



Protecting children from HIV

A point of view: The people behind the numbers **2**

Four attempts at a miracle **3**

News from the projects: The first motorcycle ambulance **6**

Other news: Olympic champion visits SolidarMed **8**

The people behind the numbers



Dr. med. Niklaus Labhardt,
President of SolidarMed

The results are promising: Only eight years ago, the likelihood of a HIV-positive expectant mother transmitting the virus to her child was around 31 percent. Today, it is merely 6 percent. This is enormous progress and is mostly due to the better availability of HIV treatment in rural Africa. Thanks to therapy, the health of a mother infected with HIV improves and the risk of transmitting the virus to her child decreases.

In 2015, treatment for mothers spared 14'000 newborn babies from an HIV infection in Zimbabwe alone. These are impressive figures. Yet behind these numbers lie the fate of individuals and their families. Theresa and her baby girl Moreblessing are one example. Thanks to HIV therapy, her daughter had a healthy start in life at Silveira Hospital.

Globally and particularly in south-eastern Africa, we see major advances in the fight against HIV/Aids. However, it's in urban areas that we're recording the biggest progress in combatting HIV/Aids. In remote and resource-poor areas, a functioning HIV programme remains a big challenge.

SolidarMed is meeting this challenge. We particularly work in those areas without donors and other large organisations. In addition to combatting HIV, our aim is to guarantee adequate and easily accessible primary health care services for the poorest of the rural population. The motorcycle ambulance introduced by SolidarMed in Chiúre in Moçambique is a good example. Women suffering medical emergencies during childbirth can be transferred to hospital faster. This increases the survival chances of both the mothers and their newborn babies. A small effort with enormous impact.

All of this is only possible with your help. Your donations make it possible for SolidarMed to respond to health challenges and to strengthen health services – where they are needed most. In this way, SolidarMed contributes not only to better numbers and health statistics, but above all to healthier lives for people like Julietta in Moçambique and Moreblessing in Zimbabwe.



Photo: Olivier Brandenberg

Four attempts at a miracle

Zimbabwe Theresa lost three children to HIV/Aids. She carries the virus, as does her husband. Thanks to treatment that SolidarMed makes possible in rural districts, she recently gave birth to a healthy baby.

Photo
Without treatment, the HI-virus is transmitted from the mother to her baby in nearly 40 percent of all births.

Theresa sits in front of her hut and can hardly believe her luck. Nobody in the village believed that she would ever have another baby. And a healthy one at that. Three times, life gave Theresa children. Three times, Aids took them from her.

“Our sorrow was so great that my husband and I decided not to have any more children.” She looks down at her four-month-old daughter. “And then it just happened. Now we are the happiest people in the world.” A test reinforces their happiness: their little daughter Moreblessing is HIV negative.

Many years of grief and fear lie behind Theresa. “When our first daughter died in 2001, we knew nothing about HIV and Aids” she remembers. “One year later, our second daughter died. She was diagnosed with HIV. Three years later, our third child died. The doctors had also diagnosed him with HIV.” As part of this last test, the mother is also tested for HIV and learns that she is HIV positive too. “My world fell apart” she remembers. All her former experience suggested that this diagnosis was tantamount to a death sentence.



Zimbabwe:
Inhabitants 15'603'000
Doctors per 1000 inhabitants 0.08
Life expectancy 60 years

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SolidarMed is the Swiss organisation for health in Africa and improves health care for 1.5 million people. SolidarMed strengthens and expands existing medical services sustainably and meaningfully. The projects pay particular attention to the health of mothers, pregnant women, newborns and children.





Photo: Justin Manhungu

Photo above
Theresa with her baby
Moreblessing

New perspectives instead of a death sentence

Theresa's husband always refused to have an HIV test. Even when, five years ago, he started complaining about chest pains and suffered from severe skin rashes. "He always said he was healthy and that everything was fine", Theresa remembers. She adds in a quiet voice: "And I believed him."

But now he is in pain and has trouble breathing. Theresa brings her husband to Silveira Hospital. The medical staff carries out an HIV test. It confirms what Theresa had feared for years: Her husband is HIV positive too. "At least I knew where I stood", Theresa says.

Thanks to treatment and counselling, both are now doing better. They typify the more than 25'000 people who receive treatment thanks to SolidarMed. Only a few years ago, an HIV diagnosis meant imminent death. Thanks to treatment, HIV positive people can lead normal, socially and economically active lives. SolidarMed trains nurses and ensures that treatment is also available in remote health centres.

Today, little Moreblessing lies in Theresa's arms. A miracle. A healthy child born without HIV. Theresa still cannot quite believe it. The virus wrested three children from her. A virus which she too carries. "Without the advice and help of the doctors, we would not be alive today", she says. In the short moment of silence, the only sound is the quiet breathing of baby Moreblessings. "But now, we have received the most beautiful gift imaginable."

Theresa (40), Zimbabwe

"Without the advice and help of the doctors, we would not be alive today. Now we have received the most beautiful gift imaginable."

Africa suffers the most from HIV/Aids

Over the past 13 years, the global number of Aids-related deaths has gone down from 2.4 to 1.1 million people per year. Today, 70 percent of the victims are from southern Africa. In Lesotho, one in four adults is infected; in Zimbabwe, it is one in six.



Photo: Christian Heuss

Photo on the right
An HIV test in Lesotho. These tests are the first step in protecting babies from an infection.

SolidarMed protects mothers and babies from HIV

Close to 40 percent of babies are infected with HIV from their mother before, during and after birth. A series of preventive measures, like HIV medication for the expectant mother, reduce the risk of transmission to less than 2 percent.

SolidarMed supports 31 hospitals and 132 health centres with:

- Antenatal care, family planning and advice on breastfeeding
- HIV/Aids tests and counselling for expectant mothers and their partners
- Treatment for HIV positive pregnant women and their babies
- Safe childbirth in a health facility with trained medical staff
- Training of nursing staff in the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV

Currently, over 25'000 patients are in treatment thanks to SolidarMed. Of these, 1'851 are children and 17'500 are women. The goal is integrate lifesaving HIV treatment into primary health care services.

Learn more about preventing HIV in children:
solidarmed.ch/en > topics > infectious diseases

Lesotho: New approaches in the fight against HIV

SolidarMed: How aware of HIV/Aids are people in Lesotho?

Josephine Muhairwe: As one in four people in Lesotho are infected, nearly everyone knows the disease. A survey shows that over 80 percent of the people in rural areas know how to protect themselves from an HIV infection. Most women also know that treatment prevents the transmission of HIV to the baby.

How is SolidarMed currently fighting the epidemic?

The principles remain the same: prevention measures and treatment. Today, treatment is very effective and cost-efficient. An HIV patient in treatment can lead a nearly normal life. In addition, treatment prevents the further spread of HIV. If enough HIV positive people are in treatment, we can stop the epidemic. For this reason, we are testing the new WHO 90-90-90* strategy in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Swiss TPH: How does one convince a patient to have an HIV test? How do we ensure that patients testing positive begin and continue treatment? Thanks to modern diagnostics, we can measure the severity of an HIV infection. This allows us to understand the course of the disease better and to adapt the treatments accordingly.

Does it work?

Yes, we are well on our way. We reach a lot of people with our door-to-door campaign. We have not yet reached the goal of testing 90 percent of the people for HIV. But we've taken a huge step forward. Thanks to our efforts, over the past year the number of HIV positive people receiving treatment in Butha-Butha increased from 57 to 67 percent. The Minister of Health congratulated SolidarMed for this success. He invited us to become members of the national advisory committee for HIV/Aids. As a result, there is now the chance that the authorities will scale-up this approach to other districts.

* 90% of the population knows its HIV status
90% of those infected receive treatment
90% of treatments lower the viral load



Dr. Josephine Muhairwe,
Country Coordinator and
Project Manager in Lesotho



Photo: SolidarMed

The first motorcycle ambulance

Moçambique The first motorcycle ambulance in Chiùre has been in use since May. The driver, Albertina, is a businesswoman. She uses the three-wheeled vehicle to transport all kinds of things. In an emergency, she comes immediately. She brings patients from remote villages to the health centre much faster when they need medical help. She did not have to wait long for her first emergency call-out. Her mobile rang and a man asked her to come as quickly as possible. His wife Julietta was experiencing complications whilst giving birth at home.

28-year-old Albertina is a stroke of luck for SolidarMed. It is not easy to get a driving license in northern Moçambique. Those with a driving license are highly sought-after on the job market. Currently, SolidarMed is helping two locals obtain their driving license. Afterwards, they'll be given the opportunity to work as independent ambulance drivers. Until then, Albertina is the only ambulance driver and is available for emergency call-outs around the clock, 7 days a week. SolidarMed is providing support for this project until the end of 2018 and will study its efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

67 percent in treatment

Lesotho Some weeks ago, the SolidarMed team in Lesotho received an email from the Ministry of Health. The senior official was pleased to note that 67 percent of patients in the district of Butha-Butha were receiving treatment. This rural district has made the most progress in this area and now has the best treatment coverage in the whole country. Only one year before, the treatment coverage was 14 percent lower. At the same time, SolidarMed received an invitation from the Ministry of Health in Lesotho to join the national HIV/Aids advisory committee. This success can be traced back to the 90-90-90 project which SolidarMed launched in partnership with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. The number 90 refers to three goals. The core goal: Nine out of 10 HIV positive patients are receiving treatment.

Water project launched with Swiss Solidarity

Zimbabwe The partner hospitals of Chikombedzi, Musiso and Ngomahuru will soon have a reliable supply of drinking water thanks to a solar-powered electric pump. SolidarMed could launch this urgently needed project thanks to a generous contribution from Swiss Solidarity.

Help for those with mental illness

Zimbabwe Mental illness is hardly a topic in southern Africa. One exception is the "Friendship Branch Initiative", which cares for people with mental illnesses in Zimbabwe. As part of a new partnership, SolidarMed will help the organisation to expand its activities to the rural district of Bikita. Until now, the "Friendship Branch Initiative" was only active in urban centres.



Moçambique
The first motorcycle ambulance

Lesotho
67 percent in treatment

Zimbabwe
Launch of a water project with Swiss Solidarity

Zimbabwe
Help for those with mental illness



Photo: Olivier Brandenberg

On the road with...

30-year-old Moira Nsefu is a mother of two small children and a student again. This experienced nurse has begun her training as a Medical Licentiate. She has taken study leave from her position in a psychiatric clinic in the remote village of Luampa. In the coming two years, she will attend Chainama College, more than seven hours drive away from her husband and two daughters. SolidarMed has made this possible by building student hostels. This allows students from remote regions to take part in this quality training. At the same time, students like Moira can now save a bit of money and return home regularly to their families. Thanks to new teaching methods, she can continue her studies there too: "Thanks to SolidarMed, we receive a tablet computer during our training. With this computer, I can also study at home." After completing her training, Moira would like to return to Luampa Hospital. She plans on using her newly acquired skills to continue improving the medical services there.

Medical Licentiates to tackle the lack of doctors

Training Medical Licentiates is Zambia's response to the lack of qualified health professionals. These clinicians perform some of the tasks usually carried out by doctors. One example is caesarean sections. With funds from the Liechtenstein Development Service, SolidarMed has been supporting the ML programme since 2009. In addition to building student hostels, SolidarMed has introduced modern online teaching and information platforms and provides experts to improve the quality of teaching.



Photo: SolidarMed

Niklaus Labhardt elected president

Svend Capol's successor is also a former SolidarMed doctor. The Annual General Meeting of the association elected the 39-year-old Dr med. Niklaus Labhardt, a proven expert in global health, as its new president. Labhardt spent a number of years working as project manager and doctor in Cameroon and Lesotho. Since June this year, he works at the University Hospital in Basel. In addition, he leads HIV research projects in Lesotho for the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute in Basel.

Olympic champion visits SolidarMed

Nik Schurter, Olympic champion and five times World Champion in mountain biking, visited the SolidarMed projects in Moçambique. He is the patron of the first e-bike ambulance in Africa. This prototype is being built by the African bicycle manufacturer Zambike. The ambulance will be powered by and receive expert support from the company Maxon Motor from the town of Sachseln. SolidarMed will test this Swiss-Zambian prototype for 2 years. The e-bike ambulance will transport expectant mothers and severely ill patients from the health centre to Chiùre district hospital faster. The health centre's solar panel will supply the ambulance with electricity.



Photo: Nik Hartmann

Follow Nino Schurter's journey on our social media channels:

facebook.com/SolidarMed

twitter.com/SolidarMed

instagram.com/SolidarMed



Photo: Benjamin Gross

Bicycle festival for e-bike ambulance

With the e-bike ambulance, SolidarMed has become a pioneer in e-mobility for patient transport – helped by the city of Lucerne! In May, Lucerne inaugurated the disused central rail track as a car-free road for slow traffic. Thousands of people celebrated this new transport axis between the town of Horw and the city of Lucerne with a big bike festival. All the proceeds from the tombola will go towards the e-bike ambulance in Moçambique. Many thanks!