



A local hospital in Kashmir

## Behind the scenes in Kashmir

Kashmir has been plagued by strife for decades. The clash between militants and government security forces has been especially intense in recent years. Violence has an insidious impact on daily existence, with many civilians killed and injured, communities traumatised, and public services and the local economy disrupted. Isolated rural communities have very poor access to essential healthcare. Mark Dalton, one of Merlin's co-founders, recently visited southern Kashmir - here he gives an insight into the assessment.

### What was the purpose of the assessment?

The aim was to understand what access civilians have to healthcare, looking at communities affected by the conflict, with a view to determining what type of Merlin support might be required - if any. It involved visiting health facilities in three mountainous districts to gain a first hand appreciation of health needs. We also held extensive meetings with officials, medical staff, and other informed parties.

### What was the outcome?

We found a mixed situation. In the larger cities, the healthcare services were relatively good - with extensive public and private services available. By contrast, in the remoter (yet surprisingly densely populated) mountainous districts, we found that the healthcare system had been severely disrupted by the ongoing violence. District health indicators signalled a highly vulnerable population, and we

determined that there was a need for Merlin to help improve maternal and child healthcare.

### How did this assessment differ from others you have done?

It is rare to deal with an area that has had virtually no international humanitarian support. Merlin was the only agency contemplating assistance to southern Kashmir. Officials we met had no previous experience of an organisation like Merlin, and we spent a lot of time explaining how we work and exploring how we could best assist. We also found the Kashmiris extremely welcoming - and it is a stunningly beautiful part of the world.

### What was the biggest challenge you faced?

As with most assessments, we had a relatively short time to grasp what the health conditions were, what existing health services could achieve, and to identify how Merlin could assist. But the main challenge will be when Merlin embarks on a pilot programme, exploring innovative measures to raise the quality of healthcare to a similar level as in the cities. This will be very challenging - but then, this is what Merlin specialises in, and we will be drawing on extensive expertise.

In the past 12 months, Merlin has also carried out humanitarian assessments in Southern Sudan, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Myanmar (Burma).

## 'Give as you earn'

Would you like to make a donation on a regular basis without the hassle of writing cheques and posting them?

If you are taxed under PAYE, it is worthwhile making a regular donation through the Payroll Giving scheme, which your employer is likely to offer. Your employer may even match your gift!

Payroll Giving is a unique way for you to give to charity. Your agreed donation is deducted from your gross pay before tax. This is the only method of giving to charities that allows charities to receive your tax directly instead of the taxman. For example, if you pay tax at the basic rate (22%) it will only cost you £3.90 to donate £5. It's even better if you are a higher rate taxpayer (40%). It will only cost you £3 to donate £5. So the charity gets more and it costs you less.

The scheme is very flexible, allowing you to give to as many charities as you like and change the amount you donate from month to month or week to week, depending on how often you are paid. If your employer does not offer a Payroll Giving scheme, you may wish suggest to your payroll department that they introduce one - it is easy and inexpensive to run.

If you would like more information on payroll giving, please contact Liz Graham on 020 7065 0800.

## Inter-agency Health Fair in Tajikistan



In support of World Health Day, Merlin's team of health educators, community mobilisers, and clinical staff in Tajikistan spearheaded a highly successful, multi-agency health fair in Kurgan Tube on April 16th 2004.

An incredible 18,000 citizens gathered in Kurgan Tube central park where Merlin staff talked to community members, young and old, about the importance of protecting their families from infectious diseases through good hygiene and healthcare practices.

## Come rain or sunshine!

Many congratulations to the 27 Merlin runners, who all completed the 24th London Marathon on Sunday 18th April 2004. They braved driving rain and unseasonable cold to take part in the event. We also applaud them for their fundraising efforts raising sponsorship in support of Merlin's work. So far, the team has raised £20,400.

Dawn Hartley one of Merlin's 2004 runners, in her article 'Running on Dahl', shares with us her experiences training for the London Marathon. In January 2004, Dawn left the cool English weather for the sub-tropics.

If you would like to be one of Merlin's runners next year, please contact Liz Graham on 020 7065 0800.

## Running on Dhal

I turned 30 last autumn, and as an act of defiance towards the aging process decided to run my second marathon. I asked my sister which charity I should run for and she promptly replied, "Merlin of course, they do excellent work and spend their money well" - a firm endorsement from a Merlin alumni of the Sierra Leone programme.

The physical preparation began in January this year, in Hyde Park. The damp, dark winter evenings are the dread of the training London marathon runner and spring is willed along, but I got even more than I bargained for. Mid-February I received a call from my employer - Accenture Development Partnerships - with an offer I could not resist: the chance to work in India for four months with India's largest NGO, the Self Employed Women's Association.

I was soon off to Gujarat and desperately seeking a place to train. The gym option was tested but not attractive - the air conditioning in the mini-gym in the town's fanciest hotel struggled to have any effect. My only option was running in the streets at 7am before the fierce 40 degree plus heat started to roast the neighbourhood.

The local residents of Ahmedabad could not understand me. One woman insisted on taking me to the bus stop, another man offered me local herbs to "calm my energy" and the children mimicked the peculiar running English girl. The reactions all helped to spur me on and I soon found that my ideal pace maker was an elderly man on a bicycle carrying 24 litres of milk. When the street dogs started barking at me, I just turned up Madonna on my walkman and kept going. The appeal of the street scenes proved to be greater out in Gujarat than in London, and training went pretty much

to schedule supplemented by daily pranayama, my yogic breathing practice which I knew would be the key to staying calm and energised on the day. The de-tox effect from the heat beat any five-star spa treatment, so in many ways I couldn't have felt stronger come mid-April.

I flew in on the Friday before the marathon, praying Air India would spare me food poisoning, dehydration and swollen feet. The rain woke me on Sunday and off I headed to south-east London for the start line. The tee-total, additive-free vegetarian diet paid off and I got round the course in 4 hours and 24 minutes with one brief stop for a leg-saving massage from St Johns Ambulance. The day was awesome. I am still figuring out how to explain the exhilaration of marathon running to my artisan colleagues back here in India.



Dawn Hartley

# Post-earthquake rehabilitation in Bam

On December 26th 2003 at 5.27 a.m. local time - cruelly, when most people were asleep indoors - an earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale struck southeast Iran, with the epicentre near the city of Bam.

The earthquake destroyed the city and killed an estimated 30-34,000 people. A further 70,000 were made homeless. All health centres were destroyed and many health workers were killed.

Merlin's teams in neighbouring Jordan and Iraq were able to respond to the disaster within 72 hours. They sent two doctors, a midwife and a logistics specialist to Bam. One of the doctors, Dr Sean Keogh, an A&E consultant with the NHS, explains that they initially focused on immediate medical relief, but also addressed the need for sustained help in the aftermath, looking at ways to rebuild community healthcare systems and provide training. Other tasks included assessment of 48 health facilities, and providing treatment in the countryside neighbouring Bam. Merlin has since been

working closely with the local Ministry of Health, focussing both on immediate medical relief and medium-term aid to the area.

Funds raised will help Merlin's team rebuild community healthcare systems, supply around 30 rural health clinics with medicine and equipment, and train local health staff in some of the neighbouring rural areas, as well as in the city of Bam itself.

During his visit to Bam in January, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales took time to meet Merlin's team, paying tribute to their work.



## Working for Merlin in the field

Morris Tamba comes from Lofa County, an area of Liberia which experienced some of the heaviest fighting during the civil war.

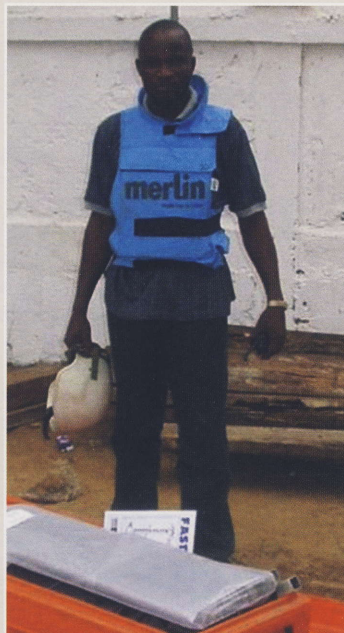
Morris, who studied auto mechanics in Monrovia, started working for Merlin in 2002 as a Field Logistics Officer in Sinoe County, south-eastern Liberia, where Merlin was supporting the primary healthcare service through a network of six clinics.

Last year, Greenville town, Sinoe, was the scene of heavy fighting for over a month, between MODEL and President Charles Taylor's forces. Waves of people fled the county to Buchanan, where they arrived exhausted, with very few belongings. There, Morris and the rest of the Merlin team quickly set up an emergency programme to provide healthcare, water and sanitation facilities and shelter to the displaced people.

During one attack last summer, a shell landed a hundred metres away from Morris, leaving him temporarily deaf. Despite the shock, Morris continued to work that afternoon. Later that day, a stray bullet passed through the 30,000 litre water bladder that Merlin had installed in the camp. Morris and his team put on their flak jackets and helmets and walked up the road from the Merlin office to repair the bladder.

Morris is now Merlin's Supply Manager in Liberia, responsible for procurement for Merlin's programmes throughout the country. He is proud to have continued working throughout the war despite the danger. "I am very happy to have had the opportunity to help my fellow Liberians," he said.

Although sporadic fighting still continues in some areas, the peace accord signed at the end of 2003 has mostly held. Morris and his Merlin colleagues have high hopes for Liberia's future.



Morris Tamba

## Rapid Response

Next time you hear of a natural disaster or the outbreak of a war, wouldn't you like to know that you are already helping to alleviate suffering and save lives?

Wars, conflicts, droughts, floods, cyclones, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions - all are terrible for any country, but for the poorest, most vulnerable, they are simply catastrophic. When a disaster strikes, health services collapse just when the need is greatest, and safe, clean water becomes scarce. Disease outbreaks are an imminent threat. Without rapid action, casualties mount quickly.

It's a race against time to save lives. That is why Merlin aims to be on the scene within 72 hours. However, we can only achieve this with your support.

Knowing that we have regular financial support also means that we can plan ahead and therefore be more cost-effective and pro-active in helping vulnerable people.

A regular donation of at least £5 every month will help Merlin to be ready to provide healthcare, water, sanitation, shelter - whatever is required to save lives.

If you would like to make a regular donation, please call us on 020 7065 0800. We will help you set up a direct debit instruction immediately over the phone.

Your gift to support Merlin's work will ensure that emergency relief reaches those in need in the first hours and days. It's the difference between life and death.

## Merlin mourns an icon

It was with enormous sadness that Merlin announced the death, on Sunday 4th April, of world-renowned Lassa fever specialist, Dr Aniru Conteh.

Dr Conteh's work was widely acclaimed in NGO and medical circles throughout the world. He was considered Sierra Leone's foremost expert on Lassa fever, a deadly viral disease prevalent in the region. He was responsible for establishing the world's only specialist Lassa fever ward in Kenema Government Hospital.

Dr Conteh, a native of Sierra Leone, led the fight against Lassa fever for over 20 years. He continued his pioneering work throughout the country's civil war, sometimes at great personal risk. He worked with Merlin for almost 8 years, and in 2003 was presented with the 'Spirit of Merlin Award' at Merlin's 10th Anniversary reception in London. The award honoured an individual whose tireless efforts to combat Lassa fever displayed enormous dedication, innovation, courage and skill.

Geoff Prescott, Merlin's CEO, paid tribute:

"It is rare that one individual's impact is so widely felt. However, Dr Conteh's endless commitment and dedication to fighting Lassa fever, and his personal devotion to his patients, means that he will be sorely missed by a huge number of people. Certainly, the population of Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries, for whom Lassa fever is a terrifying reality, have lost an important crusader. Merlin too has lost a true ambassador, and a valued colleague and friend."

In an obituary in the Independent newspaper (9 April 2004), Merlin co-founder and trustee, Nicholas Mellor, wrote of Dr Conteh: "His skill in diagnosis and treatment was unparalleled ... he was an icon to Merlin's 1,400 relief workers worldwide."

Dr Conteh, 62, caught the disease he had devoted his life to fighting, and passed away in his ward in Kenema Hospital, on Sunday 4th April 2004, with his wife and family close by.



## Merlin Association Launched

To celebrate our 10th anniversary, Merlin has launched a Merlin Association.

The Association is open to everyone who has worked for Merlin, whether in the field or in London, whether an 'expat', volunteer, or national staff member. It is also open to 'Friends of Merlin'.

Ali Troup, CEO of Merlin in 1998-9 and founder member of the Association, said: "While the Association is principally a networking forum, we aim to link present and past Merlin employees to support the organisation, and where possible, draw on the resources and expertise of past employees. We also hope to support Merlin's work through fundraising events."

To find out more about the Merlin Association visit [www.merlinassociation.org](http://www.merlinassociation.org)



Natasha Kaplinsky

## Merlin DR Congo welcomes Natasha Kaplinsky

Merlin's team in eastern DR Congo recently welcomed new Merlin Patron, BBC Breakfast News presenter Natasha Kaplinsky, who paid a week-long visit. She described her trip as, "one of the most moving experiences of my life."

Accompanied by trustee Charles Stewart-Smith and Merlin's Health Director Linda Doull, Natasha visited projects in Kindu and Beni to get a glimpse of how Merlin's largest programme is run. In Beni, Natasha visited the camps for internally displaced people where Merlin provides healthcare for around

50,000 people, and in Kindu she visited one of the few referral hospitals in the region – also supported by Merlin.

"It's hard to believe the extent of suffering that the Congolese people have endured, and are still experiencing," Natasha said. "The war in DR Congo is something that we should never forget."

Merlin is also delighted to welcome broadcaster Edward Stourton, and actor Hugh Bonnerville on board as Patrons.

## Songs for DR Congo

A CD of inspirational songs highlighting the plight of people in DR Congo was released in March 2004, to raise money for Merlin's programme.

The collection of songs, entitled "Conversations with God," was written

and produced by Cedric Kithima, 21, who is originally from DR Congo. He arrived in the UK in 1994 after being forced to flee when the country was plunged into chaos following the genocide in Rwanda.

This CD, costing £9.99 is available via the website: [www.c-w-g.com](http://www.c-w-g.com)

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