

KUJIPANGA BULLETIN

Quater 3: IMPROVING ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES IN KENYA

Edition 18





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Welcome to Year 6, Quarter 2 of the Kujipanga Bulletin. This quarter, the risk and compliance department traveled to Elgeyo Marakwet and West Pokot to assess project implementation and evaluate the identification of risks and mitigation measures. Internal conflicts remain a focus, with field teams collaborating with county leadership to identify potential incidents.

DESIP participated in various Technical Working Groups (TwGs) at both county and national levels. Options Consultancy led engagements with DRMH to review and revise the 6th edition of the Family Planning (FP) guidelines, convening a

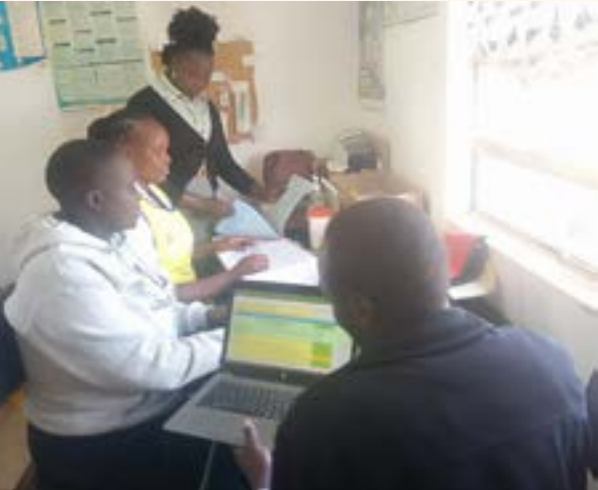
workshop that incorporated stakeholder suggestions. Alongside UNFPA and FCDO, DESIP participated the Last Mile Assessment for FP commodities in Meru, Isiolo, and Tharaka Nithi counties, revealing gaps between physical counts and recorded data on bin cards. Capacity strengthening for healthcare workers is essential to streamline commodity management and minimize waste.

Internally, the team collaborated with staff from the Accelerate and A360 projects to review implementation progress, share learnings, and enhance efficiencies across reproductive health programs. The communications department from the Council of Governors joined the team to document success stories from supported counties for wider dissemination.

Additionally, DESIP participated in the inaugural TMA TWG, focusing on strategic engagement with the private sector to enhance FP commodity availability.

In the upcoming quarter, DESIP looks forward to disseminating findings from the Political Economic Analysis on domestic financing for Family Planning, which aims to advance discussions on FP commodities beyond the project

period. We expect to validate and launch the 7th draft FP guidelines before the year ends. DESIP also plans to engage the Head of the Primary Health Care division to ensure ongoing support for Community Health Promoters (CHPs) in FP demand creation at the community level. Engagement with county health management teams will continue, focusing on skill transfer to relevant program officers to sustain critical FP services beyond donor funding.



Providing technical support to health care facility in Elgeyo Marakwet

In the heart of Kenya, where cultural beliefs and access to family planning often intersect, a dedicated champion is making strides in promoting long-term family planning methods. Jemutai, a native of Elgeyo Marakwet County, has spent more than five years educating women about their family planning options. Her journey reflects not only a personal commitment but also a broader movement towards empowering women to take control of their reproductive health.

Passionate about maternal health, Jemutai has become a trusted figure in her community. Her advocacy for intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUCDs) stems from her firsthand experience with the challenges women face when they lack access to appropriate family planning options. “I used the IUCD for seven years with no side effects,” Jemutai explains. “It allowed me to focus on nurturing my healthy children without worrying about daily pills or frequent clinic visits.” By promoting IUCDs, she helps women plan their families according to their circumstances, improving their well-being and peace of mind.

Jemutai emphasizes that IUCDs contribute to better maternal health outcomes. “I had been using implants for three years, but at times, they didn’t work well for me,” she recalls. “With the support of Irene, a nurse at Tambach Hospital, I decided to switch to the IUCD method.” Thanks to DESIP’s support, the facility ensures regular check-ups and quality care for IUCD users like Jemutai, contributing to her positive experience.

Her advocacy has led to an increase in IUCD adoption in her community. For Jemutai, the work is about more than just numbers; it’s about transforming lives and creating a space where women feel empowered to make informed decisions about their bodies. Her efforts illustrate how grassroots advocacy can advance long-term family planning in Kenya. By educating women, dispelling stereotypes, and promoting community engagement, she is paving the way for healthier families and stronger communities.

Jemutai’s dedication inspires others to join the movement for informed reproductive choices. She believes that when women are equipped with knowledge and the right tools, they can confidently shape their futures. She also calls on the Ministry of Health to focus more on educating men, who often lack information on the importance of family planning, which in turn denies their partners the right to better maternal health outcomes.

Transitioning Women to Economic Independence Through Family Planning in West Pokot County

In the land of hidden treasures, family planning is more than just a health service; it's a pathway to empowerment and economic independence for women. Thanks to community-based distributors trained by the DESIP programme, women in rural areas are discovering how family planning can transform their lives and enable them to engage in business and other economic activities.

Gideon, a 38-year-old community health promoter in West Pokot County, has been a trained community-based distributor (CBD) of family planning commodities for the past three years. Through counseling, facilitating referrals, and providing short-term family planning options, he delivers essential reproductive health services to underserved populations in the area.

Gideon has seen the transformative impact of the DESIP programme in his community. One of his beneficiaries, Tombue, began large-scale farming after adopting modern, long-term family planning methods, which allowed her to plan and space her pregnancies. "Before learning about family planning, Tombue was overwhelmed. Having children too close together made it difficult for her to focus on farming," he explains. With better pregnancy spacing, her increased agricultural income not only improved her family's standard of living but also inspired other women in the neighborhood to do the same.

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Gideon highlights that the DESIP programme also supports community dialogues. Healthcare personnel lead these discussions to provide contraceptive information, encourage women to engage in economic activities, and dispel cultural misconceptions surrounding family planning. According to Gideon, the programme has successfully enabled women in West Pokot to access modern family planning methods while promoting economic development.

Gideon's success story with Tombue illustrates how investing in women's health and livelihoods can lead to long-term development in remote areas. They represent their peers in groups addressing Reproductive Health, HIV, Malaria, and Tuberculosis. A designated private practitioners' cluster representative plays a crucial role in TWGs, particularly in licensing and regulating private facilities, thereby strengthening the link between private healthcare providers and the MOH.

As a result of PPP collaborations, 66 private healthcare facilities now receive FP and other essential commodities directly from the Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA). There is also evidence of improved reporting to the MOH through the use of recommended tools.



Community based distributor counseling a couple on family planning

Embracing Promising Practices; Samburu County Rolls out Community-Based Distribution

Samburu County is among the regions in Kenya with a high unmet need for family planning, standing at 29%, and a low modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) of 25%, according to the 2022 KDHS. The county also has one of the highest fertility rates in the country at 6.3. Several factors, including its vastness, nomadic lifestyle, high poverty levels, and cultural barriers, hinder access to contraception among the Samburu community.

Women, particularly those in rural areas, face significant challenges in accessing reproductive health services due to the unavailability of healthcare facilities, poor road networks, and transportation issues. Even when services are available, utilization remains low. While efforts such as the Manyatta Model for family planning demand creation have been fruitful, there is still a need to complement these interventions and align them with the country's focus on self-care within the Primary Health Care framework to ensure sustainable access to contraception.

One promising approach under the DESIP Programme is Community-Based Distribution (CBD) of contraceptives by trained community health promoters. Although this model was not initially implemented in Samburu, its success in other regions demonstrates its potential to deliver equitable and sustainable family planning services, especially in remote areas.

With the advent of Primary Health Care, Samburu County recognized the value of CBDs in addressing the unique challenges of the region. Supported by DESIP through advocacy efforts in county forums, Samburu County officials—led by the Director of Promotive and Preventive Health and the County Reproductive Health Coordinator—pushed for the training and certification of CBDs. In September 2024, USAID Nawiri supported the training of 24 CBDs from Samburu East and Central sub-counties.



Pioneer Certified CBDs in Samburu County

These newly trained CBDs are set to collaborate with local health facilities and community units to strengthen family planning services at the household level. Their roles will include administering DMPA-SC to eligible women of reproductive age (WRA), promoting male involvement in reproductive health and child spacing decisions, and referring clients who need long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC). By providing follow-up care and strengthening links to health facilities, CBDs aim to significantly boost the uptake of modern family planning methods.

The Reproductive Health and Community Health Strategy departments will provide supervision, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the CBDs achieve the desired outcomes. While this milestone marks progress, Samburu's vast, rural landscape will require more CBDs to close the gap in unmet family planning needs.

The CBD model in other DESIP counties has proven successful in enhancing access to reproductive health services through community involvement, continuous mentorship, and regular supervision. Critical factors for success include stipends for CBDs, service integration, improved management information systems, and better referral and logistics management systems between CBDs and health facilities. By building on these lessons, Samburu County can create a sustainable future for family planning uptake in the region.



Director Promotive and Preventive Health Samburu County handing over certificate to a CBD

Overcoming Cultural Norms in Promoting Increase in Contraceptive Uptake

Access to safe and voluntary family planning (FP) services is a fundamental human right critical for achieving gender equality and empowering women. Male involvement is essential for fostering confidence in the uptake of family planning services. Engaging men in reproductive health (RH) programs helps promote and increase the acceptability of FP services among both genders. This involvement includes men participating in decision-making, endorsing family planning, and encouraging their partners to utilize these services, enabling informed choices about contraception and sexual and reproductive health needs.

In Kilifi County, the ‘Mwenye Syndrome’ significantly influences the uptake of FP services and other healthcare needs. This belief holds that husbands– and sometimes mothers-in-law or aunts–own their wives, granting them the final say on any health-related decisions. This cultural mindset poses a barrier to timely and informed decision-making regarding reproductive health, particularly for young women of reproductive age. Incorporating a gender perspective in the planning of sexual and reproductive health services allows healthcare providers to address the gender inequalities present in both healthcare facilities and the community, leading to better outcomes.

For example, staffing rural healthcare facilities with more female healthcare assistants can encourage women to seek care. The lack of support from spouses can hinder a woman’s ability to access and negotiate for contraceptive use. Additionally, some men may feel uncomfortable seeking RH services in spaces perceived as exclusively for women, such as maternity and child health (MCH) or family planning clinics. This perception often leads men to view family planning as a “women’s issue.”

The DESIP programme has actively promoted access to FP and RH services while advancing gender equality and social inclusion. By empowering women to make decisions about their reproductive health, DESIP enables them to expand their social and economic opportunities. Key activities within the programme include engaging youth and young people, facilitating community dialogues, involving religious leaders, and using duty bearers during these discussions to promote targeted mobilization and sensitization on social inclusion.

Through Community Health Promoters (CHPs), DESIP provides essential FP and RH information while also focusing on women’s education to counteract the effects of the Mwenye syndrome. Healthcare workers have received training on long-acting reversible contraceptives and comprehensive counseling, ensuring both male and female clients can make informed choices.

Since the initiation of DESIP’s interventions, there has been a significant improvement in the uptake of FP services. According to Kenneth Miriti, the County Reproductive Health Coordinator, the modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) has increased from 42% in 2014 to 51% currently. This progress underscores the importance of male involvement and gender-sensitive approaches in enhancing access to reproductive health services.



Training on post partum IUD insertion

Beyond the Call: A Nurse’s Dedication to Family Planning Amongst Persons Living with Disabilities, Adolescents, and Youth

Angela has dedicated over a decade to nursing in Elgeyo Marakwet county, specializing in reproductive health. Early in her career, she noticed a significant gap in family planning (FP) services for clients with disabilities after receiving training from the DESIP Programme on Disability Inclusion. These individuals are often overlooked in traditional healthcare settings. Driven by a desire to serve all members of her community, Angela immersed herself in understanding their unique needs and challenges.

Recognizing the importance of informed choices, Angela has developed a comprehensive knowledge of various FP methods. She tirelessly educates her clients, ensuring they understand their options—from hormonal contraceptives to long-term solutions. Her approachable demeanor fosters open discussions, allowing young people to express their concerns and preferences without fear of judgment.

One of Angela’s most notable contributions is her expertise in screening clients with disabilities using Washington Group of Questions (WQGs). She has trained her colleagues on using the tool for screening and the best practices for accommodating and understanding the specific needs of these clients.

Whether ensuring physical accessibility or adapting communication methods using Kenya Sign Language Chart and booklets provided by DESIP, Angela goes above and beyond to make healthcare inclusive and effective.

Angela’s dedication often leads her to work past closing time, creating a safe space for adolescents and youth seeking specialized reproductive health services. She understands that many young people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, may struggle to access these services during regular hours. By offering extended hours, she ensures they have the time and support necessary to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. Impact on the Community.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. Over the years, Angela has built strong relationships with her clients, many of whom return to share their stories of empowerment. Parents in the community also express their gratitude, noting how Angela has helped their children navigate sensitive topics and make informed choices. Through workshops and Integrated community outreach, she has become a trusted resource, breaking down stigmas associated with FP and reproductive health.

Angela’s story is a testament to the impact that one dedicated healthcare professional can have on a community. Her commitment to providing family planning services, particularly for youth and individuals with disabilities, exemplifies the essence of compassionate care. As she continues to advocate for accessible reproductive health services, Angela inspires not only her colleagues but also the students she mentors daily in school and those in clinical placement.



Angela showcasing her FP sample bag

Naishola (not her real name), a young woman from Narok County, has been through more than many can imagine. She is one of the countless women who have benefited from the DESIP programme, supported by UKAID in Kenya. This programme changed her life, teaching her the importance of child spacing and how to better plan her future.

One day, after experiencing unusual pains, Naishola went to her local health facility. There, she was hit with unexpected news. The nurse on duty, sensing something was off, advised her to take a pregnancy test before any further checkups. It hadn't been two years since she had her first child, and she was still trying to balance the demands of caring for her little one. The positive test result left Naishola heartbroken, unsure of what this meant for her already overwhelming responsibilities.

But this wasn't her first time feeling lost and devastated. When Naishola first became pregnant, her family, in line with their traditions, married her off immediately. She was still a young girl when her husband, deeply rooted in tradition, took her as his wife.

In this moment of distress, a light came in the form of a Community Health Promoter (CHP) at the facility. The CHP, trained through the DESIP programme, sat with Naishola, patiently listening to her fears. They guided her through a counseling session that helped her come to terms with her situation. With each visit, the CHP gave her more information about family planning methods she could choose to avoid getting pregnant again too soon.

After Naishola gave birth to a healthy baby boy, she made a decision that would shape her future. With the help of the CHP, she chose a family planning method that suited her. The CHP walked her through the side effects and how to manage them, reassuring her every step of the way.



Naishola been educated about her contraception choices

Today, Naishola is filled with gratitude for the care and support she received. The DESIP programme didn't just give her access to information; it gave her a sense of control over her life. She now feels better prepared to plan her family's future, thanks to the tireless efforts of the CHPs and healthcare providers trained under this programme. Their kindness, patience, and understanding made all the difference.

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About DESIP

Delivering Equitable and Sustainable Increases in Family Planning programme, abbreviated DESIP, is a 6-year, UK Aid funded programme focusing on improving Reproductive Health in Kenya with focus on Family Planning in low (<45%) modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) counties in line with Kenya 'Vision 2030'. The goal of the programme is to ensure that women and girls can safely plan their pregnancies and improve their SRHR, particularly the young rural, and marginalized, with programme impact contributing to reduced maternal mortality, newborn, and child mortality, and increased mCPR in Kenya.

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