

MARCH 13, 2006

People



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SHERYL CROW'S ORDEAL

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Inside People



"Malawians are the most welcoming people I've met," says Green, learning to bear water.

This week PEOPLE goes to the African nation of Malawi, one of the poorest countries on earth, for a special report on the Millennium Villages project. Under the direction of antipoverty crusader Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, a United Nations adviser, it has a simple but staggeringly ambitious goal: to wipe out poverty in a world where almost half the population exists on \$2 or less a day and millions die each year from malnutrition and diseases that, in richer countries, are easily cured. Sachs—who has enlisted such celebrities as Bono and Angelina Jolie in his cause—targets the most impoverished towns and villages, chosen on factors such as location and agricultural needs, and provides the people there with the materials and expertise to build healthier, more prosperous lives. One such community is Gwengwere, Malawi, where correspondent Mary Green spent three days

on the ground watching a new Millennium Village take root and following the story of Gift Msunzi, a 3-year-old boy with malaria, and his family as they raced to save his life. "This family's ordeal was heartbreaking," says Green. "I saw firsthand what happens when people, especially children, don't have basic needs, like food, water and medicine."

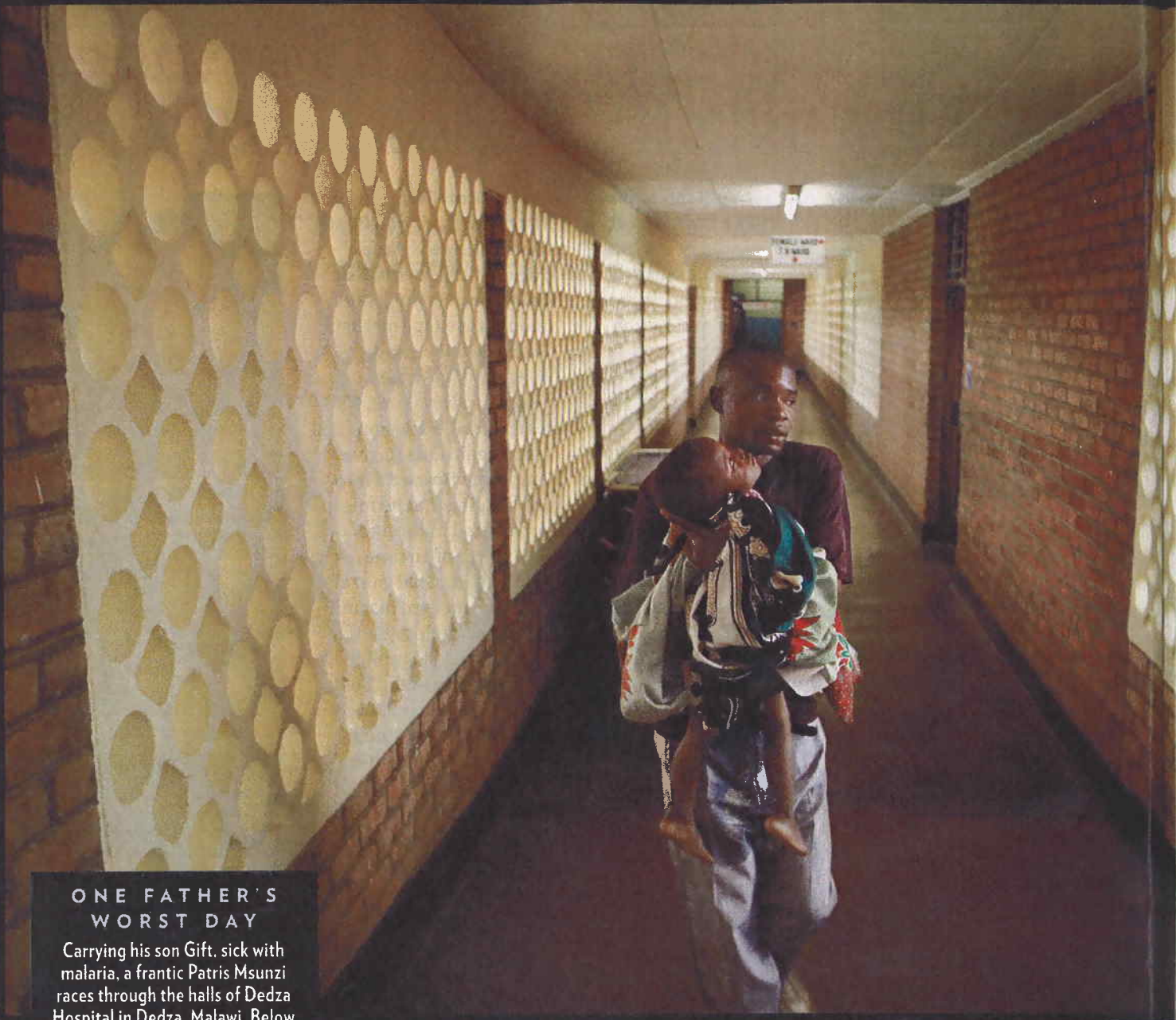
How will life in Malawi change? Later this year PEOPLE plans to return, to see whether high hopes pay off in tangible results. For more on Malawi, including Green's online reporter's notebook and a photographic portfolio, log on to www.people.com/malawi.

LARRY HACKETT, MANAGING EDITOR

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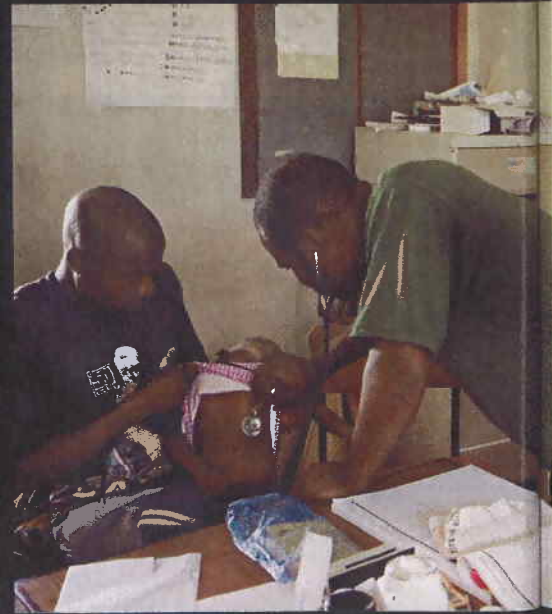
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RON HAVIV/VEI



ONE FATHER'S WORST DAY

Carrying his son Gift, sick with malaria, a frantic Patris Msunzi races through the halls of Dedza Hospital in Dedza, Malawi. Below left, Gift, in convulsions, lies with a depressor to keep him from biting his tongue; right, he's examined at a clinic near home.



BRINGING HOPE TO AFRICA

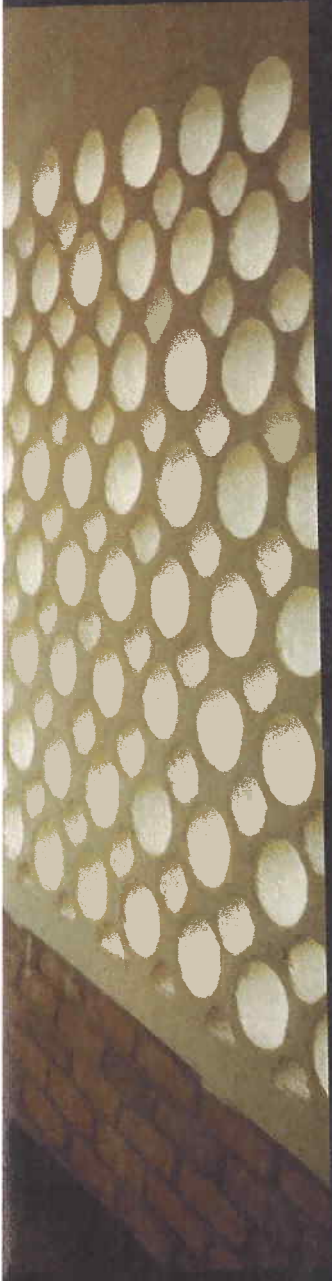
A FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

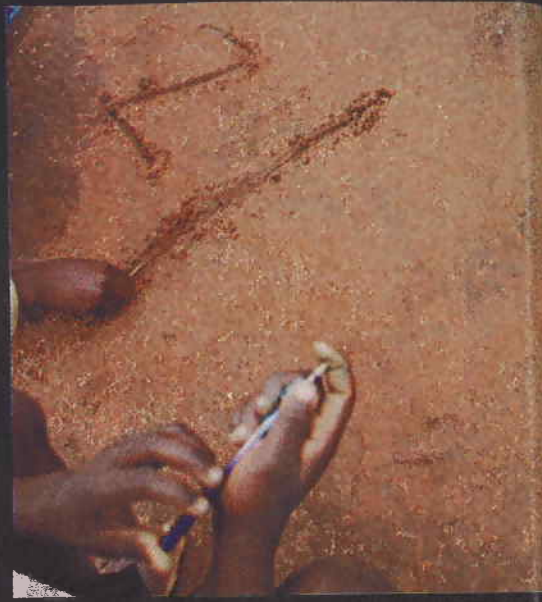
A father races to save his son as a new international effort seeks to help the desperately poor people of Malawi

One day in January, 3-year-old Gift Msunzi rose with the dawn, just as he always did. But on this Sunday morning life was just a bit sweeter. The flulike aches and fever that had troubled him the past two days had subsided, and now Gift was his exuberant self again. He raced to his best pal James's house, and the boys played soccer. Here in Gwengwere, a village in Malawi, they didn't have a regulation ball—or any ball for that matter. So Gift and James made do with a piece of refuse, which they kicked through a maze of muddy puddles left from the previous night's rain.

Photographs by **RON HAVIV**

M A L A W I Villagers commonly walk miles for water; even then, it's often unsanitary.





Then, at noon, Gift's mother, Esther, called him in for the day's first meal—a local dish called *sima*, made of cornmeal and water. Gift sat on the dirt floor of the home he shared with his parents and two brothers—a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. hut, with a thatched roof and not a stick of furniture. And that was when he started feeling sick again. "Pick me up, Mommy," he asked. Setting down Patrick, her 4-month-old, Esther took Gift in her arms. He was feverish. The aches had returned and his jaw grew so tense it locked into place. Frantic, Esther called for her husband, Patris, 28, who was working in the cornfields that provide the family's food and income, which averages less than \$100 a year. Carrying Gift on his back, Patris ran to the health clinic two miles away. There the lone staffer, not a doctor but a medical assistant, made an immediate and grim diagnosis: acute malaria, which in combination with the severe anemia Gift was suffering from can lead to organ failure, coma or even death.

Entering its seventh year of famine, Gwengwere, the home of 5,000 people in central Malawi, has been plagued by years of almost unimaginable depriva-

tion. But the people of Gwengwere have some reason for hope: It is one of dozens of "Millennium Villages" throughout Africa, at the center of a bold experiment conceived by economist and global antipoverty crusader Jeffrey Sachs and supported by celebrities like Angelina Jolie to give the world's poorest people the tools—such as access to medicine and clean drinking water—to fend for themselves (see box). Just weeks earlier, with a celebration attended by hundreds of villagers, seeds and fertilizer for every family had arrived. But the fruits of these labors are months if not years away, and Gift didn't have that long.

Patris had to get his son to the hospital instantly, but the nearest one was 19 miles away, and there was only one ambulance in the entire 100-sq.-mile district. Patris managed to hitch a ride with a group of U.N. aid workers—a stroke of fortune that, most anywhere in the developed world, would have sent Gift well on the way to recovery. But here the boy still faced overwhelming odds. The most successful cure for malaria is ACTs, short for Artemisinin Combination Therapies. The good news is that this





**LEARNING
AGAINST
ALL ODDS**

Scenes from a school
in Gwengwere, Gift's village:
Kids go to class in crumbling
buildings and do math
in the sand; in some grades
there are as few as 10
tattered textbooks for 150
students; their "blackboard"
—on a chipping wall.



