

## Guidance for the training of community leaders in an insecticide-treated net (ITN) campaign

Adaptable tool

V.1 July 2023

See also: [Engagement of community leaders in ITN distribution in the context of COVID-19 transmission<sup>1</sup>](#). Note that the guidance is still relevant even when COVID-19 is no longer an issue.

The following training guide is designed to help national malaria programmes and partners train community leaders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in ITN mass campaigns. It should be used with the *Job aid for community leaders during an ITN mass campaign* to ensure a robust training session.

The guide is based on a two-phase campaign, i.e. door-to-door household registration followed by ITN distribution at fixed (including outreach and mobile) distribution points. The national malaria programme/civil society organization(s) (CSOs) tasked with supporting community leaders should adapt this training manual based on the specific strategy (e.g. distribution door-to-door) that has been chosen for their campaign.

Given the range of responsibilities that community leaders may have in an ITN campaign they must be provided with the skills, knowledge and support to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively and efficiently and use the tools provided. It is highly recommended that community leaders are provided with a detailed training session and are given well-structured job aids and/or standard operating procedures (as required based on responsibilities).

For training of community leaders, develop an agenda that:

- Respects the limited time that community leaders may have but ensures sufficient focus on their roles and responsibilities and equips them with the skills and information required to accomplish their tasks in support of the campaign objectives. Typically, training sessions will take two to three hours, depending on the roles assigned to community leaders
- Ensures participation through practical exercises based on realistic problems for which solutions need to be developed/suggested by the community leaders themselves
- Builds on existing experiences and strengths. As leaders, participants have knowledge, strengths and skills that can be leveraged to ensure high-quality implementation of the campaign and problem resolution, 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 and use that information to modify existing plans from higher levels
- Provides concrete examples of what community leaders and their communities can contribute, e.g. identification of non-traditional households (female headed households, extended family, men or women sharing accommodation, internally displaced persons [IDP] camps, nomads and mobile populations, etc.) to ensure that all households are reached appropriately
- Helps community leaders develop an “action plan” that they can implement

### The role of community leaders in social and behaviour change (SBC)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Engagement-of-community-leaders-EN.pdf>

A mass ITN distribution campaign uses SBC to mobilize communities to participate fully in the campaign and promote positive ITN behaviour (use, care and repair) by individuals and households to reduce morbidity and mortality due to malaria. Various SBC activities will be carried out at the national, district and community levels focused on ensuring participation of all targeted households and communities. At the community level, community leaders and influencers are typically requested to disseminate key information on malaria and the use of ITNs to protect people from the mosquito bites that cause the disease. Appropriate and consistent messaging by these leaders will help ensure that communities obtain the right information to have access to sufficient ITNs and to influence them to adopt positive behaviours, i.e. sleeping under an ITN every night of the year, repairing small holes and tears to extend the lifespan of the ITNs received, not misusing nets for other purposes, such as fishing, etc.

### **Objective of the training guide**

The objective of this guide is to support those responsible for identifying and training community leaders and influencers to implement SBC activities in their communities (for example, district or community health educator, contracted CSO, etc.). Specifically, it provides guidance to training facilitators to:

1. Plan for SBC activities that will be carried out by community leaders
2. Identify, mobilize and train community leaders to carry out social mobilization and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) activities in their communities
3. Report on the SBC activities carried out at the community level

### **Community leaders and influencers**

Community leaders and influencers are respected members of their community and have a platform to reach people, e.g. religious leaders through gatherings at their place of worship, or local personalities/DJs who have a programme on community radio or a following on social media. The community looks up to them as role models and as guides for decision-making and what is acceptable behaviour. Respected community leaders are very effective in reaching large populations and are therefore key in mobilizing their communities and encouraging them to adopt positive behaviours, following their own examples.

What constitutes a community can vary greatly: communities can be defined based on geographical boundaries, cultural identity, common interests, etc. In this guidance, the term community is used broadly but national malaria programmes may prefer to define communities geographically, in line with microplanning for household registration and distribution purposes.

### **Identifying and recruiting community leaders and influencers**

During the microplanning workshop it is important to identify community leaders and influencers that can help promote the campaign to encourage maximum participation. Community leaders and influencers can include:

- Village chiefs and elders
- Religious leaders
- Presidents of women groups
- Youth group leaders
- Traditional healers
- Radio personalities and DJs
- Social media influencers
- Representatives of non-state armed groups
- Representatives from IDP or refugee camps or mobile populations such as nomads
- Schoolteachers and directors

- People working for civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both local and international, etc.

Once community leaders have been identified, they need to be mobilized/recruited as SBC agents. It is important to briefly explain the campaign to the community leaders and influencers and request their support in its implementation.

The tasks of the community leaders as SBC agents will include:

- Before and during the household registration: making people aware of the dangers of malaria, and the different components of the upcoming mass ITN campaign; mobilizing community members to take part in the household registration process so that the campaign reaches the maximum number of people
- Before and during the ITN distribution: mobilizing community members to collect their ITNs from the distribution points; promoting positive ITN use, care and repair within the community
- Post-campaign: continuing the discussion about malaria; encouraging community members to adopt and maintain positive ITN use, care and maintenance behaviours
- Throughout the campaign and post campaign: identifying and addressing any emergency/issue, misinformation or rumour that may arise in the community during the implementation of activities

### **Training community leaders**

The following are practical guidelines to help facilitators train community leaders and influencers to become effective SBC agents:

- A training workshop/working session should be organized (between two and three hours) for the session (depending on the level of responsibility the community leaders are expected to have during the campaign)
- Organize training sessions at a health centre, in an administrative office, or even at someone's residence
- Prepare tools and materials to implement the training such as:
  - Job aid for community leaders – one for each participant<sup>2</sup>
  - An ITN of the type that will be distributed to demonstrate proper net hang-up
  - Pens and notebooks for taking notes

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<sup>2</sup> See: *Job aid for community leaders during an insecticide-treated net (ITN) mass campaign.*  
[https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/resources/resource-library/?sfm\\_res\\_campaign\\_component=Social%20%26%20Behavior%20Change](https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/resources/resource-library/?sfm_res_campaign_component=Social%20%26%20Behavior%20Change)

The following section should be adapted by national malaria programmes based on their strategy. The Word version of the training session can be found [here](#).

## The training session

To be used in conjunction with the *Job aid for community leaders during an insecticide-treated net (ITN) campaign*.

It is critical to remember that community leaders and influencers are often people with a great deal of experience and knowledge, especially when it comes to their community: they know their community better than outside stakeholders. During the training, it is important to draw from their and their communities' experience with malaria and ITNs. Facilitators should not simply "dismiss" incorrect answers or inaccurate information shared by community leaders and influencers during the training. If the answers shared by participants are incorrect, ask for more clarification and then correct the misinformation by giving the correct answer which is backed by evidence and research. Facilitators can do this diplomatically by answering with (for example) "I hear what you are saying. This is what I also used to believe, but there is now new evidence that shows ....."

The facilitator should thank the community leaders for their participation in the campaign and should encourage them to actively ask questions they might have about the contents of the training.

### Tasks of community leaders

The facilitator should explain to community leaders that their support is needed to sensitize and mobilize their communities to take part in the campaign and utilize the ITNs received correctly. They are invaluable in disseminating information to their communities about:

- The dangers of malaria and the proper use of ITNs to help prevent malaria
- The different stages of the campaign and what is expected of individuals and households in their community
- Mobilizing their community so that a maximum number of people take part in, and benefit from, the campaign
- Promoting positive ITN use, care and maintenance within their community to maximize the lifespan of the ITNs

The facilitator should further explain that community leaders are also in a good position to:

- Identify and address any incorrect information or rumours in the community about the campaign or the ITNs
- Help ensure that the campaign reaches everyone in their community, including through identification of households that otherwise may not participate for different reasons
- Support the successful implementation of the campaign by providing access to valuable resources such as trustworthy campaign workers and places to store nets
- Promote positive ITN use and care by being role models within their community

The facilitator should explain the campaign to participants, i.e.:

- It is a national campaign being implemented by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners
- The MoH is distributing ITNs to every household free of charge to protect communities from malaria
- People wearing or carrying something clearly identifying them as mobilizers for the campaign will be going door-to-door registering the household and providing them with vouchers
- ITNs will be distributed at fixed distribution sites. Households will be told when and where they can exchange their vouchers for ITNs

### The community leaders guide

Provide each participant with (1) a copy of the job aid for community leaders and (2) several copies of the SBC reporting sheet (Annex 1), after which the facilitator should go through the following information:

#### What is malaria?

The facilitator should ask participants what they know about malaria. After participants have provided some answers, the facilitator should read the text “malaria is a dangerous disease” from the job aid and reinforce the following points:

- Malaria is only transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito
- Malaria is a serious illness that can cause death if not treated quickly
- Malaria affects everyone in the area being targeted for ITNs
- Pregnant women and children under five years, as well as people with immune-compromised systems, are the most at risk
  - Malaria in pregnant women is a major cause of still birth, low birth weight and maternal anaemia
  - Small children who have severe malaria may suffer from learning disabilities or brain injuries
  - People suffering from auto-immune disorders may suffer disproportionately from malaria due to a weakened natural response

#### How is malaria prevented?

The facilitator should ask participants if they know how they can protect themselves from malaria. After participants have provided some answers, the facilitator should read the text “Sleeping under insecticide-treated mosquito nets protects us from malaria” from the job aid and reinforce the following points:

- One of the best ways to prevent malaria is for everyone to sleep under a mosquito net that has been treated with insecticide, called an ITN
- All members of the family must sleep under an ITN every night of the year
- ITNs help to stop malaria transmission by knocking down or killing the mosquitoes that transmit the disease
- All ITNs being distributed by the government have been approved by the World Health Organization and are safe and effective

#### How do you correctly use, care for and maintain ITNs?

The facilitator should read out loud (or invite one of the participants to read) the text “The ITNs must be used properly so that we are protected from malaria” from the job aid. Important points that facilitators should highlight are:

- When households collect their new ITN, they should air it in the shade for 24 hours before hanging and using it
- An ITN should be hung over your sleeping material (mat, mattress, bed) low enough to prevent entry of mosquitoes (tucked under the sleeping material) and slept under every night throughout the year

The facilitator should read out loud (or invite one of the participants to read) the text “The ITNs must be cared for so that they last as long as possible” from the job aid. Important points to highlight are:

- When dirty, an ITN should be washed in cool water with a mild soap (never with bleach); it is best if it is only washed once every three months to maintain its efficacy
- An ITN must always be dried in the shade

- An ITN must be stored safely when it is not used for sleeping under: carefully pack up the ITN during the day so that it is not accidentally damaged by cooking fires, children playing, etc.
- An ITN must be repaired to ensure it lasts as long as possible: holes and rips in the ITN must be sewn straight away before they get too big and the net is considered no longer effective for sleeping under

**Practical exercise:** Using the ITN, ask two of the participants to show how the ITNs should be hung over the sleeping space. Ask other participants if they have seen nets hanging in a different way in households and ask them to demonstrate any alternative(s).

**Group discussion:** have a discussion with the participants by asking them the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties that some households may have in hanging and using the ITN correctly? How can households overcome this difficulty?
2. What are the difficulties that some households may have in packing/tying up their ITNs during the day? How can households overcome this difficulty?

### The mass distribution campaign

The facilitator should read (or invite one of the participants to read out loud) the “During the household registration” text from the job aid and reinforce the following:

- Campaign workers will be trained to go door-to-door to register households
- Households must participate in the registration process, so that the whole community can receive ITNs and be protected from malaria
- During the household registration process, households will be given a voucher. This voucher is very important as it will later be exchanged for ITNs and must be kept safely and not lost before the ITN distribution
- A representative from each household must take the voucher to a distribution point on a specified day so that they can obtain their ITNs. No children should be sent to the distribution point to collect nets

The facilitator should read (or invite one of the participants to read out loud) the “During the distribution” text from the job aid and reinforce the following:

- Households must bring their voucher to get ITNs. No voucher means no ITNs
- Only one adult per household should go to the distribution point to collect the ITN. Children will not be served with ITNs
- Community members must calmly wait in line for their turn to present their voucher and collect their ITN

### Practising the messages

**Group exercise:** If there a big group, the facilitator should ask the participants to break into smaller groups of four or five (if possible, with a good mix of male/female/function in the community).

The facilitator should **ask participants** to think about how they can pass messages to their communities and give participants 15 minutes to brainstorm. Each group should be thinking about:

- The different ways that they usually pass messages, and what they have needed to do to be able to pass the messages effectively
- Any new way that they can pass messages to their community members, what do they need, and what do they need to do to be able to pass on the messages effectively in this new way

After the groups have had a chance to discuss internally the facilitator should **ask each group to present** one way that they usually pass the message, and any new way that they have thought of. The facilitator and participants should record these suggestions.

If not already mentioned, the facilitator can suggest the following:

- Community or group meeting
- Announcement at a gathering (includes religious ceremonies)
- Door-to-door announcements
- Online platforms or existing digital community groups

The facilitator should remember that community leaders have been interacting with their community for a long time: they know their community best. It is critical that their experience is acknowledged and that they are allowed to make recommendations and suggestions on how they should pass on these messages to their communities.

### Misinformation and rumours

The facilitator should explain to participants that community leaders can support the campaign by addressing any misinformation or rumours that may arise in the community during the campaign.

The facilitator should ask community leaders if they have ever heard of incorrect information about malaria in their community. The facilitator should allow participants to share their experience of these situations, how the incorrect information came up and was spread further and the effect within their community. If they were involved in responding to these situations, their experience on best practices should be shared.

**Practical exercise:** The facilitator should break the participants into two groups. Give each group one of the following rumours (as per their job aid) and ask them to discuss amongst themselves:

- What is the potential result of the rumour?
- What is the truth?
- Explain one way that they (as community leaders) can dispel this rumour?

THE RUMOUR	THE TRUTH	HOW TO DISPEL THE RUMOUR
The mosquito nets being distributed are bad for your health.	All the nets distributed during the campaign are approved by the WHO and the Ministry of Health. They have been rigorously tested to ensure that they are safe to sleep under.  It is important for households to protect themselves and their community from malaria by sleeping under an insecticide-treated mosquito net every night.	Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a community meeting explaining the truth about the nets.</li> <li>• Visit community members who are particularly hesitant to use the nets in their household.</li> <li>• Act as a role model and make community members aware that community leaders always sleep under a net to show the rest of the community that it is safe to do so.</li> </ul>
The mosquito nets are being distributed to government party supporters only. You won't get one if you	Mosquito nets are being distributed by the government free of charge. They are being distributed to everyone in the country/region/district irrespective of their politics, religion, race or gender. The ITNs are being distributed to everyone to protect us from malaria.	Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilize other community leaders (e.g. those of different political affiliations, gender, race or religion) and hold a community meeting explaining that the nets are being distributed to everyone.</li> </ul>

don't share their politics.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All leaders (irrespective of political affiliation, gender, race or religion) should sleep under a mosquito net every night and make community members aware of that fact.</li> </ul>
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The facilitator should remind participants to alert campaign supervisors if they hear of any misinformation or rumours within their community during the campaign, even where they feel that the situation has been managed locally.

**Reporting** (see Annex 1)

The facilitator should explain to the community leaders that for the purposes of supervision, monitoring and accountability, as well as to help improve campaigns in the future, it is important that all SBC activities that take place in their community are recorded. Annex 1 provides an example of a simple form that can be used to keep a record of dates, events, objectives of events and estimated numbers of participants. The facilitator should demonstrate how the form should be filled in and give participants the opportunity to practise completing one of them. The facilitator should request participants to ask any questions about the reporting form, including any reservations they may have, or potential challenges that they foresee in completing the form. The facilitator should address any concerns raised by the participants and discuss potential solutions.

The facilitator should explain to the participants that completed forms should be handed over to the campaign supervisor once their role in the campaign is over.

At the end of the session, the facilitator should ask if there are any questions or further suggestions about the campaign, community leaders' role and responsibilities in it, or any other aspect of the ITN distribution.

*This is the end of the training. The facilitator should be sure:*

- That all participants know who to contact (and how) in case of any challenges or issues*
- To thank participants for their participation and to reinforce that their support and active collaboration before, during and after the campaign is very valuable for the health and well-being of their community.*



## Annex 1

### SBC reporting sheet (for community leaders)

Name of district	
Name of health centre	
Name of village/town/community	
Campaign phase (e.g. during household registration)	
Name of leader	

Date of activity	Please tick the appropriate box			Objective of activity	Approx. no of participants
	Community meeting (including religious service)	Community event (e.g. drama play)	Other event		
Totals					