

Elders and Chiefs Monitor Volunteer Activity in Ghana's Remote Communities

Community volunteers are an essential component of the malaria prevention and treatment effort in Ghana because they expand the reach of the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP). From 2009 to 2012, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Promoting Malaria Prevention and Treatment (ProMPT) project, managed by University Research Co., LLC (URC), supported Ghanaian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which mobilized community volunteers to educate the public on preventing and treating malaria. Through door-to-door visits, group discussions, and community meetings, the volunteers delivered messaging on the use of malaria-preventing bed nets, prevention of malaria during pregnancy, and prompt treatment of fever (a symptom of malaria) in young children. Continuous monitoring of volunteer activities was critical to their success. However, this monitoring can be challenging for NGOs where communities are long distances apart and transportation infrastructure is minimal.

One NGO's Solution

One ProMPT-supported NGO, the Agency for Health and Food Security (AHEFS), found a solution for this problem. AHEFS is supporting malaria prevention and treatment education through community volunteers in 200 communities of the Amansie Central District



A community chief demonstrates the house marking system for volunteer monitoring

of Ghana's Ashanti Region. These communities are spread out over a wide area, and the roads between them are frequently impassable by cars. In order to ensure effective volunteer monitoring, AHEFS engaged traditional village leaders to monitor volunteers in 56 targeted difficult-to-reach communities.

AHEFS staff approached the chiefs and elders during community meetings to introduce the volunteers' malaria education efforts and solicit the leaders' support in ensuring that messages reach every household, particularly those with pregnant women and young children. Together, AHEFS staff and the leaders decided that volunteers should use chalk to mark the letter "M" along with the number of people met on each house visited. Leaders were then able to follow up on the volunteers' visits, monitoring their work and identifying the extent of their outreach.

Results for Improved Malaria Interventions

As a result of this new policy, traditional leaders, who are responsible for the health and well-being of their communities, can ensure that malaria messaging appropriately targets mothers and caregivers as well as the general population. Leaders and volunteers can both see clearly which areas were reached and not reached and address gaps. According to one community chief, Nana Boafo, "Health is a matter of concern for all. Since the volunteers have been chosen by the community to serve the preventative health needs of the people, we as leaders must support and encourage them. We must show interest in the work that they do and help them mitigate the challenges they encounter."

An assessment of this monitoring model conducted by AHEFS showed that communities whose traditional leaders supported community volunteer monitoring saw improved levels of coverage for malaria messaging. Community volunteer Abraham Appiah explained, "I didn't know the chief was also going house-to-house to find out if I had been there to deliver messages to the families in the households. When I realized this, I made sure that all the houses were covered, and the chief's visit would reveal not only that I had educated them but also that they are putting the education to use."

Because of this monitoring effort, AHEFS and ProMPT are able to assess the reach of the community volunteer program to educate the public on malaria. In total, AHEFS was able to reach 60,060 people through a variety of activities in the Amansie Central District. AHEFS predicts that the partnership with community leaders will increase the likelihood that malaria outreach and education will continue long after ProMPT support has ended.

About ProMPT's NGO Program

AHEFS is one of 33 NGOs that ProMPT engaged between 2009 and 2012 to implement community-based activities in support of malaria prevention and control interventions. ProMPT provided the NGOs with grants and technical support to initiate awareness and support good practices of ITN use and prevention of malaria during pregnancy; to mobilize communities for improved engagement of community leaders, stakeholders, and volunteers; and to expand the reach of evidence-based malaria interventions to populations including rural and marginalized communities with limited access to health information and services that promote healthy behaviors and practices. Over the course of the project, ProMPT has overseen the training of more than 3,200 NGO volunteers, and ProMPT-supported NGO activities have reached over 2.1 million people.