

**Universal Coverage Bednet Distribution
Barrow Kunda, Mano Koto Forde and Mano Koto Keita Villages
Upper River Region
The Gambia
December 23-28, 2009**



Post-Distribution Report by Amin Ramzan and Michelle Nicolas

I. INTRODUCTION

On December 23rd we arrived in the large up-country town of Basse Santa Su, where 800 nets had been recently been delivered from Dakar, Senegal. Simply having the nets in Basse was a tremendous accomplishment, made possible by the help of Peace Corps administrations in Gambia and Senegal, as well as the cooperation of Gambian customs officials. The nets were being securely stored at the Peace Corps hostel just outside of Basse.

To transport the nets the approximately 25km from Basse to Barrow Kunda we enlisted the help of the Basse Regional Health Department. On December 24th we loaded the eight 100-net containers onto a pickup truck and after crossing the River Gambia via ferry, made the bumpy and dusty trek to Barrow Kunda.



The village had been expecting our arrival with the nets and a good portion of the Barrow Kunda residents came out to greet our car as it arrived. Shortly thereafter we gathered in the community meeting place where we received an official reception, in addition to some music and dancing. We took this opportunity with most of the village in attendance to describe the LLIN distribution that would be taking place over the next several days and introduce some basic anti-malarial educational topics that would be expanded on in subsequent events.

II. Education

Prior to arriving in the village we had extensive communication with village leaders concerning actions the community could take to help make the distribution a success. The one major request we made to the leaders of Barrow Kunda was to mobilize community groups to prepare anti-malarial education programs that would resonate with the community (especially children), such as dramas and songs.



The village organizations, particularly the woman's group, did an amazing job at using traditional forms of communication to promote the anti-malarial education that was a critical part of this bednet distribution. Over the course of several community programs, the woman's group and others used song, dance and plays to transmit basic but essential knowledge about the necessity of using a treated bednet every night, the importance of reducing standing water and other essential components of malaria education.

III. Barrow Kunda Distribution

On the morning of December 26th we gathered with our core team for the distribution, including several prominent village leaders and the community health nurse. It was decided that the best way to kick-off the distribution would be to re-emphasize the educational messages that had been discussed during the prior two days at several public events. Thus, after the village big-wigs had commenced the event with several speeches and proclamations, we asked everyone to gather outside the community building where the nets were being stored. The community health nurse demonstrated how to properly hang and care for the nets, including detailed steps that should be taken to ensure the nets provide protection for 4 years.



We organized a system to maximize efficiency and guarantee that at the end of the distribution, each person in Barrow Kunda owned a quality LLIN to sleep under. Several weeks prior to the distribution the community health nurse and Peace Corps Volunteer in the village took an extensive village census, recording the number of people in each compound and how many slept under a quality LLIN. We used this data to calculate how many new LLINs should be distributed to each family. Collecting this data prior to the distribution was critically important in helping us ensure the nets were distributed fairly.

Over the course of a 5 hour period our team of village leaders distributed 680 bednets to 75 compounds. This was neither easy nor simple. In Gambian society it is acceptable for a male to marry up to 4 wives. There were instances of one wife collecting nets for an entire family, and not sharing with the other wives and her children. Also, there are "mega compounds" where up to 4 men and their many wives live as a collective unit. The individual family units that make up these compounds often feud, which resulted in some families not initially receiving their fair share of nets. Luckily, the exceptional leaders of Barrow Kunda were able to mediate these disputes where necessary so that each citizen of the village was guaranteed the protection of a long lasting insecticidal treated bednet.

The actual steps that were taken each time a family representative was called to come collect their nets was as follows: First, we look at the census to see how many nets a particular family is entitled to. We then go to collect the nets from the young men that ensure the security of the nets. The appropriate number of nets are then marked with the name of the compound using a permanent marker (this helps to fight sale of nets on the black market). Finally, the nets are distributed to a representative of the family, along with a reminder about the proper use and upkeep of the nets.



No.	Name of compound	Number of households	Household 1				Household 2				Household 3				Household 4				
			Male	Female	Child	Total	Male	Female	Child	Total	Male	Female	Child	Total	Male	Female	Child	Total	
1	QANDA TUNU	1	10	2	2														
2	QANDA TUNU	1	5	0	0														
3	SABA TUNU	1	8	1	0														
4	QANDA TUNU	1	15	0	0														
5	QANDA TUNU	1	9	1	0														
6	QANDA TUNU	1	7	1	0														
7	QANDA TUNU	1	8	3	0														
8	QANDA TUNU	1	4	1	1														
9	QANDA TUNU	1	6	1	2														
10	QANDA TUNU	1	22	6	0														
11	QANDA TUNU	1	10	11	2														
12	QANDA TUNU	1	11	0	1														

IV. Mano Koto Forde and Mano Koto Keita Distributions

With our Barrow Kunda distribution complete and every citizen of that village now having a long-lasting insecticidal treated bednet to sleep under, we had an extra 120 bednets remaining that we had not planned for. Sticking to our goal of delegating as much local control as possible, we asked the leadership of Barrow Kunda to decide what they would like done with the remaining nets. We were pleased when they told us that it was their preference to share the remaining nets with two tiny villages called Mano Koto Forde and Mano Koto Keita, located about 5 km from Barrow Kunda. Within hours we organized a census to see how many nets would be needed to provide blanket coverage to these two villages. As luck would have it, the census revealed that 120 nets would be needed for comprehensive bednet coverage. Thus, on December 28th we mobilized our net distribution team to make the 5 km trek to the Mano Koto villages to conduct two more net distributions. Both distributions went as well as we could have hoped and we had the satisfaction of covering two more villages than originally planned with universal bednet coverage.



V. Conclusions

At the conclusion of the distribution we had supplied 800 bed nets and guaranteed universal LLIN protection for 3 villages that historically shoulder a heavy malaria burden. We were extremely pleased with the process leading up to the Barrow Kunda distribution, and felt the entire village came together for this important cause. Numerous community groups invested considerable time and energy in preparing for the distribution and were critically important in the education component of this project.

The one factor that may possibly limit the success of our distribution is the timing. Because it was not the rainy (i.e. malaria) season, many people do not feel the need to use a bednet. We frequently explained throughout our distribution that one can be infected with malaria throughout the entire year, regardless of season. But there is a possibility that the nets would be more likely to be used immediately if distributed during the rainy season. Happily, however, our post-distribution survey indicated most people put their nets to immediate use (after allowing them to air in the shade, of course!).

We look forward to the subsequent distributions in the Upper River Region of The Gambia and fully expect they will be as successful as this effort.

We would like to thank the following for helping make this distribution a success: Peace Corps Gambia, Peace Corps Senegal, The Against Malaria Foundation, the Basse Regional Health Department and Mike McConnell (former country director of Peace Corps Gambia). A special thanks to all those that graciously donated money to this effort so that people they will likely never know are able to sleep safely at night.