



2021

Quarterly Newsletter

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Message from the Representative

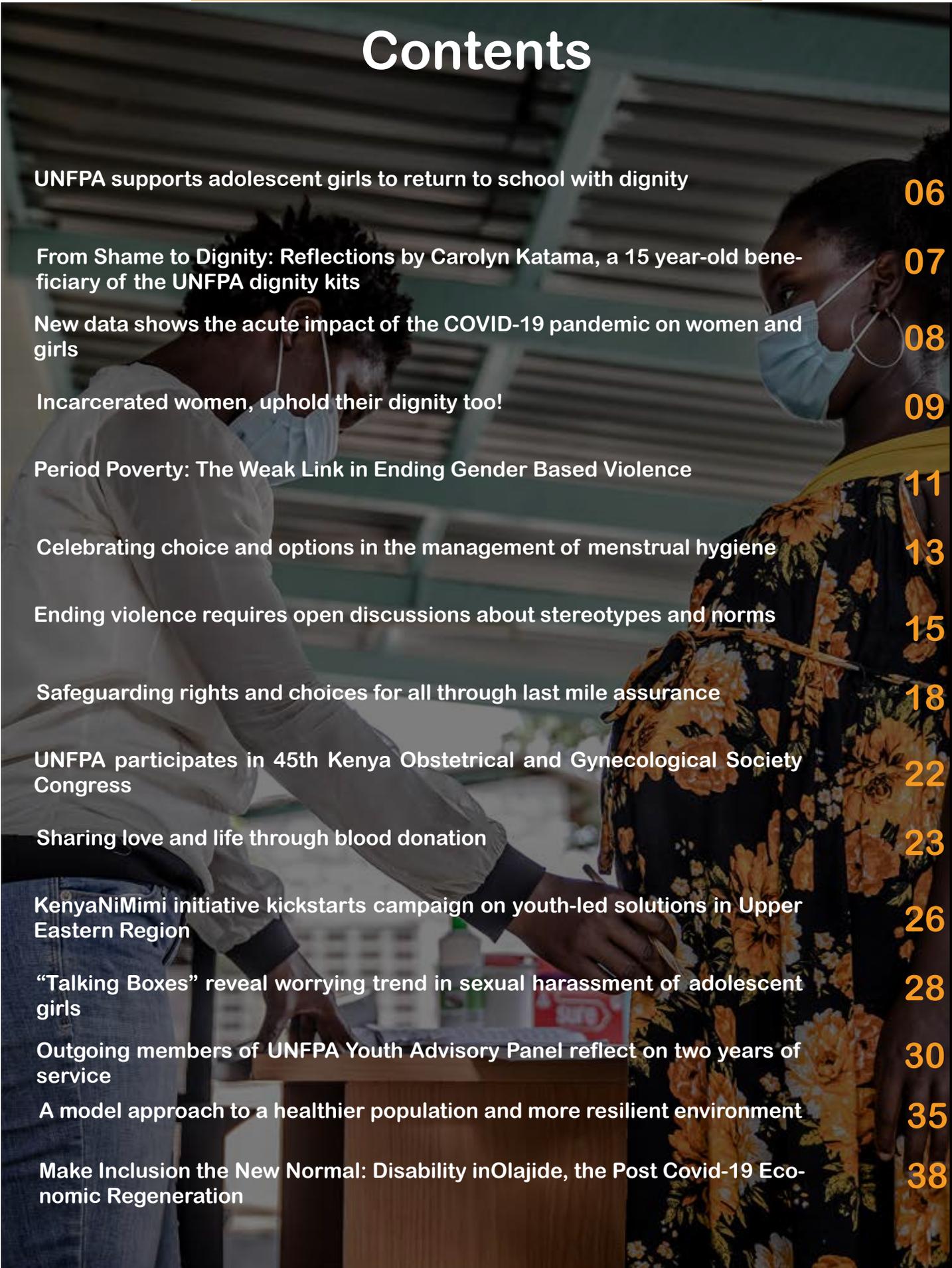
From a year of unprecedented challenges and loss, we usher in the new year with hope, embracing the drive to build forward better for all. The pandemic tested us all, but it also revealed the resilience of our human spirit. Covid-19 has forever altered the world we live in; it has unleashed what could be one of the largest health and economic crises of this century, with the end not yet in sight and the longer-term impact unknown. We watched as our frontline healthcare workers, scientists, community volunteers, donors, and development agencies quickly mounted a response to save millions of lives. In 2021, UNFPA will be leveraging the lessons learnt from the pandemic response to accelerate progress in ensuring rights, choices and dignity for the communities we serve. As with any crisis, women and girls bore a disproportionate brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, once again reminding us that the mandate of UNFPA remains vital in ensuring life saving sexual and reproductive health services are maintained, even in a crisis.

At the UNFPA Kenya country office, the team hit the ground running with spot-checks to assess the status of programme implementation, and ensure funds transferred and commodities issued to our implementing partners are utilized as intended. This year, our focus will be on providing support

to the government and the people of Kenya in recovery efforts that will help mitigate the negative impact of Covid-19 on the health, economic, and social wellbeing of communities across the 47 counties. In this second year of the decade of action, an ambitious effort is required to meet the sustainable development goals and in realizing Kenya's vision 2030. Our programmes will focus on driving innovation, advocating for greater financial investments in sexual and reproductive health services, all the while making space for young people to act as the leaders and changemakers our societies need.

Last year, UNFPA Kenya partnered with the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth affairs to launch Kenya Ni Mimi, a youth dialogue platform that was commissioned by His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta. In this first quarter, UNFPA has rolled out dialogues in the coast and upper-eastern regions of Kenya. Our work continues in the new year to reach more young people with knowledge and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. I look forward to a collaborative and successful 2021, working with our valued partners, in the delivery of the three transformative results

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COVID19 RESPONSE

Photo: Student representative from Waso Primary School, Isiolo County with a dignity kit provided by UNFPA through the KenyaNiMimi initiative from the ministry of ICT innovation and youth

UNFPA supports adolescent girls to return to school with dignity

After nearly ten months of a nationwide school shutdown ordered by the government to curb the spread of Covid-19, students were finally able to return to class in early January 2021 under strict health and safety protocols. For many girls, the shutdown period had placed them at a high risk of suffering reproductive health and menstrual hygiene challenges. Nationwide, a majority of women and girls reported a decrease of up to 90% access to menstrual hygiene products at the height of the Covid-19 lockdowns, due to the economic and social impact of the pandemic.

UNFPA with the support of our implementing partners, launched a back to school distribution of dignity kits to more than 2,000 girls especially in remote rural locations and urban informal settlements, with the goal of providing hygiene products including sanitary towels to those in vulnerable communities. The distribution events also served as an opportunity to reach out to the girls with information on prevention and response to

gender-based, sensitization on how to stay safe at school with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, as well as imparting life skills.

In Kwale County, the Deputy President H. E. William Ruto, led distribution of more than 200 dignity kits to vulnerable girls from 9 schools in the county. He urged the girls not to relent in their pursuit of education, as it remains the key to achieving their goals. At the Korogocho informal settlement in Nairobi, UNFPA partnered with a community based organization, Miss Koch Kenya, to distribute the kits to girls schools. “Menstrual health and hygiene is one of the most fundamental issues that adolescent girls have to deal with, and without proper care and support, some of them tend to abandon their education altogether,” said Miss Koch, Executive Director Emmie Erondanga. In Kilifi County, more than 100 girls received dignity kits distributed through the sports for development organization Moving the Goalposts. Amongst the beneficiaries was Amina Fondo,



Photo: School going adolescent girls overjoyed at receiving the dignity kits provided by UNFPA Kenya as they go back to school with dignity



Photo: Contents of the dignity kits provided by UNFPA



Photo: Adolescent girls walk home after being issued with dignity kits

who expressed her delight upon receiving the timely supplies. Amina comes from a single parent household and has four sisters who all face challenges in accessing sanitary towels. “ My younger sisters depend on me especially for the provision of personal hygiene products like sanitary towels and body lotion. These items will help my siblings and I for a long period of time, and I cannot thank you enough.” She said.

In Tana-River County, FGM survivor Sadia Hussein led the distribution of dignity kits to the most vulnerable girls’ at the Maumau Memorial and Kulesa girls Secondary schools. At Kulesa girls School, 17 cases of early pregnancy amongst the students had been reported during the school shutdown period. “I felt that it was important to do an urgent intervention with the girls in these schools because many of them are at risk of abandoning their education. The dignity kits provided mean opportunity for talks with the girls on the harmful effects of FGM, child marriage and teen pregnancy, and I believe we have impacted them today,” said Sadia. UNFPA’s dignity kits are aimed at improving hygiene, and maintaining the dignity and safety of women and girls during periods of crisis. They contain among other items, a tooth paste, tooth brush, whistle, torch, reusable pads, vaseline, tissues, panties, and soap.



Photo: Adolescent girls display their dignity kits



From Shame to Dignity: Reflections by Carolyn Katama, a 15 year-old beneficiary of the UNFPA dignity kits

“Anytime I hear the word menstruation, I just want the earth to open and swallow me. This word has meant shame, pain and ridicule to me for years.

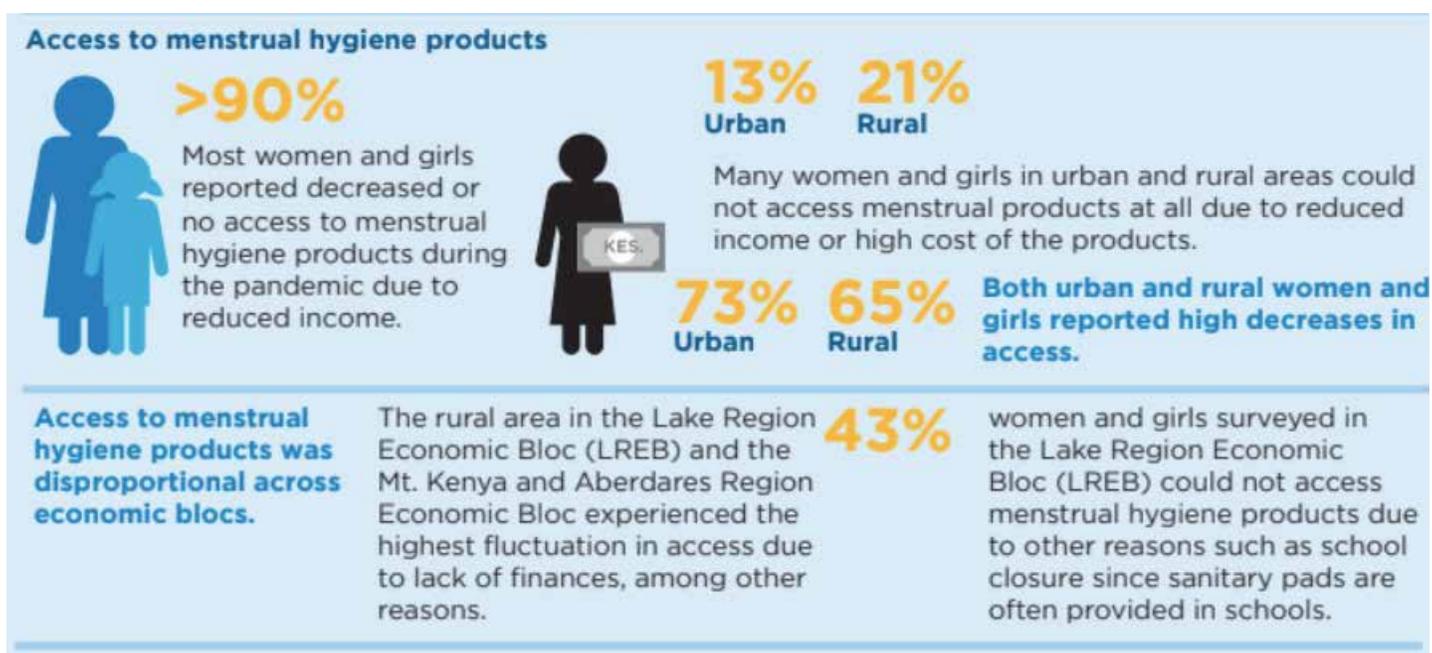
I was 14 years when I first had my periods. Without an idea of whom I could speak to, I looked for pieces of clothes and stuffed them through my vagina in an attempt to stop the bleeding but it never stopped. It was difficult for me to discuss the issue with my mother since I felt ashamed. This only meant that I could not even ask for sanitary towels from my mum. On the other hand I wasn't sure she would afford to buy me one every month. As a farm worker, my mum struggles to provide for my six siblings, including four girls who all have menstrual hygiene needs. I am now in form 2 and have only used disposable pads 4 times in my life. What I normally use are pieces of clothes that I collect from around the house. They come with a share of misery and infections, not to mention the countless times that they cause a stain on my clothes.

“I am thrilled today to know that someone cares
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about my plight and has donated this wonderful pack. I have seen many items in the bag that will make me appreciate myself as a girl more. When I go back to school, I will rock my bag. I have new panties, brush, comb, slippers and other personal items. Before I would never have thought how all these items are connected to menstruation but today after the menstrual hygiene management talk that was delivered by our church, I clearly see that I need to put more effort in maintaining my hygiene as a girl. Maybe I will share the items with my sisters, maybe not, but the dignity kit has changed my perception. While I used to hate the mention of the word menstruation, now I can't wait to see my next menses since I have the right items to manage my periods. I start a new journey to rewrite my period story.”

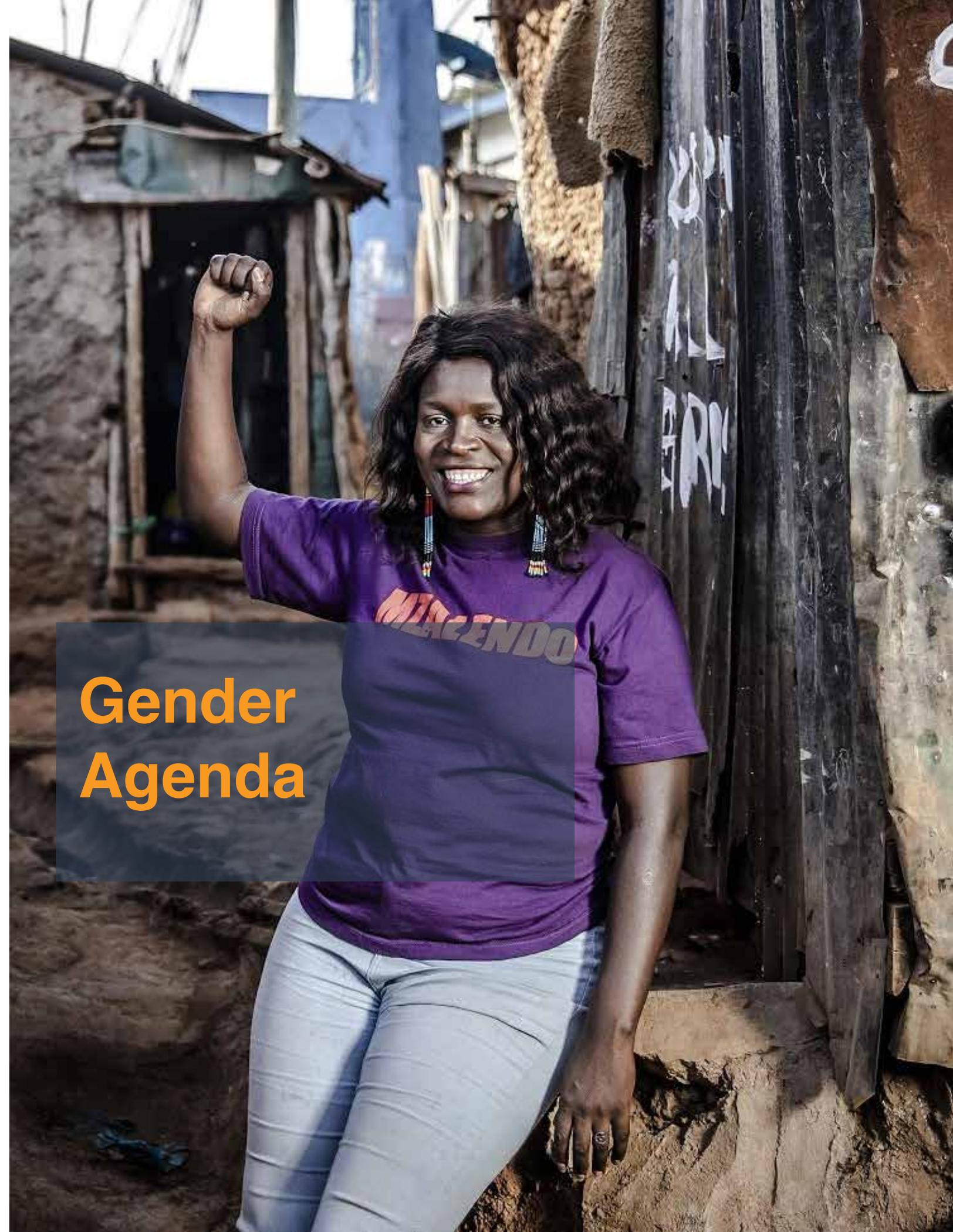
New data shows the acute impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls

Covid-19 brought unprecedented challenges on everyone, and now, a nationwide survey shows that the Covid-19 pandemic affected men and women differently, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate brunt of the socioeconomic impact. The survey was conducted across all 47 counties between August and September 2020, the gendered effects of the covid-19 pandemic on households. The key finding contained in the survey report shows significant limitations for women and girls in accessing menstrual hygiene and sanitation products, with over 90 per cent of female respondents reporting decreased or no access to some menstrual hygiene products during COVID-19. Interviews with respondents revealed that one of the prime causes of this was the closure of education institutions that would provide items such as sanitary pads.



The survey also signals a disproportionate number of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence. This finding correlates with a spike in calls being recorded by Kenya's national helpline for gender-based violence 1195. Data from the UNFPA supported helpline shows that in some months, the number of distress calls received went up by more than 600 per cent between April-September 2020, compared to the same time period in 2019. This reveals a 'shadow pandemic' of violence occurring behind closed doors. Alarming, the survey results state that 61% of respondents who did not seek any help after experiencing some form of GBV, did not know where to seek it.

The survey assessing the gendered effects of the Covid-19 pandemic was prepared through a collaborative effort involving UNFPA-Kenya, UN Women-Kenya, Care-Kenya, OXFAM-Kenya, UNILIVER-Tea Kenya, the State Department for Gender, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), and the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). It recommends amongst other things, a public sensitization and awareness effort to influence behavior and social norms change for the protection of women and girls, an ease of restrictions to allow for a rebound of economic activity, as well as expanded support for social assistance to vulnerable households. The full report is available at kenya.unfpa.org.



Gender Agenda



Photo: UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide and Her Excellency Rachael Ruto, present dignity kits to officials Western Regional Prisons Headquarters

Incarcerated women, uphold their dignity too!

UNFPA, working in partnership with the office of the Second Lady Her Excellency Rachel Ruto undertook the distribution of dignity kits to 157 women incarcerated at the Kakamega Women's Prison in western Kenya. The visit to the prison is part of ongoing efforts to reach vulnerable women most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with basic hygiene supplies as a means of protecting their dignity and reproductive health. Her Excellency Mrs. Rachel Ruto and the UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, paid a courtesy visit to the prison facility on 25th February 2021, where they met with prison staff to learn more about challenges faced by the female prisoners, as well as rehabilitation activities being undertaken by the facility.

A majority of prisoners rely on family visits for hygiene supplies, but with Covid-restrictions limiting such interactions, access to personal hygiene items has been greatly curtailed, leaving many incarcerated women at risk of infections and other complications brought on by poor menstrual hygiene. "Being in conflict with the law should not take away the dignity of women. Neither should it alienate them from their basic human right to health," said Dr. Olajide. He reaffirmed UNFPA's commitment to work with the government and other stakeholders to ensure no woman is left behind in accessing life-saving sexual and reproductive health information and services.

The Kenya Prisons Service is keen on facilitating rehabilitation of custodial sentenced offenders for social and community re-integration. Under Her Excellency Rachel Ruto's patronage, the Joyful Women Organization (JoyWo) will work with the Kakamega Women's Prison administration and leadership to provide incarcerated women with training on cross stitching, a skill which will empower them economically as they reintegrate back into their communities. "Having studied in Kakamega, it feels good to be back here working with other partners to make a difference in the community, and particularly the incarcerated women who I am sure will benefit greatly from the dignity kits and skills training," said Mrs. Ruto.

Kenya's prisons hold over 50,000 detainees, some of whom are women incarcerated with children under the age of four. Incarcerated women are part of a special interest group who face increased barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health services. "We cannot achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030, if any woman is left behind in the progress towards good health and well-being. We must always ensure that we are reaching the furthest behind, no matter their standing in society," noted Dr. Olajide.



Photo: Women at the Kakamega prisons receive dignity kits supported by Joyful Women foundation and UNFPA Kenya



Period Poverty: The Weak Link in Ending Gender Based Violence :

Dr Olajide is UNFPA Representative. Ms Mbugua is a Gender Equality Champion, author and Media Personality with the Inua Dada Foundation

The onset of menstruation can undermine girls' human rights and push them to the vulnerable margins of society. It is not always an exciting affirmation of rich womanhood.

In many places around the world, menstruation is believed to signal that girls are eligible for marriage, or sexual activity, and child bearing which leaves them exposed to a host of violations, including child marriage and sexual violence.

The silence, myths and taboos around the subject of menses obscures the painful experience of women and girls. In 2016, a report funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation found that only 50% of Kenyan girls felt they could openly discuss menstruation at home. Aversion and negativity in society degrades and traumatizes girls already weighed down by a deeper need to understand their bodies. Last year, a girl was reported to have committed suicide after her teacher subjected her to unsavory comments about her periods.

The menstruation predicament has been the cause

“The silence, myths and taboos around the subject of menses obscures the painful experience of women and girls”

of physical violence against women and girls in communities and households. Dysmenorrhea or painful periods sometimes associated with back pain, nausea, diarrhea and headaches impact on women's and girls' ability to perform their duties. This can be misconstrued for laziness for which they are subjected to punitive actions, including beating.

Social and cultural norms linked to women's menstrual experience lead to economic violence and deprivation. For instance, communities that bar

women from participation in livelihood activities during menses deny them crucial economic opportunities. Some communities believe that crops would wither if cultivated by a woman experiencing the monthly flow.

In Kenya, one in ten girls misses school due to periods. Demographic surveys in the country have consistently established a link between the incidence of intimate partner violence and low education and economic ability. Women and girls who cannot exit from the paralyzing cycle of poverty as a result of low education have higher chances of suffering violence.

The Covid-19 pandemic has compounded inequalities and worsened violence against women and girls. With job losses and cutbacks reported across most sectors of the economy, many women and girls have been left unable to meet their hygiene needs. A gender rapid assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya conducted by UNFPA, UN Women, CARE International and Oxfam has revealed that over 90 percent of women and girls have reported a decrease or no access to menstrual hygiene products.

The Government of Kenya has made laudable progress so far in combating period poverty. The launch of the Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy this year amidst the restraining Covid-19 environment, one of its kind in Africa, is a starting point of hope for women and girls in Kenya. The State Department for Gender Sanitary Towel Distribution Programme, anchored on amendments to the Basic Education Act 2013 is yet another initiative that has enabled many girls to stay in school, protecting them from a dehumanizing narrative of degrading survival and sexual exploitation.

Alleviating period poverty should occupy the mainstream of conversations to fund anti-gender based violence interventions in the country. Prevention of violence against women and girls calls for radical and courageous shifts in social and gender norms. Consistent collection of credible data will invigorate advocacy voices to honour the aspiration of women and girls to live free from period poverty!



Photo: Ms Mbugua is a Gender Equality Champion, author and Media Personality with the Inua Dada Foundation



Celebrating choice and options in the management of menstrual hygiene:

By Diana Nelson, Global Advocacy Director, Days for Girls International and Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative

This year’s theme for the International Women’s Day, “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world,” recognizes that women and girls are playing pivotal roles to help shape a more equal future and recovery from COVID-19. Even as we celebrate women and their achievements, we recognise that many women and girls continue to face challenges in meeting basic needs including biological functions such as menstruation management. A majority of girls in Kenya- 58% in rural areas and 53% in urban areas cannot afford sanitary pads. This lack of access to sanitary hygiene products hinders women and girls from realising their full potential as many stay away from school during their menstrual flow period.

Many incredible women have responded to the challenges that the pandemic has brought and have been a part of the solution to help ensure the menstrual health needs of many are met in Kenya. They include women like TV personality Janet

Mbugua, who through her non-profit organization, Inua Dada, has been championing menstrual hygiene for women and girls in vulnerable communities hit hard by the pandemic. The Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Hon. Rachel Shebesh, not only over-



Photo: Diana Nelson, Global Advocacy Director, Days for Girls International

sees with diligence the implementation of government programs on menstrual hygiene, but has also been a collaborative link between government and other actors working towards influencing policy in this area.

Significant barriers to high-quality menstrual hygiene management (MHM) persist across Kenya and remain a particular challenge for low-income women and girls. Up to 65% of women and girls throughout Kenya face significant challenges in managing their menstruation and often struggle, due to lack of access to affordable sanitary products. Covid-19 continues to shine a light on the fact that periods don't stop for pandemics and that human rights are negatively impacted when women and girls cannot manage their menstruation with dignity, and when they lack access to accurate menstrual health information and menstrual products.

To combat this challenge, the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KeBS) published the Reusable Sanitary Towel Standard (KS 2925:2020) in December 2020. With this new standard, consumers can be confident that a reusable menstrual pad offers another product option for women and girls that is affordable and longer lasting than a single use pad. We have also seen action by the government in challenging the menstrual stigma and barriers that have existed in communities through systemic change implemented at a national level. In May, 2020, the Ministry of Health launched Kenya's Menstrual Hygiene

“As we celebrate the International Women’s Day, we recognize and thank the women and girls who are playing pivotal roles to help shape a more equal future and recovery from COVID-19.”



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative in Kenya

Management Policy, which was then followed by the publication of the Reusable Sanitary Towel standard by KeBS.

Days for Girls, Kenya Country Manager, Bridgit Kurgat notes, “the work of the Kenyan government and KeBS has made the new reusable standard possible, even during a pandemic. They worked to advance this important standard to help meet the diverse needs of women and girls in Kenya, ensuring their health and safety. “

As we celebrate the International Women’s Day, we recognize and thank the women and girls who are playing pivotal roles to help shape a more equal future and recovery from COVID-19. The Kenyan government, KeBS, and many others, are choosing to remove the menstrual health barriers by putting menstrual health policies and standards in place to ensure women and girls have a more equal future and can overcome the challenge of period poverty. Together we can end the shame and stigma that period poverty brings on women and girls by providing opportunities and options for the management of menstruation.



Ending violence requires open discussions about stereotypes

and norms: *opinion piece by Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative in Kenya and Anne Mutavati, Kenya Country Representative UN Women*

Sexual violence is not a women's problem, nor a girl's problem. It is an entire society's problem because it affects us all. Breaking down harmful stereotypes and bringing men and boys into the conversation are two of the most important norm changes we collectively need to nurture. Sexual violence and harassment take place in our homes, public spaces, workplaces, in our streets and in our education institutions. Exposure is heightened in conflict and emergency contexts. During COVID-19, violence in the home has become what the global community calls, the 'shadow pandemic'. Reports from Kenya's national helpline that responds to sexual and gender-based violence shows a huge spike in calls since the pandemic began.

Women and girls in Kenya often experience alternate but equally damaging forms of sexual and gender-based violence, both mentally and physically, including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and femicide. One in three women globally are affected by



Photo: Anne Mutavati, Country Representative UN Women

gender-based violence, and in Kenya, statistics record 45% affected are women and girls aged 15-49. 1 in 5 women have suffered from female genital mutilation in Kenya and 23% of the nation's girls are married before their eighteenth birthday, 4% are married before their fifteenth birthday. Exact numbers of rape and sexual assaults are difficult to assert due to reluctance or fear for victims to report it and inefficiency in addressing the reports ade-

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Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative in Kenya

quately because of lack of capacity and resources, and sometimes will.

We are daily witnesses to “rape culture”, sometimes even silent bystanders. Society has entrenched the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women’s bodies on screens, indifference to consent, and the glamorization of violence in advertisements. Victim-blaming, trivializing of rape and the stigma faced by survivors are still far too common. The understanding of mutual consent: that only yes means yes, given freely without manipulation or coercion – is paramount in the prevention and eradication of rape and sexual harassment.

Male involvement in ending sexual and gender based violence is particularly crucial as many Kenyan communities remain highly patriarchal. As authority figures, men hold more power and influence over decision making in the social domain and are often considered the custodians of culture. They are in a position to determine the cultural traits, behaviours and social practices that are viewed as either good or harmful.

The socialization of boys at an early age can have a long-term impact in shifting gender norms.

Some harmful traditional notions of masculinity have been identified as the key drivers of aggression among the male gender. These include expectations of what it is “to be a man,” where boys are expected to be physically strong, aggressive, showing little emotion in order to maintain the tough persona. What boys learn about expectations of femininity and the value of women and girls at home and in the community also shapes their attitudes towards gender based violence.

Efforts should aim at engaging men on the dangers of toxic masculinity and internalized gender bias that can be harmful to the well-being of women and girls. By teaching boys about healthy masculinity, as well as the links between gender inequality and violence against women, we can begin to promote positive behaviours and attitudes towards women’s rights, while eliminating harmful gender stereotypes.

The Government of Kenya has clear legislation and policies on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The State Department for Gender is coordinating efforts from a multi sectoral approach to advocate for this cause. The President of Kenya, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta has made firm commitments towards the eradication of gender-based violence and harmful practices by 2030 and to eradicate the practice of FGM by 2022. This strong commitment and leadership is a source of inspiration for all actors, including cultural and religious leaders and it calls for concerted efforts to stop the violation of human rights.



Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Photo: A demonstration on how to correctly use male condoms. Male condoms have a triple advantage: prevention of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unintended pregnancies.

Safeguarding rights and choices for all through last mile assurance

Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, access to family planning for women and girls in Kenya has increased by nearly 50 percent, with more women having a variety of modern contraceptives to choose from. However, disparities in access still remain, particularly amongst women from marginalised communities and persons with disabilities. In 2019, at the Nairobi Summit that marked the 25th anniversary of the ICPD, the government committed to close this gap by increasing financing of family planning commodities from domestic resources.

UNFPA has partnered with the government and various other stakeholders in efforts to achieve the transformative goal of eliminating the unmet need for family planning by 2030. Last year (2020), UNFPA supported Kenya's Ministry of Health to procure assorted family planning commodities worth US\$ 3.1 million in order to ensure modern methods of family planning are available in the right quantities, right condition, right place, right time and at the right cost to women and girls across the country. The commodities procured in-

cluded male and female condoms, oral and injectable contraceptives, as well as intrauterine devices (IUDs). In another important step, the UNFPA Kenya Country Office also took a closer look at the established supply chain systems by conducting spot-checks to verify whether or not the family planning supplies are effectively reaching the beneficiaries intended.

Commodities procured by UNFPA are delivered to the KEMSA central warehouse in Nairobi as a point of first warehousing. They are then distributed to KEMSA's regional depots and finally to health facilities across the country, where they are dispensed to the population. For the last mile assurance spot-checks, UNFPA staff visited these KEMSA warehouses and numerous other facilities, including hospitals, health centres, and clinics in selected counties, with the support of a team from the global consulting firm Ernst and Young. At these facilities, the team performed stock counts, inspected inventory records, and assessed the condition of the commodities to ensure that they are stored, managed, and distributed in a manner that minimises waste and fraud.



Photo: UNFPA spot-check team inspect family planning commodities at the KEMSA Warehouse in Embakasi, Nairobi.

Among the facilities visited by the spot-check team was the Bar Hostess Empowerment & Support Programme (BHESP) organization's drop-in centre located in the Dandora Sub-County. The centre serves sex workers living and working in various informal settlements within Nairobi. BHESP provides various services, including HIV testing and care, family planning, as well as clinical and psychosocial support to survivors of domestic violence.

At the centres, the team met several clients seeking clinical services, while others arrived to collect condoms from the facility's dispenser. According to Sylvia Okoth, a Field and Advocacy Officer at BHESP, uptake of injectables amongst sex workers is high. Likewise, there is high demand for condoms with an almost 100% uptake. The Dandora drop-in centre currently serves 6,254 sex workers in five neighbouring sub-counties through a network of peer educators, outreach workers, and clinicians. "On a busy day, we distribute more than 5,000 condoms through community outreach and in-person client visits to the centre," explains Okoth. She is tasked with going through the daily outreach summary sheet where staff members record the number of condoms issued to ensure accountability and proper stock management.

As part of the spot-check, the drop-in centre's storage facility and distribution mechanisms were inspected. The spot-check team was able to provide BHESP with feedback on gaps identified in inventory management and storage, as well as recommendations on how they can be improved. "We have acknowledged a gap in record keeping, which can be attributed to our focus on distribution as a priority. We are now aware of the need to put more emphasis on tracking this distribution more thoroughly to improve accountability," said the centre's clinician Caroline Miloyo.

The visits to the warehouses and distribution facilities provided a valuable opportunity for UNFPA staff and implementing partners to learn from each other on how best to coordinate and strengthen efforts to reach the last mile in order to ensure that all women and adolescent girls can realise their right to family planning. "Through this



Photo: commodities supplied to the last mile through the support of UNFPA Kenya

exercise, we have been able to identify areas where our partners require support and training on system strengthening for effective supply chain management," said UNFPA Sexual and Reproductive Health Advisor, Dr. Dan Okoro. The exercise also helped to determine ways to reduce stock outs by improving staff capacity on stock management and monitoring of family planning commodities.

UNFPA's Family Planning Specialist, Charity Koronya noted that the spot-checks also enabled the team to interact with health workers and family planning beneficiaries in remote areas, who may be considered the furthest behind in access to family planning. "By way of the spot-checks and resulting interactions with partners and beneficiaries, we have been able to emphasise the vital message that every citizen deserves the opportunity to access quality contraceptive commodities and services. These should be provided by skilled health personnel in a safe and clean environment, no matter where they live," she concluded.



UNFPA participates in 45th Kenya Obstetrical and Gynecological Society Congress

The Kenya Obstetrical and Gynecological Society (KOGS) annual conference was held from 17th -19th February 2021, under the theme “Addressing Reproductive Health Barriers and Closing the Gaps in the Wake of Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond.” The gathering of the country’s leading gynecologists and obstetricians presented a unique opportunity to reflect on the broad impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as the appropriate response and mitigating measures necessary in the recovery period.

UNFPA’s Country Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, as the Keynote Speaker, stressed on the need for more robust public health programmes and the scale up of funding to meet the demand for sexual and reproductive health services in the country. “To improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes and support a more rapid recovery in the aftermath of Covid-19, we must address factors that undermine the wellbeing of women and girls within society,” said Dr. Olajide.

He noted that the Ministry of Health in response to the pandemic, engaged various partners including UNFPA to provide support in ensuring continuity of care particularly reproductive, maternal, and adolescent health services both at facility and community levels. Kenya witnessed a decline in utilization of these services amidst the temporary closure of primary health facilities in some counties. Although evidence so far demonstrates a low mortality rate among women of reproductive age, this population remains disproportionately affected by the disruption caused by the pandemic, as evidenced by heightened reports of maternal deaths. “We all saw the impact of the pandemic in hindering the supply and uptake of reproductive health and family planning commodities. We will have to adapt our strategies and practices and embrace innovation in order to effectively deal with these barriers, moving forward,” noted Dr. Olajide.

The conference also tackled the issue of increased medicalization of Female Genital Mutila-

tion (FGM), in a conversation that was co-led by the UNFPA Gender Advisor, Caroline Murgor. The session highlighted the harmful effects of FGM, and called for punitive action to be taken against health-care workers who carry out the practice. The provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal health care and gender-based violence related services, are central to the health, rights and well-being of women and girls. UNFPA continues to advocate for universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights as an essential part of universal health coverage, and a key driver to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and targets by 2030. The Country Office considers the Kenya Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society as a strategic partner to collaborate with to champion for the reproductive health and rights of women and girls in Kenya.



Photo: Caroline Murgor, Gender Advisor UNFPA co-chairing a session on FGM



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide UNFPA representative receives an award from the President of the KOGS for his key note address during the opening ceremony of the KOGS congress



Photo: Mr. John Gitahi, UNFPA Senior driver during the blood donation drive in Nairobi held on Valentines Day



Sharing love and life through blood donation

Severe bleeding after giving birth (post-partum haemorrhage) is one of the leading causes of deaths in new mothers, as acknowledged in the Kenya Health Service Delivery Indicator Survey (SDI) 2018. In counties with a high number of maternal deaths, access to safe blood is critical to saving the lives of women at risk due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Kenya's blood crisis has heightened perilously as evidenced by the downward trend of blood units donated between 2013- 2019. COVID-19 has further exacerbated the situation, where measures put in place in response to the pandemic, such as restricted movement and physical/social distancing have constrained the smooth running of blood services. With 60 percent of blood collected in the country used for maternity services, women are most affected by the blood shortage.

To mark Valentine's Day this year, UNFPA partnered with the Ministry of Health, Kenya Red Cross Society and Damu Sasa to carry out a

blood donor drive across 52 donation facilities in the country. The Blood drive took place over three days, with a call to Kenyans to show their love and save a life through blood donation. On the occasion of Valentine's Day, UNFPA representative in Kenya Dr. Ademola Olajide led UNFPA staff in donating blood at a facility set-up at Uhuru Park in Nairobi. "One of the three transformative goals that UNFPA works towards is that of zero preventable maternal deaths. We believe that no woman should die in the process of giving birth, and encourage all Kenyans to give blood in support of women, especially in that process of giving life," said Dr. Olajide.

The valentine's day blood drive is part of activities carried out through a strategic partnership between UNFPA Kenya, Damu Sasa and Kenya Red Cross Society, which aims at actively preventing maternal and newborn deaths through timely and equitable access to safe blood for transfusion.

The partnership was launched in 2020 with the pilot phase implemented in Kitui and Migori counties with the enrolment of health facilities onto the innovative Damu-Sasa end-to-end blood services information management system. The Damu-sasa system is built to aid hospitals in the sourcing of blood from donors and from each other, while also supporting screening, preparation of blood products and inventory and transfusions management. The system also helps mobilise donors and track their donations with a goal of building relationships to increase voluntary blood donations from residents in the two counties.

Over the last year, the partnership has been able to strengthen the digital blood donor system at health facilities in the two counties. An Android blood donor app was launched to link blood donors with the health facilities, which coupled with regular blood drives resulted in the recruitment and retainment of blood donors in the two pilot counties. Drawing on this success, UNFPA will in 2021 increase support towards strengthening the Kenya blood supply system, as we march towards ending preventable maternal deaths by 2030.



**EVERY 10 MINS
7 PATIENTS ARE
IN SEVERE NEED
OF BLOOD**

**60% of blood
collected is used
for **Maternity
Services****



**Loss of blood is
the leading
cause of death
for Kenyan Mothers**



Photo: Dr. Dan Okoro, SRH and FP advisor UNFPA Kenya, donates blood during the Damu Sasa blood drive held at Uhuru park on the 14th of February 2021



**Youth and
development**

Photo: Student representative from Waso Primary School, Isiolo County with a dignity kit provided by UNFPA through the KenyaNiMimi initiative from the ministry of ICT innovation and youth

KenyaNiMimi initiative kickstarts campaign on youth-led solutions in Upper Eastern Region



Photo: CAS's, Public Service and Gender, Hon. Jebii Kilimo, Hon. Rachel Shebesh, CAS Education Mumina Bonaya and CAS ICT, innovation and youth affairs Nadia Abdallas entry during the launch of the Upper Eastern Region of the KenyaNiMimi campaign

The #KenyaNiMimi initiative is “a dialogue platform by the youth for the youth” that is aimed at stimulating youth participation in social, economic, and leadership processes. Following its successful launch by HE the President on 7th December 2020, the initiative has continued to grow in leaps and bounds under the leadership of the Ministry of ICT Innovation and Youth Affairs in collaboration with UNFPA.

On 26th and 27th February 2021, all roads led to Isiolo County as over 160 young delegates and leaders convened for the #KenyaNiMimi Upper Eastern Edition regional youth dialogue. The delegates were drawn from Marsabit, Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Embu and Isiolo counties. The one of a kind event provided a perfect opportunity for the youth in the region to engage with the duty bearers on issues affecting them and explore solutions towards the same. It also provided a platform for young people to showcase their innovations and share knowledge with their peers. Four Chief Ad-

ministrative Secretaries were in attendance at the event. #KenyaNiMimi patron CAS Nadia Abdalla from the Ministry of ICT Innovation and Youth Affairs was joined by CAS Mumina Bonaya-Ministry of Education, CAS Hon. Linah Jebii Kilimo-Ministry of Public Service and Gender (State Department of Gender), and CAS Hon. Rachel Shebesh- Ministry of Public Service and Gender (State Department for Public Service). The Principal Secretary in the State Department for Youth Affairs Mr. Charles Sunkuli and the Deputy County Commissioner for Isiolo County were also in attendance, alongside other policy makers and implementers.

Discussions focused on issues around the KenyaNiMimi initiative pillars which include opportunities for the youth, innovation and education, health and well-being, environmental conservation, and the values of peace, love, and unity. Participants also tackled barriers to meaningful youth engagement in development processes, taking the opportunity

to engage the Chief Administrative Secretaries on issues of social and economic empowerment. The event also featured exhibition booths where youth could access information on government affirmative action funds such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Women Enterprise Fund, and Uwezo Fund on hand to provide information to the youth. Visitors to the booths were also able to acquaint themselves with economic empowerment opportunities from the Kenya Film Commission, Kenya Film Classification Board and private sector actors such as the KCB foundation and various Technical and Vocational Education and Training Centres (TVETs). The leaders present implored the youth to challenge themselves and pursue leadership positions while maximizing economic empowerment opportunities created by the government and the private sector to develop themselves.

Corruption, lack of opportunities, lack of finances, lack of information and politics were cited as the key barriers to the meaningful engagement of youth in development processes. Mental health issues such as depression and political exploitation of the youth were also raised as some of the concerns affecting the youth in the region.

The forum also provided an opportunity for the youth to dialogue with the elders in their communities with the aim of finding solutions to challenges deeply embedded in culture such as FGM, child marriages and teenage pregnancies, which are pre-dominant in the Upper Eastern Region. The KenyaNiMimi Upper Eastern Edition was capped with a visit to Waso Secondary School in Isiolo County on the 28th February 2020, where adolescent girls and boys were inspired by the leadership present and equipped with dignity kits to ensure their comfort while in school.



Photo: CAS Rachel Shebesh engages with the youth during the intergenerational discussion on ending FGM



Photo: Youth representative from the Waso Primary school receives a dignity kit to facilitate his continued learning from board chairperson

“Talking Boxes” reveal worrying trend in sexual harassment of adolescent girls

“My uncle comes to our house when my parents are gone and touches my private parts,” says a handwritten note retrieved from an orange “talking box” at a school in Nairobi’s Kibera slum. The boxes are strategically placed around the school compound and provide a safe platform for adolescent girls to share their personal challenges in confidence, and seek help when needed. Over the years, girls have used the boxes to express themselves and reveal their most pressing problems. These have ranged from a lack of basic needs such as food and sanitary towels, conflict at home, to the graver cases of sexual abuse and rape. The Talking Boxes were launched in 2011 by the Polycom Development Project, in 14 pilot schools within the Kibera informal settlement. In 2018, UNFPA supported Polycom to scale up the initiative to an additional 35 public and private schools in Kibera, with a combined population of 3,300 girls in the 12-16 years age bracket.

In the period between January 2018 to December 2020, Polycom collected 3,021 notes from the talking boxes. An analysis of the notes reveals that adolescent and teenage girls are grappling

with high rates of sexual harassment and abuse both at home and in community spaces such as schools, playgrounds, shops, and walkways. In a report launched on 6th March 2021, the analysis showed that more than 87% of the notes contained reports of sexual harassment including defilement, indecent touching, catcalling, and stalking. “Data from the talking boxes confirms that adolescent girls are indeed bearing the brunt of sexual harassment and abuse, largely driven by a culture of silence. The boxes have become a lethal weapon against this abuse as they give girls a safe space to have their voices heard,” says Polycom Director, Jane Anyango.

Over the years, Polycom has been able to respond to girls’ requests for help, linking them to healthcare providers, legal aid, and law enforcement when required. “Girls living in informal settlements are facing many threats to their wellbeing, compounded by conditions of poverty in the informal settlements. This report is a call to action for stakeholders and communities to do more in ensuring that girls are protected from sexual and gender based violence, and that they receive



Photo: Stacey Akiinyi a Polycom youth ambassador demonstrates how the talking boxes are used

the support needed to safeguard their future and reach their full potential,” said UNFPA Representative, Ademola Olajide.

Other issues featured in the collected notes were inquiries about relationships and adolescent health (21%) as well as requests for economic support (25%). Polycom works with a team of 50 representatives that include peer mentors, teachers, and local administrators who are trained on the use of the Talking Box methodology in responding to the needs and challenges faced by adolescent youth. With the support of UNFPA and other partners, the organization also runs a mentorship program that equips girls with information and resources on safeguarding their health and wellbeing. Polycom also sensitizes young girls on how to identify and report cases of sexual harassment and abuse, and provides training on life and income generating skills to empower women and girls within the community.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting containment measures deepened the vulnerability to violence for women and girls across the country. The disruption of income-generating activities and essential services, including the closure of schools, exposed women and girls to sexual exploitation and rape. UNFPA Kenya in its response, has equipped more than 2,500 adolescent girls from Kibera informal settlements with life skills to help them make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. An additional 9,400 adolescent girls and their parents were sensitized on the prevention and response to risk of sexual and gender based violence through community radio. UNFPA also distributed over 1, 000 dignity kits to girls living within the informal settlement, providing them with essential hygiene supplies such as sanitary towels and soap, in order to safeguard their dignity and bodily agency during the pandemic crisis.



Photo: Girls display their notes on the challenges they face that are later put into the talking boxes for mentors to address while mentoring the girls.



Photo: Youth Advisory Panel members with Dr Ademola Olajide , UNFPA Representative, during the donor round table engagement to end FGM by 2022

Outgoing members of UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel reflect on two years of service

That youth make up 75% of Kenya's population is not to be ignored, making necessary the need to actively seek out their input / contribution in all matters that affect the country's development. Over the years, UNFPA has worked with a talented pool of young people recruited into the Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) to help the organization establish programmes that are responsive to the needs of the youth demographic. The UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel was established in Kenya in 2014 as a forum for open dialogue and exchange with youth groups and youth-networks across the country. The panel advises UNFPA on the opportunities and action needed to address adolescent and youth issues on matters relating to sexual reproductive health and rights , gender equality, and population dynamics.

In 2021, we say goodbye to our dedicated third cohort of 16 advisors whose two year term limit as members of the YAP Kenya chapter has come to an end. The members included leading voices and changemakers working in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, development, and social inclusion.

Under the stewardship of outgoing chairperson, Faith

Opiyo, the YAP members have made significant contributions to UNFPA's programmes on youth participation in Kenya. This cohort played a big role in the planning of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 convened in November 2019, ensuring that youth voices remained front and center in the Summit deliberations and resulting commitments. They have campaigned tirelessly against FGM across different counties, actively participated in technical working groups, and helped produced youth-friendly content on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including translating this content into braille. "Our involvement in the technical working groups really increased our capacity as young people in the sexual and reproductive health space. It sharpened our advocacy skills and understanding of policy review and formulation processes," said Ms. Opiyo.

YAP members have also been UNFPA's digital advocates in online spaces, carrying out sustained outreach to the youth through social media with information and messages related to UNFPA's mandate. "The opportunity to get involved in the ICPD25 Summit and the #IMarchFor campaign was a highlight of my time as a UNFPA YAP member. It showed that UN-

FPA values the input and feedback of young people from the grassroots to the global level,” said Migori County YAP representative Nelson Akoth. Nairobi County representative Hannah Wanja was a strong advocate for special interest groups in the YAP, specifically persons with disabilities. In reflecting on her time on the panel, she is particularly proud of the work done in fighting FGM and other harmful practices against women and girls, as well as in ensuring that youth with disabilities were included in various national initiatives. “ I have been able to learn from my peers on the panel and capitalize on their unique perspectives and experiences to expand my understanding of youth related issues,” said Wanja.

UNFPA remains extremely grateful for the diligence and passion exhibited by the outgoing members who worked diligently to ensure that our programmes are responsive to the needs of the Kenyan youth.



Photo: Faith Fao UNFPA YAP chairlady and Dr. Ademola Olajide dance during the Upper region of the Kenya-NiMimi launch

Advice from the outgoing YAP members

Be proactive in championing the youth agenda.

Emmanuel Lekishon- Narok County



Make use the UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel membership and network as a springboard to grow your potential

Nelson Akoth- Migori County



Take advantage of the opportunities that come with being part of the UNFPA YAP and take back to your community the skills and knowledge gained from this experience.

Zainab Ahmed-Lamu County



“ Have an individual commitment to teamwork.”

Godano Yusuf, Isiolo County



Use the knowledge and experience gained within the YAP panel to benefit other youth in your county.

Lucy Nyawira- Kilifi County





Population and Development

Kenya takes stock of gains made one year after the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25

At a meeting to take stock of progress made in the realization of these commitments, government officials in the Ministries of Health, Gender, Education, ICT, Labour & Social Protection, and Public Service shared the achievements and work done by government and implementing partners over the last year. The event was presided over by Amb. Ukur Yatani, the Cabinet Secretary, National Treasury and Planning, who was joined by Dr. Medhin Tsehau UN Resident Coordinator ad interim, in launching the 2019/2020 Annual Report on the Implementation of Kenya Country Commitments. “As successful hosts of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, Kenya must lead the way in implementing her part of the commitments made. In doing so, Kenya will become the reference point for ICPD25 in the same

manner that Cairo was the reference point for the first Global Conference on Population and Development,” said Amb. Yatani.

The report shows that despite challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, efforts towards eliminating preventable maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality continued over the last year with the training of over 17,000 health care workers on Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care (EmONC), provision of family planning services, obstetric fistula care, among other maternal and neonatal health issues. Ag. UN Resident Coordinator Dr. Medhin Tsehau said the UN remains committed to supporting government efforts aimed at helping Kenya’s health sector build back better from



Photo: Mr. Saitoti Torome, CAS Treasury, Dr. Medhin Tsehau, A.g Resident Coordinator/UN AIDS Country Director, Amb Ukur Yattani, CS Treausy and Dr. Sheikh Mohammed, NCPD Director General, hold the annual report on ICPD implementation during the ICPD25 anniversary

the pandemic.” In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNFPA has continued to provide Family Planning commodities to eliminate the unmet need for family planning as well as support in the provision of maternal health services that are key in eliminating preventable deaths,” she noted.

Key milestones were recorded in addressing social and economic challenges faced by the youth, including the establishment of a multi-agency task force to end teenage pregnancies in the country. The report shows that close to half a million adolescents have been linked to healthcare services within their localities, including access to health services for survivors of sexual and gender based violence. “The Ministry of Education has established school re-entry guidelines to make sure no student is left behind due to teenage and early pregnancy. We have been able to provide sanitary pads to vulnerable girls, which has gone a long way in ensuring that they remain in school and complete their education,” shared the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Dr. Richard Belio Kipsang.

Among the 17 commitments made by the government of Kenya at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 was the elimination of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya by 2022, ahead of the global target of 2030. With the support of partners including UNFPA, the government through a multi-stakeholder approach has made progress on this commitment, including through the training of more than 4,000 law enforcement officers and community leaders on FGM prevention. Drawing from lessons learnt over the past year, the report recommends the integration of emergency response and risk mitigation plans in the design of programs on adolescents and youth, whose wellbeing has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.



Photo: Amb. Ukur Yattani, Cabinet Secretary for Treasury during the launch of the ICPD25+1 report



Photo: Dr. Medhin Tsehau, Ag. Resident Coordinator/UN AIDS hold the Annual Report on ICPD implementation during the ICPD25 Anniversary



Photo: Clifford and Florence Wanjala at their home in Homa Bay County.

A model approach to a healthier population and more resilient environment

In a small village located in Rachuonyo North sub-county of Homa Bay, 33 year old Clifford Wanjala and his wife Florence Wanjala, 31, are considered a unique couple. In 2017, Clifford left his job as an IT consultant in Nairobi and moved back to his home village to focus on full-time farming. Shortly after, Florence, who is a trained teacher joined him. Leaving steady employment to cultivate their small piece of land is a decision that few of their neighbours understood, but one which they both agree has made their lives and that of their community better.

Settling into their new lives, the couple set out to find resources on how to improve their farming methods and build a livelihood from land cultivation. They joined Tanyoka CBO, a community based organization that practices the Population, Health and Environment (PHE) approach to sustainable development. PHE projects work to integrate health and family planning with environment conservation activities for better outcomes. Members of Tanyoka CBO therefore receive information and services on maintaining their sexual and reproductive health, and on how to run income generating activities while protecting the health of the natural environment around them. “We learnt a lot from the PHE champions at Tanyoka on how

We learnt a lot from the PHE champions at Tanyoka on how to improve our income through farming, while at the same time being mindful of the environment.

to improve our income through farming, while at the same time being mindful of the environment. We now use an energy saving stove, and our toilet is eco-friendly. My wife and I also practice family planning,” says Clifford. Members of the CBO have been able to successfully launch several income generating projects centered around PHE, including the establishment of tree nurseries, rearing of farm animals, as well as the building and sale of the energy saving stoves.

UNFPA works in partnership with the National Council for Population Development (NCPD) to support PHE programs in Homa Bay County. The vast county has experienced environmen-

tal degradation resulting in the loss of land productivity, poor crop yields and food insecurity. “A poor environment has a detrimental impact on the county population, including increased morbidity brought about by air and water pollution,” says UNFPA Population Data Specialist Ezekiel Ngunjiri. With funding and technical support from UNFPA, NCPD has been able to scale up PHE programs in the county by working with community based organizations such as Tanyoka. The support goes towards, among others, the PHE Model Home Initiative, where champions who have embraced the PHE system are able to transfer their knowledge and skills to neighbors and others in the community using their homes to showcase benefits of the approach.

A key focus of the PHE approach is educating women and girls on the importance of family planning, thus empowering them to make decisions on when to have children and the spacing of their families. This in turn enables them to have control over their choices including on the pursuit of education, employment and leadership opportunities. Clifford and Florence run a model home in their village, having fully qualified for the status after receiving a water tank donated by UNFPA and the government of Kenya. To be afforded model home status, the woman in the home must practice family planning, attend ante-natal care visits when pregnant, and deliver in a health facility. Men are expected to be involved and provide support to their wives in accessing family planning and reproductive health services. Children from the home should also be fully immunized. The home should have an energy saving stove that utilizes less firewood and produces less smoke, a kitchen garden, a latrine or eco-toilet, and a reliable source of water. “Water is important in the practice of PHE because it helps us observe good hygiene and practice farming successfully,” says Florence. She explains that before receiving the tank, she and her mother-in-law would fetch water from a river 500 meters away from the homestead. “The river’s water is not safe to drink, so we had to buy drinking water at a costly Kshs 20 a litre. With the tank, we can harvest and store up to 5,000 litres of water,” she says. So far, 20 model homes have been equipped with water tanks, enabling the scale up of PHE learning centers, and



photo: Clifford shows his latrine to PS Torome and DG Dr. Sheikh Mohammed

Clifford and Florence have a two year old daughter, and plan to wait a while before adding to their family. “When you have fewer and well spaced children, it leaves you with a lot of energy to take care of your family and to pursue your dreams,” says Clifford. Their model home receives regular visitors whom they train on the importance of embracing modern family planning methods, sustainable farming, as well as sanitation and hygiene. In February 2021, the family received a visit from a joint government and UNFPA delegation, led by the Principal Secretary in the State Department of Planning, Saitoti Torome. Mr Torome lauded the couple for their efforts, and commended UNFPA for the support accorded to the government in implementing the project. “These tanks will go a long way in enhancing women’s contribution to the economy, as well as in protecting our girls from harm and vices such as teenage pregnancy, as long walks to the river will not be necessary,” he noted.

When you have fewer and well spaced children, it leaves you with a lot of energy to take care of your family and to pursue your dreams,” says Clifford.





Make Inclusion the New Normal: Disability in the Post Covid-19 Economic Regeneration: *opinion piece by Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA representative in Kenya and Ms. Lizzie Kiama Managing Trustee, This Ability Trust---*

The potential of persons with disabilities to spur social and economic progress and transformation remains undiminished despite the impediments that they face. The gap between their potential and actual productivity is an indictment of structural issues in their environment not an affirmation of perceived inability to make a difference.

Approximately 1 billion people in the world, including 918, 270 in Kenya, have a form of disability. Out of this population, 386 million are estimated to be of working age yet majority remain excluded from education, skills development and employment.

Barriers experienced by different cadres of persons with disabilities are often misconstrued as incompetence. In effect, many persons with disabilities perform sub-optimally in productive activities which affects their quality of life and overall societal progress. Low and middle income coun-

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tries in Africa have recorded losses of between 3 and 7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour force.

Disability can accentuate poverty and vice versa. It is estimated that 1 in 5 of the world's poorest people, is a person with disability. In Kenya, slightly over a half (54.7%) of persons with disability reported to have had difficulties in engaging in economic activity with a higher proportion reported in rural areas than in urban areas.

Covid-19 has exacerbated the social exclusion and economic vulnerability of persons with disabilities. The pandemic has further disrupted and disconnected them from the already fragile social support systems and institutional infrastructures that hitherto enabled their capacity to surmount livelihood needs. Pre-existing protection risks, stigma

and discrimination against persons with disabilities have deepened during Covid-19. Globally, some 22 countries have reported a drop of more than 25 percent coverage of disability support services since the onset of the pandemic.

Containment measures such as lock downs and physical distancing without appropriate social solidarity strategies have encumbered the capacity of persons with disabilities to harness opportunities for sustained livelihoods. The drastic shift in health priorities during the pandemic has compromised access to services, leading to adverse effects on their economic and social functionality. Lack of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities across multiple development domains has made it difficult to tailor responses during Covid-19.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities urges States to ensure access by persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabili-



Photo: Ms. Lizzie Kiama Managing Trustee, This Ability Trust

ties, to social protection and poverty reduction programmes. Further, the Convention urges countries to ensure persons with disabilities and their families living in situations of poverty receive assistance from the State, covering disability related expenses, including adequate training, counselling, financial assistance and respite care.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action reiter-

ates these provisions, appealing to Governments at all levels to implement and follow up social and economic integration of persons with disabilities. Kenya affirmed its commitment during the ICPD25 Nairobi Summit to improve support to older persons, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children by increasing the core social protection investment from 0.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product to at least 2 percent over the next 10 years.

Impressively, the Constitution of Kenya) under the Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability (Article 27). The Constitution further recognizes entitlements of persons with disabilities under Article 54, including the right to be treated with dignity and respect. The country's main development blueprint, the Kenya Vision 2030 Medium Term Plan Three (2018-2022) pledges a raft of measures to ameliorate the situation of persons with disabilities, including scaling up of the National Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities, provision of assistive devices, educational bursaries and grants for economic empowerment.

Countries that have significantly embraced inclusion of persons with disabilities in their development continue to reap enormous dividends. The 1990 national census in the US revealed that persons with disabilities have a higher rate of self-employment and small business experience (12.2 per cent) than persons without disabilities (7.8 per cent).

Kenya should reposition for similar dividends by considering the direct and indirect benefits of inclusion such as increased innovation, improved planning, reduced spending on social assistance programmes, and increased tax revenues.

There is need to work with the community of persons with disabilities to design solutions that frame their Covid-19 socio-economic reality plausibly. Investment in unlearning is necessary in order to rise above conscious and subconscious biases, and place power back in the hands of women, men, boys and girls with disabilities to re-imagine the future they want against the backdrop of the pervasive effects of the pandemic. Their participation in

conceptualizing the desired economic solutions achieves broad ownership and sustainability.

Kenya requires reliable, comprehensive, disaggregated and timely data and information to better design policies and strategies that respond to the needs and aspirations of persons with disabilities. During the Global Disability Summit held in 2018 in London, the country committed to sign up to the Inclusive Data Charter. The recently concluded Populations and Housing Census accelerates realization of this commitment by granulating data by disability, gender, age and socio-economic status.

Investment in healthcare and education designed to address access and equity gaps is a compelling consideration for the socio-economic rebound of persons with disabilities in the post Covid-19 recovery architecture. A comprehensive health package, including mental health and psychosocial support, will not only address the impact of reduced health care attention to persons with disabilities during Covid-19 but will also identify and treat conditions that manifest as a result of the vagaries of the pandemic. Mainstreaming of quality healthcare for persons

Inclusion of persons with disabilities should be seen as an end in themselves and not entirely as a means to achieving prosperity for the rest of society

with disabilities will stimulate their economic productivity.

Leveraging technology to deliver healthcare, education and business openings for persons with disabilities should be the new normal. Technology-driven platforms should be explored and supported to ensure persons with disabilities benefit from the continuity of services and many other post Covid-19 benefits.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities should be seen as an end in themselves and not entirely as a means to achieving prosperity for the rest of society. Through collaborative and synergistic initiatives, we can achieve an inclusive world.



Photo: Ms. Lizzie Kiama Managing Trustee, This Ability Trust and Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative during a joint field mission to Kakamega and Kisumu County



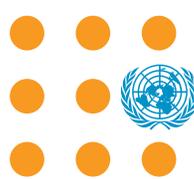
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