

Engagement of community leaders in ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission

V.1 September 2020

Remember the COVID-19 infection prevention measures¹

- Maintain physical distance of at least one metre from all others, except immediate members of the 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 tissue² and wash your hands
- If you have fever or respiratory symptoms, you should stay home and not go to work
- Wear a fabric mask if there is widespread community transmission, and especially where physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Correctly use and dispose of any COVID-19 infection prevention materials provided. Follow 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

NOTE: As the pandemic evolves, WHO updates the infection prevention measures based on new scientific findings. Check for any updates on <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>.

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

Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission See:

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

Ensure community engagement³

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 the community or household level for fear of COVID-19 transmission. During COVID-19, external and unnecessary contact with communities and households should be limited. To ensure that the ITN distribution is effective, it is important to work through community-level structures and with guidance from people that know the community best.

¹ <https://www.WHO.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

² 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>

³ See also: <https://www.who.int/risk-communication/training/Module-B5.pdf>

Community engagement is the process through which community organizations and individuals agree on a collective vision for the benefit of the community. Community engagement:

- Puts the community first and centralizes the planning and implementation of activities that affect the community.
- Ensures respect for cultural norms and alignment to local contexts.
- Involves the community intentionally in understanding the risks and opportunities community members face in any particular situation.
- Helps develop action that is acceptable and effective.

Community engagement is central to the success of ITN mass campaigns in the context of COVID-19, as well as in other complex operating environments.

Engage community leaders

Community leaders are key to effective community engagement in all health activities and, in the context of COVID-19 transmission, even more so.

“Unlike any other outbreak before it, control of the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the fullest engagement of the public and leaders of communities just as much as it does on the health care sector and humanitarian players to ensure we can end transmission of this virus.” WHO⁴

Communities can be reached more easily through their different local leaders who have an influence on the behaviour, attitudes and practice of community members. Community leaders can be instrumental in ensuring the successful implementation of the ITN distribution campaign and, at the same time, can ensure that community members adhere to regulations put in place for COVID-19 infection prevention.

Engaging and involving community leaders has always been part of ITN campaign planning in every country, although roles and responsibilities have differed from country to country and community to community. The overall effectiveness of community leaders in the contexts of the areas targeted for ITN distribution – urban versus rural, level of social cohesion and other factors – should be discussed during planning for determining the most effective resource allocations for different SBC activities. Lessons learned from community leader engagement in previous campaigns should be used to identify and reinforce best practices and to mitigate against potential challenges in an effort to improve the effectiveness of community leader engagement for achieving distribution outcomes. Having local leaders and influencers engaged and ensuring that they are supported in their work will be important for the rapid identification of problems, reporting on incidents and finding practical and sustainable solutions. Many of the problems and challenges that will arise will be local problems that are identified in communities first (and by the community members themselves) and should be, as much as possible, resolved at this level⁵.

Establishing good relationships with formal and informal community leaders, asking for their active commitment to the fight against malaria in their community and supporting them in successfully implementing their tasks in support of the ITN distribution are critical steps in ensuring high-quality activities that achieve the objectives of the distribution by reaching targeted households with ITNs and ensuring that the ITNs received by households are used every night throughout the year by all members of the household. Obtaining the active commitment of community leaders through their successful engagement is to ensure that, as much as possible, they take ownership of processes and

⁴ <https://extranet.who.int/goarn/content/achieving-community-leadership-covid-19-response>

⁵ See also: *COVID-19 considerations for the development of rumour management plans related to ITN distribution*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

activities in their community, lead community members by example and promote sustained positive malaria prevention behaviours.

Trusted and respected community leaders will be able to clearly communicate to their neighbours and friends, respond to questions, identify sources and minimize impact of rumours, and ensure rapid resolution to problems arising through locally available solutions and mechanisms or structures in place for addressing disagreements and differences. Community leaders can be an important part of ensuring that the ITN distribution reaches everyone, including households that do not meet the traditional household definition, such as female-headed households, or households in quarantine due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases, and that data are validated to account for the ITNs received and the complete coverage of all households in their community with sufficient ITNs.

Plan and budget early for community leader engagement

Engaging community leaders effectively has operational and budget implications which should be taken into account early in the planning process of the campaign. During macroplanning, the SBC sub-committee should work with the logistics and implementation sub-committees to ensure that the resources required for engaging community leaders (technical, financial and logistics) are properly budgeted. This should include:

- The process and resources required for the identification of community leaders (e.g. any costs incurred in communicating with partners working at the local level to request their support in identifying local leaders, especially in areas with insecurity or political tension)
- The costs for their engagement. Particularly in rural areas, community leaders may not have access to social media and other virtual channels and engagement is likely to require face-to-face meetings. In that case, costs would include venue rental, hand washing stations, refreshment breaks, transport and per diem, etc.).
- The printing of the correct quantity of tools, materials and visual supports needed for their orientation, as well as for use during implementation. These might include posters or flipcharts that act as a communication guide and help community leaders successfully carry out their set tasks. Posters are useful for displaying key behaviours and messages and can be used in community meetings to inform and engage community members or can be posted in high-traffic areas within the community (such as around water collection points).
- Timely procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) needed for activities that engage community leaders.

In order to avoid any delays in campaign implementation, it is critical to ensure delivery of all materials for community leaders to the sub-district level in advance (minimum of one week to ensure timely deployment to community level) of the community leader engagement sessions.

It is important to make sure that community leaders are not “out of pocket” because of their engagement in the ITN campaign.

- Consider remunerating community leaders depending on how much responsibility they take on (data verification, secure storage of ITNs, etc.). Where remuneration can create expectations that future community level programmes may not be able to meet, consider providing community leaders with other motivators such as t-shirts or caps that will also act as SBC material for the campaign.
- If community leaders are required to communicate with their community and/or with campaign personnel such as supervisors by phone, ensure that the budget includes their communication allowance/telephone card. Where community leaders are part of the rumour management structure in terms of reporting on and responding to rumours, communication costs must be taken into account, so ensure that the SBC budget for community leaders is aligned with the roles and responsibilities they have been allocated.

Identify community leaders

Communities will identify their leaders in different ways, particularly in the case of informal community leaders who, through their personality, actions, behaviour or support to others, are recognized as key pillars of community well-being. Community leaders and influencers will vary by context (e.g. urban and rural), role (e.g. economic, spiritual, political, educational) and influence (e.g. broad or limited influence over the community), as well as the channel(s) through which they engage community members (e.g. religious services and events, social or other media, traditional structures and venues, women's or youth groups, etc.). Community leaders with a limited influence on the overall community may have a much greater influence in the areas where they live, or on the people who look up to them for leadership. They can thus be critical in addressing specific issues, such as misuse of ITNs for fishing, rejection of ITNs because of specific cultural norms or beliefs, or access of minority or hard-to-reach populations to ITNs.

Leaders and influencers are people who, because of their status, can influence the beliefs, opinions and attitudes of community members broadly or within subsets of the community and therefore also influence their behaviour and the social norms that they follow. They are people who know their community well in terms of structure and internal dynamics, sources of information, beliefs, attitudes and practices, resources, economic condition, social networks, demographics and past experiences. They are best placed to identify specific risks associated with campaign activities and potential mitigation measures.

Community leaders and influencers include:

- People involved with community-based organizational structures including but not limited to: traditional (e.g. village or chiefdom) chiefs; mayors or people in other government positions whether elected or appointed; women's, youth and other group representatives; Red Cross Red Crescent branch staff or youth leaders; religious leaders; teachers; business leaders; representatives of trusted national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); civil society organizations (CSOs).
- People involved with the health system, including but not limited to community health workers (CHWs), community health extension workers, community-owned resource persons and health surveillance assistants (depending on national community health structure).
- People that others follow for different individual reasons, such as local sports figures, musicians, crafts people, comedians, television and radio personalities, etc.

Plan for community engagement in urban areas

While communities are heterogeneous, particular consideration needs to be given to urban areas, where there are likely to be large differences in geographically close areas in terms of socio-economic status, political affiliations and opinions, housing structures, access to health care, social cohesion, employment, education and stability. In many urban areas, population growth is rapid, with new inhabitants coming in from many different rural or peri-urban areas. This leads to a great diversity in terms of ethnic and cultural groups in a relatively small area. There will likely be a greater range of leaders and influencers (e.g. people on social media channels) with influence on key target groups within the urban area, less alignment behind individuals due to more partisan opinions and less formalized social and interpersonal networks between people in different neighbourhoods. There is the potential for rumours arising and spreading rapidly with the information sources that are more prevalent in urban communities, such as social media. In addition, many people, including women, will work away from their household, which requires a different kind of effort to communicate how and when ITNs will be distributed and ensure that all households are covered. SBC plans, budgets, materials and tools should be adapted accordingly. For example, it may be necessary to engage more "community" leaders representing key target groups in urban areas which could be done through

virtual and print channels to allow for financial resources to be used more effectively. It would also allow for more people to be engaged than would be possible at face-to-face meetings.

Develop roles and responsibilities of community leaders in the context of COVID-19 transmission

In the context of COVID-19, roles and responsibilities (R&R) of community leaders in ITN campaigns will build on those typically conferred on community leaders, which include:

Often included as R&R during planning:

- Mobilize the members of the community to participate in the campaign (e.g. informing community members of the dates and times of household registration and ITN distribution, the location of distribution points, as well as encouraging them to redeem their coupons for ITNs where this is the strategy).
- Facilitate CHW access to the community (e.g. support the planning of door-to-door household registration and/or ITN distribution).

Additionally during COVID-19

- Ensure criteria for selection of campaign workers are respected and/or be responsible for the identification and/or validation of the list of community workers, particularly those who have some experience of ITN distribution or similar activity⁶ to minimize problems with selection of people from outside the community.

Often included as R&R during implementation:

- Support with high-quality implementation of various activities at the community level (e.g. crowd control at distribution points or for door-to-door teams).
- Disseminate key information for social mobilization and social and behaviour change through community meetings, as well as individual interactions.
- Validate campaign data during the household registration and/or ITN distribution period to verify that everyone has been reached and facilitate follow-up of households that were missed during the door-to-door registration and/or ITN distribution.
- Gather daily information from community members and campaign workers about the activities being implemented and liaise with campaign supervisors so that the information supports necessary programme adjustments to improve overall implementation quality in real-time, as well as for future programme implementation in the community.
- Encourage correct hanging and use of ITNs for malaria prevention and discourage misuse (e.g. misusing ITNs for fishing).
- Address barriers to hanging and use of ITNs, such as rumours about their toxicity, where these are preventing correct malaria prevention behaviour in specific households or parts or all of the community.
- Attend daily progress meetings (as much as possible), and give feedback on any issues, challenges or lessons learned.

Additionally, during COVID-19:

- Ensure that households understand the necessity of the ITN distribution and the need to maintain protection from malaria even during COVID-19 transmission when facilitating CHW access to households. This will be particularly important given that COVID-19 can create community mistrust of external parties. Local leaders can help to allay fears around the ITN distribution by ensuring communities know that campaign workers have been recruited locally and that they know about the procedures put in place for their and for campaign personnel safety.
- Ensure that the issue of malaria is not lost in all the information about COVID-19. Community leaders can talk about malaria and the importance of managing malaria in the COVID-19

⁶ See also AMP guidance for further information on selection criteria: *Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

context (e.g. reducing the risk of malaria/COVID-19 co-infection, promoting timely diagnosis and treatment in case of febrile illness, participation in malaria prevention activities including indoor residual spraying (IRS) and seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC) and ITN campaigns, ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected from exposure to mosquito biting, etc.).

- Store ITNs to be distributed locally securely. This will be particularly important given that many campaigns are shifting from fixed point distribution to door-to-door distribution, thus increasing the need for (1) secure storage areas for small quantities of ITNs and (2) storing of the ITNs as close as possible to communities to reduce the need for last mile transportation.
- Monitor respect for COVID-19 infection prevention measures by campaign personnel and community members, such as physical distancing, use of PPE and regulations around the number of people gathering together.
- Ensure that households that may be disadvantaged in terms of receiving information about or participating in the campaign, such as female-headed households, people with disabilities, the elderly and other marginalized groups in the community are reached, receive information, are registered to receive an ITN during the distribution and that, eventually, they have received the required number of ITNs for their household.
- Ensure that households in quarantine and self-isolation due to COVID-19 are identified to receive their ITNs through a safe strategy.

Often included as R&R for post-distribution:

- Influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours in the community (e.g. creating social norms, promoting self-efficacy, changing attitudes, etc.). For example, if all community leaders sleep under an ITN (and ensure that their whole family sleeps under an ITN every night of the year – and tell the people that this is the case), ITN use can become a social norm within the community.
- Respond to questions from households about what to do with ITNs that are no longer considered effective for sleeping under and provide appropriate responses based on national policies about ITN repurposing.

Additionally, during COVID-19:

- Increasing awareness in communities on how to manage ITNs that have been used by people who were sick or who died of COVID-19. Community leaders can help to ensure that households are correctly washing and reusing these ITNs rather than destroying them.
- Encouraging people with COVID-19 symptoms to sleep by themselves under an ITN, as well as following national guidelines in terms of self-isolation, testing, treatment seeking for febrile illness, etc.

Roles and responsibilities will vary from country to country and may, for example, include additional responsibilities for COVID-19 infection prevention, such as daily health checks, where responsibilities are largely decentralized to the community level. Regardless of roles and responsibilities identified, it is critical to ensure that community leaders are equipped and supported to successfully implement them.

Develop SBC materials and supports for community leaders

Provide community leaders with the right tools based on an understanding of skills, capacities, preferences and information from previous campaigns – ITN and other – as to what worked or did not. Decisions should be taken on the tools that are required for community leaders based on the roles and responsibilities assigned to them (e.g. standard operating procedures for data verification or key

messages for social mobilization or frequently asked questions and responses for media purposes, etc.).

- Ensure that the tools are aligned to the capacity of the targeted community leaders (e.g. teachers may be more comfortable with text and require more information, while village chiefs may prefer visual supports that can be used to disseminate information to community members).
- In areas where literacy is a challenge, keep narrative text to a minimum. Important messages which guide community leader actions can be displayed visually using pictures or cartoons.
- Provide community leaders with SBC materials (such as posters or banners) that promote increased community awareness about the campaign and how it will be organized. Community leaders can post these SBC materials in their homes or workplace and in other busy locations such as pharmacies, markets, schools, etc. Those using social media platforms should be provided with audiovisual messages in addition to other visual materials.
- Provide themed t-shirts, caps, etc. that can be worn by community leaders to show their solidarity with the campaign. These types of visibility materials are important for advertising the campaign itself and for motivating and recognizing community leaders' efforts.

Train/orient community leaders

Given the range of responsibilities that community leaders may have in the ITN campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic (depending on decisions taken during the planning phase), community leaders must be provided with the skills, knowledge and support to effectively and efficiently carry out their function and use the tools provided. It is thus highly recommended that community leaders are provided with a detailed advocacy and orientation/training session and are given well-structured job aids and standard operating procedures (as required based on responsibilities).

Develop an agenda that:

- Respects the limited time that community leaders may have but ensures sufficient time to cover their roles and responsibilities and equip them with the skills and information required to accomplish their tasks in support of the campaign objectives. Typically, the advocacy, orientation and training sessions will not take more than two to three hours.
- Ensures participation and practical exercises with realistic problems for which solutions need to be developed/suggested by the community leaders themselves.
- Builds on existing strengths. As leaders, participants have existing strengths and skills that can facilitate the implementation of the campaign, i.e. local solutions to local problems.
- Transfers ownership of the activity to the community. Provide the right information, but encourage community leaders to have a say in what works best in their communities.
- Provides concrete examples of what community leaders and their communities can contribute, e.g. identification of non-standard households (female household head, extended family, men or women sharing accommodation) to ensure that all households are covered appropriately; buckets, water and soap to help prevent COVID-19 transmission.
- Helps community leaders develop an "action plan" that they can implement.

Ensure information on both malaria and COVID-19 is represented in the orientation session. Work with the national COVID-19 task force to ensure that the ITN campaign does not duplicate the workload of community leaders, but complements it. Consider the following carefully:

- To what extent have targeted communities (and their leaders) received information on COVID-19?
- To what extent and to which level will COVID-19 messages be included in (1) the orientation session and (2) the SBC materials and messages? (these questions are country specific and will

follow from early planning on the options of co-messaging⁷ and rumour management⁸ and response structure).

In rural areas, it is unlikely that orientation sessions can be conducted virtually. Face-to-face orientation of community leaders will provide a valuable opportunity for campaign personnel to understand the beliefs and attitudes around malaria, the ITN distribution and COVID-19, which should then feed back into the campaign implementation. Depending on national regulations and WHO guidelines, all COVID-19 infection prevention measures must be ensured for face-to-face meetings⁹.

Ensure community leaders are able to respond to issues such as bottlenecks, panic and fear

Community leaders are generally in a good position to resolve problems that arise within the community in a timely manner before they become too big to manage. Local level problems are likely to quickly come to the attention of community leaders and part of their role and responsibilities should be to address these problems locally as much as possible. During ITN distribution, they should quickly be alerted to issues such as bottlenecks and through their orientation know what they should do about the issue. If unable to address the problem personally, they should be responsible for immediately reporting the situation to their contact at supervisory level for appropriate intervention.

Community leaders can reduce and negate any panic and fear in the community that may create a barrier to accessing ITNs, malaria diagnosis or treatment for people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. To do this, community leaders need to know how malaria and COVID-19 are both a threat to themselves and their community, how they can be protected from the diseases and be given the tools and materials (such as ITNs and PPE) that will help protect them. In addition, community leaders need to be convinced of the importance of implementing the ITN campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic and believe in the efficacy of the COVID-19 prevention measures put in place by the campaign.

Ensure community leaders are supported to identify and respond to rumours, misinformation and disinformation¹⁰

Community leaders are one of the most effective (and trusted) channels to respond to rumours, misinformation and disinformation¹¹ and provide the correct information and guidance in times of crisis and confusion. With COVID-19, it will be more important than ever to have their support to respond to and quell any rumours, incorrect, misleading or malicious information before they extend beyond the community level. This requires that they receive robust orientation on the kind of rumours, misinformation or disinformation that might arise and, based on the rumour management plan, what they should do about them. While there should be clear guidelines about how they can best respond to rumours, the orientation session should give community leaders the opportunity to brainstorm on how best to respond given the community context. The rumour management plan should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the community leaders in:

- Identifying rumours, misinformation and disinformation
- Addressing and responding to rumours at the local level

⁷ See also AMP guidance: *Co-messaging – integrating malaria and ITN messages with messages on COVID-19*

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

⁸ See also AMP guidance: *COVID-19 considerations for the development of rumour management plans related to ITN distribution*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

⁹ For general guidelines on safety, see AMP guidance: *Planning for safe ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements/>

¹⁰ See AMP guidance: *COVID-19 considerations for the development of rumour management plans related to ITN distribution*. <https://www.allianceformalariaprevention.com/about/amp-guidelines-and-statements>

¹¹ Misinformation is defined as misunderstood or incomplete information. Disinformation is false information spread with intent to cause harm or take advantage of a situation.

- Seeking support from campaign staff where rumours cannot be resolved quickly at the community level
 - Reporting on rumours, the community level response and the result thereof to campaign staff
- The rumour management plan should also clearly define the role and responsibility of campaign staff in providing community leaders with on-going support in responding to rumours.

Campaign personnel are potentially at risk of aggression from householders given the possibility of rumours, e.g. the campaign staff are coming to the community and spreading COVID-19. Community leaders can help mitigate concerns or conflict. This is an important orientation topic. Community leaders must be aware which campaign personnel will give them support, and what the nature of that support would be (see information on supportive supervision below).

Provide supportive supervision

In times of rumours, emergencies and crises, it is important that additional stress and pressures are not put on the community or its leaders. Consider the following points:

- Community leaders need to always know what is happening in their community and when. Ensure they are always in communication with the household registration and distribution supervisors, and any other personnel that are working in the community. If an external person (such as an independent monitor) is coming to the community, even for a very short time, it is important that they first introduce themselves to the community leaders. Remember to always rely on people that already know the community well to guide campaign personnel interaction with community members.
- Set up a two way communication structure that helps campaign personnel provide continuous mentoring and support from a distance and allows community leaders to easily contact campaign personnel to:
 - Report issues and problems (in particular rumours) and mitigation measures put in place
 - Seek guidance on unforeseen challenges
 - Inform or receive information about changes and delays to planned activities

During orientation and advocacy sessions with community leaders, ensure that they are aware of (and agree on) the communication structure including:

- With whom community leaders will be communicating before, during and after the campaign
- How they will be communicating with these campaign personnel, making sure that the campaign plan and budget reflect communication channels to which community leaders have ready access

Identify risks and mitigation measures

It must be understood that there will be challenges and limitations in ensuring the full participation of community leaders in the campaign, including:

- Community leaders might currently be overwhelmed with COVID-19 issues and response. It is necessary to make sure that the added responsibilities related to the ITN campaign do not affect the quality of their existing work, nor the work that they will be undertaking for the campaign.
 - Gain an understanding of existing roles and responsibilities of community leaders in targeted communities from the national COVID-19 task force as well as other actors or partners working in and with communities.
 - Ensure that, if they are too busy with COVID-19, community leaders are able to delegate or share their ITN responsibilities with someone else.
- ITNs may not be a priority for the community. Many communities are facing severe food insecurity, economic instability and reduced income generation and other types of insecurity

(such as conflict, natural disaster, emergencies, etc.) and malaria and ITNs may not be their priority at this time.

- The advocacy and orientation/training sessions are a good opportunity to listen to the concerns of community leaders, but at the same time to explain why malaria is still a major threat to the community.
- Political pressure faced by community leaders to not accept the government's support during this COVID-19 pandemic. This can be particularly true in conflict areas and advocacy and orientation/training sessions are an opportunity to move the discussion away from political affiliations and tensions towards a focus on the dangers of malaria and how the ITN campaign aims to reach and protect ALL community members.
- Community divisions along political, religious, cultural etc. lines. It may be difficult to gather all community leaders within the same advocacy and orientation session. But it is important to ensure that the information from the advocacy and orientation session reaches ALL leaders, so that the campaign can reach ALL community members. In divided communities:
 - Speak to NGOs that are already working with the community, and seek their guidance on the best way to reach community leaders
 - Hold multiple separate orientation sessions to ensure that all community leaders are obtaining campaign information
 - Develop packages of materials to be delivered to all community leaders so that everyone has access to the same information
 - Campaign personnel should consider leading the development of the action plan during the orientation session (so that one group of community leaders is not privileged over the other/s) and ensure that all community leaders agree and adhere to this plan
- Exclusion of community leaders because of their gender or identification and membership to a minority group (such as ethnic minorities). Women may be excluded since they may be taken up with work and domestic concerns during the time that advocacy and orientation session are being held.
 - Speak to NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society branch leaders etc. that are already working with the community, and seek their guidance on the identification of and best way to reach minority groups
 - Hold orientation sessions at a time that does not conflict with women's roles and responsibilities, and allows them to participate fully in the session
 - Ensure SBC materials are developed with women and minority groups in mind
 - Ensure that the definition of community leaders is well understood at the decentralized levels to minimize the risks that leaders at that level are overlooked or omitted from the community leader engagement process.

Sustain community leader engagement

Post-distribution communication is often neglected once the campaign is finished. But community leaders remain in their communities and a continuous engagement of community leaders will maintain gains made in ITN access and use, and contribute to reducing malaria morbidity and mortality. In the COVID-19 context, continuous dissemination of key messages at the community level is important as it is very likely that community members will need information on how to manage the use of ITNs by people with COVID-19. Consequently, ensure that:

- SBC materials (such as job aids) that are developed for community leaders contain post-distribution information and are prioritized for lamination where budget and time permits to ensure they can be continually used.
- Involve community leaders in wrap-up meetings being held and allow them to:

- Give feedback on successes and challenges and develop lessons learned and recommendations for future campaigns. Ensure that the contributions of community leaders are well documented and reported on to national leadership
- Express the way forward for their community (if there are NGOs working in the community, also encourage them to be part of the wrap-up meeting, as they may be able to continue working with community leaders on the “way forward”)

Remember: Best practices in working with communities and community leaders^{12,13}

- Develop activities in a co-operative and participatory manner
- Build on existing capacities – strength-based approach
- Ensure community ownership of activities
- Leverage on rather than underestimate local knowledge – local solutions to local problems
- Build mutual trust and respect
- Respect the other commitments of community leaders and do not overburden them

¹² https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Comm_health_care-2020.1

¹³ <https://www.who.int/activities/supporting-community-based-health-workers>