

Malaria Prevention: Bednet Distribution

Mamadou Bajeeffa, Kolda, Senegal

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Mamadou Bajeeffa is a village of roughly 150 people in southern Senegal. The population is Pulaar, with the majority of villagers speaking only the Fulakunda dialect. This particular village is quite undeveloped, with only one cement-lined well, very few latrines, and an overwhelming lack of mosquito nets. I had done health and agricultural work with this village with success in the past and thought they were an excellent candidate for a net distribution. Their enthusiasm for Peace Corps' work, and their isolation from health amenities encouraged me to approach the village chief with the idea of the distribution coupled with a related health causerie.

In early February, the chief and I went to every compound in the village and compiled a list of beds lacking nets. When the requested nets were transported to Kolda, I had a meeting with the local health education representative, Malan Drame, about assisting with a malaria causerie in the village prior to the net distribution. On the day of the distribution, the entire village gathered in the chief's compound, and the male leaders of the village led a prayer to give thanks for the nets. Malan then led an informational session on mosquito-borne illnesses. He came to Mamadou Bajeeffa with great resources to share with the villagers. He passed around many illustrations detailing the causes of malaria, yellow- and dengue fever, possible means of prevention, and action to take if one contracts any of the aforementioned. The villagers were very receptive to his presentation, and seemed to absorb much of the information.

Following Malan's talk, a female representative from the village assisted me in distributing the nets to everyone I had listed as having need. This was an important part of the distribution, as it forced an individual from the village to take charge of at least some of the logistics of the distribution. Village ownership of the distribution, as opposed to a Peace Corps volunteer running it in its entirety, was encouraging. We charged a nominal fee for high-quality string to hang the nets, for those who were interested in purchasing it. If not, they hung their nets with scraps of fabric or bark. I conducted a follow-up one week after the net distribution to ensure that nets were hung properly and over the correct beds. I had anticipated some problems with people using their nets for things other than the designated purpose, or with people selling the nets to other villages, but I was happy to find that everyone had hung their nets as hoped.

One problem encountered was contention from individuals who did not receive nets. The village chief and I did not extend to people who already undamaged nets. If a net did not have holes, and was less than five years old, we chose not to replace it. Certain people in the village were unhappy about this, and another contingent claimed that we had overlooked them entirely, because they actually did not have any nets, but were not on the list. In these cases, after the

formation was over, the chief and I accompanied these people to their sleeping areas and determined on a case by case basis if they qualified for a new net. I had anticipated this to some degree, and had ten additional nets to give out, all of which we ended up distributing.

The Mamadou Bajeeffa distribution was quite successful. Having the health representative lent legitimacy to the day that I think otherwise could have been lacking, and I would recommend combining distributions with causeries whenever possible. The follow-up was very encouraging, because it proved that people really do appreciate the importance of bednets and of using them properly.