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# Anti-DDT Policies Are Deadly

*Thompson Ayodele and Adegoke Anthony / 03 Jul 2007*

*This Day* Last year, one of our colleagues, his wife and their two children were diagnosed with malaria. In an instant, their lives were turned upside down, and all other priorities and plans were postponed. The new priority was getting better and simply staying alive.

For countless families in Nigeria and the rest of Africa, this horrible drama is repeated over and over, year after year. Over 300 million Africans get malaria and up to 1 million of our children die from it ñ every year.

Meanwhile, a few weeks ago, in countries that no longer have malaria, environmentalists were celebrating the 100th birthday of Rachel Carson, whose book *Silent Spring* helped launch the environmental activist movement and get the repellent-insecticide DDT banned nearly all over the world. Were she still alive, she would have witnessed the countless family tragedies that this ban helped cause and probably would have been appalled by them.

Malaria once killed thousands of Americans annually, from New Jersey to California, from Florida and Louisiana to Michigan and even Alaska. It sent Jamestown colonists to early graves and, as late as the 1930s, reduced the industrial output of America's southern states by a third.

Malarial mosquitoes ruled over Europe for centuries. They decimated armies from the time of Alexander the Great to World War II.

But during that global war, dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane or DDT was dusted on Allied soldiers and tents to prevent malaria. After the war, it stopped a European typhus epidemic. It then helped eradicate malaria in the US by 1952, and in Europe by 1961. It was also used (often carelessly and in excess) to protect crops against insects.

However, in the midst of these successes, Rachel Carson and the emerging environmental movement concluded that DDT was building up in wildlife, livestock and humans ñ and said it would result in devastating consequences. Instead of conducting objective, scientific studies to see if DDT was actually harmful to humans and animals, they mounted a worldwide campaign that ultimately caused DDT to be removed even from the malaria control arsenal.

For these Americans and Europeans, seeking this ban imposed no costs. Malaria was gone in their countries. When they visit Africa, they stay in Five Star Hotels, away from mosquitoes. They have bug sprays, and medicines to prevent and treat the disease. They rarely visit the hospitals or homes where its victims are suffering and dying, or feel the pain of million of poor people whose cause they claim to champion.

So Africa became a sacrifice zone, where environmental ideologies demand that only politically correct tools like bed nets be used to prevent the disease that is still the biggest single killer of our children. It is a crime against humanity ñ banning DDT and leaving over 300 million African mothers, fathers and children to suffer every year from acute malaria.

Even today, 65 years after it was first used in disease control, no other chemical works as well, for as long or at a lower cost than DDT to malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases. There is no proof that it is harmful to people or animals, when used responsibly in disease control. That is why hundreds of physicians, clergy and human rights advocates have demanded that it be put back into the malaria control arsenal.

Finally, our health officials are listening, the World Health Organisation and USAID are again supporting DDT for household spraying, and millions are benefiting.

South Africa's DDT household-spraying programme cut malaria rates by 80 per cent in 18 months, with no harmful

environmental effects. Mozambique, Zambia, Madagascar and Swaziland slashed their malaria rates by more than 75 per cent within two years. The countries were then able to treat a much smaller number of seriously ill patients with new artemisinin-based drugs, and slashed malaria rates by over 90 per cent in just three years!

Uganda has also been able to reduce the malarial burden from 30 per cent to three per cent in villages where houses were sprayed with Icon. Now it plans to use DDT as well, because it costs less, keeps mosquitoes out of houses and remains effective much longer.

Despite these huge achievements, though, some people in Europe threaten agricultural bans and other sanctions against countries that use DDT to save lives. Aid agencies refuse to supply or support the use of DDT, while they promote bed nets that don't get delivered and await vaccines that are still a decade away. And environmental groups continue to tell lies about DDT and worry more about hypothetical health problems from the chemical, than about the disease and death it can prevent.

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