



# Strengthening Social and Behavior Change Capacity

## ► Introduction

One of the main goals of the Breakthrough ACTION Guyana project was to increase the capacity of local institutions to coordinate, design, implement, evaluate, and advocate for high-quality social and behavior change (SBC) programs. Breakthrough ACTION focused on capacity strengthening with the Guyana Ministry of Health (MOH) and two specific departments within it: the Vector Control Services/National Malaria Program (VCS/NMP) and the Public Relations/Health Promotion Unit (PR/HPU).

When the project began working with VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU, it became clear that although they had some capacity to implement elements of SBC, impractical deadlines and inadequate resources hindered being able to follow a strategic approach to SBC program planning and implementation.



To better understand the departments' gaps and needs in SBC capacity, Breakthrough ACTION facilitated a baseline SBC capacity assessment in 2018. This assessment took participants through a discussion of specific skill sets and indicators involved in the implementation of the SBC Flow Chart, the SBC process supported by Breakthrough ACTION. The resulting set of key findings allowed both groups to identify specific areas of strengths as well as areas for improvement and to strategically outline priorities and a plan for capacity strengthening with support from the project.

Along with the results from the capacity assessment, Breakthrough ACTION set out to build a trusting and collaborative relationship with the MOH, which was treated as an equal partner and leader in creating its capacity strengthening agenda. Throughout this process, Breakthrough ACTION drew on the experience and expertise of the MOH and employed capacity strengthening activities, such as workshops, professional development opportunities, trainings, and reflection meetings, to ensure learning was explicit and systematic.

Breakthrough ACTION conducted follow-up SBC capacity assessments in 2022 and 2024. Both exercises allowed VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU to identify areas of achievement that can sustain the implementation of the SBC process in their respective departments and core programs even after the project ends.

## ► Interventions

Over the life of the project, Breakthrough ACTION worked collaboratively with VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU using a “learning-by-doing” approach, whereby both groups were involved in all project activities and provided significant input at key decision points. Specifically, both departments

participated at every level of the human-centered design process, including various research and design workshops used to develop the project's umbrella campaign, Lil Mosquito, Big Problem (LMBP). These workshops centered on skill sets that both departments prioritized for capacity strengthening during the assessment process. Additional capacity strengthening activities included the baseline and

endline surveys; planning, mobilizing, and coordinating the launch; and full implementation/monitoring of the LMBP campaign and others listed below.

- **National Malaria SBC Strategy and Implementation Plan.** In February and July 2021, respectively, Breakthrough ACTION provided support to VCS/ NMP to host two virtual workshops to facilitate the development of the next iteration of the National Malaria SBC Strategy. Key components of the strategy include long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs); case management; and surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation. SBC skills transferred to participants during the workshop included identifying behavioral determinants, understanding and conducting root cause analysis, identifying those root causes that can be addressed by SBC, and tailoring messages to key audiences. Breakthrough ACTION, as part of the priority strengthening activities, provided technical assistance to VCS/NMP for the dissemination and operationalization of the strategy, which guides the functioning of the unit and the activities of anyone implementing malaria SBC. The strategy, which

reflects the latest global thinking in malaria SBC and is aligned with the National Malaria Strategic Plan, was launched in November 2022 during the commemoration of the Malaria Day of Americas with participation from high-ranking officials, including Minister of Health Dr. Frank Anthony, former US Ambassador to Guyana Sarah Ann Lynch, and PAHO/WHO representative Dr. Luis Codina.

- **SMART Advocacy.** Breakthrough ACTION facilitated a “SMART Advocacy” workshop during November 1–3, 2022, at the Herdmanston Lodge in Georgetown, Guyana. A total of 22 stakeholders participated in the workshop, including personnel who worked in the capacity of supervisor/coordinator and deputy supervisor from the PR/HPU, central VCS, and VCS in Regions 1, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The objectives of the workshop were to build capacity for conducting strategic advocacy for increased resource allocation and provide technical support to develop advocacy action plans for their respective departments and regions.



Participants and facilitators of the M&E Training

- Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning.** Breakthrough ACTION collaborated with MOH on various monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning activities. Specifically, the project developed a continuous monitoring form in 2020 in conjunction with VCS/NMP and the local PAHO/WHO office. Through the tool, volunteer malaria testers conducted short exit interviews with miners to gather information on four key questions related to prompt care-seeking, treatment adherence, self-medication, and the use of LLINs. In addition, the project conducted workshops on the importance of monitoring and evaluation for malaria SBC, the new Epi Info database, and the development of insecticide-treated net indicators for the national strategy. A supervisory tool, developed and used by VCS/NMP to monitor SBC materials and malaria treatment and testing supplies, was also revised by Breakthrough ACTION with support from PAHO/WHO. A two-day workshop, led by Breakthrough ACTION in collaboration with PAHO on Epi Info in March 2024, was conducted for VCS/NMP, with 16 participants from the malaria endemic regions and the central department. The workshop focused on data analysis using Epi Info and visualization using the geographic information system software QGIS. Despite the limited duration of the workshop, participants engaged in hands-on activities.
- Malaria Champions.** On World Malaria Day 2022, the MOH launched a new Malaria Champions Initiative with PAHO and Breakthrough ACTION to recognize malaria champions in Guyana. Breakthrough ACTION Guyana provided support to harmonize the initiative with the LMBP SBC campaign to avoid having two parallel campaigns. The project developed and implemented a communication plan for the initiative that detailed the use of channels such as Facebook to encourage people to become malaria champions by promoting the key behaviors. In collaboration with VCS/NMP and PAHO, Breakthrough ACTION produced a 13-minute documentary titled *On the Road to Malaria Champions*. The documentary highlights successes and outstanding work in the fight toward malaria elimination. The documentary aims to recognize and energize communities, stakeholders, and people championing efforts that significantly contribute towards reducing malaria transmission in Guyana. It was featured as part of the Malaria Day in the Americas observances in November 2022 and disseminated on social media. The documentary has been viewed 2,342 times on YouTube (503,685 impressions) and 174 times on Facebook.
- International Conferences.** Representatives from VCS/NMP attended several international and regional conferences to share results and experiences from Breakthrough ACTION Guyana, including the Roll Back Malaria Partnership to End Malaria Social and Behavior Change Working Group annual meetings in Mozambique and Kenya; the Symposium on Malaria Prevention and Control in Mobile and Hard to Reach Populations in Paramaribo, Suriname; USAID/LAC Case Management Workshop in Washington, DC; and the International Social and Behavior Change Communication Summit in Morocco. The MOH's participation in these conferences exposed the representatives to different ideas and experiences in malaria and provided a space for them to build networks and relationships with fellow vector control and malaria program colleagues from around world.
- Social Media and Campaign Training.** Breakthrough ACTION, through its partnership with a local creative agency, hosted a three-day training for VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU on best practices and lessons learned from the LMBP campaign and management of the LMBP Facebook page as a step towards ensuring sustainability of the campaign. The training also provided applicable skills and tips for managing other aspects of the campaign, including media buying and placement of advertisements.
- After Action Reviews.** Breakthrough ACTION conducted After Action Reviews with the MOH on various activities, including the 2021 LLIN mass distribution campaign. The objective of the session was to review all segments of the previous distribution campaign, including the elements that worked well, those that did not work well, and those that required improvement in the pre-distribution, distribution and post-distribution stages. Participants recommended several immediate next steps for the April 2024 LLIN distribution, including improved collaboration between programs, articulating the roles that the mining organizations (such as the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, the Guyana Women's Miners Organization, Guyana Forestry Commission, and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission) could play in the distribution; clarifying roles, responsibilities, and lines of communication between regional and central staff; identifying persons who need to be trained; and outlining the process for obtaining an LLIN.

## ▶ Results

- A suite of capacity strengthening activities over the life of the project have contributed to creating a sustainable SBC environment for VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU, and both departments have begun using the skills gained to implement SBC activities on their own.
- The project strengthened the capacity of 37 staff from the two departments in SBC and monitoring and evaluation over the life of the project.
- Representatives from VCS/NMP have attended or participated in four regional and international SBC and/or malaria conferences to showcase results from the project and highlight their work in malaria with a unique population. MOH representatives noted these experiences were life changing and that they will apply lessons learned to their work in Guyana.
- Breakthrough ACTION has begun to hand over elements of the project to VCS/NMP and the PR/HPU; both departments have committed to implementing activities after Breakthrough ACTION ends. The process of transferring the LMBP Facebook page is currently underway. VCS/NMP will assist in the migration of content to the Ministry of Health's official Facebook page. Breakthrough ACTION is also expected to provide the ministry with a hard drive containing all digital content and editable files as part of the handover.

## ▶ Lessons Learned

- **Established and sustained counterpart relationships improve collaboration.** Commitments that go a long way toward establishing trust and ensuring your counterpart will show up when you request their assistance include being intentional about fostering connections and relationships with counterparts early in the project; setting up a regular time to meet either weekly or monthly; and showing up for counterparts, as possible, when they request help or assistance.
- **Enhanced SBC human resources capacity may require an increase in budgetary resources to improve institutional functionality.** Utilizing newly acquired skills to implement various activities was sometimes difficult to accomplish because of the VCS/NMP and PR/HPU budgetary limitations. The budgetary limitations affected the staff's ability to conduct some field research, while inadequate equipment such as computers or no or weak internet connectivity affected timely completion and delivery of reports. It is therefore important for malaria staff to use innovative approaches, such as data utilization, to show how increased budgetary allocations can contribute to improved institutional functionality to achieve the goal of malaria prevention and elimination.
- **Sustained learning-by-doing approaches allow counterparts to practice and improve new skills.** Over the life of the project, counterparts had several opportunities to participate in SBC learning-by-doing approaches, including the define, design and test, and apply phases of the SBC Flow Chart. These opportunities ensured that the staff were able to practice and implement their improved skills in a host of areas, including conducting interviews and probing techniques, creating personas and journey maps of the intended audience based on primary data, and using human-centered design to develop prototypes to address key insights from the data. The staff also gained knowledge about the importance and application of concept testing and pretesting with the intended audience, the process of elevating a prototype to a concrete idea, and how to design, implement, and regularly monitor and evaluate an evidence-based SBC campaign.

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