Conversation with Rob Mather and Peter Sherratt, February 11, 2016

Participants

- Rob Mather – Founder and CEO, Against Malaria Foundation (AMF)
- Peter Sherratt – Executive Chairman, AMF
- Milan Griffes – Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Natalie Crispin – Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Sarah Ward – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Mather and Mr. Sherratt.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Rob Mather and Peter Sherratt of the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF) to get an update on AMF's long-lasting insecticide-treated net (LLIN) distributions. Conversation topics included the status of distributions (recently completed, ongoing, planned, potential future, and cancelled), and some of the challenges of net distribution programs.

Status of recently completed and ongoing distributions

Balaka, Malawi

AMF is awaiting the report from its recently completed distribution in Balaka, Malawi.

Ntcheu, Malawi

AMF's distribution in Ntcheu, Malawi is nearing completion. Actual net needs ended up being greater than the amounts estimated in the pre-distribution registration survey (PDRS), so AMF had to ship in an additional 100,000 nets in the second week of January 2016. AMF is awaiting the report from this distribution from its distribution partner, Concern Universal.

Nord-Ubangi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Nord-Ubangi is a highly malaria endemic region. AMF's Nord-Ubangi distribution is expected to take approximately eight weeks, beginning in early March 2016 and ending in early May. It is a two-phase distribution. One of the region's 11 health districts, Wasolo, received a distribution just before Christmas. The experience spurred discussions between AMF and its partners, including IMA World Health (IMA), regarding the operational challenges of the single-phase distribution.

Nets destined for Nord-Ubangi travel by boat along the Congo River; depending on the season, transportation time can vary by 4-6 weeks. The river's low water level has delayed the nets' arrival. The nets are currently in transit and the majority are expected to arrive shortly.

Status of planned distribution in Ghana

Ghana had a net gap of 2.7 million LLINs, required for 3 regions: Upper West, Northern, and Greater Accra. AMF agreed to fund the nets to close this gap. The three distributions were due to take place in 2015 but were delayed as a result of a large fire at the country's Central Medical Stores in January 2015. The aftermath presented the Ghanaian National Malaria Control Program (NMCP)'s small team with significant challenges due to programme disruption and lost supplies and funding decisions from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) and others were put on hold.

The Ghana distribution is now going ahead: AMF is funding the costs of the nets and AMF's additional monitoring costs, and the Global Fund will fund other non-net costs.

The nets are being produced next month, in March 2016. They are expected to arrive in Ghana in early to mid May 2016, and their transport to the distribution zone will take 3-5 days. The distributions are planned for June 2016.

The logistics, monitoring, and operational teams of Ghana's NMCP will be on the ground in all 3 districts, liaising with local health systems to manage and supervise distributions. In order to keep the teams' schedules on track, the NMCP is eager to complete the distributions by the end of June. While AMF intends to respect this deadline, it has also received assurance from the NMCP that the distributions can still proceed if pushed back (for example, due to transportation challenges) to July or August.

AMF will partner with the Ghanaian NMCP to transfer paper household-level records into electronic form. AMF expects to cover the costs of data collection and entry. Given the short timeline, it will not be possible to pilot electronic data gathering methods (i.e. using hand-held devices) during this distribution. The distribution will also include 6-monthly post-distribution check-ups (PDCUs) of net use and condition.

AMF is interested in working in Ghana for a number of reasons:

- It has high malaria rates and a significant ongoing need for nets.
- Insecticide (pyrethroid, the insecticide used in long-lasting insecticidal nets, LLINs) resistance has been identified in some parts of Ghana and other countries. AMF is keen to support (through logistical and other distribution-related synergies) where possible and scientifically sensible, the various aspects of insecticide resistance research i.e. gathering data on resistance levels and testing new net types that may contribute to better malaria control, of interest to the wider malaria community.
- It will work closely with the Ghana NMCP, which has demonstrated a significant interest in accountability.

Upcoming distributions that were cancelled

South and North Idjwi, DRC

AMF has withdrawn from two small planned distributions in North and South Idjwi in South Kivu province, DRC. This was as a result of the area being planned to be covered in a South Kivu-wide distribution being coordinated by another group.

Net viability and the 3-year distribution cycle

In the malaria community, there is increasing concern that nets do not last as long as originally thought. Despite these concerns, distributions continue to follow a three-year cycle. The current funding gap would be very significantly increased if distributions took place every two years.

How AMF ensures that all targeted households are registered

Registering all villages

It is rare that villages are missed. In one case, three villages were accidentally excluded from a distribution in Balaka, Malawi. Two groups were working in the area, and each believed the missed villages were within the other group's jurisdiction. The issue was picked up by AMF's and Concern Universal's procedures when the registration data was shown to the local health officials as part of the verification procedure. This procedure includes identifying each village on the district-maintained 'master' list in the registration data set.

Registering all households

AMF has a number of mechanisms to increase accountability:

1. **"105%" data collection process** – In some countries, such as Malawi, AMF distribution partners conduct a two-step, "105%" data collection process. A first wave of data collectors collect registration data from all households in a given area (i.e. 100% data collection). A separate, smaller group of data collectors then visits unannounced 5% of the households which are randomly selected and collects the same registration data. This second set of data collectors does not have sight of the original data set at any stage. The 5% overlap data is then compared. Before the entire data collection process starts, both sets of data collectors are made aware of the 5% checking process and AMF reports that this motivates the first wave of data collectors to do high-quality work.

2. **Community verification of registration data** – Each household in the district is visited and listed, and the data is transferred into electronic format. The data is then analysed and cleaned, for example, i) inconsistencies (e.g. 4 people in a household, 2 adults and 3 children) or ii) likely errors often identified through analysis of certain ratios (e.g. a ratio of people/net of 1, perhaps with 4 people in a household and 4 nets stated being required, given that typically 2 people sleep under a net on average) are identified and flagged for review. A printed draft beneficiary

3

list is returned to each community so they can review the accuracy of the information. AMF does not believe its distributions miss a material number of households in the registration process, if any.

The Malawi NMCP has been impressed by aspects of the AMF model, and adopted a number of elements of it for its recent distribution. In general, AMF believes its distribution partners have the competence to conduct a high-quality registration.

This process once uncovered an issue where a data collector doubled the number of requested nets for his relatives and removed the equivalent number of nets from another village. The data collector was identified through his unique log-in and was immediately dismissed by AMF's distribution partner. The distribution partner reported the incident to AMF in their weekly report. After this incident, policy was changed so that data entry clerks do not work on data covering their own or nearby villages.

3. **Comparison of paper and electronic data** – Data manipulation (e.g., inflating or deflating numbers) can be detected by comparing the net totals on paper forms with the corresponding line in the electronic version.

Net theft

AMF has gathered some knowledge about different net theft scenarios through conversations with other stakeholders.

Small-scale theft

A bale of 100 nets might be worth $800-$900 on the black market. Given that the health workers who distribute nets in many countries may earn about $150/month, some workers might be tempted to steal nets. AMF believes, due to anecdotal information rather than hard data, that the vast majority of health workers and individuals are of high integrity and are hard-working, and that just a small percentage of workers are prepared to steal.

Medium-scale theft

Net theft might also involve thousands or tens of thousands of nets being diverted, stored, and slowly drip-fed into the market. AMF is aware of a case (not involving AMF nets) where an entire container of 40,000 nets was stolen and transported to another country. In the same distribution, AMF understands that another 20,000 were stolen by about 5% of the health workers. The distribution also suffered from poor hang-up rates due lack of malaria education efforts.

Large-scale theft

Thefts of larger quantities of nets (not from AMF distributions) have been reported to AMF, although it does not have hard evidence about this. For example, in one country, several hundred thousand nets were sold to another country.

As a second-order but highly significant effect, net theft can fuel the black market, lead to market inefficiencies, and embed patterns of corruption. For example, a government employee might receive a lower salary based on the assumption that it can be supplemented by stealing commodities. The resources required to combat the trade of nets on the black market could be used much more productively.

All GiveWell conversations are available at http://www.givewell.org/conversations