

By Gadosa Lamtey

PRIMARY funder of Tanzania's free provision of mosquito nets to expectant mothers' programme has indefinitely withdrawn their support.

The UK government yesterday announced its official halt of funding support for the National Voucher Scheme (NVS) following allegations of fund misappropriation.

It is reported that, early this month, the UK government received finding reports

compiled by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) alleging irregularities in the implementation of the program.

The findings purported widespread corruption in which unfaithful health workers colluded with private

pharmacies to sell the nets rather than offer them free of charge as intended.

In response, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Welfare Dr Kebwe Stephen told newsmen yesterday in Dar es Salaam that the government will look into the allegations and stringent legal action will be taken against any found guilty.

"We will look into the matter...any person or business that will be implicated can expect strict legal ramifications," he said.

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UK withdraws mosquito nets voucher programme

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“We will also develop new guidelines to better steer and monitor the distribution exercise,” he added noting that among other things, this time around, the mosquito nets will be distributed exclusively at clinics and health centers only.

In the wake of this development the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has announced that as of April next year a new campaign against malaria will be launched.

“This new program shall see every household provided with free insecticide treated mosquito nets (ITNs) with special focus on pregnant women and infants,” the official announced.

He said the government is already in talks with the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) seeking alternative funding for this new initiative.

Ahead of next year’s launch of the program, the minister explained that plans are already underway to commence the distribution of treated mosquito nets to school children in

southern regions as of next month.

The intended regions are Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma.

“As of August this year, families in these regions will get the treated bed nets through their children who will receive them at school,” said the Deputy Minister.

Since introduction of the National Voucher Scheme (the faulted program) a decade ago (2004), a total of 13 million bed nets have been distributed.

It is estimated that thanks to these nets, mother and infant deaths have been reduced from 75 percent in 2004 to 16 percent in 2012.

Referred to in Swahili as ‘Hati Punguzo’ the National Voucher Scheme saw treated mosquito nets sold at only 500/-

It was funded by various donors including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), United States Agency for Aid and Development (USAID), and the now withdrawn UK Department for International Development (DFID).