

BEST PRACTICES AND ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR MALARIA ELIMINATION

A CASE STUDY OF THE CSO PLATFORM IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION
– DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CSO PLATFORM & ASIA PACIFIC
REGIONAL LEARNING HUB (APRLH) BY SEVEN ALLIANCE

About the CSO Platform

The Civil Society Organization (CSO) Platform for Health Equity and Inclusiveness (or The CSO Platform), formerly known as the Malaria Free Mekong, is a regional network of over 60 community and civil society groups across the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Established in 2014 with support from the Global Fund's Regional Artemisinin Initiative (RAI) grant, the Platform was created to ensure that the voices of civil society and communities, particularly those from border, migrant, and ethnic populations, are meaningfully represented in regional malaria elimination efforts. It has a 15-member steering committee and a secretariat to support implementation of the planned activities, which is currently hosted by the Malaria Consortium, historically hosted by Raks Thai Foundation, and ALIGHT South East Asia Program.

The following engagement activities have been critical to ensuring that community perspectives are authentically and meaningfully reflected in policies and programming:

- Initiating **field visits and community dialogues to capture real-time feedback** on malaria health services and triangulating information with communities and local stakeholders;
- Ensuring **community representation and participation** at policy-level country coordinating mechanism (CCM) with national malaria programs, and country stakeholders;
- Providing **capacity building and co-developing tools** with community and CSO networks to improve malaria services and activities during program implementation;
- Facilitating **cross-country and cross-border discussion**, exchange visits, and peer learning of communities and CSOs across the subregion; and
- Navigating **direct feedback and funding request** through RAI RSC CSO representative and advocating for community perspectives in regional decision-making spaces.

Best Practices & Examples

FIELD VISITS & COMMUNITY DIALOGUES:

Creating a safe space for sharing and opportunity for triangulating information

Listening directly to communities is one of the most effective ways to understand what is really happening on the ground. Combining community insights with information from program data, service providers, and local authorities helps create a fuller picture of the local malaria situations.

Importantly, **field visits and community network building activities** allow the team to see these conditions firsthand and help validate what programs share in discussions and often reveals issues that may not come up in meetings alone. The information gathered through these discussions and observations is triangulated with other forms of evidence, including routine program data, local authority reports, and presentations at country and regional consultations. Bringing these sources together highlights gaps between reported and lived realities, and identifies areas that required closer attention.

1

WHY FIELD VISITS MATTER

- Capture lived realities beyond reported data
- Observe practices firsthand
- Strengthen trust through direct engagement

2

WHAT ARE THE KEY OUTPUTS

- Community priority maps
- Insights from the field and local priorities identified by communities
- Validated baseline for planning and actions

3

WHERE TO FIND DATA SOURCES

- Program data including routine malaria data and local/national reports
- Collective learning spaces such as local, national and regional consultation meetings

4

HOW BEST TO PLAN FIELD VISITS

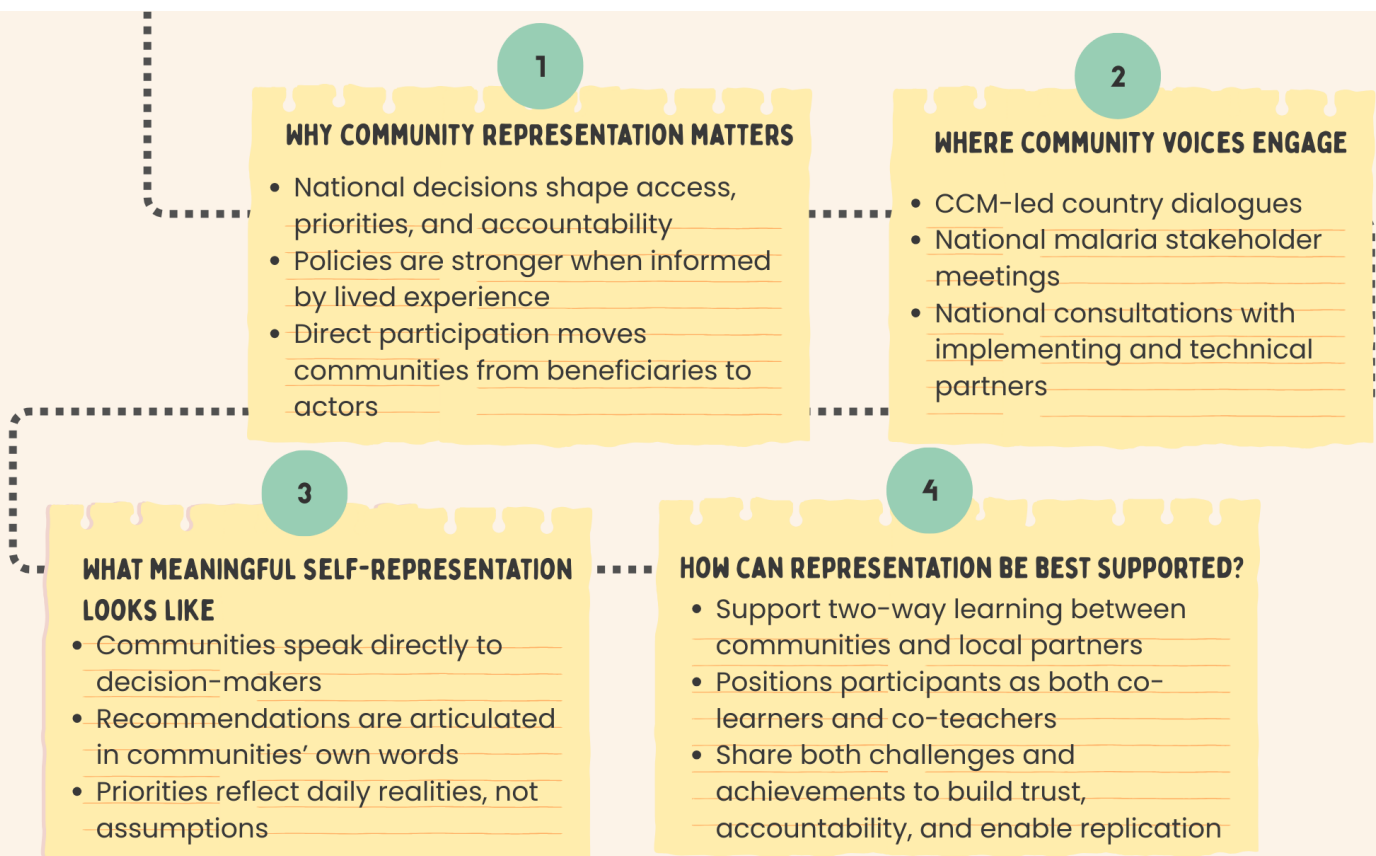
- Triangulate data with lived community experience
- Combine observation with open dialogue
- Leverage existing community networks
- Share findings back with communities

Ensuring that community voices are heard at national-level meetings is essential for fair and effective decision-making. Experience from policy advocacy among malaria stakeholders illustrates that a key opportunity lies in strengthening community self-representation in meetings where key stakeholders to the malaria program were present. Their direct participation allows communities to speak from lived experience, highlight the barriers they face, and propose solutions grounded in daily reality.

With support, **community representatives can take part in national consultations and CCM-led country dialogues.** A crucial part of this support is building confidence and capacity of local voices and providing opportunities for the communities to articulate their recommendations and priorities directly to decision-makers. Applying an inclusive and multilingual approach in these consultations can improve the quality and legitimacy of national discussions, as well as ensures that advocacy reflects real community

ELEVATING COMMUNITY VOICES IN NATIONAL DECISION-MAKING:

Meaningful community representation in multi-stakeholder meetings



BUILDING CAPACITY & CO-DEVELOPING TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH SERVICES:

Community-led monitoring (CLM) for malaria elimination

Equitable, inclusive health services require active participation from both providers and the communities they serve. Key community members and health workers should regularly monitor services, identify challenges, and share ideas. Their observations, from delays and stockouts to local innovations, offer vital insights for improving malaria programs.

Capacity building plays a key role in supporting the community in this engagement. A key notable approach is **the development of community-led mechanisms (CLM) for structured feedback from service users and wider community members**. These mechanisms create regular spaces for community members to share concerns, report service gaps, and co-design solutions with government and non-government service providers. In the remotest communities, such mechanisms have been shown to support early detection of service issues and strengthen collaboration between local communities and health actors. [See Regional CLM Guideline](#)

1

WHY COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING MATTERS

- Active community participation is essential to creating equitable and inclusive services
- Communities observe service gaps first-hand
- Local insights complement routine program data

2

WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN MONITOR

- Delays in service delivery
- Essential equipment stockouts such as medicine, diagnostic tools, bed nets
- Vulnerable groups and access barriers in remote settings
- Local health priorities related to or beyond malaria

3

HOW SHOULD CAPACITY BUILDING AND CO-DEVELOPMENT BE ORGANIZED

- Tailored training sessions for community members and implementing CSOs
- Joint development and refinement of monitoring tools to reflect local reality
- Peer exchange from different sites

4

WHAT SUPPORTS CLM PROCESS BEST?

- Initiate a regular forums for sharing community feedback and joint review of service gaps
- Encourage communities to co-design of solutions with government and CSOs
- Support and share local innovations and adaptive practices

Sharing knowledge across borders helps communities and their local CSOs learn faster, adapt smarter, and strengthen malaria services together. Information gathered from the aforementioned field visits, capacity building activities, and consultations is not only used within each country but also regularly shared across countries to support collective learning and problem-solving.

To facilitate this exchange, communities and CSO networks participate in **cross-country learning activities**, for example, peer-learning activities, exchange visits, webinars as well as through websites, social media and networking. These opportunities allow participants to **observe how communities and border areas address similar challenges, share practical tools, and adapt useful ideas to their own contexts.**

[See Integrated Diseases Guidebook](#)

FACILITATING CROSS-COUNTRY & CROSS-BORDER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

1

WHY CROSS-COUNTRY LEARNING MATTERS

- Malaria-endemic communities may face similar risks and constraints
- Shared learning accelerates adaptation and innovation
- Collective problem-solving strengthens services for mobile and border populations

2

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES AND PLATFORM OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE

- In-person peer learning events
- Virtual exchanges and webinars
- Cross-border exchange visits
- Online platforms
- Collaborative tool development

3

WHAT COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERS GAIN

- Observe how others address shared challenges
- Exchange practical tools and approaches
- Adapt ideas to local and border contexts
- Strengthen regional CSO and community networks

4

HOW CAN LEARNING BE BEST FACILITATED?

- Provide multilingual facilitation and interpretation
- Build confidence such as familiarizing representatives with the agenda and format of the meeting
- Address power balance between stakeholders

AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY VOICES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional platforms, especially the RAI RSC, serve as key decision-making spaces where community realities can directly shape funding priorities and program direction for malaria elimination.

By channeling **direct feedback and funding requests through the CSO Representatives in the regional platform**, lived experiences from the field meaningfully inform regional-level decisions that shape service delivery across countries. This process ensures that the development of the Global Fund's RAI grants remains grounded in the realities of communities and local implementers, aligning investments with what matters most to those affected.



Photo: Attapue province, CSO representatives and the Platform Secretariat discussed with the communities about the current practices and challenges and prepare for CLM implementation and [gender equality, disability, and social inclusion \(GEDSI\)](#) data collection. These data and stories are used to advocate for practical, community-informed solutions. Once implementation begins, these same insights form the baseline for ongoing monitoring and accountability efforts.

Guidance & Tips

Ground and triangulate data with lived community experience



- Combine dialogues, field visits, and local data to synthesize evidence-based report.
- Observe practices firsthand, talk with community members, and triangulate with other sources to produce evidence-informed and practical program or service improvement.

Make it easy for communities to participate and be heard



- Include community self-representation in key stakeholder meetings and facilitate their participation and inputs in a multilingual and inclusive approach.
- Co-develop monitoring tools such as feedback dialogues or community-led reporting mechanisms that help communities identify problems early and propose solutions.

Always address what does not work, but equally share what has



- Highlight both challenges and achievements by sharing what works as well as what does not to encourage trust, accountability, and replication of effective approaches.
- Use feedback strategically by presenting insights during national and regional discussions to guide improvements and celebrate achievements.

Support two-way learning between communities and partners



- Facilitate peer learning and information sharing among communities and implementing partners from different contexts to adopt and adapt successful approaches.
- Support local coordination mechanisms through meetings and volunteer networks to ensure continuity of services for the most vulnerable populations.

Address diversity and inclusion so no one is left out



- Invest in language access and accessible tools by providing translation, non-literate, and disability-adapted materials so all community members can participate confidently.
- Actively include underrepresented groups by tailoring field visits and community dialogues to their needs and removing barriers that limit their participation.

Maximize impact even when funding is tight



- Integrate engagement with routine activities by combining community dialogues with monitoring and training visits to maintain contact even with limited resources.
- Prioritize high-impact moments by focusing available funds on critical activities, while also document and share these efficiently in reusable formats (reports, briefs, videos) to maximize their value for multiple meetings or funding cycle.



Supplementary documents

Learn more about the key learnings, opportunities and challenges for community engagement, as well as the key materials on best practices and examples of community engagement in our [full report](#).



Website:
www.cso-platform.org



Facebook Page:
CSO Platform



LinkedIn:
CSO Platform

