

**Helping people save their own lives**  
**Cooperation Against Malaria**  
Ginette Karirekinyana, director general of ACECI

Today is World Malaria Day, and I would like to seize this opportunity to tell you about an innovative project which could have a determining effect on this disease in Africa as well as help populations overcome chronic poverty. The NGO I am in charge of, the [International Cooperation Ethics Advisory Agency](#) (ACECI), based in Canada, works with Burundian community organizations to produce an insect repellent from catnip, an aromatic plant which can easily be grown in Burundi and elsewhere in Africa. This production will have major economic and social spin-offs.

Malaria is like a very bad flu that you get when bitten by a mosquito carrying a parasite. People in sub-Saharan Africa are the ones mostly affected by it. Each year, hundreds of millions of people are sick with malaria, and hundreds of thousands of people die of it. Pregnant women and young children are particularly vulnerable. The parasite attacks red blood cells, therefore people suffering from the disease feel very weak. They run a high fever, and have no appetite, strong headaches, diarrhea and muscle pains. No need to say, malaria is quite unpleasant. If not quickly treated, the patient can die.

When a father or a mother are sick with malaria, they are unable to work or to take care of their children. In some areas of the world, in particular in the Burundian rural areas, mosquitoes carrying the parasite proliferate (more than 60 bites in a typical evening), so people inevitable end up with malaria. And catching the disease once does not immunize you. You can get it several times in your life. In fact, 23 % of the population of Burundi gets it each month. One can easily imagine that, under such conditions, the life of Africans whose houses have no mosquito screen and no air conditioning and who must work in the fields to survive and feed their family can be greatly affected by malaria, which has important economical and social consequences. Malaria is the number one public health issue in many regions of Africa. Most people do not know that insect repellents do exist.

Until now, the international aid to fight malaria has been centred on the distribution of mosquito screens to protect people during the night, since it is the time when people are most vulnerable to mosquito bites. Nevertheless, mosquitoes are present in large numbers right after sunset and even during the day in marshy areas, especially in rural areas of Burundi. **That is why it would be very beneficial to produce locally an affordable and easy-to-use insect repellent to protect people not only at night, but also during the day, while they are working in the fields or even when they are in their houses.**

Production takes place entirely on site and is done by the communities themselves. For the design part of the project initiated by ACECI, we were able to benefit from the help of a chemical engineering professor from École polytechnique de Montréal, Mr. Gregory Patience. He is in charge of the scientific and technical aspects of the project. We asked Canadian businesses to provide us with the processing equipment to make the insect repellent out of catnip. Acquiring this equipment generates most of the costs associated with the project. We have a web site called "[Fight against malaria and sustainable development](#)" to explain the project and encourage people to make donations.

Burundians will establish cooperatives for growing and processing catnip. We bring them technology and seeds. And since catnip is a perennial, they will be self-sufficient for the growing part of the business in no time. We have set up a small processing unit on a trial basis. In a few months, we should be able to extract from catnip the essential oil which is the basic ingredient of the natural insect repellent.

Problems in the Third World often seem impossible to solve. International aid looks like a waste of time. Yet, sustainable change is possible, and we think our project will have profound effects on the economy and on society as a whole. The agricultural and processing cooperatives which will grow and process catnip to produce the insect repellent will create jobs and economic growth. The insect repellent will reduce the incidence of malaria and, consequently, the cost to the health care system. It will improve the productivity of the work force and will be beneficial for the society in many other ways. We are very enthusiastic about our project and filled with hope. We just need a little more help from a larger number of donors.

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I am in Burundi on this World Malaria Day with professor Patience, where we are distributing catnip seeds to community groups and launching the pilot phase of the project. We would be happy to grant interviews to the media. You can reach us at the phone number or e-mail address below.

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