

European Parliamentary Study Tour to Cameroon on Malaria 26 August-01 September 2007

The European Parliamentary Forum's Delegation has recently returned from a week-long study tour to Cameroon on Malaria hosted by the Cameroon Coalition against Malaria. The European Parliamentary Forum Delegation was composed of one German member of the Free Democratic Party (Liberal) of the DSW Parliamentary Advisory Council, one Lithuanian member of the Labour Party (Liberal) of the Lithuanian All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, one Spanish member from the United Left Party from the Spanish Parliamentary Inter-Group on Population and Development and one Swedish Young Decision Maker from the Christian Democratic Youth.

At the beginning of the week participants were received by M. Urbain Olanguena Awono, Cameroonian Minister of Public Health and the representatives of the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) as well as the Researchers' community to be introduced to the successes and challenges related to the fight against malaria in Cameroon. The Delegation visited various local initiatives dealing with malaria prevention, such as the Plan Project implemented by the NGO EMICAM (Entraide Maternelle et Infantile du Cameroun) in Etol village and focusing on taking care and raising awareness amongst women and children regarding health education, promotion and prevention.

The Delegation was very impressed by the women's community work as well as their strategies and mobilisation efforts for reducing malaria burden in the district through education and home to home information and awareness about malaria prevention and treatment. Participants recognised that women's groups and volunteers are vital partners in local community based development initiatives. The Delegation was able to learn about the whole procedure for treating a bed net and could enjoy a theater piece played by community children showing the importance of using insecticides treated bed nets, particularly for pregnant women and children under five who constitute the most vulnerable groups. Participants visited houses in the community and noticed that some houses still had no bed nets. The Delegation were explained that this lack of bed nets is due to the slowness of administrative control procedures regarding tax exoneration of the bed nets and the insecticides arriving at the port of Douala, which therefore means that they are stocked in the port instead of being distributed to the people. The Delegation took note of this major problem which was addressed to the Minister of Finance. During the two- day trip to Bamenda, the Delegation was pleased to see the implementation of the Global Fund project in Bali district, one of the Malaria Control Activities in the North West Province.

The Delegation visited two rural hospitals, the District Hospital in Akonolinga and the Provincial Hospital in Bamenda. Participants could notice the paucity of medical and health supplies as well as the lack of human resources. The Delegation regretted that not every patient can have access to a clinical diagnostic testing stressing that a medical diagnostic is not sufficiently reliable for identifying malaria cases. The Delegation could see a case of severe malaria where the patient explained that she was using a bed net at home to protect herself from malaria and that she was bitten by a mosquito while she was visiting her husband in prison.

Meetings were held with officials in the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Finance and other relevant Ministries working on malaria related issues who provided an overview of their activities within the country. The Ministry of Health and Finance were particularly concerned about the difficulties due to the slowness of administrative procedures and committed to their best to overpass these internal disagreements. A working session was organised with the new elected members of the Cameroonian Parliament where the members of the Delegation could exchange views and share best practices.

Parliamentarians were impressed by the National Malaria Control Programme aiming to reduce the malaria burden in Cameroon but also recognised the financial and human resources challenges that Cameroon is facing and the need to strengthen Parliamentary budgetary scrutiny

given the new trend of directing aid through general budget support in recipient countries. The Parliamentarians consequently committed to work with the new All-Party Parliamentary Malaria Group and to report back on these challenges to their own Government and Parliament in order to help try and shape future development aid policies.

For more pictures, please click on the following link: <http://www.mijnalbum.nl/Album=Y6HLJJDF>