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Carlos Odora / 31 May 2007

New Vision Malaria has continued to claim many lives among vulnerable people. Perhaps one of the reasons for this continued grip is the ongoing political interference in the choice of tools to fight the deadly disease. Spraying houses with insecticides is one intervention that is contested. Luckily for many Africans, the US Agency for International Development defied the debates and implemented spraying programmes in a number of African countries, including Uganda where Kabale, Kanungu and Kitgum districts benefited. The result of these spraying programmes has been impressive.

According to Dr. JB Rwakimari, the malaria control programme manager, malaria prevalence rates have gone down from 30% to 3% in Kabale.

Despite this good news, opposition to indoor residual spraying particularly with DDT is contested by various constituencies, who can not substantiate any of their claims about the benefits of this intervention. They would rather lie to the populace that if their houses are sprayed with chemicals, they will become impotent, develop cancer and have children with defects.

It is good to remind ourselves that DDT was internationally used in the 1950s and 1960s during a time of unprecedented population growth and wealth creation. Wherever DDT has been used, death and disease rates have fallen. The use of DDT is a desperate need to halt malaria deaths. Anyone rational would promote the use of DDT.

As a result of misinformation, in Gulu, one of the districts supposed to benefit from the indoor residual spraying programme, they were misled to restrict any spraying programme to Icon only, which is one of the chemicals approved by the WHO. This is risky because insects when exposed to only one chemical over time develop what is known as knockdown resistance. The ultimate benefit of a chemical is lost and the population which is supposed to be protected becomes vulnerable. There must be an allowance for alternative insecticides. It is important that the decision to protect the public be left to health experts who understand the mechanism of protecting life through known conventional methods approved internationally. Indoor residual spraying is one of the most effective interventions for malaria control and must be encouraged in conjunction with other interventions such as the use of insecticide treated nets, Artemisinin Combination Therapy drugs and Intermittent Treatment of malaria in pregnancy. When properly administered, we shall begin to talk of a proper malaria intervention policy.

The writer is a Fellow at Africa Fighting Malaria.

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