

Why Our Work Is Important



Imagine for a moment

that you are a farmer living in northern Senegal. You have five children, and your wife is pregnant. You also care for your elderly mother, an elderly aunt, and a brother who was blinded in a farming accident, as well as your brother's wife and three children. You have a plot in the village fields, where you grow corn, onions, and tomatoes. There is only one well to provide all of the water for your village and five surrounding villages. Your crops sometimes wither in the 115 degree heat. You struggle to feed, clothe, and house your entire family on just a few dollars a day.

Now don't get me wrong: in many ways, life is good. You are part of a close-knit community and a loving extended family. Your children laugh and play with the other children of the village. They are happy; you are happy. You work hard, and your family is getting by. But you want more for your children. You want them to receive a good education, and you want them to get through childhood without contracting malaria, with its risks of brain damage and death.

A new school has just opened in the next village over, and you have enrolled your four oldest children and your brother's two

oldest children there. The school is paid for by the government, but it is your responsibility to pay for their school supplies. You already own a couple of pens, so that will help, but with six children enrolled, you will have to spend more than a week's earnings to get them even basic school supplies. But your family is just scraping by on an extremely tight budget. You have discussed this extensively with your wife, and it seems that there may be no way to find the extra money this year. The kids may have to wait until next year to see if there is enough then for them to buy school supplies and start school.

Well, if you can just keep them healthy... You live in a simple but adequate hut with your wife and children, and you have built two huts next to yours: one for your mother and aunt and one for your brother and his family. Everybody has a couple of outfits, and you are able to provide everyone with enough food to fill their bellies. But you are worried about malaria. One of your neighbor's children died of malaria just a week ago, and you fear for your family. When his daughter fell ill, your neighbor went to seek treatment, but your village is set back many miles from the road. The village chief allowed your neigh-

bor to use his horse and cart to get to the road, but the journey took hours, and even when he reached the main road, it took your neighbor another hour to flag down a vehicle to get him to the nearest pharmacy. By the time your neighbor returned to the village, his daughter had an extremely high fever. He gave her the treatment, but it was too late.

You have heard that sleeping under the protection of a mosquito net is the most effective way to prevent malaria, but you know that the nets are very expensive. As a healthy grown man, you figure that you'll probably survive malaria if you're able to get treatment, so you don't need a net for yourself. And your brother and his wife will probably be OK too. But the rest of your family falls into the higher risk categories: children, elderly, pregnant women. You'd like to buy two nets for your pregnant wife and five children to share, one net for your brother's wife and three children, one net for your mother, and one for your aunt. But five nets will cost you several weeks' earnings. Even a single net seems out of reach. It keeps you up at night worrying, but you feel powerless to do anything. You're praying for an unusually successful crop this year. Maybe then...

Kids of Kadiogne supports the education and health of children in northern Senegal. If you are interested in learning more about our work, please visit our web site: www.kidsofkadiogne.org