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World Malaria Day highlights success of the National Malaria Control Program to the community of Los Palos

The Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization joined the people of Los Palos for the celebration of World Malaria Day on April 26th, 2013. During the ceremony and exhibition the National Malaria Control Program showcased their achievements over the past six years and discussed present challenges with community members living in a high risk malaria district.

From humble beginnings the malaria control program has gone from strength to strength in a relatively short space of time. When the first WHO technical advisor on malaria was appointed in 2006, Dr. Manel Yapabandara, there were two Ministry of Health staff working full time on malaria, there was no laboratory and no equipment to carry out entomological surveillance. Dr. Manel brought a number of microscopes from her home country Sri Lanka and bought soup ladles in Dili supermarkets to carry out water tests for mosquito larvae. 'At that time there was no equipment, so we did it on our own and we carried out the entomological surveys (mosquito surveillance) using material available locally' explained Dr. Manel. With increased political commitment, advances in diagnostic tests and treatment, and financial support from the Global Fund, Timor-Leste has made huge strides in the prevention and control of malaria in recent years. There are now over 100 staff working on malaria in this country, tens of thousands of free Long Lasting Insecticide nets have been distributed and all 135 health posts have the facilities to diagnose and treat malaria. As a result, malaria cases have been reduced by over 97% over the past 6 years.

In 2006, there were 223,002 cases of malaria in Timor-Leste. By 2012, the number of cases was reduced to 6,148. The malaria control management team expressed their pride in the success of the program. 'We have made a lot of improvements. We have a very good team at the national, district and sub district level and we are very happy with the success of the malaria program.' Timor-Leste is now on track to meet Millennium Development Goal 6 to halt and reverse the incidence of malaria by 2015.

By the end of 2014 the malaria control programme will achieve another milestone. With assistance from Global Fund and WHO, the Ministry of Health will distribute over 270,000 Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Nets covering 80% of the population.



Bernadette Mozinho and her son Zaqil from Fuiloru village, Los Palos sleep under the mosquito net distributed recently by the Community Health

Lautem is one of the first districts to benefit from the first phase of this distribution. Over 27,000 nets have been distributed over the past four weeks. Together with this distribution, a bed net hanging up campaign was launched on April 25th by the community health volunteers in Los Palos. The volunteers are calling from house to house to ensure that people are hanging up their bed nets to protect against the malaria carrying mosquitos that bite during the night. The Vice Minister also assisted with hanging up the nets and praised the work of the community health volunteers. On World Malaria Day, Vice Minister of Health, Señora Natália de Araújo visited the houses of Marta Costanca and Paulina da Costa to handover bed nets.



Vice Minister of Health, Señora Natália de Araújo visited Marta Costanca's home to handover bed nets, Los Palos



Vice Minister of Health, Señora Natália de Araújo tours the exhibition during World Malaria Day

During the World Malaria Day exhibition important information was given to the community on how to prevent malaria, how to recognize symptoms, and where to go to get tested and treatment. Laboratory microscopes were set up displaying what different mosquitoes and parasites look like, the entomology (mosquito surveillance) team displayed the equipment they use in the field for their experiments to monitor mosquitos and malaria transmission.

WHO Representative Dr. Jorge Mario Luna noted during his speech that while significant progress has been made on malaria over the past few years, Timor-Leste continues to have the second highest incidence of confirmed malaria cases in South East Asia and furthering strengthening of the malaria control program is needed. "There needs to be greater access to diagnosis and treatment in remote areas and greater inter-sectoral collaboration to tackle this global public health problem effectively." The Vice Minister of Health, Señora Natália de Araújo, the Director General of Health, Mr. Jose dos Reis Magno and the World Health Organization Representative, Dr. Jorge Mario Luna attended the event demonstrating high level commitment to tackling malaria in this country. Dr. Luna reaffirmed WHO's commitment to continue to support the government and people of Timor-Leste to control and prevent malaria in this country.



Distinguished guests rise for the singing of the National Anthem including Vice Minister of Health, Señora Natália de Araújo, WHO Representative, Dr. Jorge Mario Luna, and the Director General of Health, Señor Jose dos Reis Magno



Members of the public are invited to view the mosquito parasites underneath the microscope by the entomology teams during the World Malaria Day exhibition