



Malaria Bytes

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Care - Net Consulting

Global Initiatives may be undermining health Systems in sub-Saharan Africa

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It has long been learnt that early achievements of extending delivery of specific health interventions such as childhood immunisation or distributions of insecticide bed nets cannot be sustained unless they become an integral part of national health systems. This entails adequate budgetary allocations, human resources, systems for logistics, supervision, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Global Initiatives such as Roll Back Malaria (RBM), Global Fund to fight Tuberculosis, AIDS and Malaria (GFTAM) and so on; have been set up usually as projects and therefore ignore these system

Endangering health systems?

issues that are necessary to drive the delivery of disease interventions. These projects have a tendency to develop a life and momentum of their own. Secondly, Global Initiatives also overlook how the health system is situated within the political economy of a particular country.

For example, in a federal country such as Nigeria, where the States have con-

resources well above the annual budgets of many countries in the sub-region – Global Initiatives have often failed to take this into account in their programming.

Bilateral donors working in-country (who also contribute to Global Initiatives) do not spend enough time in persuading countries to develop harmonized plans led by the countries. The focus has always been on developing policies rather than effective institutions that would ensure the delivery of services on a sustainable basis. This requires working the politics as well as providing expert know-how.

Multilateral agencies, especially those of the UN family, derive their legitimacy from the weak systems they are meant to support. Therefore there is little incentive for them to strengthen national delivery systems.



siderable autonomy and

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Special points of interest:

- * Global Initiatives have usually been set up as projects ignoring systems issues
- * Effective institutions rather than policies ensure the delivery of services on a sustainable basis

UN Malaria Awareness Day

Since the landmark Summit of Africa Heads of State on Malaria in April 25 2000 at Abuja — this day has been set side by African governments committed to rolling back malaria and meeting the United Nations malaria-

related Millennium Development Goals.

While April 25 has usually been tagged Africa Malaria Day (AMD), it took a new significance starting from this year when the first ever UN Malaria Awareness was commemo-

rated all over the world.

In North America the malaria community highlighted this day with special events across several cities in United States and Canada.

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Health Centers, Drugs and Knowledge are not Sufficient

It has long been recognised that medical actions on their own are not sufficient to restore the health of entire communities. In order to achieve this, individual and community actions - facilitated by a process of information dissemination and education that leads to behaviour change - are needed.

This has become more urgent in the face of tackling Malaria and other diseases of poverty. Similarly, in order to go to scale with essential interventions that can reverse the trend in Malaria re-

lated MDG indicators – it would require more than health centres, drugs and knowledge to convince individuals to take appropriate action within the context of their families and communities to adopt and maintain healthy behaviour.

For example, stockpiles of insecticide treated bed nets do not make sense if families do not appreciate the value of owning and using them appropriately.

In the case of control of malaria control and prevention the issue is more of a political and communica-



Stockpiles of ITNs are of no use if families do not sleep under them

tions challenge than a scientific and medical one.

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Malaria Vaccine - Another Magic Bullet?

The news that an effective vaccine against malaria has been developed and could be licensed by 2010, although cheering, has also brought a lot of mixed feelings within the

It is believed that a malaria vaccine, even of moderate efficacy, could make a huge impact.

global malaria community.

The trail vaccine - RS,S/AS02A - tested on children aged between one and four years in Mozambique has taken the lead among several candidate vaccines in the pipeline.

While the introduction of an effective vaccine is a welcome addition to the arsenal in the fight against malaria, especially in the face of widespread drug resistance; there are concerns

in several quarters of the potential untoward effects this may have in the control and prevention of malaria in endemic countries.

First, there is the potential for the vaccine to be regarded as a 'magic bullet' thereby dissuading individuals, families and communities from taking other appropriate measures.

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UN Malaria Awareness Day.....Cont'd

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This included an awareness raising event hosted by the President of the United States - Mr. George Bush - at the White House.

In Europe, coalitions and alliances against malaria advocated with parliaments and other decision-makers.

In Africa, numerous countries organized events and activities to



President Bush marked Malaria Awareness Day – participating in a Rose Garden Ceremony at the White House

mark Africa Malaria Day which has been celebrated since 2001.

The focus of this year's Africa Malaria Day is to work in partnership to reverse

the progression of malaria and make significant impact in endemic countries:

Leadership and Partnership for Results

It was therefore an opportunity for the RBM Partnership to show solidarity with African countries battling against this scourge by supporting several events and activities around the world ◇◇◇

Malaria Vaccine...Cont'd

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It may also be regarded as the ultimate solution to the problem of malaria thus diverting most of the resources to this mode of intervention at the expense of other effective methods



A Step closer to a Malaria Vaccine

of tackling the malaria scourge.

It is also argued that the administration of a malaria vaccine will meet the same fate as other vaccines - the challenge of logistics, maintenance of cold-chain and injections safety that has hindered the establishment of a sustainable system of childhood immunisation in poor countries.

All these problems notwithstanding, the benefits of an effective malaria vaccine if well managed may far outweigh the side effects of such a promising intervention. This can be achieved in three ways.

First, the vaccine is targeted at the most vulnerable group - children under 5 years - most at risk. Secondly, the process of administration could still latch on to the existing Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) infrastructure - even with the attendant difficulties. Finally, communicating the knowledge that a malaria vaccine is not a stand alone but part of the tools when combined with others - could lead to sustainable impact.

Another notable concern still remains. And that is the cost and availability (uninterrupted supply) of vaccines ◇◇

Global InitiativesCont'd

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The claim that global initiatives could be an entry point through which health systems can be revitalized by using the huge resources available to these initiatives has not happened. Rather in some cases they have ridden on the back of a growing industry such as HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment and now Malaria control and prevention, to assume the role of an alternative health system.

If global initiatives are to add real value

Global Initiatives should work more by relieving critical constraints that are 'system issues, irrespective of disease or health problem

to improving health status of the people in sub-Saharan Africa; they should work more by relieving critical constraints such as human resources for health, access to medicines, payment for health

services etc, that are 'system issues' irrespective of the disease or health problem.

Most importantly these initiatives should be seen as a "resource" that strengthens the competences of "change champions" from within countries - who are at the forefront, championing institutional reforms that will enable whole countries to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ◇◇

Health Centres, Drugs, and Knowledge....Cont'd

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It has been noted that a key resource in pursuing behavioural goals in national disease prevention programmes is good, old-fashioned "political will".

Similarly, private-sector consumer communication resource needs to be



Private-sector consumer communication expertise will be required to convince 100m Africans to use ITNs

better tapped for health programmes since the ability to plan and use communication effectively for behavioural impact in development programmes calls for a special expertise that is not readily available in the public sector.

Finally experience has shown that efforts to influence political behaviour work synergistically with efforts to influence personal health behaviour ◇◇

There has been great anxiety among the global health community to “scale up” successful interventions in

malaria control and prevention to reach the great majority of the poor within the shortest possible time.

Such apprehension has been fueled partly by pressure from the huge task of overcoming the large malaria disease burden and its consequent socio-economic implications. Also partly from the demands of the global funding community to demonstrate impact for the massive resources that have been applied to malaria control efforts.

While the above concerns are quite legitimate, they fall short of tackling the problems of rolling back malaria from its root cause.

The basis for the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) strategy is widespread prevention and prompt treatment. This has thus given rise to: the use of insecticide treated bed-nets because up to 30% of malaria deaths can be pre-

MATTERS ARISING: Strengthening Health Services through Investments in Malaria programming

passing the health system. We have now come

vented if children at risk sleep under these nets; social marketing of nets by promoting and making available these commodities to communities at risk; giving pregnant women, who are particularly vulnerable to infection, intermittent preventive treatment to reduce the risk of malaria and associated anaemia and low birth weight; spraying the inner walls of houses with insecticides to reduce mosquito populations; and prompt treatment with a combination of anti-malaria drugs using the Chinese herb derivative artemisinin, which can achieve malaria cure rates of above 95% even in areas of multidrug resistance. Possibly, in the not so distant future, a malaria vaccine may join this arsenal in the fight against malaria.

But these life-saving tools have to be delivered to those at great risk through a delivery mechanism. Several options have been tried in the past usually by-

to the realization that the health services provide the best means of dispatching the tools and supporting the strategies needed to combat malaria. This involves trained and well motivated staff, laboratories and microscopes, health centres and medicines. In addition, a mechanism for people to pay for the health services without throwing them into poverty.

However, in most developing countries the health systems are too weak to provide services that meet the health needs of the populations. Herein lies the opportunity to use the huge investments targeted at malaria control and prevention to strengthen the health services - in doing so, they are able to respond not only to malaria but other health needs of the community ◇◇

CARE - NET provides leadership in a broad range of strategic and technical areas related to Nigeria's Health Sector Reform Programme that enables the country to make accelerated progress towards the MDGs.

We advise and support Nigeria's efforts to improve the enabling environment for health service provision through improved policies, more efficiently managed sector resources, and improved quality of health services.

With a strong team of Independent Health Advisors, CARE - NET provides technical assistance to Governments (Federal, States, and Local Councils), Communities, NGOs/CBOs, Private Sector and Donors - on sector level assessments, strategic planning processes, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Nigeria's health reform programme.

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