



## **Fighting Malaria on the ‘River of Life’**

**Roll Back Malaria Zambezi Expedition**

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2008 – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

<http://www.zambezi-expedition.org>

### **The Roll Back Malaria Zambezi Expedition**

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008, a seasoned expedition crew will venture on a two-month voyage on the Zambezi River to highlight the successes and challenges of fighting malaria across six countries of the Trans-Zambezi region.

Countries in the Trans-Zambezi region have successfully implemented and are continuing to strengthen their malaria control programs. Yet for communities cut off from effective malaria protection and treatment by geographical barriers, conflict, or lack of infrastructure and resources, life remains difficult and precarious. Illness from this preventable and treatable disease causes loss of income and productivity on a scale large enough to slow a country’s economic growth by as much as 1.3% per year.

Traveling down river, the Roll Back Malaria Zambezi Expedition will spread awareness of malaria as a major public health problem in Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and help mobilize donor support for making effective protection and treatment available to all people at risk of contracting malaria in the region.

By exposing the difficulties of delivering prevention and treatment tools, the Expedition will bring home the need for cross-border cooperation in the region and rally government and public support for a common Zambezi-wide malaria control strategy that is currently in development.

## **MALARIA - The lethal disease that holds back southern Africa**

The Zambezi River, winding for 2500 kilometers between stunning cliffs, majestic vistas and fertile lowlands, is the lifeline of southern Africa. Yet both development and tourism are being held hostage to malaria, a disease that kills over one million people a year, most of them in Africa.

After two years of preparation, Expedition Organizers Helge Bendl and Andy Leemann have joined with members of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership - six countries from the Southern African Development Community, non-profit institutions and private companies - to put a spotlight on the plight of malaria-stricken communities in Africa, suffering 90% of the global annual death toll.

### **Turning the Zambezi into a “River of Life”**

The expedition crew, accompanied by local medical personnel, community workers and media teams, will meet remote river communities in each country to diagnose malaria cases, deliver immediate relief and engage the local population in the fight against malaria. The RBM Expedition will signal united action to turn the lifeline of southern Africa into a “River of Life” for those threatened by the disease.

#### **Calling for concerted cross-border action**

The crew's provisions and resources are small compared to the enormity of the problem that they are meant to alleviate. No single crew, however well-meaning, and no single government, however committed, can alone win the fight against this resilient disease. Highly mobile in nature, mosquitoes that transmit malaria parasites to humans can spread the disease from malaria-endemic countries to malaria-free ones, wiping out years of countrywide effort. By shedding light on the ways in which malaria is transmitted across national borders, the Expedition will stimulate political and public support for cross-border initiatives in the region.

Five countries in the region are developing a joint action plan and proposal for increased coverage of populations at risk. If successful, the proposal will receive financial assistance from the Global Fund, the world's largest financier of malaria control programs and help relieve the heavy burden of malaria in the Trans-Zambezi region.

#### **Showing progress and helping understand challenges**

To raise public and donor support for future cross-country initiatives, the Zambezi Expedition will narrate stories of triumph of the kind that come to life when political commitment is backed by expertise and funding.

One such cross-border project, covering parts of Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland decreased malaria cases in the Lubombo region by 82% in four years - a success that paints a brighter future for the new Zambezi-wide initiative.

Footage captured during the Expedition will illustrate the complex challenges and daunting obstacles that malaria control workers are facing daily. It will show how cross-border population movement, lack of health facilities, an overburdened health workforce and missing infrastructure obstruct and delay the delivery of malaria prevention and treatment to those who need them most.

## **Renewing commitment to fighting malaria by taking the story to the media**

The Zambezi Expedition will serve to voice each country's unique story of struggle and success and project them to national and international media outlets to raise awareness of both the problem and its solutions and alert the donor community of areas where action is most urgently needed. Unprecedented in both scale and purpose, the event has already received considerable interest by the media.

### **The Trans-Zambezi region in brief: Progress and Challenges**

**Zambia** - A large proportion of the country's population is protected by nets and spraying measures. Coverage with artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) is the highest in Africa. Pregnant women have wide access to anti-malaria prevention. Delivering commodities and services to remote river communities, however, remains a major challenge.

**Angola** - Health care systems in Angola have suffered severe damages due to 27 years of civil war. As a result, 70% of the population has poor or no access to government health facilities and malaria commodities. Malaria accounts for 35% of mortality among children under the age of five.

**Namibia and Botswana** - Namibia and Botswana are almost malaria-free except for an area around the Zambezi River and border regions. Elimination of malaria in the two countries would greatly enhance tourism and economic development in the Zambezi corridor, which is famous for its agriculture and tourist attractions.

**Zimbabwe** - Ongoing economic difficulties are obstructing malaria control efforts in a country which had historically made much progress in the fight against the disease.

**Mozambique** - 99% of the population in Mozambique is at risk of contracting malaria. Regular flooding of the Zambezi compounds the malaria problem. There is a need to expand spraying, increase use of long lasting nets and improve coordination.

## **About the partners**

### **RBM Partnership**

The Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM) provides cohesive and comprehensive support to countries burdened by malaria, leads advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of malaria at the global, regional, national and community levels and mobilizes resources for malaria control and research.

### **Expedition Organizers**

Helge Bendl, an award-winning journalist, and Andy Leemann (RIB Expedition S.L.), who has planned river expeditions on the Amazon, Mekong and Orinoco, will lead the Zambezi Expedition and navigate the river with their crew, medical personnel and media teams on board four inflatable boats, supported by land vehicles.

### **SADC**

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) was set up to harmonize and coordinate policies of member countries to achieve collective self-reliance and improve the living standards of the people of the region. SADC Member States are Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **Sponsors**

ExxonMobil, Coca Cola Africa Foundation, Novartis, Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), Nets for Life, Malaria No More.

### **Suppliers**

The Zambezi Expedition has received in-kind support from the following suppliers: Bestard, Nautica Reyes, Imnasa, Imperial Fleet Services, International Paint, Lalizas, MACS, MarineTrack, Marinepool, Waeco, Yacht Center Palma, Zodiac Spain.

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