

Learning from the Locals stickers

This project focused on promoting malaria awareness and preventative education in an area of Africa where the disease is endemic. A small group of researchers and students from Edinburgh Napier University collaborated with local designers in the Nampula region of northern Mozambique to create an effective communication warning and information system that was highly recognisable, and easy to make and distribute. This co-design process resulted in a series of nine stickers illustrating good practice, from protecting your home and family to seeking treatment if you have contracted malaria.

date

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project leads

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Can graphic design save your life?

Inspired by Ken Garland's *First Things First* manifesto of 1964, Learning from the Locals is a project that draws upon ideas about ethical graphic design. This is not a top-down project but rather the result of co-design based on the lived experiences and knowledge of the participants.

Despite interventions from NGOs, mosquito nets designed to stop the spread of malaria are not always used correctly. In the remote northern Mozambique coastal town of Mossuril, for example, new mosquito nets are used as fishing nets instead. Considering health is not always the first priority of people when basic survival is more pressing. Ingrained cultural behaviours often dictate decision-making.

The local hospital carries out free malaria testing, treating all who test positive, but many people with symptoms don't go – preferring to visit a traditional healer, despite this being ineffective. By the time they get to a doctor, the disease count in their body may be fatal.

In June 2016, graphic design workshops were held in three locations in northern Mozambique. Local participants co-designed a pack of stickers alerting users to key moments, where a small behaviour change could result in preventing malaria. Young and old people, students, community leaders, mothers, teachers, doctors, traditional healers and NGOs took part in the workshops, some of which held on the streets. Hundreds of iterations of the intended stickers were discussed, designed and refined. Along the way, new streams of knowledge were identified from lived experience.

There was a great deal of solidarity around the aims and objectives of this project. If the messages on the stickers encourage users to think and act differently, then yes, graphic design can save your life.