

Malaria experts join forces with Novartis to empower local communities to tackle malaria in Africa

- *The Novartis Malaria Initiative is convening global experts from education, government, community health and economics to share best practices and empower local African communities to deliver sustainable malaria healthcare.*
- *Roll Back Malaria, the World Health Organization, World Bank and the African Leaders Malaria Alliance are highlighting the urgent need to ensure malaria remains a priority in the current economic climate.*

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia/Basel, Switzerland, June 26, 2012 – Today, more than 35 countries from across Africa are represented at this year's National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) Best Practice Sharing Workshop, entitled 'Empowering Communities: The Heart of Malaria Control'. Convened by Novartis, this pivotal workshop brings together national and international malaria leaders to discuss key topics and challenges.

This year the workshop is being held in Ethiopia to acknowledge the progress that the country has made in the management of malaria, particularly at the community level. Novartis, with support from the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM), has built a workshop program that addresses the needs of multiple malaria partners and explores how efforts to combat malaria can be expanded. The objective of the workshop is to exchange lessons learned from different models of community case management of malaria among countries and to determine how the gains that have been made can be sustained in the current economic climate.

"We are delighted to launch the 11th NMCP workshop that will address key topics based on the needs of our malaria partners," said Thomas Teuscher, *ad interim* Executive Director, Roll Back Malaria, hosted by the World Health Organization. *"It's imperative that we listen to the key challenges for all those active in the fight against malaria to ensure that we deliver outputs from the workshop that provide benefits to all the countries and organizations involved."*

Malaria funding – sustaining the gains

One of the core sessions will focus on the evolving malaria funding landscape. At a time of global economic uncertainty, partners are calling for malaria to continue to be a priority so that the unprecedented but fragile gains that have been made can be sustained and expanded.

"While it is important that development aid continues to be provided for national malaria control programs, it is also crucial that African countries increase domestic spending on Malaria to ensure we achieve our ambitious target of near zero malaria deaths by 2015," said Dr. Melanie Renshaw, African Leaders Malaria Alliance. *"African communities are increasingly empowered to deliver quality integrated healthcare at a local level to ensure a sustainable approach to the management of this disease."*

Other topics that will be discussed during the workshop include the evolution of the SMS for Life program (which uses text messages to improve the quality of malaria management by accurately reporting stock levels of antimalarials and other products) and safeguarding the future of African children by delivering child-friendly antimalarial formulations.

NMCP Best Practice Sharing Workshops

Since the first pioneering workshop in 2006, NMCP Best Practice Sharing Workshops have been held in South Africa, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mali, Rwanda,

Zambia and Benin. These meetings facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practice between countries, highlighting successes and challenges, raising awareness of new initiatives, and discussing practical solutions to the barriers to malaria prevention and treatment.

“The Novartis Malaria Initiative is an active partner in the fight against malaria and we are proud to host the NMCP workshops, which are vital for sharing expertise to improve management of this disease,” said Linus Igwemezie, Head of the Novartis Malaria Initiative. “No one organization can combat malaria alone – through combined efforts from all the partners we are able to improve local expertise and skills to ensure long-term health outcomes within communities in Africa”.

Groundbreaking and successful projects have emerged from these meetings. For example, as a result of discussions with NMCP managers, Novartis reduced the size of our antimalarial packaging by 40%, making transport and storage more efficient. It was also at a NMCP workshop that participants raised the stock-out issue that led to the SMS for Life program to support more efficient stock management in rural health facilities initially in Tanzania, but now being expanded.

(Source: Novartis)

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