

IMPROVING QUALITY, INCREASING ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE IN AFRICAN URBAN SLUMS



Community Members Linked to Health Care Providers
in the Urban Informal Settlements of Nairobi, Kenya

AUTHORS

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Jhpiego is an international, non-profit health organization affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. For nearly 40 years, Jhpiego has empowered front-line health workers by designing and implementing effective, low-cost, hands-on solutions to strengthen the delivery of health care services for women and their families. By putting evidence-based health innovations into everyday practice, Jhpiego works to break down barriers to high-quality health care for the world's most vulnerable populations.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Urbanization is changing the dynamics of health in Africa, and those living in the densely-packed and underserved informal settlements, or slums, are among those who suffer the most as a result. For many reasons, access to quality health care is limited in the slums. This is especially true for reproductive health (RH) and family planning (FP) services; they are often mediocre at best and dangerous at worst.



Korogocho Slum, Kenya.

Photo by: S. Merkel

Jhpiego, with generous support from the Wallace Global Fund, has leveraged its history and success in two slum communities—Korogocho and Viwandani—in Nairobi, Kenya to further improve the well-being of women and households in these urban informal settlements. In partnership with the communities and with health care providers, Jhpiego has conducted targeted activities to meet two distinct objectives:

- Improve the quality of and increase the use of reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP) services in the slums
- Learn lessons about RH/FP usage in the slums that can be scaled up within other programs, and to other urban centers nationally, regionally and across regions

IMPROVED THE QUALITY OF AND INCREASED THE USE OF RH/FP SERVICES IN THE SLUMS

Jhpiego has made great strides toward accomplishing the first objective. By utilizing the Performance and Quality Improvement Process (see below for detailed description), Jhpiego has engaged both health care workers and communities to ensure that all slum residents have equitable access to quality reproductive health and family planning services. Specifically:

- A rapid assessment was completed at the start of the project to identify gaps in quality and service provision.

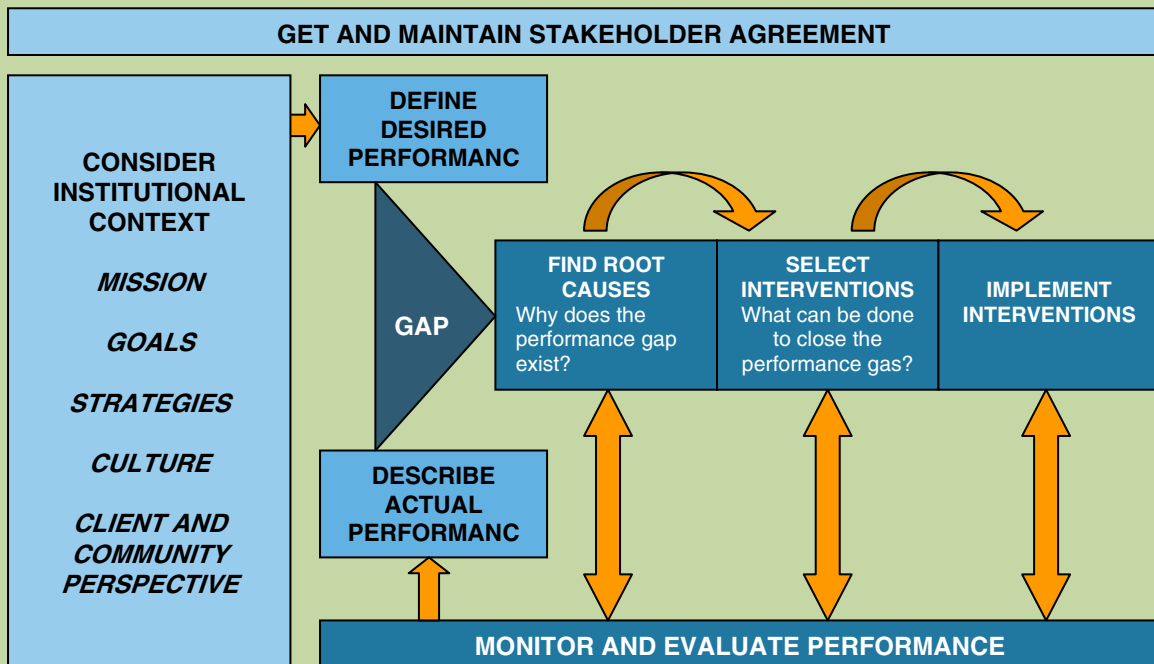
- A stakeholders meeting was held to gain buy-in from both the communities and health care workers, as well as the government bodies that supervise and manage the health facilities. Using the PQI Process, all stakeholders agreed that they were necessary to creating sustained improvements in reproductive health care for slum residents. Local acceptance and ownership of the project has been a key reason for the success of the project.
- The capacity of supervisors has been strengthened through training and logistical assistance to ensure that health care providers are not only offering quality services, but that the relationship between providers and supervisors is productive and beneficial for the providers, as well as for clients.
- Knowledge and skills sets were improved for health care providers in a variety of technical areas, including: contraceptive technology, family planning and HIV integration, adolescent reproductive health services, and behavioral change communication.
- At the community level, advocacy meetings were held to promote the importance of reproductive health for women and to gain buy-in and acceptance of RH services by men and community leaders.
- Participatory mapping exercises were conducted to help community residents identify where RH services can be found, which services have a negative reputation, and where danger spots are for rape and other acts of violence.
- Community-based volunteer lay health workers were trained to offer guidance and counseling to community residents in need of reproductive health services, including youth and pregnant mothers. These and other community groups were made aware of and trained on the Government of Kenya's new "Kenya Essential Package for Health," a nationwide strategy that puts communities at the heart of improving national health indicators. They were also targeted to receive peer education training. In this way, the information they gained from participating in Jhpiego-sponsored activities would be disseminated to others in Korogocho and Viwandani for wider appreciation and understanding of the need for women to access RH services at facilities.
- Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) were brought together to discuss the benefits of pregnant mothers' accessing skilled care at birth. Recognizing the role of TBAs in the communities, Jhpiego worked with the TBAs to strengthen their skills and integrate them into the community-facility linkages for improved care and support for pregnant mothers.

- Long acting contraceptive methods, including the Intrauterine Contraceptive Device, or IUCD, and implant, were re-introduced in five of the eight supported health facilities with very encouraging results. Comparing acceptance between the first third and the second third of 2007, there were 26% more acceptors of long acting and permanent methods; the breakdown was: a 10% increase in implants, 62% increase in IUCD insertions and a doubling of Bitubal Ligation, or BTL (female sterilization). The total number of acceptors did not change over the period.

PQI Explained: To meet the unique situational needs of each health facility and its catchment population, Jhpiego introduced (and has continually refined) the PQI approach. The PQI approach (see figure below) is a very simple, practical and non-proscriptive tool for helping communities assess their needs and develop solutions. Rather than offering a preformed package of solutions, PQI encourages clinics, communities and households to consider four key questions:

PQI APPROACH

- What is the situation?
- What are the gaps at each step in the continuum of care?
- What are the key issues?
- How can we fill the gaps?



Using the PQI model, Jhpiego worked with the communities to identify problems and then guided them to develop their own solutions, thus giving them a stake in the success or failure of the health interventions. In this way, PQI not only built the capacity of local leaders to solve problems, but also energized communities to assert their role in improving health.

DOCUMENTATION OF LESSONS LEARNED FOR SCALING UP RH/FP IN THE SLUMS

Jhpiego has been focused on improving the quality and availability of RH/FP services for slum residents, both by targeting the facility-based health care providers and the community members who access these services. Several lessons have been learned from this experience. Jhpiego plans to further document and disseminate these lessons learned as the project continues.

Key Lessons Learned:

- Communities in the informal settlements are vastly underserved for reproductive health and family planning services. Presence of a health facility within a community does not necessarily translate into improved health. There is a need to create trust and confidence between health facilities and the communities they serve for improved health care quality, and confidence in the services.
- There is a great deal of enthusiasm and energy within both the communities and the health facilities to improve reproductive health services. These stakeholders simply need to be engaged in the quality improvement process. Communities know their challenges in health and must be consulted when coming up with solutions. No outside organizations can claim to know their problems or come up with solutions to health without community involvement. Sometimes solutions are as simple as change of service provider attitudes.
- It is very important to build capacities within the health facilities before creating demand for services in the communities.
- While Jhpiego is working at building capacities of service providers, lack of supplies and equipment continue to inhibit some new knowledge and skills from being put into practice.
- While this program has mainly addressed reproductive health, many other services in the health facilities have improved as a result of program interventions. As an example, assistance to supportive supervision, which helped correct errors in practice and build a friendly mentoring atmosphere, had a large impact on all services offered within the health facilities.
- Real changes, community empowerment and networks can be used beyond the target interventions—as our communities are now using community mapping for other services. Peer education is an important approach to community education in the slums. During peer education sessions, myths, misconceptions and fears of the service providers are addressed. Such sessions create a link between service providers and the community (a link which was initially lacking). A heart-warming example

of this empowerment is the fact that our peer educators used their skill and networks to address the recent outbreaks of violence in the slums.

CHALLENGES

Due to its prior work in Korogocho and Viwandani to introduce comprehensive care for HIV in both government-run and private health facilities, Jhpiego faced no resistance—anticipated or unanticipated—from communities, health care providers or government officials. Jhpiego’s reputation among residents of Korogocho and

Viwandani is well known, the PQI process is now an understood and accepted method of addressing issues related to health, and government officials are thrilled with the improvements in the quality and reach of health services. Remarked Dr. Daniel Nguku, Chief Medical Officer for Health of the Nairobi City Council: “Jhpiego has improved the provision of health services in the health facilities found in the slums of Korogocho and Viwandani. The services are benefiting the community.”



Inside of a home. Korogocho Slum, Kenya.

Photo by: S. Merkel

SUSTAINABLE SUCCESSES

The *Expanding Reproductive Health in African Informal Settlements* program has been a great success. Jhpiego has been able to successfully build on existing programs in the slums and expand access to quality RH/FP services in the slums. However, much remains to be done, and Jhpiego looks forward to continuing its work with the Wallace Global Fund and other donors to scale up the provision of reproductive health services within Korogocho and Viwandani, as well as apply lessons learned to other slum communities in Kenya and beyond.

The greatest achievement that a program such as Expanding Reproductive Healthcare in African Informal Settlements can hope for is systemic change for the improvement of RH/FP services. As the post 2007 election turmoil continues in Kenya, however, Jhpiego has witnessed an even greater achievement: the power of community groups to prevent violence and maintain peace. As the slums became the centers of much ethnic and tribal violence, Jhpiego-formed youth groups mobilized to calm tempers and to promote peace. While RH/FP services have indeed been improved, and

systems are being strengthened for sustainability, the power of health to serve as a catalyst for building community is clear. As evidence of this, on the next page follows the testimonial of Ms. Jane Otai, Program Manager of Jhpiego/Kenya, who has been the principal lead for the Expanding Reproductive Healthcare in African Informal Settlements program, describing her interactions with these youth groups during the post-election tumult. The following was sent in an email on 10 January 2008 from Ms. Jane Otai, Program Manager for Jhpiego/Kenya's urban slums programs, to Mr. Stuart Merkel, Program Officer for Kenya, based in Baltimore:

From: Jane Otai
Sent: January 10, 2008
To: Stuart Merkel
Subject: Youth group interactions

Dear Stu:

Thanks so much for thinking about us during this difficult time in our country. It has been a trying period in our nation. Till now the situation keeps fluctuating and one cannot predict what the next day will look like. The urban slums have been badly affected by this political violence. In Korogocho especially the tribal animosity was more felt. However the most heartening news is that the groups that Jhpiego initiated and is working with worked hard to contain the violence. We work with a youth peer educators group in both slums. In Viwandani, this group came up strongly to call for peace in the slums. Indeed, Viwandani was not so reactive to the elections results because these youths went out of their way and calmed the situation. I was permanently on phone encouraging and motivating them to keep peace. I felt like a commander giving instructions from a command post. Conversations went like this:

- "Hey Jane, what should we do in this situation? The various tribes are planning to start burning houses for the enemy."
- "Please, I urge you to talk to these youths and stop them from this plan. Where are they? Do whatever it takes and prevail on them to stop this plan."
- "But they are already armed."
- "It doesn't matter. You know them and you can convince them not to start this. Can I speak to them?"
- "Okay, I will walk to them and see if they will accept to talk to you." (He then moves to his fellow youth and gives them the phone)
- "Hello, my name is Jane Otai and I would like to speak to you."
- "Oh are you the one from Jhpiego?"
- "Yes. Just let me call you since your phone is running out on credit."

I call him and start the conversation.

- "Yes, I understand you are planning to burn up the Luos' houses."
- "Yes, these guys are stupid and uncircumcised. We won the elections and they are not accepting the results. We want to smoke them out of this slum and show them our might."
- "No, you can't do this. I am sure many of them are innocent. I am also sure you have a girlfriend, relative or just a friend who is Luo. You can't afford to have enemies just because of elections results. Don't do it."
- "So what should we do? The whole country is burning and we need to do something."

- “Yes, you should do something. Call the peer educators and speak peace. Make sure all the youths are informed of this meeting so that you save lives. You know the slums are already suffering from many problems. Why should you add this to the slums? --You are the youths, models, people look up to you for HIV and FP education. NOW if you start burning their houses, how will you again educate them or perform in magnet theatres. Just think about it. Jhpiego will also not want to associate with an arsonist in its programs. So think about your future and you will realize you are net losers’ if you start this burning, raping or any of these evils.”
- “Okay, mum, we will try our best to keep peace.”

These kinds of conversations went on throughout the time violence was in the country. It was a situation that was very palpable and I needed to speak to them hour by hour to ensure they were still keeping the peace. Korogocho and Viwandani groups played significant roles in quelling down the riots. In Korogocho, the support groups organized peace talks between various ethnic communities and saved lives. On Sunday, the youths spread out to all the churches in the slums and promoted peace in the slums. In Viwandani, the beauty queen is one of our peer educators. I encouraged her to speak for peace as the beauty queen and mobilize the women around peace. This worked so well and it's amazing just how an HIV or reproductive health program can be an instrument to save lives in times of war. I have also been able to mobilize blankets from a factory to distribute to the people in the slums who were affected by the skirmishes.

Jane Otai

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN AFRICAN URBAN SLUMS

In Korogocho and Viwandani, Jhpiego continues to work with the community to build upon their joint successes in a sustainable manner. Together, there are many activities planned for the future, some of which include ongoing stakeholders meetings, support group meetings, and community trainings in Reproductive Health and Family Planning. With help and inspiration from slum dwellers, Jhpiego will promote innovative interventions such as Community Health Days during which residents can access free family planning, testing and other services. With service providers at the slums health facilities, Jhpiego will continue to strengthen linkages and foster trust between the service providers and the slums dwellers, as well as providing training on key technical areas.



Photo by: S. Merkel

A training session during a women's HIV support group. Korogocho Slum, Kenya.

Jhpiego is currently pursuing opportunities to scale up to other slums in Nairobi, as well as throughout Kenya and beyond. It is Jhpiego's intention to share lessons learned through this program in a South-to-South collaborative effort worldwide. Jhpiego has shown that targeted amounts of funding can make a huge impact. Using its technical expertise, lessons learned in the communities, the PQI process, and innovative strategies to address the unique challenges each slums community faces, Jhpiego is moving into the next phase of improving health in urban slums; even more can be done with increased levels of support. The time to focus on the health needs of urban slum dwellers is now.