

Parliamentary Engagement for Immunization



KANCO Executive Director making opening remarks during the Members of Parliament sensitization on Immunization

“There is not dignity in living with a vaccine preventable disease”
Dr. Collins Tabu, NVIP

KANCO through the GAVI-HSS project hosted members of the Parliamentary Health Committee led by the Committee vice chairperson Hon. Dr. Mishra Swarup MP-Kesses Constituency on 31st July 2019. The meeting was a follow-up of a previous engagement with the committee to impress on the need for legislative and policy support for immunization, for improved immunization outcomes in the country.

Making opening remarks, the Executive Director KANCO, Mr. Allan Ragi, noted that it is a sad time for Kenya, after cancer had robbed Kenya 3 prominent leaders in one month yet, unfortunately it is the case for many Kenyans as Kenya losses about 90 people to cancer every day. He compelled that in the ongoing media wave around cancer, the policy makers could leverage and support the oncoming HPV vaccine as well as holistically transforming the vaccine and immunization narrative in Kenya. He highlighted the need to reach the missing cases highlighting that in some of the informal settlements in Nairobi, immunization coverage was extremely low giving an example of Ngando whose coverage stood at 33% as of March 2019. He impressed that with the new vaccines coming into place, there is need for strong partnerships to support the uptake and sustainability of vaccines and immunization in general, especially with the impending donors transition.

The acting head Department of Medical Services and Preventive and Promotive Services, Dr. Onyancha appreciating KANCO for convening the forum saying that it was critical in driving the important discussion on getting to the root cause of the challenges surrounding immunization. ‘We have been facing budgeting and supply challenges that impede on efficiency and thus such interactions with members of parliament will help address these challenges sus-

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Hon. Mishra Swarup, making remarks during the engagement

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Hon. Mishra Swarup, the vice-chairperson of the Parliamentary Health Committee, impressed on the on the need to increase the investments for health stating ‘We cannot politicise health, we must invest in adequate and quality health infrastructure including medicines, machinery and human resources to achieve Universal Health Coverage.’ He impressed on health vigilance stating ‘We need to establish a family health day as a step towards ensuring that health is prioritized from the house hold level.’ He emphasized on the need for community sensitization on health matters saying “what a mind doesn’t know, the eye cannot see’ calling for the need for sharing health related information in a language that the communities can understand and translate to action. He impressed that the

citizenry must elect the right leaders for the right position to safeguard their health interest.

Dr. Kibachio addressing the meeting observed “These policy cafes are critical to holding honest exchanges on improving the immunization service delivery sustainably.’ The added that health is still largely in the hands of donors such as GAVI, and thus the conversations around sustainability of health after transition must be prioritized. He noted that the biggest challenge with vaccine is that their value is not immediate and thus often contending with vaccine hesitancy compounded by myths and misconceptions around them. He impressed on the need for the ministry of health to help package information to help members of parliament articulate health issues well. He made a call to KANCO to include the media in these engagements as they are critical in promoting information dissemination and learning.

Sharing on the status of immunization in the County, Dr. Collins Tabu highlighted the funding gap as at Kshs. 734Million calling for both legislative and financial support for immunization. He challenged that “There is no dignity in living with a vaccine preventable disease” terming it as a lifelong injustice to our children. He observed that the conversation was moving from the push to immunise to the quality of vaccines, saying unfortunately in these conversations, some quarters of the population are left behind. He called on the need for continuous financial support, leadership and governance, structural reforms and consistency until all vaccine preventable disease are eradicated; steps critical to Kenya meeting the national and global health obligations.

Hon Martin Peter Owiti, Nthiwa Constituency MP, called on the ministry of health to get their priorities right, as the priorities presented to parliament form the basis for the budget allocation. He impressed on the need for consid-

eration of the household as the primary implementation level and thus the family must be empowered so that the health seeking conversations begin there.

Hon Dr. Esseli Simiyu MP Tongaren Constituency, impressed on the need to have legislation. He challenged KANCO and the technical team from the ministry of health to evaluate the gaps existing in immunization legislation to effectively inform policy ask and reforms.

In closing, two action points were identified, including evaluating the immunization financing and Legislation to highlight the gaps through a multi stakeholder engagement led by KANCO and the Ministry of Health technical team, to inform the next the policy engagements with the Parliamentary health committee.



Dr. Onyancha, MOH making remarks during the engagement

Reaching Every Child: Immunization Outreach in Embakasi East and West



Immunization and Vitamin A supplementation during the Immunization Outreach in Embakasi East and West

KANCO in partnership with the Ministry of Health conducted a two days immunization outreach between the 2nd and 3rd of August 2019, in the Embakasi East (Maendeleo Learning Centre) and Embakasi West (Mowlem Superloaf Primary School) towards reaching every child and improve the immunization outcomes by bringing services closer to the people.

The immunization coverage in these two informal settlements remains significantly low. In Embakasi East it stands at 37% and Embakasi West at 31% against the Nairobi county average of 96%. The informal settlements often contend with Vaccine Hesitancy and Resistance, high levels of poverty that impede health seeking behavior yet the living condition make the residents highly susceptible to diseases and infections.

Prior to the health camps, KANCO and Ministry of Health worked with CHVs to conduct mobilization all week ahead of the outreach. To maximize on the outcome, the stakeholders conducted a walk around the community, in Mukuru kwa Reuben slum and around Mowlem to create more awareness and mobilize the resident for service uptake. During the walk, community members were sensitized on the importance of immunization and other health services offered at the health camp.

In both Embakasi East and West where the outreaches were conducted there was great turn out with resident seeking a range of services including immunization services, TB screening, HTS, Family Planning and referrals.

Worth noting is that anti-vaccine sentiments are quite high in both areas propelled by myths and misconceptions and religious dogmas. An example is during the walk at Mukuru Kwa Reuben Slum, the team came across a lady who had recently joined a sect that saw her withdraw her kids from school, stop seeking formal health care including immunization. The chief shared that her actions attracted a lot of attention, and his office working with the County Children Department intervened and took the older children away placing them in a children home. During the outreach, the team tried to reach the mother to bring her youngest 6 month old baby for check up and immunization and they were met with great hostility where she refused to open the gate nor engage. While these cases are quite common, they call for multi-stakeholder concerted effort to combat these anti vaccine sentiments for the safety of the future generations.



CHV holding a poster displaying the services being provided at the outreach camps

Immunization Outreach Pictorials : Embakasi East and West



Weight taking



Measuring the MUAC



Mother and Child after receiving services



Extreme Left Dr. Koyio Nairobi County Health Director, Florence Kabuga, County EPI Logistician and county nurses during the outreach



Care givers and children waiting to receive health services



GAVI-HSS Project Manager , Elizabeth Muchoki giving a health talk during the outreach



Dr. Koyio, the Nairobi County Health Director Sharing on the state of immunization in the County with the GAVI team



CHVs working in Embakasi West, reiterating that Vaccines Work!



Dr. Koyio immunizing a child



Parents, Caregivers and their children registering to take up the health services at the camp



TB Screening services at the outreach camp



GAVI-HSS project assistant Ann Wanjiru and CHV celebrating the end of a two day successful outreach in Embakasi East

When Religion Prohibits Immunization



Mama Mary and her two youngest daughters

Religion is a major social pillar in societies and more so in the informal settlements where the socio-economic challenges force people to seek refuge and hope in the places of worship. But what happens when the religious teaching goes against the societal grain or infringe on the right to health of the followers? Some religions for various reasons have been accused of or have come out to oppose the uptake of vaccines citing different reasons, and leveraging on the trust of the followers to advance their agendas. Some use fear and intimidation forcing their followers to either refrain from seeking health services or do so secretly. While the age-old conflict between science and religion rages on, the victim remains the innocent child who has no power to make decisions, yet so gravely affected by the decisions that the stakeholders make.

This is the story of Mama Mary* a mother of 9 and expecting the 10th child. A member of the Kavonokia sect, predominant in Eastern Kenya and some pockets of the informal settlements. The sect prohibits both formal health care including vaccines and family planning as well as formal education. Mama Mary's problems are further compounded by the fact that her husband is a leader in the sect and so she is supposed to set a precedence for the followers by walking the talk using her own children and family.

Mama Mary worries though, and that's why she's been contacting Njeri, a CHV in the area to secretly take her children to the hospital when they are unwell, but she reckons that her husband and any other person must never know, as the consequences could be dire.

During the Outreach held by KANCO and the Ministry of Health in Embakasi West, Njeri convinced her to bring her two youngest children aged 4 and 5 years (Terry* and Lily*) to the outreach centre. She offered to accompany them and the children got all the vaccines they had missed as the health workers assured her of confidentiality in all their services. She expressed that she was happy with the reception and would consider going back next time.

Though the administrative officials are doing their best to keep tabs on parents and combat these abuses to the rights of children, children like Terry and Lily are still at the mercy of their parents and stakeholders who must push for legislation and sustained advocacy and financing for vaccines to ensure these children are reached.

Immunizing the Street Families: Defaulter Tracing, Embakasi West



Monica and her two sons, and Njeri a CHV Embakasi West

Most children born to street families face multiple deprivations – from poor nutrition to inadequate health, water and sanitation services leaving them highly susceptible to a myriad of diseases including vaccine preventable diseases. Monica's case is one that many street families can relate with.

A mother of three, Monica and her children aged 8, 4 and 2 years, until recently had been living in the streets until a well-wisher offered to pay her rent. Monica and her sister were orphaned early in life and she never got to enroll for formal education. She also became a mother at a very young age and had to contend with the economic hardships as well as take care of her eldest daughter Mary who is now eight years old and yet to start school.

Monica shares that she knows that vaccines are important and has once in while taken each of her children to get them, but often the economic hardships are more pressing and she has to forego other things and concentrate on getting food for her children. Monica collects plastic bottles which are resold at a small fee, which she says only facilitates her to feed her children. "Even clothing to us is a luxury, food comes first. But often I'm able to pick disposed clothes as I go around and that's what my children wear"

Monica expressed her gratitude for the outreach, saying "I'm happy that my children and myself will get services here, today for free and I don't have to take so much time, this kind of health service delivery would help other parents like me to protect their children without too much hustle"

Monica shared that most mothers in the streets know that vaccines are important, but there are too many competing needs, thus asked the stakeholders to seek ways to reach them. She added that often these parents shy away from hospitals because they are ungroomed and unrepresentable and are often apprehensive of how they would be received by the health workers and also fear that they may be required to pay for these services. She requested that special attention be given to the street and migratory populations as they create pockets of infections that pose a danger to their children,

CHV Voices in Immunization in Embakasi Sub County



Catherine Njeri, sharing the CHVs experience in Immunization in Embakasi East

Catherine Njeri a CHV in Embakasi West shares that the biggest challenge the CHVs have had to contend with in terms of pushing mothers for immunization are religious sects that are dominant in the slum area that strongly oppose immunization and sometimes escalate the opposition to hostility against the CHVs. She also cited ignorance given that the benefits of immunization are not immediate, most parents feel that their children do not really need them. There is also the challenge of myths and misconceptions that are wide spread in the slum areas, for example some people question the intention of vaccines fearing that they are meant to wipe out the communities since they are poor.

She shared that the CHVs are committed to educating the residents and asked that such outreaches be brought more often as they greatly compliment their efforts to reaching every child. She also called on the county government to consider instituting a health facility in the area to improve access to health care as presently health facilities are extremely far apart.

Marking World Breastfeeding Week 2019



Nairobi County World Breastfeeding Week 2019 walk

KANCO participated in the Nairobi County World Breastfeeding Week (WBW2019), organized by Career Mothers For Exclusive Breastfeeding (CAMFEB) and the Ministry of Health on the 3rd August 2019. Participants walked from Uhuru Park to Nyayo stadium and back to the podium for interactions and speeches.

Veronica Kirogo, the head of Nutrition and dietetics services in the ministry of health touched on the *Breastfeeding mother bill 2017*, that every office must have a lactating area. She called on the CSOs to do more advocacy on the matter to make sure that it's fully implemented.

shared on Breastfeeding foundation of good nutrition terming it 'A great investment!' She also noted that returning to work after delivery is the leading cause for non-exclusive 6 months breastfeeding. She then urged the local companies to follow the health act, and to adhere to the requirements. "A woman should be able to provide for her family economically, and nourishment for her infants," she noted.

Nereah Amondi, a nominated ward representative in Homabay County talked about her experience as a working mom, who had to go back to work immediately after delivering. She emphasized that it is a both parents matter, and even fathers need to come in the campaigns for exclusive breastfeeding.

Peter, the CEO of SUSO, a youth centered organization, talked about how breastfeeding will give us a strong society and the importance of engaging youths in such campaigns, because they are the parents of tomorrow. 21 year old Jessica, who is a student and a mother of one, gave the overwhelming journey of being a mother in school. She appreciated such initiatives, saying they were timely as 'The next young parent will have an easier time.'

Martha Kimkungi, the founder of CAMFEB talked

Upcoming Events:

- ♦ High Level Women Parliamentarians Engagement on Immunization and Child Health
- ♦ SUN-CSA ,ACSM sub- committee meeting 9th August 2019

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