

Awareness raising activities increase community engagement in malaria prevention

In Uganda – where the malaria burden is among the highest in the world – raising public awareness of the disease is helping to contribute to the prevention and treatment of malaria in communities. For World Malaria Day 2017, USAID's Malaria Action Program for districts supported a malaria run which successfully promoted awareness of malaria prevention in the Rwenzori region.



District Health Officer, Dr Mugahi Richard, informing participants pre-run about malaria prevention and USAID's Malaria Action Program's work in the district

BACKGROUND

Uganda has the third highest number of malaria infections in Africa, as well as some of the highest reported malaria transmission rates in the world. The impact of the malaria burden in Uganda for communities and the society is large, with approximately 8.5 million people getting sick and 12,000 deaths in 2015 alone (Malaria Indicator Survey 2014-15).

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts is working in Uganda to improve malaria prevention in communities by improving knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards malaria. On World Malaria Day on 25 April 2017, the project, together with the Uganda Ministry of Health (National Malaria Control Programme) took the opportunity to raise awareness about malaria prevention, testing and treatment.

In the run-up to a World Malaria Day event, the project supported the Ministry of Health to organise a number of activities hosted in Fort Portal Municipality, Kabarole district. The activities were carried out with district, cultural and religious leaders, social clubs, local businessmen and schools. Village health camps, TV and radio adverts and talk shows, and a malaria run were among the activities scheduled for the event to encourage

community engagement and extend the reach of malaria prevention messages in the community.

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts supported the Ministry of Health to organise a five-kilometer malaria run across Fort Portal town on the 22 April 2017. The run aimed to raise awareness and motivate the community to prevent and control malaria.

The run was successful in gaining the support of His Royal Highness King of Toro Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru IV who supported the run. A number of public figures also attended, including members of parliament, the district chairperson, and the National Malaria Control Programme. More than 500 people participated in the run – a success which was helped by the support of district leaders, as well as religious and cultural leaders, who promoted the activity and complemented by radio messages and use of experiential mobile film trucks.

"I was very happy because the king was involved and he told everyone to sleep under mosquito net in order to prevent malaria..."

Abdu Nsamba, boda boda rider



His Royal Highness, King Oyo, and NMCP Programme Manager, Dr Jimmy Opigo, preparing to launch the run at Muchwa

RAISING AWARENESS FOR WORLD MALARIA DAY

The World Malaria Day event, which included the malaria run, was organized by the Ministry of Health in partnership with USAID's Malaria Action Program for districts, USAID/Communication for Health Communities (CHC), Uganda Health Marketing group and the Kabarole district local government.

The event brought together leaders from the ministry, the district leadership, cultural and religious leaders to reinforce the messages given during the run-up activities and to promote community action against malaria. The Hon. State Minister for Health - General Duties also gave an educational speech on malaria, encouraging people to use mosquito nets, and who applauded the children in the crowd as 'champions of change'.

"I urge you to embrace the campaign by sleeping under mosquito nets, avoiding stagnant water around your houses and testing for malaria before treatment"

*- His Royal Highness King of Toro Oyo
Nyimba Kabamba Iguru IV*

"I would like to call on everybody to embrace the vision of chasing malaria (Okubinga Malaria) using the proven malaria control interventions. We all need to ensure that all our households' members do not store the LLINs received, but use them as per the instructions given..."

- Sarah Achiong Opendi, Hon. State Minister for Health

The event began with a march past through the town to Boma grounds where activities to raise knowledge about malaria took place. Malaria messages were communicated through drama plays and through songs, poems and plays delivered by children.

A total of 699 people from the local communities were tested for malaria using rapid diagnostic tests, including children below five years of age. Those tested positive were treated with artemisinin combination therapy.

"[The event] helped me ... get information on how to sleep under a mosquito net. They also gave us free testing for cancer, malaria and HIV and free water. I thank the organizers because they did not charge us for the run and they also gave us free t shirts..."

- Musinguzi Peter, plumber in Muchwa

LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

To build on the interest and momentum generated by the World Malaria Day activities, USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts will continue to use the experiential communication approach and engage with key influencers to further raise awareness of malaria prevention in the Rwenzori region. The program will engage cultural leaders to lead the malaria control campaigns in the region and school children as change agents for net use.

Such awareness raising activities will support larger program efforts, such as a behavior change communications campaign designed to motivate caregivers to adopt malaria prevention practices. This campaign, which will launch in the second half of 2017, hopes to reach at least 13 million people across 43 districts in Uganda. The campaign aims to fill community knowledge gaps which can, in turn, result in a number of flow-through effects, such as improvement in school attendance for children and household financial security.

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 Gudo, s.gudo@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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