

# ROBBIE AND ROSEMARY: TWO DECADES OF CARING IN KENYA

Almost twenty years of AMREF's history concludes with the retirement of that inseparable pair, Robbie and Rosemary. To anyone who has visited the Nairobi Headquarters Winifred Robinson and Rosemary Sandercock are the Mobile Unit. Since 1966 they have been identified with AMREF's work in Maasailand and reckon to have averaged 12,000 kilometres each year taking health care into the outlying bush. The evolution and development of the Unit has been their joint achievement. To date they have given 543,819 vaccinations, treated thousands of people and referred many others to health facilities.



*Robbie, left, and Rosemary at Luuq Hospital, Somalia, with Sarameki Mbelwa, the Matron.*

The running of the Unit has been narrowed down to such a fine point that it almost runs itself. The knowledge accrued during these years has enabled Robbie and Rosemary to teach government mobile teams in many places and they have been able to pass on their expertise so that the benefit of their work will be carried on into the future. In North-West Uganda in 1982 while it was still severely disrupted they worked with a team of nationals at the request of the government and OXFAM and were able to do a major immunisation campaign in a much shorter time than anyone thought possible — vaccinating, at one point, 30,000 children in just 14 days.

Rosemary Sandercock, a nurse, came as a volunteer to work with AMREF as an odd job girl. It was an apt title as she helped in many small ways with expansion of the Foundation activities. Before this,

having studied social sciences, Rosemary worked in the U.K. as a Child Care Officer. She spent ten years in this strenuous and sometimes heart-breaking job where, she claims, she saw more child neglect and child abuse than she has ever seen during her eighteen years in Kenya. "I have seen a father walk for miles with a sick child. And I have seen the heartbreak of mothers when their children die. They love their children and I am happy to help keep these children alive", she says with strong conviction. In Kenya and Uganda Rosemary has been very involved in caring for the needs of nomadic and semi-nomadic people and helping to ease the suffering caused by droughts and internal conflicts.

Winifred Robinson is an experienced health visitor who came to Kenya in 1966 as a volunteer to work with AMREF in the Health Education section. She

has been concerned with prevention of the six killer diseases that take such a heavy toll of children's lives: tetanus, diphtheria, measles, pertussis and tuberculosis. She has held workshops for government and NGOs in Kenya and Uganda in the maintenance of the "cold chain" and given advice and help on the running of the immunisation programmes to people from Sudan, Somalia, Zaire, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. She hopes the AMREF mobile team she has trained will form the basis of a future control unit, sharing experience with other teams to maintain a high level of immunisation. Additionally, her wish is that mothers will continue to be given the knowledge they require to prevent those unnecessary deaths she has occasionally witnessed, deaths that need never occur, and says "We want to give mothers the knowledge that will protect their

children".

Statistics alone give no idea of what Robbie and Rosemary have really accomplished. It has all been done by quiet, efficient example, motivated by a strong faith and sense of dedication. In June 1983 they were each honoured by Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace with the award of the M.B.E.

All of us who have worked with them and shared their hospitality in the bush wish Robbie and Rosemary a very happy retirement back in England. They have earned a rest many times over and we hope they will keep in touch with us and their numerous friends in East Africa. We hope, too, that they may see their way to writing up their experiences as these would be really beneficial to others wanting to follow in their footsteps.