



CASE STUDY

EquityTool wealth assessment helps ensure no one is left behind

The Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health conducts treatment coverage surveys of neglected tropical diseases and uses the EquityTool to ensure programming reaches the most vulnerable



BACKGROUND

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are communicable diseases linked with poverty and poor access to clean water, sanitation, and hygienic practices. Of the 20 conditions that classify as NTDs, the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health focuses efforts on eliminating onchocerciasis, lymphatic filariasis, soil transmitted helminth, schistosomiasis, and trachoma.

One of the strategies deployed in the campaign against NTDs is preventive chemotherapy (PC) through mass drug administration (MDA), with the goal of reaching target populations living in disease endemic areas. The Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health uses a coverage evaluation survey to validate the reported treatment coverage and provide a precise estimate of PC coverage. Implementation of a wealth assessment tool that helps ensure programming reaches the most vulnerable is critical – and the EquityTool does just that. For a recent project, the EquityTool helped provide additional insight into economic demographics of targeted individuals, strengthening and improving the efficiency of NTD MDA.

CHALLENGE: ENSURING THAT MDA REACHES THE MOST VULNERABLE

A critical step in measuring the success of an NTD program is understanding treatment distribution coverage, including how many people in need of the treatment had access to treatment and also took the medicine.

Self-reported coverage is prone to error. Therefore, the World Health Organization recommends use of a coverage evaluation survey post-MDA to obtain a precise estimate of treatment coverage and to validate self-reported coverage.

The coverage evaluation survey is composed of questions to gather information on name, sex, age, school, NTD drug coverage variables, as well as reasons why an individual was not offered the medicine, and if they took the medication it asked for their motivations. While this information is important to track coverage, Afolayan Oluwale Gabriel, Principal Scientific Officer in the Division of Control and Elimination of NTDs at the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health said that it is more important to ensure interventions reach those in vulnerable households as NTDs are a disease of the poor and thrive in environments with inadequate sanitation and hygiene, making it critical to be able to identify poor households in order to reach those most in need.

SOLUTION: IDENTIFYING A RELIABLE WEALTH ASSESSMENT TOOL

The EquityTool is a simple and easy-to-use tool that allows users to measure relative wealth to the wealth of respondents of the national or urban-only population of the country. It provides a short set of questions that can be incorporated into any survey platform and is free to use. The short set of questions facilitates easy, quick, and inexpensive data collection and analysis of wealth distribution. This allows for fast and accurate comparisons across programs and populations by wealth quintiles. EquityTool data lets users make near real-time adjustments in program delivery that increase organizational effectiveness and strengthen program outcomes.

The short EquityTool survey, which can be completed in a few minutes, measures household wealth based on country-specific questions. It is available for over 65 countries and survey questions are pre-translated into local languages. The questionnaire identifies what percentage of respondents are in each national or urban wealth quintile and supplies automated analysis or statistical code to calculate the results. Compatible with any data collection platform – even paper-based systems – the EquityTool requires only six to 18 questions from the DHS Wealth Index for a respondent's country, reducing the number of variables needed for accurate wealth assessment.

The Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health adopted the EquityTool to determine if access to NTD interventions were reaching those most in need, based on household wealth status, to ensure households in the lowest wealth quintiles were reached. The Nigeria EquityTool's 11 questions were integrated in the general coverage evaluation survey to better understand household wealth, ultimately allowing for improved efficiency of NTD MDA in low-resource areas. "The EquityTool is a very simple tool to measure the wealth category of people living in a particular household," said Mr. Afolayan.

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RESULTS: USING DATA TO DRIVE DECISION-MAKING

The coverage evaluation survey, and the 11 questions integrated from the EquityTool, was implemented in 30 randomly selected communities for each of the 10 local government areas (LGAs) that spanned across four states and four geopolitical zones. In total, 26,548 respondents were interviewed between August 2021 and May 2022. The majority (70%) of the LGAs reported meeting the minimum coverage threshold of 65% for lymphatic filariasis intervention and were deemed to be successful MDAs.

However, the EquityTool data depicted significant proportions of individuals, particularly within the two poorest wealth quintiles, were left behind in three of the LGAs, as access to treatment was skewed in favor of wealthier households. This illustrated the significant relationship between the wealth quintile of respondents and access to the NTD intervention. Drawing from this data, the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health was able to reprioritize resources to ensure that lower quintile individuals were prioritized in getting access to medicines in the MDA cycle.

The EquityTool further provided insight to the importance of addressing wealth in surveys and has become a “household tool” for the Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme of Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health. The findings informed the review of standard operating procedures and have influenced a standardized approach to conducting the coverage evaluation survey. The EquityTool has provided evidence that guides decision-making at the national level.

Lessons learned

- The EquityTool provided a simple and objective way to measure wealth.
- The EquityTool helps to mitigate biased reporting.
- There can be a relationship between wealth and access to NTD intervention.
- Real-time wealth assessment data improves client targeting and conserves resources.
- It is important to incorporate equity-based questions into all coverage surveys.

NEXT STEPS

As of September 2022, the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health is revising the standard operating procedures for conducting coverage evaluation surveys. The EquityTool will be included as an integral component of the revised edition and will be used for wealth assessment of NTD interventions across Nigeria.

M4M can help you use the EquityTool in your project. For more information, contact communications@m4mgt.org

For more information on Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Health’s use of the EquityTool, contact oluwoleafolayan@yahoo.com.

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