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*Globally Relevant,
Globally Accessible AIDS
Vaccine*

<http://www.GAIAVaccine.org>

Why and Why Not

Why is Providence unlike Bamako? There are no sudden rushes of rain, nor the verdant splendor that comes afterwards nor red earth to contrast with the green nor the joy of being that is everywhere. **That beauty is Mali.** And that *joy of being* that is everywhere in Bamako is uniquely Malian. That joy of being is abundant despite the lack of food, and clothing, education and certitude of health. Despite those deficits, in Mali, there is abundant joy to share.

But **joy does not feed a child, nor is it enough to save a life.** Perhaps that joy is one way of making it possible for people to accept the great disparities that are so obvious to those of us who come from outside. **Here in Providence, we can see but do not accept** the great distance between health care systems and human welfare that we so easily transcend with planes and trains and bushels of dollar bills. This is distance that dislocates the mind. This is distance that is built not out of asphalt but of willingness to forget.

And so, in answer to that question - **what can we do**, faced with the great disparities in care that exist between our own experience and Africa? To quote Bill Clinton, speaking on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of AIDS this past spring, "We must do what we can".

This is what we, as GAIA Vaccine Foundation, have done – we took action—we set up a pilot program, we showed that HIV care can be improved, we raised expectations, we asked not **why**, but **why not**.

Indeed. We are setting up new center for HIV care in Sikoro, Mali. We are getting men and women in Mali on treatment. We are testing their partners for HIV. We are setting up the electronic medical records that are needed to track them. We are getting HIV medication delivered to the clinic for them to take. We are arranging to have the patients' lab results wired to us from the clinical lab

across town - the data will travel up to the satellites that are orbiting Africa, and then pass down through the ether to that village of mud and cement blocks and open sewers that is Sikoro. We are partnering with the community to provide peer education. We are teaching the village elders about HIV so that they will pass the information along to the younger ones who will listen. We will organize a festival of music when this work is done. We will sing about HIV and dance about HIV and learn new words in Bambara like Yellé (Light) and Héré (Hope). We will make change. We will continue to ask **Why**. We will ask **Why Not**.

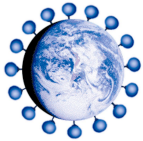
Why sit still when there is so much to do? *Why not* give each child, each woman, each man a chance to live a full life, and make it possible to choose health – and to stop AIDS in Africa. That is why we go to Bamako and to Sikoro, where we are establishing the Hope Center Clinic, to live amongst the donkeys and the furtive dogs, amongst the joyful children and the beauty that is Mali. That is what we can do – and we will continue to ask how else we can change the world while having two feet firmly planted on that red earth. We know we can do this. **We can make it so.**

What we do:

- **Educate** about HIV/AIDS.
- **Prevent** HIV Where We Can.
- Improve **Access** to HIV care.
- Support the development of a Globally Relevant, Globally Accessible (not for profit) HIV **Vaccine**.

Hope Center Baby- All photos by S. Denice





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Stopping AIDS Chez Rosalie

AIDS affects one in every 30 Malian women who are giving birth – and who can pass the virus along to their babies if their infection is not detected. Prevention is simple and almost 100% effective. So - while waiting for our vaccine to be developed – a long slow process that may take many more years, we wondered *why not* stop AIDS right now, if we can?

And so, in fact, last year we said *why not* stop AIDS in a tiny clinic in the village of Sikoro, outside of Bamako, even though it had never been done before. There were no mother-to child-transmission-prevention (MTCP) programs in any of the villages in Mali. But we knew that there were women who had HIV in that village who would want to get tested and would,

if tested, would find it difficult to travel to the "center of reference" several miles away to deliver. We asked to help, our help was accepted, and so we set up an MTCP program, **Chez Rosalie**.

Here are the results of our work – 1,440 pregnant women in the village were evaluated for HIV infection at Chez Rosalie in the last year. 99% accepted the test so - - more than 1,425 women were tested. 53 of these women were found to be HIV seropositive (3.7%). Of these 53, 19 women had delivered in the last 12 months - and 18 were provided Nevirapine. The babies are healthy, happy and the moms are now being enrolled in continuity of care at the Hope Center Clinic, a GAIA Project in Sikoro.

Catching Babies Chez Rosalie

GAIA volunteer **Victoria Albina** was catching babies at Chez Rosalie this summer. She helped the midwives deliver in a room that is as old as the gesture itself - six bright new beings in just one day at times – over 100 per month! More volunteers are wanted!



Shape up Rhode Island

Shape Up RI Downtown River Walkathon - September 16, 2006 - Sponsored by Davol Fitness & Spa – Sign up for a project that supports GAIA in Mali – form a walk team and fundraise and walk together! <http://shapeupri.kintera.org/>

Save the Date – Dec 1, 2006

December 1st is **World AIDS Day** – a day for reflection, information, and organization! Watch for news about Habib Koite's second benefit for GAIA! Check the GAIA Vaccine Foundation website for more information.

Helping Hope - Peer Ed in Mali

GAIA volunteers **Maddie DiLorenzo** and **Bay Hudner** are teaming up with Ramatoullaye (a PLWHA) to track down and destroy ignorance about HIV. Armed with T shirts and a simple message, they started their work in July. Five fingers, five essential ideas: Treatment is Hope (Thumb), Knowing is Power (Index), Transmission can be Stopped (Third), Families (Ring finger) and Communities (hand) can fight AIDS together. This message went out to elders, women's groups, men's groups, and to youth. Only 12 % of girls in Mali know how HIV is transmitted. Maddie's and Bay's Hêre Bolo (hand of hope) will change that.



Contact GAIA in Providence-

To support our programs and find out how to become a GAIA Volunteer, write Dr. Gandhi Drak, Director@GAIAVaccine.org Or call us at 401.453.2068 Or visit <http://www.GAIAVaccine.org>