

My Net, My Life Initiative: LLINs distribution saving lives in hard to reach communities of Mbire District, Mashonaland Central Province

Partnership and community participation has been the hallmark of the President Malaria Initiative (PMI) supported Zimbabwe Assistance Program in Malaria (ZAPIM) project in Zimbabwe. During the program's scoping exercise, it was observed that some communities in Mbire spent a larger part of the year of between six to eight months residing in unsprayable temporary structures along the Angwa and Mwazamutanda Rivers guarding their crops against wild animals. Furthermore due to the high temperatures these communities sleep outside were the temperatures a considered to be a bit cool leaving their sprayed rooms. For this community it was not unusual for a person to have 2-4 bouts of malaria in a season. Suffering from malaria in these wild animal infested areas used to be the norm.

In 2016 PMI through ZAPIM partnered with the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the Mbire community and distributed 6,100 LLINs and protected 11,685 people (97% coverage) in three malaria high burdened wards. The targeted wards were Angwa, Chapoto and Masoka. The mass distribution was targeted at protecting these marginalized and hard to reach communities as part of a comprehensive malaria control intervention program. The mass distribution done in September 2016 was then followed by the launch in January 2017 of a Continuous Distribution program of LLINs under the **My Net My Life Initiative** aimed at sustaining the gains achieved in mass distribution. As of September 2018 a total of 2,680 LLINs have been distributed under the My Net, My Life Initiative. Thus maintaining the 97% coverage achieved at mass distribution.

In order to build a culture of net use, **the My Net My Life Initiative** was started in Mbire District. It emphasized the need for communities to value, accept and use nets irrespective of colour, shape, place of use, type of sleeping material or sleeping place (indoor or outdoor sleeping) . Under the My Net My Life initiative beneficiary communities (Local Leaders, Village Health Workers, Facility Health Workers and the community in general) were engaged through a continuous engagement process by way of meetings and visits by health workers and village health workers (VHW) on a regular basis educating them on how to hang a net and the importance of sleeping under a net every night at all times.

The launch of the **My Net My Life Initiative** has transformed the lives and work of the Mbire community including the malaria epidemiology. Getting malaria which used to be considered as a norm has all changed with the launch of the **My Net My Life Initiative** as testified by a VHW. The distribution of LLINs has brought immense changes on the malaria burden. With nearly every indoor or outdoor sleeping place having a net, the war against malaria is slowly being won.



Before the launch of the My Net My Life Initiative Estina Chizvi a VHW from Angwa Clinic has this to say **“Every morning till evening people would come to my residence for malaria testing and treating day and night especially from August to May of the following year. I was overworked and I hardly had time to do my household chores as a house wife and bread winner. In most cases I even used my resources to feed the patients and their guardians. But now with every sleeping place having a net and people sleeping under them the long queues have disappeared and are a thing of the past. I now have time to do my household chores and to fend for my family. We are now liberated”**

Her counterpart Komba who is employed as an HIV volunteer chipped in and said **“Even at the local clinic, queues of people suffering from malaria are a thing of the past. Due to the reduced malaria burden the quality of care has also improved and great savings have been made on the malaria medicines and testing kits. I used to give 75 referral letters to children per week to go to the local clinic but since July 2018 I have only given out a few. Children are now attending their sessions. Since 2016 malaria has been on the downward trend and statistics from the VHWs and local clinic bear testimony to this”**.