What does she think about the future? Christina understands she and the twins are HIV positive. She seems determined they should survive, although she is clearly frightened and becomes tearful when she talks. “I want to do something for them, but I don’t know what. I need to earn more money, so I can feed them better. They are so weak, they are eight months old and they cannot even sit up.”

“Both HIV/AIDS and malaria remain major threats to a child’s life in Mozambique, as well as being two of the most challenging diseases to prevent and treat.”

Albert Kilian,
Malaria Consortium

**Malaria Consortium
Mozambique**

Rue António José de Almeida
191, CP 3655
www.malariaconsortium.org
info@malariaconsortium.org

malaria consortium
disease control, better health