



Frontlines: My first mission in Africa

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Mission: Uganda

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The first time I heard about MSF was on 26 May 2009, when Dr Shanti Hegde, an experienced MSF volunteer from Karnataka, came to my institute, along with Farhat Mantoo from the human resources office, to give a presentation about MSF's activities. I was very much impressed by MSF's principles, values and medical humanitarian work.



After going through the interview process, I was very happy to be selected by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organisation. Following a Preparation for Departure course (known as the PPD course) in Germany, I was called to a project in Uganda on TB/HIV, which is my particular field of interest. I left India with lots of doubts and some fear in my mind about my first mission in this new country.

New challenges

From day one, I came across so many challenges as a medical doctor



.The first was when I was asked to go on an exploratory mission after a landslide in the eastern part of Uganda, where more than 80 people had lost their lives and many more were injured. My second exploratory mission was exactly two

months later, this time to Haama Island, located between Uganda and Kenya in the world's largest sweetwater lake, Lake Victoria. I went there along with my best friend Habtamu, who was the mission's logistical coordinator (or LogCo). A suspected meningitis outbreak had been reported there, and we went to confirm the outbreak and treat the cause. This was a thrilling experience as we travelled in a small boat for seven hours, and stayed on the island for two days

Kitgum project

Kitgum is a small district located in the north of Uganda, close to southern Sudan, without much health infrastructure. MSF began by supporting the TB/HIV programme in seven health centres, with a plan to expand to the entire district. MSF was also running a home-based

multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) programme throughout the district, as well as a basic health clinic in Madi Opei health centre.



I learnt lots of things from the project, including cross-cultural behaviour, different health programmes, and how different MSF staff work. Having worked in the Ministry of Health system in India, human resource management was not so difficult for me, but it was still very interesting to work with local staff of different categories. I really enjoyed working with Ugandan people, who were very polite, humble and friendly by nature. I never faced any major problems working with them.

Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis

I was responsible for the TB programme, but because of the project's needs, I also involved myself in the MDR-TB project, which was a learning experience for me. This was the first time in the world that home-based care had been given to MDR-TB patients. Previously I had read about MDR-TB drugs, but now that I had the opportunity to use them, I learnt lots of new things in terms of the clinical management of

side effects. I am thankful to MSF for providing me with the chance to work in such a mission.

Health education

Whenever I went to the field, I attended the health education sessions in the community. I used to get lots of interesting questions from the people – the interest shown by them was really excellent.

The pearl of Africa

Team dynamics were very interesting. Because the team was constantly changing, particularly in the later part of the mission, it was really good. We used to enjoy ourselves at weekends by cooking, though during my project period I actually lost weight because of the type of food we ate.

Uganda is known as the 'pearl of Africa'. When, during my second period of holiday leave, I visited the national park of Murchison Falls, I realised that yes, it really is the pearl of Africa, with its huge natural resources and variety of animals.

Finally let me say that if you want to help others and see what conditions on the ground are really like, you should take a break from your routine work, and involve yourself in humanitarian activities. Doing this gives you the chance to really understand what is going on in the surrounding world.

MSF is urgently looking for doctors with experience in TB and HIV. If you are interested please apply online on our website : www.msfindia.in and for any other general enquiry please write to : msfh-india-hrm@field.amsterdam.msf.org