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*The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of Vestergaard or PermaNet®.*

## **Why is the civil society voice important in malaria prevention?**

Civil society organizations (CSO) are key to malaria prevention. Civil society can ensure malaria prevention interventions serve the needs of communities impacted by malaria and fully cover communities in all their diversity, regardless of location. CSOs if engaged at the design, implementation, and monitoring of prevention strategies/tools /programs can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of those prevention strategies: by making sure the tools are adapted to local needs, that communities use them correctly, ensure groups are not left behind and can help monitor any issues/sides effects. It's important to consider feedback from those communities affected by malaria and use that feedback to improve strategies/tools. Involving civil society also helps to build strong malaria advocates at country levels to increase political commitment, drive policies and support domestic resources mobilization to fund and sustain malaria prevention.



40 civil society organizations from 15 French-speaking countries in Africa gather at the 33rd African Union Summit in 2019 to advocate for an increase in domestic resources for health.

## **What role does CS4ME play? Are there any stories that could illustrate the work?**

CS4ME unites malaria civil society advocates from a variety of countries affected by malaria, to jointly advocate and increase voices for malaria elimination. More specifically, we aim to make malaria control programs and interventions more effective, sustainable, equitable, innovative, inclusive of civil society, community-centered, human rights and gender-based and adequately funded. Some of our key objectives are:

- To connect local and other associations, NGOs and communities affected by or at-risk of malaria on a single platform, build their capacity and enable South-South\* collaboration and coordination (\*South-South collaboration refers to the partnerships and exchange of local expertise between countries and between CSOs from the southern part of the globe, often between low- and middle-income countries);
- To promote the participation of civil society organizations and local communities beyond service delivery as actors in decision-making processes, strategy and program development, monitoring and evaluation, research, to complement and strengthen malaria control and elimination and contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs);
- To promote and secure community-based programs and strengthen the sense of urgency for malaria elimination and for universal access and effective use of existing tools;
- To advocate for sufficient funding for malaria programs to reach elimination;

Recently CS4ME members were active in the development of The Global Fund malaria concept notes, assuring community engagement, gender inclusion as well as the addition of specific strategies to reach high-risk groups.



Effective civil society engagement is critical to improving maternal health. Here a community health worker educates pregnant women on malaria and how to properly use a bed net in Tanzania in 2016. Photo courtesy of USAID.

## **How has the role of civil society changed since COVID-19?**

Our role has increased. It is now more important with the COVID-19 threat because there is a need to ensure malaria is high on the agenda and not forgotten. More people will suffer/die from malaria during a health crisis where health centers are disrupted, where having a fever is a stigma, where self-medication increases and where attendance in health centers decreases. As a result, CS4ME is actively sensitizing not only leaders and decision-makers but also community members on the importance of malaria prevention and prompt diagnosis and treatment.

## **How is CS4ME responding to COVID's impact on malaria?**

CS4ME members launched a malaria campaign to remind leaders to ensure continuity of malaria services and the full protection of community health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was done via civil society media engagements such as RFI, FRANCE 24, AFRICA 24, local media, statements, letters to local leaders and partners, and the social media campaign #thefightmustcontinue. In Ivory Coast, civil society asked leaders to provide COVID-19 updates in addition to including updates on malaria, after a survey they conducted showed the impact of malaria during COVID-19. In Cameroon, CSOs developed communication materials to raise awareness about both COVID-19 and malaria.

## **What advice would you give to others trying to maintain the commitment to fighting malaria?**

We must mitigate the risks of COVID-19 on malaria. Otherwise, we risk waking up to a situation where we have a high increase of malaria deaths globally. We must protect the gains made in the malaria fight and we must ensure the lives of people at risk /affected by this disease remain protected.

Mosquitoes won't wait for COVID-19 to end. Instead, they will continue to bite and malaria will strike harder. Malaria is preventable and treatable. If we want to protect the lives of our friends, colleagues, children, parents, spouses, we must continue to raise awareness to ensure malaria is not forgotten.

### **My advice to others:**

- Document or engage with communities to learn about issues/disruptions of services or the effect of COVID-19 on malaria and the effects of malaria for pregnant women, children, and others.
- Continue to raise awareness about the danger of malaria via social media, mainstream media, local leaders, community members, etc.
- Not only maintain but increase your own commitment, engagement and investment in malaria to protect the gains and save lives.
- We must unite to fight. Your contribution to this fight is key.
- Right now, we need to come together in solidarity to not only tackle COVID-19, but to

also ensure that malaria services and other essential health services are not disrupted.