

Engaging Civil Society to Drive Malaria Away in Ghana

Techiman, a thriving business town in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana with a population of more than 200,000, has a higher prevalence rate of malaria compared to the national rates: 44% of all Techiman hospital cases are attributed to malaria, whereas the national malaria rates are closer to one third of outpatient cases. To address this problem, the Civic Union of Techiman, an umbrella organization representing 96 civil society groups, such as the Tailors and Dressmakers Association, the Hair Dressers and Beauticians Association, the Christian Mothers Association, and the Drivers Union, turned to the Promoting Malaria Prevention and Treatment (ProMPT) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) and managed by University Research Co., LLC (URC). The project has been working with Ghana's National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) since 2009 to strengthen malaria prevention and control and scale up evidence-based malaria interventions.

Intervention through a Traditional Gathering

ProMPT had previously trained some of the Civic Union's group members on malaria prevention, and the leaders had been working to educate their members on the lessons that they learned. To educate the general public on malaria prevention and



Health workers perform a skit on the benefits of bed net use at the Techiman *durbar* organized by ProMPT and the Civic Union of Techiman.

treatment, ProMPT and the Civic Union organized a *durbar*, a traditional gathering of leaders (chiefs, queen mothers, and other dignitaries) and the public.

During the *durbar*, which was attended by about 450 people and broadcast using a PA system throughout the busy Techiman market, ProMPT staff addressed five key issues. First, because many Ghanaians believe that malaria is normal and relatively non-threatening, they discussed the dangers associated



A member of the drivers union displays a poster on home-based care of childhood illnesses, including home management of malaria, at the Techiman *durbar*.



Health workers educate the audience on the prevention of malaria during pregnancy through a skit performed at the Techiman *durbar*.

with malaria, particularly for children and pregnant women. Second, they explained that sleeping under a long-lasting insecticidal net (LLIN) every night is essential to prevent malaria, because the nets prevent malaria-transmitting mosquitoes from biting at night, when they are active. Third, ProMPT staff discussed prevention of malaria in pregnant women: pregnant women should go to antenatal care and take the malaria-preventing drug called SP. Fourth, they explained that ACTs are the recommended drugs for preventing malaria and that trained community-based agents are available to assist in providing timely treatment of suspected malaria through ACTs. Finally, ProMPT staff discussed how to eliminate places where mosquitoes breed, such as exposed containers where fresh standing water can accumulate.

To reinforce ProMPT staff messages, the presiding member of the municipal assembly reviewed each of the five key issues and requested that all attendees share the malaria prevention and treatment techniques that they had learned with others. He reminded attendees that all members of society are victims of malaria, so they should work together to fight the disease. In addition, a local drama group performed a short skit on the benefits of using LLINs (especially for pregnant women and children under five) and the consequences of not sleeping under the nets.

Sustainable Malaria Education at the Community Level

Engaging civil society is essential to ensuring that “driving malaria away” is “everyone’s business” (quoted from Ghana’s anti-malaria campaign). Since 2009, ProMPT has supported over 326 organized groups throughout seven regions of the country to educate its members on malaria prevention and treatment. Addressing these groups, like the members of the Civic Union of Techiman, allows ProMPT to reach entire communities through existing societal networks. ProMPT has supported a range of civil society organizations, including trade associations, NGOs, and faith-based organizations, to give more than 1.5 million people in their communities access to messages on malaria prevention and treatment. ProMPT has also trained more than 4,500 traditional and opinion leaders on malaria prevention and treatment, enabling on-going malaria education at the community level.