

Working with religious leaders to drive positive behavior change

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts works together with religious leaders to develop sermon guides about malaria and health, so these influential leaders can drive positive malaria change among their followers – a novel approach in Uganda.



Photo: MAPD working with religious leaders to fight malaria

BACKGROUND

Malaria remains a disease of major public concern in Uganda, and innovative ways of addressing it are needed to ensure that the fight against it is won.

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts (MAPD), a five-year USAID Uganda-based malaria project, works with Uganda's Ministry of Health and the USAID Communication for Healthy Communities project, to improve the community's attitudes and behavior around malaria prevention and treatment.

To achieve positive change, a multi-pronged communication and behavior change strategy has been developed, one element of which is to use prominent community influencers to drive change. Religious leaders are highly influential in Uganda and hence are pivotal in the fight against malaria. Therefore, MAPD has engaged religious leaders to drive positive malaria behavior in their followers. MAPD led a collaborative and participatory orientation of religious leaders to:

- Develop contextually relevant strategies to address negative/alternative beliefs surrounding malaria control.

- Customize sermon guides to ensure appropriate and accurate advocacy for appropriate malaria control actions.
- Develop work-plans to fight malaria.

Seventy-nine Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Seventh-day Adventist and Pentecostal leaders engaged with this process, and took on the responsibility to promote malaria-free congregations.

Some examples of adapted sermon guides are as follows:

EPHESIANS 5:15, 16 – *So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.*

Leaders will discuss positive malaria prevention behaviors, the importance of timely testing and treatment, and the best places to seek these.

PROVERBS 1:7 – *Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline...*

Deuteronomy 23:12-14 – *You must have a*

designated area outside the camp where you can go to release yourselves. Vs 13 – You must have a spade as part of your equipment.

Leaders will discuss how to avoid diseases, outlining that to fight malaria we need equipment such as mosquito nets, tests and treatment, and they will explain how to use them.

In prevention of diseases, God also advised the Children of Israel to avoid contact with dead animals according to Leviticus 11:32-40.

Leaders will explain how God wants His people to be in good health, to be disease free and explain how to do this for malaria.

PROVERBS 22:3 – *A prudent person foresees dangers and takes precautions. The simpleton who goes blindly on suffers the consequences. If we foresee dangers towards our lives it is wise to hide ourselves from them, hence saving money and, more importantly, lives*

Leaders will discuss how people must seek knowledge about possible dangers around them, including the symptoms of malaria. They will discuss how to avoid getting malaria and what to do if signs and symptoms are spotted.

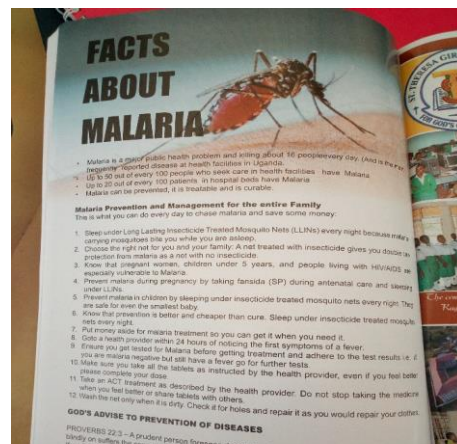
“And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the Earth, all, from Himself; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” (Qur’an 45:13)

Leaders will discuss how people can see signs of threats to our health, such as malaria, and how people can reflect on this and take specific actions to keep safe from malaria.

Activity implemented together with religious leaders

MAPD participated in the celebration of Bishop

Kaggwa 23rd Feast day in Sembabule district, Masaka region. During the celebration the Catholic diocese, together with MAPD and Sembabule district, organized a health camp and conducted behavior change activities centered on malaria prevention, testing and treating. During the celebrations, the catholic dioceses printed a Catholic Church booklet/magazine that included a ‘Facts about Malaria’ page. Over 1,000 copies were distributed.



The Facts About Malaria included in the Catholic program booklet/magazine

NEXT STEPS

- Integrate malaria-related interventions into religious programs.
- Involve health stakeholders in religious activities where health can be integrated
- Evaluate the impact of the malaria sermons

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 Gudozi, s.gudozi@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.

This project, made possible by the generous support from the American and British people, is implemented by Malaria Consortium in partnership with Jhpiego, Banyan Global, and Communication for Development Foundation Uganda (CDFU), Deloitte Uganda and Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI).

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