

Côte d'Ivoire: Supporting Children in Crisis

As a community caregiver for PEPFAR-supported IdeAfrique in Côte d'Ivoire, Dacha Bah had been working for three years to build a safe, healthy world for orphans and vulnerable children when one day everything changed.

On March 28, 2011, armed men attacked her suburb of Duékoué in western Côte d'Ivoire, where she supported 45 children affected by HIV. Ethnic and political clashes in the area left hundreds dead and sent tens of thousands fleeing, their homes looted and burned. "We all fled into the bush. We had to spend a couple of weeks living in the forest," Dacha says. "We slept on the ground; we had nothing to eat except cassava roots and papaya – things we could find in the forest.

"I was with my family, another community caregiver, and several of the children we look after. The children were distressed. We tried to raise their morale, to help them understand that the war would end and that it is possible to survive a war."

For weeks Dacha lived under plastic sheeting in an overcrowded camp for displaced people at the Duékoué Catholic Mission, along with more than 100 orphans and vulnerable children from her "home visits" at the camp, delivering water food, listening to the concerns and fears of children and their families, referring them for medical care, and offering counsel and cheer as she was able.



Photo caption: Community caregiver Dacha Bah, left, sits next to a 13-year-old whose foot was amputated after she was shot during fighting. Dacha regularly visited the family at the Catholic Mission in Duékoué during Côte d'Ivoire's recent civil war.

While the guns have stopped firing and many families have returned home, displacement, disruption, and trauma have heightened vulnerabilities and weakened family and community resources. Save the Children partners and community caregivers continue to work in camps as well as their regular sites to provide a wide range of health, nutrition, child-protection, and psychosocial care for HIV-affected children and families. Dacha says the project is keeping her busy. "Recently Save the Children trained us to recognize malnutrition and to carry out HIV awareness-raising sessions," she says. "I've also started running life skills sessions with girls in the camp. I'm thankful for these sessions for the girls."

IdeAfrique is a local partner of Save the Children which receives funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).