



From Darkness to Light: Concern Worldwide's Child Survival Program *Providing Lasting, Low-Cost Health Care for the Developing World*

Claudine Mukeshimana sits quietly, eyes downcast. When asked when she learned she had HIV she gives an immediate, shockingly specific response: August 14, 2004. She explains that she'll never forget the date that changed her life, and her future, forever. Claudine is one of 130,000 women living with HIV/AIDS in Rwanda, one of more than 13 million in Africa. She is also pregnant.

Before Concern's Child Survival Program (CSP) came to the Kibilizi Health District in Rwanda nearly five years ago, the chances of Claudine preventing the transmission of HIV to her child would have been slim. In fact, she would not have even known it was possible. Claudine could have easily spread the disease to her child, continuing the seemingly unassailable march of death from HIV/AIDS. Now, as a member of the Concern-supported Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS at her local health center, she has learned how to keep both herself and her child healthy. The association has given her the strength and confidence to face her disease head on.

And because of Concern's ground-breaking work in forging bonds between national and local health authorities, health centers and communities, Claudine will give birth at a health center that provides appropriate medication to prevent the transmission of her disease to her child during labor. By applying its innovative approach to health care in the developing world Concern helped Kansi Health Center establish itself as the first in the nation to offer this type of maternal treatment to rural Rwandans. Today, there are four health centers offering this life-saving treatment, all in Concern's areas of operation.

Background

Sustainable, low-cost healthcare for the developing world in the face of AIDS, malaria and malnutrition -- impossible? Concern Worldwide is proving that it's not. Concern's Child Survival Program is benefiting 75,000 women and children in Rwanda, and another 314,000 in Bangladesh, offering cheap, practical, long-lasting solutions to some of the developing world's most intractable health problems, including:

- HIV/AIDS
- Malaria Control
- Malnutrition
- Maternal and Newborn Care

Specifically, activities include:

- Providing pre-natal care to pregnant women



- Providing home-based malaria treatment to the rural poor
- Providing nutrition training to mothers to help them care for their families
- Providing voluntary counseling and testing for AIDS as well as services preventing mother to child transmission of the disease
- Community outreach to educate on HIV/AIDS, basic health and hygiene, etc.

The implications of this seemingly simple program are nothing short of revolutionary! By encouraging local people and local communities to work with their accessible resources, ***by training them to provide their own solutions***, the improvements made in their health and health care will be sustainable once Concern leaves the area.

The cornerstone of the program is making connections between agencies and services that already exist – health centers, local health authorities, traditional birth attendants, community leaders – to ensure they work together to educate communities and improve their level of health care. The key ingredient to this recipe for success is the hard, unglamorous work of *making partners out of strangers*.

Implementation

Here's how it works.

When Concern began working in the Kibizi Health District in Rwanda, one of the poorest areas of the country, there was an overwhelming concern about HIV/AIDS. Few people knew their status, and even those that wanted to couldn't afford to go to city hospitals to get tested for the disease. A majority lacked a basic understanding of the disease, how it was transmitted and how to protect themselves. In addition to HIV/AIDS, chronic issues such as the health of small children and their susceptibility to malaria were identified as major health issues.

After speaking with the community about their needs, Concern created partnerships among local health center staffs, local health authorities and the Ministry of Health to train appropriate staff in testing for HIV/AIDS. Concern learned of an underutilized government health outreach program in which *animateurs* elected by the local communities serve as informal health advisors to their neighbors. Recognizing the tremendous potential this group had, Concern stepped in, creating a training program for the *animateurs*, educating them in identifying basic signs of malnutrition, alerting them to the need for pre-natal care for pregnant women and connecting them with both Concern staff and the staff at nearby health centers for further training and advice.

With access to basic health information near their homes, families are able to seek help from a trained *animateur*, who then refers them to the appropriate means of solving their problem. To some it may seem trivial, but for the poorest of the poor, living on less than \$1 a day in rural Rwanda, access to accurate advice and information related to healthcare is a dramatic improvement.

In 2003, the World Health Organization estimated that more than 3,000 African children died of malaria *every day*. One of the greatest achievements of Child Survival's work with in malaria is that community distributors, chosen by their village, or cell, now trained to identify signs of malaria and are able to administer basic drugs to treat malaria as soon as they observe a child that shows symptoms of the disease. This basic treatment, available at little cost and close to home, is a revolution in the home care of the disease, saving the lives of thousands of children whose malaria might otherwise go untreated.

The success of these programs are so many examples of how the links between local communities and national authorities are reaping huge rewards for the people of Rwanda.

- Concern persuaded the Ministry of Health to supply the necessary tools for testing for HIV/AIDS at local health centers.
- Working with the Ministry of Health Concern introduced a program to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS at rural health centers by administering naviropene during labor. Concern started the program at one health center – there are now four nationwide.
- Concern is training traditional birth attendants (TBA's) in identifying warning signs for problem pregnancies, how to provide the special care needed for mothers with HIV/AIDS and how to refer women to health centers for pre-natal care. Prior to Concern's work, there were few links between TBA's and the health centers.
- Through its pre-natal health program, Concern is distributing subsidized mosquito nets and teaching mothers the importance of having their families sleep under the nets to prevent malaria. For a cost of just 200Rwandan Francs (approximately 40 cents) a family can greatly reduce their risk of contracting malaria, the most frequent cause of death in Rwanda.

These are just a few examples of how forging links between groups will lead to long-lasting improvements in the health of mothers and children.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Cost Efficiency

Through an investment of just \$2 to \$6 per person per year, individuals who previously had little knowledge of or access to basic health care now actively participate in voluntary counseling and testing for HIV/AIDS, nutrition education and training for mothers and home-based malaria care among many other critical health care interventions.



Access

One of Concern's main objectives is providing access to those who need it. Christophe Habiyambere, Assistant Coordinator of the Child Survival Program in Rwanda explains the emphasis Concern places on this critical element.

"Having previously working in a pediatric clinic with fees that were unaffordable to many, it was terrible to say to mothers of sick children, 'we can't treat you,'" says Habiyambere.

Child Survival programs place a major emphasis on making sure poor people have access to treatment – particularly treatment that can be administered at home.

"The home-based strategy reduces cost and waiting time, because when a baby is sick, if they have to go to a health center for treatment, the parents wait for money to go to the health facility. In that time, the baby dies," explains Habiyambere.

"The key challenges are reducing the time and cost of treatment and improving the knowledge of the community. Those are the goals of this methodology."

Comprehensive Support Network

Active involvement like Concern's is shown to reduce mortality by as much as 50%. A trailblazer in its philosophical approach to aid, Concern is among the first to focus on encouraging local people and communities to work with their resources to become self-sufficient - the ultimate goal being to let them care for themselves. Concern has clearly differentiated itself from other humanitarian organizations by initiating true collaboration between government health authorities, local health centers, community leaders and health providers and to ensure they work together to educate communities and improve their level of health care.

As mentioned above, the challenge in forging relationships of this nature is the hard, unglamorous work of creating partners out of strangers. When achieved however, this comprehensive support system has also helped reduce fear and denial while increasing self sufficiency and confidence among families.

Sustainability

Studies have shown that direct delivery of services such as vaccinations or Vitamin A, while valuable, have little long-term value. Once an agency leaves, the community is back where they started, without access to these health services and without the knowledge of where to find them on their own.

That's what makes Concern's methodology so critical – by educating individuals – mothers, community leaders, people living with HIV/AIDS, local health care staff—on the simple, low-cost ways they can protect themselves and their families from sickness and improve their health, the communities take an active role in their own care, a role that will only expand when Concern moves to other areas in need.

"The purpose of all of our work should be to make ourselves redundant," says Concern US Health Advisor Michelle Kouletio. "Development and sustainability are achieved when communities find their own resources to solve their problems. If we don't create self-reliance, we've failed. It's the only way the improvements can continue once Concern leaves."

Esteemed Recognition

USAID and CORE, the coordinating body of international community maternal and child health practitioners, both hold Concern's Child Survival Program up as one of the finest programs of its kind.

Results

Concern's goals of preventing transmission of HIV during labor along with reducing the overall risk of HIV and malaria are already being achieved. The results speak for themselves. In the short time that Concern's Child Survival has been active in Rwanda:

- Condom distribution has increased four-fold to more than 30,000
- Testing of adults doubled from 2001 – 2003
- Six associations of people living with HIV/AIDS were established with over 500 members, one third of the total infected population of the Kibizi Health District
- Concern established the first health center outside of a major Rwandan city, focused on preventing mother to child transmission (PMTCT)
 - Reached 1,981 women in 30 months (95% of pregnant women in the area)
- Since 2001, 5,000 mosquito nets were subsidized and purchased by pregnant women in the district as direct result of Concern's CSP
- 47% percent of children now sleep under mosquito nets

Contact Us

In developing nations, the most frequent victims of preventable catastrophes are children; more than 11 million children under the age of five die each year. For nearly forty years, Concern Worldwide has been a pioneer in developing innovative solutions in the critical area of child and maternal health in the least developed countries in the world.

We recognize that as times change, so must our programs in developing nations. CSP represents a dramatic philosophical shift from directly providing health services to programs designed to enable local residents and community leaders to develop, better utilize and coordinate existing health services. Working *with* the communities, *for* the communities, health services are built and sustained for mothers and children in need for years to come.

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