

VOLUNTEER HEALTH CORPS

STORIES FROM THE GROUND





**Mosquito nets and awareness campaigns
have changed radically our lives**

Embaló Family



No measles epidemic in Pirada

I'd never imagined I could be someone that could prevent an epidemic in a community. Pirada is a Guinean village located on the border with Senegal. A few months ago, we conducted a door-to-door health awareness campaign to give information to the community about preventing common illnesses and also encouraging them to visit the health center whenever they feel sick.

During the campaign, I noticed that one member of a certain family had red spots on his arms. As the visit continued, I noticed the same spots on other family members, especially the children. Most of them also had a fever so I thought it might be measles. I phoned the Health Area Manager to discuss the topic with him and ask what I could do. He came to the community to visit the family and take tests to send to the laboratory in Bissau Capital. The following week the results were confirmed: Pirada was suffering a measles epidemic. The Health Area Authority organized a vaccination campaign in the community and there haven't been any more cases of measles since.

I feel really useful being a part of this project as I've realized that many communities, especially those far from city centers and near borders with other countries, don't have much knowledge about hygiene and staying healthy.

Ayu Tamba
Volunteer
Pirada Health Area



For the children's sake

Two weeks ago, we lost a child in Sonaco to diarrhea. He was only 4 years-old and he has passed away.

We were doing our daily door-to-door campaign, talking to families about measures for disease prevention. A young boy in one of the households had been ill for many days but they hadn't taken him to the health center as they thought he just had a fever. We entered the house to see the little boy: his body was wasting away, he had lost a lot of liquid and his eyes were very white. We asked the family to take him to the health center immediately but it was too late. The child died at the hospital.

It's devastating because that child could have been an amazing person in the future. His death could have been avoided if his parents had known to take him to the hospital as soon as he got sick.

The experience has motivated us even more in our work in community awareness. Day by day, we want to make sure all families can really take care of their health through better hygiene and visits to the health center.

Lorenço Mané
Volunteer
Sonaco Health Area



Adapting traditions to improve health

The Volunteer Health Corps has brought people to the health center. Patients tell me there is a group of volunteers that informs them about hygiene and how to avoid getting sick, and also encourages them to visit the hospital. Most people don't come to the health center because they prefer to visit traditional healers. Taking this into consideration, we visited a healer and asked him to contact us when he receives patients with serious illnesses that he cannot treat through traditional methods, such as paraplegia. Once we are contacted by him, we visit the community to take the patient to hospital.

The project has a big impact on the community's general health. Volunteers are succeeding in sending people to the health center to be treated, especially those who live far away and are used to more traditional practices, like visiting the healer.

Prevention is cheaper than recovery. We are working closely with the volunteers: we ask them to help us with vaccination campaigns in the communities. At the end of each month, we meet to share the results of their activities to evaluate them and plan for the following month.

Jaucuba Biai
Sonaco Health Director
Sonaco Health Area



We will never give up

We have a big challenge with one of the members of the Mafanco community. He is an old man with tuberculosis, however he denies it and says that someone has put a curse on him. One of the villagers told us that he had been ill for a very long time. We visited him at his house and encouraged him to go to the health center to see a doctor and receive treatment, but without success. He is determined not to visit any medical professional.

The biggest problem is that not only is his own life at risk, but also that of his family members. In fact, one of his children, a 13 year-old boy, contracted the disease. He described his symptoms to us and we accompanied him to the health center where he was diagnosed and received treatment.

A few days later we spoke to his father again, offering to accompany him to the health center and receive treatment like his son, but he refused. Despite this, we won't give up. We'll keep visiting until we succeed in getting him to the hospital, but, to be honest, time is running out and so is his health.

Areolino Bampuqui
Volunteer
Mafanco Health Area



Raising awareness through the Mosque

Health is not in the pharmacy. Health is in our hands, in our head, in the way we take care of our environment and our hygiene habits. Many people in the community don't know that, but thanks to the volunteers, people are starting to change their habits.

Volunteers came to talk to the village Headmen to inform us about the activities they had planned for our communities to improve hygiene, sanitation and our living environment. They suggested cleaning up the fountain where we get drinking water because there was a lot of rubbish there and stagnant puddles were attracting insects that contaminate our water.

As Imam, I used the mosque's loud speaker to call young people in the community to come and help the volunteers. Each of them brought a tool that they had from home and now we have a clean fountain. Our health and our children's health is less at risk. I've also used the loud speaker to encourage people to not wash themselves or dishes at the fountain, like they used to. We have imposed a fine of 500XOF to anyone who does so.

We're very grateful to the volunteers. They have left their parents and families to come here and help us, and the changes are already visible.

Abudu Danso
Imam
Candjadude Health Area



HIV/AIDS: Taboo in the village

HIV/AIDS is a taboo subject in Guinean society. No one wants to know their status. Sometimes it even seems like those who have it want to spread it so that they're not alone.

This fear is reflected by the fact that most people don't get tested, even if they might be at risk. The Regional Health Authority began a campaign to persuade pregnant women to come to the health center, accompanied by their husband, so there is more pressure to get tested. Young people are more aware and come to the hospital more often. In Mafanco, we registered two diagnoses of HIV/AIDS last month. That is the same amount of people who were tested at the center.

A large problem with HIV/AIDS are those who are lost to follow-up: HIV+ people who start treatment but end up stopping because of the stigma attached to the illness. They have to visit the health center a lot to pick up medication, which can draw unwanted attention from neighbors if they don't want anyone to know their diagnosis. One solution to this challenge could be to count on local activists to bring treatment to people in their homes. Taking these circumstances into consideration, we focus our intervention on awareness campaigns, encouraging people to get tested and also collaborating with condom distribution.

Ayu Tamba
Volunteer
Candjadude Health Area



**Children are the best tool to pass
the message to their families**

Mamadu Lamine

Volunteer