

Planning social and behaviour change (SBC) for ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission¹

Remember the COVID-19 infection prevention measures²

- Maintain physical distance of at least one metre from all others, except immediate members of your family or people with whom you share accommodation
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer or wash them with soap and water. WHO recommends washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap or hand sanitizer are not available, rub hands vigorously with wood ashes
- Avoid going to crowded places
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Practise respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately dispose of the tissue³ and wash your hands
- People with respiratory symptoms should stay home and not go to work. Follow national government guidance for suspected COVID-19
- Correctly use and dispose of any COVID-19 infection prevention materials provided. Follow WHO or national government guidance for disposal
- Maintain all other measures described even when wearing protective equipment
- Keep up to date with the latest guidance and regulations put in place by WHO and the national government

Core AMP documents: *Key guidance for distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) during the COVID-19 pandemic*

General considerations for safe ITN distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic

<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

SBC before, during, and after ITN distribution campaigns

Social and behaviour change (SBC) is an important component of ITN distribution, whether through campaign or continuous distribution approaches. SBC objectives for ITN distribution include, but are not limited to, ensuring:

- Awareness of malaria and how it can be prevented
- ITN access (via mass campaign, attendance at ANC or EPI, request to a Community Health Worker (CHW) or purchase).

¹ See also: https://covid19communicationnetwork.org/search-materials/?fwp_paged=4
https://endmalaria.org/sites/default/files/Malaria-SBC-Guidance-in-the-Context-of-COVID-19-RBMSBCWG-16Apr2020_0.pdf

² [WHO.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public)

³ Follow WHO and national guidance on waste disposal. Waste should be disposed of appropriately where it will not be in the environment risking contaminating others. See also: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-the-covid-19-virus-interim-guidance>.

- Participation of household representatives in ITN distribution (including registration, ITN distribution and post-distribution activities)
- ITN use (sleep under an ITN in both dry and rainy seasons, use an ITN regardless of shape, material, type or colour, sleep under an ITN indoors and outdoors, use ITNs in high and low transmission settings)
- ITN care (tie up ITN when not in use, handle gently, keep away from children and pets, wash in a basin with mild soap, repair when torn)
- Engagement of stakeholders and partners at all levels (national, regional, district, sub-district, community)
- Safety and security of ITN personnel and household representatives
- Appropriate repurposing or disposal of old ITNs⁴ that are no longer viable for sleeping under.

SBC during COVID-19

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, SBC becomes an even more critical component of ITN distribution and must also focus on:

- Ensuring that campaign workers understand the measures in place for COVID-19 infection prevention, and how these measures should be applied
- Providing information to the targeted population about how COVID-19 transmission will be mitigated during the ITN distribution
- Ensuring access to households that may otherwise refuse visits or materials from people outside the home
- Providing information about the importance of protecting people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 from co-infection with malaria
- Providing information about seeking care in the case of fever (when, where and how), particularly for children under five and pregnant women, in line with national health protocols established in the COVID-19 context
- Providing information on what to do with ITNs that have been used by someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19

SBC will be a critical part of any successful ITN distribution in the COVID-19 context. Robust SBC plans and activities which take into account WHO and national level guidance on COVID-19 must be developed and fully funded. The adaptations made to ensure safe campaign delivery of ITNs must be explained to avoid confusion, mistrust and fear of COVID-19 transmission, as well as mistrust of ITN distribution campaign workers and ITNs.

Even if national restrictions have been somewhat lifted by the government, it will be important to remain cautious about the COVID-19 risk and to continue with precautionary measures during the implementation of the ITN distribution. Messages should be developed that make it clear that the measures are still in place to ensure the safety of campaign workers and ITN recipients.

Cutting or reducing SBC budgets to compensate for cost increases in other areas will increase the risk that the ITN distribution objectives will not be achieved.

⁴ See consensus statement on repurposing from RBM Partnership to End Malaria:
<https://endmalaria.org/sites/default/files/Consensus%20Statement%20on%20Repurposing%20ITNs.pdf>

Establish the SBC sub-committee early to make timely plans

National malaria control/elimination programmes should establish the SBC sub-committee as early as possible in the campaign planning and ensure that its membership is representative, including SBC partners that are present or active at community level in the targeted campaign area(s). The SBC sub-committee should develop the plan, activities and channels that will be prioritized once the campaign strategy has been decided. As SBC is a support to the overall programme, it is imperative that SBC sub-committee members participate in discussions about the overall campaign strategy and identify areas where SBC will be important for ensuring success, as well as areas of risk that may require SBC as part of the response (e.g. where fixed site distribution is opted for, SBC will be needed to reinforce COVID-19 infection prevention measures). The SBC plan must be based on the campaign strategy, which may include different approaches in different places (e.g. door-to-door distribution in urban areas and modified fixed site distribution in rural and remote areas), each of which would require a specific SBC approach to ensure that messages are clear and consistent about how the distribution will be organized and how the safety of campaign workers and household representatives will be ensured.

Use data for planning

As in a pre-COVID-19 campaign, data from research, studies and evaluations on determinants of key malaria prevention behaviours, preferred and trusted communication channels, and reach of communication channels should inform SBC activities. Conducting information gathering (such as focus group discussions) in the COVID-19 context may not be possible, given regulations about numbers of people gathering together and the need to maintain physical distancing, but there are alternative ways to gather information:

- Online searches for published and grey literature
- Contact with organizations working in the country that may have data or research results that can be shared
- Discussion with the COVID-19 task force about any concerns raised by communities during the pandemic that may affect the success of the campaign
- Review lessons learned from previous campaigns, both ITN and other health interventions, to adapt activities, channels and messages for the current campaign
- Conduct interviews by phone (ensuring that phone time is covered for the interview lead):
 - with households using a standardized questionnaire to determine the issues that need to be addressed for the success of the campaign
 - with a sample of community leaders and influencers (village chiefs, religious leaders, women's group presidents, CHWs etc.) to determine issues to be considered in development of the SBC plan
- Discussion and regular communication with district or sub-district SBC staff within the Ministry of Health structure or focal points from different community-based organizations for inputs and perspectives on best approaches and potential facilitators and barriers in the areas where they are working (as above, ensure that phone time is covered)

Based on a review of existing data and information, the SBC sub-committee should then develop the campaign SBC plan with a focus on the main issues that need to be addressed to ensure high uptake and use of ITNs by targeted communities. Targeted communities might include areas where ITNs

were distributed in an earlier campaign or other type of distribution with a focus on ensuring that any unused ITNs are hung and used to protect people from malaria.

During the campaign implementation, ensure that lessons learned are collected through community leaders and campaign workers such as supervisors and monitors, as well as district and sub-district Ministry of Health SBC staff, and use any information gathered to improve/adapt post-campaign SBC activities.

Adapt SBC to the COVID-19 context

Advocacy at the national, regional, district and community levels, social mobilization and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) through mass, print, mid, social and digital media should be maintained in the SBC planning and adapted to work within the COVID-19 context. Ensuring people understand what is happening, why and how, including mitigation of COVID-19 transmission and why it is important at this time to distribute ITNs, will be key for the success of the ITN distribution.

- Engaging the right people at all levels remains a critical part of risk mitigation, so determining the appropriate channels for this to take place in the current context will be a major aspect of the SBC planning.
- Mobilizing the population to participate in the campaign and access ITNs will be the main element to ensure success, so identifying the safest and most effective ways to communicate clear and standard information about the campaign process will be important.
- Promoting nightly hanging and use of ITNs received through pre, during and post-distribution SBC should remain a major focus in an effort to reduce malaria infection and burden on community and facility-based health workers for case management.
- All planned SBC activities need to focus on no-contact approaches as much as possible. Where face-to-face interaction is required, all measures for COVID-19 infection prevention must be respected.

While developing the SBC plans, it will be important to take into consideration factors specific to the COVID-19 context including:

- COVID-19 infection prevention among campaign workers and household representatives, with a particular focus on ensuring that people understand the measures taken to minimize potential transmission during the campaign activities
- Ensuring proper use and disposal⁵ of any COVID-19 infection prevention equipment provided to campaign workers
- Minimizing contact as much as possible to prevent COVID-19 transmission while ensuring that campaign workers are receiving the right information and resources to communicate clear and consistent messages and respond correctly to questions and issues arising
- Integration of messages about COVID-19, malaria and ITNs and advantages or disadvantages of combined messaging at different levels⁶
- Optimizing the impact of SBC activities during the campaign without causing an information overload which can result in confusion, misunderstanding and misinformation

⁵ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-the-covid-19-virus-interim-guidance>

⁶ See AMP guidance: *SBC activities – integrating malaria and ITN messages with messages on COVID-19*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

- Identifying potential risks and how they can be mitigated during the planning period so that sufficient preparation can be done to be able to respond to issues arising during implementation
- Addressing the major stressors at the household level that could lead to ITN misuse, such as ITNs being sold to ensure sufficient money for food where economic restrictions have severely affected household earning
- Problem identification and management during the implementation of activities (including rumours) which must, to the greatest extent possible, be monitored and resolved at the community level, increasing the responsibilities placed on community-level leaders and campaign personnel
- Waste management, including individual ITN packages where these will not be retained by the distribution team
- Considering what form post-campaign SBC activities (at all levels from national to community) will take in the COVID-19 context and their associated risks

See also: https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/Malaria-SBC-Guidance-in-the-Context-of-COVID-19-RBMSBCWG-16Apr2020.pdf

Plan for SBC training, briefing and orientation to reinforce the key messages about both malaria and COVID-19

The main challenge for ensuring high quality SBC activities are implemented is the limited training, briefing or orientation opportunities that may be possible in the COVID-19 context⁷.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, training for SBC for campaign implementation was often insufficient, as it was not seen as important as other implementation activities such as data collection, Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D), etc. In the COVID-19 context, there is a risk that SBC will be further reduced in an effort to ensure that other aspects of the campaign (such as data collection) are understood within a more limited amount of time (number of days, minutes/hours for specific subjects) for training sessions at different levels. It is critical that the SBC sub-committee members are part of the budget development and finalization, as well as the training agenda and material development and finalization to support SBC being a priority in any training that is planned. This includes training for logistics, where COVID-19 infection prevention among workers will be important to explain.

For each type of activity planned for SBC, such as advocacy, social mobilization and SBCC, some type of information sharing is required. In some cases, it will be possible to organize virtual trainings or meetings, while in other cases face-to-face interactions will be needed, likely for a reduced period of time versus what would have been planned pre-COVID-19.

Examples of the various SBC training, orientation and briefing sessions can be found in the SBC Working Group document about malaria SBC in the COVID-19 context. See: https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/Malaria-SBC-Guidance-in-the-Context-of-COVID-19-RBMSBCWG-16Apr2020.pdf

⁷ See also: *Training for implementing ITN mass distribution campaigns in the context of COVID-19*. (URL to follow)

The SBC sub-committee should determine how messages will be standardized among campaign workers during implementation of the campaign, such as print materials (laminated if possible) that can be kept and used as reminders. Other options include the use of “reminder videos” or “reminder texts” sent to campaign workers via WhatsApp or SMS (depending on the level of social media and mobile phone use amongst campaign workers) that can serve as a tool or guide. Irrespective of whether a paper-based or electronic format is used, campaign workers must be provided with tools that help reinforce messages learned during training, which they may not have retained due to limited training time.

Engage the right people at the right time at all levels and provide appropriate SBC tools

The SBC sub-committee should review plans for advocacy at all levels in an effort to ensure that the right people are being included in the engagement activities and that these people will have sufficient knowledge to manage or mitigate problems arising during the implementation of activities. The SBC sub-committee should review the list of people/organizations that participated in advocacy meetings during the previous campaign, as well as the engagement of those people/organizations during the implementation of activities, and make any needed changes to strengthen advocacy outcomes. Given the higher potential for rumours and misinformation because of the ITN distribution taking place while COVID-19 transmission is ongoing, it will be critical to ensure that political leaders at all levels, and not only those currently in power, are engaged and willing to support the activities rather than undermine them.

Community level engagement must ensure representation of the different individuals, groups and organizations that have influence over the population and are listened to as “sources of true information”. These representatives must be convinced of the importance of the ITN distribution in the COVID-19 context and must be provided with concrete examples of how their involvement and support will ensure that the activities are successful. Community buy-in and ownership of the ITN distribution is more important than ever in the COVID-19 context, particularly given the risk of rejection of people or materials from outside at community or household level.

Advocacy to, and engagement of, individuals and representatives of groups or organizations must include the provision of information packages to ensure consistent, correct and standard information is communicated before, during and after the ITN distribution. Information packages may include some or all of the following:

- Basic information sheet that explains the malaria situation in the country, the risks of not implementing the campaign, the campaign objectives and how the campaign will be carried out in line with COVID-19 infection prevention measures
- Information about the ITNs being distributed, particularly where new or different ITN types will be deployed (depending on national level decisions in the case of multi-product campaigns⁸)
- Frequently asked questions about COVID-19 (developed in collaboration with the COVID-19 emergency task force), malaria and the ITNs that are being distributed
- Key messages for pre, during and post campaign

⁸ See also AMP guidance: *Planning and operational recommendations for multi-product campaigns*.
<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/amp-tools/tools-resources/>

- Potential rumours that may arise and facts to debunk them if they need to be addressed⁹
- Posters of various sizes that can be placed in strategic locations where they will be visible to a wide range of audiences
- Campaign visibility materials such as t-shirts, caps, etc. that can be worn to demonstrate engagement in and support of the ITN campaign
- A list of contact people that can be reached in case of questions or problems before, during or after the ITN distribution
- Additional print or other supports depending on what is being developed for the campaign

Where individuals and representatives of groups or organizations will participate in media fora (radio, Facebook live, television, TikTok, etc.), the SBC sub-committee should develop scripts that can be used to ensure clear and consistent messages are communicated. Request that they do not diverge from the most important points about the ITN distribution in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engage the media as a critical partner

Mass media (in particular radio and television, depending on the context of the targeted area) will be one of the safest communication channels to use during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can also have the advantage of reaching a wide group of people at the same time with clear, consistent and standardized messages. Media may be a friend or a foe, so ensuring that media house representatives are engaged and provided with correct information about the campaign, including how COVID-19 transmission will be mitigated during the implementation of activities, will be important to avoid mis- and disinformation spreading on channels that will quickly reach people and have a detrimental effect on the campaign outcomes, at best, and on security of campaign workers, at worst.

Typically, media workshops on health matters are more effective when broadcasters, health spokespersons and community leaders come together to plan participation in call-in shows, panel discussions and interviews. However, during COVID-19, only very small gatherings may be allowed (with adherence to the regulations concerning handwashing facilities, physical distancing, etc.). As media representatives, at least at the central and regional levels, are typically well connected to the internet in order to research and report stories, consider the possibility of virtual meetings using platforms such as Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp. Regardless of the method for engaging the media, ensure that they are provided with packages that include much of the same information described above for advocacy and engagement meetings.

Where community radio will be used, it may be necessary to have face-to-face orientations given limited access to virtual platforms. In these cases, limit the time for the orientation to the minimum required to provide the needed information and packages and ensure that representatives of community radio stations have contact information for district SBC personnel in case of questions or issues arising, such as callers phoning in with questions about mis- or disinformation circulating at the community level.

⁹ See also AMP guidance: *COVID-19 considerations for the development of rumour management plans related to ITN distribution*. https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID_19_-_Rumour_management_plans.pdf

Leverage on the reach of social media

Social media and messaging apps are good platforms to provide up-to-date, timely and actionable information about the ITN distribution at low cost and with, in many cases, large reach. Where social media use is prevalent, it will be important to identify the most used platforms (what is the usage of Facebook versus Twitter, WhatsApp etc.) and focus efforts on those. Although the use of the social media platform might not be expensive (e.g. even boosting messages via Facebook is relatively cheap), developing high quality audio-visual messages to be disseminated via social media will have budget implications. It is, however, possible for national malaria programmes and partners to develop cost-effective short video tools modelling appropriate behaviours using a camera or smartphone, but these are likely to be less effective for getting people's attention than professionally developed audio-visuals. Videos produced could cover topics such as:

- What happens during registration and ITN distribution, physical distancing, etc.
- What should be done with ITNs – airing, hanging, etc.
- How campaign workers are protecting ITN recipients from COVID-19 transmission – most importantly physical distancing and handwashing – and, if provided, personal protective equipment, etc.

These short videos may be particularly effective in urban areas where they can be disseminated on TV and social media as well as in rural areas that have access to national TV programming. As there will be a cost implication, ensure that these short videos can be used across a wide range of communication channels and disseminated to a large audience.

Social media influencers should be used to reach large audiences with the correct messages about COVID-19, malaria and ITNs and should also be requested to intervene in the case of rumours or mis- or disinformation to correct perceptions and beliefs.

Where social media will be used as a major channel for information dissemination, SBC planning and budgeting should include a campaign staff that will be focused on developing and disseminating the different posts and information for the public, as well as monitoring the different channels for any rumours or mis- or disinformation about the campaign, malaria, COVID-19 or the ITNs being distributed. These staff should be responsible for tracking issues that come up on the different social media platforms and communicating them on a daily basis to the national coordinating committee, including identifying those that may need a more formal response from the government and partners.

WhatsApp is one of the most used platforms in Africa¹⁰ and offers the opportunity of both disseminating messages outward to different social networks and groups and ensuring strong coordination and information sharing among campaign personnel. For example, WhatsApp groups can be set up for supervisors, monitors, district and community level teams for regular and timely sharing of information. These also provide a good platform for collecting information about rumours that are circulating, the spread of the rumour(s) and the effect it is having on the ITN distribution in order to identify collectively the best way for those to be addressed.

¹⁰ <https://qz.com/africa/1804859/fake-whatsapp-app-more-popular-than-facebook-instagram-in-africa/>

See also the following document from the IFRC which provides tips for using social media to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/04/Tips-on-using-social-media-for-COVID-19-FINAL-01.04.2020.pdf>

Engage community influencers and their communities

Community influencers will have an important role in the SBC activities and they therefore must have a sense of ownership of the distribution campaign. Examples of community influencers include, for example, village chiefs, religious leaders, women's groups leaders, youth leaders, etc. They may also be community members that do not have a "formal" status within the community structure, but still command a lot of respect.

Community influencers are likely to be:

- The first people asked questions about the ITN campaign, COVID-19 transmission and potential risks as community members consider their participation in activities
- The first people in a community who are able to refute fake news, debunk rumours and prevent panic
- Able to resolve any disputes that may occur, for example, households receiving different numbers of ITNs or management of insufficient ITNs or those remaining at the end of the distribution period, by providing local solutions
- One of the main social mobilization agents (i.e. ensuring that campaign workers have access to the community, and that households participate fully in the campaign)

Even with SBC, some households may refuse to be registered, to take ITNs and/or to have their household marked. If distribution is at a modified fixed site, there is the potential that people will not wish to move from their home, particularly if there are rumours that the site is crowded and not well managed. In these types of scenarios, community influencers (even more than public authorities) can be crucial in helping campaign personnel have access to the community and its members.

See *Roles and responsibilities of community leaders in ITN campaigns during COVID-19 pandemic* – (URL to follow) for additional information on engaging community leaders in the ITN distribution process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tools, materials and training developed for community influencers, should consider the following SBC aspects:

- What communities should expect from campaign personnel and what is to take place for household registration and ITN distribution
- Actions to be taken after receiving ITNs (e.g. handwashing, airing, hanging, always sleeping under, care and repair)
- Reinforcement of positive social norms, i.e. responsible people protect themselves, their families, neighbours and community members from malaria and also from COVID-19
- Promotion of a sense of self-efficacy, i.e. everyone has the ability to make a difference through positive actions and these include preventing malaria and following the regulations around COVID-19
- Reinforcing the dangers of malaria, so that community perception of the risk associated with malaria is not skewed and minimized during the COVID-19 pandemic

Faith-based organizations (whether national or community-based) are particularly important to reinforce social mobilization and behavioural messages in the COVID-19 context¹¹. Their involvement and active participation in the campaign may counteract some of the alternative theories about transmission of COVID-19 and how it can be prevented, as well as correct any misinformation that arises before, during or after the campaign.

Use no-touch interpersonal communication (IPC)

There are many people that do not have or have limited access to radio. This is especially true in remote, rural areas and hard-to-reach locations. Considering that these households may also have limited access to health facilities (and therefore malaria treatment and/or diagnosis), it is even more crucial that they receive ITNs and information on how to properly use and care for them. In this case, it may be necessary to have some kind of interpersonal communication (IPC).

IPC is likely to be significantly reduced in the COVID-19 context. Therefore, consider:

- Capitalizing on the household registration or distribution (if being conducted door-to-door) to disseminate key malaria, ITN and COVID-19 information to households. It should be noted, however, that campaign workers and households should not be overloaded with information because training time is likely to be limited, which increases the possibility of incorrect messages being communicated and the risk of confusion and misunderstanding at the household level
- Providing appropriate guides or tools for campaign workers involved in IPC. These should be clear and concise and remind campaign personnel to protect themselves and household members from COVID-19 transmission and provide messages on malaria, seeking diagnosis and treatment for fever (in line with national guidelines and protocols), ITNs, hanging, care and repair, etc.
- Expanding the use of town criers/announcers, mobile units and megaphones for use by campaign workers, bearing in mind that there are still risks for non-adherence to COVID-19 infection prevention measures (children in particular, have been known to run after town criers and mobile units, creating gatherings of people)

Plan to emphasize safety measures for campaign workers and household representatives during the ITN campaign

During the campaign, everyone involved – campaign workers and household representatives – must feel comfortable and assured that all measures possible have been taken to prevent COVID-19 transmission during the implementation of activities. Training, briefing and orientation should be planned to include:

- Ensuring that campaign workers understand all the COVID-19 infection prevention measures (such as how often hands should be washed and what technique should be used), as well as how to use any personal protective equipment provided (such as hand sanitizer or soap, masks or other materials), as well as any equipment for undertaking health checks of campaign staff (such as infrared thermometers or health checklists)
- Ensuring that campaign workers are comfortable with putting on and taking off their protective equipment, and that they understand the importance of proper disposal of non-reusable equipment at the end of each day and/or the end of the distribution period

¹¹ See also: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

- Ensuring that campaign workers understand what to do with reusable equipment, such as fabric masks, at the end of each day (e.g. how to wash and with what, drying instructions, etc.)

In addition, it will be necessary to communicate clear and consistent information across as many channels as possible, and particularly through community radio, regarding adaptations made to the campaign strategy to allow it to take place in the COVID-19 context and ensure the safety of the households receiving ITNs. Procedures for receiving ITNs should be broadcast widely and the COVID-19 prevention measures to be taken by both campaign workers and household representatives explained clearly. For example, where fixed site distribution is organized and community members may only attend and receive their ITNs if they are wearing a mask, this must be communicated through all channels to avoid frustration at distribution points.

Campaign workers and household representatives must also be confident in the efficacy of these prevention measures in protecting them from COVID-19. It is therefore important that they understand that these protection measures have been identified by various national and international sources (Ministry of Health, WHO, etc.) as the best means of protection from COVID-19.

SBC for managing adapted or modified fixed site distribution

While many countries are shifting to a door-to-door distribution strategy, several countries have opted for an adapted or modified fixed site distribution. This can include adaptations such as:

- Households going to fixed sites for their nets the same day or the day after they have been registered and received their vouchers (where vouchers are part of the strategy)
- Households only being allowed into fixed site distribution points based on specific clusters of households, the serial numbers on their vouchers, by alphabetical order or other strategy for managing crowds and limiting unnecessary physical contact and closeness between people

SBC must be clear how the ITN distribution is organized at fixed sites and what is being done to keep recipients safe from COVID-19 transmission. Households need to know the details of “how” the ITN distribution will take place before they arrive at the distribution point. This can be done through radio, town criers, mobile units or campaign personnel using megaphones, etc. to disseminate key information such as:

- The days that they are able to collect their ITNs
- How health screening areas will be set up before the main distribution area to identify potential COVID-19 cases
- Whether there will be markings on the ground to help them keep physical distancing and the importance of respecting them
- When and how they can wash their hands during distribution
- Only one person per household and no children (whether with a parent or alone) will be admitted to the distribution area
- How the distribution site will be set up and how campaign personnel will organize themselves, so that COVID-19 prevention measures are maintained
- Whether household representatives are required to wear masks in the distribution point area
- That people will be asked to leave the distribution area if they are unable to respect the measures that have been put in place for everyone’s safety

With strong SBC in advance of the ITN distribution, households will know what to expect at the distribution points, and it will be easier for campaign personnel to reinforce distribution points processes and manage the distribution.

Given that health education will be limited, fixed distribution points can display SBC materials (such as health education posters) that disseminate key messages before the entrance to the main distribution area. Even with the SBC materials displayed, it is important to ensure that all fixed distribution point personnel are trained on SBC messages that need to be communicated to households. It is also very important to ensure that distribution point personnel know how to manage potential issues (including conflicts, rumours, people with COVID-19-like symptoms, etc.) that may arise during the distribution.

Urban and rural challenges and opportunities

SBC strategies differ between urban and rural areas since people in each area obtain their information through different channels or, more likely, through the same channels but in different proportions (e.g. while rural areas may have a small percentage use of social media due to communication network reach, this same channel may be significant in urban areas where access to communication networks is prevalent). In addition to the different levels of access to different communication channels, it is important to take into account political, socio-economic, religious and cultural norms and variations. The SBC sub-committee must take these varying challenges into account when determining how best to ensure that clear, consistent and standard information is easily available to the targeted communities and households. The table below shows some baseline considerations for development of the SBC strategy for urban and rural areas, and these can be added to and expanded upon with country-specific information in order to support more effective SBC planning.

Context	Challenges	Opportunities
Urban	<p>Physical distancing will be difficult to maintain for COVID-19 infection prevention</p> <p>Less traditional structures and thus community leaders are not as influential and community health worker networks are often less developed</p> <p>Rumours and misinformation can spread more quickly through the use of social media and may be more difficult to contain and manage</p>	<p>More access to PPE, including masks and gloves that can be made mandatory for picking up ITNs where fixed sites are opted for</p> <p>High access to national radio and TV stations</p> <p>Good road access means that public announcements can be diffused effectively through mobile motorized units</p> <p>Traffic jam points offer an opportunity for reaching people with posters and large-size banners if text is simple and images are catchy</p>

		<p>Many people have access to social media which can be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disseminate messages in audio-visual format • identify and respond to rumours and misinformation
Rural	<p>Access barriers for communities in remote and hard-to-reach areas</p> <p>Less access to television and social media channels for audio-visual SBC</p> <p>Insufficient resources such as running water and soap can make it difficult to maintain COVID-19 infection prevention measures</p> <p>Rumours and misinformation may be more difficult to address where a local, trusted source is involved in their propagation</p>	<p>Physical distancing easier to maintain for COVID-19 infection prevention</p> <p>Traditional structures (such as village councils) often set and enforce social norms and have great influence in communities</p> <p>Community meetings can be held outdoors in community areas where physical distancing can be maintained</p> <p>Sense of community may increase willingness to identify local solutions to bottlenecks and problems (e.g. transport of ITNs to remote communities)</p>

Post-distribution SBC

SBC following the distribution is often disregarded for lack of proper planning, organizational challenges (such as lack of dedicated human resources following the campaign) and/or lack of funding. But it is important to maintain SBC following the distribution to reinforce key messages that were disseminated during the other phases of the campaign. When planning for post distribution SBC, the SBC sub-committee should consider the following aspects:

- **Timeframe:** determine how long after the end of the distribution SBC activities should continue to be implemented to ensure that objectives for ITN hanging and nightly use are met. Even if a timeframe is fixed during the planning period, countries may prolong SBC activities if malaria and/or COVID-19 cases increase in an effort to ensure that all ITNs are used and proper treatment-seeking behaviour is promoted
- **Activities:** while traditionally post-distribution ITN campaign activities have been limited to SBCC, a mix of advocacy and engagement, social mobilization and SBCC activities can be more effective in the COVID-19 context to allow for regular changes in messages and channels to address issues arising (e.g. mobilizing communities so that everyone is concerned about ensuring that COVID-19 patients have access to an ITN, rather than stigmatize those with suspected or confirmed illness)
- **Key messages:** decide which key messages will be disseminated to communities and how they will build on and reinforce the messages that were disseminated during the distribution. Ensure that the situation with malaria and COVID-19 is monitored, including that for malaria case management to identify reductions in health facility attendance, so as

to tailor messages appropriately. This may include, for example, reiterating the need for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 to sleep alone and be provided with an ITN to cover the space where they are sleeping or reinforcing the importance of correct malaria case management for children under five and pregnant women. If malaria cases increase and there is evidence that people have unused ITNs in their households, a SBC campaign may be needed in focused areas to ensure that ITNs are used correctly and regularly. Additionally, in communities that have been more affected by COVID-19, there may be a need for specific messaging about what households should do with ITNs that have been used by people who have recovered from or died of COVID-19

- **Channels:** determine the most effective channels to ensure effective post-distribution SBC. Where possible, use data collected during the campaign about sources of information and reinforce those channels in the post-distribution period, while also limiting investment of typically insufficient funds in less effective channels. Community leaders might be a good SBC channel post-distribution, given that they are present in and have access to the community on a continuous basis. Community leaders can also ensure people understand and implement positive behaviours (such as allowable repurposing of old nets) in an effort to establish community social norms.

Post-distribution SBC should build on existing data, including MIS data and/or the ITN access:use ratio¹² for the different areas of the country in order to best target different approaches and ensure specific efforts and investment are targeted where needed, such as areas with a high malaria burden, high ITN access and low ITN use. Post-distribution SBC should also focus on areas with known risks for ITN misuse and identify appropriate channels and activities for these communities to address the barriers for use of ITNs to prevent malaria. Supervision and monitoring data from the campaign, as described above, should be used to tailor the mix of channels to those that are most cost-effective where resources are limited.

Plan for rumour and misinformation management

It is important to plan for the tracking and management of rumours. Experience with the Ebola crisis in West Africa has shown the complex nature of managing rumours during a crisis. It is important for countries to undertake an evaluation of potential risks, develop risk mitigation measures and establish clear channels for SBC around some or all of the following, which should be added to based on national malaria programme information:

- Reaction of general public to security forces deployed to enforce COVID-19 regulations and fear of security force violence
- Fear of others and potential aggression – xenophobia, marginalized groups
- Greater reliance on broadcast and social media communication – these may well have smaller reach than traditional SBC measures and not be as trusted as local SBC by actors known in the community
- Rumours about multi-product campaigns
- Rumours about ITNs carrying COVID-19
- Rumours about campaign workers spreading COVID-19
- Rumours about Chinese products

¹² <https://www.vector-works.org/resources/itn-access-and-use/>

It is important for the campaign to ensure that roles and responsibilities are well established for countering misinformation, rumours, fake news, etc. Community leaders are usually the first to be able to respond to rumours and fake news, as long as they are clear that this is their role and responsibility and that they have been provided with the knowledge and tools to respond appropriately.

It will be particularly important to have trained staff monitoring social media platforms and ensuring that accurate information is being disseminated. Using the same platform, the staff must be able to respond rapidly to any misinformation or rumours.

Several resource materials should be consulted by countries in developing a rumour management plan. These include:

- *COVID-19 considerations for the development of rumour management plans related to ITN distribution.* (<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>)
- Creating a real-time rumour management system for COVID-19. (https://covid19communicationnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Creating-a-Real-Time-Rumor-Management-System-Technical-Brief_v1.0.pdf)
- Technical brief on COVID-19 rumour tracking. (https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/COVID-19%20Rumor%20Tracking%20-%20Technical%20Brief_v1.1.pdf)

Plan appropriate SBC for multi-product campaigns

Where multi-product campaigns are planned, the SBC sub-committee needs to pay special attention to the potential differences between the ITNs provided, such as some districts receiving a polyethylene ITN and others receiving a polyester ITN. In countries with data indicating household preference for one or the other type of netting material, it will be important to develop specific messages to address issues and misinformation that affect preference and that may lead to low household participation or increased rejection of ITNs, as well as non- or misuse of ITNs received. Where different ITN types will be distributed in different parts of the country, many of the same considerations raised about SBC and multi-product campaigns in the pre-COVID-19 period still apply¹³.

Specific consideration should be given to planning for management of rumours related to multi-product campaigns in a context where people are already feeling economically and socially disadvantaged. Potential rumours may include:

- Another community close by is receiving “better” nets than we are
- Pregnant women are being provided with sub-standard nets (during routine ANC distributions) by the government
- We are being stigmatized with this type of net as they know we do not like it and they are giving it to us anyway
- This specific type of net will give you COVID-19 (this rumour can develop if there is a larger number of COVID-19 cases in an area where a specific type of net has been distributed, as opposed to other areas/type of nets)

Reporting on the campaign SBC

¹³ See: *Planning and operational recommendations for multi-product ITN campaigns.*
<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/amp-tools/tools-resources/>

During the campaign implementation, ensure that lessons learned are collected through community leaders and campaign workers such as supervisors and monitors, as well as district and sub-district Ministry of Health SBC staff, and use any information gathered to improve/adapt during and post-campaign SBC activities. For campaigns that are taking place in multiple phases it is particularly important to ensure that lessons learned are built on, rumours that have come up are planned for and that any quality improvements possible for reinforcing the ITN distribution messages are put in place.