

### Angola (July 29 - August 2, 2003)

In Angola, I visited Bie Province, about an hour and a half by air from Luanda, the capital. For years, the long Angolan civil war nearly stopped progress there in many ways. Not only did Bie see some of the fiercest fighting in the civil war, but it now also has one of the highest prevalence rates in the country — 5.83 as of 2002. We drove 80 kilometers from the city of Kuito to a hospital in a town called Camakupa. The hospital is understaffed and lacking in equipment, and I can only imagine how difficult it must be to work there.

Nevertheless, in spite of these conditions, it was encouraging to see a young volunteer doctor from overseas working diligently alongside the local staff.



Meeting with Outpatients at a Hospital in Camakupa, Bie Province, Angola

During my visit, I also had a chance to attend a Partners' Meeting on Leprosy Elimination. It was apparent that there is a strong political will to achieve the elimination of leprosy by the end of 2005. I felt assured that progress, having been delayed for so long by the civil war, will now begin in earnest. When I attended the meeting, all partners were treated as equals, from the health minister, representatives of WHO and NGOs, to the people affected by leprosy. This is a good indication of the government's efforts to deal with the issue, both medically and socially. Progress must be made, not only in improving detection and treatment, but on the issue of discrimination as well.

### Madagascar (September 14-21, 2003)

In Madagascar, I accompanied Dr. E.M. Samba (regional director of WHO-AFRO), and Michel Recipon (president of the Association Francaise Raoul Follereau), as we looked at the state of elimination



Children at Foulpointe Basic Health Center in Toamasina Province, Madagascar

activities there. While in the country, the three of us exchanged views with representatives of the government and local medical personnel, encouraging them to make further progress.

We took a close look at the high prevalence rate in the northeast part of the country, visiting several villages in our efforts to promulgate accurate information about leprosy. We were welcomed in a village in Toamasina Province by around 300 villagers who performed educational songs and dances about the elimination of leprosy. When a group of more than 100 children was asked who knew that leprosy is curable, nearly all of them raised their hands.

During this trip, top leaders were able to meet and discuss issues. Both a thorough knowledge of leprosy and a high level of political commitment toward the problem were expressed. It was emphasized that the fight to eliminate the disease is connected with the fight to eliminate poverty.

Certainly, there are barriers to overcome in these three countries, from access problems in difficult areas to the need for better training for local health workers. However, having felt firsthand the political will to reach the elimination goals, I am convinced that the road to the elimination of leprosy is not such a long one. □



Children Performing Leprosy Educational Play at Antetezambaro Basic Health Center in Toamasina Province, Madagascar