

# Strategy to improve access to diagnosis and treatment of *rhodesiense* human African trypanosomiasis (r-HAT) in Uganda

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## Introduction

Human African trypanosomiasis is a fatal neglected tropical disease affecting poor communities in rural settings of sub-Saharan Africa. Its diagnosis is cumbersome and there are few treatment options that have been in use for a very long time.

A clinical trial investigating the efficacy and safety of a new oral drug, fexinidazole, for *rhodesiense* human African trypanosomiasis (r-HAT) was initiated at Lwala Hospital. However, a reduction in the number of reported cases was an impediment to timely enrolment of patients into the clinical trial.

The objective was to develop a strategy to a) hasten enrolment of patients into the study and b) improve access to diagnosis & treatment for r-HAT in the medium to long term.

## Materials and Methods

We reviewed findings from an ethnographic study on the perceptions and practises of the local community and peripheral health center staff about r-HAT in Eastern Uganda in 2019, to help develop the strategy.

Different stakeholders at national & subnational levels were engaged in the review. The process was participatory, involving back and forth review by stakeholders.

The team identified key communication issues, the target audience(s), key activities, and delivery channels.

*Participants from Ugandan Ministry of Health at the workshop to define communication strategy and materials for HAT*



Photo: Ugandan Ministry of Health

## Results

### *Strengthening of social mobilisation in the local community*

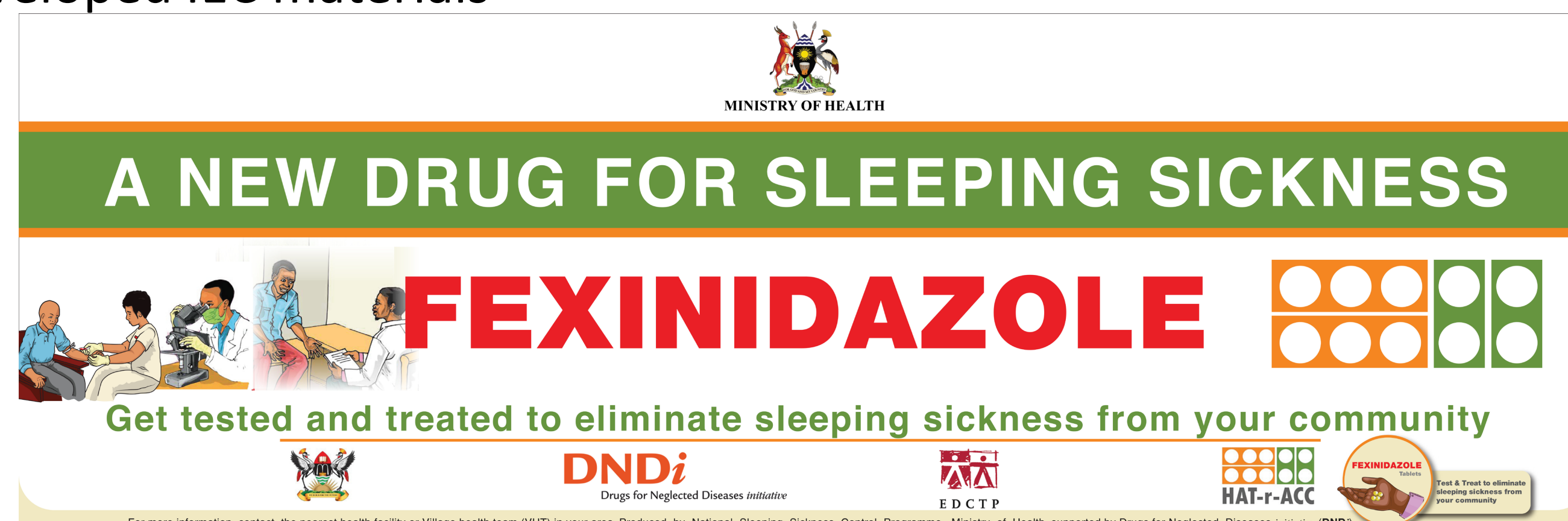
- Developed information, education, and communication (IEC) messages to address stigma, poor health-seeking behavior, prevention activities, and motivational messages. Messages to address barriers were presented as posters.
- Broadcast radio messages on r-HAT (radio talk show, radio spots, and DJ mentions)
- Conducted community dialogue meetings in the project area
- Held interdisciplinary meeting with leaders at various district and lower Government Levels
- Trained community health workers

### *Posters produced to raise awareness about human African trypanosomiasis in Uganda*



### *Health workforce*

- Increased index of suspicion for r-HAT for the health workforce through refresher training in the project area and surrounding high-risk endemic districts.
- Produced and distributed T-shirts for trained health workers to improve visibility of the clinical trial and r-HAT in general
- Developed IEC materials



## Conclusion

The communication strategy is important in supporting enrolment of patients in the clinical trial. It is equally useful for maintaining awareness of community members and health workers about r-HAT, thus improving and sustaining access to r-HAT services in the long term, and can be adapted for use in different settings beyond health service units

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