

## Malaria: An Everyday Story Making Headlines in Nigeria

“I am awakened to my personal and professional responsibilities in fighting malaria together with the people, to provide information that makes a difference in society.”

Malaria is one of the principal causes of sickness and death in Nigeria, and puts a huge socioeconomic burden on the country. With more than 50% of Nigerians suffering at least one bout of malaria per year (according to the Federal Ministry of Health), it's such an everyday story that it rarely made the news until a new treatment regimen was introduced in April 2005. That produced a flurry of press and some confusion over the phasing out of the old treatment, Chloroquine.

To increase understanding of malaria treatment, government policy and prevention, 13 top newspaper editors from across Nigeria came together for a week-long training workshop in the capital city of Abuja in July, enhancing their ability to inform their readers on this critical topic. The workshop was organized and conducted by Internews and sponsored by the USAID-funded ENHANSE Project in collaboration with the Roll Back Malaria Program of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO).

### CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT

During the week, the editors observed demonstrations on how bed nets are treated with insecticide for malaria prevention, were briefed on Nigeria's new policies in malaria treatment, visited community health centers in two villages outside of Abuja where small children sick with malaria are treated with the paltry supplies that are available, as well as the National Hospital where the new treatment Artemisinin Combination Therapy or ACT is now available. At the same time, they honed their journalistic skills such as interviewing techniques, researching stories,

and using statistics, while applying these skills to reporting on the new information gleaned at the workshop.

### EDUCATING THE MEDIA

“For us to inform the public well, we also need to be appropriately informed on these basic issues,” said Francis Awowole-



GBOYEGA SOTUNDE

**Mrs. Ajamoh of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health demonstrating insecticide-treated bed nets to journalists at a workshop in the capital city of Abuja.**

Brown of *The Champion Newspapers* at the end of the training week. “I feel well informed now on malaria prevention and treatment, and I feel empowered to inform my readers as well.”

For some it was an eye-opening experience, particularly the visit to the village clinics.

“It was surprising to learn that less than

three out of every ten malaria cases at the community level receives correct treatment,” observed one editor from *The Sun* newspaper in Lagos. “This experience really showed that Nigerians need more information on this disease we take for granted. I am awakened to my personal and professional responsibilities in fighting malaria together with the people, to provide information that makes a difference in society.”

### MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY

Dr. Bamgboye Afolabi of WHO, in speaking to the editors, stressed the critical role of the media in investigating health issues, informing people correctly, setting the agenda and maintaining public discourse. Cece Fadope of Internews Nigeria said news reporting on malaria “needs to have more relevance to people's lives so that they can get a handle on how to prevent and treat it.”

The message got through. Since the July workshop, over 20 news stories have been published in Nigeria's leading papers focusing on various aspects of malaria prevention and treatment — from reports about why treatment failure can happen to the importance of insecticide-treated bed nets (ITNs) for all children under five who are the most vulnerable. A few of these stories are excerpted on the reverse.

The ENHANSE Project is a United States Agency for International Development initiative aimed at creating an enabling environment necessary for universal access to high quality healthcare and educational opportunities for Nigerians. Internews Nigeria provides support to news media organizations and staff to report effectively on ENHANSE focus areas.



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Below are just a few of the news stories that have been published focusing on malaria prevention and treatment following the training workshops in July. Follow-up training will insure that media coverage on the prevention and treatment of malaria continues to be both accurate and widely disseminated.



JULY 24, 2005

## “Roll Back Malaria may fail, except ...”

**Sebastine Ebhuomhan, Lagos**

Except Nigerians turn a new leaf and play a vital role in the battle against malaria, the bid by the Federal Government to fight the disease through the programme of Roll Back Malaria may not succeed.

National Professional Officer of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Malaria, Dr. Bamgboye Afolabi, made the remark in an exclusive interview with Sunday Independent.

Afolabi who had just concluded a tour of some rural communities in Abuja as a part of a workshop facilitated for journalists by the Internews Network-Nigeria with the sponsorship of ENHANSE and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with WHO and Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), said the role of the people in the success of the programme was very important.



GOOD HEALTH  
Tuesday, July 26, 2005

## Nigeria loses N132b annually to malaria

By **ENYERIBE EJIUGU**

Coordinator of the National Malaria Control Programme, Dr. T.O. Sofola, has begun what will soon turn into active people-driven initiatives to meet the great challenge posed by malaria.

Unknown to many, malaria is one illness that has been taking a heavy toll on life in Nigeria. Of every 1000 babies born alive, Dr. Bayo S. Faummbi, a public health spe-

cialist at the Malaria Control Unit of the WHO Country Office in Abuja says that malaria kills 178 of them. “This illness is the leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths in the country,” he adds. National Professional Officer of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Malaria, Dr. Bamgboye Afolabi, made the remark in an exclusive interview with Sunday Independent.



## Surviving Malaria with New Treatment Regimen

*Lately, the treatment of malaria as one of the leading ailments in Nigeria has been at the front burner of health care providers, policy makers and donors. The problem of resistance is being addressed at the highest levels of Nigeria's health care system.*

**Godwin Haruna** reports...

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