Supporting frontline health workers in Uganda

Strengthening capacity during COVID-19 and beyond

Background

Frontline health workers (FLHWs) in Uganda — including health facility workers and village health team members (VHTs) — play a critical role in the management of infectious diseases, such as malaria, diarrhoea and pneumonia, many of which are endemic in the country. With the emergence of the novel coronavirus pandemic, FLHWs now face the challenge of safely and effectively continuing to provide integrated community case management (iCCM) to tackle these diseases, while also managing cases of COVID-19.

As COVID-19 infections continue to grow, health workers are increasingly at risk of exposure — not only because of their close contact with the public, but also given limited stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE), drugs and other equipment, and a lack of training in infection prevention and control (IPC). Without these resources, the risk of mortality and morbidity attributable to COVID-19 and other diseases is greatly increased for both FLHWs and the communities they serve. Furthermore, with the majority of resources being diverted to respond to the pandemic — such as for social and behaviour interventions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 — it has become challenging to implement and track

Country
Uganda

Donor
Mastercard Foundation

Length of project
May 2020 – October 2020

Partners
Implementing districts
Malaria Consortium
Mastercard Foundation
Ministry of Health, Uganda
existing interventions that target endemic diseases. This could have severe repercussions for the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of these illnesses.

It is, therefore, vital to develop FLHWs’ capacity to diagnose and treat cases of COVID-19, while at the same time continuing to provide iCCM services safely, accurately and with the right tools and support.

**Project outline and objectives**

In partnership with Mastercard Foundation, through its COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Program, Malaria Consortium will develop the capacity of 33,000 FLHWs to identify, safely treat and refer cases of COVID-19 while continuing to provide effective iCCM during the outbreak. This project will support FLHWs in 40 districts where the Strengthening Uganda’s Response to Malaria (SURMa) and the USAID Malaria Action Program for Districts (MAPD) projects are being implemented.

This project seeks to:

- develop FLHWs’ capacity in IPC and early identification of suspected cases of COVID-19, with the aim of encouraging referral to health facilities
- guarantee access to essential PPE — such as masks, eye goggles and gloves — for all FLHWs in the target districts
- improve the accuracy of data reported by VHTs
- expand the reach of appropriate messaging on COVID-19 and health-seeking behaviour to the target population.

**Activities**

To achieve these objectives, Malaria Consortium will:

- provide targeted training to FLHWs on the prevention, control and risk factors for the transmission of COVID-19
- procure and distribute PPE to FLHWs
- procure and distribute water, sanitation and hygiene kits to FLHWs — these will include soap and 10-litre jerry cans
- enhance VHT surveillance through the use of digitised reporting channels — such as email and SMS — and phone calls. These methods reduce error in the recording chain by enabling health facilities to follow up with VHTs on reporting errors and omissions
- disseminate information, education and communication materials — such as posters and pamphlets — through house visits, radio broadcasts, social media and SMS to inform and sensitise communities about COVID-19 and appropriate health-seeking behaviours.

**References**