



# Newsletter

Issue 11, Spring/Summer 2013  
From the Executive Director

Dear Friend,

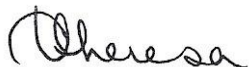
This month, I'm excited to welcome four new board members to Merlin USA: Kavelle Bajaj, Damon Hemmerdinger, Gina Sanchez, and Asha Saxena. I am sure their experience, dedication, and belief in public service will strengthen an already stellar board and open new perspectives on our mission to provide health care to those most in need.

I also want to share with you the extraordinary progress Merlin has made to address the world's most pressing health care issues: Merlin's midwives have dramatically impacted the health of thousands of mothers and infants; our clinicians have immunized hundreds of thousands of children, protecting them from life-threatening disease; and our malaria prevention programs have measurably improved the lives of people living in tropical countries.

But for all our progress, man-made and natural catastrophes are always a hindrance to progress. Men, women, and children still need Merlin's help. We continue to monitor the civil war in Syria and provide care to families who have fled the fighting—over 1.5 million refugees at last count. A coup in the Central African Republic has disrupted the local health care system, and Merlin's services are needed more than ever before. In West Africa the long-term drought has led to crop failure, famine, and a health care crisis in Chad where Merlin has rapidly expanded its clinics and health care centers into the poorest, most isolated, and desperate region of the country.

I've come to realize this is the nature of Merlin's work. While I celebrate our successes, I understand that there are always vulnerable populations who need our help. It is challenging, rewarding, and complex—all at the same time. And the impact Merlin has on the lives of real people, with real needs is what makes it worthwhile.

All the best,



Theresa Pike Rhodes  
Executive Director

## WELCOME TO THE MERLIN USA BOARD!

### **Kavelle Bajaj**

Kavelle Bajaj was born in New Delhi, India and earned a degree in home economics at Delhi University. She founded T-NET, a company providing services in communications and information systems, as well as automatic data processing and telecommunications facilities management.

Starting in her basement, she grew her business to over 3,000 employees. It was sold in 1996 to Wang Laboratories.

### **Damon Hemmerdinger**

Damon Hemmerdinger is Co-President of ATCO, a family of real estate companies. He is a seasoned executive who brings to his work a wide-ranging expertise in construction and development; leasing and financing; community and economic development; and the structuring of multi-party relationships to facilitate transactions.

Committed to public service, Mr. Hemmerdinger has worked in the Connecticut Attorney General's office, and the Clinton White House Chief of Staff's office. He is a member of the Board of Governors of the Real Estate Board of New York and the International Council of Shopping Centers' Open Air Committee. He also sits on the boards of the Queens Library Foundation and the Queens Chamber of Commerce.

He is a graduate of the Yale Law School and Williams College.

### **Gina Sanchez**

Gina Sanchez is the founder and chairwoman of Chantico Global, LLC a company offering a wide range of financial services. She has been the director of equity and asset allocation at Roubini Global Economics, and has also served as managing director of public investments at the California Endowment in

Los Angeles and at the Ford Foundation as direction of public investments.

In the past she has worked as a portfolio manager and strategist for American Century Investment Management in California and in Emerging Markets Research at JP Morgan in New York.

In 2009, Ms. Sanchez received the Institutional Investor's Foundations and Endowments Rising Stars Award. She is a contributor and guest host for CNBC. She holds a bachelor's degree in Economics from Harvard and a master's degree in International Policy Studies from Stanford.

### **Asha Saxena**

Asha Saxena is the President and CEO of Future Technologies, Inc. (FTI), an international data management solutions firm specializing in management and technology consulting around business intelligence and data warehousing. Under her leadership, FTI has worked with over 100 businesses and completed over 500 projects with companies such as JP Morgan Chase, the Federal Reserve Bank, the New York Times, and Movado.

Having started her career in a New York based IT firm she has enjoyed a number of challenging and diverse assignments in the financial services industry. In 2007 Ms. Saxena was invited to be part of the World Economic Forum where FTI was named a Global Growth Company. She has worked successfully with a wide variety of organizations including a number of non-profits, and has received numerous awards for her personal and professional contributions.

Ms. Saxena graduated from Bangalore University as a Computer Science Engineer and attended management programs at MIT and the London Business School.

## 2015 AND BEYOND: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP

In our last newsletter we highlighted Merlin's vision for the future. It included plans to bring life-saving health care to 15 million people; to provide 1.5 million women with access to family planning services; to treat over 2 million children for malnutrition; and save 1.8 million children younger than 5 from malaria related deaths.

While these are just a few of our long-term goals, Merlin recognizes that our successes depend on the measurable impact of our programs. Individual donors, foundations, NGO partners, and governments demand accountability; while our own passion for excellence requires that we constantly evaluate the effectiveness of our services.

In response, we have created an assessment matrix to ensure we meet the highest standards and that the work of Merlin professionals saves the greatest number of lives. Merlin has committed to produce a series of monthly reports with specific numbers on a wide range of health issues, from those treated for tuberculosis to those receiving anti-retroviral therapy for HIV; from infant deliveries attended by a qualified professional, to the number of men and women who have started a modern family planning method. Additionally, Merlin will conduct population surveys, which include a focus on childhood development, and will measure the percentages of children receiving nutritional supplements, those sleeping under insecticide-treated nets, and those who receive age-appropriate immunizations.

Merlin uses a wide variety of data to further our partnerships with existing health services. In our quarterly reports we describe in detail our ability to increase both the scale and quality of our programs. Every bit of data, our surveys, and our reports go to show Merlin's commitment to global health care and the broad impact of our work. Every result counts, and thanks to our efforts countries, partners and donors know that Merlin provides sustainable value while delivering medically effective treatment to those most in need.



### FAST FACTS

-  In Afghanistan 1 in 10 women die in childbirth.
-  130,000 children in Chad are at risk for severe malnutrition.
-  Patient numbers have doubled and tripled in areas of the Central African Republic.
-  10% of Yemen's children do not live past the age of 5.

### ON THE GROUND UPDATES

#### *Afghanistan*

May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013 was the International Day of the Midwife, and in Afghanistan, Merlin midwives are making a difference in a country with the worst maternal mortality rate in the world. It is a place where 1 in 10 women dies in childbirth. Merlin's midwife program continues to depend on the professional dedication of Afghan women like those featured below.

#### *Qutba*

Qutba is a 26-year old midwifery student in training with Merlin. Her dedication is inspiring. Working as well as studying full-time she has delivered over 150 healthy babies. Outside of school hours she vaccinates babies while advising new and expectant mothers.



*(above) Midwives in training at the Faizabad Midwifery Training School in Khaspak, Badakhshan.*

Merlin has given Qutba the tools with which to act in an emergency. Recently, one of her patients, Gul Jan, suffered from eclampsia, which without qualified health care is an often deadly complication during pregnancy. Thanks to Merlin, when Qutba found Gul Jan unconscious in her home, she was able to quickly take control of the situation to save both mother and baby.

### ***Nabila***

At 19 years old, Nabila is the first midwife in her village. She received schooling at the Merlin Community Midwifery School, which trains women and girls to serve as health care workers in rural

areas. Nabila is on-call 24 hours and sees anywhere from 20 to 30 patients a day at the Merlin health center, over 37 road less miles from the nearest hospital.

As she says, “There is no such thing as a normal day in my line of work. Pregnancies don’t always go to plan—babies turn up when they want and often without warning.”

In the course of one week, in addition to a steady stream of regular consults, Nabila faces emergency after emergency. For example, a late night call to a woman in the countryside turned into a crisis. The woman’s condition was critical with bleeding, low blood pressure and anemia. Phoning a colleague at the Merlin office for consultation, Nabila then successfully delivered a baby boy. Her skills were again put to the test trying to stop the post-partum bleeding (post-partum hemorrhage is the leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide), and save the life of the mother. Nabila gained control of the situation with a series of injections, IV solution, and dedicated care.

### ***Leila***

Leila Hassan is a trainer at Merlin’s midwife training school in the Afghan district of Taloqan. She says, “I decided to become a midwife after my mother had a still birth when I was 14. She almost died and was alone in the hospital. That was when I decided I’d like to be a midwife and be there for women in such situations. To decrease maternal mortality we need midwives.” Ms. Hassan reflects Merlin’s passionate commitment to train more midwives, because in Afghanistan, more midwives means more mothers saved.

While NATO forces plan for a pullout in 2014, Merlin remains very much involved in Afghanistan. Over 1 million people have access to our health care and we have done over 1.2 million outpatient consults all while treating close to 20,000 children under the age of five. In addition to its midwifery programs, Merlin has fully immunized nearly 35,000 children, and continues to support 312 health care facilities inside the country.



*(above) Leila Hassan demonstrates normal delivery to students.*

## Chad

Due to the food crisis ravaging the countries of West Africa, in the past months, Merlin has increased its efforts in Chad where nearly 3.6 million people face innumerable hardships as they search for food to feed their families. It is a country where 130,000 children are at risk of severe malnutrition, and where even before the famine, one child in five was likely to die before his or her 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Faced with such extremes it is often hard to know where to begin. Merlin understands how important it is to have the courage to act in the face of crisis. We have consulted extensively with Chad's Ministry of Health to determine how best to contribute to the relief effort.

Consequently, we have turned our attention to the Hadjer Lamis region in western Chad



*(above) A volunteer screens for malnutrition at the Massaguet Health Center in Hadjer Lamis.*

where no international aid has been available. It is an area of extreme poverty, where malnourishment rates are past the World Health Organization's emergency level and people are increasingly vulnerable to measles, meningitis, malaria, and diarrheal diseases.

Merlin is focused on reaching the 50,000 children and 11,500 pregnant women living in the region. Through twelve health

care facilities we support increased access to nutrition and provide free basic primary care with vaccinations and emergency treatment. Additionally, Merlin professionals are training local health care professionals to effectively confront potential outbreaks of diseases like cholera. Our dedicated staff remains committed to the well-being of western Africa and the Hadjer Lamis region.

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## Central African Republic

What do you do when a violent coup takes place in one of the world's poorest countries? How do you respond when widespread violence erupts in a country where 1 in 10 children dies before their first birthday? The Central African Republic (CAR) is often referred to as Africa's forgotten country, but Merlin doesn't forget. Over 200 Merlin staff and health workers remain in the CAR working 14-hour days to treat the wounded and provide basic care to an increasing number of internal refugees and the nearly 2 million people in need of critical health assistance.

In the Batalimo refugee camp, Merlin is the only NGO that remains to provide medical services. Cut off from the outside world—anyone who needs surgery or a caesarean section must travel overland by motorcycle and boat across a river—and with little more than a 75-day supply of drugs, the conditions are desperate. Six Merlin nurses and one Merlin-trained doctor work at Batalimo to save lives. Not too long ago the Congolese nurses were themselves refugees, and have a special insight into the trauma of those living through violent upheaval and the loss of friends and family.

It is no better in other areas of the country. In four prefectures in the CAR's southeast the Lord's Resistance Army has harassed, murdered and pillaged the population for years. It has reached a point where people flee into the bush at night, since it is too dangerous to sleep in their homes. In two of the prefectures health services have completely collapsed.

In response, Merlin continues to support the local health system. In the next year our goal is to reach over 200,000 people in our project areas. Under difficult and dangerous conditions we will continue to provide drugs, medical supplies, and training for health workers. Whenever possible, we will rehabilitate facilities and establish projects to bring emergency obstetrics care and primary health care to those most in need.



(above) Merlin staff training at the Batalimo refugee camp facility.

Though patient numbers have nearly tripled and Merlin clinics have been looted, we continue to establish mobile teams to reach vulnerable populations. Merlin and its staff remain committed to the people the Central African Republic.



(above) Children wait to be treated for malnutrition, Yemen.

## Yemen

Yemen is imploding. Widespread political upheaval makes the headlines, but behind the protests, rallies and tribal conflict people are starving. More than 6.4 million people have no access to health care, and the country's malnutrition rates are among the worlds highest. Every night a million children go hungry and a staggering 10% of the country's children do not live past the age of five. Additionally, 90,000 Somalian refugees live in a camp with little health care and where many are vulnerable to diarrhea, malaria, and dengue fever.

Merlin continues to bring life saving health care to those Yemeni women and children most at risk. This year alone we plan to reach 500,000 people from 18 mobile clinics and from more than 30 other health centers. Merlin is training volunteers in first-aid to ensure good health in isolated communities, but malnutrition is our number one priority. This year Merlin aims to reach 80% of all malnourished children under the age of 5, and cut in half the number of deaths from malnutrition of newborn infants. Additionally, we intend to distribute high-energy food aid directly to 33,000 people, which will benefit over 250,000 desperate men, women and children.

As Merlin's Head of Region for Asia, Gabor Beszterczy, says, "Yemen is incredibly difficult to work in at the present time. The people need us, though. We will not turn our backs on them."

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

### *Solar Power Lights the Way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Recently, Merlin's Global Technology Manager, Mark Hawkins spent a few weeks on a mission to Africa. His experiences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlight the profound impact even the simplest Merlin programs can have on health care. Merlin has worked in the DRC for over 10 years. While Merlin works hard in areas threatened by internal violence, we have also made a sustained effort to support hospitals, and clinics and small outposts that are often deep in the jungle and accessible only on foot.

Hawkins notes that health care is more than doctors, nurses, and medical supplies, it includes the basic infrastructure where patients can recover in peace and where medical professionals can respond to an emergency without worrying that the lights might go out.



As he says, "Injury and illness do not respect the time of day. People need medical assistance 24/7. Imagine a woman going into labor during the small hours of the morning. The neighborhood clinic will not be much use if it's in complete darkness."

Merlin has initiated a program to meet these basic needs. A solar lighting module we installed in the Kasuku II clinic consists of 12 LED lights, 3 solar panels, batteries and control circuits. We paid particular attention to the LED spotlights in the delivery room and Tiba Ramazani, the senior midwife, is confident she will be able to treat an even greater number of patients. Hawkins says that, "Solar-powered lighting is changing the way that Merlin's clinics and health staff work. We now have solar-powered lighting installed in 27 health posts in the Maniema province."

All the components of the lighting system were found in the DRC so if it breaks, it can easily be fixed by local technicians. With the new lighting, doctors can treat patients late into the evening and even operate when there is a sudden emergency.

Merlin is working hard to expand the program, and we have started to implement the sustainable lighting project in Liberia where we plan to have it in nearly 200 clinics across the country. Merlin's solar lighting program is a simple solution to a real world problem and it saves lives.

*(left) midwife Tiba Ramazani stands in a delivery room lit by solar panels, DRC.*

Merlin thanks Volunteer David Curtis for producing the articles and Intern Stuart Agnew for her work to design this newsletter.

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