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## Impact of Malaria on Food Production in the Western Highlands of Cameroon

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### Abstract

Parasitic diseases contribute immensely to undermining the health status and jeopardising the economic development of African nations. 515 million cases of clinical malaria were reported globally in 2002 with more than 80 % in Sub-Saharan Africa. Experts estimate that a child dies every 30 seconds from malaria in Africa. WHO reports rank Cameroon endemic, with an incidence rate of 45.96‰ in 1998. Country statistics revealed incidence values of 83.6 % in 1984, 90.5 % in 1985, and 67.5 % in 1986. The incidence remains high because of deteriorating health systems, growing drug resistance and insecticide resistance. An epidemiological study of malaria was carried in the agricultural region of Dschang, Cameroon. The study was done in 2 phases; collection of blood samples by the finger prick method from a total of 515 persons, and data collection from the Dschang District Hospital laboratory. Of the 515 persons, 79(15.3 %) were positive for malaria, ranking Dschang as meso-endemic for malaria. From our studies, transmission occurs throughout the year with parasitemia increasing during the rainy months. The month of August had the highest Plasmodium Index of 17.5 % from our tests, while July and August had the highest Plasmodium Index for the patients who visited the hospital. These months are the peak periods for final weeding and harvesting of most staple crops in the rainy season. During the dry season, mosquito density is highest along rivers, which are fertile farming areas where farming is done. Malaria causes weakness of patients thereby reducing labour output, causes interruption of the production cycle and also causes deviation of funds from farm inputs to treatment costs for malaria. Malaria is therefore a great hazard to food security and a hindrance to poverty alleviation since poor farmers in agricultural production zones are highly vulnerable. Malaria remains a big problem as no effective vaccine has yet been developed against it. The use of drugs is limited due to costs incurred and worse still, it is not a guarantee, since the farmer remains exposed to predisposing factors promoting transmission and re-infection.

**Keywords:** Cameroon, Food Security, Hazard, malaria