



Council of Governors



How Kisii County used Community Engagement to Improve Access to Universal Health Care for Residents

County:	Kisii		
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Context and Challenge

Kenya is implementing a strategy towards attaining universal health coverage (UHC), where all citizens will be able to access healthcare for all conditions, in all parts of the country, regardless of their economic capability and ability to pay. In December 2018, President Uhuru Kenyatta launched a pilot UHC programme in four counties, which will contribute learning for other counties on how to roll out the Kenya model of UHC. At the same time, several other counties have launched their own drive towards UHC in various ways and models. Kisii County is one of these counties, seeking to improve UHC coverage and the health outcomes for her population. The five most common diseases are malaria, diarrhoea, skin diseases, pneumonia and respiratory diseases.; provision of clean environment through proper waste management (CIDP, 2017¹).

According to the County Integrated Development Plan (2018-2022), the county has given priority to the following programmes and projects towards realising UHC: implementation of free maternal healthcare; employment of additional healthcare staff; collaboration with learning institutions for research; provision of subsidized pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals to facilities; and paying premiums to enrol the underprivileged members of community to a health insurance scheme to increase their access to services. In addition, the county has invested heavily in upgrading, equipping and stocking most health facilities in a bid to reduce the average household distance to the nearest health facility to 3km.

Over time, county staff noted a gap in the community's health seeking behaviour on key health issues, including immunization coverage; latrine coverage; disease management; and nutrition.

- Latrines: Most homesteads had pit-latrines without a superstructure. This was unsanitary and prone to spreading contamination, and also uncomfortable to use during rainy seasons.
- Immunization coverage: The number of unimmunized children stood at 30,000 in 2017, much lower than the county target. This implied that many families were defaulting and simply not bringing their children to receive the relevant vaccinations.
- Disease management and nutrition: There is a general increase of lifestyle diseases e.g diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Through community strategy we are using Community health volunteers to visit homes and sensitize the community members on the importance of visiting/ seeking medical check-ups time to time.

¹ Kisii County Integrated Development Plan, 2017-2022

Response and Actions

Kisii County Health Department adopted the Community Engagement programme to address the gaps and challenges faced in promoting healthcare within the county. This strategic approach is implemented by community health extension workers (CHEWs) and Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) through formation of community health units and implementing outreach activities. Through mobilization, households and communities are empowered in health and related behaviour through activities to increase their knowledge, skills and participation in decisions and activities regarding their own health. Mobilisation involves electing or selecting volunteers and training them on the basic health modules. Thereafter, the volunteers engage in the following activities:

- Visiting households to inform community members on importance of specific health issues such as immunization. Identifying children who have not been immunized, and tracing defaulters to get them immunized.
- Conducting outreach services to facilitate immunization.
- Community case management on malaria, where the volunteers give rapid diagnostic tests of potential patients.
- Distribution of insecticide treated mosquito nets.
- Monitoring of proper and full usage of mosquito nets.
- Triggering the community into realizing the importance of latrine use.
- Follow ups to make sure that the community uses latrines instead of engaging in open defecation.

To ensure that the role of CHVs was entrenched in the county health service, the County Department of Health developed the Community Health Strategy Bill, which was tabled in the County Assembly for adoption in late 2018. Once passed, the new law will ensure CHVs' role is recognised and remunerated for in the county health system.

Outcomes and Results

Through the community engagement programme, the community is now more knowledgeable, skilled and are participating better in health related issues. The community can now monitor diseases such as TB, diarrhoea and malaria outbreak among others in their own communities. The County has also recorded improvement in immunization coverage. In the year 2018, for example, the County recorded 76% in immunization coverage, which is an increase from 46% in 2015². In latrine coverage, 67% of households had a latrine in 2018, up from 61% in 2015 with the highest gains recorded in Nyaribari Masaba at 85% in 2018 from 59% in 2015. In addition, the linkage between the community and the health facilities has improved because more people are now coming to the health centres to seek medical attention instead of buying drugs over the counter or taking herbal medicine, as was the case before.

Lessons Learned

- Curbing attrition of CHVs from the programme is crucial. In most cases, CHVs drop out of the programme because of unmet financial needs. Empowering volunteers in the community economically enables them to stay on ensure the programme's success.
- Empowering the community makes them willing participants in assisting the Community Health Volunteers reach out to marginalised community members.
- The County Government should be more involved in supporting the community engagement initiative through developing policy/Act that can guide and give direction on the initiative.
- The County should also consider giving stipend to the CHVs to facilitate and motivate them in their daily engagements with the community.

² DHIS data, cited by county health staff interviewed

Recommendations for other counties considering similar initiatives

- Creation of a community health strategy bill to cover the CHV'S on stipend is important to mainstream their role in the health system.
- Engagement with community is important in helping them to own public health initiatives.
- Exchange visits to other counties are crucial, in learning how to better manage and incentivise CHVs.

Link to video: [Interview with staff on Kisii community engagement](#)