

Stealing dreams, Part 3: One village defeats malaria

By DAMASO REYES

JAMBIANI, ZANZIBAR—The road to Jambiani, a small coastal town on one of the two islands that makes up Zanzibar off Tanzania's coast, is long and bumpy. The hour-long drive to the village was dotted with the occasional glimpse of pristine white sand beaches and tall palm trees lining the road, but showed no sign of the paved blacktop most foreigners are used to.

"Welcome to Jambiani! Welcome to Jambiani! Malaria, bye-bye! Malaria, bye-bye!" young schoolgirls, their heads wrapped in traditional white Islamic scarves, sang to a group of weary visitors who were instantly revived by their enthusiastic singing. Older women held signs declaring the success villagers have had in fighting the disease, which perhaps more than any other, even AIDS, has held Tanzania's future hostage.

The young girls had something to be very happy about indeed: the village of Jambiani, population 5, 137, has not had a documented case of malaria since October of 2005.

This is a small miracle for a town that in 1999 had over 3,000 cases; in 1997, more than 50 percent of the population suffered from more than one attack. Given that malaria still runs rampant throughout the mainland of Tanzania, the casual observer can be forgiven for thinking the village is in possession of some kind of magic cure, some potion which renders its inhabitants immune from this ancient scourge.

The answer, of course, is much simpler: insecticide treated mosquito nets, Artemisinin-based combination drugs, and a commitment from the government and international donor community to wipe out malaria. These three things, which together cost little more than \$10 per person per year, have in a few short years freed Jambiani from this disease which kills tens of thousands of children in Tanzania each year.

Of course, education has played a critical role in this village's success. Community leaders were brought together to help clear out potential mosquito breeding sites like standing pools of water; pregnant women were given preventative drugs to cut their risk of infection; mothers with children under five were shown how to use, then given free insecticide-treated bed nets; and children in the community's schools were taught not only how malaria is transmitted, but the signs were that someone has the disease and the importance of seeking medical treatment immediately, especially for children.

"For us money was not the issue, saving people's lives was," said Dr. Abdullah Ali, program manager of the malaria control program in Zanzibar. "We then had to find the money. Thank God we did," he added, noting the difficulty health professionals have in a country where the health budget is roughly \$10 per person per year. The money came because Zanzibar, with its homogenous and small population made up of roughly one million people who are mostly Muslim, was seen as an ideal test bed for policies the mainland has been considering



The women of Jambiani hold up signs declaring their victories over malaria.

(Damaso Reyes photo)

adopting, including free distribution of bed nets and a switch to the more expensive, but highly affective Artemisinin-based drugs.

"Malaria has been a menace to this part of the world for a very long time," said President Amani Karume in an interview at his official residence. But "some of us still believe that it is possible to eradicate malaria completely," he added. This is a view that doesn't seem to be held by many in the international donor community. However, many Tanzanians, seeing the success of communities in Zanzibar in curbing

the epidemic, hold out hope that with enough funding and dedication, malaria, like smallpox before it, can become a thing of the past.

"The African condition has to part and parcel of the improvement of the global human condition," said Ibrahim Gambari, United Nations under-secretary-general for political affairs.

"There should be much more commitment from the developed world. America should lead the way. You have the resources, the people and the technical know how," President Karume said.

Africa needs your help to fight malaria

By DAMASO REYES

Eliminating the threat that malaria poses to Africa's future is a difficult job that will take many years, but with the help of people throughout the developed world this goal is achievable. Education is the first step in understanding both the disease and what role African-Americans can play in combating it. To learn more about what is being done to fight malaria and how you can help, visit these web sites:

THE GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND MALARIA
WWW.THEGLOBALFUND.ORG/EN/

AFRICA FIGHTING MALARIA
WWW.FIGHTINGMALARIA.ORG/

US PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVE ON FIGHTING MALARIA
WWW.FIGHTINGMALARIA.GOV/

THE UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION
WWW.UNFOUNDATION.ORG/

THE UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM PROJECT
WWW.UNMILLENNIUMPROJECT.ORG/

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

TOGOLESE BEAUTY CROWNED MS. WORLD CUP

Jun. 5 (GIN) - With a dazzling 200 watt smile, student Edwige Madze Badakou, 24, came in ahead of 31 other finalists to be crowned Miss World Cup 2006.

Thousands of diehard soccer fans are already in Germany, watching their favorite teams train. The games will be played in 12 stadiums starting June 9 with the World Cup Final July 9.

Ms Badakou's victory comes after a Togolese voodoo priest predicted glory for the Sparrowhawks, Togo's team, widely seen as rank outsiders, in Germany.

Maria Garrido B'aez, 23, of Spain came in second, followed by Ecuador's Katty Lopez Saman, 23.

"The ancestral spirits say that Togo will go far at the World Cup," predicted the priest, Togbui Assiogbo Gnagblondjro III.

MILLIONS IN COMPENSATION OWED FOR STOLEN LANDS

Jun. 5 (GIN) - Descendants of the Khoi-Khoi, South Africa's first inhabitants, have moved a step closer to a multimillion-dollar settlement with the South African government and the return of 210,000 acres taken from them by the white-led regime in the 1920s.

The group, in papers filed in the Cape High Court in 2005, said they wanted 1.5 billion rand compensation for the alluvial diamonds extracted from the rich coastal mine fields since then.

They also wanted one billion rand for damage done to the environment and 10 million rand for their "pain and suffering." One rand is equal to 15 U.S. cents.

Earlier, a constitutional court had upheld their complaint that the state gold mine group Alexkor was mining on their traditional land.

SOMALI LEADERS DEFEAT U.S.-BACKED INSURGENTS

Jun, 5 (GIN) - Somali Islamists on Monday declared victory over a United States-backed warlord alliance in Mogadishu after four months of bloody fighting.

The fighting ended just two days after a massive protest of thousands of angry Somali Muslims filled the streets of Mogadishu, with protestors denouncing the United States and the U.S.-backed warlord alliance fighting Islamic militia.

Chanting anti-U.S. slogans and comparing U.S. President George W. Bush to a Nazi, 5,000 Muslims gathered in southern Mogadishu after Friday prayers and pledged to fight the alliance to the death.

Surrounded by heavily armed Islamist militiamen, the throng cheered as clerics accused Washington of financing a genocide by bankrolling the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism in Somalia.

The United States denies responsibility for the clashes, although it has refused to confirm or deny its support for the ARPCT.

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