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President's Malaria Initiative  
Africa Indoor Residual Spraying Project

**AIRS**

U.S. President's Malaria Initiative

# Empowering Women as Leaders in Malaria Prevention

One of the primary control measures for malaria is indoor residual spraying (IRS). Historically, few women have been employed in IRS programs. The President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) Africa Indoor Residual Spraying Project (AIRS) implements the largest IRS project globally and protects millions of people from malaria across sub-Saharan Africa. The project's work benefits pregnant women and children, as they are most vulnerable to contracting malaria. In addition, the project actively promotes gender equality and female empowerment at all levels of its operations. The project worked with key stakeholders to identify barriers to women's participation in IRS and implemented a series of operational policies to address these barriers. Using routine programmatic data, the project actively monitors and reports against gender-related goals. Results show that including women more fully in IRS results in improved vector control outcomes while also advancing women's economic empowerment.



## Ensuring a Hospitable Work Environment

To attract and retain female employees, the PMI AIRS Project adapted the physical work environment to ensure privacy for women. The PMI AIRS Project ensures that every operational site has separate changing areas, separate bathrooms with trashcans, and separate shower areas for men and women as spray operators must change and shower after spraying to minimize the risk of insecticide contamination. To further enhance privacy, the women's showers are designed with walls that reach the ground and are high enough to ensure complete privacy. Showers have proper drainage so that others cannot see the residual water, which women requested due to sensitivity around menstruation. Spray campaigns do not begin unless operational sites

are verified as meeting these and other environmental compliance standards.

Sexual harassment is not tolerated, and all workers, both temporary and full-time staff, can anonymously report any misconduct. Sexual harassment guidelines, with a phone number to call to report any misconduct, are posted in a local language at each operational site. The project has incorporated gender and sexual harassment content into trainings given to government partners, supervisors, and seasonal employees.

To accommodate traditional norms that might prevent women from working all day alone with men to whom they are not related, the project instituted a buddy system for female spray operators. If there are women on a spray team, there must be at least two women on the team.

## Supporting Professional Advancement during the Childbearing Years

The PMI AIRS Project is committed to providing jobs to qualified staff, regardless of their gender. With spray campaigns happening annually in many of the project's countries, work on PMI AIRS can provide opportunities for professional growth as returning workers take on increasing levels of responsibility. To date, the project has trained over 21,000 women to support indoor residual spraying. The project is working with the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) in each country to recruit and hire more women, ensuring a sustainable approach to gender-integrated IRS after the project ends. The project trained 7% more women to deliver IRS in 2015 compared to 2014.

Exposure to insecticides for IRS is not safe for pregnant or lactating women. The PMI AIRS Project is committed to upholding safety standards, while also attracting and retaining female talent. All female seasonal workers take a pregnancy test every 30 days during the spray campaign. Results are delivered in private. Any woman who has signed a contract and then is found pregnant is guaranteed a position on the Project at her initial wages. Depending on her role, the teams find other positions, such as data verification assistants or mobilizers, for the pregnant worker. The objective is to retain and promote qualified women, while allowing professional growth and income generation during a pregnancy.

The project focuses on identifying women with potential for supervisory positions. These women receive mentorship and training and many return to work as team leaders or supervisors in the following year. While 25% of supervisors in 2013 were women, 2015 figures show an increase to 46%.

The project's approaches have led to increased hiring of women and a dramatic increase in the number of women in supervisory roles, all while meeting or exceeding the project's IRS targets.

For more information:

[www.pmi.gov](http://www.pmi.gov)

[www.africairs.net](http://www.africairs.net)

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## Mobile Payments Increase Women's Economic Power

In 2015, the PMI AIRS Project implemented a mobile banking system in Zambia for its seasonal workers, providing risk-free, safe and reliable payments. Facilitated by a mobile network operator, seasonal workers were able to access their money through a mobile phone SIM card. Mobile payments are helping to increase financial options and decision-making authority for workers, particularly women. With direct access to electronic funds, women now have more control over their money, allowing for independent financial planning, saving, and purchasing as the recipients can use the phones to manage their financial accounts including money deposits, transfers, and cash out.

Before working as a spray operator, Filumba Beauty was working as a volunteer counselor and had no income. Since she started working for the PMI AIRS Project three years ago, she has been promoted from spray operator to Team Leader. The money she's earned has enabled her to build a house for her and her three children and is helping to pay for her son's third year of teaching school. Beauty said, however, that she was having difficulty saving money and getting her son the money when he needed it.

"When you have cash and no bank account, it's hard to save," said Beauty. "You just use the money. I would see things and buy them. Now I don't do that. It's easy to send my son money with the mobile phone when he needs it," she added. "And using the phone is much safer." Beauty's son Richard said, "School is very stressful. We get bills and we have to pay immediately. Before, we really struggled. It's so much easier with the mobile phones. My mom seems so much stronger. It's not as stressful now and I can focus on my tests instead of worrying about bills."



**PMI AIRS Team Leader Filumba Beauty and her son Richard at the house she built with her income from the project.**