



NIGERIA:

PROCESS EVALUATION OF 2020 ITN CAMPAIGNS CONDUCTED IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19¹

DEMAND CREATION² AND COVID-19

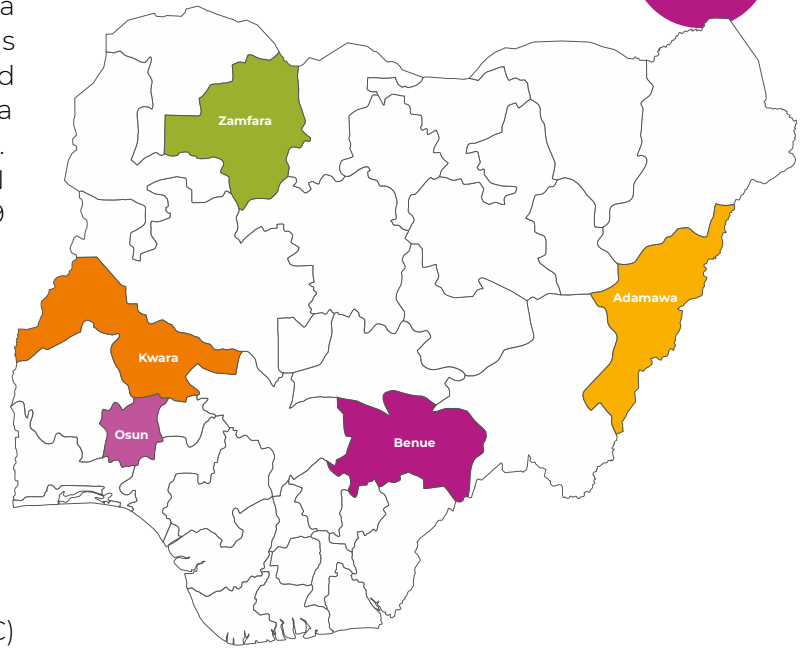
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The Alliance for
Malaria Prevention

From 2009 to 2021, Nigeria’s National Malaria Elimination Programme (NMEP) has distributed over 212 million insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) country wide, contributing to a decline in malaria morbidity and mortality^{3,4}. Five Nigerian states implemented their ITN campaign following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. NMEP, with support from the Alliance for Malaria Prevention (AMP), the Global Fund to fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund)⁵, the United States President’s Malaria Initiative (US-PMI)⁶ and other global and national implementing partners adapted strategies and activities from the 2019 ITN campaign implementation guidelines to the COVID-19 context.



To maximize the reach of demand creation (DC) activities during planning and implementation of the 2020 Nigeria ITN mass campaign, various communication channels were identified. As in the 2019 campaigns, the engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) ensured that states and Local Government Areas (LGAs) could adapt generic DC strategies, materials and messages to their specific context. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a review of the communication channels to limit close contact between individuals, with adaptations focused on increased message dissemination through mass media channels in urban areas, and an increase in non-contact interpersonal communication (IPC), such as town announcers, in rural areas.

The CSOs carried out social mobilization activities at the LGA level and, in some states, they implemented the newly introduced social and behaviour change (SBC) action planning tool for monitoring. DC activities carried out included:

- Engagement meetings and visits to community leaders with adherence to COVID-19 prevention protocols

- Recruitment of town announcers for public announcements before and during the campaign to mobilize communities: in Kwara state, monitoring activities revealed that most community members recalled having heard about the campaign through town announcers, compared with other communication channels
- Orientation of community and religious leaders to mobilize their community members and disseminate key campaign information using existing community-based structures such as community meetings or religious services
- Orientation of union leaders and school health educators for school-based SBC

By working closely with community leaders, ward development committee (WDC) members, local union members and in implementing school-based SBC orientations, CSOs were able to “bridge the gap” between the state and the grassroots level actors. It was noted, however, that some CSOs did not cascade the training

1. The full Process Evaluation, including details of the Key Informant Interviews and Online Questionnaire will be made available on the AMP website: <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com>
 2. Nigeria uses the term “demand creation” where other national malaria programmes use social and behaviour change communication (SBC).
 3. MEASURE Evaluation, National Malaria Elimination Programme and the President’s Malaria Initiative. (2017). *Coverage of malaria interventions in Nigeria: Secondary analysis of data from national surveys*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA: MEASURE Evaluation.
 4. <https://www.severemalaria.org/countries/nigeria>
 5. Global Fund-supported states were Adamawa, Kwara, and Osun.
 6. PMI-supported states were Benue and Zamfara.



to their field staff, thereby increasing the risk of sub-standard implementation of planned SBC activities, and that CSOs could have benefited from additional training.

The household mobilizers were also responsible for undertaking “health education” talks when they were moving from door-to-door for the single-phase distribution. During the planning period, a large-size handheld guide was developed to allow mobilizers to display pictures of positive behaviours to households while maintaining physical distancing. One state noted that the under-utilization of the handheld guide, likely due to its size, resulted in inadequate health talks. The same state noted that implementing individual health talks was more exhausting than group health talks, although they did eliminate the gathering of

crowds and thus reduce COVID-19 exposure. States using digital technology expressed that the “prompt” for the household mobilizer to carry out the health education was a positive reminder that physical distance should be maintained. For fixed-site distribution, the distribution point health educators conducted health education, including demonstrations of ITN use adapted to the local context.

The use of TV and radio for spots and jingles, as well as for interviews and call-in programmes with key campaign staff, allowed for safe dissemination of key campaign information in both urban and rural areas. Some states negotiated free airtime with various TV and radio stations during their media engagement and advocacy meetings, increasing the number of messages that could be aired.

CAMPAIGN FLAG-OFF



Most state-level campaign launches were adapted for COVID-19. Several state-level campaign launches, due to COVID-19 restrictions on large gatherings, were

streamed live. Many LGAs also had flag-offs with LGA chairmen symbolically distributing ITNs to selected household recipients and with ITN hanging demonstrations to educate participants on the correct hanging and use of the nets in their households.

LOCAL LEADERS



State-level reports and key informants indicated that key stakeholders were engaged through advocacy visits. AMP has traditionally recommended advocacy

meetings and workshops to ensure consistency in messaging, strategy and implementation, as well as to create opportunities for collaboration among and between stakeholders. However, in the COVID-19 context, advocacy in the form of individual visits can avoid crowds and allow for physical distancing. LGA-level advocacy visits were successful and provided access to financial, human and technical resources.

LGA and community-level leaders (including LGA chairmen, community and religious leaders, youth leaders, women's leaders, heads of associations, market women's associations, and security agencies, etc.) were engaged

by CSOs and LGA DC teams. These targeted groups were effective in:

- Disseminating key messages to their communities (including how the campaign would be implemented in the COVID-19 context and the specific COVID-19 prevention measures)
- Responding to community concerns, although there was little information on the exact concerns being addressed by community leaders, or how community leaders were able to address these concerns
- Providing technical and human resources. For example, traditional leaders in two LGAs of Adamawa freely provided a total of 80 local vigilantes (security personnel) for security of ITNs and devices for data collection during transportation

RISK MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION



The NMEP and implementing partners developed a strategy for crisis communication which was included as part of state-level training for the 2020 campaigns. The strategy

highlighted engagement of and collaboration with key stakeholders. Interviews with key informants and review of existing documents indicated that states were effective in engaging and collaborating with key stakeholders in managing risks and communicating during a crisis.

In areas of Zamfara, identified as complex operating environments (COE), community leaders and influencers that had direct communication lines with "bandits" were

targeted for engagement meetings. Other states engaged security forces, including vigilante groups, during advocacy and engagement meetings. This strategy appeared to allow campaign personnel to successfully negotiate safe access to communities in some LGAs.

In Osun state, where a large quantity of nets was stolen, the State Malaria Elimination Programme (SMEP) was able to leverage on initial advocacy meetings with key stakeholders to quickly develop a response. Several key state influencers were engaged to address target groups via TV programmes and ask people to return nets. These opportunities were also used to clear up misconceptions that had been the cause of the nets being taken in the first place.

INTEGRATION OF COVID-19 MESSAGES



COVID-19 messages were integrated as part of campaign messages wherever possible. Communities were aware of COVID-19 through either the various state COVID-19

Emergency Response Teams, local CSOs or non-governmental organization (NGO) SBC activities. For the 2020 ITN mass campaigns, the CSOs engaged for DC activities were trained in COVID-19 prevention, the first item on the CSO training agenda.

During social mobilization activities, communities were made aware of the specific

COVID-19 prevention measures that were being implemented to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 including:

- The assigning of a specific date to collect their nets (for fixed site distributions) to limit crowding in the waiting and distribution areas
- Requests to wear face masks and maintain physical distancing when waiting to enter the distribution point, when collecting nets or when nets were being distributed door-to-door
- Campaign staff wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing

RUMOUR MANAGEMENT



A rumour management plan was developed at the central level. The rumour management plan for 2020 ITN campaigns was updated to include potential rumours

associated with COVID-19 and these were also included as part of the DC state-level training.

Some rumours were reported that associated ITNs with COVID-19, that poor people could not get COVID-19, and that the face mask gave users COVID-19. It seems that these rumours were limited in scale and were quickly and easily dispelled at the local or community level, with one KII participant stating that “civil society organizations managed any rumours”.

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on the interviews, online questionnaire responses and documents reviewed, lessons learned that can be used in the future include:

- Provide LGAs with the resources to adapt their campaign flag-offs to ensure proper prevention measures in a COVID-19 or similar setting. This should include various options on safe flag-offs and clear guidelines on how to implement these flag-offs, including essential tools and materials such as handwashing stations and proper masks (as defined for campaign workers) for community members attending the ceremony. Virtual or hybrid in-person/virtual campaign flag-offs are another option.
- Provide more robust training sessions to CSOs rather than just orientation sessions. Adapt these sessions to ensure COVID-19 infection prevention measures are in place.
- Mandate that CSOs ensure that training is cascaded down to field level staff and that these trainings are monitored for quality assurance.
- Strengthen messaging around COVID-19 prevention during community mobilization activities to improve adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures by community members.
- Ensure sufficient PPE at the implementation level, including hand sanitizers for campaign workers and handwashing stations at training venues, community meetings and fixed-point distribution sites.
- Promote the use of community leaders in facilitating demand creation activities, especially in COE contexts.



AMP CONTACTS

To join the weekly AMP conference call each Wednesday at 10:00 AM Eastern time (16.00 PM CET) use the following Zoom meeting line:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/2367777867?pwd=allhZk9KQmcxMXNaWnRaN1JCUTQ3dz09>

You can find your local number to join the weekly call:

<https://zoom.us/u/acyOjklJj4>

To be added to the AMP mailing list visit:

<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/weekly-conference-call/signup-for-our-mailing-list/>

To contact AMP or join an AMP working group please e-mail:

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For further information please go to the AMP website:

<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com>

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