

AMKENI: Engaging communities in Coast and Western Provinces

AMKENI was a USAID/Kenya-funded project aimed at improving the health of Kenyans through integrated family planning, reproductive health, and child survival services, including HIV and AIDS, in Coast and Western Provinces. AMKENI was implemented by EngenderHealth, PATH, FHI, and IntraHealth, with PATH providing technical and managerial leadership in behavior change communication (BCC). From 2001 to 2006, AMKENI worked with 97 facilities in ten districts in the two provinces. PATH was responsible for the community interventions in the facility catchment areas.

PATH developed a BCC strategy to increase the demand for services at the community level in collaboration with local partners, which included Aga Khan Health Services, Community Aid International, the Cooperative League of the United States of America, and the Family Planning Association of Kenya. From 2001 to 2005 at AMKENI-target facilities, total family planning acceptance increased by 40 percent and new family planning acceptors increased by 65 percent.

PATH implemented the BCC strategy using innovative activities to bring community members into closer relationships with the health facilities that served them – both as clients and agents of change. PATH worked with communities to promote healthier behaviors and demand for services by promoting preventative and health-care seeking behavior, fostering community agency, and creating a supportive environment for individual and community change. The BCC strategy viewed families as a unifying community structure that was the natural place for health issues to be addressed, as health outcomes are largely determined by the family's ability to identify the problem and find appropriate solutions. The strategy employed the following key interventions:

Community agency

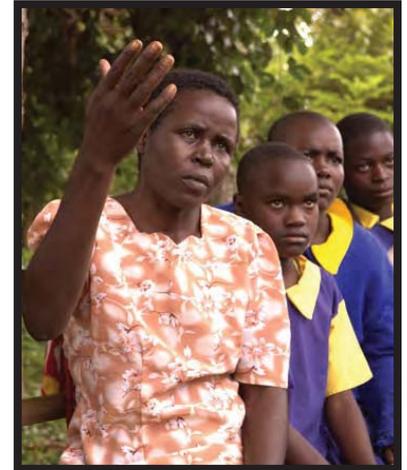
AMKENI's community activities centered around the concept of community agency; working with the community as a whole to form and strengthen key structures and skills to identify and address health issues. Members of village health committees, sub-location health coordinating committees, and other existing community groups received training in advocacy, leadership, management, program planning, resource mobilization, and health education. Improving community members' ability to understand and respond to their health needs led to sustainable improvements in reproductive and child health. In addition to building skills, AMKENI strengthened community-facility linkages, creating greater community ownership and investment in service delivery.

Family-to-family communication

PATH's innovative peer family activities increased dialogue around reproductive health issues between individual family members (e.g., parents and their children), as well as between separate families (e.g., two families that live in the same village). Through AMKENI, peer families met for weekly facilitated small group discussions to explore relationship and health issues and discuss health-enhancing family values and behaviors.

Other interventions

PATH sponsored activities at worksites, schools, and churches to reach the larger community with targeted interventions on specific topics. Activities used drama, songs, and verse to reinforce messages in an entertaining and informative way. The focus on community ownership, working with existing organizations, and capacity building have ensured that the individual and community-wide changes experienced during the project will continue long after AMKENI.



Peer family discussion group

Photo: PATH, Mike Wang

PATH improves the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors.

For more information, contact:
Kennedy Odera
CSC Advisor
kennedyodera@yahoo.com