An innovative approach to developing a National Malaria Operations Research Agenda - Nigerian experience

Background: Prioritization of malaria operations research (MOR) is critical for targeted implementation of interventions for malaria control. Previously, National Malaria Elimination Program has prioritized MOR questions, but this has been limited to few stakeholders and their subsequent uptake was abysmally low. The Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (NFELTP) in collaboration with NMEP conducted preliminary exploratory study to identify key malaria research gaps/needs and provided data to inform revision of list of prioritized MOR questions while setting a robust national MOR agenda. We present the process of generating the data.

Methods: A twelve-member task-team comprising NMEP officers, NFELTP, and university researchers was commissioned, and the team developed a framework of activities. Planning meetings, online and self-administered paper-based surveys, key informant interviews (KII), desk review workshop, qualitative data analysis, result and report writing workshops were held. A two-day MOR agenda setting stakeholders’ workshop was conducted based on study report.

Results: A structured framework and study protocol were developed and scoping review was done. Purposively selected researchers and stakeholders experienced with MOR, the gaps/needs in each thematic area; were surveyed. Primary data were collected using online survey (n = 100), self- administered paper-based survey (n = 85), KII (n = 40), at desk review workshop (n = 22) and Delphi interviews (n = 8). Comprehensive lists of research gaps/bottlenecks and needs were generated for each thematic area in malaria control. These were used at a two-day national stakeholder workshop (n = 54) to guide the development of national MOR agenda document.

Conclusions: An innovative approach involving broad stakeholder engagement provided evidence-based information for development of a robust national MOR agenda. The processes involved are recommended for use in public health settings.