

Bringing an End to Malaria Suffering

Malaria Consortium leads SuNMaP programme to reduce malaria in children and women by half



Photo by William Daniels

Zainab Abdu stands patiently in line in a crowded village square in the Gezawa district of Kano state, Nigeria. In her right hand she holds a white and blue ticket – evidence of her status as a female head of household and what she needs to receive two free mosquito nets for her family to sleep under. Every now and then she glances at the distribution point to see how much longer she will have to wait, a line of thousands of women snaking in front of her, most of them fasting during this Ramadan period.

Asked why she is willing to wait for hours in the mid-day sun, her reply is simple – “It’s my life. It’s my family’s life.” Zainab has already lost one of her two children to malaria at the age of six. Even though she took him to a private hospital five hours away from her village, he did not respond to the treatment. “He was not sleeping under a net. If he was sleeping under a net he would not have got malaria.”

Universal Net Distribution Campaign

Zainab’s village square was one of over 500 mosquito net distribution sites run by SuNMaP spread across Kano state as part of a massive universal bed net campaign. Led by Malaria Consortium, the Department for International Development funded SuNMaP programme aims to support the Government of Nigeria to distribute two long-lasting insecticidal nets to every household

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over a period of 18 months, in the hopes of reducing the malaria burden by 50% at least. SuNMaP is working alongside other national and international partners to achieve this goal.

Women like Zainab as well as her children are particularly vulnerable to malaria, which is responsible for 30% of childhood and 11% of maternal deaths in Nigeria. Sleeping under an insecticide treated net could be the answer. They are a safe, proven and cost-effective preventative measure against malaria.

Distributing free nets is one part of SuNMaP’s strategy to reduce deaths caused by malaria. Another more challenging aspect is to ensure that the nets are actually used and used correctly. Many people in Nigeria have never used a net before and like Zainab, in the past they relied on cheaper but less effective mosquito coils that are used up after 24 hours.

Using the Nets

Now, to help promote the use of bed nets properly, SuNMaP and partners have developed a crucial advocacy and mobilisation component to the campaign. Messages on usage have been played over the radio as well as shouted out by town announcers. Teams of mobilisers have been trained to go house to house and provide information on how to air, hang, and maintain the nets to last up to three years. At net distribution sites, health educators demonstrate how to hang nets to trees and answer questions.

From varied sources, the messages are getting through to women like Zainab. While she doesn’t own a radio, she received information and fliers from the mobilisers who visited her house.

“After it is aired, tomorrow I’m going to hang it on the bed and sleep under it with my son. My husband will sleep under the other net.”

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