

Influence of Malaria on household livelihoods in Homa Bay District, Kenya

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Abstract:

Malaria is a major public health problem today in more than 90 countries of the world, inhabited by a total of some 2 400 million people - 40% of the world's population (WHO, 2000).

Worldwide prevalence of the disease is estimated to be in the order of 300-500 million clinical cases each year. Malaria is estimated to kill more than 1 million people annually, the majority of whom are young children. Ninety per cent of malaria cases in the world occur in Africa south of the Sahara. Children under 5 years of age and pregnant women are the worst affected by malaria. It is one of the leading causes of death among young children. Together with pneumonia, diarrhoea, measles and malnutrition, malaria is responsible for over 70% of deaths in young children especially in developing countries. Malaria during pregnancy causes severe maternal illness and anaemia, and is also associated with low birth weight among newborn infants, a leading risk factor for infant mortality. Malaria's cost to human and social well-being is enormous. It uses a conceptual framework that takes a holistic approach to understand the effects and the link between malaria and livelihood change. The purpose of this study was therefore to establish influence of malaria on the household livelihoods in Homa Bay District. In order to investigate these issues, this research project was designed to meet five main objectives: Identify factors that make households susceptible to malaria illnesses and explore various malaria prevention methods in Homa Bay District; Determine the extent to which malaria illness influenced agricultural activities as a source of household livelihoods in Homa Bay District; Establish the level at which malaria illness influences sustainability of household assets and children's education as a means of household livelihoods in Homa Bay District; To determine the extent at which malaria illness influences household income and savings as means of household livelihoods in Homa Bay District; Establish households' coping mechanisms in mitigating against the costs of malaria illness in Homa Bay District. This study employed the use of descriptive study design which is used to establish a range of problems, issues, or concerns that have not previously been explored in depth within communities. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews to collect data. Data was analyzed using the statistical packages of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS); Ms excel and it is discussed to make deductions for the way forward. Amongst the key findings from the study, malaria illness lowered households' capacities to earn income due to the loss of productive days during malaria episodes. It also significantly depleted households savings used for treatment hence reducing the capacity of such households to improve on their living conditions by posing significant constraints on their budgets. This study concludes that malaria illnesses adversely affects households by depleting their livelihoods making them to suffer from a cycle of poverty because of the consequences it has on their children's education and general growth. Amongst others, this study recommends intensified health education and information dissemination on malaria prevention strategies so as to improve people's knowledge, attitudes and practices on issues of malaria to prevent its occurrence. It also recommends that households increase their asset base, accumulate savings, join welfare groups and social networks, and diversify on their livelihoods to boost on their capacities especially during emergencies. This study therefore

recommends a further research on determinants of health information uptake and practices amongst households to establish factors that hinder utilization of such malaria prevention strategies amongst the intended beneficiaries and target group.