

Keeping the Momentum in fighting Malaria

Written by Mela Ghebremedhin

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Engaging local communities in raising awareness and eradicate bad habits are essential parts in development endeavours. Often, the significance of local community as driver for change is disregarded by policymakers and organizations. In recent years, the role of communities seems to be increasingly recognized by those at the top of the pyramid. Truly, including local community throughout the whole process from planning to implementation is pivotal in monitoring and keeping the momentum.

As health is one of the top priorities of the Government of Eritrea, eradicating diseases is key for the development of the country. In fact, eradicating malaria prevalence is at the forefront of Eritrea's fight, which started during the armed struggle for independence. Clearly, the fight against malaria, especially in rural areas, has been vigorous through campaigning, sensitization programs and the implementation of preventive measures.

On April 25th, Eritrea commemorated the International Malaria Day at national level. For the occasion, I went to attend an event with local communities in the outskirts of Asmara, in a small town called Emba Dorho. In the morning hours of Tuesday, the organizing committee was making the final arrangements. Posters, leaflets and banners decorated the venue. Local communities of the town as well as neighbouring villages from Serejeka sub-zone started to fill up the hall wearing hats bearing the slogan, "let's get rid of Malaria" and t-shirts assorted for the occasion.



At the event, Snit cultural troupe including school girls and boys of the area, showcased various cultural performances to enhance the message of prevention against malaria. The audience expressed their pleasure towards the performers by encouraging them. The spirit of the local community was clearly reflected at the event. Actually, the motto in eradicating malaria in Eritrea is by engaging communities to enhance awareness and take preventive measures in their respective areas.

Accordingly, Eritrea together with its partner agencies included a system of village committees whose role is together organize seminars, sensitize people in their neighbourhood as well as

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ensure clean and hygienic standards without failing to recall the good use of mosquito nets.

The Governor of the Sub-Zone of Serejeka, Mr. Tesfu Fessehazion, said in his welcoming speech that “Eritrea continues to register one of the best results in Africa”. He also stressed the importance of prioritizing health as a key element in development.

To promote health, engaging the people is an important feature as it creates a sense of ownership for the well-being of the collective. To strengthen this statement, the community-based programs implemented since 1999 in Eritrea have shown positive results in lowering malaria prevalence nationwide. Mr. Mehari Hedad, who is in charge of Administration and Finance at the Ministry of Health Central region branch, explained the consequences of malaria prevalence particularly on children and pregnant women and that only prevention can actually eradicate the disease.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), between 2001 and 2016, about 6 million people worldwide were affected by the disease as stated by the international report in which 52.2% are children in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mr. Mehari stressed.

In Eritrea, from 2000 to 2015, the number dropped by 75% and the Central region remains the region with best results registered. Besides, according to the Ministry of Health



(2016), at national level, malaria incidence per 1000 people declined from 157.1 in 1998 to 11.4 in 2015.

Despite the positive results registered, Mr. Teklit Berhe, representative of the Governor of Emba Dorho, explained to the audience on the necessity of continuous efforts for the eradication of malaria. A research conducted by the Ministry of Health in 2016 in 17 villages of the region registered higher malaria prevalence in Durfo and Wuqay. The administration of the Central region has so far distributed about 7,000 insecticide-treated nets to pregnant women while another 40,000 have been disseminated to rural areas of the region.

Although the region is less prone to malaria compared to the Gash Barka region with the

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highest risk in the country, the work against malaria shouldn't stop until it is totally eradicated", Mr. Teklit stressed.

Commemorating Malaria Day at community level is an occasion to remind every citizen of his/her responsibility to promote healthy and clean practices and enhance the level of awareness of the community.