

Using Community Health Dialogues to Encourage Prenatal Care Attendance and Prevent Malaria in Zamfara State, Nigeria



Photo shows Yardije receiving IPTp services from a health provider during an ANC visit in Zauma PHC

When a woman becomes pregnant, she is more vulnerable to getting malaria,

which in pregnancy has negative effects on the woman and the baby.

Pregnant women with malaria are at risk for anaemia, miscarriage, and low birth weight or premature birth. By taking intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy (IPTp) and sleeping under an insecticide-treated net (ITN) every night, pregnant women can reduce their risk for malaria. One effective approach to supporting women in accessing ITNs, receiving IPTp, and obtaining essential information for malaria prevention and a safe pregnancy is facilitating their attendance at antenatal care (ANC) visits.

Since 2018, Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria (BA-N), supported by the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), in collaboration with the Zamfara State Primary Health Care Board, implemented social and behavior change activities like compound meetings, community health dialogues and household visits in communities across the state. Community Volunteers (CVs), Local Government Area Supervisors, and Ward Development Committees (WDC) use these approaches to have conversations with women, their spouses, and other community members to encourage women to register for ANC, attend ANC early and regularly, and obtain spousal support as they receive the antenatal care.

During one of the dialogue sessions in Zauma ward, Labbo Hakimi felt concerned when he heard about the dangers of malaria to pregnant mothers. He and his wife Yardije were parents of four children and expecting their fifth child. After hearing this, he collected a referral form for his pregnant wife, Yardije. Referrals from trusted community members (such as CVs or WDC members) are valuable for providing social support and encouraging community members and mothers-to-be like Yardije to seek care. This was a timely intervention as Yardije had been sick for a few months, experiencing painful headaches, vomiting, dizziness and body weakness. Though there is a Primary Healthcare Facility in Zauma supported by PMI, throughout all of her pregnancies, Yardije had never attended ANC.

"I do not visit the hospital, particularly for ANC and malaria. We take herbs whenever we are sick because that's what he [my husband] thinks is affordable." - Yardije Labbo

After the dialogue session, and with her husband's support, Yardije visited the facility where she tested positive for malaria and started medication. She also started attending ANC. She convinced her friends and relatives to attend ANC during pregnancy and test for malaria before treatment.

"I have never chosen a hospital as an option for my treatment and that of my family because I thought it was expensive. Herbs and traditional medication have always been my preferences; however, that has changed now, and will try to adopt that" - Labbo Hakimi

Since 2018 in Zamfara State, Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria has worked through

162 Community Volunteers and has conducted 57,444 malaria SBC community activities across 9 LGAs. Through these activities, the project has reached 494,343 people and has ensured that 7,592 pregnant women like Yardije have gone for at least one ANC and taken medicine to prevent malaria.



Breakthrough ACTION- Nigeria's community sessions have helped transform behaviors and practices surrounding maternal health care. This includes fostering a culture of spousal support and safe deliveries.