



Report on COVID-19 Pandemic in Informal Settlement twitter chat

May 15th, 2020



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Background

The world is currently grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely stretched the health care systems of most countries and significantly compromised the social and economic order at micro and macro levels. As it stands, there are an estimated 4,200,953 confirmed cases of COVID 19 globally, with 284,150 deaths and 1,502,591 recoveries. In Kenya, there have been 672 confirmed cases, 32 deaths and 41 recoveries as of 14th May 2020. Whereas the burden remains relatively low compared to other countries of the globe, the risk of community infection remains significantly high and this is corroborated by the Ministry of Health which links all recent cases to community infections.

As the country continues to scale up its response efforts, there have been notable concerns with the rising cases of COVID 19 infections in informal settlements and other densely populated areas in cities and towns. The Ministry of health has particularly singled out settlements like Kawangware, Kibera, Eastleigh and Old town, with the latter two being subjected to further containment measures in the form of restricted movement.

Dense population, coupled with congested housing, shared amenities and general resource limitations are some of the factors behind the rising incidence of COVID 19 in these settings as they make it difficult for residents to practice preventive measures outlined in the global guidelines such as social distancing, frequent hand-washing with soap and water and other hygiene practices aimed at combating the virus.

Other than the growing risk of infection in the informal settlements, loss of livelihoods due to shut down/slowdown of some of the industries is also likely to see an upsurge of insecurity within the settlements. It also increased tension at household level with cases of gender based violence being reported. Similarly, school closure is likely to see an increase in the incidence of teenage pregnancies, which predominantly tends to affect urban informal settlements compared to other urban setups.

In view of the foregoing, UNFPA in collaboration with Nairobi County Department of Health, Polycom Development Project, Koch FM, and UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel convened a twitter chat on Friday 11th May 2020 between 11:00am-12:00pm

Panelists



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Panelist



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Mrs. Jane Anyango,
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Mr. Tom Mboya
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Panelist



Dr. Olajide Ademola
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Moderator

Objectives

- To deliberate on the risks and implications of COVID-19 on people from urban informal settlements
- To explore practical solutions from the residents on what needs to be done to flatten the curve

Key Issues Raised

Informal settlements being disproportionately affected by COVID 19 than other settlements

- The daily numbers posted by the ministry covers almost every part of Nairobi, informal settlements included. Nonetheless, concerns raised over rising numbers in informal settlements brings fear to the residents as most people find it hard to live with the new restrictions.
- There are so far eight (8) confirmed cases in Kibera, and being an area where people depend on others (99%) to survive, social distancing isn't possible, and hygiene is also a challenge. Residents have however not given up and are doing their best to keep their people safe

Interference with empowerment efforts including safe spaces for girls and young people

- The Pandemic has interfered with the Girls' platforms and safe spaces where SRHR information are disseminated,
- Meetings to discuss issues affecting girls in the informal settlements have been restricted and the girls can't reach organizations like Polycom online because they can't afford the cost of a phone or even air time to call

Challenges in adhering to social distancing in informal settlements

- Physical distancing is almost impossible in the informal settlements given the crowding and the size of the "house" vis a vis the number of people in a household
- This is the time one of the big 4s Agenda should be discussed, decent housing should be mainstreamed by county government

SRHR, GBV and mental health concerns in informal settlements

- Houses in Kibera are too small, families aren't used to sharing these small spaces. With the curfew and lockdown, these shared spaces bring a lot of conflicts and results in GBV
- Lack of information, sanitary towels and psychosocial support for mental health challenges is critical at this point as there is high depression due to poor economic conditions not forgetting Gender based violence
- Women and girls, are going through ALOT especially on GBV and on menstrual management. They have inadequate sanitary pads.

Ongoing community led efforts to respond to COVID19 in informal settlements

- Community led initiatives of fighting COVID 19 should be supported. Community health volunteers should be part of the response team, while specific programs for women/girls should be enhanced
- We must step up awareness on handwashing and use of masks in the short term. However, COVID-19 presents an opportunity for us to rethink about family planning and decent housing
- Engage CHVs and the youth for door to door testing. This however calls for equipping of local communities with test kits
- Korogocho community have come together, mobilizing through WhatsApp, fundraising and putting handwashing points in all the 9 villages. They are also giving food supplies to the aged in the community besides awareness
- Artists in Kibera have devised a way of collaborating with various NGOs in the community to obtain vouchers for food relief. Well-wishers have also been at the forefront doing the same since the local majority lack basic needs
- Misinformation is the greatest enemy and it can bring about trauma leading to "fear of the Pandemic". KCOMNET through local community radio stations in the informal settlements is providing fact-checked information to debunk the fake information
- Art is powerful and communicates directly. CREAM in kibra has done some excellent artistic work there. One can demonstrate proper wearing of masks

Current needs in informal settlements to facilitate appropriate response

- Water is a basic need. It helps in hygiene and sanitation and informal settlement lacks it despite being key in COVID19 response. Recently, some women had to fetch water from the sewer line due to the inconsistencies in water supply patterns.
- Women as caregivers should have access to gloves, masks, detergents and event enough food for the whole family. They all rely on her to survive
- Grassroots women are the uncelebrated champions in this COVID 19 response. Making sure hygiene stuff, food and information can be accessed by the families. They should access relief services
- Unemployment, drugs and substance abuse are the major problems in informal settlements especially at this time when the country is fighting corona virus

Recommendations

Addressing information needs on COVID19 prevention in informal settlements

- Educative illustrations can be done to show just how fast the spread can reach and how effective social distancing can be. The people just need a distinctive contrast to understand the importance.
- Designing communications that best targets the youth is a key. Using the role models in the region can as well enhance a better understanding. Not forgetting the slung used in the slums.
- Leveraging on the artistic power by the youth is a plus in matters sensitization especially using artists from the informal settlements and not the national or international artists. Youth are the solution. Creative youth can be challenged to pass safety guidelines along to their peers through sheng rap or spoken word that can be done on phone and shared via WhatsApp. Some groups have also done graffiti.
- Adherence to the Pandemic directives that are there, and going for home visits to offer information and psychosocial support to young people and in particular girls who are weighed down by their girl issues
- Use of community radios to give information on how to observe protective measures
- Door to door advocacy for families to understand that this is a temporary situation and no one is to blame should be undertaken, a serious need to engage the CHVs

Addressing SRHR, GBV and mental health challenges during this COVID19 period

- The girls still need safe spaces to meet, share and be advised, without these they end up with people who take advantage of them
- Whereas digital interventions can impact on girls' welfare, in the least way we can, with face to face empowerment sessions should continue while adhering to the set rules
- Toll free hotlines where the women and girls can speak to counselors should they need to speak to someone or if they feel unsafe. Regular virtual safe space sessions for those that have access to internet should also be explored

Addressing economic needs of residents of informal settlements during the COVID19 period

- Economic strengthening at this time of lockdown is the biggest challenge. How to feed in a time where businesses can't run effectively puts those in informal settlement at even higher risks compared to that of COVID 19. From other communicable infections, teen pregnancy and crime
- When livelihoods are affected and fear beats reason, the common "mwananchi" prefers a fight with an unknown pandemic rather than a fight with what he/she may know best, Poverty. Feed the people and they will oblige.
- Information flow in the Informal settlements should be accompanied with solutions to basic needs to avoid constant movements to 'hustle' hence an uphill task in contact tracing and combating the pandemic