

Empowering women in Malaria programmes



In partnership with



Introduction

Since the turn of the century, vector control has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for reducing malaria incidence and deaths. Since 2000, more than 80% of the reduction in malaria prevalence in Africa can be attributed to indoor residual spraying (IRS) and insecticide-treated nets (ITNs).

The success of vector control interventions depends on good planning, efficient implementation and strong social acceptance across communities. This is particularly true for IRS as a dedicated and well trained workforce is required to carry out the spraying and to engage with community leaders and members beforehand to obtain permission to spray their properties.

Traditionally, men have been responsible for implementing IRS in sub-Saharan Africa. There are only a handful of examples where female community spray operators were appointed before 2005 (Booman et al. 2007). Cultural and gender norms

restricted women to limited roles, such as vector control educational support for villages and communities (Gunn et al, 2017). However, this traditional view is increasingly being challenged as more organisations recognize that women should play a more significant role in conducting and leading spray operations.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) are key proponents of integrating women more fully into malaria control and elimination campaigns. They have recognised that gender-segregated vector control roles can limit the overall reach and effectiveness of IRS. In particular, all-male spray teams may not be able to access female-headed households in malaria risk areas.

**In grateful thanks
to IVCC for funding the
compilation of this report
and to Dr. Derek Willis
(Research Affiliate, Columbia
University) for undertaking
the analysis.**

Goodbye Malaria's commitment to invest in women and to share the story

Goodbye Malaria is an initiative started by African entrepreneurs who believe that today's generation can create innovative solutions to the continent's problems and ultimately change the way the world sees Africa. Since Goodbye Malaria's founding in 2013, it has conducted IRS campaigns in southern Mozambique with a predominantly female workforce.

This innovative initiative set out to control malaria but now elimination is on the horizon. The programme is locally known as Tchau Tchau Malaria and the initiative has provided local women with the opportunity to work as spray operators and additionally take on more responsibility as team leaders.

According to Kim Lazarus,
Co-founder of Goodbye Malaria it is
imperative that women are provided the
opportunity to take on leadership positions
within vector control programmes:

“Women need to be a part of decision-making processes so that we can broaden and magnify their significant contributions to eradicating malaria. More women in leadership roles at all levels of the fight against malaria will not only help to improve health outcomes and accelerate the eradication of malaria, but will also play a key role in advancing gender equality.”

Goodbye Malaria's approach to empowering women to be spray operators and leaders in spray campaigns

The three key components:

1. Training

- Train women in the theory and practice necessary to be effective spray operators
- Provide additional leadership training and opportunities to progress to team leader roles

2. Infrastructure and equipment

- Invest in spray equipment that's lighter and more ergonomically designed
- Provide personal protective equipment more suitable for women
- Provide dedicated uniform changing facilities for women that allow for privacy, especially during menstrual cycles

3. Practices and policies to promote and protect women

- Assist women with obtaining driving licences to empower them to travel to spray site locations autonomously
- Conduct regular pregnancy tests to ensure that women who become pregnant can be reassigned to positions that do not bring them into contact with insecticides
- Implement enhanced safety policies for pregnant workers to ensure that no harm comes to the mother or child



As of 2021, Goodbye Malaria's female-led spray campaign reduced malaria infections by 70%* with women making up almost two-thirds of the spray teams.

*This is a cumulative number from data ranging between 2014 and 2021. The result is from an internal analysis of the country level case data obtained from SIS-MA

Looking at operational data with a gender lens

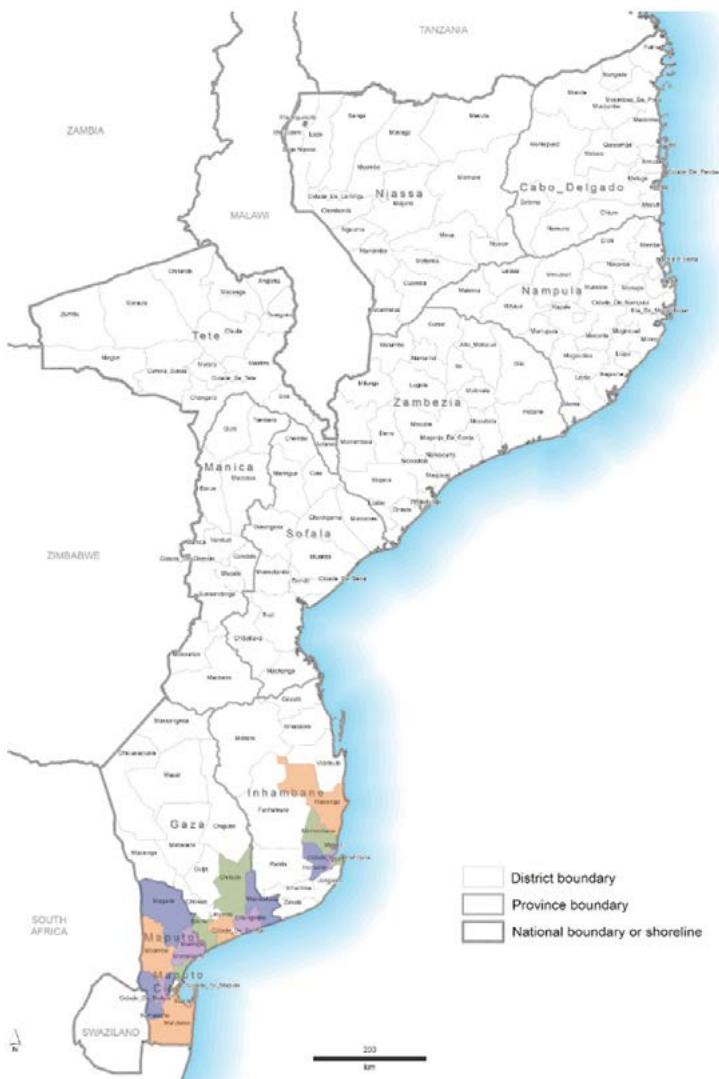
In partnership with IVCC, Goodbye Malaria analysed operational data collected from the 2020 spray campaign across Southern Mozambique. The data covered participation and the performance of men and women working in spray teams covering 18 districts, more than 600,000 homes and over 2 million people.

Participation of women in spray programmes

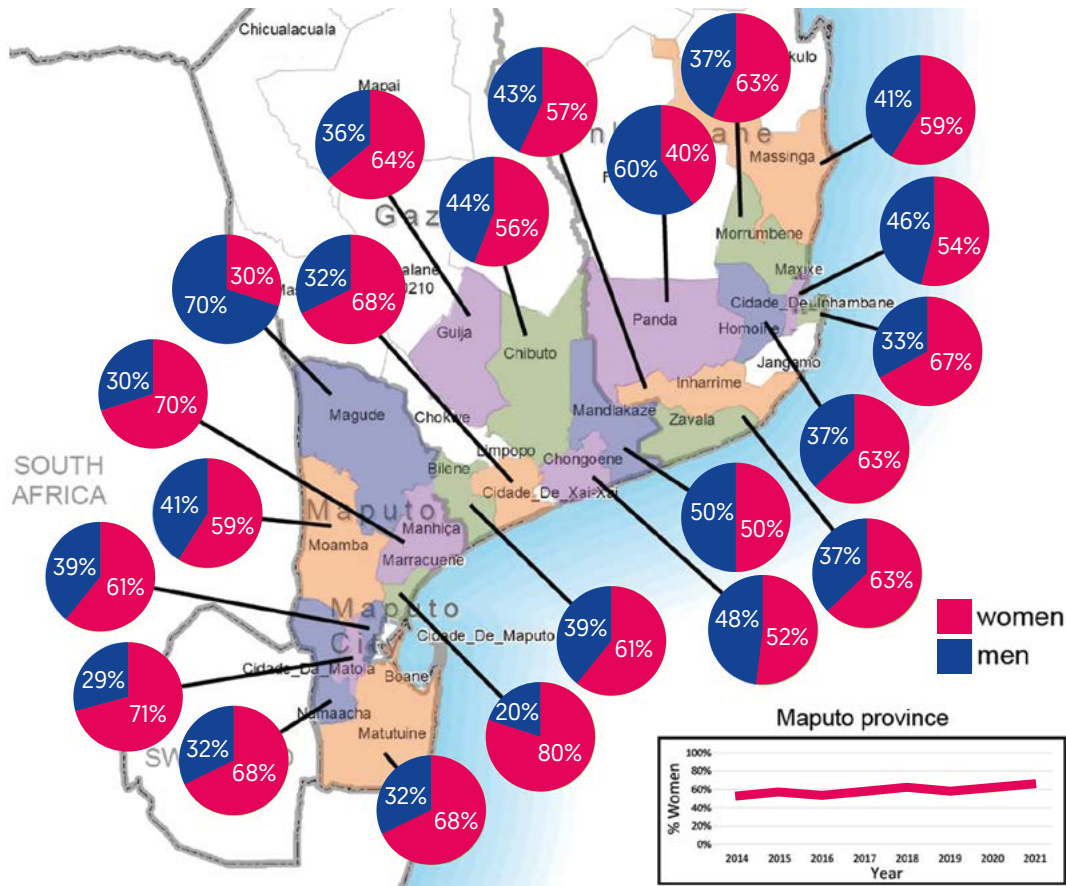
- Women made up 64% of the total labour force. In all but two of the districts, there were more women than men employed by the campaign.
- Women employed by the 2020 spray campaign had more experience than men. Among the workers with at least three years of experience, there were more than twice as many women (210) as men (101).
- This longevity suggests that women find working with Goodbye Malaria to be personally rewarding. As one spray team worker, Omak Huvo, said:

“When I was just 12 years old, I was hospitalised for 6 months because of malaria. I told myself that after I got better I wanted to become one of those people who did something to stop it. When I turned 18, I enrolled in a government spraying programme and eventually started working for Goodbye Malaria. I have been able to help save lives for the past 7 years.”

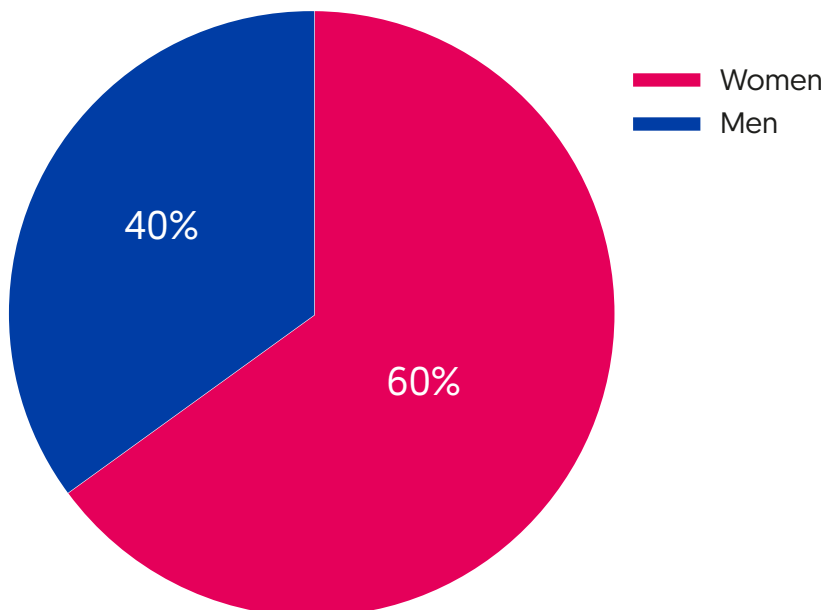
- The campaign ensured that women not only had opportunities as spray operators but also as leaders. 60% of the spray team leaders with at least two years of experience were women.



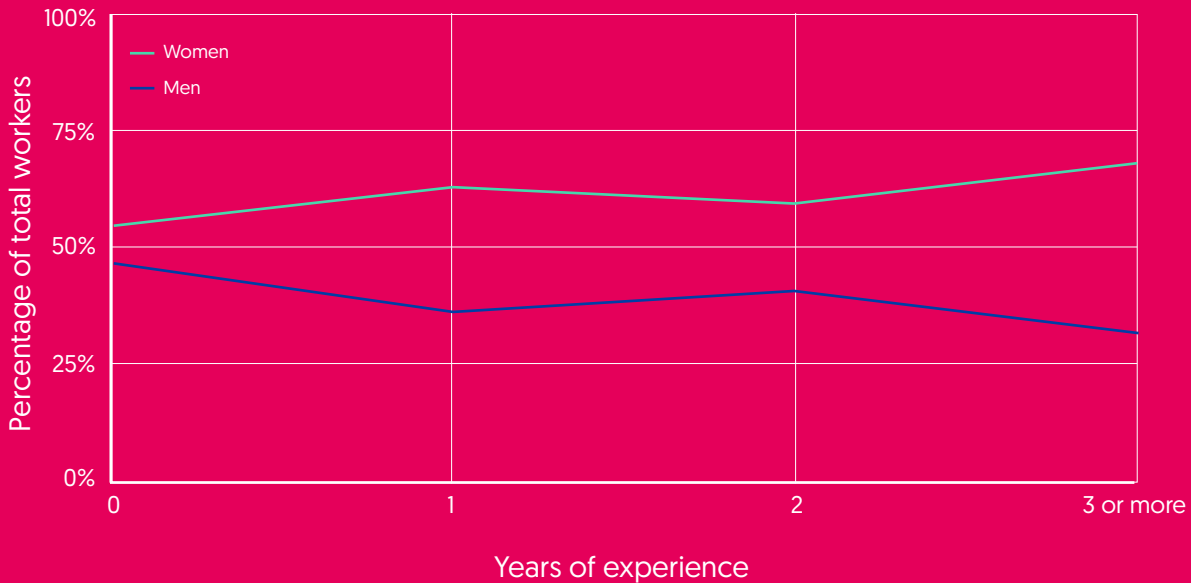
Percentage of Women versus Men in District Spray Operator Teams (2021)



Most team leaders with at least two years of experience are women



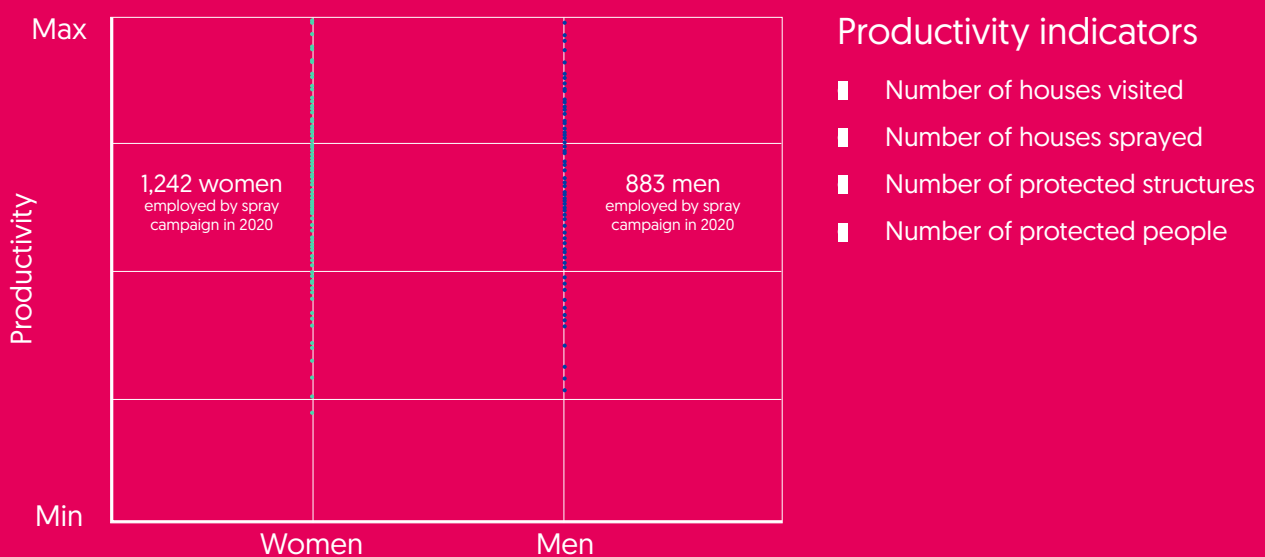
Spray campaign employs more women than men at every level of experience



Performance of women in spray programmes

An evaluation found no difference in the productivity of women versus men based on an analysis of the following indicators: number of houses visited, number of houses sprayed, number of protected structures and number of protected people.

No Statistically Significant Difference in the Productivity of Women and Men



These findings are consistent with PMI's Africa Indoor Residual Spraying (AIRS) Project observations from 2015 which found that the difference in the number of houses that women and men could spray was less than 1.2 households per day (Donner et al. 2017).

The impact on women

Working on Goodbye Malaria's mitigation teams has powerfully impacted the women who do this work. One Team Leader, Adelaide, a 47-year-old mother of six from Mozambique, has a son who contracted malaria in 2016.

"Knowing and hearing that malaria is a disease that kills, I was very worried when the boy had this disease of malaria." Fortunately, Adelaide was able to get her son to a local hospital where he received treatment that helped him recover. He is now a healthy adult and works as a police officer.

Adelaide became involved in the fight against malaria after her husband had an accident at work and was forced to retire due to disability. She remembers, "seeing my family's situation, that my husband cannot do other things to help us at home, I decided to apply." Adelaide began her work with Goodbye Malaria as an Information, Education and Communication [IEC] Officer and quickly climbed the ranks to become a Spray Operator and then a Team Leader.

But for Adelaide this work is more than a job. It's a way to support her family while also helping her community. "The reason I joined Tchou Tchou Malaria was to help my family and resident families in neighbourhoods where we are doing the work, so that we can all be at ease."

"As long as we are spraying, there will be no problems of malaria existing in us, because we are always protected, because we are spraying houses. Thus, while we are spraying houses, we are not afraid of malaria defeating us."



Adelaide, pictured above

Call for action and commitment to empower more women in vector control

The partnership between Goodbye Malaria and IVCC has laid a strong foundation for understanding the contributions of women as part of IRS teams and in leadership positions. The learnings and success of this initiative in Mozambique provide a template for how other vector control programmes can increase the role of women in intervention campaigns. Simple training and equipment modifications will likely attract more women and enhance the overall impact of these programmes.

Goodbye Malaria and IVCC have already begun the process of analysing data from the 2021 spray campaign. The initial results of that analysis indicate that women continue to play a leading role in implementing IRS with women representing more than 60% of the total spray team of 2,993 workers. Goodbye Malaria and IVCC will be sharing the results of a thorough analysis of the 2021 spray campaign data in the near future.

Goodbye Malaria is looking forward to continuing its pioneering work in empowering women and sharing lessons learned in the hope that women will have more opportunities to fight malaria and other vector-borne diseases, around the world.