

Street Vendors Tell Customers: Nets Are Essential

The private sector in Mozambique gets involved in distributing and setting up a sustainable network to sell affordable nets

Joaquina Muacigano, a widow with five children, has been saving the little money she gets from selling fish to buy insecticide treated mosquito nets.

“This one is for me,” she says admiring the net she is about to buy from a street vendor in the heart of the city of Nampula in the north of Mozambique. “Last month, I bought a net for my children. Now all my savings have gone.”

The net cost 100 Meticaís, just a little less than \$4. It is a lot of money for Joaquina, but she says it is worth it. Just before she bought the children’s net, her 10 year-old daughter, Benildine, got malaria. “She was very sick,” says Muacigano.

Joaquina is also aware she cannot afford to fall sick herself. It is already a struggle to care for her five children. Besides the serious harm malaria could do to her health, she would be too ill to work for about four days, losing much needed earnings. She would also have to pay for transport to reach the health centre.

Joaquina’s predicament is a familiar one - malaria significantly reduces productivity in Mozambique. Pregnant women are especially vulnerable, as are children under five years old, with malaria accounting for 30 percent of all under five hospital deaths. Many of these deaths could be prevented and earnings lost to malaria saved, by the simple act of sleeping under an insecticide treated net (ITN).

The government considers malaria control a top priority, with free net distribution to pregnant women. However, those who are not currently eligible for free nets, like Joaquina, must buy them.

In the recent past that would have been difficult. In 2005, there were no major net distributors in the country. However, a



Joaquina Muacigano, the mother of five, buys a insecticide treated mosquito net from a street vendor

Widow Juaquina Muacigano is aware she cannot afford to fall sick with five children to care for

project supported by Malaria Consortium, with funds from the UK Government, has assisted the private sector to distribute and set up a sustainable network to sell affordable nets. By March 2007 there were three commercial partners supplying insecticide treated nets with support from the programme.

Marketplace sales of ITNs

Quality treated nets are now widely available at affordable prices in the city of Nampula and even in some of the more remote rural areas of the province. Over 43,000 have been sold in Nampula, says Brighton Masaki from local distribution company Proserv.

The UK Government-supported five-year programme aimed to support the sale of at least 200,000 ITNs in the private sector countrywide by November 2007. This target was met six months ahead of schedule.

The street vendors in Nampula, most of whom are poor and have had little formal education, have played a major part in this success, says Masaki. They have tapped into a vibrant market and have become expert sales people. The street vendors received training facilitated by Malaria Consortium, which included business tips such as how to persuade your customers, explanations about the net and how to use it.

The vendors took up the challenge and have not looked back. "There has not been one vendor who has stopped selling the nets. What I have seen is that they keep demanding even more nets to sell and are expanding their sales areas," says Vasconcelas Mario, programme officer for Malaria Consortium in Nampula.

Reaching remote rural areas

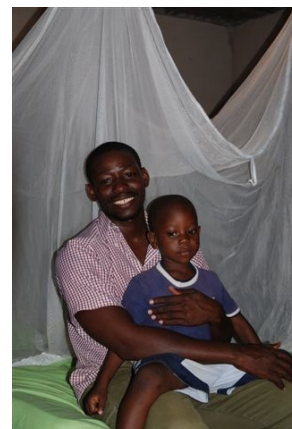
Fernando da Costa is one of the vendors who benefitted from the training and is expanding his sales into the remote areas. He did not need much convincing about why nets are important. His four-year-old son, Fernando Junior, was admitted into intensive care last year with life-threatening convulsions caused by malaria. "I was shocked. After that I bought a net, and Proserv asked me to sell for them."

Da Costa is one of Proserv's most valuable vendors because most of his sales are in the remote rural areas. His wife works in Lalaua district some 280 kilometres away, so when he visits her he takes a supply of nets to sell on the way. In one month he sells around 375 nets in the rural areas, and about 125 in Nampula city.

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Vasconcelas Mario, programme officer in Nampula for Malaria Consortium

Vendor Fernando da Costa sits with his son, who was admitted to intensive care last year with malaria



He concedes it is tough. "I travel long distances on very bad dirt roads sitting on the back of trucks. Last Sunday I started waiting at 6am for the *chapa* (a public minibus) to Nampula. It only came at 3pm, it rained, I got wet and I only arrived after 2am the next day. I have to leave Fernando with relatives while I am away."

But he says it is worth it and he is doing good business. The reason for the success is simple. Although Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries, with most rural people depending on subsistence farming, they are beginning to see nets as an essential item. "Our message is to tell people how important it is to use a bed net every night, and preferably a long lasting impregnated one. The insecticide used on those kills the mosquito and they do not need retreatment, even if washed regularly, as the product remains active for up to 20 washes," says Mario of Malaria Consortium.

Joaquina, the widow, is one of those who sees the net as an essential item. "It is a squash for all five children to sleep on the mats under just one net," she says.

"When I have saved more money, I will buy another one. I need it".

"It is a squash for all children to sleep on mats under just one net... when I have saved more money, I will buy another one"

Joaquina Muacigano

Fernando da Costa: a vendor, who has benefitted from training by Malaria Consortium, is able to explain the use of the net to customers

