

Effective program management: A cornerstone of malaria elimination

KEY MESSAGES

- Malaria elimination cannot be achieved without robust program management.
- Elimination programs should not be fully integrated into the local health system—some tasks must be run vertically to ensure focus, quality and sustainability.
- Successful elimination can only occur when personnel at all levels are effectively engaged and incentivized.
- Securing commitment from the highest government office, the Ministries of Health and Finance is necessary to sustain political and financial support for elimination.

WHY IS GOOD MANAGEMENT SO CRITICAL?

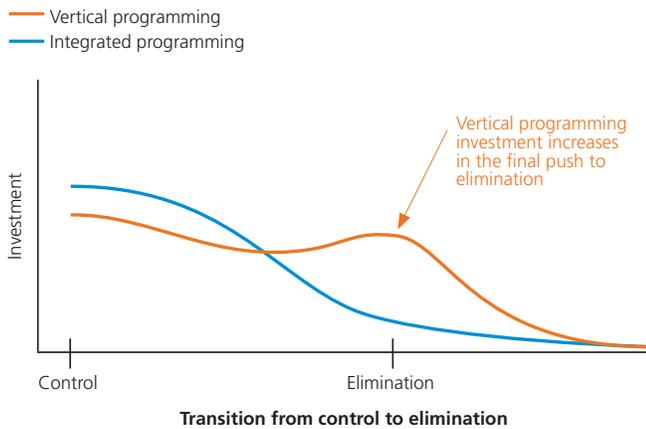
Effective program management is essential to ensure the elimination and eventual eradication of malaria. **Malaria elimination is a long-term, focused and technical process that requires dedicated management and communication at all levels**, from national down to the community. There are several core features of successful health program management, all of which are critical to achieve elimination. In general, elimination is facilitated by robust health systems, determined leadership, appropriate incentives, a comprehensive and real-time surveillance system, and information sharing through regional collaborations. Elimination is hampered by inflexible health systems, a lack of sustained political and financial commitment, poorly trained managers, unmotivated staff, and unpredictable external funding streams. In this background paper, we advocate contextually appropriate

guidance for managers at the country level, continuous learning and adaptation, and, in some circumstances, direct operational intervention.

SHIFTING FROM CONTROL TO ELIMINATION

In many respects, **the requirements for elimination conflict with those for control, and there is currently a lack of research and thorough understanding of these distinctions**. Elimination relies upon a similar mix of interventions as malaria control: high quality case management, vector control, and parasitological and entomological surveillance. However, whereas control programs often aim for universal coverage of interventions on an annual basis, elimination programs require an intense degree of intervention timeliness and precision, targeting specific populations in specific foci immediately after detecting a new malaria case. Despite the need for

Figure 1. Investment shifts on the trajectory to elimination



In a control setting, there is an increased investment in integrated programming and in the health system in general. As a country transitions to its final push for elimination, greater investment is needed for the management of vertical activities. This figure illustrates a general trend; the balance between investments in integrated and vertical programming will vary by country.

intensified response capabilities during elimination, governments and external donors typically reduce funding as case incidence declines, which often pushes malaria programs to integrate their activities into the local health system. Yet such integration has been shown to be harmful to elimination efforts, resulting in outbreaks and re-introduction of malaria transmission. The evidence suggests that **integration of malaria activities into the local health system should not lead to the abandonment of vertical oversight of the elimination program.** Rather, some tasks (e.g. targeted vector control, rapid case investigation and reactive case detection) should be vertically run by dedicated staff while others (case management, surveillance and reporting) can be overseen by local health teams. Programmatic investments should mirror this shift, with a peak in vertical program investments occurring during elimination (Figure 1).

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCENTIVES

Appropriate incentives at every level of the malaria elimination program must be identified and implemented in order to keep employees focused and committed to success. Achieving elimination is more likely if all personnel—including volunteers, community health workers and staff formally employed by the program or in the health system—internalize program goals and are motivated to reach them. Incentives

may be financial or non-monetary; identification of appropriate incentives should be a collaborative process with staff members at all levels. Non-monetary options should include opportunities for career advancement and enhancement of professional identity through participation in workshops and conferences, with the aim of improving the meaning and value that employees get from their work. Regardless of the type of incentive, initiating a comprehensive system of reward and recognition will require significant investment but will, in turn, reduce staff turnover and improve program performance.

SECURING COMMITMENT FOR ELIMINATION

In an environment of limited resources and competing health priorities, maintaining political and financial support for the malaria program in eliminating countries becomes extremely challenging. When setting malaria elimination goals, top level program managers must interface with the highest government office (e.g. Prime Minister or President) as well as the Ministries of Health and Finance to secure political support and ensure a sustainable funding source. **Engaging government leaders allows for the institutionalization of elimination goals and sets high expectations for malaria program managers.** It also facilitates coordination and collaboration with external donors, other government agencies, local and international organizations and academic institutions, and regional elimination initiatives, all of which provide essential support for the program as it approaches elimination.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Achieving elimination requires dedicated, knowledgeable and flexible managers who can guide the program through frequent priority changes and strategy shifts.
- Managers must advocate for increased investments in vertical programming as countries approach elimination.
- Incentives should be linked to a system of accountability and established using a participatory approach to ensure that rewards are contextually appropriate and sufficient in motivating staff at all levels.
- Elimination cannot be achieved without sustained political and financial support; active engagement with the highest government office can ensure that elimination goals are prioritized and well-funded.