

KENYA

FAITH LEADERS REACH A WIDE COMMUNITY WITH FAMILY PLANNING ADVOCACY

Challenge

County structures and competing priorities have hindered prioritization of family planning (FP) in Kenya. There is limited funding for advocacy activities to push for tangible outcomes such as favorable policies, a budget line for FP in county budgets and Costed Implementation Plans (CIP) for family planning.

Why Religious Leaders Are Key to Family Planning Acceptance

Involving religious leaders in health matters and social norms is important because they are critical influencers of health outcomes. Religious leaders are able to reach policy makers and influence key decisions. They are engaged community members and understand their communities' culture, beliefs, and other factors that may influence health.

The Christian Advocacy for Family Planning in Africa (CAFPA) project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, engages religious leaders to advocate for community and policy maker support for family planning to drive positive policy change.



Reverend Carol Mberia of the Maua Methodist Church (center) and Venerable Reverend Silas Micheni, Archdeacon, Anglican Church of Kenya, Meru County (right) on WERU TV July 25, 2019.

LOCATION

Kiambu, Meru, and Murang'a Counties in Kenya

KEY PLAYERS

Christian Health Association of Kenya, religious leaders, national and county policy makers, hospital managers, health care workers and community social influencers.

STRATEGY & APPROACH

Religious leaders are natural advocates for health matters, including family planning because they care about the well-being of their congregations, are well connected in their communities, and are experienced public speakers with access to large numbers of people through their houses of worship.

The CAFPA project capitalized on these factors and engaged religious leaders to advocate for policy changes and budget allocation specifically for FP and to ensure availability of FP commodities and supplies.

TACTICS

Religious leaders from Meru County, who were trained in family planning advocacy, have actively used mass media, primarily radio and TV, to share information about raising healthy families with their community.

In July 2019, Reverend Carol Mberia of the Maua Methodist Church and Venerable Reverend Silas Micheni, Archdeacon, Anglican Church of Kenya, Meru Diocese appeared on WERU TV and radio to discuss how family planning protects the health of mothers and children and is consistent with Christian values.

Another religious leader, Reverend Jamlick Murimi of the Anglican Church of Kenya Nyanya, also in Meru County, hosts a programme on MERU TV with a focus on the role of the Church in a variety of aspects of life. Before he started hosting the TV programme, Reverend Murimi had a similar show on a community radio station, Thiiri FM.

The media house managers believed a show on TV would attract a larger audience due to the exciting discussions, especially touching on family life, and launched a show featuring Reverend Murimi on MERU TV, a sister station of Thiiri FM.

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The TV programme, which started in August 2019, airs every Saturday morning from 7:00 to 8:00 am and is repeated on Sunday between 6:00 to 7:00 pm. These are prime viewing times for the TV channel. The station agreed to air the repeat programme due to demand from the viewers.

In several episodes of the programme, Reverend Murimi touched on family planning and healthy spacing of pregnancies. He also invites other religious leaders with knowledge on family planning and healthy spacing of pregnancies to participate in the discussions and answer questions from the viewers. CHAK trained the religious leaders to discuss family planning, although the religious leaders always encourage people to seek counseling from a health worker.

The show is interactive with viewers sending in their questions through text messages. The response from the viewers has been encouraging with approximately 100 to 120 questions or comments received in each show. The questions come from viewers in Meru County as well as the neighboring Embu and Kirinyaga counties. Reverend Murimi and the other guests speak a mix of the Meru language as well as English and Kiswahili to cater to audiences that are not fluent Kimeru speakers.



Reverend Jamlick Murimi at the community radio station (above) and showing his support for family planning (below left).

OUTCOMES

Through use of the mass media, Meru County religious leaders have reached a large section of the population in the county as well as surrounding counties with messages on healthy families. The viewers are now actively seeking information on family planning and health timing and spacing of pregnancies. Couples have approached Reverend Murimi at his church and in the community asking for more information about family planning because they have seen him on TV. Reverend Murimi refers them to a health facility, and some of them have come back later to tell him they took his advice and are now using an FP method.

NEXT STEPS

The TV station management realized that Rev. Murimi is passionate about family planning and proposed that he raise funds to pay for a segment which will specifically focus on the issue. Although fundraising is challenging, Reverend Murimi and other religious leaders are hopeful they can continue to share their message through TV and radio. Reverend Murimi has also been invited to other churches in Meru County to speak on FP.

LESSONS LEARNED

Religious leaders have a powerful voice for reaching communities with messages on family planning and healthy families. Open discussions on community mass media provide a platform for the audience to learn and ask questions about issues they might find difficult to address on a one-to-one basis with a health practitioner without discussing with a faith leader first. The open discussions also provide a space for correcting myths and misconceptions on FP and healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies by the religious leaders, who are well informed and equipped through their training from CHAK and trusted by the community due to their position.

