The Power of Communication: SBCC as a pillar in malaria control

Malaria Commemoration Webinar – National Department of Health

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Outline

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Role of SBCC in Malaria Control

Core SBCC approaches in malaria

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SBCC in Practice: strategies and innovation

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Malaria – still a threat

Over 240 million cases globally in 2024, with 95% in Africa

In South Africa, malaria is endemic in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal

Border communities, mobile/migrant workers, pregnant women, and children under 5 are at high risk.

Medical tools are available, but behavioral barriers persist - people not using nets, delaying treatment, avoiding IRS

Goal for malaria elimination in South Africa

- WHO global strategy
  - 90% reduction in malaria incidence and mortality rate
- South Africa
  - targets malaria elimination by 2028
- Human behaviour = critical
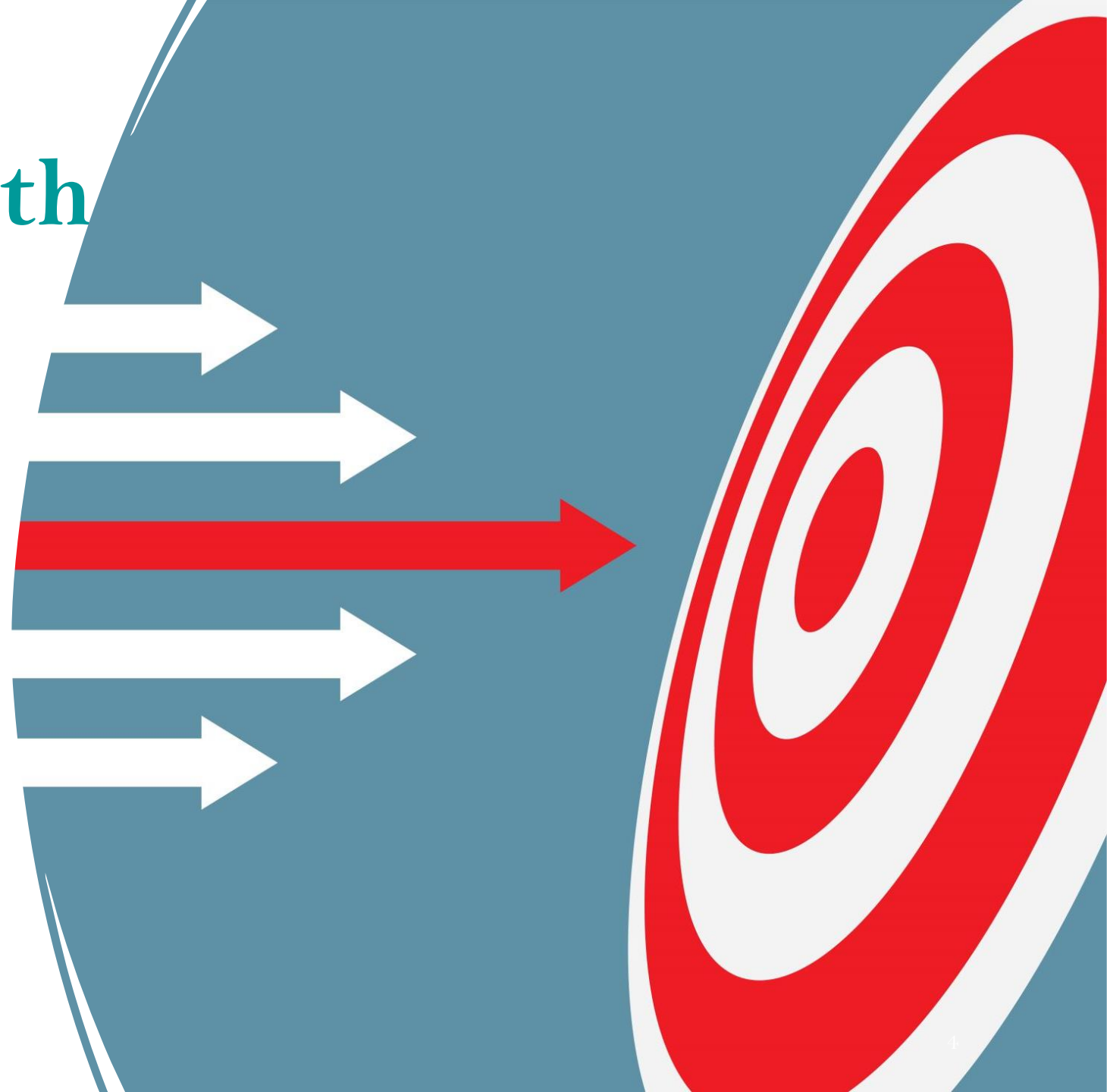
What is SBCC

SBCC – SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL CHANGE COMMUNICATION

A COMMUNICATION APPROACH THAT USES THEORY-BASED, RESEARCH-DRIVEN STRATEGIES TO INFLUENCE BEHAVIORS AND SOCIAL NORMS.

FOCUSES ON UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE'S MOTIVATIONS, CULTURAL BELIEFS, FEARS, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS.

INVOLVES MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS (I.E., HEALTH WORKERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, MEDIA, SCHOOLS, ETC.)

GOAL: PROMOTE POSITIVE HEALTH BEHAVIORS, SUSTAIN THEM, AND SHIFT HARMFUL NORMS.
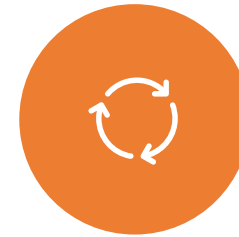
Stages of SBCC in malaria control

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

STRATEGIC DESIGN

MESSAGE AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT

IMPLEMENTATION

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Why SBCC matters in malaria control

Informs and empowers

Promotes adoption of preventive measures

**Addresses fears and misinformation**

Encourages timely treatment-seeking

Core SBCC approaches in malaria

Approaches	Examples
Interpersonal communication	Door to door visits, peer education, CHWs
Mass media	Radio, TV, billboards
Community based engagement	Drama, storytelling and music
Digital tools	SMS alerts, social media, WhatsApp group,

Arts–based engagement examples

Exploring the use of creative arts as a community engagement strategy in the context of the pilot Insect Sterile Technique programme in South Africa
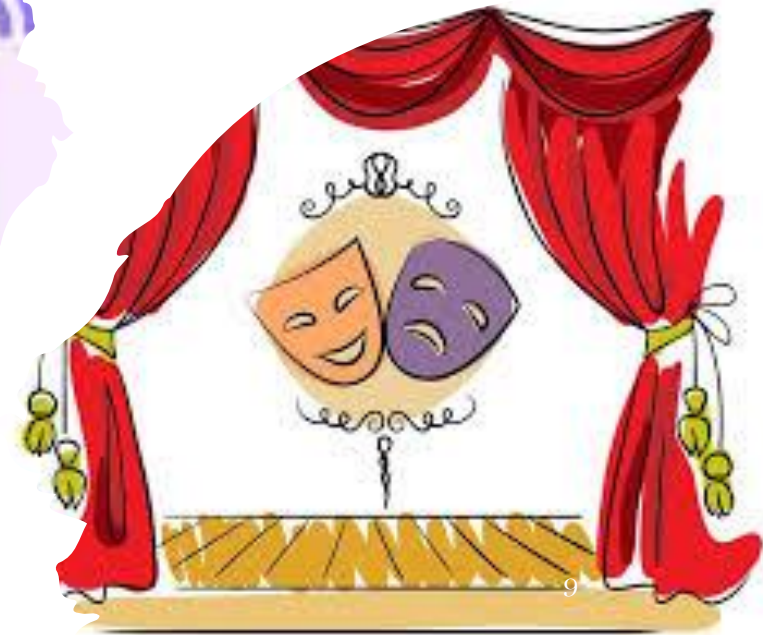
Three art forms used

- *Music*
  A local "Maskandi" artist

- *Short stories*

"umdlalo womoya," were created by a drama team

- *Drama*
  Life Orientation educators from four local schools

107.6fm
Maputaland
Community Radio

Experiences

Limited reach of interventions due to reliance on a single community event and restricted broadcast of materials (e.g., short stories aired at suboptimal times)

Logistical constraints and resource limitations affected the scale and consistency of intervention delivery

Time and funding constraints impacted the ability to conduct longer-term follow-up or expand the reach of the arts-based components

Lessons learned

Arts-based methods can be powerful tools for community engagement → Exposure alone is not enough → Community engagement needs to be continuous → Collaborating with local artists, community leaders, and media platforms

Mixed-methods approaches offered a richer understanding → Engagement is not a one-size-fits-all → Different types of engagement serve different purposes → Engagement is a process, not a tick box

SBCC in action: Prevention

Why people avoid the IRS: fear of chemicals

SBCC strategies: Address these concerns directly; promote consistent use

Positive framing: "Protect your home from mosquitoes" is more effective than fear-based messages

Gender-sensitive messaging: target audience is key

SBCC in action: Early diagnosis and treatment

Barriers to early care: Cost, distance, fear, reliance on traditional remedies.

SBCC response: Normalize testing after fever, promote public clinics, address stigma around malaria diagnosis.

Use real stories: Testimonies from survivors who sought early care.

Emphasize urgency: Malaria can worsen fast—time matters.

Building community ownership

- Involve communities in message development
- Leverage local leaders
- Use participatory methods
- Increased buy-in and sustainability

Community or Social Groups

Religious Groups/ Organizations

Schools

Health Facilities

Work Places

Challenges in SBCC implementation

One-size-fits-all messaging: doesn't work across diverse cultural groups.

Low literacy: Limits impact of written materials - need for visual and oral methods.

Funding gaps: SBCC often underfunded compared to commodities.

Behavior change takes time: Requires patience, trust-building, and consistency.

Importance of monitoring and evaluation to assess impact

Opportunities and innovations

- Arts-based approaches, school-based interventions

- Engaging influential leaders, participatory action

- Monitoring tools for behavior change

- Integrating SBCC into national strategy

- mHealth & mobile platforms: Reminders for net use, IRS days, symptom checkers.

- Youth-led campaigns: TikTok, WhatsApp storytelling by young people.
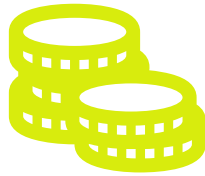
- Real-time feedback systems: Use community WhatsApp groups to gather opinions and adapt messaging.
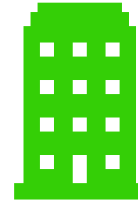
Recommendations

Integrate

Budget

Capacity building
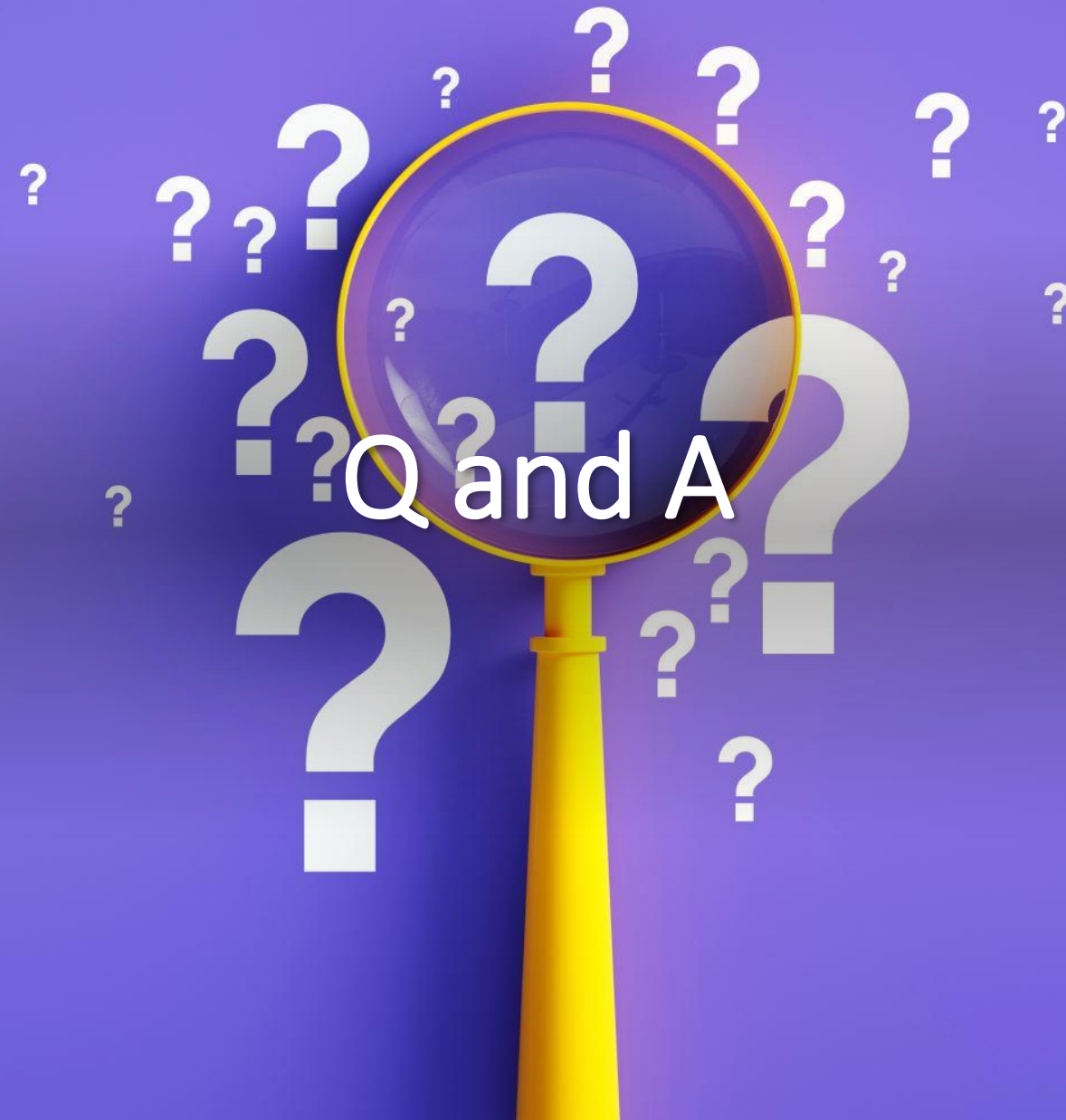
Monitoring and Evaluation

Conclusion

SBCC is not optional - it's essential

Real impact = when people understand, believe, and act

Let's invest in communication with the same urgency as commodities

Q and A