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WHO Contribution in the transfer of Olyset technology to Africa

For the past five years WHO has been encouraging industry to develop long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs). The advantage of the long-lasting net is that it needs no re-treatment and maintains its efficacy as a powerful prevention against malaria for up to five years. WHO -- through its technical units, its network of collaborators within academic institutions and the WHO Pesticide Evaluation Scheme (WHOPES) -- has provided ongoing technical advice to interested parties.

When the first long-lasting insecticidal nets reached the market, net manufacturers from Africa publicly expressed their wish to acquire the technology, recognizing that long-lasting nets would largely take the place of the conventional insecticide-treated mosquito nets. The first LLIN to be recommended by WHO was the Olyset® net, produced by Sumitomo Chemicals in Japan.

WHO approached the company and advocated for technology transfer, preferably to Africa. The main objectives of this initiative were to facilitate scaling-up production of this new life-saving technology and adapt it to local needs in Africa. After an initial agreement was made with Sumitomo, WHO approached the Acumen Fund and UNICEF in New York, hoping to obtain their collaboration.

Subsequently, WHO visited a number of net manufacturers in Africa looking for potential candidates for the transfer. A to Z Mills (Arusha, Tanzania) was selected through a process managed by the Acumen Fund. In parallel, WHO contacted ExxonMobil because the company is an RBM partner and very active in the African market and in African communities. The company made a donation for the supply of resin needed for production of the nets.

A first technical forum participated in by the five partners -- Acumen Fund, UNICEF, WHO, Sumitomo, A to Z and ExxonMobil -- was convened by WHO in 2002 to address various technical and managerial issues related to the technology transfer. Having catalysed the relationship, WHO continued providing technical advice with special emphasis on quality issues, efficacy and safety during production.

To build on this initiative, WHO, UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation have jointly funded the development of a "Business plan for stimulating the development, manufacturing and widespread distribution of long-lasting insecticidal nets" by Management Sciences for Health (MSH Europe). A business meeting was organized by WHO, UNICEF and AID-Netmark and facilitated by RBM Secretariat, to review various aspects related to implementation of the business plan in late September 2004. More than 50 private companies participated in this meeting (chiefly textile engineering companies, insecticide producers, and net manufacturers). WHO sees such involvement of the private sector in the development of LLINs as a major achievement in the scaling-up of malaria prevention in Africa and a significant move towards Abuja targets.

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