

INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM

2015



AFRICA | NETSFORLIFE®

Changing Behavior For Improved Health

Malaria continues to be one of the most significant health challenges in Africa and remains one of the major causes of death in children under five in sub-Saharan Africa. While sleeping under a net is widely recognized as a proven way to prevent malaria and net distribution is in process in most countries, working to ensure that people sleep under nets, adopt other healthy behaviors and seek treatment for malaria are essential to success. Since its inception in 2006, *NetsforLife*® has developed a unique methodology to bring about positive behavior change and has saved the lives of an estimated 112,235 children under five years of age. The program has also educated 41 million people with malaria messaging, and improved health outcomes for all members in communities where it is active.

Instilling a “Net Culture” and Mobilizing Communities to Fight Malaria

NetsforLife® began in 2006 as a pilot program in Zambia and expanded to 17 countries across sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on remote, rural communities where government health services are scarce. Episcopal Relief & Development designed *NetsforLife*® to address the barriers identified by the communities in the initial assessment of getting individuals to change behavior and use long-lasting insecticide-treated nets. The program takes advantage of global health’s greatest underutilized assets – faith leaders and dedicated volunteers who are motivated by their faith – and also uses a community-based approach to build a “net culture.” This makes it the norm for family members to sleep under a net every night, and unacceptable, especially for young children and pregnant women, not to do so. A “net culture” means people prioritize owning nets, take care of them, save money to buy them and seek early treatment if a household member shows signs of malaria.

Mobilizing Faith Communities and Leaders to Change Behavior

NetsforLife® has incorporated a number of strategies considered “best practices” and has developed a unique methodology through integrating community-based faith networks. It also is constantly testing ways to support and retain volunteers, such as integrating Savings & Loan Groups for supporting volunteers and encouraging community cohesion. The methodology emphasizes house-hold level malaria education messaging by trained faith volunteers called Malaria Control Agents (MCAs).



Malaria by the Numbers

3.2 BILLION
PEOPLE AT RISK

198 MILLION
MALARIA CASES IN 2013

584,000
MALARIA DEATHS IN 2013

437,000
MALARIA CHILD DEATHS IN 2013

47%
REDUCTION IN MORTALITY RATES SINCE 2000

\$12 BILLION
ANNUAL DRAIN ON AFRICA'S ECONOMY

To reinforce the MCAs' house-to-house work, *NetsforLife®* engages creative communication vehicles, such as drama to show how to properly hang a net, and the resources of existing and extensive church networks. The foundation of these networks includes the institutional longevity, credibility and familiarity of the Anglican Communion; the engagement of women's groups such as the Mothers' Union, as well as schools and health facilities; and the work of community health volunteers.

Faith leaders also have been instrumental to *NetsforLife®*'s methodology. Not only do they use the 'power of the pulpit' to reinforce malaria messaging, but they also advocate for improved malaria programming at a national level. For example, The Most Reverend Albert Chama, Archbishop of the Anglican Province of Central Africa, which includes Zambia and three other countries, promoted the *NetsforLife®* methodology and advocated for policy change with government policymakers and other key stakeholders such as USAID and UNICEF.

Linking Communities with Government Services

Two other key elements for ensuring that a health program succeeds are providing a way for individuals to seek care and access the more formal health system, and integrating a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. *NetsforLife®* collaborates closely with the government health system in each country, essentially serving as an extension of government services in under-served communities, training community volunteers to be Malaria Control Agents and, in some cases, training government officials. As an example, the Liberian Ministry of Health requested that *NetsforLife®* train the government trainers on the *NetsforLife®* methodology after seeing its effectiveness at the community level.

NetsforLife®'s M&E system informs activities and messaging, identifies and solves problems and measures results. The system incorporates baseline and follow-up surveys, as well as household-level data collection that identifies, for example, when people are not sleeping under nets and why not. A strong M&E system generates information that can be used to shape more effective program implementation, and demonstrates impact that can influence national policy. This robust foundation positions Episcopal Relief & Development's faith partners to be engaged at all levels, from the highest government office to the last hut in a village at the end of the road.



NetsforLife® Impact



Impact and Sustaining the Gains

The numbers illustrating *NetsforLife*®'s impact are compelling. A study by the University of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo found that the effectiveness of the faith organization-led distribution campaign – a door-to-door strategy, coupled with the use of the “hang-up method” – was twice as effective in getting people to use the nets as the more common fixed-point method. Such results have influenced national policies in five countries. In Zambia, it was common for health centers to distribute nets from fixed-point health centers, but now the national government has implemented change based on the *NetsforLife*® model.

In the future, Episcopal Relief & Development will build on its success, leveraging and modifying the program to address some of the challenges on the horizon.

- **Net Repair and Replacement:** In 2006, it was anticipated that nets would last four to five years. However, the lifespan of nets is actually closer to two years. Future malaria control will depend on individuals being willing to invest in and use their own money for nets. Is the *NetsforLife*® “net culture” strong enough to motivate individuals to invest their own money in a replacement net?
- **Volunteer Retention and Motivation:** *NetsforLife*® invests heavily in training and motivating volunteers. Increasingly, *NetsforLife*® is providing integrated programming for malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia since communities frequently have a high burden of all three diseases. Addressing multiple health issues in a single home visit is more efficient, and also is a way to further stimulate volunteers who may have been educating only on malaria for years. With more being asked of community volunteers, what are ways that Episcopal Relief & Development can find to provide financial incentive, as well as honor and thank its Malaria Control Agents?

NetsforLife® Impact

112,235

CHILDREN UNDER FIVE ALIVE TODAY
DUE TO THE PROGRAM

41 MILLION

PEOPLE SENSITIZED TO MALARIA
PREVENTION

21.9 MILLION

NETS DISTRIBUTED

111,000

MALARIA CONTROL AGENTS TRAINED





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Episcopal Relief & Development works with more than 3 million people in nearly 40 countries worldwide to overcome poverty, hunger and disease through multi-sector programs. An independent 501(c)(3) organization, it works closely with Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners to help communities create long-term development strategies and rebuild after disasters. In 2015, the organization is celebrating 75 Years of Healing a Hurting World.