

# Don't misuse free mosquito nets, Sikika urges public



Proper use of mosquito nets has been proven as one of the best ways of reducing malaria.

A three-day insecticide treated mosquito nets (ITNs) distribution exercise saw mothers of children under the age of five getting free mosquito nets throughout the country.

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**W**ITH the war against malaria under the government-rolled Malaria Haikubaliki campaign intensifying, following a three-day insecticide-treated mosquito nets (ITNs) distribution exercise held recently, beneficiaries have been urged to desist from misusing the nets for the betterment of their health.

The advice was voiced by Sikika, a non-governmental organisation dealing with health issues, through a press release last week.

"Sikika urges recipients of these ITNs to use them and stop compromising their health by either selling them or turning them into fishing nets. We also urge all citizens to adhere to user guidelines of the nets, a move that will provide best results," read part of the press release, adding that the general public have the right to information when such distributions are taking place and also to monitor public resources.

The organisation hailed the brains behind the national exercise that saw mothers with children under the age of five getting free mosquito nets.

"This will go a long way in saving life, that is, if the nets are properly used. It is vital that the responsible authorities, especially those involved in the Malaria Haikubaliki programme, educate the general public on proper use of nets and make follow ups to make sure that the nets are not misused," said Sikika.

The organisation also took the opportunity to sound a warning to those responsible for the exercise to desist from using the nets for personal gains.

"Public leaders responsible for distributing ITNs under the Malaria Haikubaliki programme should make sure that the nets reach the intended targets" Sikika said, adding that the abuse and misuse of resources and programmes aimed at benefiting the public should stop and government must leave no stone unturned in

taking legal action towards those involved, for the betterment of the country.

This comes amid reports that some leaders might have misused nets meant to be distributed free of charge and benefit children under the age of five years.

"Sikika condemns such behavior as it deprives the most vulnerable groups within the society of protection from the number one killer disease that claims 291 lives, mostly children, in Tanzania every day. In other words 10 people die of malaria, in this country, every hour. Malaria is preventable and treatable but continues to kill such a large number of people especially children, while the use of ITNs has been proved as one of the most effective way of reducing malaria cases in Africa," the organisation added.

Tanzania recently intensified the war against malaria by launching the Malaria Haikubaliki campaign, under which the nets were distributed early this year. And if successful, the country arguably one of the leaders in the global fight against malaria, is this year set to become one of the first African countries to achieve universal access to mosquito nets and affordable treatment for all of its citizens as it struggles to fight malaria, a disease ravaging societies worldwide.

In support of this landmark effort, President Jakaya Kikwete, who is also the head of the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) which brings African leaders together on the world stage to raise global awareness and support, is leading the "Malaria Haikubaliki: Tushirikiane Kitokomeza" (Malaria is unacceptable: Working together, we can eliminate malaria) awareness campaign.

While launching the campaign in Dar es Salaam, President Kikwete declared malaria a national disaster due to the number of lives it claims per hour in this country. He revealed that the bulk of these victims constitute children.

The president mentioned three ways of fighting and winning the war against malaria. They include use of insecticide treated mosquito nets and ensuring availability of nets, to stop the

replication of mosquitoes that carry malaria and lastly using effective drugs to treat those with malaria.

On nets, the president further said that while children under five were currently getting them for free, plans were in final stages to enable every household to have at least two treated nets. "We must ensure we annihilate these mosquitoes and their breeding sites. It is possible to ensure that we become the last generation to die of malaria.

Other countries in the world have managed, it is possible for us to make it. "This is a campaign to save our lives. It is a campaign to prevent deaths which can be avoided," said Kikwete.

The national campaign is anchored at the community and household level by community mobilisation activities implemented by PSF-Tanzania and District Advocacy activities led by Voices 11.

Malaria is one of the main health problems in the world with 300-500 millions cases yearly and about one million deaths. It remains sad that despite having methods to control the disease, the malaria problem in Africa has increased over the years.

The vast majority of malaria deaths occur in Africa, south of the Sahara, where malaria also presents major obstacles to social and economic development. Malaria has been estimated to cost Africa more than US\$12 billion every year in lost GDP, even though it could be controlled for a fraction of that sum.

Malaria is Africa's leading cause of under-five mortality (20 percent) and constitutes 10 percent of the continent's overall disease burden. It accounts for 40 percent of public health expenditure, 30-50 percent of inpatient admissions, and up to 50 percent of outpatient visits in areas with high malaria transmission.

There are several reasons Africa bears an overwhelming proportion of the malaria burden. Most malaria infections in Africa south of the Sahara are caused by Plasmodium falciparum, the most severe and life-threatening

form of the disease.

"This region is also home to the most efficient, and therefore deadly, species of the mosquitoes which transmit the disease. Moreover, many countries in Africa lack the infrastructure and resources necessary to mount sustainable campaigns against malaria and as a result few benefited from historical efforts to eradicate malaria.

In Africa today, malaria is understood to be both a disease of poverty and a cause of poverty. Annual economic growth in countries with high malaria transmission has historically been lower than in countries without malaria.

Economists believe that malaria is responsible for a growth penalty of up to 1.3 percent per year in some African countries. When compounded over the years, this penalty leads to substantial differences in GDP between countries with and without malaria and severely restrains the economic growth of the entire region.

Malaria also has a direct impact on Africa's human resources. Not only does malaria result in lost life and lost productivity due to illness and premature death, but malaria also hampers children's schooling and social development through both absenteeism and permanent neurological and other damage associated with severe episodes of the disease.

One of the greatest challenges facing Africa in the fight against malaria is drug resistance. Resistance to chloroquine, the cheapest and most widely used antimalarial, is common throughout Africa (particularly in southern and eastern parts of the continent).

Resistance to sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP), often seen as the first and least expensive alternative to chloroquine, is also increasing in east and southern Africa. As a result of these trends, many countries are having to change their treatment policies and use drugs which are more expensive, including combinations of drugs, which it is hoped will slow the development of resistance.