

# GLOBAL VIEWS

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## Defeating malaria in Comoros

Eradicating the once prevalent disease in the African country is one of the 60 cooperative projects with China that have helped bolster ties

Comoros, an African country located in the south-west Indian Ocean, is known as the Islands of the Moon. It is a mysterious country with beautiful natural scenery, where kind and hospitable people have created a profound culture. But malaria was a major public health problem in Comoros, causing huge losses and hindering local economic and social development.

However, the Chinese government, a good friend of Comoros, has provided assistance to improve public health in this country, and combating malaria is one of the 60 cooperation projects that the Chinese government has launched and supported in the country over the past 44 years.

China was the first country to recognize the independence of the Union of the Comoros, as the country is officially called. Since diplomatic ties were established on November 13, 1975, bilateral relations have developed smoothly, with expanding exchanges and increasing cooperation. The malaria project is a good example of this.

In Comoros, malaria was regarded as a demon bringing pain and torment. Fonad Muheji, former vice-president of Comoros, once mentioned that three members in his family suffered from malaria and had to go to hospital each month. Two to four people in every family were found infected with malaria. In 2006, malaria was detected in 108,000 of the 800,000 people in the country. In other words, 142 out of every 1,000 people had malaria.

In hospitals, malaria patients accounted for over 38 percent of outpatients and 60 percent of inpatients. Since 2004, anti-malaria experts from China have analyzed the previous anti-malaria efforts and innovated concepts and methods based on the actual situation in the islands, such as serious infection areas, and the life cycle and transmission characteristics of mosquitoes.

The experts then launched the anti-malaria project with medication combining artemisinin and piperazine, which can flush out

parasites and block the source of infection.

Initially, the Chinese experts encountered many difficulties, namely a lack of cooperation from the authorities and of understanding among residents.

However, they did not flinch.

The experts visited local governments to win their support, and put great effort into training and educating the population about malaria prevention and nationwide medication, using the media as a channel of communication. Posters and banners about malaria prevention can now be seen across the nation. This has helped generate a good atmosphere while motivating all parties.

“We conducted field research day and night, going to each household to publicize the knowledge about malaria prevention,” said Deng Changsheng, one of the Chinese experts. “We also helped to set up special teams composed of local people to visit villages and persuade prestigious elders to support our work. Taking the Island of Moheli as an example, we visited its 27 villages, some of which even the president has perhaps not visited.”

These efforts have won the support of the relevant authorities and people's trust in Comoros. It also dispelled doubts and worries of primary medical institutions. In November 2007, after more than two years of preparation, the anti-malaria project was introduced into the Island of Moheli. The then president of Comoros gave a speech and took the drug as a demonstration to others.

Such efforts were also promoted in the other islands, Anjouan and Grande Comore, in 2012 and 2013, respectively, achieving huge success. The infection of malaria was eliminated in Anjouan and the basic control has been realized in Grande Comore.

According to statistics, the anti-malarial team has sent 200 people to Comoros, trained 236 personnel for malaria prevention and control and nearly 4,000 anti-malaria workers at village-level. By 2014, the country finally achieved zero



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deaths from malaria, with the number of people infected declining 98 percent and the new infection rate 0.28 percent.

“ZERO PALU, JE M'ENGAGE! (ZERO MALARIA, START FROM ME!)” This slogan has appeared frequently in the major news media and is popular among the public now.

The Chinese team is preparing for another round of island wide medication in Grande Comore from September to October. The anti-malaria campaign has lasted 12 years, proof that the Chinese plan finally won acceptance with its excellent results. The anti-malaria project has

grown into a highlight of cooperation between Comoros and China. Reported by the international media, its experience and approach have caught the attention of the world. The fruits of the project were reported by Clinical Infectious Diseases, a leading international journal of infectious diseases.

The nationwide medication of artemisinin combined with piperazine was recorded by the World Health Organization. At present, the experience has been promoted in Sao Tome and Principe, Papua New Guinea, Kenya, Togo and Gambia.

In 2018, in order to help Comoros

clear the remaining malaria sources on Grande Comore and fulfill the commitment of zero malaria to the Comoros government by 2021, the Chinese government again offered help by setting up an expert team for the project. It has been strongly supported by the Comoros government, which equipped it with local technical strength. The government also took the initiative to mobilize the public and enhanced exchanges with local residents. The project was also supported by the World Health Organization, which actively participated in the assessment at all stages during implementation,

together with urging Comoros to establish and maintain an effective anti-malarial system.

Through the joint efforts of China, Comoros and international organizations, it is believed that zero malaria can become a reality in Comoros. And once the country shakes off the stigma of malaria, it can once again showcase its unique charms to the world.

*The author is the Chinese ambassador to Comoros. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

SERIGNE MBAYE THIAM

## China's education experience offers valuable lessons

In September 2018, Senegal's President Macky Sall, stood beside Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to support the adoption of the Beijing Declaration Toward an Even Stronger China-Africa Community with a Shared Future. Senegal was proud to co-chair the FOCAC with China, a country that has, for a number of years, demonstrated its capacity to act with increasing dynamism as a true development partner for the African continent.

Senegal's robust economic growth and stable political system make it a highly attractive destination for Chinese investment, and the country takes a positive view of China's role in Africa and welcomes China's involvement not just in infrastructure financing, but in fields as diverse as tourism, medical cooperation and support for Senegal's manufacturing industry. Senegal was the first West African country to formalize its cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative, signing an agreement during Xi's visit last year.

Education is recognized around the world as a universal good that is essential for the economic and social prosperity of nations. Today, the importance of education is enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals that have been adopted by the global community. SDG4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to provide opportunities

for lifelong learning, lies at the heart of all the other SDGs.

Considerable progress has been made with the support of global actors such as Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and thanks to the knowledge and experience of countries such as China. However, in many regions of the world, particularly in Africa, where expectations are extremely high, progress has been uneven. Of the 63 million primary school-age children that are out of school, more than half live in sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa's population will double by 2050. Unless there is a collective, concerted effort to address it, the number of out-of-school children can be expected to rise. Education is particularly important for countries such as Senegal that face the challenge of providing a growing population of young people with the necessary skills to remain competitive in a globalized economy. Investments in education serve to develop our human capital and contribute to growth in our economies.

GPE was established to improve children's education in the world's poorest countries, by strengthening these countries' education systems. It brings together donor countries, developing countries, international organizations, civil society organizations, teachers, members of the private sector, and foundations. Over 60 percent of GPE funds are used to support education in countries affected by fragility and conflict, the majority of which are in Africa.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

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Senegal has, for many years, been committed to providing quality education to children and youths. The unwavering support that we have received from the GPE over the past 13 years has reinforced our own efforts and helped Senegal achieve real transformational progress. Consequently, the number of pupils who passed the national end-of-primary school exam has increased sharply, rising from 41 percent in 2013 to 52 percent in 2018. The primary completion rate has also increased.

At the international level, Senegal is an active proponent of children's education. In February 2018, President Macky Sall announced Senegal's pledge of two million dollars at the GPE Financing Conference, the first contribution by a developing country.

Chinese students perform extremely well in international assessments such as PISA or in the World University Rankings, and the Chinese government is well aware that investing in education is the key to economic growth and prosperity.

For Africa, the Chinese model is an example from which we should learn as much as possible. Let us look to China's Belt and Road Initiative, as well as to FOCAC and to the many philanthropic foundations in China that are already involved in promoting education at the international level. Indeed, Jack Ma has joined Julia Gillard, former Australian prime minister and chair of the GPE Board of Directors,

on the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity that helps finance increased GPE investments.

The Belt and Road Initiative assigns strategic importance to human capital as part of China's vision for world trade and infrastructure connections. Many countries with a stake in the Belt and Road Initiative are also GPE developing country partners. FOCAC has generated commitments related to education and human capital, and education and development should be included as key elements of FOCAC 2021 to be held in Dakar.

Last year, Senegal was proud to co-organize the GPE Financing Conference with France. In his address, Zhang Xun, China's ambassador to Senegal, noted that China itself is still a developing country and therefore understood the strategic importance of education. At GPE, we welcome the opportunity to continue strengthening our partnership with China so that, together, we may seek to ensure that all the world's children have equal access to quality education.

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