



Newsletter



**Empowering Communities to
Combat Contraceptive Stock
outs and increase choice**

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter reporting on the progress of implementation of the project **Empowering Ugandan Communities to Combat Contraceptive Stock outs and Expand Contraceptive Choice**. After 17 months of the project implementation, it's the onset of project achievements and results which we focus on in this edition. Some of the key activities in this quarter included Radio Talk Shows, TRAC FM opinion polls questions, community drama skits promoting family planning, field support visits, an input matrix and follow ups on community action plans during the second round of Community score cards. Though there have been some challenges in our effort to empower communities in Kamuli and Mbarara districts to combat contraceptive stock outs and increase choice, the project experience has come with positive lessons to learn. This will go a long way to help us perform even better in the quest to make our intervention a success.

Enjoy the read both in this newsletter and on our website. As always, we welcome your comments. You can reach us at info@heps.or.ug www.heps.or.ug



Above, a community monitor teaches people about family planning in Kamuli District, Left, a community member hosted during a radio talk show at KBS FM, kamuli and Below, the Panel in KBS FM studios. Monthly talk shows are held in Mbarara and Kamuli to sensitise people on family planning and promote a full, free and informed choice.



Nankadulo Community petitions D.H.O over contraceptive stock outs



Family planning Scorecard issues outlined in main stream media

During the last quarter, HEPS UGANDA held a press conference and the key issues from the scorecard results were highlighted in the main stream media and online at <http://www.observer.ug/lifestyle/42-entertainment/43260-civil-society-decries-contraceptive-stock-outs>



A community monitor in Kamuli discussing barriers to access of family planning as scored in the community scorecard

Family Planning saved me from annual pregnancy woes

Rosemary Nanteeza, 35, from Kibweera Cell, Biharwe Division in Mbarara district has given birth in each of the last six years. She now has 6 children. She got a miscarriage during her seventh pregnancy.

Realizing that her husband was not about to stop procreating, she resorted to using pills as one way of preventing herself from getting pregnant again in secrecy.

"I started using pills without telling my husband because I did not consult a health worker since I was doing it in secret. I was tired of giving birth every year and this made me weak and I could not work hard to provide for my

family as much as possible," Nanteeza remarks. This was before she met Safina Millers a community monitor trained by HEPS Uganda during the door to door household community sensitization on family planning. Nanteeza and her husband were able to understand. She used this chance to open up to her husband with the truth about the family planning method she had been using secretly.

He understood after being sensitized about the good that family planning can bring to their home. Nanteeza and her husband then went to Biharwe health center III where she got an injection after counseling by the health

worker. She says they used to fear family planning because of the myths and misconceptions around its use. Currently they are now living happily because they are not worried about unplanned pregnancies.

"My children are continuing to go to school. Those days, I would get pregnant every year but now my last born is 3 years. If it wasn't family planning by now I would have gotten pregnant," Nanteeza narrates. She has empowered and encouraged her friends start using family planning and she is very proud about it "Thanks to HEPS, for changing our lives, I'm proud to be using family planning"

Men should be involved in family planning

Says Lawrence Ssemanda

Ssemanda Lawrence, 32 has been married to Grace, 28 for 6 years. They live Bihaarwe, Mbarara district. They have one child who is aged 3 years and 7 months. Ssemanda says that it wasn't easy to accept the idea of family planning in his mind. He had to however put his pride aside when he was approached by one of the community trainers capacitated by HEPS Uganda to sensitize communities on rights based sexual reproductive

health including family planning. "My wife told me about family planning and of course as a man it was not easy for me to let her use family planning." He says. It has been noted from the community scorecards carried out in Mbarara that low male involvement in making family planning decisions has affected the access of these services.

Ssemanda says he had to put my pride aside to save

his wife the unplanned pregnancies. "A community trainer from HEPS came to visit us at home telling us about family planning. At first I wanted to chase her away but because of my wife's situation, I agreed to listen. Because of the sensitization by HEPS and visiting a health center after that, we learnt it was possible to be on family planning to have a better and fulfilling life by spacing our children even when it was hard for me to comprehend. Later we agreed to have only 3 children and currently my wife is taking pills as a method of family planning." He narrates.



When Waiswa Monica, a HEPS Uganda trained community monitor encountered Mrs. Kyankone Harriet at her home in Nawanyago Sub County during a routine house hold visit, she didn't envisage the level of influence information can have on dispelling myths and misconceptions about family planning in the locale. A self confessed Kyankone intimated that she has always shunned family planning because she didn't have knowledge about it until Monica showed up at her home. She is now an ardent user and promoter of family planning and contraception among her peers.

"At first, I did not want anything to do with family planning. To me that was stopping to produce and whenever I imagined about that, there was no way I would discuss using family planning with my husband. After all even religious leaders never encouraged us to use it and whenever somebody approached me over issues to do with family planning, they would get a bitter response", says Kyankone. But after the household sensitization about rights based family planning by Monica Waiswa, a HEPS Uganda trained community trainer, Kyankone was able to change her attitude and her misconceptions about family planning dispelled. Now she is an ardent promoter of family planning use and she approves the use of information to sensitize people about family. She thus says; "It was the first time I heard of such a thing like having rights and responsibilities as far as deciding whether to use family planning is concerned. Monica explained to me the three family planning rights of full, free and informed choice, and also told me my responsibilities, I had questions about what I was told by friends...she was able to clear some which was rumor and referred me to Buphandhengo health centre III for more information and to clear my questions that needed to be answered by the health worker.."

The rights based approach to family planning which HEPS Uganda has employed has triggered community interest and willingness from community members to seek family planning services from their local health facilities. Harriet asserted that Monica's continued visits enabled her and her husband to slowly realize the need to embrace family planning and that the choice needed to be theirs.

Rights Based Family Planning Sensitisation as a Key Driver of Change in Communities

"Monica never specified which particular family planning method to use, she always said it's upon us to go and seek information on the available family planning methods and then choose for ourselves... We had six children and the sixth one came not because we were ready for her... when we tried to discuss our needs as a family, our capability and our future with more than six children, we started seeing the need for what Monica was always telling us," says Harriet. But she adds: "After the health worker Monica took us to, gave us information on all methods we found there, me and my husband felt interested in the permanent method after deciding that the six children we have were enough, it was interesting making our own choice and the health worker just guiding us on. We felt happy our right was respected since we also played our responsibility of going for information and sharing as much as we could with the health worker...the rate

I was giving birth was high, in fact I would be pregnant by now had it not been me embracing family planning, but now I have concentrated on business which is doing good and my husband is also doing fine in his business..." Like Harriet, many community members are still ignorant about their rights and responsibilities as far as family planning is concerned, yet these can ably change their perceptions if more interventions are geared to support and empower them to knowing their family planning rights and playing their responsibility. Harriet is among the few who have realized the need to limit the number of giving birth in a district were fertility rate is at 7.2 for an average woman! Harriet says that she know many people who are still at large with negative perceptions towards family planning and contraception who need to get sensitized. "If they get the information that I got am sure they will be responsible and will start using



HEPS trained community monitor Monica (left) talks to Harriet (right)

CHANGE STORY

family planning... knowing my family planning rights and my responsibilities enabled me and my husband to make the most important decision in our life, by choosing the best family planning method together," she says. HEPS Uganda has empowered 200 community monitors in eight district sub counties with information on family planning rights and responsibilities, and like Monica these have managed to sensitize more than 1000 people on family planning rights and responsibilities. The project impact has been felt by health centre administrators and workers who applaud HEPS Uganda for empowering the communities with information to make full, free and informed choices on family planning. Mr Nhaika Vincent, an In-Charge of Buphathengo health centre III Nawanyago sub county testifies that the number of people coming for family planning services has generally increased at the health facility compared to the previous years. "It has been a nice experience, we did not think a lot would happen when the project had just come but now we see it can work and cause meaningful impact, community members now are supportive in ensuring that service delivery in the area of family planning improves at this health centre, but this has only been because they are starting to play their responsibilities gradually, we just wish empowerment can be maintained for some time," he says.

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Nhaika Vincent, In-Charge
Buphathengo health centre III



A community member teaching other women about family planning barriers during the score card in Mbarara



A community Monitor doing door to door family planning sensitisation in Kamuli



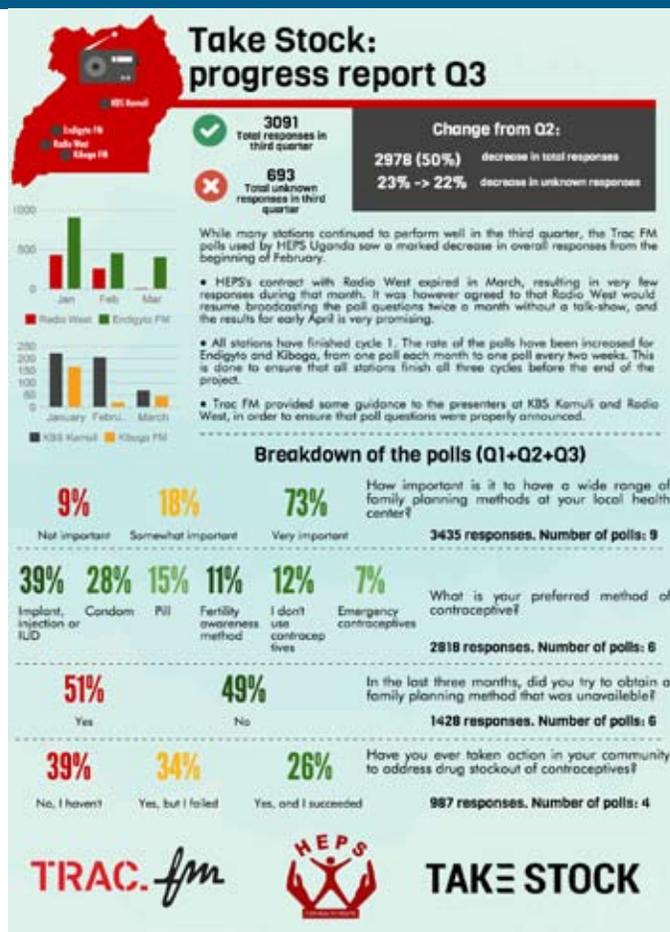
Family Planning sensitisation in Balawoli subcounty, Kamuli District.

Tracking Progress with TRAC FM

Trac FM is an online software platform serving Radio stations, NGO's and Government bodies with the ability to hold citizen centered interactive Radio polls through a visualization dashboard that creates unique crowd-sourced Feedback Loops.

Trac FM has enabled HEPS Uganda to interact directly with even more of the most important people in the bid to improve access to family planning commodities and services: the women and men themselves who want to have a full, free, and informed choice when it comes to family planning. The Trac FM platform has been used to feature live interactive SMS polls during radio shows that address the issue. TRAC FM uses SMS based opinion polls where the radio presenter reads out a question on air and the public responds with answers sent to a given code. The SMS' are free of charge. By gathering the reactions of the audience through the Trac FM platform, our radio talk shows have even become

even more lively and informed by the voices of the listeners. Meanwhile, Trac FM's smart visualisation of the data has allowed us to evaluate the impact of the project. During the project life time, more than 20 opinion polls have so far been run on both Radion West (Mbarara) and Kamuli Broadcasting Services (KBS) in Kamuli. The Trac FM's platform has helped to support citizens to hold policy makers and other relevant actors accountable,



in this case local health service delivery. Listeners in both districts of Kamuli and Mbarara have been directly making themselves heard about the availability of family planning and contraception and their use in the community. Below is an infographic summary of the TRAC FM polls which were conducted

Achievements in the last quarter (Jan-March 2016)

All the action plans that were identified during the first phase of the score card in Kamuli and Mbarara have been achieved to a tune of 70%. The remaining actions are continuous such as community sensitization.

There has been a great improvement towards community response to the poll questions. This has been due to the various community interventions that have been used to reach out to community on family planning.

There has been a great improvement in the relationship between community and the health service providers as

reported and scored during the score card activity. A great number of people have experienced the desire for long term and permanent methods of family planning after our sensitisation drives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

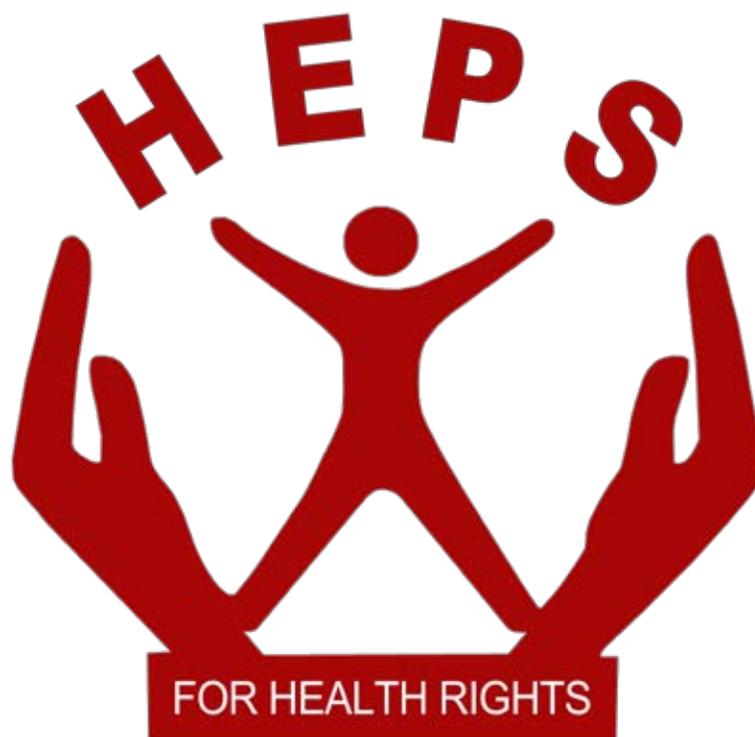
There is need to advocate for a streamlined budget for family planning and this should be prioritized.

For the case of information giving, family planning needs to be prioritized by the health departments and comprehensive counselors targeting family planning should be trained and placed at various health facilities

The mid wives need full capacity building on family planning. This should range from information giving, capacity to offer the methods and then management of the side effects.

There is need to strengthen in house trainings among the various health centres to ensure that those who have the skills can capacitate other who lack these skills.

There is also need for the organizations offering direct service deliver to build capacity of the health workers at these outreach points.



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