

MANDY'S MISSION

Singer and actress Mandy Moore joins a bipartisan congressional delegation to bring life-saving mosquito nets to Cameroon



I did a Google search on the history of malaria. It's the disease that kept European explorers at bay on the coasts of Africa, delayed the opening of the Panama Canal and became a key component of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's effort to stimulate economic development in the American South.

For 3.3 billion people around the world, malaria is more than a historical reference. It is a daily reality that kills one child every 45 seconds in sub-Saharan Africa.

Recently, I traveled to Cameroon with Washington, D.C.-based global health organization Population Services International (PSI) for which I am an ambassador, and with the U.N. Foundation's Nothing But Nets campaign. I was traveling with a bipartisan delegation of congressional staffers to learn about the Cameroonian government's upcoming campaign to distribute insecticide-treated mosquito nets across the entire country. No easy feat.

I have traveled to Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic to help distribute nets and raise awareness, but this trip was different. It provided a look at the engine that powers a nationwide net distribution partnership. The Cameroonian government is actively working with companies, civil society, hospitals and clinics, individuals and donors like The Global Fund, which is making this distribution possible, to pull this off.

I met people from all levels of society, each critical in executing this historic feat. André Mama Fouda, the minister of public health, is rallying his team of national experts to

ensure nets reach those who need them most. Atangana Manga, a community health worker in the village of Ebanga, volunteers every day to treat and protect his community from malaria. And, Madame Ngono, a stoic and

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PSI Ambassador Mandy Moore visits a warehouse in Yaounde, Cameroon, where more than 30,000 nets are being stored. They were distributed to families in Yaounde last month, as part of a national mosquito net distribution supported by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.



hardened grandmother, welcomed me into her mud home where she told me of the benefit of using a net to protect against mosquitos.

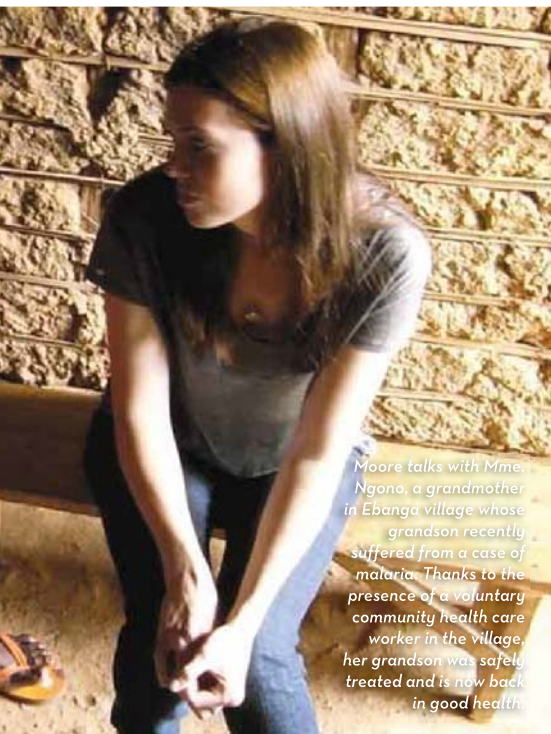
It was a deeply moving experience for me and for the entire delegation. I wondered why this work would matter to people back home, outside of the fact that America is a generous country and that it's part of our DNA to provide assistance.

I wondered if one couldn't buy into the

humanitarian aspect of aid, what else might matter.

For one, the economy - ours and theirs. America's economic future rests in the strength of the economies in the developing world to buy our goods and use our technologies. Without the basic building block of health the economic strength of countries like Cameroon don't stand a chance.

In such a tense time, having the partnership and friendship of countries abroad helps us



Moore talks with Mme. Ngano, a grandmother in Ebanga village whose grandson recently suffered from a case of malaria. Thanks to the presence of a voluntary community health care worker in the village, her grandson was safely treated and is now back in good health.

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Members of the bipartisan delegation that traveled to Cameroon.

remain secure as a nation.

I think the less than 1 percent that the U.S. spends on foreign aid is a worthy investment.

Next time I Google malaria and Cameroon, I'd like to see that it's no longer the leading cause of death. There's still a funding gap and one of the things I've committed to do is to help fill that with PSI's partner, Nothing But Nets. Please visit www.nothingbutnets.net to send a net and save a life. **WL**

A NET WIN

Bipartisan support helps save lives in Cameroon.



Rep. Michael Honda. (Photo courtesy Rep. Michael Honda)

Cameroon may not register on the consciousness of Washingtonians. It is hard to get

Africa on the radar screen, let alone one of its lesser-known nations. What happened in Cameroon recently, however, is not only unique, but brings to bear the potential in pairing American policymakers and pop culture.

For many African nations, it is difficult to become a priority for the U.S. For Cameroon, that is particularly apparent. Unlike Libya, Nigeria and Algeria — all oil rich — Cameroon's natural resources are not yet priorities for foreign extractive industries. Unlike Rwanda and Sudan — both genocidal — Cameroon is relatively peaceful and has no recent history of crimes against humanity. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia — both revolutionary rich — Cameroon is not featured in the foreign policy journals. Furthermore, Cameroon is not experiencing a Somalia-like famine or struggling with Zimbabwe-level inflation. So, what about Cameroon is noteworthy?

Ask a mosquito, who brought together a rare mix of congressional bipartisanship, Hollywood celebrity, government officials, international institutions and nonprofit organizations. That

mosquito carries malaria and kills indiscriminately. By the time you finish reading this article, a handful of children already died from its menacing bite. Every 45 seconds another African child dies, bitten at night while lying in bed unprotected.

In the wake of a contentious congressional debt debate, a bipartisan delegation, my office included, joined actor-singer Mandy Moore and a host of organizations — U.N. Foundation, PSI and the Humpty Dumpty Institute — in paving the way for Cameroon's first-ever national campaign to cover its country with over 8 million mosquito bed nets.

Sound ambitious? It is, but worth doing for more than humanitarian reasons. The costs alone compel. Conservative estimates say the economic impact of malaria on the continent is \$12 billion annually, though the costs are likely greater due to data inaccuracy. The real costs include the price of health care, missed working and class days, decreased productivity due to brain damage, and loss of investment and tourism. In some countries, the disease accounts for as much as 40 percent of public health expenditure.

For Cameroon, with half the population in poverty, these costs are untenable. Prevention is the

only viable option. A long-lasting insecticide-treated bed net, which protects two people and kills mosquitoes on contact (and can be purchased for \$10 through the Nothing But Nets campaign) may save the nation.

There are obstacles. Cameroon's government could afford to pitch in more money to ensure a successful rollout. A couple million dollars, out of GDP of \$22 billion, hardly cuts it. A cleanup of corruption in the 30-year administration of President Biya, which thrives on a patrimonial system, could garner much-needed funds. The nets, secondly, are good for three to five years, and then must be replaced. With climate change, these mosquitoes are not going away soon, so more nets will be needed.

Hope can be found in the benevolence of bipartisanship, a mission-driven celebrity Mandy Moore (whose track record includes Sudan and the Central African Republic) and organizations like PSI, UNF and HDI that are protecting vulnerable and impoverished populations one net at a time.

As House Appropriations Committee member, I consistently advocate for huge plus-ups in State and Foreign Operations funding for Child Survival and Health Programs and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This year, President Obama's request for the 2012 federal budget was \$1 billion, a plus-up I pushed to \$1.45 billion.

Complement this short-term fix with longer-term poverty alleviation and sustainable development and Cameroon is immunized from the conflict-ridden characteristics of its neighbors and kept off Washington's radar screen — an irony worth fighting for.

Rep. Michael Honda (D-Calif.) represents Silicon Valley and serves on the House budget and appropriations committees.

PHOTOS BY KYLE MOORE.