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MADAGASCAR

FIRST PERSON Bednets Go Beyond Malaria Prevention

Community-based sales of bednets improve health and economy



Photo: USAID

Lalaina, a certified community-based distribution agent, sells bednets in Sahambavy in the Fianarantsoa Province of Madagascar.

“I am happy to get training and to help prevent malaria in my village while growing a small business,” said Lalaina, a certified community-based distribution agent working in Sahambavy in Madagascar’s southeastern Fianarantsoa Province.

Telling Our Story
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Lalaina works in Sahambavy, a village in the Fianarantsoa province of southeastern Madagascar. In October 2005, she took a big step: she became a certified community-based health education and distribution agent for a USAID program that supports community-based development. After successfully completing five days of technical training, she joined the ranks of Madagascar’s 1,685 trained health agents.

Community-based distribution agents bring critical health education and products, like anti-malaria bednets and water treatment kits, into areas where these items are hard to find. Once agents complete the training, USAID gives them a start-up stock of health products. When Lalaina finished her training, she received a start-up kit of priority health products for free: five malaria-preventing bednets, 20 packages of malaria drugs, 10 packets of oral contraceptives, a box of condoms, and five water-treatment kits. She sold the products at a price that is affordable, yet allows her to make a small profit. With the start-up stock, she created a revolving fund for purchasing more products. The training she received gave her the skills and knowledge to manage her fund carefully.

Four weeks after returning to Sahambavy, she had already bought and sold 83 bednets, 43 packets of oral contraceptives, and a host of other products. With a profit of 50 cents per bednet and the knowledge that she is helping her community, Lalaina is motivated to go the extra mile to bring life-saving products to families that need them. So not only has Lalaina directly improved the health of mothers and children in her community, she made \$44.41 for herself and her family in one month, in a country where nearly half of the population lives on less than \$1 per day.

As demand for health products increases in her community, Lalaina is confident she will continue having customers. Her income will steadily increase and she will continue to grow a successful small business. Through the development of her small enterprise, she improves her family’s standard of living and inspires others to do the same, showing the true spirit of leadership — and building a real foundation for development.