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SUCCESS STORY

Governor of Bamako Motivates Others to Participate in the Neglected Tropical Disease Control Program in Mali



The governor of Bamako District takes his doses of ivermectin and albendazole during the launching ceremony for drug distribution, to motivate the Bamako population to participate in Mali's national NTD control program.

Photo: Helen Keller International

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In 2007, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) began working with Mali's Ministry of Health and Sanitation to launch an ambitious program aimed at controlling neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis, trachoma, lymphatic filariasis, and soil-transmitted helminths are all endemic in Mali.

To date, the NTD Control Program has reached all nine regions in the country and achieved high treatment rates. However, it has not achieved the same level of success in reaching people in urban settings compared to those living in rural areas. In Mali's large cities, such as the capital city of Bamako, tracking the whereabouts of individuals eligible for treatment can be difficult because of frequent population movements. Moreover, program strategies that were successful in rural areas, such as distributing drugs by going house-to-house, proved ineffective in the urban context because residents were frequently not home.

To address this situation, top Bamako authorities—such as the governor, mayors, chiefs, and religious and community leaders—piloted new strategies to ensure the program reached all those in need of treatment. During the drug distribution campaign launch in 2009, these leaders publically demonstrated how to take NTD drugs, inspiring others to do the same. They worked tirelessly to advocate for the program, visiting mosques; churches; city halls; and conferences, to inform citizens about NTDs, the safe and effective medicines available to treat the diseases, and the dates when treatments would be provided. These leaders also played an integral role in encouraging residents to volunteer as drug distributors for the national program.

In addition to community mobilization efforts, organizers employed several drug distribution strategies to reach all of the eligible population. These strategies included distributing drugs in fixed locations, such as schools, health service centers, and public places, as well as going door-to-door to people's homes and workplaces. As a result, the program exceeded targeted coverage rates in Bamako. The success attests to the commitment of national and community leaders to eliminate and control NTDs in Mali.