



Advocacy in Zambia

Advocacy is a critical tool in any national health endeavor requiring partner coordination at the country level, prioritization at the district level, and acceptance and endorsement at the community level. The Malaria Control and Evaluation Partnership in Africa (MACEPA), a program at PATH, is working with a range of partners to ensure that preventing and treating malaria is a priority in government offices, in district health agencies, and in the homes of those who are vulnerable to the disease. With the government of Zambia, MACEPA is documenting progress in Zambia, sharing lessons, and strengthening partnerships to ensure that over the long term, every family in every community has the means and information to protect itself from malaria.

Sustaining national support

Zambia's six-year national malaria strategic plan aims to cut malaria incidence by 75 percent and significantly reduce malaria-related mortality by the end of 2011 through national scale-up of proven, effective malaria interventions. They include insecticide-treated mosquito nets, indoor residual spraying, intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy, and prompt, effective antimalarial treatment, especially to vulnerable populations.

At the national level in Zambia, leaders in malaria control today are motivated and committed to ensuring the success of this ambitious plan. But sustaining both the political will and necessary financial resources is critical. MACEPA is working to galvanize ongoing partner support and secure long-term commitment to a robust national malaria control program for many years to come.

Convening strategic meetings and targeted awareness-raising events—formal updates on the malaria program with members of Zambia's parliament and support for events on Africa Malaria Day, for example—is an important facet of this work. Much of the national advocacy effort is more subtle, however, focusing on strengthening partner linkages and communication. Zambia has risen to the challenges involved in coordinating many malaria control partners and unprecedented funding from international donors to ensure that all are working in pursuit of a common goal with a shared strategy. This alignment is key to the *three ones* approach to scaling up: working from one national plan, one monitoring and evaluation mechanism, and one coordinating body. Harmonizing the activities of governmental, nongovernmental, faith-based, and



PATH (Meg DeRonghe)

Participants in a malaria advocacy meeting for Zambia's Paramount Chiefs.

private-sector organizations in support of sustained malaria prevention and control is a central theme in MACEPA's national advocacy work.

Engaging provinces and districts

Advocacy at the provincial and district levels in Zambia is focusing on ensuring that health officials, political leaders, and implementing partners are familiar with the national plan for tackling malaria and understand the vital role they play in ensuring success. Recently, progress has been made in strengthening capacity at the district level to plan and manage yearly activities. For instance, leadership on district health management teams—as well as a strong sense of ownership and responsibility—is being demonstrated in the areas of planning, logistics, and implementation of insecticide-treated net and indoor residual spraying strategies.

At the same time, there are other individuals and organizations who are not directly involved in planning or implementation but who have a major influence over whether and how support for malaria

control takes shape over the long term. For example, Paramount Chiefs hold considerable influence over public opinion; the National Malaria Control Centre, together with MACEPA and other partners, is engaging these traditional leaders in an ongoing dialogue about the impact of malaria and efforts to reduce it. As a result, the Chiefs have enthusiastically embraced their role as malaria “ambassadors,” speaking out about stopping malaria, actively promoting the uptake of interventions, and serving as role models in their communities.

Helping people and communities stop malaria

Rapidly scaling up national malaria interventions is complex, but the end goal is simple: Zambians sleeping under treated nets, allowing their homes to be sprayed in targeted districts, learning to recognize malaria symptoms, and obtaining prevention and treatment medicines.

Malaria has long been accepted as a way of life—and death—in Zambia. Moving people to change their long-held habits, beliefs, and priorities can be daunting. Understanding what people know, whom they trust, how they access information, and how they make decisions informs the development of a sound strategy to change behavior. With this in mind, MACEPA is working with national partners to identify

trusted sources of information and reaching out to those groups—including religious leaders, women’s groups, and community radio announcers—to ensure that they speak out loudly, accurately, and consistently about preventing malaria in their communities. Providing formal training about malaria prevention and control to an already powerful cadre of messengers is tapping an extraordinary resource in the fight against this preventable disease. Tailored malaria messages that are delivered in local languages from a respected leader, by a community health worker at the neighborhood health center or during home visits, or heard on radio can arm one more person with lifesaving information.

Evidence is the best advocacy

Advocacy and communication at all levels in Zambia—national planning, district-level training, and encouraging healthy behaviors in communities—guide both the building and the sharing of the Zambian experience. MACEPA views accurate documentation of the process, progress, and lessons learned as central to growing the evidence base in support of national malaria control. Policymakers, scientists, health workers, community leaders, and mothers—all are stakeholders, all have voices that must be heard in order to achieve a sustained commitment to malaria control. Enabling Zambia to succeed and tell its own stories of success is pivotal to moving malaria control forward in Africa.



Journalists participate in a training on malaria reporting and visit health centers to develop story lines for news reports.

Training the messengers

“I feel like a clinical expert!” declared a community radio disc-jockey upon completing a training on malaria and the goals of the national malaria strategic plan. Print, television, and radio journalists have been invited to learn about the disease in workshops, even joining field trips where they witnessed malaria control and prevention in action, developed story lines, and interviewed health workers, politicians, and mothers waiting for their children to be tested. Zambian media professionals, in peer-to-peer groups, developed strategies for addressing myths and misconceptions surrounding malaria and interventions, and met with the corresponding health official for their location to coordinate the timing and content of malaria messages. These activities continue to produce substantial media coverage on the disease and the government’s ongoing fight against it.