

SUCCESS STORY.

How Two Clinical Officers Restored Hope For COVID-19 Vaccination In Unguja



Zanzibar: It felt like an eternity, after waiting for too long to see the start of COVID-19 vaccination services at Selem Primary Health Care Unit+ (PHCU+) in Unguja—the largest and most populated Island of the Zanzibar archipelago. Then, finally in August 2021 the facility was earmarked as a vaccination center by the Ministry of Health. However, people’s hopes to be vaccinated almost vanished. No services were available as expected.

At the time, Josephine Maboko, the Facility In-charge of Selem PHCU+ was the only clinical officer available, alongside 10 nurses who were providing medical services to the high volume of clients flocking to the facility.

“It was really challenging. I was the only clinician here providing routine health services, yet there were directives to provide COVID-19 services as well,” says Maboko.

This, according to her, caused a three-month delay for Selem PHCU+ to start providing COVID-19 vaccination services.

“Clients in need of vaccination were being advised to access services 25 kilometres away, at Mnazi Mmoja Referral Hospital which was also congested, as it was receiving many clients who demanded the service,” says Maboko.

After the storm then came a calm. From October 2021, the Benjamin William Mkapa Foundation through USAID Afya Endelevu Activity, in consultation with the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar, allocated two clinicians at the facility to strengthen provision of quality healthcare and respond to the urgent need for COVID-19 services.

Afya Endelevu deployed 100 healthcare workers of skills-mix in 36 health facilities and 6 Ports of Entry to facilitate emergency response to COVID-19 and provide other integrated health services, such as outpatient care, reproductive, maternal, new-born, children, and adolescent health. Out of the deployed 100 HCWs, 51 were allocated in Pemba and 49 in Unguja facilities.

Communities who rely on Selem PHCU started accessing COVID-19 services soon after the arrival of two clinical officers on 10th October 2021. This was preceded by orientation on COVID-19 prevention, administration of vaccine and case management.

As only a small part of the population held anti-vaccination views, the new clinical officers Rukia Kheri and Lutfia sprang into action to educate clients who were visiting the facility for other services, by debunking widespread myths about COVID-19 vaccination.

“Then we became part of the community outreach services team which are integrated into other services to provide COVID-19 vaccine awareness campaign and vaccination,” says Rukia Kheri after she and her colleague were introduced to the District Health Management Team.

Following the new impetus at the facility, 292 clients were vaccinated by December 2021 and majority were no longer traveling long distances to Mnazi Mmoja for the service.

“I was vaccinated here this January but my brother who was travelling abroad in September last year had to go to all the way to Mnazi Mmoja Hospital because the vaccine wasn’t being offered here at this facility,” says Himid Choko, a client at the PHCU+

More still, the number of clients being screened for COVID-19 at the facility rose to 6,046 and those receiving vaccines rose to 3,167 by June 2022, up from 0 clients in September 2021.

Now that, Rukia and Lutfia are in the front accelerating vaccination uptake and at the same time providing other essential health care services at the facility, Josephine is now also able to conduct administrative and management work at the facility.