

Central African Republic (CAR): Lifesaving Clean Water for a Forgotten Town

In the remote town of Sikkikede, CAR, located in a rebel-controlled area near the border with Chad, a local health worker was in despair. Over the course of a single week, 80 children under age five had died from waterborne diseases. Malaria, diarrheal diseases, skin infections: illnesses caused by unsafe, stagnant waters were taking a brutal toll on the town's children. The health worker sent out an SOS.

“The call from Sikkikede came as a surprise,” says Patrick Laurent, UNICEF's Water and Sanitation Coordinator in CAR. “This town is so remote that the situation of its population has gone mostly unnoticed for the last 15 years.”

UNICEF immediately mobilized, delivering water purification tablets for 800 families, tools to dig a street drainage system to improve sanitation, 9,600 packets of oral rehydration salts to combat diarrheal dehydration, and 5,600 insecticide-treated mosquito nets—two for each of the town's 2,800 households. UNICEF's partner the World Health Organization provided vital medical kits and anti-malaria drugs.

Abandoned by the government and caught in an area of near-perpetual conflict, Sikkikede has sunk into deep poverty. During the rainy season from June to November, roads are flooded and impassable, leaving the town completely isolated and accessible only by helicopter. The town's only health clinic has no supplies save an iron bed. One teacher tries valiantly to serve five primary schools. And the town has just two functioning water pumps.

“The quality of water is extremely poor, sanitation facilities are almost nonexistent,” says Laurent. “Under these conditions, the high mortality rate is unfortunately not surprising.”

The emergency supplies from UNICEF will go a long way toward keeping children alive in Sikkikede. And UNICEF and its partners plan to drill new wells in the town to help keep children there disease-free. This town—once forgotten—will get the attention it needs.