



UNFPA Kenya
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LEAVING NO ONE

BEHIND!



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Dr. Ademola Olajide,
UNPFA Representative



FOREWORD

Statement from the Representative

I am pleased to share the Third Edition of UNPFA Kenya's quarterly magazine.

We applaud the Government of Kenya for the tremendous capacity and resilience in efforts to contain the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. The experience has been fraught with challenges in an environment of limited past lessons to guide the strategic thrust across health, social and economic platforms. The milestones and results that inspire us today are fruits of unwavering collective hope and collaboration in confronting the crisis.

We are confident that the worst is in the past as we continue witnessing a drastic decline in Covid-19 morbidity and mortality statistics. Yet we echo the President's call to remain acutely aware of the need to sustain containment measures as we march towards building back better. We aim to realize not just the absence of numbers that signal despair but genuine and sustainable improvement in the quality of life for all.

UNPFA has diligently pursued its mandate in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, gender

equality and women empowerment, adolescents and youth, and population and development in the last three months despite the unique constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. We have equally maintained focus on delivering interventions in humanitarian settings against the backdrop of concurrent and intersecting emergencies such as the locust infestation, floods, conflict and Covid-19. The transformative impact of our efforts together with our partners that we present here seek to contribute to Kenya's vision of a prosperous middle-income nation by 2030.

During this period, we marked the World Population Day, the World Humanitarian Day and the World Contraception Day. These occasions are integral to strengthening advocacy for action on the various commitments espoused in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. We appeal to all actors across the development spectrum to sustain the tempo of accelerating the promises made during the ICPD25 Nairobi Summit in 2019.

Our solemn obligation is to bring the furthest behind in the development hierarchy to the mainstream. We continue seeking strategic partnerships and strengthening collaborations with Government and other development partners to ensure adolescents

and youth, the elderly, survivors of all forms of violence, and persons with disability experience the authentic value of a prosperous society. UNFPA leverages its expertise in population and development to ensure these constituents are targeted for effective service delivery and access to requisite information. Our promise and pledge is to heed their voice.

We are at the tipping point, pulsating with optimism that the coming three months will crown this historic year with new initiatives and breakthroughs that will catalyze recovery of missed opportunities and deferred actions as we grappled with Covid-19. We shall take forward the precious lessons learnt and ways of doing things in keeping with the new normal. We shall not permit the baggage of the past to hinder our view of the infinite possibilities created by our partnership and solidarity.

The FINISH LINE is nigh!

“ The milestones and results that inspire us today are fruits of unwavering collective hope and collaboration in confronting the crisis.”



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Light at the End of the Tunnel: Covid-19 Highlights

Flattening the Curve: Kenya has managed Covid-19 for 195 days since the first case was established on the 13th of March 2020. Cases reduced drastically during the month of September compared to the preceding months of July and August (Figure 1). This has been cited as evidence of the curve flattening in the country. Cumulatively, 38,713 Kenyans have tested positive for Covid-19 between March and September 2020 out of a sample size of 562,648 while 718 have succumbed to health conditions

associated with the pandemic. The national attack rate presently stands at 81.4% while the case fatality rate (CFR) is 1.9%. The positivity rate for the country is 7.01%.

There was a slight decline in asymptomatic cases from 92.0% in July to 93.2% in September. Local transmissions for the largest segment of Covid-19 positive cases at 98.3%. The main presenting symptoms have remained the same over the last

three months albeit a noticeable decline in coughs and headaches over the period: coughs, 50%; fever, 35%; difficulty in breathing, 27%; headache, 10%; sore throat, 7%; and running nose, 6%.

- Total number of health workers infected are 1078 with 16 mortalities reported in 38 counties.
- Currently, there are 19 COVID – 19 cases admitted in intensive care unit and 22 are on supplemental oxygen.

- Recoveries from both health facilities and home based care support presently stand at 64.9% up from 58% in August 2020.

38,713

Covid-19 Positive Cases between March and September

718

Lives Lost to Covid-19

562,648

Population Tested for Covid-19 between March and September 2020

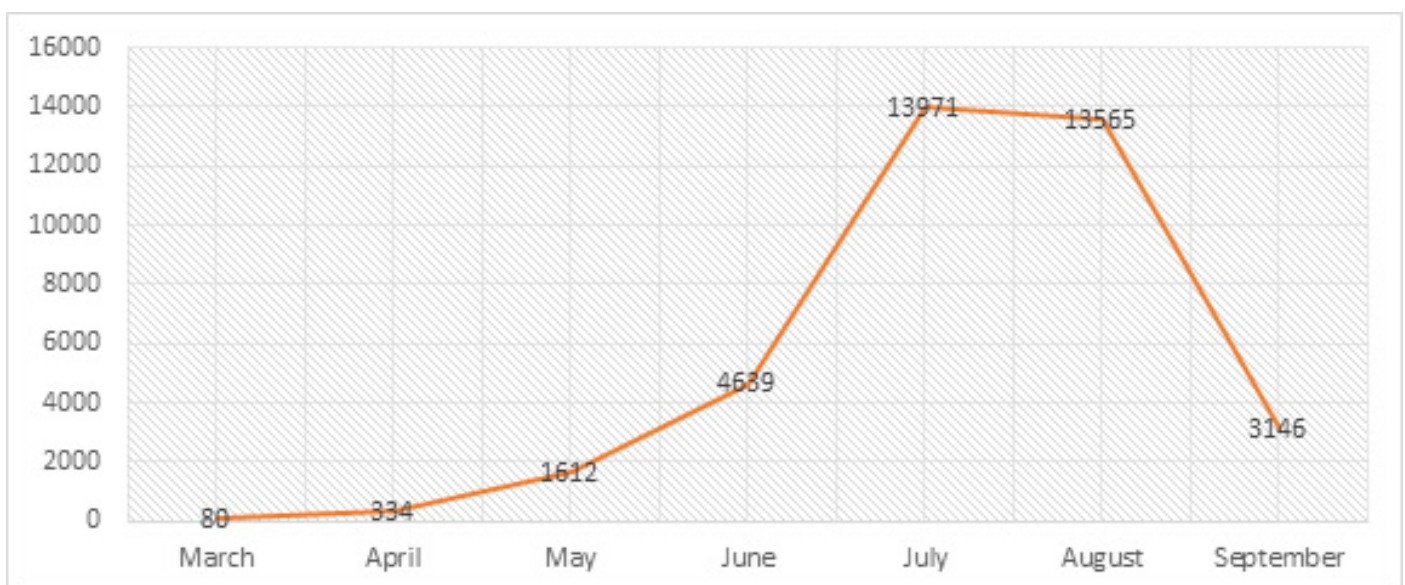


Figure 1: Pandemic progression

What has UNFPA done to mitigate effects of Covid 19?



2,100

PPEs distributed to Kisumu County and health facilities in informal settlements in Nairobi



9

Specialists deployed to provide technical assistance to national and county governments



3,385

Mama kits and dignity kits distributed



5,040

GBV cases received on the Hotline 1195 and offered PFA and referral services



13

Number of counties visited by UNFPA staff for advocacy and awareness on SRH and GBV, including FGM and child marriage



5.3 Million

Number reached with information through print and electronic media



3

New partners supporting implementation of the Covid-19 response



201

Local administrators sensitized on FGM



1,362

Number of skilled deliveries conducted in Kakuma and Kalobeyei between July and September 2020

A Disability-Inclusive Response to Covid-19 in Kisumu and Kakamega Counties

Photo: This Ability Trust in partnership with UNFPA Kenya joins Kakamega Immanuel Deaf-Women Group to celebrate International Deaf Awareness Week



Like every emergency does, the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a disproportionate and larger negative impact on vulnerable communities. The pandemic has affected people of all categories, but persons with disabilities have been hardest hit.

In addressing challenges faced by persons with disabilities during these difficult times, UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide and This-Ability Trust Managing Trustee, Lizzie Kiama, set out to Kisumu and Kakamega counties to assess the impact of Covid-19 on the community and identify feasible mitigating measures.

The team interacted with women and girls with disabilities, the County Government leadership and disability focal points to explore the impact of Covid-19 on access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. The main challenges, according to the women, are stigma, discrimination

and insufficient capacity by health personnel to attend to women living with disabilities.

“Physical distancing is nearly impossible for many who rely on caregivers. We need assistance from people to get dressed, move about and even wash hands in public spaces to keep COVID19 away,” explained Benter Bella, the Chairperson of the Women with Disabilities Organisation.

A visit to Nyalenda Medical Centre confirmed lack of sufficient disability friendly infrastructure like beds, sign language interpretation, ramps, bathrooms and toilets. The team was told that there has been a drop in the number of visits since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country.

UNFPA committed to work closely with the Kisumu County Government and This-Ability Trust to ensure improvement of service provision to women and girls with disabilities. Priority will be given to ensuring

improved infrastructure in a pilot medical facility and training of the medical personnel to reduce stigma, and improve communication with people with disability.

UNFPA donated assorted COVID-19 PPE kits to the Kisumu Government through the Kenya Red Cross. The donation was received by the Kisumu County Deputy Governor, Dr. Matthew Owili, and the County Executive Committee Members for Health, Prof. Boaz Nyunya.

The County Governor who also chairs the Council of Governors, H.E. Wycliffe Oparanya, received the team in Kakamega County. Governor Oparanya explained the milestones his government has made in improving access to medical services especially for persons with disabilities. He acknowledged existing gaps in access infrastructure, data collection, as

well as medical personnel training in sign language interpretation and braille, which he attributed to budgetary constraints. Kakamega County is in the final stages of developing a Disability Bill.

The UNFPA will work in partnership with This-Ability Trust to support infrastructure improvement, digital data collection on women with disabilities, and training of health personnel. UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide noted that overall, UNFPA will aim to strengthen the health system's response to sexual and reproductive health needs of women with disabilities through robust partnerships with counties and implementing partners such as This-Ability.

UNFPA donated dignity kits to women and girls with disabilities in Kakamega and Kisumu counties during the mission.

Photo: UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide and Lizzie Kiama This Ability Trust listen keenly to a Person with Disabilities express her concerns on SRH in Kisumu County





“Maternal health is the backbone of community health and critical determinant of social and economic progress that should never be surpassed in any hierarchy of priorities.”

Sustaining Access to Maternity Services in Nairobi City County During Covid-19

The Pumwani Maternity Hospital is the biggest and specialized health facility dedicated to maternity and newborn care in Kenya, handling an average of 120 deliveries per day. Normal and caesarian deliveries, including referral cases from other hospitals are handled at the hospital.

Most Nairobi born residents trace their birth to this hospital, which continues to play a critical role in ensuring access to quality obstetric care for middle and low income households in the city and its environs.

“The catchment area for Pumwani Hospital are mostly low income and informal settlements in Nairobi and the surrounding counties. This is a hospital where women arrive with barely anything to support the imminent delivery other than the hope of walking back home with a bouncing baby,” says Esther Kiambati, the Nairobi City County Reproductive Health Coordinator. She added that the free maternity services offered under the Linda Mama Programme and fees waivers have made it popular with many resource deprived households struggling to access quality maternal and child health.

The multifaceted effects of Covid-19 on the health sector in Kenya have been sorely faced at Pumwani Maternity Hospital. Due to inadequate personal protection equipment, a portion of health workers at the hospital tested positive for Covid-19 which precipitated a go-slow among workers for fear of continued infection risk. There is concern about mothers giving birth at home, fearing Covid-19 infection in health facility settings.

UNFPA in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Nairobi Metropolitan Services have moved swiftly to address the challenges faced by the iconic maternity and newborn health facility. To ensure reduction in Covid-19 infections among health care workers, UNFPA donated assorted PPEs and consumables, and mama kits to the hospital for newly delivered mothers facing the severe economic vagaries triggered by Covid-19.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has largely affected SRH services, but today we are thankful for the donation of PPEs and mama kits that will go a long way in the training of our staff,” said Dr. Beth Maina, the Deputy Medical Superintendent at Pumwani Hospital. Dr. Oluga, the Nairobi Metropolitan Services Chief Officer of Health echoed these sentiments, stressing that UNFPA’s support in the fight against Covid-19 contributed immensely to ensuring the safety of women and girls, ultimately achieving the goal of preventable maternal deaths.

Reducing maternal mortality, a major target under sustainable development goals, is at the heart of Kenya’s development vision that seeks to achieve universal health coverage by 2022. The 2014 Kenya Demographic Health Survey showed that maternal mortality is 362/100,000 live births which the country aims to reverse through flagship initiatives like the Linda Mama Programme under which women receive free maternity and newborn care services.

The Pumwani Maternity Hospital is pivotal to the realization of sexual and reproductive rights in Kenya, playing a strategic role in catalyzing achievement

of commitments made by the country during the ICPD25 Nairobi Summit. Kenya committed during historic event to eliminate preventable maternal and newborn mortality, mother to child transmission of HIV and severe morbidity such as obstetric fistula among women by 2030. “UNFPA recognizes the reality of Covid-19 which should not overshadow the promise of posterity resident in the availability and quality of maternal and child health services for all women. Our signature duty is to take practical steps that achieve the safety and well-being of all women seeking services in health facilities on the

basis of knowledge and choice. No woman should die while giving life!” said the UNFPA Kenya Country Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide during the event.

Maternal health is the backbone of community health and critical determinant of social and economic progress that should never be surpassed in any hierarchy of priorities.

Photo: Dr Ademola hands over a Mama kit to a new mother at Pumwani Maternity Hospital





“The Covid-19 pandemic is fraught with needs that require a mindset shift in humanitarian approaches and practices.”

Covid-19 and the Elderly: The Story of 72-Year-Old Granny on Rusinga Island

The sudden emergence of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has left Kenya's elderly population vulnerable, lonely and disconnected.

At seventy-two years old, Dorice Oguta, 72 is among thousands of elderly people whose life has been adversely impacted by the pandemic. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018 and subsequently diabetes. Because of these underlying conditions, her vulnerability to Covid-19 is heightened.

She is a resident of Kakerego Village on Rusinga Island, Homa Bay County, where she takes care of eight grandchildren. Unfortunately, her sons are out of employment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, limiting their ability to send back financial support. Dorice is now selling firewood with the help of her eldest grandchild in order to eke out a living.

Many older people in the community do not have the resources to acquire personal protective supplies such as soap, sanitizers, face masks and other equipment. The advice to limit contact to aged kin, together with the general COVID-related restrictions, has led to substantial reductions in the support older persons receive from extended family and traditional community support systems.

UNFPA in support of efforts rolled out by the government of Kenya, has been working with local community-based organizations and other actors in strengthening their capacities to raise COVID-19 related awareness among the elderly, and provide practical support to older persons and their caregivers. These efforts have also been geared towards prevention and detection of abuse of older persons.

Photo: Dr Ademola and UNFPA Population Data Specialist Ezekiel Ngure speaking to Dorice at her home in Rusinga Island



Improving the Lives of Women and Girls in Kibera: Voices from the Feminist Centre

Adolescent girls and young women in the sprawling Kibera slums flock to the 'The Feminist for Peace, Rights and Justice Centre' (FPRJC) offices to access contraception and sanitary wear. The Centre has been their source of support and hope during the Covid-19 pandemic as it is their source of sanitizers and masks that are critical in the densely populated settlement. They also receive psychosocial support especially for survivors of sexual violence, access to reading materials and training on livelihood initiatives such as soap making.

The Feminist for Peace, Rights and Justice Centre (FPRJC) was founded in 2016 to be a driving force that motivates transformative and equitable social and economic progress in the resource constrained Kibera informal settlement in Nairobi City County. The vision of the Centre is to nurture the leadership of young women and create spaces for their engagement in social, economic and policy making processes, and build their capacity to realize their full potential.

The Centre undertakes community Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) responses in the Kibera informal settlement where they focus on empowering young women with knowledge and skills to address their SRH and GBV challenges.

"The Centre helped to rebuild my life after I came from the Mathari Mental Hospital, broken and rejected by society. Here I found friends and the kind of acceptance that I needed for healing and reintegration into society," says one of the

beneficiaries that the UNFPA and Ministry of Health team met when they visited the Centre. Eunice, a mother of three at the age of 24 having conceived her first born when fourteen years old as a result of sexual abuse is another beneficiary of the centre. Eunice pulsates with hope about her future and that of her children courtesy of the mentorship and social support that the Centre offers.

UNFPA is currently collaborating with the FPRJC to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to gender based violence and ensure timely access to quality services for survivors. Some of the activities being undertaken with the support of UNFPA's partners include life skills training for adolescent girls and young women; livelihood training and linkages for adolescent girls and young women; community dialogues on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR); awareness creation on gender-based violence through social media campaigns; and training of young activist on SRHR.

UNFPA is also supporting a rescue facility run by the Centre, which provides psychosocial support, strengthening of referral services, and access to justice for survivors. UNFPA has donated 2 double-decker beds with bedding and 100 dignity kits towards supporting the FPRJC especially during Covid-19.

Editara Achieng, the leader and brain child behind the Centre's activities thanked UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, and Ministry of Health Chief Administrative Secretary, Dr. Mercy Mwangangi for visiting the Centre. "We appreciated you for

believing in our small efforts and making us feel we accomplished our dream,” she tweeted.

“Angels on earth! There is no better way to describe the group of ladies that I met today at Kibera. They proudly call themselves the Feminist Movement. They even have an anthem to boot and I had my first lesson at it. I am now a life-time member!” wrote Dr. Mercy Mwangangi on her twitter page after joining UNFPA at the Centre to celebrate the spectacular achievement of young women in the midst of immeasurable obstacles. She said that the Centre will be linked to Government health services in the area in line with the Government’s plan to put up 24 new hospitals in Nairobi that included one in Kibra.

The UNFPA Representative joined the young women and girls in reciting their self-affirmation anthem

and applauded their efforts to provide access to a range of services for adolescents and young people in a severely deprived situation. Dr. Ademola acknowledged that Covid-19 had aggravated the plight of young people especially in informal settlements and continues to be a major threat to the fulfillment of their potential.

Addressing young people and community leaders gathered at the centre, Dr. Ademola promised that “UNFPA will do whatever it takes to serve the underserved. The energy and dynamism of the young women mobilized by the Centre takes us to the tipping point when their leadership on the various issues that underpin sustainable development ceases to be a matter of tomorrow and becomes commendable fact of today!”

Dr. Mercy Mwangangi at the Feminist Centre office cum safe house in the Kibera slums





ENDING UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING

World Contraception Day 2020: Marching towards sustainable domestic financing of Family Planning in Kenya

Kenya's World Contraception Day (WCD) was commemorated on Saturday, September 26th, 2020 at a function graced by the Chief Administrative Secretary for the Ministry of Health, Dr. Mercy Mwangangi, with the attendance of UNFPA Deputy Country Representative, Dr. Ezizgeldi Hellenov. The annual worldwide campaign centers around a vision where every pregnancy is wanted. Launched in 2007, WCD's mission is about scientific advances

in contraception tailored to enable couples make informed decisions regarding starting a family, and individuals make informed choices on their sexual and reproductive health.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) in collaboration with stakeholders hosted the event whose theme was 'Sustaining Family Planning Services during the COVID-19 pandemic while marching towards sustainable domestic financing of FP in Kenya'.

Photo: Queen and King of Condoms with Charity Kenya UNFPA Family Planning Specialist

The occasion was used to raise awareness on how FP choices and opportunities have changed for girls and women since the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a platform to mobilize support and goodwill for prioritization and continuation of FP services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Mwangangi stated that she was comforted that Kenya had made outstanding progress in increasing access to modern methods for fertility management from 36% of married women using modern methods of family planning at the launch of the World Contraceptive Day campaign in 2007 to a current regional high of 62%. During the ICPD 25 - Nairobi Summit in 2019, the Government of Kenya made 17 commitments aimed at achieving Universal Health Coverage, Ending GBV, FGM and other harmful practices against women and girls and ending the unmet need for family planning. The commitments also aimed at ensuring availability and accessibility of high-quality data for decision making at all levels and to address the unmet needs for family planning.

She further emphasized the importance of making family planning more accessible, noting that the Government was committed to providing quality family planning services. In 2019 and 2020, UNFPA mobilized USD. 4.8 Million and US\$ 3.1 million respectively towards FP intervention in Kenya through the Ministry of Health.

Acknowledging support from development partners, UNFPA Deputy Country Representative, Dr. Ezizgeldi Hellenov further stated that in 2020, DFID has supported the Ministry of Health through UNFPA to procure modern contraception (Levoplant) to the tune of USD.1.3million.

The support will lead to prevention of over 175,000 unintended pregnancies, nearly 500 maternal

deaths and 40,000 unsafe abortions over the next 3 years. The contribution from partners has translated into prevention of over 1,464,068 unintended pregnancies, nearly 1,439 maternal deaths and aversion of 890,168 unsafe abortions over the next three years.

The Deputy Country Representative said that providing access to contraceptives and reproductive health services helps women thrive and prosper in economies hit by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Dr. Ezizgeldi underscored the need for strong investment in Family Planning as an intervention for saving lives as well as attaining the demographic dividend. He appealed to the Government to ensure that Family Planning commodities are adequately funded in the national and county budgets. "We must strengthen the supply chain system and take advantage of the wealth of technology available to improve efficiency and effectiveness in improving access to quality family planning services," he stressed.

Photo: UNFPA Deputy Representative Dr. Ezizgeldi Hellenov speaks at World Contraception Day Celebration





“A well-spaced family means children will be well fed and the parents will be able to provide them with education and all the basic amenities, including good health.”

Using Farming Models to Teach Family Planning in Homa Bay

For Joshua Okundi, resigning from his teaching job in 2014 in order to sensitize his community about the importance of family planning was a no brainer. Okundi runs a community-based organization christened Bwogi Mak Bwogi in his Kanyadhian'g Village home, Kendu Bay, Homa Bay County.

It is a model home under the Population Health and Environment (PHE) integrated programme coordinated by the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD). Within this programme, Okundi sensitizes youth, couples and widows on the importance of family planning using various farming models.

One of the models borrows from the spacing of trees in a garden. When trees are properly spaced in the garden, the plants will be better managed, there will be sufficient nutrients for all the plants and in the long run, the farmer will get maximum yields. This model is applicable to families as well and it is what Okundi uses to educate his eager audiences on a daily basis. A well-spaced family means children will be well fed and the parents will be able to provide them with education and all the basic amenities, including good health.

Photo: Joshua Okundi uses a tree seedling to demonstrate a family planning concept



“Planting plenty of maize on a small piece of land will not yield a good harvest. Conversely, spacing the maize on the small piece of land will get one a better harvest. Similarly, a big family with little resources becomes stressful to the parents as they strive to provide basic needs. The little food available will be competed for,” Okundi explains.


Okundi’s group has so far attracted 78 households within his community. Their discussions also touch on the significance of ante-natal clinics for pregnant women and delivering in health facilities. Morine Otieno, a mother of three, says she has learnt so much about farming and how to engage her children particularly during this period of COVID-19 from

Mwalimu Okundi since she joined the group two years ago.

“When we come here we learn how to take care of our shamba. It is the same way we should plan for our families,” she notes.

“When you have a single tree on your garden you have enough time to weed and water it, unlike when you have many of them that consume most of your time. You will end up neglecting some of them. It is the same with our children. If you do not plan and have so many children, you end up not having time to attend to them,” Morine emphasized.

Photo: Joshua Okundi at his tree planting farm in HomaBay county



“A big family with little resources becomes stressful to the parents as they strive to provide basic needs.”



EDITORIAL

World Humanitarian Day: Unbowed and Resilient

By Dr. Ademola Olajide, *UNFPA Representative*

The world is facing an unprecedented increase and diversity in emergencies and natural disasters. 1 out of every 45 people are exposed to humanitarian fragilities in 2020. The combined effect of multiple and simultaneous emergencies has put more than 168 million people in dire need of humanitarian aid worldwide. Many of the vulnerable populations are women and girls facing increased protection risks and aggravated lives aving services.

As ripples from the horrendous explosion in Lebanon recede, we remain acutely aware of the Covid-19 pandemic for which recent history lacks a comparative experience in the scope of morbidity and mortality, and widespread paralysis of human activity. The economic and social losses are colossal.

Kenya has experienced the heightened impact of emergencies occurring simultaneously and often in regions already grappling with relatively low development indices.

Cyclic bouts of drought, floods that recently claimed 346 lives, and the worst locust infestation in 70 years have interfaced with the Covid-19 pandemic to portend uncertainty for many citizens.

We should not permit the future predicted by these present calamitous happenings to come true. Disasters and emergencies affirm our focus on ending preventable maternal deaths, the unmet need for family planning, and gender-based violence and harmful practices as critical development priorities. Our investments in population data should provide

catalytic traction in responding to humanitarian situations.

UNFPA continues to provide a wide array of sexual and reproductive health and protection, and mental health and psychosocial support services to 185,000 refugees in the Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee camps and the host community. A multi-year initiative anchoring on sports to reduce the vulnerability of young people to violence and erosion of their potential is underway in the refugee camps and Turkana County funded by UNFPA and the Olympic Refuge Foundation.

In the wake of recent droughts and floods, UNFPA intervened in ten most affected counties that included Turkana and West Pokot to sustain access to essential health and protection services.

Mainstreaming of the unique needs of women and girls, and persons with disabilities, is the hall-mark of UNFPA's humanitarian and development response in Kenya and other parts of the world. Crises should not amplify exclusion and marginalization.

The Covid-19 pandemic is fraught with needs that require a mindset shift in humanitarian approaches and practices. More than any other crisis, the pandemic has emphasized the global scale of disasters and the urgency to build and establish local capacities and efficacy. Sectoral interlinkages health, education, commerce and the service industry have emerged as precariously intertwined. The pandemic has articulated the urgency to remedy inequality and opportunistic deviance that undermines especially women's rights during crises.

Photo: UNFPA Representative Dr. Ademola Olajide presents a flood victim with a Dignity Kit in Baringo County



“We should not permit the future predicted by these present calamitous happenings to come true.”

Use Societal Approach to Address the Menace of Teenage Pregnancies in Kenya

By Dr. Githinji Gitahi - *Global CEO, Amref Health Africa* and Dr. Ademola Olajide - *UNFPA Representative, Kenya*.

Half of adolescent (15-19 years) pregnancies in developing regions are unintended and over half end in, often, unsafe abortion. In Kenya, 900,000 girls aged 10-19 were reported pregnant at health facilities in 2018 and 2019.

Teenage pregnancy is a fatal blow to the bodies and aspirations of adolescents. They develop psychological problems from social stigma and suffer physical and domestic violence in an attempt to meet the demands of pregnancy and childbearing. Their health is jeopardized as the developing bodies adjust to the physiological demands of parturition.

Childhood motherhood is a recipe for the poverty cycle in families where, in most cases, households, especially in low-income settings, take on the responsibility of raising a child on behalf of the teenager.

The National Gender and Equality Commission says many pregnancies occur in the context of human rights violations such as child marriage. Inadequate sex education and quality sexual and reproductive health services, as well as poverty, which exacerbates transactional sex, also lead to to unwanted pregnancies among girls and young women.

Soon after the first case of Covid-19 was reported in Kenya, the government reported a surge in Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) with adolescents mostly being defiled. Projections by UNFPA show the pandemic could lead to 13 million more child marriages globally over the next decade,

and in the six months of lockdown or restrictions, seven million unintended pregnancies.

But we continue to bury our heads in the sand and remain unwilling to confront the root cause and complexity of this worrying trend. Arguments among communities and leaders revolving around morality, values and social codes represent convenient sentiments that are invoked to vilify and place responsibility entirely on minors who deserve protection and information from society.

These knee-jerk reactions from our leaders aggravate rather than fix the problem with adolescent girls mostly suffering the consequences and punishment for early pregnancy, including being ostracized. Most times, the perpetrators of the act go scot-free due to our weak justice and accountability systems. The teenage pregnancies menace can only be brought to an end through a societal approach and a national change in mindset. The impunity must be eliminated through proactive measures and unyielding resolve.

Firstly, country commitments need to be matched with investments by the government. Reproductive health is a constitutional right and not a choice. The nation should not permit spurious merchants of morality to undermine the destiny of adolescent girls.

Kenya committed at the Family Planning Summit in London, on July 11, 2017, to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate for any method among adolescent women (15-19 years) from 40-50 per cent by 2020 and 55 per cent by 2025 and reduce teenage pregnancy among 15-19-year-

olds from 18-12 per cent by 2020 and 10 per cent by 2025. More than half (54 per cent) of sexually active adolescent women in Kenya who do not want to become pregnant still have an unmet need for modern contraception. Guttmacher Institute says 86% of unintended pregnancies in the country occur among this group.

Secondly, interventions to provide sexuality education and reproductive health services and address SGBV and harmful cultural practices that contribute to teenage pregnancies must be the responsibility of everyone.

Achievement of the world's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 depends significantly

on the health and rights of the young people. Yet as the world celebrated World Population Day on July 11, governments once again failed to highlight the urgency and importance of global population issues, including teenage pregnancy. Leaders need to facilitate a societal approach which involves governments, communities, youth and other stakeholders in ending the menace.

Photo: Young girls take part in a mentorship session facilitated by PolyCon and UNFPA at Olympic Primary School Nairobi



Photo Gallery



1 H.E. Dr. William Ruto The Deputy President of the Republic of Kenya and Dr Ademola Olajide UNFPA Kenya Representative during the presentation of dignity kits to those most vulnerable

2 A birth model donated to train midwives in delivery

3 Hon. Esther Passaris Women Representative Nairobi handing Mama kits to mothers in Mama Lucy Hospital

4 Consignment of PPE Kits and Mama Kits handed over to Pumwani Maternal Hospital



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