

# Awareness about malaria rises among rural women

## Working with the government to spread messages about free net distribution for pregnant women at antenatal clinics in Mozambique

Isabel Fernando has lost two children - one, she believes, to witchcraft. "My daughter died at six months. She had a problem with her backbone, so I took her to the traditional healer. It was then I learnt she had been bewitched," she says in Macua, the local language. "My son died of diarrhoea when he was five months old."

Isabel has never been to school, does not know how to read or write and does not know her age. But she does know how to protect herself and her third, as yet unborn, child against malaria.

She is five-months pregnant and this is her second visit to her local health facility, a 20 kilometre walk from her remote village. "I left home before the sun rose to get here for my consultation." She concedes she might not have made the effort for that first trip if she had not heard of the free distribution of insecticide treated nets for pregnant women. "I had heard about the nets," she says shyly. "I hoped to receive one - I wouldn't be able to ask."

She was given a net during that first visit and she says she is using it. She knows why insecticide treated nets prevent malaria and the dangers of malaria, especially to pregnant women and infants.

The nets are a proven means of malaria control and could drastically reduce the high mortality rates in Mozambique. More children die of malaria in the country than of any other disease; malaria accounts for over 40 percent of child deaths<sup>1</sup>.

The Mozambican government, with the support of partners like Malaria Consortium, has used a variety of means to transmit messages in Portuguese (the official language) and in local languages about the free net distribution for pregnant women at antenatal clinics. Due to high levels of illiteracy, communication is mainly through word of mouth, the radio or through visual aids used by nurses at the antenatal clinics who have been specially trained in malaria control.

Ansha Lurdes is the nurse at the health centre which Isabel attends in the rural district of Monapo, some 125 kilometres from the city of Nampula in the North of Mozambique. She says that the pregnant women who come to the centre all know about the nets and most of them will ask for them.



*Isabel Fernando received a free net during a visit to her local health facility*

Isabel has never been to school and does not know how to read and write, but she knows how to prevent malaria.

<sup>1</sup> National survey on causes of mortality in Mozambique 2007-8 from the MDG Report for Mozambique 2010.



The challenge is to access even more women living in remote areas, like Isabel. A mobile outreach team from the health centre travels up to 90 kilometres from the centre, three times a week to reach isolated communities.

It is not an easy journey. "Out of the 21 districts in Nampula, only three are accessible by tarred roads," explains Armando Matos, the assistant programme officer in Nampula for Malaria Consortium. "Most of the roads are very bad dirt roads."

But the aim is to have 95 percent of pregnant women countrywide sleeping under nets by the end of 2007.

Isabel heard about the mosquito net distribution during a talk given by a health worker in her remote community. She is convinced of the importance of the net. Although she and her husband are subsistence farmers and have little income to spend, she says that she knows the nets are essential items. "I don't want to be without a net now."

The challenge is to access even more women living in remote areas. "Out of the 21 districts in Nampula, only three are accessible by tarred roads"

Armando Matos,  
assistant programme officer in  
Nampula for Malaria Consortium

Free net distribution for pregnant women at antenatal clinics



Malaria Consortium  
Development House  
56-64 Leonard Street, London  
EC2A 4LT, United Kingdom

[info@malariaconsortium.org](mailto:info@malariaconsortium.org)  
[www.malariaconsortium.org](http://www.malariaconsortium.org)

UK Registered Charity No: 1099776

**malaria consortium**  
disease control, better health