

KUJIPANGA BULLETIN



JUNE 2023 IMPROVING ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES IN KENYA

Edition 13





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Reproductive Health Director

Director's Statement

The DESIP Program is now in its final year of implementation. In the first quarter of Year 5, DESIP has shared its best practises through the Religious Leaders and Male Involvement Webinars, with the expected outcomes being meaningful engagement of faith actors on matters of health and progressing national dialogue on the role of men in promoting family planning uptake, respectively.

DESIP had the privilege of participating in the 10th Anniversary of the Preventing Maternal and Child Deaths Media Breakfast. This event provided the programme with a valuable opportunity to reflect on Kenya's progress in maternal and child survival initiatives. It also reaffirmed our unwavering dedication to the set objectives, ensuring that we remain steadfast in our mission to improve the health and well-being of mothers and children across the nation.

The program also took part in the 6th Annual Scientific Conference on Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR), which was jointly

convened by the Reproductive Health Network of Kenya (RHNK), The Centre for Reproductive Rights, FP 2030, and The Ministry of Health (MOH).

Looking ahead, the DESIP program is gearing up for the highly anticipated national dissemination conference, which will serve as a platform to share our best practises and learnings with stakeholders from diverse sectors. This event will undoubtedly be a landmark occasion as we collectively celebrate our achievements and strategize for an even brighter future.

I want to convey my appreciation to the Donor, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and implementing partners for their support throughout the period: Faith to Action Network (F2A), Health Right International (HRI), AMREF, Options Consultancy, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), and Population Services International (PSI). Your dedication and collaboration have been invaluable in making DESIP a resounding success.

Together, we have witnessed the power of collective action in effecting positive change and leaving a lasting impact on the lives of countless community members.

Sharing DESIPS Best Practices

The DESIP Program, which is in its final year of implementation, has been holding webinars focusing on sharing its best practices with Family Planning Stakeholders. The webinars provided a good chance for participants to delve into interactive discussions and gain knowledge on the programs experience thus far. Two webinars were held in the period April to June 2023.

Leveraging on Faith and Religious Leaders for Increased Family Planning Acceptance, Access and Uptake

Ministry of Health UKaid

PS KENYA AND FAITH TO ACTION NETWORK INVITE YOU TO A

LIVE WEBINAR 2:00PM EAT 19TH APRIL 2023

"Leveraging Faith and Religious Leaders' Influence for Increased Contraceptive Acceptance, Access and Uptake"

Objectives:

- To highlight the important role played by faith and religious leaders in health and health systems strengthening.
- To discuss the role of faith leaders and the inter-faith approach in addressing religious and socio-cultural barriers to family planning.
- To discuss experiences, lessons learnt, best practices, challenges and solutions in collaborating with faith actors to promote family planning acceptance and use.

REGISTRATION LINK
https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_J-PTbDA_Qqa9a1oNGPvzzA

desip FAITH TO ACTION NETWORK ps

Family planning, or child spacing," as it is referred to in Islam, is the practice of using contraception to control the number of children one has and how much space there is between them. The practice itself is riddled with a lot of myths and misconceptions, from its supposed side effects to its role as a population control strategy, that act as barriers to its uptake. The attitudes and beliefs

towards family planning are deeply influenced by a lot of social factors, including religion, with Pastors and Imams' acting as trusted sources and voices of reason in the community.

Religion is important to the masses and has a great impact on both individuals and the community as a whole. Some people interpret the scriptures views on family planning as saying that the practice is morally wrong and goes against the natural order of life, as referred from the Christian bible in Genesis 1.28, 'Be fruitful and multiply'. These beliefs may discourage individuals from using contraception, which can lead to unintended pregnancies and larger family sizes. Religious leaders have the unique advantage of being able to reach both women and men to educate them on the importance of child spacing. They are in a position to act as change agents and policymakers and use their platform to address their congregations on the benefits of family planning for maternal and child health, women's empowerment, and the well-being of families. They can also address misconceptions about the scriptures interpretations by providing a more accurate reading and encouraging open dialogue.

"There is a need for sensitivity in the language and terminology used to discuss family planning when interacting with faith leaders. The accepted terminology in Islam is child spacing. The Qur'an states that women should be allowed to breastfeed their children for two years," Sheikh Lethome, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) The DESIP Program, funded by UKAID, aims to increase family planning uptake among poor rural women, adolescents, youth, and persons with disabilities and is currently implemented in 12 counties in Kenya. The program continuously partners with religious and cultural leaders to educate the

communities on the cultural and religious provisions on family planning. DESIP works with religious leaders and other policymakers to advocate for the accessibility and affordability of contraceptives for all who need them. The program recently hosted a live webinar in collaboration with the Faith to Action Network, where they highlighted the role of faith and religious leaders and had meaningful engagement with faith actors on matters of health.

In conclusion, religion can play a complex role in the uptake of family planning, and it is important for all policymakers and healthcare providers to be sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of their clients when discussing family planning options.

Empowering Men as Family Planning Champions: Breaking Stereotypes and Promoting Equitable Reproductive Health

Ministry of Health UKaid

The Contraceptive Quest: Men Championing Family Planning

PS Kenya and Hera Consortium invite you to join an

Online Webinar

Theme: Enhancing Men's Involvement in Family Planning to Improve Access and Uptake of Contraceptives.

Objectives

- To reflect on how successful (or unsuccessful) male involvement in FP uptake has been to date.
- To highlight groups that are male-dominated within various communities that have the potential to influence the uptake of modern family planning methods among girls and women.
- To discuss DESIP program's contribution in encouraging male involvement to promote FP uptake.
- To discuss lessons learned and challenges in enhancing male involvement in family planning.

9:30am-11:00am | 31st May 2023
<https://bit.ly/3poaFIL>

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In the heart of Narok County, amidst its tranquil nature and greenery that stretches as far as the eye

can see, lives Joseph Sirikwa, a hardworking father of four who has taken up the responsibility of educating his community members on the importance of family planning. The Maasai community is known for its belief in siring children as a sign of wealth, and yet for Joseph and his wife, the decision to stop at four was a no-brainer after they were enlightened on the benefits of family planning.

“My wife and I have aimed to set a good example in our community by practicing family planning. We spaced each of our children by two years after learning about the benefits and doing away with all the myths and misconceptions that surround the topic.”

Working as a family planning Male Champion

A typical day for Joseph starts with taking his cows out to graze, where he meets up with his fellow men and, among other topics, makes sure to inform them of an upcoming family planning dialogue session. Motivated by the need to empower fellow men to make decisions that would have a positive impact not only at the individual level but for the community as a whole, Joseph would then go back home and collect his information, education, and communication (IEC) materials from his wife and, with her blessing, head out to perform what he has taken up as his calling. Waiting in a field near his homestead was a diverse group of men representing different age groups and perspectives, but all very eager to learn and have an open conversation about family planning, contraceptives, and reproductive health as a whole. Joseph targets both the young and the old men, stating that in his community even the old men require family planning as they get married to young women and have children.

“Those who have no knowledge about family planning think it is harmful; however, I am here to tell you that it is very important. It not only helps you to space out



Joseph Sirikwa, a male Community Health Promoter, taking men through a Male Involvement in Family Planning dialogue session.

your children but also enables you to provide enough resources to cater to each of their needs,” stated Joseph.

Armed with the DESIP program family planning training kit, Joseph then proceeded to take out the different contraceptive methods, that is, both female and male condoms, the coil, oral contraceptives, or the pill, and the DEPO injection. One by one, Joseph took the group of men through each method and went into the details of how each worked, proving how empowered he was as a male community health volunteer.

“We were trained on family planning for one and a half months, shown how to administer some of the methods, and taught how to write referral notes for the methods that require doctors. This training from the DESIP program has empowered us to go into the villages and teach the youth, middle-aged men, and elderly men about family planning,” says Joseph.

Advisory to Men

Joseph stressed the need for husbands to support their wives and take a more active role in their family

planning journey. He advised them on the importance of taking it on as a shared responsibility, as it would lead to a healthier relationship with better informed decisions and improve their general well-being.

“Male involvement in family planning has led to a significant improvement in the reproductive health indicators as shown in the 2022 Kenya Demographic Health Survey, from 53% in 2014 to 57% in 2022. When women have supportive spouses, they are more likely to choose a contraceptive method that is suitable for them,” Toroitich Sang, Narok County Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health Coordinator.

For Joseph, spreading the word on family planning in a community that still considers the topic taboo comes with its challenges, with some men accusing him of encouraging infidelity within their marriages. However, he remains relentless in his pursuit of a well-informed community and with the backing of PS Kenya’s DESIP program, he pledges to ensure that the men of Narok County take the right steps and make family planning initiatives more inclusive.

Empowering Choice and Inclusivity

A Case of Homabay and Narok Counties

In a nation brimming with potential, the DESIP program emerged as a beacon of hope, dedicated to empowering communities and transforming lives. Five years into its remarkable journey, this innovative initiative has left an indelible mark on the lives of countless individuals, fostering progress, inclusivity, and access to essential services. Since its inception, the DESIP program recognized the pressing need to address the low modern contraceptive prevalence rate (MCPR) in selected Kenyan counties, where percentages ranged from 2% to 45%. With a vision to create positive change, the program targeted these regions, ready to uplift the underserved and marginalized communities.

One county that stood at the heart of the DESIP program's focus was Homabay. This region faced significant challenges, grappling with a high number of unplanned pregnancies among young people, those living with disabilities, and rural women. The program's concerted efforts in Homabay gave rise to a transformation that surpassed expectations. Venturing forth with passion and purpose, the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) and DESIP teams worked hand in hand to visit several healthcare facilities in the county. From the Homabay Referral Hospital to Rangwe Sub-County Hospital and the Faith-based St. Teresa Nagoya, the program left no stone unturned in its mission to bring about change.

As a testament to the program's impact, Narok County witnessed firsthand the transformative power of DESIP. At Olchoro Health Facility, Fountain Based Health Centre, Narok Sub County Hospital, and Mulot, the program proved its efficacy in empowering communities. Notably, Mulot stood out as a symbol of male involvement in family planning, breaking

conventional norms and setting a precedent for the rest.

Through the tireless efforts of community health volunteers, the program educated young girls about the benefits of family planning, ensuring a brighter and more informed future. Moreover, the provision of a toll-free number for gender-based violence victims highlighted DESIP's commitment to comprehensive care and support for those in need.

Inclusivity

At St. Teresa Nagoya Hospital, the DESIP program exhibited its unwavering commitment to inclusivity. By conducting support supervision and advising on structural adjustments, the program facilitated the installation of wheelchair ramps, ensuring smooth accessibility for persons with disabilities. This marked a pivotal step towards eliminating barriers to sexual and reproductive health services for persons living with disabilities, exemplifying the program's vision of a truly inclusive society. Embracing a multifaceted approach, the DESIP program addressed negative perceptions among both healthcare providers and the wider community. By fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding, the program ushered in an era of empowerment for people with disabilities, granting them access to vital services, including family planning.

Impact in Narok

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As DESIP enters its fifth and final year, its vision remains steadfast. It aims to collaborate with other existing partners in the county's health sector for Technical Working groups and commodity redistribution initiatives. DESIP embodies the unwavering commitment of visionary leaders to leave no one behind in the pursuit of progress and inclusivity. Together, with the power of unity and determination, the DESIP program has created a brighter future for Kenya, one empowered individual and one transformed life at a time.

Reaching Marginalized Adolescent and Young People with Reproductive Health Information and Services

Learnings from Homabay County

The DESIP Program has impacted and contributed to the reduction of maternal and new-born mortality and child mortality in populations from hard-to-reach areas, including persons with disabilities, through contextualised strategic interventions. Recognising the power of peer influence, the program integrated peer education and support networks. Young people from the communities were trained as youth champions, equipped with comprehensive knowledge of SRH. These peer educators engaged in outreach sessions, facilitated discussions, and served as a bridge between male and boys involvement, helping break down barriers and empower the youth to openly discuss their reproductive health needs. “There are times when we go on outreach to offer contraceptive services as a standalone service without tagging along other health services, and the turnout has always been low. This is always different when we visit them with a range of services,” adds Brian, a clinical Officer.

Structured Mentorship

Contraceptive services should not be handled as stand-alones but should be integrated, including interaction and care from health personnel. The ESIP program worked around this through structured mentorship, training health care providers and demand creation agents on counselling for Choice (C4C), post-training follow-ups and Routine Data Quality Assessments, continuing medical Education (CMEs), and Commodity management support through verification redistribution, which has been essential for continuity of service provision. Mercy, a nursing officer at Suba Sub County Hospital, recalls when they used to see fewer young people turning up for services, but since the program came, healthcare providers and the youth have increased.

This approach created a safe space for adolescents and young people to express themselves, share concerns, and seek guidance from their peers who understood their unique challenges. “I conceived while in my final year of high school, and this affected my KCSE performance, and with the tough experience I went through, it made me shy away from people. I could, however, still have a boy-girl relationship with no agemate to advise me better. But since I got recruited and trained as a youth champion, I got empowered to share with my peers, and they have since come out and shared freely and referred them appropriately.” Remembers Jane, a trained youth champion.

Accessibility

Understanding the limited accessibility to healthcare facilities by young people because of the distance and topographical nature of Suba sub-county, the program took proactive steps to ensure that SRH services were brought directly to the communities. Integrated Mobile clinics were set up in strategic locations, coupled with door-to-door outreach and awareness campaigns. The program leaders, recognising the deeply embedded cultural norms and stigmas surrounding SRH, prioritised sensitization services closer to the target audience by organising targeted integrated health outreaches. The program has also strengthened communication via digital technologies and social media, which has created a positive output on information dissemination in a holistic manner to youth and adolescents within the implementation sites in hard-to-reach areas. Linet, one of the audience members who has reached out with intervention and has also mobilised her peers, cites that “online engagement has made information access easy to me; when I need information, I don’t

need to go and line up in the facility for long just to consult; I get it in the palm of my hands and can still book a real-time appointment with the nurse or clinician.” This has been made effective through the use of trained youth peer providers in hard-to-reach settings; they engage their peers in online weekly sessions, WhatsApp, Facebook, and SMS to convey relevant and appropriate messages to their members and the public in need of FP information, products, and services. Not only is access to health services critical, but the quality of those services is critical too. Poor and marginalised adolescents used not to seek reproductive health services, but as they faced stigma and discrimination and inadequate youth-friendly services, there has been greater improvement. “Some of us stay within the hospital, and I can tell you, nowadays they even come check us in our houses during weekends or late in the evening, and we are flexible and attend to them. Personally, weekends used to be my resting days, but currently I understand how dealing with youths requires flexibility.”

DESIP’s adolescent-responsive contraceptive interventions have been enhanced through improved health information systems, mobilizers and service providers capacity building, service delivery, access to essential medicines, financing, and governance. This has helped young people from hard-to-reach areas receive information and services without interruption.



DESIP Youth Engagement in Homabay County

Capacity Building Community Workers to Demystify the Myths and Misconceptions Around Family Planning

In the deep rural village of Laluk, within the green scenery of Mulot, we met Richard Lelei, a husband and father of five with a story to share. The visit to the village was made possible through the area's Public Health Officer (PHO), Peris Kirinyet. Over time, there has been tremendous improvement in the number of women seeking Family Planning (FP) services at the nearby Mulot Health Centre.

What led to this increase in a community where social norms affect the social acceptability of FP? The answer to that question lies in Richard's immense efforts in sensitising his community on the importance of family planning. One quiet afternoon, we engaged him on his insights into tackling the unending effect of retrogressive social norms that eventually have negative maternal effects as well as economic and social effects.

Richard was born into a polygamous family, with his father having four wives. He points out that his mother was the youngest, and therefore there was a huge age difference between his parents. According to Richard, life was tough since his father had many children. "Tulikuwa wengi ata hatukujuana vizuri," stated Richard, adding that even their father would sometimes get confused when identifying his own children.

Richard grew up with a sense of constant uncertainty as the shadows of financial strain always loomed over his family. The provision of basic needs was always limited, and he and his siblings never set foot in school. As he grew up, Richard wanted a different life for himself and his future children, even going so far as to turn down the wife that his father had chosen for him. "During our time, a father would choose your bride; I refused because I wanted to plan my own life. I wasn't educated, but I was sure that I would make a difference," says Richard. Eventually, Richard got married to a lady from another village who shared his



Richard Lelei, a male Community Health Promoter, engaging with FCDO and PS Kenya-DESIP team.

interest in family planning, a topic on which he had gained a lot of knowledge from the then-only radio station, KBC. Their interest is what made them both become Community Health Promoters (CHPs), a title they proudly hold.

In 2021, through the DESIP program, Richard was chosen for training to become a male champion. Men's decisions among the Maasai and Kalenjin communities are key, especially because they are often considered the custodians of culture and tradition. In such a community, men have an important role to play in family planning, both to meet their own reproductive health needs and to support and facilitate their partner's access to and use of family planning services. Historically, men in this community don't engage in family planning conversations since it is considered a woman's 'business'. To others, family planning is still taboo and should not be practised. In fact, their women should not adopt any method without their consent. The training was meant to equip Richard with comprehensive

information, enabling him to create awareness and achieve behaviour change among his fellow men. 30 other men across the county were trained along with Richard.

Using his own personal experience to educate other men, Richard targets community functions such as barazas, funerals, weddings, church gatherings, and informal gatherings to communicate the benefits of FP. His children are all educated, with the last born currently attending a local university. His encouragement comes from seeing men change from "traditional men" to informed men. There is also a significant reduction in the taboo associated with men participating in FP conversations because of Richard's approach. Peris, the PHO who identified and recommended Richard as a community health volunteer, expresses satisfaction in Richard's achievements. He says that despite the fact that age is catching up with him, he will never get tired of reminding men that mwanaume ni kupanga familia." (A real man practises family planning.)

Photo Gallery

DESIP Program at the 10th anniversary of the Preventing Maternal and Child Deaths Initiative



6th RHNK Annual Scientific Conference



FCDO Donor Visit in Narok and Homabay County



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About DESIP

DESIP is a five-year (2019 to 2024) UKaid funded project focused on Delivering Sustainable and Equitable Increases in Family Planning (DESIP) in low Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) Counties in line with Kenya's 'Vision 2030' as well as the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) 'Accessible quality healthcare for all Kenyans.' The country's long-term development blueprint has progressively realized a skilled and healthy workforce. Gains in Family Planning (FP) uptake have been considerable, with the 2018 modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (mCPR) amongst married women at 59%, exceeding Kenya's FP2020 target of 58.3%. Despite the progress, many women and girls are still left behind, notably, the 19 Counties where DESIP is implemented (Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Garissa, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kilifi, Kwale, Lamu, Mandera, Marsabit, Migori, Mombasa, Narok, Samburu, Tana River, Turkana, Wajir and West Pokot). The mCPR in these Counties range from 2% to 45%, as per the 2014 Kenya Demographic Health Survey.

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