

Ensuring Nets Distributed in Nigeria are Used



Photo by William Daniels

Twenty six year old Rebecca Peter laughs as she slips under the new mosquito net covering her mattress. Her daughter, two-year-old Fatima plays at her feet, twiddling the end of the net that hangs down. Fatima's cheeks are glowing and she is full of life.

Less than six months ago, Fatima's situation was very different. She was extremely weak, having convulsions and suffering from severe malaria. Worried that her child might die, Rebecca, who did not own a mosquito net at the time and was not aware of its benefits, carried her to the local clinic where she was admitted.

After a stay of two weeks, Fatima was well enough to return home to her village in Tarauni, an area just outside of Kano, Nigeria.

"After my child was so sick I worried that it would happen again to one of my children. Then I heard from our town announcer they were going to give out free nets to stop malaria," Rebecca explained. "Now I have covered our bed and there will be no more mosquitoes in here, and no more fever."

Advocacy and communication to promote net use and care

As part of a large-scale advocacy and communication initiative to complement the distribution of free nets to every household across Kano and Anambra states, messages such as those shouted out by town announcers have been carefully developed and tested.

Increasing community awareness and demand for effective malaria treatment and prevention is one of the key outputs of SuNMaP, or Support to the National Malaria Programme, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and led by Malaria Consortium. Messages focus on the importance of the nets, the link between mosquitoes, malaria and net use, when and where to get the nets, how to care for the nets, and most essentially to "Use the Net" rather than re-sell it or use it as something else – such as a fishing net or a sieve for cooking.

“Mosquito nets save lives”



Photo by William Daniels

Messages were aired on Kano’s two most popular radio stations, integrated into a catchy jingle and literally driven home by mobilizers who visit each and every household. These visits provide “a human to human relationship, an opportunity to ask questions,” says Behaviour Change Communications Consultant Dr. Faruk. Trained town announcers have also spread the message as they walk through the streets, managing to reach the many families who can’t afford a radio like Rebecca’s. Fliers, posters, t-shirts and hats have also been produced in English as well as the local language Hausa, further reinforcing the messages.

Meeting the Challenge

Changing the behaviour of net recipients like Rebecca and her family can be more challenging – yet equally important – as organising and distributing 63 million nets provided by DFID’s SunMaP and other partners including the World Bank and USAID.

The Head of DFID’s Kano office, Dr. Grema, says “The biggest step in the field is not giving the nets - this is only the first step. Demonstrating utility and developing conviction that the nets are the way to go with the people is a bigger step.”

By all accounts the messages telling people when and where to collect their nets have been almost too successful, with thousands of people flocking to their local net distribution points, resulting in capacity crowds and lines of women waiting for several hours on end. “We attributed the success of the net distribution campaign largely to the activities of the demand creation team. If the messages were not there, I don’t know how people would have known where to go” says Dr Faruk.

However, messages aimed at ensuring that recipients use their nets and hang them correctly are more complex. According to World Bank Country Director Onno Ruhl, “The challenge is that they sleep under the net two years after, otherwise we won’t achieve our objectives.”

SuNMaP has taken this into account and plans to ensure that the advocacy and mobilisation happening now will continue to have an effect in future. In three years time the nets given out during this campaign will be too old to use, and it is unlikely that donors or the Nigerian Government will finance another round of free nets for the entire country. These net recipients have a rare chance to experience the benefits of a net at no cost, “[But they] need to see if the net works and if they see that it does, they need to go out there and get it and we need to help them to see where to go,” Dr. Grema explains.

Supported by:

