

International Medical Assistance — Helping Those Who Need It Most

In early autumn in September 2004 in Myanmar (Burma). An 11-year-old boy, Myo Min Thu, was playing at school and was accidentally hit in his right eye by a classmate. He did not think much about it since there did not appear to be any wound. He went on his way, but after several days, the vision in his right eye gradually became blurred. A local doctor suggested that he drink more fruit juice and eat more oranges. Three months later, the boy's vision had not only worsened, but it had deteriorated to the point where he could discern only that people were moving about. He was gradually moving into a life of darkness.

While the boy's doctors could not figure out what to do, the TaiwanICDF and ORBIS Taiwan provided assistance. The two organizations were sponsors in the Flying Eye



Photograph by ORBIS



Photograph by ORBIS

① The inauguration of the Flying Eye Hospital Humanitarian Assistance Project ② A volunteer eye doctor from Taiwan treating a Burmese boy

Hospital Project, providing international medical aid to Myanmar. Myo received treatment from Dr. Liu Jung-hung. After retinal surgery, his eyesight was partially restored. The boy's parents were so grateful that they shed tears of joy, expressing their appreciation to the TaiwanICDF and ORBIS Taiwan for bringing the gift of sight back to their son.

This story is a real one, and it depicts the close cooperation between the TaiwanICDF and other international non-profit organizations. Assistance for the needy should be dynamic and action-oriented, not unwieldy or too abstract. The TaiwanICDF believes that without strengthening the fragile medical

standards in cooperating nations, there is no way to help these countries get on the road to self-sufficiency. As a result, Taiwan has initiated a number of medical assistance projects, helping these regions improve their health care systems.

Exporting Taiwan's Medical Development Experience

In the early post-World War II years, Taiwan faced all sorts of challenges. The nation's medical and health standards were sub-par, and residents suffered from various contagious diseases and a lack of sanitation. However, one of the main methods of helping Taiwan develop was the effort to overcome the country's weak medical systems and create a high-quality disease prevention and medical framework. With this developmental experience, Taiwan is highly qualified to offer assistance to developing nations who are now facing the same challenges that Taiwan did several decades ago.

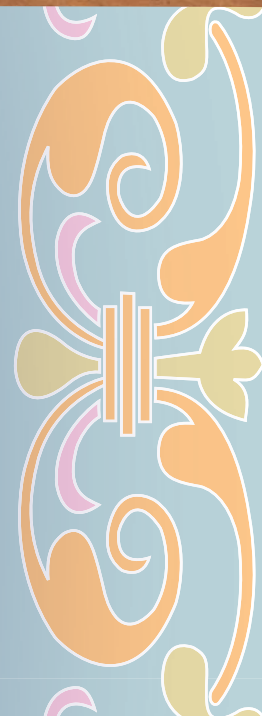
As a dedicated foreign assistance provider, the TaiwanICDF has a comprehensive set of medical assistance strategies and action plans. Its medical missions stationed overseas help to carry out long-term and sustainable assistance projects. In addition, the Fund has established mobile hospitals to provide immediate medical humanitarian assistance. The TaiwanICDF also cooperates with various international organizations in staging medical assistance activities.

The aforementioned three types of assistance are closely related. Medical missions abroad provide long-term and far-reaching assistance. The mobile hospitals provide a quick response in

times of emergency and also help Taiwan solve problems associated with carrying out medical assistance projects in countries without formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Lastly, cooperation with international organizations expands the range of services the Fund can offer and also strengthens the allocation of technology and resources. This three-pronged medical assistance strategy provides a comprehensive framework and network for the TaiwanICDF to improve public health in partner countries.

The Establishment of Medical Missions Overseas

Improving the public's health requires long-term support. The TaiwanICDF has therefore stationed long-term medical missions in allied countries to facilitate the implementation of medical-related projects. In fact, Taiwan's history of providing medical missions covers many decades. In 1962, Taiwan sent six military doctors to Libya, where they were responsible for improving that nation's military medical services. Presently, Taiwan has medical missions stationed in Burkina Faso, São Tomé and Príncipe, Chad, and Malawi, providing hospital treatment, free outreach services in remote areas, public health campaigns, and technology transfers. In recent years, the missions have implemented many special projects to meet the





medical needs of the local populations. The plans aim not only to treat patients, but also to utilize preventive medicine. The establishment of community medical systems, outreach services, and infectious disease surveys are important pillars in treating and foiling the diseases of local people. The missions will continue to play a role in helping the people of friendly countries to get on the road to development.

Reaching Out from City Hospitals to Village Clinics

The van was moving along the pot-hole-ridden muddy road. Strictly speaking, this route could not even be considered a proper road. It was a muddy path that had not been repaired in years. Every year during the rainy season, road conditions would deteriorate, and vehicles would sometimes slide or get stuck in the mud. As a result, vehicles regularly could be immobile for five or six hours during each incident.

This scenario is something that the Taiwan Medical Mission in Burkina Faso faces on an ongoing basis. While the medical missions have hospital offices and laboratories, they do not simply wait for patients to come to them. In Burkina Faso, for instance, TaiwanICDF medical specialists journey to

remote villages every week as far as 100 kilometers away from their headquarters at CHR de Koudougou L'Hopital de l'Amitie to provide medical services to rural patients. In fact, of the numerous international medical organizations operating in Burkina Faso, the medical mission is the only entity that regularly stages outreach clinics, helping to take care of people who lack access to quality health care.

With the long-term experience of providing community-based clinics, the medical mission has a deep understanding of the illnesses facing each community, making it easier to assist them in solving their problems. The leader of the medical mission in Burkina Faso, Huang Chi-lin, said, "From a medical standpoint, occasionally holding a large-scale free clinic for local residents does not have as much of an impact as one might think. Rather, we focus on providing regular clinics in order to provide medical care over the long term.

While outreach clinics require a large amount of labor, resources, time, and effort, they are just one of the many types of services provided by the Taiwan Medical Mission in Burkina Faso. Normally, the doctors of the medical mission have many responsibilities and provide clinical diagnoses at the



① Burkina Faso medical mission leader Huang Chi-lin (center) and a serviceman provide free clinical treatment in a remote area of the country ② Chad medical mission nurse Chen Hwai-cheng (center) gives clinical instruction in anesthesia ③ Nicaragua medical volunteer Shen Chia-lin (right) provides a blood pressure reading for a patient at an outreach clinic

CHR de Koudougou L'Hopital de l'Amitie in internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, pediatrics, dentistry, and anesthesia. They even carry out traditional Chinese medical treatments such as acupuncture. "The number of hours worked each month by the people in the medical mission exceeds that of local doctors," Huang said.

No matter how skilled a physician is, doctors need proper medical equipment to successfully carry out their work. The TaiwanICDF has provided an endoscope for the medical mission, which is the only one available in the entire nation. Meanwhile, Dr. Huang is one of only two urologists in Burkina Faso. The combination of experts and top-quality equipment is helping to create a stable foundation for a strong medical system in Burkina Faso. It is not surprising that the reputation of the medical mission has spread throughout the country. Many people come to Koudougou to seek medical care. Some even come from neighboring countries. The care and service quality of the medical mission have won a big thumb's up from the people in the region.

In addition to Burkina Faso, Taiwan has also signed a medical cooperation agreement with Chad, where it has established a medical mission at L'Hopital de la Liberte in the capital of N'Djamena. For years, the mission has provided internal, gynecological, anesthetic, and surgical services. It has also held various medical seminars in an effort to transfer medical technologies and raise the quality of local medicine.

Insufficient basic facilities are one of the biggest challenges that face mission members. Wang Wei-yang, the leader of the medical mission in Chad, related one experience that left a deep impression on him. One day around sunset, there was a 26-year-old woman in the emergency room who was hemorrhaging from an ectopic pregnancy. She required an immediate blood transfusion and

exploratory abdominal surgery. After the diagnosis, Dr. Wang began the procedure in the operating room. A large amount of plasma and clots emerged once he made the incision. Just as Dr. Wang was applying pressure and using the suction tube, the operating room went dark. He could not see anything.

"We knew that it was another power outage. Everyone rushed to get flashlights that we had already prepared for such situations and then continued the procedure," he said. The surgery was completed successfully in the dim light.

Mission members are already equipped to handle these situations. One time Dr. Fang Wei-lin, a surgeon with the mission, and his assistant, Hung Yi-chieh, who was a member of the Taiwan Youth Overseas Service, were carrying out surgery to correct a mega-colon. The patient's blood pressure was low to begin with, and after four hours of surgery, the excess part of the colon had finally been excised. However, the patient was hanging on for dear life as he had gone into shock due to low blood pressure. Cheng Huai-cheng, the anesthesiologist, immediately collected blood bags and asked medical personnel to donate blood. In just a few minutes, they had collected 450 ccs of plasma. The successful transfusion of the plasma helped to save a life.

From Treatment to Disease Prevention

The weak economic structure of developing nations makes it difficult for them to establish hygienic medical environments. As a result, infectious diseases become endemic, and locals suffer on a continuing basis. For example, a member of the Taiwan Medical Mission in Chad discovered a blood-sucking parasite in the village of Gaoui. This parasite caused illness amongst 90 percent of the villagers, resulting in many of them having abdominal pain or diarrhea. Afflicted children turned anemic and became



thin and frail. This parasite brought with it not only suffering, but caused a reduced ability among the villagers to work, affecting the overall livelihood of the village. Without the ability to earn ample income and improve the health environment, the village fell into a vicious cycle of poverty. The medical mission discovered the proper medicine to treat the villagers. The illnesses associated with the parasite were eradicated in less than three months at a cost of only about US\$2,000.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, Taiwan's assistance is helping to eradicate malaria. Taiwan also suffered from the disease during the post-World War II era. Thanks to the efforts of the government and international health organizations, a comprehensive malaria prevention system was established in the early 1960s, making Taiwan one of the world's first countries to eradicate malaria.

"Of all mosquitoes, the malaria-carrying mosquito is the hardest one to fight," claims Taiwan's mosquito expert, 77-year-old Dr. Lien Jih-ching. Dr. Lien was responsible for leading the medical mission in designing and implementing a malaria eradication plan for São Tomé and Príncipe, seeking to replicate Taiwan's achievements.

In July 2000, Taiwan sent a six-person team of experts, including Dr. Lien, to São Tomé and Príncipe on a fact-finding visit to see first-hand the ecosystem in which the mosquito thrived, the geography, and the state of sanitation in that nation. They also sought to understand the interest of the public in trying to eradicate malaria. In 1980, São Tomé and Príncipe received assistance from the WHO, through which the entire country was sprayed with DDT. While the death rate from malaria fell to 0.2 percent from 19.2 percent, the DDT got into the bloodstream of household livestock, causing many animals to die and creating an uproar among the public. The project was halted. Several years later, malaria re-emerged, and the strain this time was resistant to many drugs, making the situation even worse than to begin with. Given its experience, the government in São Tomé and Príncipe was somewhat skeptical about the plan that Taiwan was drafting.

In 2002, President Chen Shui-bian visited São Tomé and Príncipe. Lee Ming-liang, the minister of health at the time, was also part of President Chen's entourage. The two of them saw many people suffering from malaria and decided to initiate a plan to eradicate the disease. Malaria is one of the most



① Indoor pesticide spraying for the Malaria Eradication Project in São Tomé and Príncipe ② A medical worker examines a child for the Malaria Eradication Project ③ A mobile medical vehicle, donated by the TaiwanICDF, provides health care services to the Tibetan community in India

widely discussed issues when it comes to public health in underdeveloped countries. According to WHO statistics, about 960,000 people die from malaria each year in Africa, with the majority being children. Malaria is the number one cause of death in São Tomé and Príncipe. Dr. Lien was confident in saying, “The annual GDP of São Tomé and Príncipe is about US\$50 million. Malaria seriously impacts the lives of the people there. If one aims to reduce poverty in the country, a pre-condition is to eradicate malaria.”

The prevention plan was divided into two stages. In the first component, the habitats for larvae of the malaria-carrying mosquito would be destroyed. This would reduce the chance of people being bitten and then developing the disease. Then epidemiological surveys were conducted along with analyses of various malaria medicines in order to determine the best treatment method. Dr. Lien designed the key areas of work that needed to be carried out. In July 2003, he again visited the country to assist the medical mission with project implementation. The pesticide IGR was used because its impact on the environment would be minimal, and it would successfully prevent mosquito larvae growth. Dr. Lien said that the two islands of São Tomé and Príncipe are less than 1,000 square kilometers in size and are isolated from the African mainland. Therefore, it was a perfect place to carry out a malaria eradication project. “Indoor residential spraying was first conducted throughout Príncipe using alphacypermethrin. Then patients were treated one by one. This two-pronged strategy will quickly help the team reach its goal.”

In November 2003, São Tomé’s national television station TVS made a trip to Príncipe and found that the island’s only public hospital, which was usually full of people, now did not have even one patient suffering from malaria. This was only three months after the program’s inauguration. One year



▲ Dr. Lien Jih-ching observes a malaria-carrying mosquito with his microscope at the laboratory in São Tomé and Príncipe

later, the health minister of São Tomé accompanied Dr. Lien and the medical mission on a survey and treatment mission and discovered only two cases of malaria sufferers at the hospital over that period. This highlights the accomplishment of Dr. Lien’s plans. While the WHO achieved only partial success in eradicating malaria on the islands two decades ago, the residents of São Tomé and Príncipe are delighted at the results of Taiwan’s plan. Many have urged spraying nationwide given the outcome on Príncipe.

Dr. Lien visited the country again in August 2004 to coordinate the nationwide spraying. He explained that the project was carried out with the synchronization of the 40 clinics throughout the country operated by the Taiwan Medical Mission. “We started spraying from west to east, and at the same time from south to north. We expected to complete the spraying of a province each two months,” he said.

The overwhelming achievements of Dr. Lien and the medical mission in eradicating malaria have attracted a number of international medical personnel and members of the press to São Tomé to view the results first hand. The medical mission’s laboratory is now virtually a landmark, and it marks a new milestone in Taiwan’s medical assistance work.



The Beacon of Humanitarian Assistance

Getting resources to those in need has always been one of the guiding principles of the TaiwanICDF's medical humanitarian assistance. The Fund has established the mobile clinic operational model, helping to assist those who require aid in a timely manner. The concept of a mobile clinic revolves around a transportable convoy of medical vehicles. These vehicles go deep into remote areas to help residents who live in challenging environments. Presently, the concept is being carried out in countries such as India and Mongolia, which have diverse, rugged, and remote territories that often lack wide-ranging medical resources.

Compassion for Tibetan Refugee Communities in India

In 1959, Tibet's leader, the Dalai Lama, fled Tibet and set up a Government-in-Exile in northern India. Over the past four decades, Tibetan refugees have spread throughout India and many of their communities live in difficult environments. As a result, international aid is desperately needed. Since 2003, the TaiwanICDF and the Taiwan-Tibet Exchange

Foundation have initiated the Medical Infrastructure Project for the Tibetan Community in India.

In addition, the TaiwanICDF also provides humanitarian medical assistance to Tibetan refugees in the northeastern Indian city of Darjeeling.

Beginning in 2002, the TaiwanICDF and the Tibetan Refugee Self-help Center began long-term cooperation in Darjeeling to boost the quality of medical care at the grassroots level. Medical resources are delivered to remote areas through the mobile hospital concept. The TaiwanICDF has generously donated medical vehicles and has provided doctors, laboratory personnel, and nurses to administer health exams for Tibetan children. They also undertake tuberculosis diagnosis and provide polio vaccines. Tetanus shots are given to adults.

Medical Assistance to Russia and Mongolia

Medical conditions are also poor in the Altai region of Russia, which borders Mongolia. The number of tuberculosis cases in the area continues to rise. Despite being classified as the plague of the 19th Century, tuberculosis is still endemic in the 21st Century. In September 2004, the TaiwanICDF and the



① A dentist from Taiwan performs an oral examination on a Mongolian child for the Ulaanbaatar Oral Hygiene Project ② Women from a refugee camp on the Chad-Sudan border wait for treatment at an outreach clinic conducted by the medical mission in Chad ③ Nicaragua medical volunteer Lu Hsiang-hui (center) gives medical instructions to patients

Taiwan-Russia Exchange Foundation began cooperation on providing medical care for those in the region with tuberculosis. Medical equipment was donated, and various prevention seminars and lectures were held, assisting the local government in creating a prevention mechanism. In addition, the TaiwanICDF is implementing the mobile hospital concept in Mongolia, assisting those with cardiovascular disease in the southern Gobi region.

Outreach Clinics in Chad

Since February 2003, about 180,000 refugees from Darfur, Sudan, have fled to eastern Chad. They reside in 11 refugee camps throughout the region. Care for these migrants has become a focal point of international humanitarian assistance. To prevent outbreaks of disease, Chad's government asked the Taiwan Medical Mission stationed in the capital to provide outreach clinical services to the residents and refugees in the Guéréda area of eastern Chad. These services were provided in the middle of November 2004. During this time, the medical mission held a seven-day free clinic which provided medical services to 2,323 people, averaging 300 per day. In addition, the mission donated medical supplies and 500 tons of white rice.

Cooperation with International Organizations

Given political considerations involving the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan has not been able to enter UN organizations formally. However, it still plays a prominent role in international humanitarian assistance. Over the years, the TaiwanICDF has formed alliances with international medical organizations. Various cooperative models have been used to provide Taiwan's medical expertise and services to all corners of the world. In 2004, the



Photograph by ORBIS

▲ The flying eye hospital returns the gift of sight to visually challenged people in Myanmar

TaiwanICDF and international organizations cooperated on a number of unique projects, including the Flying Eye Hospital Project in Myanmar, which provided medical assistance to visually challenged people in that nation. Other projects were also carried out with NGOs to assist developing countries.

Returning the Gift of Sight

What would it be like without the colors of life?

According to statistics, presently 180 million people throughout the globe have impaired vision. Without projects to prevent the spread of diseases that cause blindness, by the year 2020, the number of the world's blind will rise to 76 million, exacting an annual social cost each year of US\$25 billion.

Unfortunately, 90 percent of the world's blind are in developing countries—the places that most lack medical equipment and resources to deal with this problem. These nations cannot execute blindness



prevention projects on their own, and the situation for afflicted people deteriorates daily. From December 6 to 12, 2004, the TaiwanICDF and ORBIS Taiwan cooperated in the Flying Eye Hospital Project in Myanmar, which sent ophthalmologists to that country to assist in treating various eye problems.

Two volunteer doctors from ORBIS Taiwan, Liu Jung-hung, the head of Chen Hsing General Hospital, and Lu Ta-wen, the head of ophthalmology at Tri-Service General Hospital, represented Taiwan in this mission, which also included doctors from the United States and the United Kingdom. The team cooperated with an Eye and ENT hospital in Mandalay, training local doctors as well as doctors in remote areas. The team of doctors also focused efforts on aiding needy children with vision problems and on providing training for correcting retinal problems.

In addition to clinical training, the members of the mission provided instruction while they were performing surgery. All surgical procedures were videotaped to serve as educational material for local doctors and trainers. A total of 60 local doctors were trained in six fields of ophthalmology. A total of 26 nurses received guidance on performing vision-related surgical procedures. Specialists were also educated in the use of various apparatuses. Hardware and medical equipment components were also donated as part of the project.

The mission was a complete success! Over 30 people had their vision restored, and various surgical procedures enabled the training of 60 ophthalmologists. This is expected to bring the light back to 250,000 visually impaired people in the country. "The surgery gave me a new view, a new life. I am so full of appreciation and thanks. I think the best way for me to make a contribution is to use my medical knowledge and ability to help more people in

Myanmar overcome their illnesses and return to health," said 31-year old physician Ma Ta Zar Win. When she was 24 years old and in medical school, she began suffering from glaucoma. Surgery performed seven years ago on her right eye failed to correct the problem, and her vision gradually deteriorated. Two years ago, she became completely blind in the one eye. She has also had surgery on her left eye, and the results were less than ideal. Ma was lucky enough to be operated on by ORBIS Taiwan Volunteer Dr. Lu Ta-wen, and the surgery was a triumph. She now has a new life.

Love from Taiwan on the Sands and Sea

In June 2003, the TaiwanICDF participated in the Love from Taiwan Material Assistance Distribution Project in Iraq. The Fund also cooperated with Mercy Corps and 19 Taiwan NGOs to provide material goods to displaced Iraqis in northern and central areas of the country.

At the end of 2004, one of the biggest natural disasters ever hit Southeast and South Asia. A great earthquake off Indonesia's coast triggered tsunamis that caused death and destruction in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and even as far as Somalia in Africa.

Shortly after the disaster struck, the TaiwanICDF was already lending a helping hand. Along with the MOFA and local NGOs, the Fund participated in another Love from Taiwan fundraising event to raise donations and supplies to send to disaster-stricken nations. Given its experience in Iraq, the TaiwanICDF was able to procure and transport goods to the disaster regions in the shortest time possible. In the future, the TaiwanICDF will continue to cooperate with Mercy Corps in executing reconstruction work in the region.

Seeking a Better Tomorrow

After Taiwan withdrew from the UN, the nation's visibility in the international arena gradually dimmed. However, over the past decade or so, Taiwan's medical missions have gradually made enormous contributions in developing countries. Cooperation is now carried out not only on a unilateral basis, but also bilaterally and multilaterally to provide medical assistance.

In the past 45 years, the TaiwanICDF has continuously believed that true prosperity is achieved only through sharing. The Fund continues to spread Taiwan's development experience to a variety of host nations. By doing so, the "Taiwan experience" is no longer limited to the country's 23 million people, but rather shared with the world at large, helping underprivileged nations fight hunger, disease, and poverty. Since sending its first mission abroad in 1959, Taiwan's people have eagerly shared their expertise in a variety of fields. They truly believe that Taiwan's contribution will make the global village a better place.

Taiwan Medical Missions will continue to display their expertise and help countries in the areas where they need help the most. They will continue cooperation with international organizations in the promotion of public health, the establishment of community medical systems, the implementation of medical policies, and the training of local medical personnel. In addition to long-term personnel, short-term visits by experts as well as volunteers will be arranged to further raise the service level and to expand TaiwanICDF's contribution within the international community. Medical assistance is one of the most practical types of humanitarian assistance. The TaiwanICDF will continue to provide medical aid and share its experiences in establishing effective humanitarian assistance programs. It is hoped that Taiwan's international cooperation and development



▲ Taiwan's medical care knows no boundaries

model will gain even more recognition from international organizations, enabling the fruits of Taiwan's experience in medicine and public health to be shared with others. Cooperation with others enables the integration of resources and fosters even broader achievements in paying back the international community.

During the history of human development, people of all nationalities have constantly sought a better future for themselves and their children. The destiny of humankind rests in its own hands. Amid the many wars and disasters around the globe, development has not been balanced, which casts a cloud over the future. While the medical assistance plans carried out by the TaiwanICDF may seem like impossible dreams, they fill people with the hope of a better tomorrow. The Fund hopes that given the prosperity that Taiwan has attained, it can assist the international community in creating a better world.