

SMALLPOX ERADICATION CAMPAIGN

In January 1970, International Review published an article on three immunization campaigns conducted in Nigeria in 1969 by the ICRC in conjunction with other aid organizations. The campaigns were undertaken to combat measles, smallpox and, at a later stage, tuberculosis. The problems had been previously studied by Dr. Nicole Grasset of the Institut Pasteur, who went herself to supervise the anti-TB campaign.

Dr. Grasset, who is currently taking part in the World Health smallpox eradication programme, has described, in an article in the August-September 1976 issue of World Health, the kind of work she is doing. We give below extracts from her answers to some of the questions she was asked concerning the vaccination campaign in India, which she considers to be of special significance.

... In 1969 during the war in Nigeria, at the request of the International Red Cross, I organized a Smallpox/Measles/BCG immunization campaign in certain regions of the country with the assistance of UNICEF and other agencies. For this, I contacted a number of WHO experts who gave me valuable advice. One of these was Dr D. A. Henderson, Chief of Smallpox Eradication, and it was he who asked me in 1970 to join the Smallpox Programme in Asia.

I had always wanted to work in developing countries, as the needs are much greater than in Europe—the work more challenging—and I had always admired Pasteur's ideal, that the results of research work should be applied throughout the world for the benefit of mankind. Also Dr Henderson easily convinced me by his faith, and by a number of concrete facts, that smallpox could be globally eradicated. Faith is as contagious as any infectious disease and is perhaps the most important factor for any endeavour.

During my first five years in Asia I thought the elimination of smallpox—a terrible disease and the first to be eradicated since the beginning of

mankind—would, in itself, be a wonderful satisfaction. Now, I am in awe of the *manner* in which it was achieved. When, in the past, have hundreds of men and women from 34 nations come to work in one country—for example India—for a common goal? When have people of different races and religions united as a dedicated team, together with a hundred thousand local workers of different socio-economic groups and professions, for the common good? The eradication of smallpox is being acclaimed as an achievement in health, but I feel it should be further publicized as an achievement of humanity to serve as an example to all people of how they might unite in other peaceful endeavours. . .

. . . What we have left behind, I feel, is a way of tackling a problem, not just a disease. The basic element of success in any field is to get good people—the right people. Good people equate with a good programme, and funds will then always be made available to assist that programme. A vacant post is better than having it filled with the wrong person. Our workers, who will now be involved in other programmes, have understood that the “ideal” solution is worthless if it cannot be implemented. They will remember that our daily problems were constantly analysed, that priorities were always established, and that they were tackled, above all, with a practical approach. Our way of thinking was “What is going wrong?” “Why?” “What must be done?” and especially, once the solution was found, “*How* shall we implement the new plan of action?” and then “How shall we assess its success?” We have also left behind the understanding of how true surveillance is carried out. We have demonstrated that the meticulous training of staff, especially at the grass-roots, is essential: explaining to all why and how they must work, periodically discussing and analysing their progress of work. We have left behind us the notion that efficiency in every aspect is more important than hypotheses or long reports, that workers at all levels must spend more time working in the villages than in the offices, that effective supervision from the highest to the lowest level is critical for getting the job done. . .