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Anti-malaria efforts 'need to be trebled'

By Basildon Peta in Mozambique**18 January 2005**

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Anti-malaria efforts 'need to be trebled'

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For many Mozambicans such as Fernando Martias, a Japanese donation last week of 25,000 durable Olyset mosquito nets to fight malaria is too little too late.

When his village was destroyed in the civil war, Mr Martias fled with his family and built his shack on a dump-site in one of Maputo's many slums.

Despite squalid conditions, Mr Martias, 61, remained hopeful. The dump was near a school. But malaria had claimed the lives of his four children before they could attend a lesson. About 125 children die of malaria every day in Mozambique.

Mr Martias buried his family 13 years ago. Today, Things are worse. Sub-Saharan Africa still has the world's highest rates of malaria-related deaths. Mozambique provides perhaps the grimmest stories. "After burying my own children," Mr Martias said, "I have had to bury dozens of others belonging to my friends, relatives and family. I frankly don't know how many. I have lost count."

The Unicef spokesman in Mozambique, Michael Klaus, said the situation is now dire. "We have seen a lot of efforts to combat malaria by the government and non-governmental organisations, including Unicef and its partners, but the impact has been very limited."

With the malaria burden in Africa compounded by the resistance to standard anti-malarial drugs, over the past five years Unicef has distributed 800,000 nets at a highly subsidised price of 30,000 meticaís (86p) each. But efforts need to be trebled, Mr Klaus said. "We have a huge country of 19 million and malaria remains the biggest child killer." Nets need to be aimed at the most vulnerable people: pregnant women and children under five. Even then they will cover only a tiny fraction of the population. Altogether, malaria accounts for 15 per cent to 30 per cent of all mortalities among children under five, between 25,000 and 50,000 deaths a year.

Mozambique has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the disease claims the lives of as many as two million people per year, three-quarters of them children, Unicef says. That adds up to 3,000 African children dying every day.

In pregnant women, the disease often results in severe anaemia, thought to be a factor involved in up to 30 per cent of maternal deaths in the region. Malarial infection during pregnancy leads to a low birth weight of the child, perhaps the most important factor in determining survival.

Malaria costs countries in the African region more than 1 per cent of their GDP or at least \$12bn. And it cost Fernando Martias his family.

INFANT DEATH RATES FROM MALARIA(Number per 100,000 children in 2000)

- *Northern Africa* 47
- *Sub-Saharan Africa* 791
- *Latin America and Caribbean* 1
- *Eastern Asia* 0
- *South-central Asia* 6
- *South-eastern Asia* 2
- *Western Asia* 26
- *Oceania* 2
- *Developed regions* 0

MEASURES AGAINST INFANT MALARIA

- *Prevention* Children in Africa under five who sleep under insecticide-treated bed nets (1999-2003, 31 countries) 2.1 per cent
- *Treatment* Children in Africa under five with fever who are appropriately treated (1998-2003, 30 countries) 38.3 per cent

Source: United Nations Statistics Division - Millennium Indicators

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