



Case study: The impact of COUNTDOWN research activities: a case study of Imeko Afon local government area, Ogun state: taking ownership of the mass administration of medicines implementation

Background

The COUNTDOWN research team, Nigeria, conducted a community engagement study in Kaduna and Ogun state in 2018, using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycle. The study aimed to increase community participation in the planning and implementation of the Mass Administration of Medicines (MAM), to increase community acceptability and ownership of the MAM programme, as it is a key driver to the sustainability of any health intervention programme.

In Ogun State, the study was implemented within two contexts; rural and urban in two local government areas (LGAs); Imeko and Ijebu Ode LGAs, respectively. At the end of the first PAR cycle, there were recommendations of how best to engage the community to increase visibility, acceptability, and ownership of the neglected tropical disease (NTD) programme.

Research Findings

One of the key findings and recommendations from the first PAR cycle of the community engagement study is the importance of sensitisation and advocacy visits to community gatekeepers, such as traditional rulers and community leaders. Hence during the 2019 MAM, which coincided with the second PAR cycle, the COUNTDOWN team supported the state implementers with the development and implementation of an action plan for the MAM process. One of the key activities in the action plan was sensitisation and advocacy visits to all community gatekeepers, which the COUNTDOWN team ensured was successfully done in the two LGAs mentioned above. The outcomes of the implementation research that year were; an increased awareness, acceptability of the MAM programme among the populations in the LGAs where COUNTDOWN project was implemented and support for the delivery of the NTD programme both in terms of financial aid and provision of implementation materials such as dose poles, and provision of water for medicines administration.

Recent feedback from one of the State NTD programme implementers showed that the COUNTDOWN research activities have positively impacted the implementation of the NTD programme in the LGAs where the study was carried out.

Below are the two examples of how the stakeholders at Imeko Afon LGA are taking ownership of NTD programme activities in the LGA.



"The COUNTDOWN CONSORTIUM has really made great impact in Mass Administration of Medicines in Imeko-Afon local government, the members of the community have now taken ownership of the programme."

State NTD implementer

The research has increased the acceptability of the MAM programme both community and school-based deworming to the extent that the community members are the people that are requesting for their drugs as and at when due."

State NTD implementer

Sourcing for funds to support NTD implementation activities

During the last school-based deworming (SBD) implementation planning exercise, a stakeholder's meeting was held in November 2020. During this meeting, the decision was made by stakeholders to write letters to philanthropists and influential people who are indigenes of the LGAs, with the intention of requesting monetary donations.

Some of the letter recipients kindly donated funds, and as a result, it was possible to purchase toys (e.g., plastic balls) to motivate the pupils to take deworming tablets. The result of this was that many of those who initially refused (at least 139 pupils mainly boys) to take the medicines decided to take them when they saw that those who took the medicines were given toys.

Constitution of the LGA NTD committee



The Imeko Afon LGA stakeholders established a committee on NTDs, which aimed to oversee successful planning and implementation of NTD activities in the LGA, this committee comprised of 15 members, including the medical officer of Health (MoH) for the LGA, the LGA NTD coordinator and community leaders of the different tribes that reside within the LGA.

“The research success stories in Imeko Afon local government has taken another dimension in the last MAM programme in the LGA, there was a report to the State before implementation that they have constituted NTD committee members, comprising of 15 members including the Asoju Oba, the Baale Agbe, Fulani leader, Ohori leader, Egun leader, the Iyalojas of 4 major markets in the LGA, religious leaders, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) representative for the LGA, the MoH, Health Educator and the LNTD coordinator.”

State NTD implementer

“We would like to hold our meeting every quarter even when implementation is not going on.”

Imeko Afon LGA NTD committee officer

The State NTD implementers explained that the Imeko Afon NTD committee agreed that they would be holding their meetings every quarter even when there are no ongoing NTD implementation activities.

The first meeting of the Imeko NTD committee was conducted this year, during the community treatment activities in the month of March 2021. The State NTD officer was there to monitor and supervise the implementation of activities at the LGA, so the programme officer for the LGA informed the committee about the upcoming community treatment (Onchocerciasis / Lymphatic Filariasis treatment) that will soon commence at their various communities.



Imeko NTD Committee at their first meeting
Photo credit: COUNTDOWN research team

The chairman of the committee requested to know the plans from the State NTD unit and the state NTD implementer informed him that the supporting partner; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have supported Imeko Afon LGA with the provision of stipends for 230 Community Drug Distributors (CDDs), identification tags and some dose poles which are currently inadequate.

All CDDs should have dose poles and identification tags. After long deliberation by the committee members, they made pledges for the provision of 80 additional CDDs, Identification tags, additional dose poles to complement those supplied by the United Nations Children's Fund, and the provision of stipends to 80 CDDs that the committee will supply.

Key messages

- Eliminating NTDs by 2030 will require that stakeholders in the endemic communities take ownership of NTD programme implementation.
- Continuous sensitization and advocacy to key stakeholders, especially the gatekeepers about health intervention projects will ensure acceptability and sustainability of the programme.

Impact

- NTD programme implementers' capacity has been built on how to engage stakeholders to support implementation of NTD programme.
- Engagement of many stakeholders during planning and implementation of NTD programme has resulted in attracting support in terms of financial aid and material resources for NTD programme implementation.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ Planning and implementation of health interventions at the community level should include engagement of stakeholders at all levels of the health system, especially the gate keepers.
- ✓ Conducting stakeholder mapping before engagement to ensure representation of all the various groups within the community.
- ✓ Facilitate stakeholders to co-plan and implement interventions ,rather than just instructing them on what to do.