June 2003

Roll Back Malaria

Mekong IEC Project News

June is an interesting month when for the first time five RBM IEC country teams will have a chance to meet together at a training workshop to be held in Vientiane from 16th - 21st June. The training workshop on field research focusing on ethnic target groups and baseline data collection aims to:

- increase participants understanding of participatory action research for the malaria IEC project
- train RBM IEC Project team members to plan, conduct and analyze data from field research
- develop field research protocols focusing on ethnic groups
- develop action plans for field research with ethnic groups based on a preliminary situation and stakeholder analysis by each country team

Each country team will start with sharing findings from situation and stakeholder analysis that has been conducted. Dr. Kunstadter will provide information on ethnic groups living in the Greater Mekong Sub-region countries and Ellie Brown will facilitate the field research protocol development training part of the workshop. At the end of the workshop each country will have protocols and plans developed for conducting field research focused on ethnic groups.

We just received a small report from on the stakeholder meeting from the Vietnam team. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the National Institute of Malariology, Parasitology and Entomology (NIMPE) on the 9th June 2003. Representatives from different agencies participated in the discussion such as: Center for Public Health and Development, Health Education Center, Organization for Highlanders Education development, MCNV, the Voice of Vietnam, WHO and NIMPE.

In summary from the meeting every participant recognized the important role of IEC in the malaria control programme in Vietnam. It was found that there are still gaps between knowledge and practices especially among ethnic communities and a recent KAP surveys in Lai Chau and Dak Lak indicated a wide gap between knowledge and practices. Also the budget for IEC is small, only 4% of the malaria control programme budget and village health workers do not have adequate communication skills to communicate and education communities effectively. It was discussed that behavioural change communication approach should be stressed as face-to-face communication is recognized as a good approach to use with ethnic communities. Mass media also plays an important role in educating people, especially ethnic groups, where literacy is low. NIMPE also

recognized that the IEC Unit staff s capacity on social mobilization and IEC development needed to be strengthened.

Findings from the Malaria Situation Analysis in Maehongson Province, Thailand, where 80% of the population is at risk of malaria, showed that the malaria control programme has not put much emphasis on the IEC component. The Vector Borne Disease Bureau in Bangkok and the office in Chiangmai have developed malaria posters and other printed materials but some of them are not appropriate to the local situation.

Picture: Some of the malaria posters and printed material developed by VBD Bureau

In 2001, the Community Malaria Clinic (COMC) was established in the villages with high malaria prevalence. Local people were hired and trained in microscopic examination and treatment for malaria. The services are provided free of charge to every patient who comes for treatment. The Malaria Mobile Clinic (MMC) is another means to provide malaria diagnosis and treatment at the village level. Staff of the COMC and MMC should be trained on how to give malaria information and should be equipped with appropriate IEC materials that will enable them to deliver malaria information effectively.

Picture: Malaria posters were put up on the outside wall of village volunteer s house

Provincial radio stations in Maehongson and Chiangmai have integrated malaria prevention information into different ethnic language programmes. During the rainy season malaria technical staff will be invited to join the health talk programme. A malaria documentary was produced in collaboration with the private sector to raise awareness on malaria prevention. Radio and TV are powerful tools but there is a need to assess, plan, produce and disseminate systematically.

We would like to introduce Malaria In The News. An electronic malaria news channel established as part of the RBM Initiative to provide news about malaria that is collated from different news agencies all over the world. People can register to receive regular news or read it on the RBM website. You can find out more information by writing to infoRBM@who.int or visit the RBM website at www.rbm.who.int

This is one of the news from Malaria In The News, issue 9 June 2003 that may interest you.

Scientists starve malaria parasite
BBCi: 4 June 2003

Scientists have discovered a way to kill the malaria parasite - by targeting its sweet tooth. Malaria kills 3,000 children every day and the parasite that causes the disease is becoming harder to treat as it develops resistance to more and more drugs. So scientists are striving to come up with new ways to combat the killer.

A team from St George's Hospital Medical School in London is confident they have come up with one such solution. The malaria parasite needs sugar in the form of glucose to grow and multiply in human red blood cells where it lives. The St George's team has effectively starved the parasite of its supply by knocking out a specialised transport protein that it uses to absorb glucose from its surroundings. With its supply lines cut, even drug resistant strains of the parasite cannot survive.

Resistance

Lead researcher Professor Sanjeev Krishna said: "We have spent 10 years developing new ways of studying parasite transport proteins so that we could work out how to block the action of the glucose transporter.

"This discovery proves for the first time that it is worth going after transport proteins of the malaria parasite and that parasites cannot live without this transporter working properly.

"We are very excited about this research, as this new information gives us the potential to design new drugs against malaria." Professor David Warhurst, of the Health Protection Agency malaria reference laboratory, said the research could be very significant. He said: "We are absolutely desperate for any new drugs to use against malaria because of the widespread development of resistance.

"If they can use this research to develop a specific drug then that would be an excellent way of targeting the malaria parasite because it uses an awful lot of glucose, and relies on transport proteins for its supply."

The research is published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.