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## African Artists Raise Voices Against Malaria

By [LYDIA POLGREEN](#)

**D**AKAR, Senegal - As far as causes go, malaria may well be the least trendy. Luckily, when more than a dozen African musical superstars converged on this coastal capital to strut their stuff against the disease, Africa's most persistent scourge, the organizers thought to invite the singer Corneille.

"Corneille, I love you," the young women screeched as he took the stage on a recent Saturday evening, his pectoral muscles bulging through a white embroidered shirt, Hugo Boss underwear peeking out of his low-slung blue jeans. When he started to sing a ballad, one young woman swooned and had to be carried away by the police. Another screamed and shook her head hysterically; yet another waved a sign that read, "Welcome back to Africa!"

Corneille, a Rwandan who fled the genocide in 1994 and became a pop star in Canada, was the fourth act in Africa Live, a two-day megaconcert billed as an all-African version of Live Aid, the groundbreaking concert held to raise money to fight the deadly famine that gripped Ethiopia in the 1980's.

This time, however, the concert was held by Africans and for Africans, to raise money and awareness to fight one of Africa's often forgotten killers, malaria. Despite being relatively easy to prevent and treat, malaria kills well over a million people a year worldwide - estimates vary - most of them children.

Youssou N'Dour, the Grammy-winning Senegalese singer, recited these statistics, shaking his head in disbelief, in a backstage interview as he waited to perform to a surging crowd of 20,000 in Dakar's main stadium.

"When I learned that malaria kills so many people just because they can't get simple medicine or a net to cover their beds, I said, 'This is not possible, we must do something,' " he recalled, massaging his vocal cords. "It is like a tsunami every day here in Africa, only it happens slowly so no one notices, no one pays attention. So we have to bring the attention ourselves."

A plan to hold a concert with a big lineup of stars from across Africa was already under way, so Mr. N'Dour decided to join that effort by Roll Back Malaria, an organization that aims to cut the burden of malaria in half by 2010. Profits will largely come from the broadcast and videos of the concert, which organizers hope will reach a billion people worldwide.

Mr. N'Dour, who enjoys a sort of demigod status here, even wrote an antimalaria anthem, urging Africans to take precautions against mosquito bites and to clean up standing water that could act as breeding grounds for the insects.

The concert occurred at an auspicious moment in Africa's history, when other nations are turning their attention to this continent's most recalcitrant problems, promising to increase aid to fight poverty. Whether it is the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which aim, among other things, to halve extreme poverty by 2015, or a British report that called for a huge increase in aid to Africa, the continent that long seemed forgotten is finally being remembered.

That may explain why malaria has suddenly become a celebrated cause.

The facts about malaria's devastating effects have been well known for a century. That may be why the disease has received much less attention than AIDS, which has devastated Africa but still infects fewer people. Indeed, Malaria affects twice as many people as AIDS, measles, leprosy and tuberculosis combined, according to Roll Back Malaria, and every day 3,000 children die of the disease. It eats up 40 percent of public health spending, and costs developing countries \$12 billion a year in lost productivity. It hurts Africa, particularly African children, the most: 90 percent of malaria deaths occur in Africa.

Yet many affordable means to fight the disease exist.

"It is the lowest-hanging fruit," said Jeffrey D. Sachs, the economist and antipoverty crusader, who attended the concert. "We are talking about \$5 nets and inexpensive pills to save thousands upon thousands of lives."

Behind the concert is a new approach, Dr. Sachs said, that emphasizes simply giving away nets rather than trying to sell them at a reduced price, which has been the traditional distribution method.

"How can you sell something to someone who has no money?" he said. "It just doesn't make sense."

Onstage the entertainers did not bore their audience with lectures about insecticide-treated nets and antifever pills. They stuck to what they

knew best. Salif Keita, the Malian singer, strutted on the stage, belting his shrill anthems to a spellbound audience. Baaba Maal, on his home turf, pranced barefoot around his kora player, and Angelique Kidjo, the songbird of Benin, serenaded the crowd with a tender rendition of the classic Swahili love song, "Malaika."

Of course there was Corneille, who got perhaps the most rousing response, from a largely female audience. When he left the stage to try to shake hands with the adoring crowd, he nearly set off a riot and had to be carried back onstage.

As he prepared for his final performance, which would end the show, Mr. N'Dour said musicians held a special place in the African imagination, making them the best agents of progress and change.

"We are guardians of Africa's diamond, its shining jewel, our culture," he said. "It has sustained us for so long, and now it can move us forward."

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