

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST MALARIA IN MALI**

The Minister of Health encourages “Mali VOICES”

On Monday, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, the Malian Minister of Health, Mrs. Maiga Zeinab Mint Youba met with members of the Voices/Mali project, Communication Advisor Oumar Kouressy and television producer Boubacar Sidibe.

After the customary greetings, the discussion between the Minister and the Voices team focused primarily on the use of insecticide treated mosquito nets (ITNs) by the Malian population.

The subject seemed to be the principle focus of the Minister, Zeinab Mint Youba, who met with the project team to outline the Malian government’s great efforts for ITN distribution, and to discuss their use, which presents the greatest bottleneck to protecting the population, especially the most vulnerable – pregnant women and children under five years of age.

“Our primary goal is the large-scale utilization of mosquito nets by our population. Our objective is for 80% of pregnant women and 80% of children under 5 to sleep under mosquito nets, because they are the most vulnerable in Mali,” remarked the Minister.

According to her, Mali is not confronted with a problem of mosquito net distribution. Nets were made free nets for pregnant women and children under five, and the exemption from import taxes on mosquito nets has been in effect since the beginning of the year. The problem today is instead with the use of mosquito nets, which are, she says, “often diverted from the targets or kept stored to later send to villages”.

She denounced this situation and welcomed a large public awareness campaign to promote the utilization of bed nets for the entire population in general and the target populations in particular.

She congratulated “VOICES of Mali” for its actions on the ground in the fight against malaria, notably in increasing access to prevention and treatment against malaria.

The Minister stressed that she regularly follows all the actions that are undertaken by the project, especially those that are visible on national television (ORTM), citing the spots recently broadcast with noted musicians Adja Soumano, Habib Koité, Abdoulaye Diabaté, Bassekou Kouyaté and Salif Keita.

Without criticizing Voices’ calls that the government to supply all the health centers of Mali with insecticide treated mosquito nets “which the Malian government has been doing for a long time”, she nevertheless maintained that use of nets is the priority issue in Mali.

She encouraged the project to work in this direction since, according to her, “it is one thing to distribute mosquito nets, and another is to use them effectively” to fight the plague of malaria which causes, according to official statistics, 105,000 deaths in Mali each year.

After 20 minutes of discussion, the Voices Mali team recognized the efforts made by the Malian government in the distribution of ITNs, but reminded the Minister that coverage in Mali cannot be limited to Bamako districts, regions, and circles alone. It is urgent and necessary to have mosquito nets in all the health clinics of Mali, down to the most secluded villages.

Madame Zeïnab Mint Youba testified to her support of the project for all the actions that it undertakes and encouraged the team to work with the National Malaria Control Program (PNLP) and to persevere in what it does to support the efforts of the Malian government to effectively fight malaria.

“It would be terrible not to be able to protect the population against malaria, since it is a disease that we can avoid, that we can cure and we can eradicate. Other countries around the world did it. Why not us?” she said.

Oumar KOURESSY

Communications Advisor

VOICES of Mali