

Optimising the role of lead mothers in seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaigns: Insights from formative research in Kano state, northern Nigeria

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Introduction

Seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC) is a safe and effective community-based intervention for preventing malaria in children under five years of age in areas of seasonal malaria transmission. Lead mothers are community health volunteers who help caregivers comply with the monthly administration of antimalarial drugs during SMC campaigns. The lead mother approach, in which female members of the community conduct health promotion activities, is used in several SMC implementing states across Nigeria; however, but there is lack of evidence on their role in, and impact on, SMC delivery. We sought to better understand the current role of lead mothers, as well as to identify areas for improvement and ways to optimise the role of lead mothers during SMC campaigns.

Methods

- The formative research used qualitative methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews with ‘information-rich’ key informants (n=20) from all levels of the health system (national, state, local government and community levels).
- We conducted the study in Kano state (Figure 1), northern Nigeria, with semi-structured interviews taking place between September and October 2021. Data were analysed using the ‘codebook’ approach to thematic analysis.
- This formative research is part of a larger implementation research study that consists of:
 - a design phase in which Malaria Consortium involved stakeholders in co-designing and pilot testing an intervention to optimise the role of lead mothers
 - an evaluation phase to assess its feasibility, acceptability and implementation.

Results

- The findings converged around four overarching themes (Table 1):
 - Skills and attributes required of lead mothers
 - Factors that affect lead mothers’ roles
 - How lead mothers interact with Community Health Influencers Promoters and Services (CHIPS) agents
 - Re-imagining the role of lead mothers during SMC campaigns.

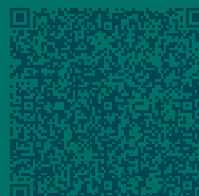
Conclusion

This work in Kano state indicates that, through their strong connection to communities, lead mothers do influence caregivers to adopt healthy malaria prevention behaviours during SMC campaigns. However, there is room for improvement in how lead mothers are recruited, trained and supervised. The sustainability of the lead mother approach is at risk if policy makers do not find a way of transitioning the role of lead mothers into the existing community health worker infrastructure, such as by integrating CHIPS agents into SMC campaigns to support the work of lead mothers.

References

1. ACCESS-SMC Partnership. *Effectiveness of seasonal malaria chemoprevention at scale in west and central Africa: An observational study.* The Lancet, 2020; 396 (10265): 1829–40.

Lead mothers can influence caregivers to adopt positive malaria prevention behaviours, but their recruitment, training and supervision could be improved



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Supplementary visual

Table 1: Main themes from the formative research and key findings

Main themes	Key findings	Illustrative quote
Skills and attributes required of lead mothers	Key informants at each health system level highlighted the attributes and skills of lead mothers that help them to establish good relationships with caregivers. Shared customs and beliefs, and being known by caregivers, help lead mothers engage with caregivers. Good communication was regarded as a valuable skill for lead mothers to have.	“...they are very familiar with the community...even the norms and culture of the communities.” State-level health official
Factors that affect lead mothers' roles	Key informants from national, state, local government area (LGA) and community levels identified several impediments to lead mothers carrying out their roles. Key aspects mentioned were recruitment, training, work planning and supervision, as well as remuneration and delayed payments.	“...make sure that lead mothers are given more training.” LGA-level health official
How lead mothers interact with CHIPS agents	Key informants from LGA, state and national levels argued that CHIPS agents should be integrated into SMC campaigns to support and complement the work of lead mothers.	“It is very important to involve CHIPS agents in the SMC programme...” Community leader
Re-imagining the role of lead mothers during SMC campaigns	Key informants at each level considered current lead mother roles and suggested improvements or modifications to re-imagine the role of lead mothers. Suggestions included: a supporting role for CHIPS agents; reviewing and strengthening selection criteria for lead mothers and supervisors; strengthening supervision of, and targeted and tailored training for, lead mothers; and sustaining programme capacity.	“...they need to have more of them selected...more of them [are] required to optimise their role.” National-level health official

Figure 1: The location of the study in Kano state, Nigeria



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