

Researching and addressing community perceptions of vaccines and malaria

The PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) worked with partners to assess community perceptions of vaccines and malaria in four African countries—Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique—over a five-year period, 2009 through 2014.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project was undertaken as part of a malaria vaccine planning process taking place in some African countries and represents a key step in the process for several reasons:

- Understanding local communities' perceptions of a health problem is critical when introducing any intervention.
- Vaccine introduction may be protracted unless efforts are made to address the concerns of local populations and to provide needed reassurances.
- Potentially effective health interventions have been rejected by communities in some cases where such interventions have been perceived as harmful.
- A malaria vaccine would need to complement rather than replace current malaria-control measures.

In approaching planning for possible malaria vaccine use, several African countries and their international partners identified the range of data and processes required for making timely and informed decisions on malaria vaccine implementation. They indicated that sociocultural data would help guide public discussions of a malaria vaccine in relation to other vaccines currently in use and in relation to existing malaria interventions.

By assessing and responding to community perceptions of vaccines and malaria, the specific goal of the project was to contribute to a supportive environment for a malaria vaccine, once licensed for use, and to strengthen informed decision-making at the national level around malaria vaccine introduction and uptake.

MVI's objectives for this project included:

- Developing a knowledge base of information gaps, attitudes, and practices in relation to malaria and vaccines at the community level in countries with malaria vaccine clinical trials.
- Developing an overview of key audiences and communication and information channels at the community level in trial-site countries.
- Enhancing targeted communication, education, and advocacy efforts to prepare for malaria vaccine use.
- Answering critical questions that will contribute to strengthened decision-making around malaria vaccine introduction.

The findings from the four countries have guided communications on the likely role and use of a malaria vaccine. In Ghana and Kenya, two countries that are participating in the Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programme coordinated by the World Health Organization, the findings have informed the development of communications plans, messages, and materials.

The research conducted by PATH and partners has been published in a number of articles; these and other articles related to malaria vaccine development are available at <http://www.malariavaccine.org/resources/publications>.

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PATH'S MALARIA VACCINE INITIATIVE (MVI) accelerates malaria vaccine development and catalyzes timely access in endemic countries, toward a world free from malaria. Standing at the intersection of malaria and immunization, MVI is part of PATH's Center for Malaria Control and Elimination and PATH's Center for Vaccine Innovation and Access, which brings together PATH's expertise across every stage of vaccine research, development, and introduction to make lifesaving vaccines widely available to women, children, and communities across the world. Learn more at www.malariavaccine.org and <http://sites.path.org/cvia>.