

First baby born at Merlin's new maternity ward

The first baby has been born at the new maternity ward built by Merlin in Kattankudy, on Sri Lanka's tsunami-devastated east coast. Wahida, 29, gave birth to a healthy baby girl, weighing 3.2kg (7lbs), on 17th May. The ward, which officially opened its doors to patients on 6th May, was constructed to replace the original facility at Kattankudy Hospital which was destroyed by the Boxing Day tsunami.

"The birth of this little girl in the first new maternity ward built after the tsunami is a special event and shows that life goes on in Kattankudy," says Dr Mohammed Rifaz, head of Kattankudy Hospital, who attended the delivery. "In a way, she represents a new beginning for the community. We would like to thank Merlin and all the people who support the organisation for constructing the ward."

Wahida, who also has a four-year-old son, said she was delighted that her baby was healthy and was the first to be born at the new facility. "It seems like a very good and well equipped ward. I wish to express my thanks to Merlin for their great efforts to complete this ward," she adds.

It is expected that around 90 babies will be born at the ward each month – the same number that the previous facility handled



Wahida with her baby girl in the new maternity ward built by Merlin

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before the tsunami. The new ward will give women and families in Kattankudy easier access to maternal and child health services, and will eliminate the need to travel to the larger town of Batticaloa for these services. In addition to the construction of the ward, Merlin has provided all the equipment for the facility, including a newborn resuscitation unit, suction machines and oxygen.

Four other damaged health facilities are being repaired, and seven health facilities that were destroyed will be rebuilt by Merlin on the east coast. In the longer term, Merlin will also work with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health on an operational plan for prevention and control of disease outbreaks, and to strengthen laboratory systems to detect and diagnose diseases.

Restoring access to health care in devastated Aceh



Patients at Merlin's new temporary clinic in Lhok Geulumpang

A new temporary clinic built by Merlin has opened in Lhok Geulumpang on the west coast of Indonesia's Aceh province, restoring vital health care services to people badly affected by the tsunami.

The clinic is the only one in the area and serves three villages that were devastated. A doctor and three nurses see about 30 patients everyday.

More than half of the 900 people in Lhok Geulumpang village were killed in the Boxing Day disaster, and not a single structure was left standing. But those who survived soon began to build a new village, and a cluster of makeshift wooden shacks are now scattered along a road and hillside a few hundred metres inland.

Merlin has worked directly with the community and the local authorities to make sure that the specifications and location of the clinic meet their needs.

Mufizar, the local District Officer, says, "I want to thank Merlin for what they have done in the village. They helped us clean up the place, provided water and toilets, and now they have built the clinic. It's made a big difference."

The clinic is a temporary structure, designed to serve for about a year. Merlin will start to construct a permanent facility in the coming months. It is just one of the health facilities that we are constructing or repairing across Aceh province to ensure affected communities once again have adequate access to essential health care. Over the next year, Merlin will rebuild or renovate at least 100 health facilities, ranging in size from village health posts to district health centres, serving more than 400,000 people.

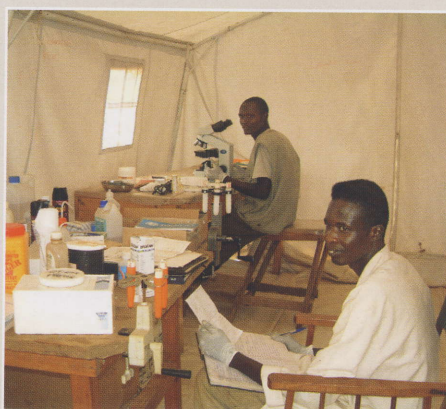
A ray of optimism in South Sudan

Dr Richard Godfrey, a Merlin health advisor, reflects on his monitoring visit to Merlin's field sites in Nimule and Boma, South Sudan, just days after a peace accord was signed in Nairobi between the Khartoum Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

Nimule is on the White Nile, just over the border from North Uganda, and Boma is further to the north-east, not far from the Ethiopian border. Although I am nearly 65 and have spent a lot of time working in various African countries, this visit made a dramatic and unforgettable impression. Here was a country waking up to peace after 22 years of war and instability – and it showed on people's faces and in their spontaneous celebrations.

In both Nimule and Boma, Merlin is helping to rebuild district hospitals and to re-establish good quality in-patient and out-patient services. The situation in the two places is very different.

In Nimule, there has been a hospital with buildings and some staff all through the long period of civil war. Funded by the European Union, Merlin is supporting a medical superintendent and other expert staff to help put the hospital back on its feet. We are also putting up new buildings to ease the congested outpatients facility, to provide a library and study centre, and create a new department where patients suffering from HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases can be counselled and treated.



Temporary laboratory at Boma hospital

In contrast, Boma, which is in a much more remote area, has had virtually nothing in the way of a hospital for years. The hospital site was there, but all activity had stopped due to staff fleeing the war, and the inability of a previous NGO to keep going. Merlin, funded by the UK government's Department for International Development, is therefore starting from scratch. We quickly got on with building a number of temporary structures, including tents for the laboratory and the children's ward.

Helping to reduce maternal mortality in Afghanistan

Fatima Yormamad is one of 22 young women currently being trained by Merlin to be community midwives in Takhar province, northern Afghanistan. The 18-year-old was selected for the course because she was the only girl who could read and write in her village of Bangi.

There are no midwives and only one untrained birth attendant in Fatima's village. This lack of access to maternal health care is a major problem for women in Afghanistan, where the maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world. In accordance with tradition, the majority of Afghan women give birth at home, usually with the assistance of an untrained relative. The problem is exacerbated by cultural issues, as it is not acceptable for women to be treated by a male doctor for maternal health issues.

"I have always wanted to be a doctor or a midwife. I am here to learn, and I will go back to my village and I will help them."

Fatima's determination to help improve this situation is particularly poignant. Three years ago, her sister had severe complications during a home birth. "My sister had a delivery at home – it was a breach delivery and it was so difficult," she explains. "Both my sister and the baby died, and I witnessed it. She was only 24, and it was her first baby. There was an untrained birth attendant there who informed my mother, but by the time my mother arrived, it was too late."

Merlin's midwife training school in Taloqan town officially opened in October 2004. The students were deliberately selected from extremely remote villages across Takhar province where women have little or no access to maternal health care. After the 18-month intensive course, the women will return to work in their communities, serving a total population of 150,000.

Like all the students on the training programme, Fatima is remarkably dedicated to her studies, and is clearly looking forward to returning to her village to help women

stay healthy during pregnancy and to give birth to healthy babies.

"I have always wanted to be a doctor or a midwife. I am here to learn, and I will go back to my village and I will help them. I want to help decrease the level of maternal mortality in my village," says Fatima. "I am so happy to be studying here, and I would be so happy if others like me could have the same opportunity."



Fatima gains clinical experience in a malnutrition screening clinic as part of her training

- Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world – 1,900 per 100,000 live births.
- According to the World Health Organisation, one in four children in Afghanistan dies before the age of five.
- Only 14% of births are attended by a trained health worker.

posts in the surrounding rural areas, where there has been literally no health care at all for many years. Consequently the people have suffered a sharp decline in health, reflected in rising child and maternal mortality rates and declining life expectancy.

Our teams in South Sudan deserve warm congratulations, as do all those in our Nairobi office who designed and secured funding for the programmes.

At both Nimule and Boma, Merlin is also helping to establish vital primary health care

The importance of clean water

Wiping away tears, 27-year-old Meko Kassim (pictured) describes how her son died of diarrhoeal disease after drinking contaminated water from a pond in 2003. "He was very ill for more than three weeks. He couldn't eat and became very weak, with diarrhoea and vomiting day and night," she says. "We couldn't get help from the local clinic and we didn't have money to take him to the health centre in town. Finally, he passed away. Maybe my son would have been alive and been with us today if we had clean water then."

Meko, a mother of seven, lives in the highlands of Otu village in Dodota Sire district of Ethiopia, where Merlin started working two years ago.

She describes how she also witnessed the deaths of her neighbours' children, who drank the contaminated water that led to a serious outbreak of diarrhoea in the area. "Everybody was sad at the time as many families buried little children and young mothers," she recalls. "No parent wants to stand and watch his or her children being buried." Merlin first set up its primary health care programme in Dodota Sire and four other districts of Arsi Zone in March 2003. In May and June that year, a sharp increase in the number of diarrhoea cases were reported at health facilities in seven villages in Dodota Sire district. Out of 71 cases, 27 people had died. The problem was aggravated by a three-year drought which had greatly reduced the community's natural resistance to disease.

Working in collaboration with the local Ministry of Health, Merlin carried out a rapid assessment and found that limited access to clean water, and poor hygiene and sanitation were major factors contributing to the increased incidence of diarrhoea. To contain the outbreak, Merlin set up a short-term emergency water tankering project, reaching 17,000 people. Further assessments revealed the magnitude of life-threatening health problems resulting from inadequate access to safe drinking water, so Merlin responded by



Meko Kassim with five of her children

setting up a water supply system across Dodota Sire, including a reservoir, a 25km water distribution network, 10 water points, and five cattle troughs. Community representatives and water technicians were trained to ensure that management of the water supply system would be maintained.

Before this, Meko recalls how people had no option but to drink dirty water, resulting in frequent outbreaks of diarrhoea. "The water had a bad smell and we could see worms inside the pond," she says. "Sometimes we used to filter it using a cloth but that didn't help much. Many people died in our area because of diarrhoea and vomiting, especially small children and women. I remember one family who lost the only two children they had in a week."

"These days, we don't go to the clinic except for vaccinations."

Meko used to travel for more than two hours to fetch water, carrying a 15-litre pot on her back, three times a day. "But after the new water point was set up in our village, my husband bought a donkey for the jerry cans that Merlin provided us with," she explains. "We now collect water using two 25-litre jerry cans, in the morning and in the afternoon. We thank God and Merlin for helping us."

Merlin also taught the villagers how to keep the water clean and how to construct a pit latrine. "Now things are different, our children are not sick any more, they have clean water both in the house and at school," says Meko. Health and hygiene education activities were carried out in schools and villages to increase people's knowledge and understanding of personal hygiene, communicable disease transmission and prevention, and management of diarrhoea.

"Merlin also taught us to wash our hands with soap or ash," explains Meko. "I wash my hands before I prepare food, after eating, after cleaning my baby and after going to the latrine. My three older children know about all these things. They wash properly and they are clean and healthy. These days, we don't go to the clinic except for vaccinations."



People filling up jerry cans at a water point set up by Merlin

Thousands flock to health fair in Tajikistan

Merlin once again took a lead role in organising a health fair in Tajikistan to mark World Health Day, following the success of a similar event last year.

More than 18,000 people of all ages attended the event on April 10 in the Central Park in Kurgan -Tyube, Khatlon Oblast, where they took part in educational games and other fun activities designed to promote important health messages.

At Merlin's stalls, the team distributed approximately 3,500 leaflets containing information about transmission, symptoms and prevention of infectious diseases including malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid. Visitors could also study malaria slides using microscopes, or learn about simple but effective ways to obtain clean drinking water.

Planning and co-ordination of the event was led by Merlin, in partnership with other agencies and the Ministry of Health.



Visitors look at malaria slides through microscopes at Merlin's stall

Lloydspharmacy and customers raise nearly £46,000 for Merlin

Lloydspharmacy, the UK's largest community pharmacy operator, has generously donated nearly £46,000 to Merlin's ongoing projects in tsunami-affected countries.

Many Lloydspharmacy customers nationwide contributed to this sum after collection boxes at all stores were changed to the "tsunami appeal" following the disaster.

Explaining why the company chose to support Merlin, Lesley Treharne-Martin, key events and charities manager at Lloydspharmacy, says, "I went to an absolutely tremendous presentation given by Merlin's medical assessor in London back in February and felt they were very genuine and sensible in their approach to assisting in areas of mass destruction."

In addition, Merlin is enormously grateful to Lloydspharmacy for donating 200 disposable cameras for a forthcoming photographic project, "Echoes of the Tsunami - Rebuilding Lives". Merlin will be distributing the cameras to a cross-section of people who have benefited from our work in Sri Lanka.

The project will offer participants the opportunity to express how the tsunami has affected their lives and to highlight the importance of agencies like Merlin when natural disasters occur. Their photos will be exhibited in December in London and Sri Lanka, marking the first anniversary of the tsunami. It follows the success of a similar project organised by Merlin in Iran last December, one year on after the earthquake in Bam.

For more information regarding this or any other event, please contact Liz Slade on +44 (0)20 7065 0831 or elizabeth.slade@merlin.org.uk



Staff at Lloydspharmacy present Merlin with a cheque for £45,600

Congratulations to London Marathon runners



Congratulations to Merlin's 2005 London Marathon team – our 31 Golden Bond and 10 independent runners who took on the challenge on April 17. Well done for completing the race and for getting sponsorship – so far you have helped us raise about £52,000 for Merlin! We are proud of your achievements and greatly appreciate your support.

It's now time to start preparing for next year's London Marathon on 23rd April, and we have guaranteed places available. We also have places for the ING New York City Marathon in November 2006. To ensure you have a place in either race, please download the application form from our website or contact Liz Graham on +44 (0)20 7065 0832 or liz.graham@merlin.org.uk.



Liverpool legends who took part in Soccer Aid

Tackling the aftermath of the tsunami

Tsunami Soccer Aid, a charity football match, took place at Liverpool's Anfield stadium on Easter Sunday, 27th March, raising more than £100,000 for Merlin. A Liverpool legends side beat a team of celebrities 6-2 and thoroughly entertained a massive crowd of 39,000.

It was a unique event bringing together some of Liverpool's finest ex-players, including Kevin Keegan, Kenny Dalglish, Ian Rush and John Barnes. TV stars Shane Ritchie, Ralf Little, and Patrick McGuinness, and Olympic boxer Amir Khan were among celebrities who battled it out on the pitch.

The initiative was the brainchild of ex-Liverpool hero and current Tranmere Rovers captain Jason McAteer, who is hoping to visit Merlin's project in Sri Lanka later this year.

The match was broadcast live on Sky One, featuring footage of an interview with Merlin's patron and BBC Breakfast presenter Natasha Kaplinsky.

Merlin was delighted to be involved in this excellent initiative which raised vital funds for our ongoing work to help rebuild healthy lives in tsunami-affected regions. We would like to thank the event organisers and everyone else who dedicated their time, energy and resources to make this historic match such a success.



Merlin is the only specialist UK charity which responds worldwide with vital health care and medical relief for vulnerable people caught up in natural disasters, conflict, disease and health system collapse.

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