



## Ghana: President Obama visits WV project exhibit

World Vision was able to showcase its Neglected Tropical Disease Control project (NTDCP) to U.S. President Barack Obama and the First Lady at an exhibition at a local hospital during their recent trip to Ghana.

“There was palpable excitement here in Ghana as President Obama visited this past weekend,” said Auckhinleck Adow, associate national director of WV Ghana. “He highlighted our nation’s progress, most recently our peaceful, democratic election. Accra is still abuzz, and my colleagues and neighbors are talking about it constantly.”

Dr. John Kwesi Marfoh, NTDCP project manager, presented a map of Ghana to the Obamas at the exhibition, indicating the neglected tropical diseases covered under the project, their distribution in the country, and where USAID funds were being used to fight the diseases.

“I am so grateful for the personal interest that Susan Wright [USAID Mission staff] has shown for the NTDCP and her support in ensuring that we participated in the exhibition,” said Marfoh. “We have been able to show President Obama how the support of the American people is making an impact in the control of neglected tropical diseases in Ghana.”

According to Research Triangle Institute International (RTI), an estimated one billion people worldwide are impacted by one or more neglected tropical diseases. Poor and rural populations are disproportionately affected by these diseases, as they lack access to safe, clean water, sanitation, and essential medicines. The diseases increase morbidity, cause sickness and disability, compromise children’s cognitive and physical development, and can result in blindness and severe disfigurement.

RTI, with USAID funds, granted the three-year, \$4 million NTDCP to World Vision to reduce the prevalence of neglected tropical diseases to levels that are no longer of public health significance for Ghana by 2015. The project focuses on five diseases: trachoma (blinding eye infection), lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis (bilharzias/snail fever), and soil-transmitted helminthiasis (intestinal worm infection). The program works to train health workers (including managers, nurses, volunteers, and others) at all levels, community to national, in education and medicine distribution in all regions of Ghana.

“I see challenge, but much hope for triumph here everyday,” said Adow. “And while many Ghanaians celebrate the visit of one of the world’s most powerful leaders to one of Africa’s most solid democracies, it is my hope that we will also join together in lifting the other half of our nation out of poverty.”

The NTDCP is making strides toward that goal, starting with preventing and treating these five debilitating diseases for more than 7 million Ghanaians who are at risk of or living with them.

After visiting the exhibition, while addressing Ghana’s parliament, President Obama mentioned fighting neglected tropical diseases, among others: “... my administration has committed \$63 billion to meet these challenges—\$63 billion. Building on the strong efforts of President Bush, we will carry forward the fight against HIV/AIDS. We will pursue the goal of ending deaths from malaria and tuberculosis, and we will work to eradicate polio. We will fight neglected tropical disease.”



Dr. John Marfoh, right, explains WV’s NTD project to the Minister of Health (black suit) and the Obamas in Ghana July 2009.

Photo courtesy of RTI