

THE LSDI HAILED AS THE HOLY GRAIL OF MALARIA CONTROL IN AFRICA

Malaria cases in South Africa have declined dramatically over the past decade. The Malaria Research Programme of the South African Medical Research Council (MRC) has a long history of implementing large scale Malaria control programmes based on sound scientific principles. The Malaria control component of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative (LSDI), a trilateral agreement between Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland, has achieved phenomenal success in decreasing the burden of the disease in eastern Swaziland, north-eastern South Africa and southern Mozambique. This model has been hailed by the WHO as the most successful demonstration of inter country collaboration for malaria control. In a span of 10 years, the incidence of Malaria in South Africa and Swaziland has been decreased by more than 99% compared to baseline studies of 2000. Similarly in Mozambique, the prevalence of the disease in children <15 years old has decreased from an average of 70% to 5% after the initiation of the Malaria control.

The success of the LSDI Malaria control programme was so remarkable that a private sector partner, BHP Billiton, requested the MRC to implement a similar programme around its aluminium smelter in Matola, Mozambique. Over a three year period, reported cases and medical evacuations decreased by 73% and fatalities decreased by 97%. This had a huge financial return for the company in reduced absenteeism from work and lower medical costs due to Malaria. So impressed were the partners that in 2007, the MRC was requested by BHP Billiton to implement a similar programme around its mines in Conakry, Guinea. The resulting programme decreased Malaria transmission and built capacity in that country to enable scientists from that country to now run their own Malaria control operations.

The success of the LSDI model has been validated by the request of MCDI and Marathon Oil to the MRC to be the scientific and technical partner in the design and implementation of a LSDI type Malaria control project on the Island of Bioko, Equatorial Guinea. The enormous success of this Malaria control programme set up by the MRC in 2003 was published in the academic publication of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. In a recent press release, Marathon Oil who funded the project have applauded the success of this Malaria control initiative that was set up on the island by the MRC, resulting in a 64% reduction in childhood mortality.

SADC Health Ministers' have mooted the success of the LSDI model and requested its extension into other African countries in southern Africa. The model based on sound scientific principles of effective vector control interventions, accurate diagnosis and prompt treatment as well as a GIS based monitoring and evaluation system, has been adopted for implementation into the Trans-Zambezi Malaria Control Initiative, spanning 5 Southern African countries of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The success of the LSDI in southern Africa has enabled countries to be designated as target countries for elimination. South Africa and Swaziland are the first two countries in Southern Africa to work towards Malaria elimination. Swaziland has

already embarked on its elimination campaign in 2009 and South Africa hopes to eliminate the disease by 2015.

The LSDI certainly embodies the principles of the NEPAD initiatives since it has demonstrated that there can be African solutions to African problems. It has now been recognised that by working together collectively in Southern Africa we can dispel the shroud of Malaria. Since neither the parasite nor the vector respects international boundaries, only a regional effort involving neighbouring countries can help in curtailing the menace of Malaria.

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