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# **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## COMMUNITY-BASED MALARIA CONTROL: STRENGTHENING LOCAL EFFORTS IN ENDEMIC REGIONS

### \*Frida Bessem Taku Bate Epse Penda, Eyong Manyiyong Queenta and Fietsop Ernestine Oyebog

Department of Public Health, Experiential Higher Institute of Science and Technology – EXHIST, Yaoundé, Cameroon / Texila American University, Guyana

# ARTICLE INFOABSTRACTArticle History<br/>Received 20th February, 2025<br/>Beceived in revised formDespite considerable global efforts to control and eliminate malaria, the disease still remains one of<br/>the most significant public health challenges in endemic regions worldwide. In order to combat<br/>malaria in endemic regions, community-based malaria control approaches are progressively emerging

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\*Corresponding author: Frida Bessem Taku Bate Epse Penda Despite considerable global efforts to control and eliminate malaria, the disease still remains one of the most significant public health challenges in endemic regions worldwide. In order to combat malaria in endemic regions, community-based malaria control approaches are progressively emerging as an important strategy, highlighting their effectiveness in reducing transmission rates - malaria prevention, early detection, and treatment, and improving access to care at the local level. This article explores the role of community-based approaches in strengthening malaria control efforts in endemic regions, and reviews various strategies that empower local populations to take a proactive role in combating malaria. Emphasis is laid on local leadership, the integration of culturally relevant health education, community participation, environmental interventions, and healthcare delivery within local communities, as well as the role of local engagement in promoting behavior change, and enhancing long-term sustainability of malaria interventions. Evidence from various endemic regions suggests that CBMCPs can lead to improved access to health services, increased awareness, and reduced malaria transmission rates. Challenges associated with these approaches are outlined such as inadequate funding, training, limited healthcare infrastructure, and community participation, and recommendations for scaling up local efforts to ensure sustainable impact are provided. This review synthesizes existing literature on community-based malaria control, highlights best practices, and provides community-focused approaches that are vital for bringing up solutions in the fight against malaria and thereby achieving the global malaria elimination goals.

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# INTRODUCTION

According to WHO (2023) annual report, malaria remains one of the world's most persistent infectious diseases and public health challenges in tropical and subtropical regions, with over 200 million cases. Malaria remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in many tropical regions, despite global efforts to control and eradicate the disease. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2020 alone, there were an estimated 241 million cases of malaria worldwide, with the majority of these cases concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa (WHO, 2021). Malaria continues to affect vulnerable populations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, despite significant advances in malaria control (prevention and treatment), such as the distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) and the use of artemisininbased combination therapies (ACTs) (Chandler et al., 2019). Despite the availability of effective interventions like insecticide-treated nets (ITNs), indoor residual spraying (IRS), and antimalarial drugs, the challenge of reaching remote and

underserved communities continues to impede progress (Tusting et al., 2019). Consequently, malaria transmission persists in areas where health infrastructure is weak or difficult to access, where there is lack of local engagement, thus necessitating innovative approaches to disease control. Studies carried out by Lengeler et al., (2008) pointed out that one such approach that has gained increasing attention in recent years is community-based malaria control (CBMCP), which involves the active participation of local populations in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of malaria prevention and treatment strategies. The introduction of community-based malaria control programs represents a paradigm shift from topdown interventions to locally-driven efforts, which could potentially overcome several challenges in endemic regions. CBMCPs seek to address the limitations of top-down interventions and promote sustainable malaria control through local engagement, by capitalizing on the knowledge, trust, and resources already present within communities. In order to reach remote and under-served areas, improve awareness, and ensure long-term sustainability of malaria control efforts, this approach is of optimum importance (Smith et al., 2018). These programs often rely on community health workers (CHWs), local leaders, and culturally relevant health education to enhance awareness and compliance with malaria prevention measures (Afoakwah et al., 2020). The intention behind CBMCPs is that with the involvement of the local community, the acceptance and uptake of malaria control measures are not only improved, but also ensures that interventions are better geared towards the unique needs and circumstances of the community (Worrall et al., 2019). Studies carried out by O'Meara et al., (2015) have shown that in reducing malaria incidence such community-driven initiatives can be effective, that is by increasing the distribution and usage of malaria prevention tools, improving early detection, and ensuring prompt treatment. Furthermore, CBMCPs are seen as an opportunity to bridge the gap between formal healthcare systems and the populations they serve, particularly in hard-toreach areas. Ajuwon et al. (2020) notes that, local knowledge and participation have been recognized as important for the success of interventions, as recent strategies have stressed the importance of community involvement in malaria control. Community-based malaria control (CBMC) involves utilizing local educational campaigns, community health workers (CHWs), and surveillance systems to empower communities to take control of their health and prevent the spread of malaria. This approach has gained grounds as it promotes local ownership of malaria control efforts, thereby improving their sustainability and effectiveness.

This review explores the current state of CBMC, examines the role of community-based malaria control in strengthening local efforts to combat malaria in endemic regions. It synthesizes evidence from various countries where CBMCPs have been implemented, evaluates the strengths and limitations these approaches, and of proposes recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness. Specifically, this article focuses on the importance of community participation, local leadership, and health improving malaria education in outcomes, while acknowledging the challenges that need to be addressed for long-term success.

Community-Based Malaria Control Programs Overview (CBMCPs): According to Lengeler et al., (2008), communitybased malaria control programs (CBMCPs) concentrate onlocal populations being implicated in the prevention, detection, and treatment of malaria. Particularly in regions where malaria transmission remains high and health services are sparse, these programs aim to bridge gaps in healthcare access. In CBMCPs, local participation isprioritized through the use of community health workers (CHWs) and local leaders who are trained to educate peers, distribute malaria prevention tools, and monitor disease cases. The success of CBMCPs often centered on community involvement, as it increases local awareness, trust, and the likelihood of sustained behavioral change (Afoakwah et al., 2020).One of the specificities of CBMCPs is that they accompany traditional health services by offering more personalized, culturally appropriate interventions. CHWs for instance, can provide primary healthcare services such as malaria diagnosis and treatment, contributing to early detection and prompt intervention in rural regions where health facilities are limited (Tusting et al., 2019). As pointed out by O'Meara et al., (2015), community-based strategies have been particularly

effective in increasing the usage of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) and improving malaria case management, the two central components of malaria control efforts.

The Role of Local Leadership and Community Engagement: Worrall et al., (2019) in their findings reveal that local leadership and community engagement greatly influence the success of CBMCPs. Local leaderssuch as chiefs, religious leaders, and respected elders in many endemic regions hold significant influence over community behaviors and can influence their peers for health-related activities. Community leaders play a very important role in addressing misconceptions about malaria transmission, ensuring the wide dissemination of prevention methods and advocating for the importance of malaria control measures. The implication of local leaders motivates the community and encourages individuals to adopt malaria control behaviors such as the use of ITNs and participation in health education sessions (Eisele et al., 2014). Local leadership support for example in Malawi,was associated with higher rates of ITN usage and greater acceptance of malaria treatments distributed by community health workers (Osei et al., 2018). Barriers to intervention implementation, such as cultural beliefs or logistical issues, were further identified by community leaders which can be addressed through local strategies that are more likely to be accepted by the population.

Community Health Workers Role (CHWs): Regarding what concerns community-based malaria control strategies, CHWs are integral, as they serve as the first point of contact for many individuals in remote or underserved areas (Winn et al., 2021). Besides other assignments, CHWs are trained to provide education on malaria prevention, diagnose and treat cases, and distribute preventive tools such as ITNs. Studies carried out by Sambo et al., (2018) show that CHWs can significantly improve malaria outcomes by increasing early diagnosis and treatment, reducing morbidity, and ensuring adherence to preventive measures. Insufficient training, inadequate support, and lack of remuneration can nevertheless, compromise their effectiveness (Bhutta et al., 2010). For the CHWs to be successful, it is thus important to enhance their capacity through training programs, regular supervision, and logistical support.

**Community** Involvement and Malaria **Education:** Community-based education has been identified to play a central role in the success of CBMC initiatives (Jones et al., 2017). Empowering local communities with knowledge about malaria transmission, symptoms, preventive measures and treatment options increases awareness and promotes healthier behaviors, as well as endows them to take proactive steps in controlling the disease (Tusting et al., 2015). Reimer et al., (2020) pointed out that programs that involve the community in education efforts, such as the distribution of insecticidetreated nets (ITNs), or participatory education campaigns that involve local leaders, traditional healers, and influencers have seen higher acceptance and adherence to malaria interventions, compared to those that rely solely on external agencies (Brown et al., 2019). To improving the uptake of interventions such as ITNs, intermittent preventive treatment during pregnancy (IPTp), and home-based management of malaria, community mobilization and engagement are of enormous importance (Giacomini et al., 2017). The involvement of local leaders in disseminating information also promotes the effectiveness of these educational campaigns.

Health Education and Behavior Change Impact: For CBMCPs to be better achieved, health education is capital. Many misconceptions about malaria transmission and treatment hinder the uptake of prevention methods in endemic regions (Eisele et al., 2014). The importance of using ITNs for example may not be recognized by some communities, or may have misconceptions about how malaria is contracted, which can delay treatment and aggravate the spread of the disease. CBMCPs focus on providing accurate, culturally relevant information to address these knowledge gaps.Worrall et al., (2019) pointed out in their study that culturally appropriate educational programs, led by community health workers, are vitalto ensure that the community does not only understand messages about malaria prevention but also accept them.A community-based education campaign led by CHWs in Kenya, for example, significantly increased knowledge about malaria transmission and the importance of preventive measures, which resulted in increased ITN usage (Lengeler et al., 2008). Further investigations by Afoakwah et al., (2020), have been seen to improve community participation in malaria prevention efforts when behavioral change campaigns that use local languages, storytelling, and community-based dialogues are employed.

**Environmental Interventions:** In reducing malaria transmission, environmental management plays a key role. According to Nguyen & Tuan, (2016), in various regions, community-based programs that encourage local action in controlling mosquito breeding sites have demonstrated great success. These interventions include the use of insecticides, removal of standing water, and environmental modifications to reduce mosquito habitats. The introduction of bio-control measures such as fish that consume mosquito larvae has also been used in some cases. When these strategies are combined with other vector control measures like ITNs, at the community level, they can significantly reduce malaria incidence.

Integrating CBMCPs with Formal Healthcare Systems: The full potential of CBMCPs which have demonstrated positive impacts on malaria control, can only be realized through integration with formal healthcare systems. Community health workers must be well-trained, supported by appropriate diagnostic tools, and linked to higher-level healthcare facilities for more advanced care, despite the very important role they play in providing malaria care and prevention(O'Meara et al., 2015). Furthermore, CBMCPs are aligned with national malaria control strategies and can leverage resources from the formal health system through collaboration between local health authorities and community leaders.For instance, in Tanzania, access to malaria diagnosis and treatment, reducing delays in seeking care and improving overall health outcomes was enhanced by the integration of CBMCPs with the formal health system (Tusting et al., 2019). Through synergy between community-based programs and formal healthcare providers, the efficiency of malaria interventions can be enhanced, thus guaranteeing that all community members benefit from the available resources.

**Community-based Monitoring and Participatory Surveillance:** Malaria surveillance systems can significantly be enhanced by effective surveillance, which is a cornerstone of malaria control, and community-based monitoring. Timely interventions and more accurate data can be gotten when communities are involved in monitoring malaria cases and vector populations (Baird *et al.*, 2019). Mukherjee *et al.*, (2016) pointed out that gaps are bridged in formal health systems, especially in remote areas where participatory surveillance programs are practiced, involving local residents who report cases and vector habitats. Further studies carried out by Aiken *et al.*, (2022) show that the efficiency and coverage of surveillance efforts can be improved when mobile technology are used for reporting and data collection.

Access to Treatment: Following reports from Harrison *et al.*, (2018), another very vital aspect of malaria control is access to prompt and effective treatment. Specifically in rural and hard-to-reach areas, community health workers (CHWs) play a pivotal role in providing diagnostic services and administering treatment. Programs that train CHWs to diagnose and treat malaria have proven to reduce mortality rates by ensuring timely intervention. At the community level, the availability of rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) and artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) has greatly improved the management of malaria.

Challenges in Implementing Community-Based Malaria Control: Significant challenges are involved when implementing CBMC, despite the advantages that are attributed. One of the primary barriers is inadequate funding. Ensuring the training and retention of CHWs, securing sustainable funding, and addressing cultural barriers to intervention acceptance, are all part of these challenges (Hansen et al., 2018). Many CBMCPs rely on external donors and grants, which are often unsustainable or insufficient to cover the long-term costs of program implementation (Tusting et al., 2019). Without stable and adequate funding, programs can face interruptions in service delivery, reduced community engagement, and an inability to scale. Also, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, insufficient community trust in health systems and political instability, can hinder the success of CBMC initiatives (Gillespie et al., 2019). Cultural and social barriers also pose a challenge to CBMCPs. Deeply inbuilt cultural beliefs and practices can influence attitudes toward malaria prevention methods, such as the use of ITNs or seeking treatment at healthcare facilities in some regions (Eisele et al., 2014). There is a reluctance to accept the malaria transmission model promoted by health programs, in some areas, which can hinder the adoption of preventive behaviors. Continuous community engagement, education, and addressing local misconceptions is required in overcoming these barriers.

Furthermore, integration with formal healthcare systems is not always seamless. In many malaria-endemic countries, healthcare systems are under-resourced, with limited access to essential medicines, diagnostic tools, and trained personnel (O'Meara et al., 2015). As a result, CBMCPs may struggle to provide comprehensive care without sufficient coordination and support from national health programs. Ensuring adequate resource allocation, building partnerships with local organizations, and fostering community ownership to increase the likelihood of long-term success are some solutions to these challenges (Mwenesi et al., 2021). Resistance to insecticides and drugs in some areas, also poses a growing threat to the sustainability of control efforts. Furthermore, there are concerns about the over-reliance on volunteer community health workers who may face burnout or lack the necessary support for their roles (Muller et al., 2020).

Successful Case Studies: Community-based malaria control strategies have been successfully implemented in several countries. The malaria control program in rural Uganda for example, which involved local volunteers in both educational campaigns and mosquito control efforts, led to a significant reduction in malaria cases over a five-year period (Smith et al., 2018). Also in Rwanda, a nationwide CHW program contributed to a significant reduction in malaria prevalence (Bunyaruguru et al., 2018). Similarly, studies from Chanda et al., (2019) pointed out that in Zambia, the effectiveness of ITN distribution and malaria education campaigns have been enhanced by community-driven interventions. Furthermore, in Kenya, the reporting and tracking of malaria cases has been improved by the use of mobile health technologies, further strengthening local control efforts (Johnson et al., 2021). These case studies highlight the potential of CBMC to complement national malaria control efforts and accelerate progress towards malaria elimination.

#### **Recommendations for Strengthening CBMCPs**

To overcome the challenges associated with CBMCPs, several strategies are recommended:

- Increased and sustainable funding: The commitmentof funding long-term community-based malaria programs must come from Governments and international donors. Additional support can be provided by innovative financing models such as public-private partnerships and community-based microfinancing schemes, in addition to donor funding, (O'Meara *et al.*, 2015).
- Enhancing integration with formal healthcare systems: Strengthening the linkages between CBMCPs and formal health systems is essential for ensuring the continuity of care and enhancing the effectiveness of both approaches. Better training for community health workers, access to diagnostic equipment, and improved referral systems can be included in this integration (Tusting *et al.*, 2019).
- Addressing cultural barriers: The specific cultural contexts of each community must be focused on health education. Messages could be accepted and acted upon when community leaders and influencers are involved in the design and delivery of malaria education campaigns (Worrall *et al.*, 2019).
- Capacity-building for community health workers: The backbone of CBMCPs are community health workers. Thus, investing in their training, providing ongoing support, and ensuring adequate resources for their work is important for program success (Afoakwah *et al.*, 2020).

# CONCLUSION

Community-based malaria control represents a promising and sustainable approach to malaria elimination strategies, particularly in endemic regions where access to healthcare services is limited. CBMC strategies can improve the effectiveness of malaria interventions by empowering CHWs, promoting education, and engaging local communities. Local involvement does not only strengthen prevention efforts but also ensures that interventions are culturally appropriate and sustainable. However, for CBMC to be truly successful, it requires adequate resources, training, support for community health workers, maintaining political and financial commitments. Collaborative efforts at local, national, and global levels can lead to more sustained impacts, ensuring that malaria control programs continue to evolve and improve. Building community trust and strengthening local efforts in malaria control measures are capital to achieving global malaria elimination goals. Future research could focus on optimizing CBMC models, addressing the barriers to implementation, and exploring innovative solutions to ensure that malaria control efforts are both effective and sustainable in the long term.

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