

A light in the darkness of Machaze

By Milton Machel, Oxfam GB August 2006

Oxfam GB Mozambique's Integrated HIV/AIDS Response is a light in the darkness where Machaze district, southeast of Manica province, is in, in terms of health.

First week of August 2006, just four months after the earthquake which resulted in 5 deaths and 14 houses destroyed, life is still literally in the dark there. A light for a better future means lightness to the darkened health facilities.

In Machaze district, health-wise, real life begins when the night comes up. During the days, says administrator Alice Tamele and latter confirms young doctor Ben Lauro, people are just looking for drinking water and doing other little things of their ordinary life, such as chatting around.

But when the night comes, pregnant women, illnesses come to health centers, they simply fail to sleep without medical help, no matter what bothers them.

The doctor who came after the earthquake

Maputo native young doctor Ben Lauro arrived just in the wake of the eartquake which, at a magnitude of 7,5 degrees on Richter Escale, worsened livelihood in Machaze.

In the latter days of his twenties, Lauro has only one year of medical practice, after finishing Medicine School in Eduardo Mondlane University.

He is the sole physician for all the district localities, therefore he is not just the clinical authority for the health center and eight health posts around Machaze, 13 112 km square. He is also the acting senior manager, for human resources, logistics and finance.

According to official data, for an estimated total population over 20 million, Mozambique has one physician for every 40 thousand people.

Ben Lauro's team consists on 46 aides, between nurses and servants, for a district with over 24 thousand inhabitants, according to figures disclosed by the Machaze administrator.

Official statistics, as of 1997 census, said Machaze district has less than 76 thousand inhabitants.

Needless to wonder doctor Ben Lauro is overloaded by so many tasks and is responsible for so many people. One can only find the answer in the words “Commitment to Society” to understand why he wants to be a teacher, to occupy the spare time in his, busy, daily agenda.

Solar power to empower Community's health

Machaze district administrator, Alice Tamele, a Gaza native and previously serving as district administrator in Inhambane province, is all smiles with Oxfam GB donation to her community: two vehicles, one of them an ambulance. However, she could not let the opportunity slip from her hands, to also cry for more help.

“If we had solar panels for our health centers, the births would be in a much proper, if not better, condition. Because, at night, when mostly our women give birth, its completely dark, there is no power, therefore we use candle light”, explains Tamele, while in talks with OGB Mozambique’s CPM Ruth Bechtel, and Oxfam GB Machaze/Manica team.

As one can see, this situation puts at risk both mother and child's lives, which is aggravated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Having been offered an ambulance by Oxfam GB was not enough to quiet her crying voice. **“If we could have ambulance-bicycles in the localities, husbands or relatives to patients and pregnant women could carry them to health posts or traditional healers houses, rather than women having babies at home, in unprivileged and risky conditions”,** argues Alice Tamele.

In the quest for water

OGB's Integrated HIV/AIDS Response, started in December 2005 and just at its implementing phase, is by no means a simply health centered programme. It integrates other aspects of livelihood in Machaze.

No wonder Ruth Bechtel and OGB Manica team visited three water walls, one completely opened, and two other under opening, sponsored by OGB.

Because Manica province, Machaze district especially, is prone to drought, and water supply is in a critical situation, the component of water was addressed. This also was due to the long distances community members – especially girls and women – have to walk to fetch water.

The more people are able to collect water near their home, the better health condition they will enjoy.

Easy access to drinking water leads to an improvement in their lives and means a better chance to fight HIV/AIDS at home, at health posts and at the health center.

Delivery of power and water to the Machazeans is the very source to respond effectively to HIV/AIDS and every other challenge Machaze faces, to achieve a better life.

Actually, Machaze district is the very example of Mozambique's underachieved health situation.

According to official data released by the Ministry of Health, more than 90 percent of mozambican health facilities have no clean water, nor electricity.

The same figures showed that just eight percent of mozambicans have access to electric power, which covers only 59 out of the country's 128 districts. **MM**