

Breakthrough ACTION

Niger

U.S. President's Malaria Initiative

End of Project Report

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Acronyms

CSI	Integrated community health center (<i>Centre de santé intégré</i>)
EMMC	Multisectoral community mobilization team (<i>Equipe multisectorial de mobilization communautaire</i>)
LLIN	Long-lasting insecticide treated bednets
MoPH/P/SA	Ministry of Public Health/Population/Social Affairs
NMCP	National Malaria Control Program
PMI	President’s Malaria Initiative
SBC	Social and behavior change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

Breakthrough ACTION is the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) global social and behavior change (SBC) flagship project led by Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) in collaboration with Save the Children, ThinkAction, ideas42, and Camber Collective with specialized support from the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Viamo. The overall vision of the project is to ignite collective action using next-generation and proven behavior change approaches to empower healthier, more prosperous households and communities.

Funded by the U.S. Government's President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), the purpose of Breakthrough ACTION PMI was to serve as a catalyst for improved SBC strategic planning and roll out with the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) and partners. More specifically, it was designed to strengthen the capacity of the NMCP and malaria implementing partners to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate SBC programs that address malaria prevention, improve malaria case management and care seeking behaviors, and generate demand for services overall.

Breakthrough ACTION PMI began activities in March 2018 (considered Year 1) with a visit from headquarters staff to Niamey to engage in discussions and solicit ideas from PMI, Ministry of Public Health/Population/Social Affairs (MoPH/P/SA) leaders, NMCP officials, and implementing partners. Having established a consensus between stakeholders on the general focus for the project, the project initiated a series of capacity building activities in Year 2, that resulted in a refreshed malaria SBC strategy with the NMCP that included established methods for messages and materials development. In Year 3 the project developed and pretested messages and materials that were further refined and disseminated in Years 4 and 5 by Breakthrough ACTION and partners, along with intensive community engagement pilots in Tahoua and Dosso.

From the beginning of the Breakthrough ACTION PMI activity through its completion in December 2022, Breakthrough ACTION worked closely with the NMCP’s Information, Education and Communication Division to develop and implement effective SBC initiatives to address the malaria burden in Niger. The project mandate was guided by one intermediate result (IR) with two sub-intermediate results:

IR 3.2: Strengthened enabling environment at national and regional levels

Sub-IR 3.2.1: Strengthened capacity of national institutions to develop and implement enhanced SBC strategies.

Sub-IR 3.2.2: Improved coordination and joint planning of SBC

Over an almost five-year period, the Breakthrough ACTION PMI team and its partners implemented a range of activities including strengthening national capacity to develop, pretest, and disseminate high-quality mass media products (radio, print, social media) engaging religious leaders in the fight against malaria, building the capacity of journalists to produce accurate and engaging stories on malaria, and finally launching pilot community engagement activities in two integrated health centers (CSIs) in Dosso and Tahoua demonstrating the power of working directly with communities in the fight against malaria.

2020 LLIN Campaign Remarks

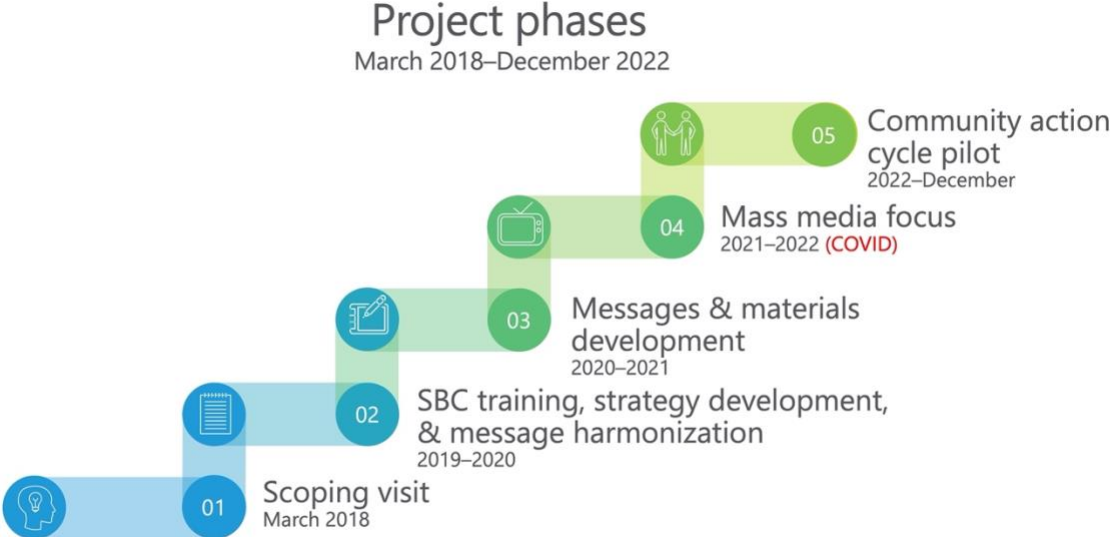
“This is the first time that we have had such a successful communication campaign in Niger.” - Dr. Hadiza, former Director, NMCP

“This is the first time an LLIN campaign has benefited from exceptional communication media that is attractive and motivates the target audience.” - Dr. Boubé Hamani, Director Epidemiology Department, NMCP

Although the project experienced various delays and challenges over the years including COVID-19 restrictions starting in 2020, establishing productive working relationships with the NMCP, and staffing issues, project results are notable. In collaboration with Breakthrough ACTION PMI and partners, the NMCP engaged in developing and disseminating materials for national initiatives including a mass media campaign *“Je m’engage!”* from 2020 – 2021, four rounds of the NMCP’s seasonal malaria chemoprophylaxis campaign, and two long-lasting insecticide-treated bednet (LLIN) mass distributions. These initiatives included the production and testing of TV and radio spots, print materials, and billboards. Participation in other national initiatives included working with colleagues from the MoPH/P/SA to incorporate malaria messaging in the National SBC Strategy for health 2022 - 2026 and the integrated *Garkuwar Al’Umma* health campaign. All media spots were broadcast on national TV and radio and community radio stations. Finally, the project demonstrated the value of directly engaging communities in the fight against malaria by working side by side with local religious and traditional leaders, elected officials, MoPH/P/SA staff, and community members to identify barriers and seek solutions to improve malaria prevention and care seeking behaviors. The reduction in malaria cases, while not directly attributable to the program, indicates that community-level engagement has the potential to influence behavior change and social norms that would be difficult to achieve with mass media alone.

Niger PMI by the Numbers

As illustrated in the graphs below, mass media reach and the total number of people trained in the community action cycle (CAC) by Breakthrough ACTION PMI demonstrate a balance of mass media and interpersonal communication. As the graph below depicts, Breakthrough ACTION focused efforts not only on individual behavior, but also structural change by building the capacity of organizations and institutions at the central, regional, district, and community levels.



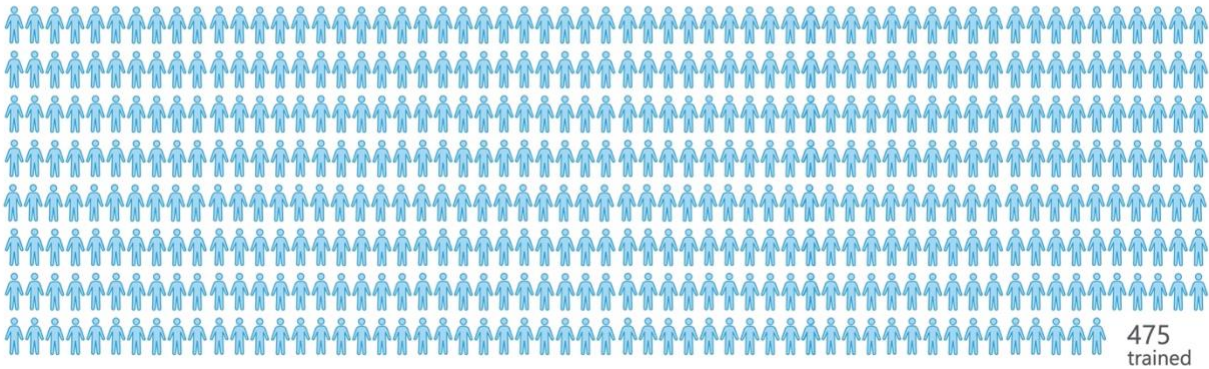
Mass Media Broadcasts

2018–2022

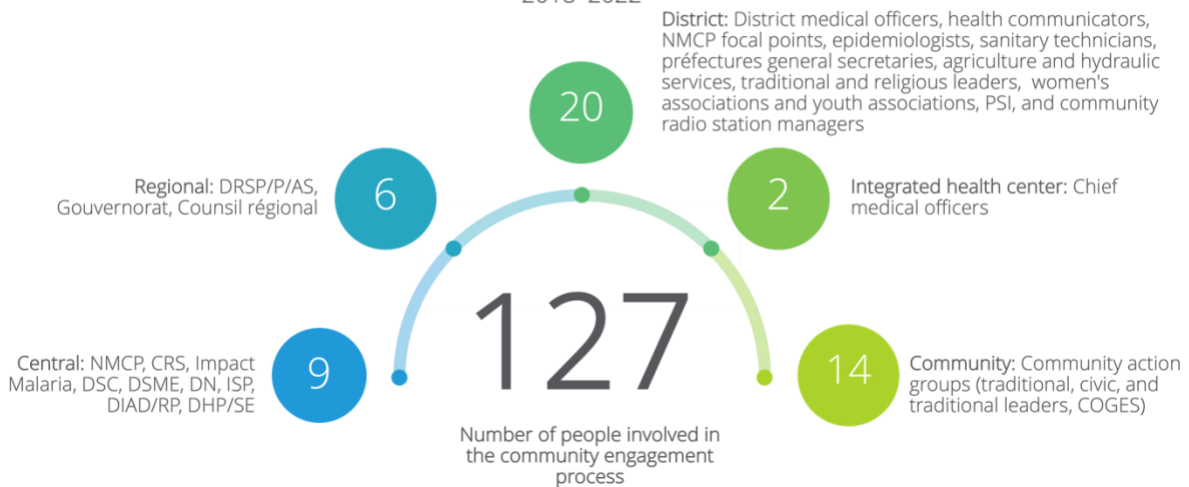


Number of people and trained on the CAC approach 2018–2022

Total registered on all CAC training participation lists



Number of institutions participating in project-led trainings 2018–2022



Intermediate Result 3.2 Enabling environment at the national and regional levels strengthened: Activities and Results

Sub-IR 3.2.1: Capacity of national institutions to develop and implement SBC strategies strengthened

Breakthrough ACTION's efforts to establish and strengthen an enabling environment for SBC at the national and regional levels were achieved through the participatory and inclusive processes used to develop and validate the NMCP's *National Malaria SBC Strategy (2020–2025)* as well as its accompanying document the *National Malaria SBC Message Guide*. This hands-on capacity building work was reinforced through the NMCP's participation in the *Leadership in Strategic Communication* two-week SBC course that Breakthrough ACTION offered in July 2019.

These combined efforts ensured that the NMCP, regional health communicators, and implementing partners began with a comprehensive and collective understanding of SBC principles. The subsequent development of a new malaria campaign and materials to support seasonal chemoprevention and insecticide-treated mosquito net distribution campaigns ensured that the NMCP and its partners had an immediate opportunity to apply their newfound understanding and skills in SBC to work.



Malaria SBC campaign slogan and logo "A shield against malaria: We protect those we love"

Breakthrough ACTION introduced the MoPH/P/SA to a global community of SBC practitioners at the 2019 Francophone SBC Summit in Côte d'Ivoire. There, Mr. Bawa Danjimo of the National Directorate of Public Hygiene and Health Education commented, "[The Summit] allowed [our colleagues] to truly convince themselves of the place of communication in the success of programs aimed at improving population health."¹

In addition to establishing a shared understanding of SBC among the NMCP and stakeholders, Breakthrough ACTION promoted knowledge management by training the NMCP on how to develop, curate, and publish SBC content. Using skills developed during the training, a [NMCP website](#) was created and linked to the [MoPH/P/SA's website](#).² In 2020, under the Sahel RISE II program, Breakthrough ACTION established an SBC catalogue that houses key health SBC materials and includes pages and materials on malaria. Further, in 2022, NMCP staff were intimately involved in developing the logo,

¹ Breakthrough ACTION Year 2 Annual Report. 2019. October 2018–September 2019

² Breakthrough ACTION PMI Year 1 Quarter 3 Report. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019.

“The SBC approach allows [us to] implement programs that go beyond a simple message of awareness or health education but rather allows for holistic strategies that put people at the center of activities for their well-being and that of the community in general.”

— Soumana Ousseini,
IEC unit head, NMCP

slogan, and key messages for the MoPH/P/SA’s integrated health campaign (*Garkuwar Al’Umma*) launched in December 2022. This integrated campaign aims to unify and promote a range of health behaviors under one flagship brand to stimulate dialogue, renew interest, and motivate households and communities to embrace and adopt proven care seeking and home-based practices that lead to better health. The difference between this health campaign and those of the past, is that it does not promote any single health topic, but rather connects multiple interrelated health themes under a common brand. Key malaria-related messages promoted in the campaign include promoting

regular antenatal care attendance (intermittent preventive treatment of malaria in pregnancy), sleeping under an insecticide treated net, and timely health care seeking for fever. Other core themes are nutrition; family planning and reproductive health; maternal, newborn, and child health; and water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Activity 3.2.1.1: Community engagement in the Dosso and Tahoua regions

In Niger, where Islam is the predominant religion and an important part of daily life, Breakthrough ACTION worked with religious leaders to enhance their capacity to encourage malaria prevention and care seeking behaviors. Building on their experiences in social mobilization and community engagement, the leaders worked with the NCMP and Breakthrough ACTION to explore opportunities to promote key malaria messages including prompt care seeking for fever, regular mosquito net use, early antenatal care attendance, and acceptance of seasonal malaria chemoprevention.

In FY22, Breakthrough ACTION worked with the religious leaders in Dosso and Tahoua to review and update several NMCP community engagement tools including the *Malaria Community and Faith Leader guide*, and the *Community Dialogue* and *Health Center Walk-through* resources. The teams worked closely with the MoPH/P/SA officials from the national and regional levels to adapt the tools for use in the areas where community activities were planned.

The next step in preparing the community work with the NMCP and Breakthrough ACTION PMI’s community work was to identify pilot CSIs for intensive community engagement work. Breakthrough ACTION and the NMCP identified Mounwadata CSI in Konni district (Tahoua) and Albarkeizé CSI in Gaya district (Dosso) to roll out and document community engagement activities. The team first introduced the community engagement process to the regional and district health authorities and then established the multisectoral community mobilization team (EMMC) comprised of the regional communicator, district authorities, the mayor, the secretary general of the prefecture, the chief of the

“This new way of doing things unites us more in our actions and will give us lasting results.”

— Hadjo Kadi Danda, women’s
group leader, Gaya (Dosso)

canton, CSI head, and at least two community structures in these two pilot health districts to lead the community engagement effort. Breakthrough ACTION and NMCP partners co-created, coordinated, and localized malaria SBC activities with the most appropriate community structures. The EMMC explored and identified priority problems with community leaders before developing and validating community action plans for both CSIs. The team targeted three clusters of villages/neighborhoods in each catchment area. The EMMC spent three days with each cluster and then all clusters came together on the fourth day to develop and validate the action plan to support the CSI. Nine villages within a five-kilometer radius of the health center in Albarkeizé and seven villages/neighborhoods within five kilometers of Mounwadata participated in these community engagement activities. The EMMC, with Breakthrough ACTION support, followed up on these action plans. Over the project period, Breakthrough ACTION built the capacity of two multisectoral community mobilization teams, 87 community leaders and 40 government officials on community engagement activities.

CLUSTER	ALBARKAIZÉ VILLAGES/QUARTIERS	MOUNWADATA VILLAGES/QUARTIERS
Cluster 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Albarkeizé ● Tounga Goumbi ● Kailou koira 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mounwadata 1 Quartier
Cluster 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balagoudjo ● Mounjo koira ● Tchkawa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mounwadata 2 Quartier ● Rougga ● Filin dan Kané et Abadjé
Cluster 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hima Koira ● Lakoazo koira ● Maiga koira 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rini Quartier ● Roudji Quartier

Examples of problems identified and prioritized for malaria included access to LLINs and malaria drugs. During discussions community members admitted that they generally did not use their nets regularly or correctly nor do they take medicines as prescribed. Barriers to proper use fell into two categories: lack of knowledge about the importance of certain actions (e.g., neglecting to use nets or take prescribed medicine as directed; not understanding why or how this helps with prevention and complete treatment) and discomfort (e.g., claustrophobic feelings under net; vomiting after medicine; preference for injectable medicines). The communities developed an action plan that included advocating about the benefits of regular LLIN use as well as taking malaria medicines as prescribed. Opportunities to disseminate messages and share information in groups and during one-on-one discussions included places of worship, *fadas* (men’s groups), and ceremonies such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals. Action plans also included disseminating prevention messages through community radio stations and establishing a monitoring committee on correct use of mosquito nets and malaria prevention drugs in each village neighborhood.

During follow-up visits to the two CSIs, the NMCP and PMI Breakthrough ACTION teams collected routine data on the number of malaria cases recorded during the peak malaria season (June –

September) in 2021 and a similar period in 2022 and compared them. The numbers showed a remarkable drop in cases between the two years, which represents the time when the highest number of malaria cases are usually recorded. As noted, Breakthrough ACTION cannot attribute these changes directly to the community engagement activities, however, they likely contributed to this reduction in cases.

CSI Albarkaizé (Gaya)	Number and Percentage decline of Cases by Month							
	June	% change	July	% change	August	% change	Sept	% change
Positive cases in 2021	482		627		933		690	
Positive cases in 2022	260	-46%	305	-51%	332	-64%	275	-60%
CSI Mounwadata (Konni)								
Positive cases in 2021	228		778		1512		2077	
Positive cases in 2022	128	-44%	246	-68%	631	-58%	1366	-34%

Source: Monthly reports from the two CSIs from 2021 and 2022.

Activity 3.2.1.2: Support for the national SBC campaigns

Breakthrough ACTION PMI Niger worked with the NMCP and implementing partners at the institutional level to design, implement, and monitor community-level behaviors. To achieve this structural change, the project and NMCP developed processes and systems that ensure SBC activities were systematic,



A religious leader discusses the benefits of seasonal malaria chemoprevention in a television spot broadcast for the campaign. Photo credit: Save the Children

theory-informed, evidence-based, and targeted. The teams engaged regional communicators and implementing partners to ensure all malaria communication activities focused on building capacity and strengthening Niger health systems.

Over the five years, Breakthrough ACTION worked closely with the NMCP to design and develop mass media materials to create demand for quality malaria services and commodities and to encourage higher rates of prevention and care

seeking behaviors. Breakthrough ACTION began training NMCP and stakeholders in the fundamentals of SBC and ultimately facilitated the development and validation of a new malaria SBC strategy. To ensure its implementation, the project led a thorough review of existing messages and materials, applied established best practices for developing new materials, and helped to produce a message harmonization guide with the NMCP. The strategy and accompanying guide were used to develop and validate a

“This is the first time in Niger that we have proposed a name, logo, and slogan for a communication campaign. It is a great innovation, and it shows how health communication is becoming more professional.”

— Government official, Tahoua

new malaria campaign and materials to support seasonal malaria chemoprevention and the mass distribution of LLINs.

Breakthrough ACTION assisted the NMCP to develop four TV spots and four radio spots to support the seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaign. The spots focused on community and family behaviors, advocacy, and modeled COVID-19 appropriate medicine distributor behaviors and dosage instructions. The head of the NMCP's entomology unit who coordinated the national LLIN campaign in 2020 noted, *"This is the first time an LLIN campaign has benefitted from exceptional communication media that is attractive and motivates the target audience."*

From July to October 2020, the project broadcast TV spots on three television channels 393 times and radio spots on three radio channels 384 times at optimal times during the day. For subsequent seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaigns (2021 & 2022), Breakthrough ACTION updated the original videos with new campaign dates, disseminated them on social media, and provided to updated versions to Impact Malaria and Catholic Relief Services to broadcast.

In December 2022, Breakthrough ACTION coordinated with the NMCP, Impact Malaria, and Catholic Relief Services to rebroadcast the existing seasonal malaria chemoprevention and LLIN radio spots so that messages complemented the MoPH/P/SA's national umbrella campaign (*Garkuwar Al'Umma*), and increased exposure to existing radio spots on malaria. While partners broadcast content through community radio station networks, Breakthrough ACTION supported national radio station coverage. Seasonal malaria chemoprevention spots were broadcast on TV/Radio Dounia, TV/Radio Ténéré, and Voix du Sahel (radio) Télé Sahel (TV)³ all of which have good national and regional coverage. The TV and radio spots were also broadcast in support of World Malaria Day and other NMCP efforts. In addition, 41 billboards to promote ITN use were mounted in all eight regions of the country for ten months. Finally, the Breakthrough ACTION team revised a job aid with the NMCP and partners for community health workers focused on seasonal malaria chemoprevention, that Impact Malaria will distribute over the course of the next campaign.

In 2021 and 2022, Breakthrough ACTION developed an additional 10 radio spots and five 30-second WhatsApp messages in three languages on different malaria topics. The project broadcast all radio spots nationally and while Catholic Relief Services and Impact Malaria broadcast them regionally. The first five radio spots were broadcast for seven months, while the five developed later were broadcast for 6 weeks but at a higher intensity and across many different radio stations. See the table below.

³ Breakthrough ACTION Year 4 Annual Report. 2019. October 2019–September 2021 (P.162)

RADIO SPOT TOPIC	NUMBER OF TIMES AIRED
Prompt and appropriate care-seeking for people with malaria symptoms	355
Seek antenatal care early and frequently	355
Use Intermittent Preventive Treatment during Pregnancy	346
Providers should perform diagnosis for malaria before treating clients	343
Mosquito net owners should use their nets consistently and correctly	343
Complete treatment for malaria (client behavior)	486
Conduct a rapid diagnostic test for malaria prior to malaria treatment (health provider behavior)	486
Use mosquito nets regularly and correctly and maintain them properly (general population)	486
Ensure children aged 3 to 59 months take the 2nd and 3rd dose of malaria prophylaxis during the malaria seasonal chemoprevention campaign (parents)	486
Welcome seasonal malaria chemoprevention distribution agents during distribution campaigns (head of households).	486
Total Radio Spots Broadcast (2022)	4,172
Seasonal malaria chemoprevention TV and Radio Spots Broadcast (2020)	
5 television spots	393 (2020)
5 radio spots	384 (2020)

COMMUNITY RADIO STATION BROADCASTS	NUMBER OF TIMES AIRED
Dosso (Koré Mairoua, Birni N'gaouaré, Karguibangou, Basyéna in Tanda)	702
Tahoua (Mourna Dolé/Konni, Keita FM, Takarkara Bouza, the Voice of Peace in Abalak)	378
Broadcasts of recent 5 spots on 50 community radio stations in Dosso and Tahoua (45 times each)	2,250
Total Community Radio Broadcasts	3,330

Breakthrough ACTION/PMI also produced five spots for social media all of which ended with the tagline: Zero malaria: I am engaged. The themes included:

- Consistent and correct use of mosquito nets
- Acceptance of seasonal malaria chemoprevention for children from 3 to 59 months old
- Correct malaria diagnosis with rapid diagnostic tests
- Early and regular antenatal care
- Availability free malaria treatment at health facilities

The team, in partnership with the NMCP, the Directorate of Archives, Information, Documentation and Public Relations of the of the regions of Dosso and Tahoua, and the Health Districts of Konni and Gaya also produced two documentary film clips on community engagement activities.

Sub-IR 3.2.2: Improved coordination and joint planning of SBC

Breakthrough ACTION began the project with an in-depth [Net-Map](#) analysis. This means of soliciting and quantitatively representing collective perceptions about who conducts malaria programming in Niger led to rich discussion among partners. The final report, *Niger Malaria Social and Behavior Change Network Analysis*, made several recommendations. The most salient was to involve regional, district, and community actors in SBC capacity strengthening, so these stakeholders could transform local actors' unfavorable behavioral advice with accurate and positive communication about malaria practices.⁴ With a better understanding of malaria SBC partners in country, as well as their stated needs, Breakthrough ACTION worked to build capacity and coordinate efforts. In particular, Breakthrough ACTION worked closely with DRSP communicators, the Impact Malaria Project, and the Global Fund-supported CRS malaria program.

Activity 3.2.2.1: Assist with and host national malaria events

Breakthrough ACTION supported the NMCP to commemorate World Malaria Day from 2019 – 2022. The



Journalists who attended the mass media training. Photo credit: Dini Aboubacar, Save the Children.

support ranged from procuring launch event materials to designing print and online [event invitations](#), and updating the [NMCP website](#). In 2021, Breakthrough ACTION disseminated existing television spots (that encourage LLIN use) on the project [Facebook page](#). The paid Facebook ads reached between 30,000 – 45,000 people while unpaid ads reached a maximum of 307 people, demonstrating the value of paid posts.

In August 2022, as part of improved coordination and planning with the NMCP, Breakthrough ACTION facilitated a two-day training on malaria prevention in Niger for twenty-five journalists from public, private, and community mass media outlets. The training aimed to sensitize writers and producers on how to disseminate accurate information (audio, audiovisual, and print) and communicate it effectively to the public in ways that were easy to understand and encouraged listeners/viewers/readers to follow the advice given. After rich discussions about the different themes, the NMCP provided special emphasis on the seasonal malaria

⁴ Niger Malaria Social and Behavior Change Network Analysis: Summary of Net-Map Findings. 2019. Conclusions (P.8). Submitted to PMI Niger September 25, 2019.

chemoprevention campaign and the correct use of mosquito nets. Journalists from each media group—TV, radio, and press—developed content for their medium.

Sub-IR 3.1.1: Leverage global knowledge and the SBC community of practice forums to improve program activities

Activity 3.1.1.1: Share community engagement successes and learn from members of the global malaria SBC community of practice



Mrs. Kadi Mamoudou, responsible for communication at the Regional Directorate for MoPH/P/SA in Tahoua (left) adds commentary to support Mr. Dini Aboubacar, Breakthrough ACTION's PMI Program Manager (right) at the 2022 SBCC Summit. Photo credit: Save the Children

The PMI Breakthrough ACTION Program Manager participated in the international SBCC Summit in Morocco (December 4-9, 2022). During the RBM Partnership to End Malaria's SBC Working Group pre-summit event, the PMI manager shared his knowledge and learned from the experiences of SBC malaria practitioners from around the world. The manager gave an oral presentation on December 9 titled: *Religious voices and culturally transformative social norms related to malaria*.

The presentation was highly engaging and featured the in-person testimony of a community health worker who was involved in the community action cycle approach. A Niger Ministry of Health official congratulated the

presenter on the community engagement approach and work with religious leaders and asked whether plans existed to scale up the approach in the future.

In January 2023, Breakthrough ACTION held a one-day share fair to promote and expose interested stakeholders in the project's community engagement activities. Breakthrough ACTION PMI shared their experiences working with communities to reduce malaria. The project shared the malaria video and hosted several roundtable discussions during the knowledge café portion of the event.

Challenges

Breakthrough ACTION PMI's mandate developed and grew over time to accommodate evolving priorities at the NMCP. Shifts in program focus from SBC capacity building to increased direct diffusion of mass media and eventually direct implementation at the community level required adjustments in staffing and administrative oversight, initially slowed program implementation. This challenge was exacerbated by restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that restricted the timely initiation of community level interventions and travel.

The greatest challenge for the first several years of the project, however, was the divergent expectations for Breakthrough ACTION's role. While the project understood that its mandate was to serve as a catalyst for improved SBC programming through capacity building with a focus on community and household behavior change, the NMCP wanted help with public relations and improving its visibility. These issues, combined with the above mentioned COVID-19 restrictions caused considerable delays for the project especially during its early years. To catch up, Breakthrough ACTION hired a new PMI program manager for Niamey in 2021 and two long term consultants to lead community pilot interventions in Tahoua and Dosso that greatly facilitated finding common ground with the NMCP and advancing project objectives during its final years.

Lessons Learned

Professionalizing SBC yields results. Introducing internationally recognized standard SBC processes, indicators, and best practices improved malaria SBC in Niger at all levels. While an intensive SBC training was a necessary first step, the immediate and highly participatory application of lessons learned served to increase the professional quality of the resulting malaria SBC strategy, message harmonization guide, and supporting materials for mosquito net and seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaigns. The quality of SBC activities and products improved dramatically as noted by the various testimonials from the MoPH/P/SA and NMCP officials involved in malaria programming.

Devolving SBC expertise throughout the NMCP helps create knowledge and expectations for high-quality products across the country. The initial Net-Map exercise highlighted the lack of SBC expertise and competencies among the regional communicators and illustrated the barrier to developing quality SBC activities at sub-national levels. Breakthrough ACTION involved regional communicators in every training, workshop, materials review, and roll out of community-level activities that exposed this cadre to a new caliber of SBC activities and products. The project's efforts to professionalize SBC among Niger malaria stakeholders was most successful among this cadre of practitioners, and, as central level actors shift and evolve, it is this cadre that will sustain these gains.

Religious and cultural leaders' role as advocates for positive health behaviors offers a unique opportunity to positively influence malaria prevention and treatment practices. Religious and cultural leaders in Niger form the backbone of society. They are respected and revered as thought leaders across society and have an important influence on social norms. With this kind of influence, comes great responsibility. Leaders recognize the power they wield and are open to actively participating in efforts to improve their community's health and wellbeing. Breakthrough ACTION and the NMCP actively worked with religious and cultural leaders to become strong voices for change through robust community engagement pilots in the Dosso and Tahoua regions. Their advocacy work and endorsements for improved malaria prevention and care seeking practices with local populations encouraged the adoption of healthier behaviors which may have directly or indirectly contributed to the decreased number of malaria cases recorded in the two pilot CSIs as described earlier in this report. Leveraging the voices of

these influential members of society to promote malaria awareness and the adoption of healthier practices will be an essential element of any SBC strategy for affecting social norm transformation and improved malaria outcomes in Niger.

Engaging communities in identifying and resolving their own problems delivers change. Community mobilization aims to facilitate dialogue among community members on health or other development issues and motivate them to identify and find local solutions. When communities are mobilized to help themselves, they can see how collectively they can resolve problems themselves without waiting on others for assistance. Breakthrough ACTION and the NMCP introduced the community action cycle (CAC), a community engagement approach that spurred communities to act to protect themselves against malaria. Community members identified and prioritized problems, identified solutions, and developed and implemented action plans to address problems and trigger changes. Indeed, health workers themselves were surprised to find that after introducing the approach malaria cases had been reduced by half in their pilot districts.

Recommendations

Breakthrough ACTION's central, regional, and community partners were almost universally eager to learn more about SBC, innovations, and best practices. In a country where one's ability to take an active role in decisions influencing is shaped so strongly by structural barriers, new approaches beyond communication may yield results that can influence individual-level behavior change. The Breakthrough ACTION Sahel RISE II activity, a cadre of people trained in behavioral economics approaches exists and could be used to explore ways to use behavioral economics to address entrenched problems related to malaria behavior change. In addition, the community engagement pilot activity was well-received and had interesting and potentially powerful results but was very limited in scope. With the support of Breakthrough ACTION Niger, the new malaria bilateral project could apply this community engagement approach much more widely so that the results can be further tested and refined and replicated across the entire country.

Perhaps more than some other countries, Nigerien society is bound by social norms that are reinforced by influential, hierarchical, and gender-bound individuals and groups. In such a system, working with and through existing power structures is of paramount importance. The challenge that SBC practitioners face in Niger may be that by working within or with such structures it indirectly reinforces them, and that these structures and social norms may have to shift or be transformed before households in Niger can have a larger voice in health and well-being decision making. Breakthrough ACTION recommends PMI/USAID, government, and implementing partners consider leveraging qualitative investigations or inquiry processes, such as ethnographic research, to help identify and examine the root causes and social forces that create barriers to malaria prevention and care seeking behaviors including opportunities for mitigation.

Finally, the recently completed Niger Malaria Indicator Survey's SBCC module contains valuable data on malaria behaviors and exposure to messages about malaria. Malaria SBC implementing partners should work closely with the NMCP to synthesize the results⁵ and ensure they inform the development of future strategies and interventions.

Conclusion

Over the course of almost five years Breakthrough ACTION worked closely with PMI, the NMCP, and implementing partners on a range of activities that has strengthened stakeholders' capacity to apply best practices in SBC strategy development, message and materials development, community mobilization, and mass media dissemination. Breakthrough ACTION responded to national priorities by building SBC knowledge and capacity using a learning-by-doing approach. Whether called to design more traditional mass media messages, work with community radio stations or implement community engagement activities new to Niger's malaria context, the project strengthened national, regional and district NMCP communicators' competencies to develop high-quality, meaningful activities and messages that yielded results. The NMCP and SBC malaria implementing partners in Niger now have the necessary training and experience in country, as well as ongoing exposure to a global community of practice so that they can move forward with confidence on the design and implementation of innovative malaria SBC programs.

⁵ Guide d'interprétation des résultats de l'Enquête sur les indicateurs du paludisme du Module de Changement Social et comportement. 2021.

<https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/MISQM/DHS8-Module-SBCC-Additional-Information-RBM-FR-19May2021.pdf>