



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



U.S. President's Malaria Initiative



Empowering Women and Promoting Equity in Malaria Prevention

The President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) VectorLink Project operates in 25 countries, implementing the largest vector control project globally and protecting millions of people from malaria across sub-Saharan Africa. The project actively promotes equity and female empowerment at all levels of its operations. The project has worked with key stakeholders to identify barriers to women's participation in IRS and implemented a series of operational policies to address these barriers. Including women more fully in IRS results in improved vector control outcomes while also advancing women's economic empowerment. In addition, VectorLink country teams collaborate with government stakeholders to identify hard-to-reach or disadvantaged population groups that are unreached by vector control. The project designs tailored solutions to reach these groups and expand equitable coverage. Using routine programmatic data, the project actively monitors and reports against gender and equity-related goals.

Ensuring a Hospitable Work Environment

To attract and retain female employees, the PMI VectorLink Project adapted the physical work environment to ensure privacy for women. The PMI VectorLink Project ensures that every operational site has separate changing areas, separate bathrooms with trashcans, and separate shower areas for men and women as spray operators must change and shower after spraying to minimize the risk of insecticide contamination. To further enhance privacy, the women's showers are designed with walls that reach the ground and are high enough to ensure complete privacy. Showers have proper drainage so that others cannot see the residual water, which women requested due to sensitivity around menstruation. PMI VectorLink also distributes sanitary pads to all female employees. Spray campaigns do not begin unless operational sites are



verified as meeting these and other environmental compliance standards.

Sexual harassment is not tolerated, and all workers, both temporary and full-time staff, can anonymously report any misconduct. Sexual harassment guidelines, with a phone number to call to report any misconduct, are posted in a local language at each operational site. The project has incorporated gender and sexual harassment content into trainings given to government partners, supervisors, and all seasonal employees. Workers sign a freedom from harassment policy at the time they sign their employment contract.

To accommodate traditional norms that might prevent women from working all day alone with men to whom they are not related, the project instituted a buddy system for female spray operators. If there are women on a spray team, there must be at least two women on the team.

Supporting Professional Advancement during the Childbearing Years

The PMI VectorLink Project is committed to providing jobs to qualified staff, regardless of their gender. With spray campaigns happening annually in many of the project's countries, work on PMI VectorLink can provide opportunities for professional growth as returning workers take on increasing levels of responsibility. To date, PMI VectorLink has hired more than 73,000 female seasonal workers to support vector control efforts. The percentage of women hired by the project continues to increase from 28 percent in the first year to 36 percent in 2021. The project is working with the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) in each country to recruit and hire more women, ensuring a sustainable approach to gender-integrated IRS after the project ends.

Exposure to insecticides for IRS is not safe for pregnant or lactating women. The PMI VectorLink Project is committed to upholding safety standards, while also attracting and retaining female talent. All female seasonal workers take a pregnancy test every 30 days during the spray campaign. Results are delivered in private. Any woman who has signed a contract and then is found pregnant is guaranteed a position on the project at her initial wages. Depending on her role, the teams find other positions, such as data verification assistants or mobilizers, for the pregnant worker. The objective is to retain and promote qualified women, while allowing professional growth and income generation during a pregnancy.

The project focuses on identifying women with potential for supervisory positions. These women receive mentorship and training and many return to work as team leaders or supervisors in the following year. In 2012, only 15 percent of supervisors were women. In 2021, nearly one-third (28 percent) of supervisors were women. These strategic approaches to gender equity have led to increased hiring of women and a dramatic increase in the number of women in supervisory roles, all while meeting or exceeding the project's IRS targets.

PMI VectorLink also contributes to the global dialogue around equity and women's leadership through peer-reviewed journal articles, conferences, and participation in discussion panels, such as the Accelerate to Equal Initiative, which strives to

understand and overcome the barriers to women's engagement in public health efforts.

Increasing Women's Economic Power through Mobile Payments

In 2015, the PMI AIRS Project implemented a mobile banking system in Zambia for its seasonal workers, providing risk-free, safe, and reliable payments. Facilitated by a mobile network operator, seasonal workers were able to access their money through a mobile phone SIM card. Mobile payments are helping to increase financial options and decision-making authority for workers, particularly women. With direct access to electronic funds, women now have more control over their money, allowing for independent financial planning, saving, and purchasing as the recipients can use the phones to manage their financial accounts including money deposits, transfers, and cash out.



IRS Team Leader Filumba Beauty and her son Richard at the house she built with her income from working on the project.

Reaching the Unreached with Tailored Solutions

PMI VectorLink country teams coordinate with the NMCP in their country to identify population groups that are unreached by vector control. These could include geographically hard-to-reach communities such as those living on islands or in remote areas with limited roads, migrants or nomadic workers, refugees or internally displaced people, people with disabilities, orphans or other low-income children, and people in prisons. For example, the Tanzania VectorLink team has sprayed in refugee camps since 2018. The project hired seasonal workers from the camps, 50 percent of whom were women. This provided refugees with a rare opportunity for economic employment and helped to increase IRS acceptance, as community

mobilizers were known and trusted by camp residents and could communicate with their neighbors in their native languages. In one large camp, malaria prevalence decreased from 63 percent in 2018 to 15 percent in 2021 because of IRS.

Fostering Inclusive Engagement Through Community Mobilization

A key component of IRS planning is community mobilization. Project teams hold “micro-planning” meetings at the community level to share information about IRS, dispel misconceptions, and address any concerns. PMI VectorLink takes specific measures to ensure mobilization has a broad reach within the community and is inclusive. For example, in Ghana, PMI VectorLink used the Ghana Federation of Disability’s regular meetings to host IRS community sensitization meetings. People with disabilities were therefore included in IRS planning and implementation, and a community forum was created

to share recommendations on assisting people with disabilities and the elderly with clearing items from their homes in preparation for spraying. In many communities where the project works, there are unequal household power dynamics, resulting in men having more decision-making authority. To ensure that women are reached with IRS messages and education, PMI VectorLink holds mobilization meetings at antenatal clinics (ANC), child health clinics, and women’s group meetings. Conversely, as many meetings are held during the day when men may be away at work, the project also makes sure to reach men by holding events after working hours or on the weekend and at locations where men typically gather.

The PMI VectorLink Project is funded by the U.S. President’s Malaria Initiative and implemented by Abt Associates. The project’s period of performance is from September 2017 to September 2023. For more information: www.pmi.gov; www.pmivectorlink.org

For more information, reach out Tess Shiras, Tess_Shiras@abtassoc.com, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Advisor for the PMI VectorLink Project