

Frontline

The newsletter for Merlin supporters August 2013



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Photo: © Jenny Matthews

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MEDICAL EXPERTS ON THE FRONTLINE

www.merlin.org.uk/frontline/August2013

Registered charity 1135111

A midwife's tale

Thanks to Nabila, women like Bibi can give birth without fear.

"There is no such thing as a normal day - babies turn up when they want."

When Merlin helped Nabila Gul to achieve her childhood ambition, we also helped her save the lives of a great many women in her home village in Afghanistan.

For as long as she can remember, Nabila wanted to be a midwife. She saw how many women and babies in her village died because they had no trained midwife to help them through childbirth.



Midwife Zarnigur takes the blood pressure of an expectant mother at our midwife training centre in Taloqan, Afghanistan.

At first it seemed like an impossible dream. How would a girl from a poor village, 40 miles from the nearest hospital, get the professional training she would need? But when Nabila was offered a place at Merlin's Community Midwifery School in north-east Afghanistan, the dream became a reality.

After two years of training, 19-year-old Nabila is now back in her village, working as the community's first and only midwife. She usually has to see between 20 and 30 patients a day and often she is working round the clock. "There is no such thing as a normal day," she says. "Pregnancies don't always go to plan - babies turn up when they want and often without warning."

Life-saving treatments

Yet Nabila knows that her hard work - and the investment Merlin has put into her - is paying off. Women who might easily have died from complications during childbirth before are now surviving and giving birth to healthy babies.

One day in March she wrote to tell us how she had saved one mother's life at the Merlin-run health centre in her village.

"I arrived today to find a woman ready to deliver," she told us. "At 11am she gave birth to a baby girl.

"Shortly afterwards, however, she began to





Baby Madinah in the crèche of Taloqan midwifery school, Afghanistan.

bleed heavily and her blood pressure dropped to 90/60. I was able to stop it. But had she been at home, away from skilled medical help, this would have been impossible."

What makes this story amazing is that it is not unusual. Life-saving treatments like this are an everyday part of Nabila's working life.

Safe delivery

Many of the women Nabila meets have lost several babies, particularly as they start giving birth when they are little more than girls. One woman told Nabila she had lost five babies, yet she was still only 22.

To break this tragic pattern, Nabila tells expectant mothers that they need to attend the clinic regularly for proper care during pregnancy.

Nabila recently treated a mother called Bibi, who has a history of suffering eclampsia during childbirth. Nabila told us: "She lost her last baby in childbirth and is extremely anxious to have a safe delivery this time. I told her that she needs to come back every week so that we can check her blood pressure – otherwise she might die."

A time of joy

Thanks to Nabila and Merlin, supported so generously by you, women like Bibi can look

forward to childbirth as a time of joy, not fear. And what is happening in Nabila's community is starting to happen in many other parts of Afghanistan as more midwives are trained by Merlin.

Helping to train a midwife is one of the most effective ways you can help to save lives. Thank you for all your help.



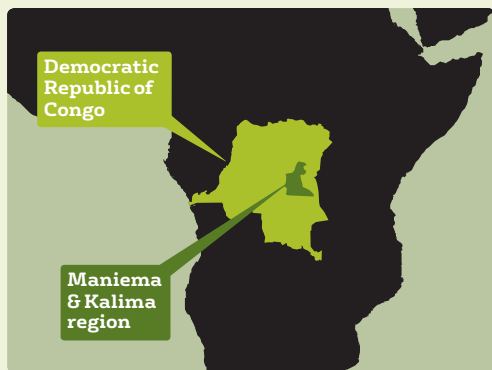
Photos: Jenny Matthews

Souhaila, a Merlin trained community midwife examines five month pregnant Bibi Khalam.

Want to know more?

Please go to our website for more in-depth information on this situation:

www.merlin.org.uk



670

In the DRC, 670 women in every 100,000 die in childbirth.

“Now the centres can see more patients and also take on emergency cases at night.”

Let there be light!

Harnessing solar power to save mothers' and babies' lives.



Photo: Jo Reid

In 2010, Mariamo Pascal gave birth by candlelight at Pempeliba Health Centre, Maniema, the DRC.



Merlin's Technology Manager, Mark Hawkins demonstrates equipment used during training.

Any mother will tell you that babies are not born to a timetable. They can arrive at any time of the day or night. But just imagine what it would be like to help a woman give birth at night, in a derelict building with no electricity and only a candle for light. How would you cope if there was an emergency and a mother's or baby's life depended on carrying out a delicate medical procedure? It's a frightening thought, and yet this is the situation that midwives in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are faced with very often.

The DRC has a high rate of mothers dying in childbirth, with 670 women dying out of 100,000. It also has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the world.

Yet many of these deaths could be prevented if health centres were better equipped and if they were able to deliver babies and carry out complex medical procedures at any time of the day or night. That is why Merlin is working to change the situation by building new maternity units in remote areas of the DRC and equipping them with their own cheap and reliable source of power – solar energy.

The power to save lives

One example is in Maniema province, one





A newborn baby in the Merlin supported Kalima hospital, Maniema, DRC.

of the most remote parts of the country, where many hospitals, clinics and health posts are deep in the jungle and can only be reached by foot.

In this one province alone, we have now installed solar-powered lighting in 27 health posts. Mark Hawkins, Merlin's Global Technology Manager, recently visited Maniema and saw for himself the difference it has made. He told us: "Now that they have lighting, the centres can operate for longer and see more patients. They can also take on emergency cases at night."

Of course, the new power system will be of little use if it breaks down and cannot be replaced. That's why we have designed it to be sustainable for the future. All the components are bought within the DRC, so that if they break, replacements can be sourced locally and the whole system can be kept going without needing outside assistance.

Practical energy

The first clinic in Maniema province to receive solar power was Kasuku II, just outside Kindu Town. In two days, our technical team installed a solar system consisting of 12 LED lights, three solar panels, batteries and control circuits.

"The finished job is fantastic," says Mark Hawkins. "The 3W LED bulbs produce the equivalent amount of light to standard 60W bulbs which means that energy use is low and they do not need a massive array of solar panels to generate power."

What's more, the DRC is not the only country where we are lighting up the clinics. In Liberia, we are illuminating over 200 health centres. Very much like the DRC, some areas of this country can be difficult to access, especially during the rainy season.

Very often, a simple change can make a lot of difference. Thanks to your help, the work Merlin is doing in the DRC and Liberia is already transforming maternity care and saving many lives. Please go on supporting Merlin so that we can give midwives the chance to deliver healthy babies.



Want to know more?

Please go to our website for more in-depth information on this situation:

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Saving lives for just £1 a child

How Merlin is fighting back against measles, polio and other deadly childhood diseases.

Three year old Teves is one of the first children under the age of five to be vaccinated by Merlin, following an outbreak of measles in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). 125,000 children between 9 months to 6 years of age have been targeted for this emergency life-saving campaign.

Teves's mother, Aubierge Goneme, is overjoyed that Merlin is here to prevent her becoming another casualty of measles, a potentially deadly disease in this part of Africa. She says, "I know the vaccine will save my little girl from getting sick."

Sadly the fight against the measles epidemic is being hampered by political unrest and fighting in and around Bangui. But thanks to Merlin, parents are still bringing their children to get vaccinated at over 100 sites around the city, at health posts, churches, mosques, and schools. Our workers are facing great dangers to bring the vaccines to the local children, but they know that unless they do so quickly, many will die.

Measles - a global scandal

Measles continues to be a huge threat to children's lives right across the developing world. It kills 433 children under five every day - that's 18 children every hour - and it can also result in blindness, deafness and brain damage. That's a global scandal, considering that a safe, effective and cheap vaccine has been around since the 1960s.

Thanks to your support, Merlin is in the front line of the battle against this terrifying disease. What's more, our vaccination programme is not restricted to measles, but covers all the common childhood diseases that can be prevented by vaccines.

Polio - the forgotten killer

For example, polio is a forgotten disease in nations like the UK. But in poor countries like the CAR it is still quite common in children under five - and the effects can be devastating.

Many children are left with weak and twisted limbs. Worse still, roughly one child in 200 who is infected suffers from irreversible paralysis. Children can die horribly when their respiratory muscles stop working.

"I know the vaccine will save my little girl from getting sick."



Midwife Nina Seddua Yatia gives vaccination injections at Batalimo camp health facility, CAR.

Photos: Jenny Matthews





New mothers wait to have their babies vaccinated, Batalimo, CAR.

A child needs three injections to be fully protected against polio. But sadly many children in the CAR do not receive the full set of injections. One reason is that many families live a very long distance – often as far as 15 - 20 miles from the nearest health centre and cannot afford transport. But now Merlin is working to protect many more children by bringing polio vaccines and other vaccines to the children in the communities where they live.

Our campaign to save young lives

One of Merlin's highest priorities for the next few years is to vaccinate millions more children against a wide range of killer diseases, including measles, polio, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and diphtheria.

At present over 19 million of the world's poorest children do not receive basic life-saving vaccines. As a result, approximately 1.7 million children die each year from diseases that can easily be prevented by vaccination.

By vaccinating more children, we know we can save the lives of many thousands of children – and do it incredibly cost-effectively. A dose of vaccine costs about £1, yet it offers lifelong protection.

Please continue to support us, so that we can go on with this vital work and give children like Teves the chance to grow up healthy.

Three week old Baby Eboma Mamie waits for immunisation at Batalimo camp, CAR. →



A fond farewell to Carolyn Miller CBE

With the announcement from Merlin's long serving Chief Executive that she will be moving on, we thought we would take time to pay tribute to her achievements since 2005.

Carolyn began her work at Merlin just days after our largest ever emergency response in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami. During those first days in the job, Carolyn witnessed Merlin's incredible team of supporters, health workers and logisticians in full flow. From day one Carolyn was left in no doubt just how special this organisation and people like you are.

As she said, "I would like to sincerely thank Merlin's incredible supporters. We couldn't do any of this without the passion and commitment of our supporters backing us all the way."

Since then Carolyn has led Merlin into 18 countries, providing access to primary health care for 12.5 million people a year.

As well as the Asian tsunami, Carolyn led Merlin's response to the Pakistan and Haiti earthquakes, the Myanmar cyclone, as well as humanitarian crises in Liberia, Afghanistan, Sudan, East Africa and many more. In addition, Carolyn's commitment to Merlin's

work in helping governments rebuild their health systems after years of war and her leadership of Merlin's 'Hands Up for Health Workers' campaign for more trained and better supported health workers has been tireless. 2013 saw a very moved Carolyn awarded a CBE for her humanitarian work.

Looking to the future Carolyn said, "The next step in this development is joining Save the Children, to create a world class humanitarian health force. This is a chance to realise Merlin's ambitious plans to reach more people and secure a sustainable future for Merlin's life-saving work.

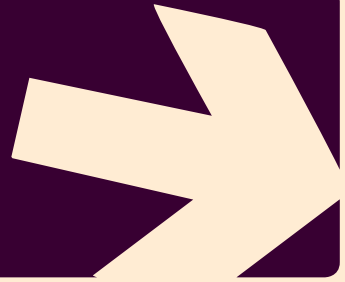
Your commitment and ongoing support to Merlin is now more important than ever before. Reaching our goals together, to save more lives on more frontlines, has to be the priority."

On behalf of our supporters, beneficiaries and staff, thank you Carolyn for leading us closer to our collective mission to bring health care to those most in need.



Carolyn working with the Merlin team and local community in Kiteki Kebele, Ethiopia to provide a clean water source.

What happens after Merlin leaves?



Merlin is well known for staying the course when there is a disaster or emergency, and not leaving until we have done all we can. But what happens after we finally leave? Here Valerie Powell, a nurse and midwife who has worked for Merlin in a number of emergencies, describes the lasting difference we have made in the Philippines, more than two years after a major disaster.

A former prison converted into a maternity unit on a remote tropical island is not most people's idea of a holiday destination! However I had worked on the island with Merlin following Typhoon Ondoy (Ketsana) and this time I was returning as a tourist.

Talim Island situated in Laguna de Bay in the Philippines was badly affected by floods - but even before the typhoon, health services were poor. There was no doctor or pharmacy for the 40,000 population and all births had to take place at home. Drinking water had to be brought from the mainland and garbage was abandoned on the lakeshore.

As many of the health facilities remained under water for some months, we decided to convert an abandoned prison rehabilitation centre into a health centre with a maternity unit.

Returning over two years later I received a tremendous welcome with cries of 'Mam



Health facilities under water following Typhoon Ketsana.



Valerie Powell holds a baby during her visit to post-typhoon affected Ketsana.

"It was great to see six babies were born whilst I was there"

Valerie!' and 'Merleen!' as I stepped onto the dock! It was great to see the health centre busy and six babies were born whilst I was there.

Water refilling stations provide the people with safe, affordable drinking water. Garbage recycling, whilst not perfect, is much improved.

It was really a wonderful experience to return and see such a positive improvement in the health services. I hope to return again!



The books that spell safety for Kenya's mothers

How Merlin is bringing health care to people on the move.

It's 10am and under a tree in the Turkana region of Kenya, Merlin's mobile health clinic is coming to life. A table is erected, a weighing machine for toddlers is hung from a branch and a large box containing vaccines and medicines is opened. Women are arriving at the clinic in great numbers.

Women appear as dots on the horizon, slowly getting bigger but not arriving with us for some 20 minutes or more. As they get closer we can see that almost every one of them is carrying a clear plastic bag containing a purple book - their 'baby book'.

All around the world mothers carry similar books, recording vital information about the progress of their pregnancy, the circumstances of birth and the health of their baby. But in Turkana these books have a special importance. The reason is that, unlike here in the UK where women frequently develop a close bond with their midwife, Turkana women may never see the same health worker twice.

Antenatal care

Nancy, a Merlin midwife, explains: "The people of Turkana are pastoralists who move

around a lot. You may see them once but the next time you visit the same place, they have moved. We follow them and set up new clinics but you might not see the same people.



Rosslyn Akwom, 22, and 1 week old Edina Atoot pictured with purple 'baby book' at Lodwar District Hospital.



↑ New mothers wait outside Lokichur Health Centre, South Turkana during the East Africa food crisis.

← Midwife Nancy Amanikor (left) speaks with Egeroe after her recent obstructed labour.

She adds: "One thing you can be sure of is the women will always carry their books. We have trained them in this. We say 'wherever you go, carry your baby book because it is the only way we have to know what treatment you were given and what you need next'."

The baby books are a vital part of Merlin's Safe Motherhood Programme which started in Turkana in 2010. In the beginning, there were 602 women registered for antenatal care, but since then the number has grown to well over 9,000. And for these women, pregnancy and childbirth are not the anxious times they used to be.

Support and reassurance

18-year-old Lydia is one of the mothers who has benefitted from the care and support of a Merlin midwife. Recently she had her first pregnancy – and the support and reassurance she received from Merlin has made all the difference. She told us: "I started coming to the clinic when I was four months pregnant and have been every month since. I received advice on feeding and was tested for HIV.

"They told me why it was better to have my baby at the hospital. They told me about the



"Merlin is important here. They fill in gaps where the government can't help."

equipment they have here to help and they also told me some of the things that can go wrong if I had my baby at home.

"Many women start pushing too soon and that can harm them or their babies. I had a good birth and my baby is fine and as soon as he was born the midwife told me he was healthy so I didn't worry."

Holding her baby proudly, Lydia smiles as she adds: "Merlin is important here. They fill in gaps where the government can't help. Tomorrow I will bring my baby to the clinic to get his injections."

Thank you for the giving Lydia and thousands of other Turkana women the chance to give birth to healthy babies through the support you give to Merlin's work.



Want to know more?

Please go to our website for more in-depth information on this situation:

www.merlin.org.uk

Bakti's got her future planned

"I feel so relieved that I can have contraception."

Bakti Zeba was married at 15. She has since had six children from 11 pregnancies. "My husband told me it was important to have a large family and so I had the children. My body is exhausted and I wouldn't be able to cope knowing I was pregnant again."

In the Swat Valley in Pakistan where Bakti is from, women can give birth to large families without ever seeing a doctor. Many women become pregnant again soon after giving birth, which can lead to anaemia, high blood pressure and weight loss. This is one reason why so many women die during pregnancy and childbirth.

Already repeated pregnancies have taken their toll on Bakti's health. She bled severely when her youngest son was born – a warning of bigger problems to come if she doesn't give her body a rest. What's more, she is poor and knows that if she has more children, she will not be able to feed them.

Limiting families

Bakti knows her life has to change. Recently she came to a Merlin clinic to ask for family planning advice – and now, with our help, she has started using a contraceptive coil. She told us: "I feel so relieved that I can have contraception."

A growing number of women in the developing world are limiting the size of their families – and Merlin is helping them to do it by offering advice and practical help with contraception. By continuing to support our work, you can give more women like Bakti to the chance to protect their health and be responsible parents to their children.



Bakti Zeba at Madyan clinic, Swat Valley Pakistan.



Merlin's Khwaza Khela health clinic is the only health facility for 50,000 people.



Mehbooba family planning project in Swat Valley, Pakistan.

Photos: Shaisra Aziz

 **Want to know more?**
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A hope in hell: Looking back at the Chechen war

Two years after Merlin was founded, we encountered one of the biggest crises we have ever faced – the war between Chechnya and Russia. Before long it was clear that people in Chechnya were suffering on a massive scale – and we willingly answered the call to provide medical relief.

In the first months of the war, hundreds of thousands of people fled Grozny, the Chechen capital. Those who were left faced unspeakable hardship. Buildings and homes were destroyed, water, food and fuel supplies were cut and hospitals were gutted.

When Merlin's team arrived at a home for the elderly, we found five women digging graves in the garden. 28 of the 100 residents had died of hypothermia or starvation over the winter.

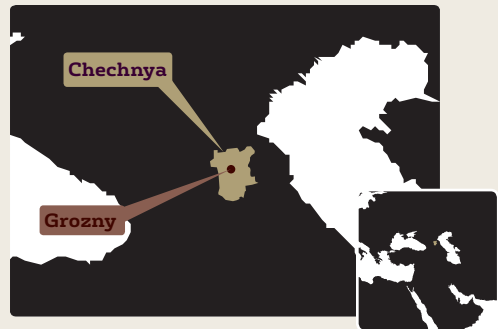
When people who had fled the city started to return, they found their homes in ruins. Clean water was in short supply. The river was contaminated with corpses and untreated sewage.

Rapid response

Merlin immediately responded by sending in emergency supplies. We set up small out-patient chemists around the city, and a mobile clinic to reach those unable to get to a chemist.

We installed clean water tanks and pipes, so that 400,000 litres of drinkable water could be pumped into Grozny every day. And we immunised thousands of people against diphtheria, polio and measles.

Merlin remained in Chechnya for three years, even after most other organisations had withdrawn. Eventually, after several attacks on our workers, we too had to leave. But Merlin's courageous actions and the resolute generosity of our supporters undoubtedly saved many lives – and made life more bearable for people caught up in a nightmare of suffering.



“We found five women digging graves in the garden.”



Photo: Sam Phelps

An elderly lady in Grozny is left stranded by the conflict that surrounds her.



Thanks!

You've done

We've been looking back over the past few months to see just how much you've helped Merlin achieve. And the figures are truly amazing. You've helped millions of people in some of the poorest countries in the world. You've given them the kind of good quality health care that they could never have dreamed of receiving in the past. And you've saved the lives of countless people - including mothers and children - who were in deadly danger from disease and malnutrition.

None of this work would have happened without your amazing help. Thank you so much for all the generous support you have given us.



Photos: Simon Rawles

- ↑ Merlin Community Health Supervisor, Robert Boduo, diagnoses a nine-month-old baby with malaria.
- ← Marie Kwaye, 16, and her two day old baby at the Merlin supported clinic in Toe Town, Liberia.

...s a bundle!

...one an amazing job.

6.5m

In 2012, thanks to you, Merlin treated 6.5 million people

12.5m

We made health services available to about 12.5 million people, including;

6.1 million

in Asia

3.9 million

in East Africa

2.5 million

in West and Central Africa



Our Promise.

On average, 96p of every £1 spent goes directly to our programme work.



Between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2013, thanks to you:



61,318

Over 61,000 women were registered for family planning services



111,866

111,866 women completed the minimum recommended four antenatal care visits during their pregnancy



127,682

Our skilled birth attendants helped 127,682 women give birth



187,265

187,265 Babies under the age of one received measles vaccinations



183,823

183,823 babies under the age of one received DPT3 or Penta3 injections for a range of childhood killer diseases



817,766

817,766 people were screened for malnutrition, of whom...



109,192

109,192 were treated with life-saving food supplements.

Make sweet music with Merlin!

On Wednesday 27 November 2013 we'll bring the sound of music to our fundraising at an 'Advent of Advent' Celebration Concert. It will be held at St Bartholomew the Great Church in London's Smithfields - one of London's oldest churches, which has appeared in films such as 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' and 'Shakespeare in Love'.

Every penny raised from the concert will be spent on Merlin's life-saving work around the world.

The candlelit concert will put you in the mood for Christmas and the start of the festive season. Join us to sing carols accompanied by the beautiful voices of St Bartholomew's church choir and hear poignant readings from some well known faces.

Registered charity 1135111



Photo: Chris O

What's more, every penny raised from the concert will be spent on Merlin's life-saving work around the world. It will go to support Merlin health workers on the frontline as they deliver vital medical care, rebuild clinics, hospitals, and train nurses, midwives and community health workers.

Tickets are £25 each, which includes a glass of wine and a mince pie.

For more information please visit www.merlin.org.uk/carolservice or contact Jackie Ord on 0207 014 1707 or email jackie.ord@merlin.org.uk.

Send the right message – Merlin Christmas cards for sale



Merlin has a delightful range of cards available this Christmas. You can wish your friends a happy Christmas - and spread the word about Merlin's life saving work! Please take a look at this year's Christmas card order form, which is enclosed - and remember, all profits from sales will go straight to help Merlin save lives.