

There Is Life In Congo

While gazing out over the tranquil waters of Lake Kivu, after finishing the final courses of a traditional Congolese meal, Dr. William Bonane broke the silence to ask the Global Strategies for HIV Prevention team, "What will you tell the people in America when you return from the Congo?" Almost as if answering his own question, he replied with the simple statement, "Tell them there is life in the Congo."

Dr. Bonane, a Congolese-born doctor, is no stranger to insecurity in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On supervision visits to rural clinics he has been forced to abandon vehicles and close down clinics in order to stay ahead of approaching rebel forces. Yet, despite those experiences, on that peaceful evening overlooking Lake Kivu, he expressed his fear that the sometimes numbing stream of news stories prevalent in the United States, focusing exclusively on violence and instability, creates the damaging belief that the Congo is hopeless or even lifeless.

Dr. Bonane oversees 14 rural Prevention of Mother to Child HIV Transmission clinics (PMTCT) in addition to the clinic based in Goma at HEAL Africa. The Global Strategies team first met Dr. Bonane five years ago while setting up an HIV prevention workshop in Goma, and were immediately impressed with his knowledge, leadership, staunch commitment and accountability. Having completed a Masters in Public Health made possible through Global Strategies scholarships this last year, Dr. Bonane is now working to expand the clinics providing highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) to treat HIV infected pregnant women.

HAART is the standard of care in the United States, where the annual occurrence of mother-to-child HIV transmission nationwide is less than 100 infants. Providing HAART to pregnant women prevents up to 98% of HIV infections in infants. Yet only 20% of HIV-infected pregnant women in resource-poor countries such as the Congo receive HAART due to a lack of funds, manpower, and training. For less than \$200 per year, Global Strategies can provide HAART to an HIV-infected pregnant woman. It is entirely within our power to prevent HIV infection.

Global Strategies, through partnerships with people like Dr. Bonane, is fighting the HIV epidemic in eastern Congo. Dr. Bonane's ongoing inspiration is evident. As the evening carried on, he smiled at his daughter Graciela and proudly discussed the exciting months ahead when he and his wife would welcome a second child into their family.

There is so much more that can and should be accomplished for the women and children in Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond. Dr. Bonane sees the reasons for hope in each of our clinics and within his own home.

The obstacle to providing all women and children with HAART is primarily financial. Dr. Bonane dreams of treating all women with HAART which would save countless lives of children throughout eastern Congo. It is surprisingly within our reach to assist his dream and our mission. The Democratic Republic of

Congo is not hopeless when we support local leaders like Dr. Bonane and help him fight HIV infection and give hope for the generations to come.

Thank you for helping us with your donations to assist individuals like Dr. Bonane and the women and children that he serves.

Sincerely

Arthur Ammann