Community Participation: a Gateway to Healthcare Sustainability

Introduction

Community participation to healthcare is an approach that was not consciously implemented until the advent of the LCI project in 2014. While it has been established that government cannot solely provide quality healthcare to all those in need, communities kept depending on the goodwill of the government to improve on their health conditions. In the meantime, health facilities continued to be understaffed, underequipped and sometimes existed only on papers or in dilapidated structures. To curb this problem, the LCI embarked on a new approach to Community Participation in healthcare.

LCI Intervention

To guarantee the success of this approach, the LCI team carried out a series of trainings to empower the various stakeholders involved in the chain of community participation.

- Firstly, they provided assistance in developing district level action plans from baseline
The team went further to identify and trained members from District Management Committee and Councils. The training established the groundwork for participants to lead efforts in health improvement in their districts by providing them with applicable skills in Policy Advocacy Strategies.

Also, selected members from all the Health Area Management Committees were trained on community engagement. Thanks to this training, participants understood their roles and responsibilities within the dialogue structure. Hence, they were drilled on how to develop and tailor action plans to mobilize resources in their health areas, and initiated sensitization and outreach efforts.

These series of trainings ignited the passion in most of the dialogue structure members who were unaware of their roles and responsibilities to support local health centers. The ripple down effect of this training started bearing its fruits as the various Dialogue Structure members started putting what they had learned in to practice to support their different health facilities. An example that stands out is the case of Nkack Health Area.

**Background of Nkack Integrated Health Center**

Nkack Integrated Health Center is one of the few health facilities in Nkack Health Area in Bangem HD - South West Region. The center is located in Nkack Village some 15km from Bangem town. Since its creation in 1998, the center went operational only in the year 2000 due to some challenges encountered. As if that was not enough, the facility was hosted in a rented private residence with the hope that the government will erect a befitting structure in future. This rented structure was in a residential area with recurrent scarcity of portable of water. There was no toilet facility and the space was small with little improvement or restructuring of rooms made in the building.

"The owner of the house did not want us to do any temporal work there. Meanwhile, we did not have the financial power to build a permanent toilet which was a big challenge...” Mr. Ekwelle Isaac, Vice Management Committee Chairperson – Nkack Health Area.

Although there was a health center land already allocated by the community, all attempts by the community to cajole government to construct a structure for the health center were in vain.

**Changes/Benefits**

The capacitated dialogue structure members upon return from the trainings, collectively drafted appeal letters and distributed to all their sons and daughters living at home and abroad. It was during this quest that they gave one of these letters to one of their illustrious sons based abroad and presented the situation and the dire needs of the health Centre. The latter responded
positively and opted to construct a modern health facility in Nkack.

After the completion of the structure, the health center was immediately transferred to the new building after 15 years of offering health services in a rented dilapidated structure. The new edifice was officially

gandoned over to the population of Nkack on February 28, 2016. The new health center building has a pharmacy, a male and female ward, a maternity (labour and delivery room), with a total of 20 beds as compared to 10 beds in the rented structure. There is also a nursing station, Chief of Center's office, two inner toilets and other rooms. This new structure has invited more community members to make use of the facility. Hence, increasing services uptake, though at a galloping rate for general consultations.

“The consultation rate has increased. People are more willing to be admitted here than before...” Mr. Mesue Alex COC, Nkack Integrated Health Centre.

“We are well accommodated, we have many facilities in our health center and it is encouraging many people to come to the health facility...” Mr. Ekwelle Isaac Management Committee

Newly Constructed Health Center Building Funded by an Elite of Nkack

Uptake of Services in Nkack HC From 2014-2017

Consultation
ANC

2014 2015 2016 2017
Unlike the case of Nkack, community leaders in Wabane Health District joint forces with other stakeholders (councils, and district team) to mobilize resources. Through their concerted efforts, the Bamumbu Development Association (USA Branch) supported four health facilities with equipment (gas bottles and plates, wheelchairs, blood pressure machines, glucometers, weighing scales, thermometers, reagents and a variety of drugs). This has gone a long way to enhance the quality of services offered in the selected health facilities.

Conclusion

Community participation as proven through the case of the Nkack Integrated Health Centre and Wabane Health District is a strategy to reckon with. This is a clear indication that community members have an indispensable role to play in the provision of quality health care and the improvement of health service uptake in supposedly forgotten communities.