



The Role of Media Campaign in India's Quest to Eliminate Malaria by 2030: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: Good health and wellbeing is the third sustainable development goal among a collection of seventeen sustainable development goals that was etched by United Nations General Assembly in order to provide a better future and make this world a much more sustainable place to live for everyone. Nations across the globe ensuring on healthy lifestyle and wellbeing is essential to sustainable development. Among a host of targets under good health and wellbeing like reducing the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births, strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse and others, this paper analyses a prime target, to end the epidemic of malaria by 2030 and how effective media campaigns in India are playing an active role in achieving this target. The research methodology that has been adapted to draw the critical analysis is based on the qualitative approach of case study research of the various media campaigns and content analysis of trending hash tags on social media platforms advocating the end of malaria by 2030.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Development Communication, Strategic Communication, Community Participation, Media Campaign

I. INTRODUCTION

Malaria, a life-threatening disease, caused by parasites (*plasmodium*) that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes. The infected mosquito is described as a malaria 'vector' because it spreads the disease but doesn't actually cause the disease. Malaria in spite of being curable and preventable claims a lot of lives across the globe. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in one of its reports points out that in 2015, there were roughly 212 million malaria cases and an estimated 429,000 malaria deaths. The symptoms are identical to that of flu. Initial symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, shivering which if not detected and treated at the right time may lead to severe anaemia, difficulties in breathing, organ failure,

eventually leading to death.

Malaria has posed a serious problem for a country like India since centuries. Details of this disease (which is termed as *Malaria*) can also be found in ancient Indian medical literature like *Atharva Veda* and *Charaka Samhita*. The outbreak of malaria in India imposed two serious problems, (a) Imposed enormous economic cost and (b) Immense amount of human misery. India being the second most populous country in the world, has achieved a lot of socio-economic progress since its independence from the British rule.

II. INDIA AND MALARIA SCENARIO

Malaria remains a major public health problem worldwide and it also affects the sociological and economic status of a country apart from other prominent factors. Malaria is often termed as the disease of the poor. Tracing back the history of malaria in India, we realise that malaria epidemics occurred throughout India and was not limited to a definite geographical area. To an extent the development of railways in India under the British rule played an active role in the spread of malaria throughout India. The construction of railway embankments and ridges provided a number of breeding sites for the malaria vectors while the laborers' probably introduced different types/variety of the parasite to the areas in which they worked. Figures associated to the outbreak of malaria in Punjab and Bengal show an alarming high morbidity and mortality rate. In the 1920s, Bengal suffered a severe malaria epidemic which resulted in the deaths of over 7,30,000 infected people. During the second world war (1943), Bengal witnessed deaths of 6,80,000 infected people followed by 7,63,220 in 1944, all due to this deadly disease.

India, contributing the largest number of cases and deaths related to malaria in the South-East Asia region, is undoubtedly

an important country in the context of global malaria elimination. 'Elimination' can be defined as the disappearance of transmission of an infection from a definite geographical area within a country, a region or a continent, such that the intended place becomes ultimately free of the infection\ disease or reduction of case transmission to a very low level where the disease stands no longer as a public health problem or social menace. On the other hand, 'Eradication' can be defined as the successful extinction of the pathogen causing infections where it has disappeared from all the countries of the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines eradication of a disease as the achievement of a status '*whereby no further cases of a disease occur anywhere, and continued control measures are unnecessary*'.

To facilitate sustainable development, and help the world build up a sustainable society, the Government of India (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare) has developed a National Framework for Malaria Elimination (2016-2030) which aims to eliminate malaria throughout the entire country by 2030 and maintain malaria free status in areas where malaria transmission has been interrupted and a National Strategic Plan (NSP, 2017-2022) with the aim to eliminate malaria (zero indigenous cases) by 2022.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

- 1) *To analyse the impact generated by trending hastags such as #EndMalaria and #FreedomFromMalaria on various social media platforms.*
- 2) *To highlight the gaps existing in India's malaria landscape.*

Methodology:

The methodology that was applied by the researcher to conduct this study includes content analysis of trending hashtags such as #EndMalaria and #FreedomFromMalaria.

IV. CAMPAIGNS AGAINST MALARIA

India, a culturally diverse and vast country, with a population of 1.3 billion people, is committed to being malaria free by 2030. The two major challenges that has cropped up to eliminate malaria in a developing country like India include, shortage of funds to run the campaigns for malaria elimination and immense difficulty in accessing remote areas affected with malaria.

Mediums that are used to communicate to the general public are known as mass mediums. Common platforms for mass media are magazines, newspapers, television, radio and the internet. A media campaign can be defined as a coordinated promotional effort to establish or reinforce certain goals using one or more mass media platforms.

In the last few years social media has grown at a rapid rate. India is using the power of social media as an important tool of development communication to improve the quality of health and lifestyle of all its citizens. The World Health Organisation

(WHO) recently released its World Malaria Report 2018 and India fortunately does not feature among the top three countries with highest malaria burdens. The report highlights that over the period 2016 – 2017 India has registered a 24% decrease in malaria cases.

In today's world, hashtags on social media play a crucial role in the generation of awareness across a lot of people. They help in starting a conversation, generate awareness and build up a community around a definite topic. Social media has penetrated almost all sections of the society. 'Malaria No More' is a not for profit organization that aims to end malaria. They visualize a scenario for this world where no one dies from the bite of a mosquito. Malaria No More (MNM) expanded its operations to support India's goal to eliminate malaria by 2030. Their main aim is to reduce new cases and deaths related to malaria with the use of new technologies, innovative strategies and accurate data. #FreedomFromMalaria and #EndMalaria are trending hashtags on social media platforms that generates awareness on the Indian malaria landscape. The primary goals of these trending hashtags include educating the mass about the present status of malaria in India, imparting knowledge to the mass about how to fight malaria and the significance progress achieved in fighting malaria and the significant work ahead to completely end malaria. Designated by a symbol (#) hashtag is basically a keyword used to describe topics on various social media platforms, especially twitter and facebook. It can also be described as a non-hierarchical method to describe about some topic or situation or any social menace. The content analysis of #FreedomFromMalaria and #EndMalaria reveal that contents uploaded under the larger umbrella of these hashtags focus mainly on three things namely; (a) development of vaccines and their application (b) raising funds (c) generation of awareness and a building up a zero tolerance attitude towards malaria.

The development of vaccine is a long and complex procedure which often takes upto 20 – 25 years. They are a light for the millions of people plagued or affected directly or indirectly by any disease that is a threat to human existence. Under these trending hashtags one thing is very certain that posts on the development of vaccination are portrayed with an optimistic attitude. Distribution of anti-malarial, pilot launch of malaria vaccine in various countries and also stories on how the first malaria vaccine was administered on a Malawi girl named Lusitana, make up most of the contents that can be segregated under the column of development of vaccines and application.

Any organised activity of raising money for any social or political or other institutional cause can be termed as a fundraiser. Funds are very important to combat malaria and end it by 2030. Funding to combat malaria does not necessarily mean funding the programme with money but also with nets, anti malarial or mosquito repellents to name a few. These hashtags often collate together all the fundraising campaigns going on to combat malaria globally. Apart from this it regularly updates all

pledges taken by the government of various countries on how they will help to end malaria throughout the world. Celebrity endorsements also play a prominent role in fundraisers.

V. GAPS EXISTING IN INDIA'S MALARIA LANDSCAPE

The efforts of WHO along with other NGO's and initiatives taken by the government, has helped in prevention of malaria to an extent but the scenario is still grim in India. The research reveals the following gaps in India's malaria landscape that must be looked upon at the earliest.

1) *Less Reporting of Malaria Cases:* In India, a lot of cases go unreported as malaria is dominant in rural areas. There is a huge gap in exact cases and reported cases of malaria. Lack of trained professionals in rural health centers is also a barrier in such areas where acute cases of malaria and death go unreported.

2) *Status of Vaccine for Malaria:* The Government of Malawi recently launched the world's first malaria vaccine. It will be followed by Ghana and Kenya in the near future. India's position pertaining to this vaccine on test run is skeptical. All countries working towards the elimination of malaria must maintain a coordinated effort to work on achieving this unified goal.

3) *Allocation and Monitoring of Funds:* The Government of India allocates funds to run the programmes devised to combat malaria at a local, regional and national level. There is no serious monitoring activity undertaken by the government for the programmes operational to control or prevent malaria.

4) *Inadequate Awareness Programmes:* Apart from few programmes generating awareness on malaria, no initiatives have been undertaken incorporating new methods of awareness. Building up communication with the mass on how to fight malaria is almost negligible.

5) *Inappropriate Sanitation Facilities:* Although the Government of India has initiated programmes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (one of the most significant campaigns focusing on cleanliness) sanitation remains a major problem acting as a pertinent barrier in the combat against malaria.

VI. DISCUSSION

The campaign strategy that is being followed by the Government of India to end malaria by 2030 is in its initial stages. Although it has been developed to support the goals listed in the National Framework for Malaria Elimination (2016-2030), it must be revised at the earliest and deserves critical attention. Media campaigns designed to eliminate malaria by 2030 must address two key things (a) how to prevent malaria (b) if diagnosed, how to treat malaria, how to ask for help from the nearest hospitals or primary health centers or rural health centers. It must be decided through which mediums the campaign must be carried out to combat malaria. As malaria is not limited to rural areas, the campaign designed must also cater to the generation of today incorporating the use of new media. To build up and follow one campaign strategy would not cater to the diverse citizens of India, all equally vulnerable to this disease.

Community mobilization and behaviour change

communication is an essential strategy that can be adopted to eliminate malaria as it cuts across all strategies by promoting positive behaviour among the citizens for the prevention and subsequent control of malaria. It also entails demand creation, whereby communities can make informed choices that will result in better health and increased overall demand for effective services. Eminent scholars who have worked on the domain of development studies like Mody, Melkote & Steeves, Hedebro and Schramm to list a few have all been pre occupied at some point of time or the other how changes occur, why changes occur and how precisely the change occurs.

The Government of India (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare) observes Anti Malaria month every year in the month of June. Still, at this juncture these standalone activities are not enough to inculcate awareness about malaria among the citizens. In the preamble of Anti-Malarial month campaign certain measures are stated on how to control malaria. Some of the listed remedies includes (a) treatment through village based community volunteers (b) drug distribution centers (c) fever treatment depots but the entire problem resides on inappropriate communication. People are not aware about who are the respective community volunteers they must reach out to in case they have high fever on any other symptom that aligns with malaria. Drug distribution centers and fever treatment depots must properly communicate their exact location, their availability and work hours if any and how people will further benefit from all these centers.

Strategic communication or purposeful use of communication that is designed in order to achieve definite goals must be adapted keeping in mind India's goal to eliminate malaria by 2030. The campaign must focus on the elimination of misconceptions about malaria transmission on first hand. There are various monetary benefits attached to malaria control activities. Money saved can further be utilized at development projects that ensures countries like India to move forward and achieve its aimed growth. Joint efforts must spring up from all sections of the society (Governments, NGOs, Universities and research institutions) to effectively control malaria. This would lead India to achieve its long cherished goal of eliminating malaria by 2030 and set an example to other countries fighting with this deadly disease every single second.

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