

Malaria Prevention: Net Distribution

A Partnership between Peace Corps, AJSDN and Poste de Sante
Maleme Niani, Senegal



Young boy receiving nets

Introduction

On July 6, 2009 1,150 nets arrived at the roadside town of Maleme Niani, situated in the region of Tambacounda in Senegal, West Africa. I communicated with the health post in Maleme Niani to store the mosquito nets until the date of the actual distribution. The arrival of the nets was long anticipated by me and members of AJSDN (Association des Jeunes et des Sympathisants pour le Developpement du Niani), a group formed to increase the amount of development work done among the younger population in the community. Previously, AJSDN and I spent a week going to every family compound obtaining data of the current population and number of beds in the community. Additionally, health post volunteers, the adjunct mayor of Maleme Niani, and I met before the distribution date to collect the number of mosquito nets given to each family during a national distribution that occurred a few weeks prior. I then added this information to a distribution document that was used on the date of the distribution. I partnered with AJSDN and the health post because they were interested in obtaining mosquito nets for the population of Maleme Niani and also because I wanted the people of Maleme Niani to take ownership of any development action (outside NGO workers). The following is a description of the distribution as well as lessons that can be learned and the effects it has had on the population to date.



Setting Up Distribution Site

Process of Distribution

Method: AJSDN members, health post employees, and I met after receiving the mosquito nets to discuss the method of distribution. Maleme Niani has two quartiers (Travaux and Guineau Rail) from which data had been collected and organized. We decided the distribution could be split up into two locations, the health post serving the members of the community from Travaux and the mayor's office serving the habitants of Guineau Rail. At each location there would be at least one health post volunteer, three AJSDN members, and two Peace Corps volunteers. The health post volunteer at each location was asked to put together a demonstration regarding proper use and implementation of mosquito nets; AJSDN members were in charge of the net distribution and would aid the Peace Corps volunteers running check in. The announcement of the distribution would occur the morning of July 11 at a meeting organized by the local CEM (middle school) to celebrate the end of the school year. We felt this would be a prime opportunity to partner with the local college in order to reach the most people in the shortest time. Following the college meeting, the distribution would begin in the afternoon and continue into the morning and evening of the following day.



Presenting AJSDN with honorary mosquito net

Distribution: The college meeting brought a large number of community members together. College employees, the mayor of Maleme Niani, the village chief, the Imam, visitors from USAID, and community members were present for the closing ceremony. Additionally three Peace Corps volunteers and a friend working for an NGO in Dakar arrived that morning to help with the organization of the distribution. After formal introductions, discussions regarding students' performances that year, and conversation among community members, we were given an opportunity to announce details regarding the mosquito net distribution. I performed a small skit in the local language describing the positive benefits of having and using a mosquito net properly and then presented the population with information regarding the initial partnership with AJSDN. The secretary of AJSDN communicated the details for the distribution (place, time, etc.). He gave ten nets to members of the community who helped with initial data collection, prominent community members, and honorable guests who were present that morning. The meeting ended with the hope that word would be spread that the distribution was to begin at 4pm that day.



Peace Corps volunteers helping with net distribution

At 4pm on July 11, volunteers arrived at their various sites and began the process of distribution. Peace Corps volunteers announced the name of the head of household, the number of mosquito nets given to that family during the previous national distribution, and how many nets they should receive based on the number of people in the family compound. All of this information was available for the Peace Corps volunteer in the previously created document. Once the number of nets was determined the Peace Corps volunteer gave the head of household a number to take AJSN members handing out nets. After receiving their nets, recipients passed by a net hanging site set up by the health post volunteer who organized a brief how-to and best practices tutorial. Approximately 900 mosquito nets were given to community members living in Maleme Niani. With the additional 250 nets, we were able to supply community members from neighboring smaller villages. 100 nets were reserved for Samba Diary, 50 for Sinthiou Ndene, and the final 50 for Dahra St Touba Niani. The remaining 50 nets were given to individuals who requested additional nets, important community members, and as tokens of appreciation for those who put work into the distribution.



Woman receives her nets from AJSDN members

Outcomes: In theory the organization and set up of the mosquito net distribution was well done and covered many possible scenarios. In reality, the distribution went well but could have been improved based on some situations that occurred. For example, our planning did not account for individuals who disagreed with the numbers that were written. Peace Corps volunteers discussed and compromised with the family representative to avoid angry recipients and a loss of nets for other community members. Additionally, some individuals were not listed as living in Maleme Niani so their names were written on a separate sheet and they were later given nets based on the number of individuals in their families. The actual net hanging demonstration and discussion organized by health post members went very well at one site and was almost non-existent at another. At the health post location, the leader of the health post and another volunteer went through the steps of proper mosquito net hanging and why it was important. At the other distribution site, however, a bed was set up with a mosquito net but I did not see any demonstration nor was the net hung properly in a very visible spot for individuals to observe and learn from. This site also had lack of leadership from the community and therefore volunteers leading check in were inundated with individuals asking for their nets. With proper leadership and ownership of the event at this location, it would have been a much smoother and effective process. On the other hand, I found it essential and very helpful to have local community members present and active in the distribution because they knew members of the community much better than I did and had a better understanding of how to communicate with those who were upset over net distribution outcomes. Also if members of the community took responsibility of the process,

the outcomes of the distribution meant much more to community members and may strengthen their ability to organize development events in the future.



Health Post demonstrating proper mosquito net use

Future Goals

In the near future, community members who helped with the distribution and I plan on visiting a number of family compounds in the community to verify if nets are being hung properly and how effective distribution activities were. We obtained mosquito patches that can be put on clothing or in rooms to give out to participating community members as an incentive to continue using their mosquito nets regularly. If nets are not hung properly, we will discuss with the family proper mosquito net use and reasons why proper net use is important. Additionally I will continue to work with the local health post to monitor the rate of Malaria in Maleme Niani as compared with previous years and the effectiveness of the net distribution in relation to eradicating malaria in the area. With this information community leaders can continue to encourage members of the community to use mosquito nets properly and regularly as they have a direct relation to keeping malaria rates low and the population healthy.



Woman receiving mosquito nets

Conclusions

The net distribution was a great experience for a number of reasons. Primarily we had an opportunity to create positive change in the community that we hope increases the well-being of the population as a whole. Additionally, I was able to work with key community members who taught me important lessons about leading an initiative in a developing country. From those lessons I will be able to improve upon any future development work I do in Maleme Niani and in any other location whose culture, economic system, etc. are foreign to me. Finally, the leaders who helped assist in planning and implementing the distribution activities, also gained a foreign perspective and organizational skills to continue to do development work in their own community. Future activities will allow us to measure the effectiveness of all three of these things. If community members continue working for the betterment of their community in these ways, they are well on their way to creating a safer, more developed, and self-sustained community with individuals who have the skills and resources to support one another.