

Pharaoh's story: community health workers promote change through village health clubs

Through the establishment of village health clubs, Pharaoh, Bukinda village's iCCM health worker, is working with members of his community to find solutions to common health issues. With his experience in iCCM, Pharaoh symbolises good health and is the ideal candidate to promote best practice and create long-term change in his community.



Pharaoh conducting house-to-house visits in Bukinda village

BACKGROUND

At the break of dawn in Bukinda, a village in mid-western Uganda, 29-year-old Pharaoh starts working his land. But beyond his work as a farmer, he is a change-maker and influencer.

When she was only two years old, Pharaoh's daughter caught malaria. This preventable disease remains a serious public health issue in Uganda. She was extremely ill and, with little time left to save her, Pharaoh travelled for over three hours across difficult terrain to get her to the nearest health facility. He spent everything he had on transport and medicine.

This is an unfortunately common story in mid-western Uganda. Rural villages are often many miles from the nearest health facility, which means there can be significant delays in accessing vital treatment. To reduce morbidity and mortality from treatable and preventable diseases, it is essential that appropriate preventative measures are taken and such diseases are diagnosed, treated or referred to health facilities at the earliest opportunity.

Under USAID's Malaria Action Programme for Districts, and supported by the National Malaria Control Programme in Uganda, Malaria Consortium has trained voluntary community health workers like Pharaoh to diagnose, treat and refer children with malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea as a means of reducing the burden of malaria and other childhood illnesses. This approach is known as integrated community case management (iCCM) and aims to ensure that vital health services are provided close to communities.

VILAGE HEALTH CLUBS AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Malaria Consortium has also trained Pharaoh and other community health workers to organise village health clubs. During village health club meetings, members of the community gather to discuss key health issues, identify solutions and develop action plans under the guidance of their community health workers.

With input from the local community, Pharaoh draws up plans to promote the uptake of necessary preventive behaviours, such as sleeping under long lasting insecticidal nets. With his experience in iCCM, Pharaoh symbolises good health and is the ideal candidate to promote best practice and create long-term change in his community.

SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Community members now flock to Pharaoh's house to consult him when their children fall sick, and in the afternoon he conducts house-to-house visits. Families no longer need to travel long distances to get the treatment they need.

The village health club allows Pharaoh to discuss key health issues with his fellow community members and influence behavioural change. By promoting preventative measures, Pharaoh is helping to reduce the prevalence of Malaria in his community.

"It is a big success. Up to date all my children sleep under the net and I advise my fellow community members to do the same, so that they chase malaria out of their homes. They have to focus on the lives of their children, because they are the generation of tomorrow.

ELIMINATING MALARIA IN UGANDA

Uganda is making progress in the fight against malaria. Malaria prevalence has decreased from 42 percent in 2009 to 19 percent in 2014. The National Malaria Control Programme wants this figure to reach as low as seven percent by 2020 and is aiming to achieve malaria elimination by 2030.

Local influencers like Pharaoh will play a key role in eliminating malaria in Uganda by promoting change from within their communities. Community dialogues and village health clubs provide platforms for even more local influencers to promote change across the country.

This success story is published as part of a series from the USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts project. For more information, see www.malariaconsortium.org/resources/publications/977/ or contact: Dr Sam Gudoi, s.gudoi@malariaconsortium.org

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts aims to improve the health status of the Ugandan population by reducing childhood and maternal morbidity and mortality due to malaria. The project will support the Government of Uganda for a period of five years, focusing in particular on children under five years of age and pregnant women.

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