

Nets to the Walallan Hamlets

Background

A long time ago, in the early 1980's, MRC Laboratories in The Gambia carried out a number of village-based studies to see if bed nets gave protection against malaria. As everyone knows now, they did and if treated with insecticide they gave even better protection. There were 16 villages/ hamlets that took part in the studies in the 1980 and since Walallan is the largest they have been known as the Walallan hamlets. The rural hamlets are found along the bolongs (tributaries) of the River Gambia and they have changed little over the past 30 years, including in their use of bednets.

The Gambian National Malaria Programme followed these studies by very active promotion of the use of bednets in the groups at highest risk and they have achieved very high levels in young children. But gradually we have realized that bednets, and especially long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLIN), are more effective when the majority of villagers use them. To recognise the contribution of these villagers to the development of this major tool against malaria, scientists and colleagues involved in the original trials and staff of MRC Gambia wanted these hamlets to be the first to receive "Nets for All". The proposal was sent to the Against Malaria Foundation in October 2009 and many individuals gave donations towards this goal but we would not have been successful without the assistance and organisation of the AMF.

Arrival of Nets in The Gambia (June 2010)

In June 2010 we sent two commercial lorries to collect the nets from Wellingara, Senegal for the Walallan distribution (1000 nets) and also for another AMF distribution in Janjanbureh. The ones for Wallalan were rectangular (160x180x150cm) PermaNets, which is the same as those distributed previously by NAYAS in the Upper River region. These were sent to the Divisional Health Team in Farafenni taking advantage of an MRC lorry that was transporting a faulty Land Rover to the MRC at the coast.

The Net distribution (December 2010)

The Malaria season in The Gambia is highly seasonal with over 80% of cases occurring between August and December, thus both government and MRC staff are normally fully stretched over this period. The rains in 2010, however, were very abundant in all areas except the coastal stretch and many areas experienced wide spread flooding. This not only made travelling difficult, it was no doubt one of the factors that lead to a rise in malaria cases and a very heavy work load for all staff. Thus it was not until December that sufficient staff were available to assist with the net distribution to the Wallalan Hamlets. This delay was a pity but unavoidable.



By telephone with Muhammed Saho, Director Regional Health Team (North Bank East Region), the MRC team agreed that the distribution would be a joint exercise. Wassa Njie, a senior MRC field worker, thus joined his colleague Pierre Gomez on Thursday 9th December in Farafenni and they met Sanjal Trawally, Administrator, and Yankuba Singateh, Regional Health Promotion Officer in the RHT office.

After Wassa Njie's briefing they agreed that village information meetings should be done just before the bed and sleeping place count in each village and they should start immediately on the following day. With the willing cooperation of the RHT management, their team members contacted the two community health nurses in the Upper and Central Baddibu to join the team from Walallan (please see section mission accomplished for the names and affiliations). The RHT management was the key player in making this exercise a success.



Pierre Gomez explains "Every day for the next three days (Friday to Monday) we went out on our motor bikes to explain how the donation was going to be done and how it would be monitored afterwards. Many of the villagers did not know that everyone was being advised to sleep under a net, not just the children and pregnant women. The bed and sleeping places were counted by households in all 16 of the villages/ hamlets. It was a very hectic exercise because we worked from 8am to 6:30pm every day.



Meanwhile Muhammed Saho and Sanjal Trawally were very instrumental with the arrangements of providing a pickup vehicle to transport the bed nets to the villages. Due to their busy schedule, two attempts were foiled and was only possible to have a vehicle during Tamharit the Muslim new year day which was declared a national public holiday. We were determined to get this done and everyone agreed to complete the task. Everyone was disrupted from observing the holiday including Albino Mendy, the driver.

There were 1245 beds/sleeping places found in the count exercise contrary to the expectation of 1000 and we had 1000 nets. This was communicated to Margaret Pinder [one of the MRC staff organising the donation] and she advised we re-strategise the delivery to achieve 80% coverage. The bed net delivery was then based on the revised figures so that every compound head and household in the village listed was able to receive nets."



Net Distribution - Mission Accomplished

The 1000 bed nets distribution exercise started 07:00am on 16th December 2010 and ended the same day around 16:50. The exercise went very well and achieved a coverage of donated nets of 80% (1000nets for 1245 beds/sleeping places). The villagers highly appreciated the donation and asked us to extend their sincere appreciation

The exercise would not have taken place without the invaluable support of Amulai Jammeh and Modou Lamin Gibba, CHNs for Upper Baddibu, Abubacarr Sonko – CHN for Central Baddibu, Momodou Salieu Jallow, a CHN attaché for Central Baddibu and Bubacarr Barry, a CHN attaché for Upper Baddibu. The RHT management, particularly Muhammed Saho and Buba Manjang, were key in making this exercise a success. We sincerely thank them all.



The Operation Team from left to right:
Back row: Pierre Gomez, Albino Mendy, Amulai Jammeh, Wassa Njie
Front row: Momodou Salieu Jallow, Bubacarr Barry
Photographer: Momodou Lamin Gibba

On Saturday 18th the team met and briefed Muhammed Saho, Director Regional Health Team and the administrator. Wassa Njie returned to Basse on Sunday 19th December 2010.



Postscript from the villagers

The Alkalo village leader, of Walallan gave a short speech after the communities had received the nets "We thought we have been abandoned ..., [but] behold MRC still remembers us, come back and work with us and eliminate this bad disease for us once and for all. We hope this will not be the beginning and the end of your philanthropic assistance to us. We are only farmers and all we have is donkey and horse carts as means of transportation, otherwise we put the child on our back and walk the distance. When we have emergencies in night we only pray to God to save the child before we can get to Farafenni hospital, Njabakunda, or Illiasa Health Centre which are all not less than 10km away"



Post distribution survey (March 2011)

The post-distribution survey was planned together with Muhammed Saho, Director Regional Health Team (North Bank East Region), to fit in with their busy schedule. Pierre Gomez, MRC, met with Buba Manjang, Regional Public Health Officer, in the RHT office on the 24th February and the survey was planned for the following week, 5th March. Pierre was also able to obtain the services of a photographer to video parts of the survey but no-one had working electronic camera.



Planning the post-distribution survey, RHT office, Farafenni

To survey a target of 20% of the 1245 beds / sleeping places, 25% of these were randomly selected by household giving a list of 44 households across 12 of the villages. The Amulai Jammeh and Modou Lamin Gibba, CHNs for Upper Baddibu and Pierre visited 36 households in 10 of these villages and were able to see the sleeping rooms in 29. At the time of the donation in December, our records showed 202 beds / sleeping places 162 nets had been donated. In March the team found 99 of these were hung above the beds ; i.e. 64% nets in use and 20/29 households had hung over half of the nets provided. As expected from previous conversations with these communities there were few other nets seen (15 in total) and as the numbers of beds / sleeping places increased from December to March, from 202 to 221, only 53% of beds had nets hung.

This somewhat low usage of the nets, however, probably reflects the low numbers of mosquitoes present in the middle of the dry season; the rains stopped in October and usually start in June. Although some people use their nets all year round, many prefer only to hang them once the rains start and the mosquito numbers rise. The next survey, which will take place in July / August 2011, should find a higher percentage of nets in use.

The accompanying video shows the CHNs in Wallalan village and then in Mbanta (Mbantang Killing) village asking about net usage and checking the nets that have been hung. In each village they are accompanied by the village reporters.

We thank the RHT management, Muhammed Saho and Buba Manjang, CHNs, Amulai Jammeh and Modou Lamin Gibba and driver, Albino Mendy for their continued support. We also thank the AMF, MRC, NMCP and all our donors for making it possible to get this far.

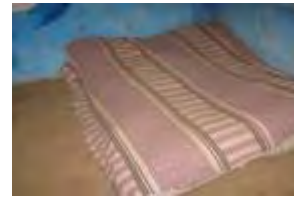
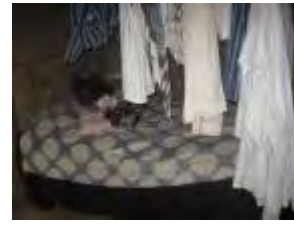
Pierre Gomez
Margaret Pinder
April 2011

PHOTO ANNEXE for the Report on the Wallalan Hamlets bednet distribution

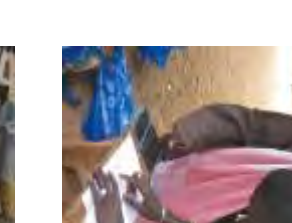
Information Meetings (20 photos)



Sleeping Places (20 photos)



The net distribution (35 Photos)





Other Pictures

