

Evaluating the effectiveness of distance support for mass campaigns to distribute insecticide-treated mosquito nets in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background & Objectives

Background:

- Capacity building: fundamental to AMP's mission to support countries to conduct high-quality ITN distribution
- Since 2017 AMP has surveyed its constituents & TA providers to document & improve how AMP builds capacity
- Distance-based TA: one of many approaches, usually in conjunction with in-country missions
- COVID-19 pandemic: switched entirely to distance-based TA by March 2020
- Given feedback from TA providers and others, AMP requested an in-depth review of distance-based TA in COVID-19 context; possible opportunity to inform future re-balancing of distance vs. in-country TA
- Evaluation funded through BMGF grant to AMP

Objectives:

- Assess effectiveness distance support to ensure timely, operationally-sound ITN campaigns
- Identify facilitators & barriers; recommend ways to improve current distance TA approaches

Methods

Country	TA Providers	National Malaria Programme Staff	In-country Partners
Cameroon	✓		✓
CAR	✓	✓	✓
Chad	✓		✓
Haiti	✓		✓
Liberia	✓	✓	✓
Mauritania	✓		
Mozambique	✓		
Niger	✓	✓	✓
Nigeria	✓	✓	
Pakistan	✓	✓	✓
Sudan	✓	✓	✓
Togo	✓	✓	
Uganda	✓		✓
Zambia	✓	✓	

30 key informant or focus group interviews covering 14 countries:

- 17 TA providers
- 25 in-country partners
- 10 national malaria programme staff
- 3 global partner representatives

TA providers & countries chosen for:

- Experience working with AMP
- Campaign experience
- Malaria endemicity
- Language

Implementation of distance-based TA

Organization: Zoom platform, weekly general meetings plus sub-committee work

National staff participation: Varied; competing priorities (GF grants); absence of key NMCP/NMEP staff delayed decision making

Mechanics: Challenges with Internet connectivity and home distractions

Follow-up in-country: Concern of TA providers

Capacity building: Building skills via distance support was challenging especially for countries newer to AMP TA

Resources for distance TA: Internet funded by Ministries of Health, implementing partners or donors

TA Quality:

(In-country partner): "AMP TA providers are skilled and experienced. They bring perspectives from other countries that help with the implementation of campaign."

Duration:

(National malaria programme observation): Weekly general meetings "are supposed to be an hour, but it can go longer if country partners aren't on board, there are new members to introduce and to be briefed, new things come up."

Facilitators & Barriers to AMP distance-based TA

Facilitators

- **Presence of national consultants in country**
- **Ability to engage key donors to help with in-country follow up**
- Significant previous experience with AMP TA
- Availability of AMP technical leadership
- Timelines and action plans
- Sharing of campaign experiences of other countries
- Use of PowerPoint slides to highlight key points during calls
- Strategic use of new communications technology (Zoom, WhatsApp groups)

Barriers

- **Technology access and internet connectivity**
- **Limited ability to fully engage national malaria programme staff and in-country partners in distance-support process, compared with in-country TA**
- Gaps in TA provider contract timeframes
- Country context and communication
- Lack of training on distance-based TA
- Terms of reference and country expectations for TA providers
- Language barriers

Facilitators & Barriers to AMP distance-based TA

Facilitators:

Presence of national consultants in country:

- Can be used as in-country liaisons
- Provide support for TA providers
- Assist in follow-up

Ability to engage key donors to help with in-country follow up:

- Facilitates strategic discussions
- Ensures follow-up in-country

Barriers:

Technology Access and Internet Connectivity:

(Global partner): "Distance support is not working when there is poor connectivity to reach NMCP. Also, NMCP has other business to do. We can send a document multiple times and feedback is not happening because NMCP has other priorities. When in country, this follow-up is easier."

Limits to country engagement distance vs missions:

(Global partner): "I'm not a great fan of distance TA as a norm. In person problem solving is a different environment. Private discussions, lunch or a drink, you lack that kind of direct conversation. It's hard to have a frank discussion, as you're cramming into a one-hour call what usually you address over a few days."

Recommendations

Improving access to and use of technology for distance-based TA:

- Seek investment as needed to improve connectivity in national malaria program offices.



Clarifying TA provider terms of reference, contractual arrangements, and expectations to improve distance support

- Ensure all parties understand TA provider terms of reference.
- Explore ways to streamline transitions between TA contracts to avoid gaps.
- Agree on choice & use of virtual communications platforms when TA starts.

Recommendations

Improving TA provider and in-country team capacity with distance-based TA

- Develop guidance on procedures and best practices for distance-based TA.
 - Tips on the mechanics, best practices for virtual TA
 - Roles and expectations of all parties

Streamlining distance-based TA meetings:

- Engage key decision-makers during distance meetings.
 - Agree how to ensure their availability to approve of key decisions in a timely manner.



Recommendations

Accessing outside resources to strengthen distance-based TA

- Promote hiring & training of national consultants to support full duration of campaigns in-country.
- Call on partners strategically to help keep distance-based support on track.
- Encourage virtual country-to-country exchange of experience on COVID-19 adaptations

Addressing urgent, exceptional country needs:

- Consider time-limited in-person missions to complement distance-based TA for urgent country needs.
- Prioritize specific training or technical needs
- Depends on progression of pandemic, funding partners rules, country regulations



Conclusions

Despite COVID-19, over 160 million nets were distributed in 2020!

- Country leadership with support from AMP, RBM, Global Fund, PMI and others made this happen.
- Over 100 mostly distance based missions completed to 26 countries in 2020.
- **Congratulations for adapting quickly & effectively to distance-based TA support under difficult circumstances.**

To make distance-based TA more efficient and effective, prioritize:

- Streamline virtual platforms including connectivity
- Clarify and understand terms of reference
- Resolve contracting issues to ensure continuity of TA
- Complement AMP TA with strategic use of national consultants & implementing partners