

Strengthening the USAID Zika Response

EXPERIENCES FROM THE ZIKA SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE WORKING GROUP

The Social and Behavior Change (SBC) Working Group for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Zika response spurred collective action among Zika implementing partners working on behavior change and community engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean. The working group—composed of technical experts from various organizations—served as a forum for partners and USAID to share and discuss issues, challenges, promising practices, and emerging data from their Zika work, as well as promote evidence-based SBC approaches among members.

The SBC Working Group was formed a year into the USAID Zika response, in November 2017, after USAID determined a need for greater coordination and harmonization among implementing partners. Breakthrough ACTION, the USAID global flagship project for SBC, convened the SBC Working Group to:

- Share and coordinate Zika prevention strategies, messages, and activities being implemented.
- Promote partner coordination, harmonize in-country SBC activities, and avoid duplication.

- Review and analyze the evidence supporting the most effective Zika prevention behaviors.
- Gain consensus on a core set of evidence-based Zika prevention behaviors and messages to promote across regional and local activities.
- Exchange experiences and knowledge on successes and challenges in Zika prevention.
- Reflect on and document lessons learned during implementation.

The SBC Working Group membership primarily represented implementing partners focused on SBC, community engagement, knowledge management, and care and support for affected families, although vector control and health systems strengthening partners also participated, lending valuable expertise.

For two years, from November 2017 to September 2019, the group met approximately bimonthly for one-day meetings in Washington, DC, with in-person participation from U.S.-based staff and virtual participation from teams based in Latin America and the Caribbean. On average, 15 to 20 participants were present in person.

Zika Partners Involved in the SBC Working Group

Abt Associates | CARE | Global Communities | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies | Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs | Medical Care Development International | Population Council | Population Services International | Save the Children | United Nations Children's Fund | United States Agency for International Development | University Research Co.



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Working Group Achievements

PRIORITIZING ZIKA PREVENTION BEHAVIORS

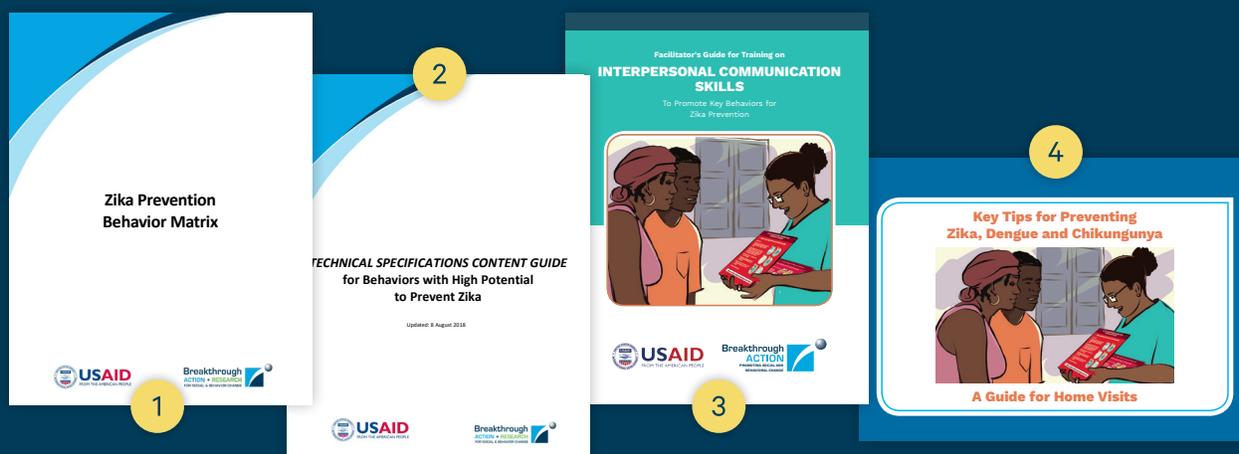
One of the foundational activities of the SBC Working Group was to conduct a robust review of evidence on the prevention of Zika and other *Aedes*-borne diseases. When the USAID Zika response began, implementing partners had to act quickly to provide support and guidance on how to prevent the spread of Zika. Various stakeholders disseminated different information and messages, which led to over 30 different prevention practices being promoted, potentially overwhelming communities and families. Additionally, some of the practices were not evidence-based, were only minimally effective, or were contradictory. Therefore, it was crucial for implementing partners working in SBC for Zika prevention to promote a harmonized set of behaviors known to be effective and to “speak with one voice” to increase the adoption of evidence-based behaviors.

USAID, Breakthrough ACTION, and Breakthrough RESEARCH led a process to prioritize behaviors, in regular consultation with the members of the SBC Working Group. Ultimately, the SBC Working Group

agreed on a set of seven key behaviors with the greatest potential for Zika prevention that would guide USAID implementing partners in focusing their SBC activities. A resulting guidance document—the *Zika Prevention Behavior Matrix*—provided a platform to support in-country coordination and harmonize prevention messages in mass media campaigns and community outreach. Additional resources were developed to translate the evidence-based behaviors into tools to help program managers understand the correct performance of key behaviors, prioritize behaviors for different audiences, train community outreach workers, and provide job aids to support community outreach workers during household visits.

“The key behaviors matrix and technical specifications were the most useful outputs [of the Zika SBC Working Group]. Placing the emphasis on the evidence base and promoting as many details on the selected behaviors as possible was a positive contribution to ensuring SBCC efficiency and efficacy.”

–USAID Zika Implementing Partners



1. [Zika Prevention Behavior Matrix](#)
2. [Technical Specifications Content Guide for Behaviors with High Potential to Prevent Zika](#)
3. [Facilitator's Guide for Training on Interpersonal Communication Skills](#)
4. [Key Tips for the Prevention of Zika, Dengue and Chikungunya: A Guide for Home Visits](#)

FACILITATING PARTNER COORDINATION

“ It has been a collegial environment to receive early feedback, pose important questions, and make sure our work is relevant for more than just ourselves. ”

–USAID Zika Implementing Partner

The SBC Working Group provided a forum for partners to share new data and reports, vet concepts, and provide project updates to enhance coordination. When the SBC Working Group first began, few members knew each other or were aware of the work of other organizations beyond their overall mandates. Over time, the group members became familiar with one another and their work creating an atmosphere that enabled brainstorming about how partners could collectively improve, identifying additional analyses or interpretations of data, forming partnerships for country activities, and reflecting on lessons learned. Importantly, partners shared results from various research and data-gathering activities, allowing all partners to collectively reflect on patterns of behaviors and distill and interpret insights. Finally, the group provided a space for partners to obtain feedback from technical subject matter experts in service delivery, vector control, and gender integration.

“ This work has increased harmony and effectiveness of Zika prevention programming across technical areas. ”

–USAID

Supporting Country SBC Working Groups

In addition to the Washington, DC-based SBC Working Group, Breakthrough ACTION supported Zika SBC working groups in three countries: the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Honduras. These working groups included SBC staff from USAID Zika implementing partners and national governments. These forums provided stakeholders with a space to discuss Zika SBC issues pertinent to each country and served as a channel for SBC technical guidance to flow from the Washington, DC-based group to their members. Country working groups evolved according to the context in each country and resulted in the following outcomes:

- In the **Dominican Republic**, the SBC Working Group served as a forum to strengthen the SBC abilities of members through audience segmentation workshops and the collaborative revision of key prevention materials.
- In **Guatemala**, USAID implementing partners and the Ministry of Health (MOH) adapted the *Technical Specifications Content Guide for Behaviors with High Potential to Prevent Zika*, a global tool, to the Guatemalan context and facilitated its adoption by the MOH as technical guidance for national Zika prevention efforts.
- In **Honduras**, the SBC Working Group harmonized SBC communication efforts among MOH and USAID implementing partners, coordinated the training of over 100 community-level volunteers in interpersonal communication, and identified USAID implementing partner activities that should be institutionalized by MOH.

Applying Lessons Learned Beyond Zika

In the final months of the Zika response, SBC Working Group members considered what had been learned from this experience that could inform future outbreak responses, including reflections on the SBC Working Group itself. Members collectively agreed that the SBC Working Group was highly valuable in supporting their work and the USAID Zika response as a whole; their feedback focused on the following 10 recommendations:

- 1 Form an SBC working group as soon as possible at the outset of an emergency response.
- 2 Prioritize evidence-based key behaviors for SBC programs at the outset of the response to harmonize SBC efforts across partners.
- 3 Leverage working groups as a forum for key stakeholders to build trust through collaborative problem solving and strengthen coordination.
- 4 Host working group meetings in-person—with an option for remote participation—and strive to create an open and trusting atmosphere among members.
- 5 Ensure that knowledge management and exchange form a core function of an SBC working group because they are essential to coordinate efforts and harmonize prevention messages from various partners.
- 6 Consult other technical areas for additional recommendations for positive and productive collaboration within SBC working groups; a history of successful groups is present in family planning, HIV, and malaria, among others.
- 7 Leverage working groups as a channel to rapidly disseminate knowledge and tools and use them as a forum for capacity strengthening when a common need is identified.
- 8 Include a wide array of relevant partners—behavior change, community engagement, communication, service provision, knowledge management, and epidemiology—because SBC cuts across many technical areas.
- 9 Include MOH SBC champions in country-level SBC working groups to support sustainability and the transfer of lessons learned.
- 10 Harmonize efforts and ensure a shared vision between country and headquarter working groups.