

# SAVING CHILDREN'S LIVES IN PERNAMBUCO STATE – BRAZIL

PREPARED FOR TUFTON OCEANIC, JANUARY 2011



## REPORT: THE 1<sup>ST</sup> SIX MONTHS (MAY-OCTOBER 2010)

This project will directly reach 15,000 children under the age of five with improved holistic health, protection and education services, with the goal of lowering child mortality by two thirds in 19 municipalities of Pernambuco State in north eastern Brazil over three years.



### BACKGROUND

Communities in the semi-arid rural area of Pernambuco state in the north east of Brazil are the most disadvantaged in the country. The land is prone to drought and communities are often cut off from public services, including basic healthcare facilities and education. Nearly two thirds of the inhabitants are either of African descent or indigenous population. The mortality rate for children of these groups is twice as high as the national average. In the 19 municipalities where this project is being carried out, children are dying from preventable conditions largely due to the lack of access to health services and low levels of education amongst parents. Of the 15,000 children under the age of five targeted in this project, we will ensure we're targeting children in hard to reach areas and from indigenous and Quilombola communities.



Map showing target municipalities in Pernambuco

### PROJECT SIX MONTH MILESTONES

Save the Children, in collaboration with our local partners and communities, made some great progress over the six months from May – October, in bringing about changes for children. Some of our highlights include:

**Launch Day.** Save the Children launched our “Saving Lives in Pernambuco State” project in Petrolina at a meeting attended by 264 key “stakeholders” on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The aims and scope of the programme were discussed with local health, education and social service professionals, other charity organisation leaders and child rights councils. Attendees were from 18 of the 19 participating municipalities and there was much discussion on many of the important issues regarding children’s needs and how we can work to improve the childhood of the under fives across Pernambuco. Participants stressed the need for improved service coordination to ensure good, comprehensive early childhood care. The importance of training parents, educators and professionals was also discussed in depth.

Together with our partners, we conducted a **health and nutrition assessment** with 430 families and 815 children. The survey recorded the health history of children and their current health and nutrition status, as well as helping us to get a clearer picture of the socioeconomic circumstances of each family. The initial results revealed the existence of many nutritional deficiencies, including anaemia, and the occurrence of many health problems directly relating to inadequate diets and easily preventable, recurring infections. Results will be available shortly. This report will serve as a foundation for monitoring children’s eating habits and health.



**We delivered 13 training sessions, attended by a total of 242 women and 12 men**, all with children under the age five. Participants were provided with both medical and practical information on newborn and infant care, including the importance of breastfeeding, the weaning process and introducing complementary foods into a baby's diet. Mothers were also informed on how best to identify and promote healthy eating habits among their children to improve their overall nutritional meanwhile reinforcing the importance of a balanced diet for the whole family. Sessions involved teaching women how to use locally available, cheap sources of food to keep their children healthy. For example, nutritious but cheap cakes were baked using banana skins and fizzy drinks were made from fresh fruit juices and sparkling water. The participants told us that they had learned a lot from the sessions and had also formed a tight social group which they greatly valued.



Mothers in Petrolina attended a training session on nutrition and child care to improve newborn and infant care practices

As part of our effort to improve health services for children, **we established two health focal groups composed of 60 nurses, community health workers, psychologists, educators and social workers** from the 19 municipalities. These professionals will receive training in the following areas: psycho-social aspects of child development, child protection, early childhood education, and health and nutrition in early childhood. Following each of the training workshops participants came away with an increased understanding of children's development and health needs. One participant said, "In my professional work as a nurse I have begun to interact more with the children I care for, treating them more tenderly, responding to their initiatives and communicating better with them, both with and without words." In the future, these professionals will act as facilitators with an additional group of 20 professionals, to communicate the need for improved health services for children and their families in their home municipalities. This will reach a further 382 health and social professionals improve the way they work with children and their families.

**We delivered training courses for 130 teachers and school leaders** at four schools. Participants were given an opportunity to improve on their skills and knowledge in early childhood education and their interaction with children in both a school and family setting. A total of 1,076 children under five will benefit from this training through improved teaching and support. **We also ran training sessions for 512 health and education professionals entitled, "I Too Am A Person"**. This course is designed to improve interaction between adults and children by ensuring parents and professionals alike understand children's emotional, cognitive and social development and how they can positively support this development. A second training was delivered for teachers to determine how best to incorporate children's values and culture into early childhood education. According to an indigenous teacher, "To be a child of the Truká people is to respect the elderly, participate in its activities, its religion, know how to help parents in the day-to-day activities and to play." Children's education in indigenous communities is greatly influenced by local culture and social practices that form and affirm ethnic identity.

There is still much work to be done, but the first six months has been incredibly positive, with a high degree of participation by local communities and high levels of cooperation with local health and education staff.

We look forward to continuing to work with children and families in Pernambuco and seeing more and more children thrive in healthy and supportive environments.



**THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR LIFE CHANGING SUPPORT.**