

# Sierra Leone: Youth and street theater are successful strategies for malaria control

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## BACKGROUND

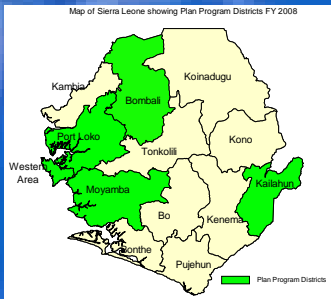
- Plan International is a humanitarian, child-centered development organization
- Started work in Sierra Leone in 1976
- Currently works in 4 districts and the Western Area on health, education, child protection, community & youth empowerment, and disaster risk reduction.
- Its health program provides improved and sustained health care for communities and children in partnership with the Ministry of Health, local NGOs, youth organizations and communities,

## MALARIA IN PLAN'S OPERATIONAL AREAS

- Malaria is endemic in Plan-supported communities
- Leading cause of morbidity and mortality
- Pregnant women and children under 5 are most vulnerable
- Malaria prevention and control programs focus on:
  - Utilization of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs)
  - Case management
  - Intermittent preventive treatment (IPT)

## THE PROJECT

A 5-year, US\$1.3M project co-funded by the European Community and Plan in Port Loko & Moyamba Districts.



## GOALS

- To reduce malaria morbidity and mortality among under five children by 30% and among pregnant women by 50%.
- To increase the capacity of youth health clubs to prevent and control malaria.

## METHODS – YOUTH PARTICIPATION COMPONENT

### WHY YOUTH PROMOTION?

- Youth have great potential to influence community opinions and also to physically deliver services.
- Street theatre, football and cleanliness campaigns are powerful means for malaria control in project communities. Street theatre is very effective to communicate social change messages, especially when there is no access to other media (TV, internet, radio).
- Youth engagement increases their sense of project ownership and accountability and thus the likelihood of success.



### METHOD 1: DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH HEALTH CLUBS

- 170 youth health clubs of 15 members each were formed by the youth organization in collaboration with communities.
- 2,550 club members aged 14-24 years were trained and provided materials/tools for street theatre, football events, and community cleanliness campaigns.
- The sponsoring youth organizations supported the club's activities and oversaw their progress.



### METHOD 2: APPLICATION OF YOUTH PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

- Drama shows by youth clubs, followed by lively community discussions and action planning, significantly improved key practices for malaria prevention and control.
- Also successful were community cleanliness campaigns and promotion during football games.
- Primary school children were also involved in school cleanliness campaigns, disseminating messages through child-to-child and child-to-adult approaches.



## RESULTS

- 2,550 youth in 170 clubs were trained
- Over 18 months, 12 performances reached 6,000 people, resulting in a 50% increase in awareness
- Utilization of ITNs increased by 49%
- Intermittent Preventive Treatment (IPT) increased by 17%
- Diagnosis increased by 7%
- Treatment increased by 45%
- Cleanliness campaigns reduced mosquito breeding sites, especially around homes, by over 50%



### ALSO...

- People were satisfied with the roles youth played in rolling back malaria
- Youth-led activities on malaria prevention and control attracted the participation of nearly 80% of the population in the communities



### VIEWS OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

- *"Youth in Port Loko district always involves us in their activities and have surely made a difference in malaria prevention and control in our district."* - District health officer, Port Loko
- *"God Bless our youth as they save our lives and those of their siblings."* - Mother, Moyamba District

### EVIDENCE OF FEASIBILITY

- Plan and its partners mobilized, formed, and trained in youth health clubs in three months.
- The 170 youth clubs were organized, trained and provided with material support at an average of US\$500/club/year.

## NEXT STEPS

- Development of youth capacity to mobilize resources for future activities.
- Inclusion of youth-led health promotion activities in the district's development plans.
- Encouraging learning and experience sharing for scale up in and out of Sierra Leone.