

A conversation with Rob Mather on May 23, 2014

Participants

- Rob Mather – Founder and CEO, Against Malaria Foundation (AMF)
- Natalie Crispin – Research Analyst, GiveWell
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Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Mr. Mather.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Rob Mather about the Against Malaria Foundation's negotiations for future distributions of long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs), including one negotiation that was unsuccessful and two that are currently pending

Discussions for a large LLIN distribution that were unsuccessful

AMF was in conversations with one country for about a year and a half about a large-scale LLIN distribution but discussions have now stalled.

The National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) twice requested nets from AMF.

1. In February 2013 AMF was approached by a potential distribution partner and the NMCP to ask if AMF was in a position to immediately fund 300,000 LLINs. The request was to fund the cost of nets as all non-net costs were already covered.
2. In discussions over several weeks, distribution verification information and post-distribution check-up activity were agreed to and AMF committed to funding 300,000 LLINs.
3. In the subsequent three month period, the net request grew to 400,000 LLINs (due to a better estimate of the net need in the region concerned) and then 680,000 LLINs when it transpired that another partner would not be delivering nets in-country by July in time for an already planned distribution. For the larger quantity of nets it was again confirmed by the NMCP that the request was just for nets as all non-net costs were covered.
4. Distribution verification and post-distribution check-up activities were agreed to for the larger quantity of nets.
5. The NMCP asked AMF if it could provide all 680,000 nets immediately (and earlier than anticipated) due to the gap created by other nets arriving from another partner.
6. AMF agreed it could and sought signature of the Distribution Agreement that precedes all net orders.

7. The NMCP then communicated to AMF they did not after all have funds for shipping costs. As a production slot had to be confirmed imminently, AMF agreed to fund \$187,000 of shipping costs.
8. AMF requested the Distribution Agreement be signed quickly by the NMCP so the order could be placed as requested.
9. Over a period of four weeks the Agreement was not signed and no communication was received from the NMCP.
10. After six weeks a third party indicated there was a problem with some aspect of AMF's distribution verification requirements. This aspect of the agreement referred to sharing with AMF information the NMCP would naturally collect in the course of carrying out the distribution. This had previously been agreed to in earlier discussions.
11. After seven weeks (to early July 2013), the NMCP communicated they were not being given permission by another partner to use funds previously approved to be used for non-nets costs. AMF did not have funds available to cover non-net costs should it have wished to do so. Other funds in AMF's possession were ringfenced for a multi-million net distribution at an advanced stage of discussion.
12. AMF could not place an order for nets.
13. In December 2013, the NMCP approached AMF and asked if they would consider funding 680,000 LLINs. The NMCP confirmed in writing all non-net costs, included shipping, were funded and requested AMF to fund this quantity of nets.
14. AMF was willing to fund the nets.
15. Over several weeks, correspondence established that project funding was secured and agreement was reached regarding post-distribution check-up activity (as previously).
16. An agreement was sent for mutual signature.
17. The NMCP informed AMF that it had made a mistake and did not have funds for shipping. It further indicated that aspects of distribution verification and data collection required by AMF were not in line with international standards and would not be acceptable to the NMCP.

AMF did not have enough confidence to continue discussions. AMF reallocated the funds that it had allocated to the country to other pending distributions. If the country were to want to re-open discussions, AMF would be willing to do so but would seek in writing a clear understanding of the project and the commitments of each party involved.

Plans for distributions in Malawi

AMF plans to fund future LLIN distributions (including funding non-net costs) in the three districts in Malawi that it has worked in previously (Ntcheu, Balaka, and Dedza), and one

additional district, in partnership with Concern Universal. The next distribution in Ntcheu is due in 2015, in Balaka in 2016 and in Dedza in 2017.

In the additional district, population figures suggest a need for 400,000 nets. An agreement has been reached between the NMCP, Concern Universal and AMF for the distribution to take place in late 2014 or early 2015. The distribution is currently being planned for November 2014.

Balaka distribution, October 2013

There was a delay of eight months in AMF's distribution in Balaka District for two reasons. First, errors in data collection led to the pilot pre-distribution registration survey (pilot PDRS) having to be re-done and, some of the results of the full PDRS were implausible, so a portion of the PDRS had to be redone. This resulted in a delay of four months. Second, available net production slots across the candidate net manufacturers contributed a further four months delay. CU demonstrated a strong approach to data errors and inaccuracies that can conceal larger problems, and AMF was pleased to see CU's commitment to ensuring the information that underpinned the distribution was sound.

Dedza distribution, Aug/Sep 2014

AMF and Concern Universal will be distributing 245,000 LLINs in Dedza district, Malawi in September 2014.

Pending distributions

AMF is in discussions about two potential distributions, totaling over 4 million LLINs or about \$12.8 million (this includes non-nets costs in the district in Malawi). If AMF signs agreements for both distributions, it will spend all of the funding it has on hand and will need to raise an additional \$437,000. It believes that it will be able to raise this funding without much additional effort on fundraising.

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