

Millions of nets, but are they being used?

Dear Editor

I would like to comment on the article by Prof. William Brieger on the challenges of getting people to use insecticide-treated bed nets, which appeared in the July issue of the *Africa Health* journal.

In Nigeria, the challenges to net use are multidimensional. There are some states that refused to distribute the nets allocated free to them by NGOs due to mere logistic reasons. The nets would not have reached the households if it were not for the intervention of the NGOs, who went door to door distributing them. This of course, they would have done initially, but for the purpose of conveying ownership of the project to the state.

In the particular area of Lagos where I reside, I have never seen anybody distributing nets. In fact I have informally interviewed many friends and

members of my church who live in the same district and none is in possession of a free net. Nets have been used on all the beds in my house since 2004, and all were purchased from our family income. I am, however, aware that nets are distributed freely to women attending antenatal clinics in government-owned health centres.

The reasons for not using nets include inadequate health information on the causes of malaria and breeding sites for mosquitoes and the perception that people sweat under nets, particularly when there is no electricity supply. The list of reasons is inexhaustible and I would like to publish my recent study which focuses on the knowledge, attitude, and practice of residents of a particular area of Lagos on vector control as a strategy for combatting malaria in the community.

White nets are not acceptable in

some states because they are conventionally used for burial ceremonies. Hence blue nets are preferred, with the majority of users not knowing the difference between insecticide-treated nets that need regular washing and long-lasting insecticide-treated nets.

In order to reduce malaria morbidity there should be an improved awareness of the prevention of mosquito-to-man contact, through the use of mosquito repellent creams and wearing long-sleeved clothing in the evening and early mornings when people are outside their rooms.

Vector control still remains the most effective method of sustaining a malaria-free world.

Thank you.

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Ghana's tax for healthcare funding lauded at international research forum

Ghana's efforts to provide universal healthcare coverage for its nearly 24 million people impressed researchers and medics gathered in Montreux, Switzerland in November for the world's first-ever conference on health research. The country has been increasing its healthcare funding in line with the Abuja declaration on healthcare funding.

Martin Dahinden, the Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, said although progress in achieving universal healthcare financing was lacking in many African countries, Ghana was close to reaching those targets.

'Progress in health is lacking in many countries,' Dahinden, a former deputy Swiss envoy to Nigeria, said in

a speech at the First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, organised by the World Health Organization.

At the turn of the decade, African leaders committed substantial increases in their health budgets to combat killer diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS in a landmark agreement known as the Abuja Declaration. However, apart from Ghana and two other African nations, progress in meeting those targets have remained anything but disappointing to international observers.

Ghana was lauded for implementing an innovative taxation system that has enabled almost everyone to access healthcare services across the country. In the past few years, Ghana has mobilised US\$115 million, mainly raised

from consumer taxes and value-added tax (VAT) to improve the provision of health services and fund health insurance.

'This money was spent on reforming the health institutions,' Ambassador Dahinden told a gathering of 1200 health researchers and practitioners. The money was spent by the government to reform the healthcare system in the past few years. It translates to 2.5% of Ghana's total healthcare expenditure, which is about 6% of its GDP.

Judith Rodin, the President of the American charity, the Rockefeller Foundation, criticised African leaders for lacking the initiative to provide universal health coverage to the continent's impoverished lot, most of whom died out of poverty.

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