



Undeterred by the Pandemic: How Athuman Delivered Comprehensive Healthcare in Communities Amid Crisis

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused millions of deaths globally and disrupted primary healthcare, Mr Abdul Athuman, a Community Health Worker (CHW) in Mwanza Region of Tanzania has lived up to the promise of keeping his community healthy during the crisis.

“I have visited many households to deliver educative messages on COVID-19 prevention. But that isn’t all. I have assured my community that basic health services such

as reproductive and child health are still accessible,” says Athuman, who resides and works in Buzuruga ward, Ilemela District.

He is one of the 1072 CHWs who were recruited by Benjamin Mkapa Foundation (BMF) under UNFPA support, and equipped with relevant knowledge to extend health services to communities that would have otherwise missed out on important healthcare services.



Mr Abdul Athuman conducts a session on health education at Buzuruga Health Centres’s Reproductive and Child Health clinic
PHOTO: BMF

On top of raising awareness about COVID-19 in communities, the CHWs ensured continued access to better nutrition, reproductive and child health as well as sensitizing households to enroll in improved Community Health Fund (ICHF).

“What I particularly did was to sensitize men to get involved in antenatal healthcare,” he says.

Increased male involvement

According to Athuman, male involvement in maternal and child health was low in Buzuruga ward.

“Initially, we used to have an average of two men accompanying their spouses for antenatal clinic on a day. But since I started sensitizing the communities, the number of men has risen to 14. This to me is an achievement, and is

a result of the knowledge and financial support I obtained through Mkapa Foundation.”

Like other CHWs in Ilemela and Nyamagana Districts of the region, Athuman was equipped with a mobile phone, protective equipment and knowledge to extend door to door health services.

“I received incentives through Mkapa Foundation to work. There was no time I couldn’t communicate to my fellow community health workers because of lack of airtime on my mobile phone.”

He further provided education on family planning to women in his community, alongside the awareness campaign on COVID-19. In collaboration with health staff at the health centers, he also provided education in healthy living to help people reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases such as cancer.

“Through this project, we also visited households of clients who are on life-long HIV treatment to ensure that there is no client miss up or lost follow ups for those on the ARV medication.”

Lessons learnt

According to the Acting Regional Community-based Health Promotion Coordinator, Mwanza, Ms Claudia Kaluli, the Pambana na Korona Project implemented by BMF with UNFPA support has empowered 171 CHWs in Ilemela and 175 CHWs in Nyamagana District.

Ms Kaluli says the CHWs have contributed to a rise in the number of women delivering at health facilities in the region.

“Two year ago, our region was recording less than 80% of women who deliver in health facilities but since CHWs started sensitizing communities, we have started recording more than 90% of health facility deliveries and our region is in the green zone in terms of indicator achievements.”

She attributes the improvement in emergency obstetric care in the region to the contribution of CHWs, in collaboration with other health staff in health facilities, through the referral system.

“Through the CHWs, we have been able to track pregnant women with emergency signs and referring them to health facilities for care. They have helped in identifying children with malnutrition in communities and referring them for appropriate care at health facilities in our municipalities. This was done alongside raising awareness on COVID-19.”

“We are seeing enthusiasm among communities in adhering to COVID-19.”

“CHWs have helped to sensitize on childhood immunization and the uptake of vaccines has risen in recent months. They have been accompanying parents of children who need vaccines to go to health facilities to access the vaccines. Our region has increased its coverage in childhood vaccination to more than 98%. We thank the CHWs, through the Mkapa Foundation project.”

“I recommend that such services offered by the CHWs should be sustained, and our municipalities have started planning and budgeting for some of the services provided by the CHWs, especially in nutrition and COVID-19 prevention.”

BMF an eye-opener

“Mkapa Foundation has helped us to recognize the role of providing supervision to our health staff. Through the foundation, we have been carrying out quarterly evaluation of the progress made by CHWs and other skilled health staff. We have adopted this and we have started evaluating the output of our staff who are in public service.”

According to the Kaluli, the regional office and municipalities, we have recognized the importance of sustaining the services provided by CHWs.

“There are plans and budget to support CHWs in their activities both financially and providing their protective equipment. I know municipalities that have set the budget to provide bicycles to CHWs so that they can go to hard-to-reach areas.”

When the BMF project comes to an end, she says, strategies are being strengthened to ensure CHWs continue offering services in communities, just as they have been doing while still under the project.

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