

Love and Malaria: Mozambique

Few people would think that a sculpture could transmit a powerful message about malaria prevention, but Sonia Sultuane does. She is not your typical person though. As well as working for a law firm as a communication director, she is a celebrated sculptor and poet in Mozambique.

And now she is getting involved in malaria prevention. She was recently photographed with a net treated with insecticide, voluntarily taking part in a project, supported by Malaria Consortium, using well known personalities to create awareness about malaria prevention, principally the importance of using a treated mosquito net.



Sonia Sultuane with one of her sculptures

Malaria is one of the major health challenges in Sub Sahara Africa, where most of the world's 300 million cases and one million deaths annually occur. It is Mozambique's main killer disease. Sultuane feels artists like herself have a major role to play in the fight against this preventable killer disease. She would like to also use her art –poetry and even sculptures to transmit messages about it.

Sculptures?

"Yes, sculptures go against the usual things," says the vibrant 37-year-old mother of an adult son. "Nobody thinks a sculpture can be so intense and pass on so much information."

Continuing her argument, Sultuane cites her most recent piece of plastic artwork called "Walking Words" which is a life-size statue "walking", made of iron and covered with recycled paper cut into letters. *"I don't want words to stay still, I want them to walk. People can then access the meaning."* The meanings are many, she explains, *"It talks about "religion, the spirit, the heart, the body..... it's a beautiful piece; and I am not saying that because I did it!"* It was exhibited in the National Museum last year.

Although Sultuane has never suffered from malaria herself, she almost lost her brother, who was 19 years at the time, to the disease. That memory haunts her. She was looking after him at the time in her home. *"I just found him shivering on the floor. I thought he was going to die. It was one of the most traumatic times in my life."*

What shocked her most was the fact that they had let his illness get to that advanced stage, delaying the critical prompt treatment for him, says Sultuane. *"We thought it was flu, as he had a cough and cold. And we live in the city with access to information and a hospital nearby. It must be so much easier for people in rural areas to let it get to that point..."* Over half of the country's 20 million people do not have access to quality health service. A study in Mozambique showed that 51.5% of children under five have confirmed malaria parasites and from this number 2.6 are from Maputo city and 5.2 from Maputo. It is not known how many children die before they reach hospital.

Sultuane's brother spent one week in intensive care being treated for severe malaria. *"I don't ever want to live through that experience again. It was really scary."*

So far, Sultuane's poems and sculptures have broadly been about, *"feelings and love, but why not about malaria?"* She becomes animated at the idea. *"A sculpture could work great for malaria awareness. It could be a powerful piece of art, which makes us think in different ways."*

She already starts to explain the type of sculpture she could make. *"Imagine a sculpture of mosquitoes, the shape of a child and a net draped over..."* Sultuane enthuses.

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