



Best Practices and Actionable Guidance for Community Engagement for Malaria Elimination

DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION
WITH THE CSO PLATFORM AND
ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL LEARNING
HUB (APRLH) BY SEVEN ALLIANCE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR MALARIA ELIMINATION IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

ABOUT THE CSO PLATFORM

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The Civil Society Organization (CSO) Platform for Health Equity and Inclusiveness (hereafter called [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) countries, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Established in 2014 with support from the Global Fund's [Regional Artemisinin Initiative \(RAI\)](#), the Platform was created to ensure that community voices—particularly those from border, migrant, and ethnic populations—are meaningfully represented in regional malaria elimination efforts. Originating as the cross-border *Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) Working Group*, it evolved into a formal mechanism that strengthened civil society participation in the RAI's Regional Steering Committee (RAI RSC), with a 15-member steering committee and a secretariat hosted, which is currently hosted by the [Malaria Consortium](#), historically hosted by [Raks Thai Foundation](#), and [ALIGHT South East Asia Program](#). Supported by the CSO Platform, two [RAI RSC Communities and CSO representatives](#) play a key role in representing communities and advocating on their behalf.

From its inception, the Platform has played a crucial role in ensuring inclusive, independent, and diverse community representation in Global Fund and RAI decision-making processes. 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.

At present, the Platform has expanded its scope beyond malaria to address broader regional priorities. Through these areas of work, the Platform continues to turn community evidence into actionable priorities at local, national and regional levels, while supporting countries in preparing for the transition from Global Fund support.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: WHO, WHAT, AND HOW

WHO IS THE COMMUNITY? The CSO Platform engaged directly with malaria affected and key populations in endemic communities:

- **Forest goers** who engage in forest visits seasonally and frequently overnight for occupational and livelihoods activities;
- **Mobile and migrant workers** who are at increased risk due to factors of frequent mobility, poor living and working conditions, and limited access to healthcare;
- **Ethnic and indigenous populations** who are disproportionately affected, often residing in hard-to-reach, forested border areas; and,
- Members of the **endemic communities** and **cross-border population**.

In addition, community health workers including **village malaria workers** and **malaria posts** are also directly engaged to ensure diverse representation and inclusion of perspectives often overlooked in formal health planning. Local CSOs, community-based organizations, and volunteer networks serve as both partners and conduits to reach these groups.

WHAT DOES THE CSO PLATFORM FOCUS ON? Key community insights are gathered to improve malaria service delivery and program implementation, particularly on:

- **Availability and accessibility** of malaria care;
- **Gaps** in service coverage and program activities; and
- Local engagement activities and interventions that **work or do not work**.

Through these engagements, safe and inclusive spaces are curated by the Platform to facilitate discussions on what has worked well, what challenges persist, and what practical strategies should guide future programming. This process results in community priority maps and stories that reflect lived realities, illustrating where services are missing and which interventions are effective.

HOW DO WE ENGAGE? Multiple, complementary mechanisms facilitate this engagement:

- **Field visits and community network building** in high-risk areas at least once a year in each country prior to the regional CCM (RAI RSC) meeting to gather updates and feedback on malaria situations and available services;
- **Community consultations** are organized twice a year through the Global Fund RAI implementing partners and during the field visits in order to collect insights and develop priorities ahead of official dialogues; and
- **Routine program monitoring** activities are implemented to monitor program performance and obtain direct feedback from communities during the three-year grant implementation.

Following these engagements, the Platform, together with the local CSO sub-recipients, validates priorities and proposes solutions that align with the national malaria strategic plan and country priorities. This evidence is then consolidated and shared with the key stakeholders, including the national malaria program, WHO, Principal Recipients, and the Global Fund country teams in order to inform program design and ensure community priorities are visible and traceable within national and regional plans.

BEST PRACTICES & EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

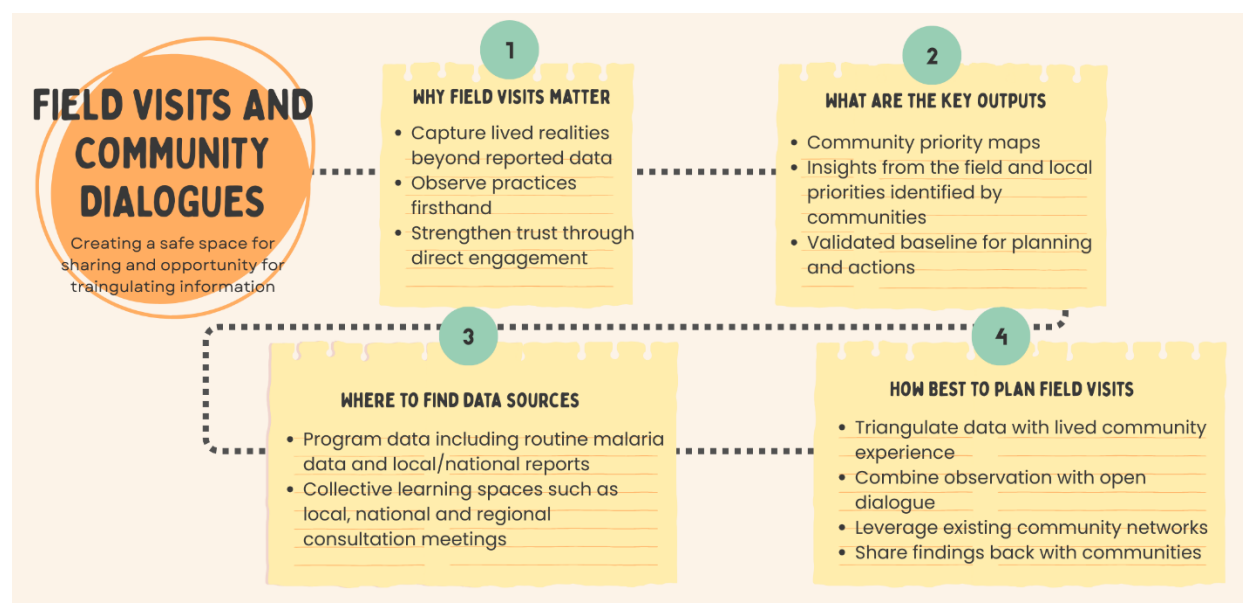
FIELD VISITS AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUES: CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR SHARING AND OPPORTUNITY FOR TRIANGULATING INFORMATION

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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.

Field visits are one of the most powerful baseline tools that the Platform uses to understand community realities. During field visits, the team observe daily practices, local barriers, and the physical and social environment that shape community's decisions. This includes how far community members has to travel, how community networks share information, or how seasonal work and mobility affect service access for vulnerable populations. When **combined with open dialogues through community network building activities**, these visits allow the Platform and the local CSO partners to see how communities actually live, work, and access services.

Importantly, seeing these conditions firsthand helps 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 was 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 identify areas that required closer attention. **The community priority maps and stories from these early engagements formed a strong baseline for the work ahead** as they ensured that communities remained central to identifying problems and shaping responses, reinforcing how evidence-informed engagement strengthens both the relevance and effectiveness of future actions.

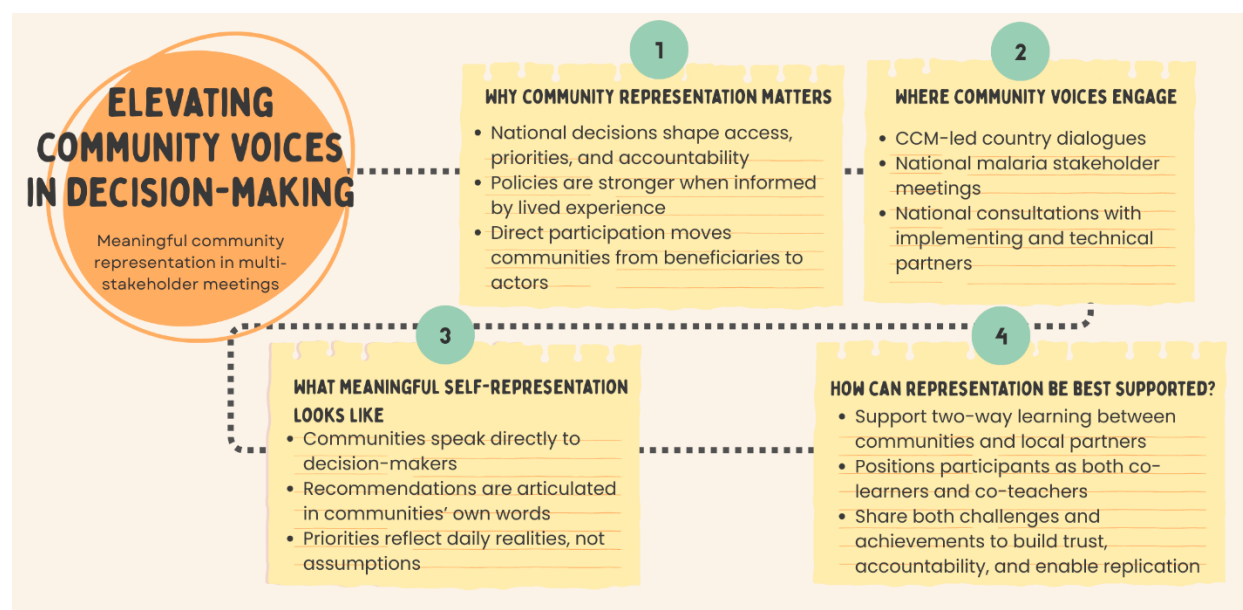


ELEVATING COMMUNITY VOICES IN NATIONAL DECISION-MAKING: MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

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, including national malaria program, implementing and technical partners, were present. Their direct participation allows communities to speak from lived experience, highlight the barriers they face, and propose solutions grounded in daily reality.

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With dedicated technical and coordination support from the CSO Platform, **community representatives are increasingly taking 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. This support goes beyond invitation – it includes structured pre-consultation briefings, simplified policy orientation sessions, translation and interpretation services, facilitation coaching, and accompaniment throughout the process. The Platform works with local CSO partners to identify and prepare representatives, consolidate community inputs in advance, and ensure that key concerns are framed in ways that align with national planning processes and funding cycles. Recognizing that many community representatives may not speak English or may feel uncomfortable in formal settings, community representatives are supported to co-develop talking points and participate in safe preparatory spaces before engaging in national forums. This approach strengthens accountability by ensuring that advocacy positions reflect real community needs and that follow-up mechanisms are in place to track whether community recommendations are reflected in malaria program implementation.

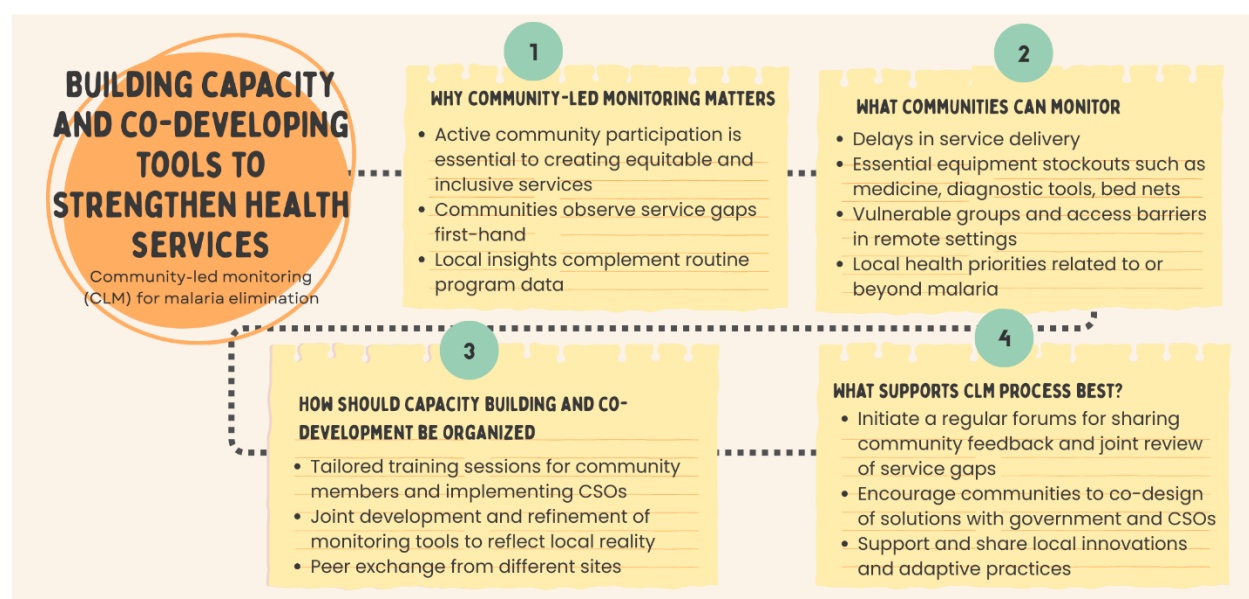


BUILDING CAPACITY AND CO-DEVELOPING TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH SERVICES: COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING (CLM) FOR MALARIA ELIMINATION

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.

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Capacity building plays a key role in supporting the community in this engagement. Key notable approach is **the development of community-led monitoring (CLM) for structured feedback from service users and recipients**. To support their implementation, the [regional CLM guideline \(2024\)](#) has been developed to support the initiatives and implementation of CLM activities in Lao PDR and Thailand where endemic communities are trained to use the CLM guideline. The guideline outlines a step-by-step toolkit for how local CSO partners co-develop CLM tools with the community representatives who will take lead in identifying priorities and collect data in their own communities. 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. Through training sessions, peer exchanges, and hands-on field exercises, the CSO Platform works with local CSOs and the communities to develop tools that make understanding CLM more responsive to communities. They are encouraged to exchange implementation experience with each other, incorporate feedback from their communities, and lead the modification of CLM guideline and communication to better respond to the local realities. In the remotest communities, such mechanism has shown to support early detection of service issues and strengthen collaboration between local communities and health actors. In the remotest communities, such mechanism has shown to support early detection of service issues and strengthen collaboration between local communities and health actors.



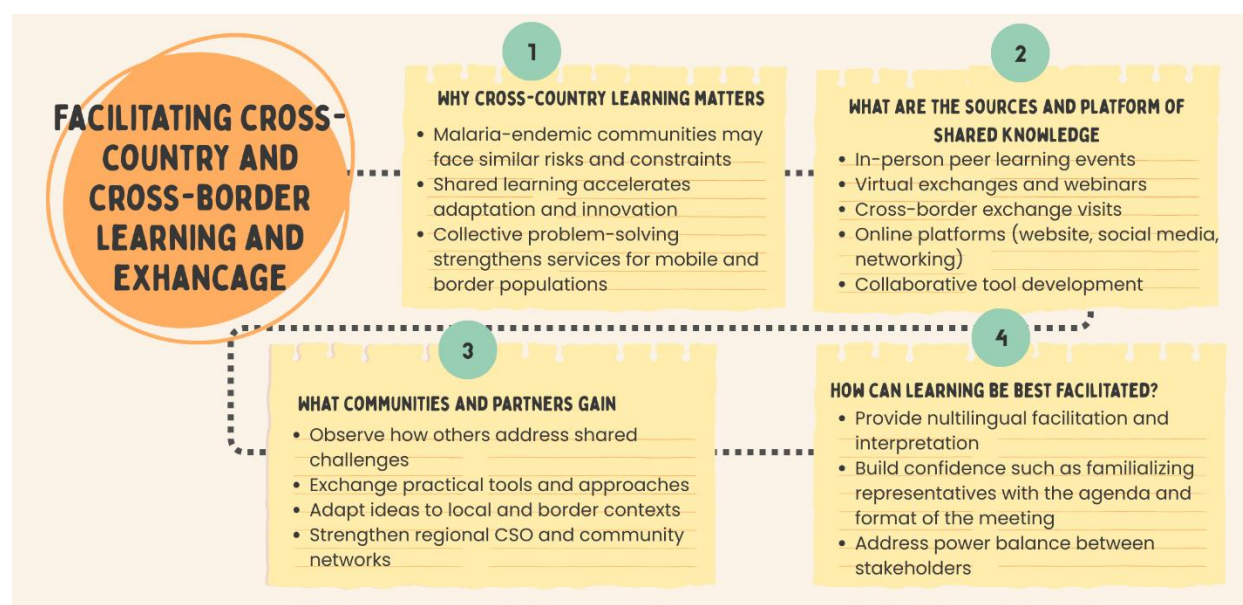
FACILITATING CROSS-COUNTRY AND CROSS-BORDER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

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.

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To facilitate this exchange, communities and CSO networks participate in **cross-country learning activities** organized by the Platform. These include in-person and virtual [peer learning activities](#), [exchange visits](#), [website](#), [webinars](#), [social media](#) and [networking](#), as well as [key tool development](#). 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. **The development of [Integrated Diseases Guidebook](#) illustrates the success of this synergy**, offering community health workers a practical toolkit to share vital health information beyond malaria.

In particular, the guidebook brings together rich information based on experiences from the field and consultation with the communities, ensuring that the content of the guideline is responsive to endemic communities. Grounded on the inputs from the [regional workshop and stakeholder consultation](#), the guidebook is produced in five languages (Lao, Khmer, Burmese, Thai and English) and user-friendly with visuals and simplified content that improve understandability. As countries progress towards elimination, addressing the wider well-being of the at-risks groups are key to ensure that malaria services remain inclusive in the last mile of elimination and in the prevention of re-introduction.



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 continuous advocacy helps ensure that community perspectives, service gaps, and unmet needs are consistently raised during the biannual RSC meetings. Systematic collection and transparent synthesis of insights from border and remote areas form the foundation of strong advocacy messages, which are then translated into clear, evidence-informed funding requests. 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.

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Photo: In Attapue province, CSO representatives and the Platform Secretariat discussed with the communities about the challenges of malaria and health service access and CLM implementation.

ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE & PRACTICAL TIPS FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Effective community engagement works best when it is practical, people-centered, and easy to integrate into everyday program activities. This section provides six evidence-informed actionable guidance that community networks, CSOs, and their partners can use to strengthen participation at all levels. Each tip is designed to help gather meaningful insights, support inclusive decision-making, and maintain strong community relationships, even with limited time or resources. These practices can be adapted to different contexts and are meant to support real-world implementation, helping programs stay responsive and grounded in what community experience.

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1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. SUPPORT TWO-WAY LEARNING BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

WHAT'S NEXT? SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As malaria transitions from a high-burden disease to one targeted for elimination, this is a timely opportunity to reimagine community engagement not as a malaria-specific activity but as a cross-cutting investment in health equity and inclusive healthcare for all.

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Sustaining these efforts requires rethinking financing structures to ensure long-term viability. Advocacy for Global Fund catalytic investments dedicated to **community engagement for health equity** can provide a foundation for institutionalizing engagement beyond the malaria sector. The CSO Platform has expanded its scope to cover [malaria and other infectious diseases](#) and broader regional priorities across ASEAN countries. This includes addressing [climate and health issues](#), [promoting the One Health approach](#), and advancing [community-based surveillance and response](#) for health security, [Gender Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion \(GEDSI\)](#), and the [Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment \(PSEAH\)](#). Such approaches not only sustain elimination gains but also build resilience to emerging and re-emerging health threats. More importantly, they would not only improve access to health services for all but also signal genuine commitment to repositioning community engagement within integrated health systems. Designing and integrating community engagement with other programs, such as maternal and child health or pandemic preparedness, together with the communities, also offers opportunities to maximize resources in overlapping geographic areas and populations.

This case study provides practical guidance and actionable tips to help community networks, CSOs, and program implementers to engage their communities effectively and meaningfully. Key iteration from the CSO Platform's experience is that meaningful participation is not a one-time activity: it is an ongoing process of listening, learning, and adapting. When communities are supported to contribute, monitor, and shape program implementations, such as in the case of malaria, health interventions become more effective, equitable, and sustainable. By applying these approaches, implementers can strengthen engagement, amplify community voices, and ensure services respond to real needs. Communities, CSOs, and partners are encouraged to adapt this guidance to their own contexts, using it to enhance participation and ensure community voices are meaningfully represented.

REFERENCES FOR KEY MATERIALS ON BEST PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Field visit reports:** <https://www.malariafreemekong.org/?s=field+visit>
- **Community network building:** <https://www.malariafreemekong.org/network-building/>
- **Community story:** <https://www.malariafreemekong.org/?s=community+story>
- **National consultation and CCM-led country dialogues:**
<https://www.malariafreemekong.org/?s=country+coordinating+mechanism>
- **A case study: Moving Steadily towards malaria elimination in times of COVID-19:**
<https://www.malariafreemekong.org/a-case-study-moving-steadily-towards-malaria-elimination-in-times-of-covid-19/>
- **Job-aid for Malaria Volunteers to safely deliver malaria services during COVID-19 Pandemic & COVID-19 guide for community healthcare worker and malaria worker:**
<https://www.malariafreemekong.org/covid-19-mitigation-tools/>
- **Regional CLM guide: A toolkit for malaria elimination and post-elimination context:**
<https://www.cso-platform.org/tools/cso-platform-regional-clm-guide-2024>
- **Integrated disease guidebook:** <https://www.malariafreemekong.org/integrated-diseases-guidebook-for-community-healthcare-worker/>
- **Regional workshop on disease integration:**
<https://www.malariafreemekong.org/regional-workshop-on-disease-integration-thailand-8-9-july-2019/>

More information could be found from www.cso-platform.org and www.malariafreemekong.org. We also would like to thank all key informants in the steering committee, CSO representative, and implementing partners for sharing their views and experience on community engagement.



Website:
www.cso-platform.org



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