

Mobilize Against Malaria

FIELD DIARY

Part 1: Ghana se'w Akwaaba - Welcome to Ghana!

Gudrun Hubinger is a Pfizer Global Health Fellow on assignment with the Mobilize Against Malaria Program in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. Her field diary attests to some of the great achievements (and everyday challenges!) of working to combat malaria on the ground.

"We have no money but we smile" - my first day at work

It is not that simple putting this new world into words, but up to now my impressions of Ghana and the people here, especially their sense of humor, are far exceeding my expectations. The biggest observation so far is how extremely friendly and positive people have been, and always open for joking. "We have no money but we smile!" – that is what a Professor of Biochemistry at Kumasi University told me recently when he asked me about my initial impressions of Ghanaian people. It's true that signs of poverty can't be missed going through towns and villages, but there is also a great sense of positivity and openness.



Gudrun arrives in Kumasi to work with the local MAM team!

On my first day at work I was warmly welcomed with a special sign made by the local team members of FHI based at the MAM field office in Kumasi "Welcome to the MAM field office – Akwaaba!". This was a word I would hear over and over again. We introduced each other and I was shown my desk, the office rooms and what I call now the

Empowering Licensed Chemical Sellers

Since it began in 2007, the MAM Program has trained over 1,300 LCSs in the Ashanti Region, and Licensed Chemical Sellers have seen their role in communities develop:

"I was skeptical about the referral system until I had a case of severe malaria in a certain little girl. I filled [out] the referral form for the mother to take her to Tafo district hospital immediately. I was amazed when the mother later came back to thank me for helping to save her daughter's life. Previously, who was I to formally refer any case to the hospital? But now thanks to MAM, I can distinguish between complicated and uncomplicated malaria and refer when necessary."

Mr. Paul Ofosuhen, an LCS in New Tafo

"MAM multivitamin backyard", with Orange-, Coconut-, Papaya-, Mango-, and Avocado trees. Coming from the very Northern Hemisphere, I only know these fruits from the shops, after they have taken a long, long journey.

Meeting the Communities

After the warm welcome at the office we went straight out to meet some of the communities involved in MAM. Especially exciting for me was the opportunity to attend my first regional meeting of Licensed Chemical Sellers. After they have completed a 2-day training session on "Managing Malaria in the Community", the LCSs are required to keep records and report on the malaria cases they have managed by either dispensing the appropriate medicine or referring severe cases to the nearest clinic. Training the LCSs to keep a record of their malaria treatment activities will help to provide an overview of drug use and compliance, helping us to analyze the data and evaluate how well the training works.

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“Working together for a healthier world”

The MAM field team support the LCSs to meet on a monthly basis to discuss challenges and opportunities, lessons learned and much more, and they also get updates on MAM. I was really happy to join this meeting until one of my new colleagues smiled at me saying: “Why don’t you introduce yourself in Twi?” Twi or Asante is the main dialect of Akan, the main language spoken in the Ashanti region. Nervously, I wrote down the Twi translation of my introduction and tried to memorize and pronounce it correctly on the way there. Getting up in front of 35 LCSs saying “N’quoa!” – meaning “Hello! To Life!” – was quite an experience because as in most cultures, people here really appreciate the effort of someone new trying to speak the local dialect. The crowd started laughing and responding when I went on with “Wo ho te sen?” (How are you all?) “Wo fre me Abena Gudrun” (My name is Abena Gudrun). As soon as I arrived in Ghana, I was also given the Ghanaian name Abena. In the Ashanti culture you are named after the day of the week you are born on, Abena translates to ‘baby girl born on Tuesday’.

Since the first day from my GHF assignment in Kumasi, Pfizer’s slogan and commitment of “Working together for a healthier world” has been brought to life. With only about 5 years left until the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, I am witnessing the very real effort being made every day by the MAM Program partners. But being here also reminds me that we have no time to delay: so let’s continue our mission with the values we stand for and contribute to this united mission for a healthier world now, in 2015 and beyond!



MAM Field Officer Stephen gathers records of LCS's treatment and referrals for malaria cases

Pfizer Global Health Fellows

The Global Health Fellows Program utilizes the professional expertise of Pfizer colleagues through specialized volunteer assignments with international development organizations designed to address global health issues and improve care for underserved populations. Assignments are focused on strengthening health systems around the world to promote access, quality and efficiency of health services.

Mobilize Against Malaria (MAM)

Pfizer’s MAM Program is a five-year, three-country initiative that aims to increase prompt and effective treatment with Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) by educating communities and building the capacity of public, private and community sector treatment providers.