

*DDT to the Rescue*

“What the World Needs Now is DDT” by Tina Rosenberg, in *The New York Times Magazine* (April 11, 2004), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Ever since Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) sparked the environmental movement, DDT has been seen as one of the world’s most terrible toxins. Surely, America, which banned the notorious insecticide in 1972, shouldn’t now encourage its use in poor nations such as Uganda and Kenya? Indeed it should, argues Rosenberg, a *New York Times* editorial writer and author of several books on the developing world.

DDT is the single best weapon against malaria, which is one of the world’s deadliest diseases. In Africa, malaria is the leading killer after AIDS, taking the lives of one in 20 children. Because it’s been eradicated in richer countries, the mosquito-borne disease has become virtually invisible to them. But it kills two million people worldwide every year. An additional 300 to 500 million are afflicted. “During the rainy season in some parts of Africa,” writes Rosenberg, “entire villages of people lie in bed, shivering with fever, too weak to stand or eat. Many spend a good part of the year incapacitated, which cripples African economies.”

When *Silent Spring* alerted Americans to the devastation DDT could wreak on bird and fish populations as it traveled up the food chain, it was being sprayed in huge quantities on crops, mostly cotton. But fighting malarial mosquitoes requires spraying

very small quantities every few months on the interior walls of houses. (The mosquitoes tend to bite at night, when people are mostly indoors.) Such limited use is “unlikely to have major negative environmental impact,” according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). “Most environmental groups don’t object to DDT where it is used appropriately and is necessary to fight malaria,” reports Rosenberg. Yet because of DDT’s hypertoxic image, AID and other major donors have not financed its use anywhere except in one country, Eritrea. It’s therefore “essentially unavailable” to poorer countries.

Something more than fear motivates the aid-givers. The fashion in development assistance today is to bypass the government and work through the private sector at the local level, and house spraying tends to be government sponsored. Donors such as the World Health Organization favor the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets—a “useful” but much less effective tool, says Rosenberg, and one whose modest cost is still too high for rural Africans. Yet she has no doubt about the root problem: “DDT killed bald eagles because of its persistence in the environment. *Silent Spring* is now killing African children because of its persistence in the public mind.”

*Is Dr. Freud In, Again?*

“Freud Returns” by Mark Solms, and “Freud Returns? Like a Bad Dream” by J. Allan Hobson, in *Scientific American* (May 2004), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017-1111.

Once so influential, Sigmund Freud and his metaphorical ideas about the unconscious and repression were history by the 1980s in the eyes of most neuroscientists. But their biological and chemical approaches to the human mind have failed to provide a “big picture,” and now “Freud is back,” reports Solms, a neuropsychologist who is director of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute’s Pfeffer Center for Neuro-Psychoanalysis.

Setting aside past antagonisms, neuroscientists and psychoanalysts are now working together in most of the world’s major cities. Neuroscientists are proving some of Freud’s theories true and gaining glimpses of “the mechanisms behind the mental processes he described,” according to Solms.

In line with Freud’s central idea of the unconscious, research confirms that “a good deal of our mental activity is unconsciously