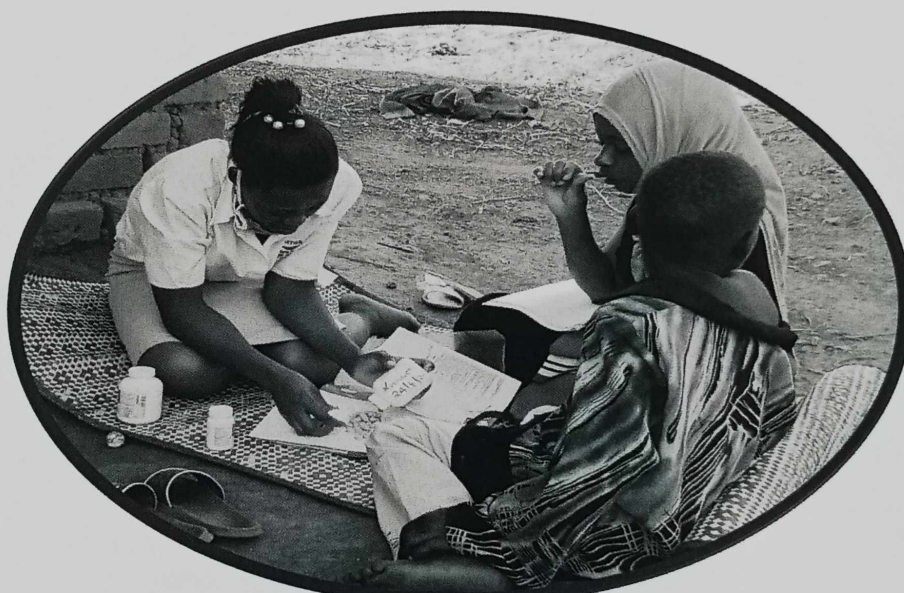




Action for Children and Young People Uganda (ACYP)

Community Health Report-2020

Enabling access to comprehensive, timely, and sustainable
health and well-being services



Covid-19 Drug Adherence Support-2020

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Annual Report 2020

Community Health

1. Introduction

The year 2020 presented unprecedented challenges to the community health program due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent national lockdowns. This report outlines how the program adapted its activities to continue supporting vulnerable children, adolescents, and their families in Kalungu District amidst movement restrictions, economic hardship, and health system strain. While traditional in-person activities were significantly hampered, ACYP had the travel licence to travel as essential workers throughout the region. The project also innovated through remote support, prioritized essential services like drug delivery, and addressed emerging needs such as food insecurity. Despite reduced direct contact and participation, the program strived to maintain essential health support and mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on the target beneficiaries.

2. Program Overview:

2.1 Background:

In early 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent government-imposed lockdowns in Uganda significantly disrupted daily life and access to essential services. Kalungu District, like other regions, experienced movement restrictions, closure of markets, and a decline in economic activities. The vulnerable children, adolescents, and their families, already facing health challenges, were disproportionately affected by limited access to healthcare, reduced income for food and medication, and social isolation due to lockdown measures. ACYP had to rapidly adapt its approach to continue providing support in this challenging environment.

2.2 Program Goals and Objectives (Adapted for COVID-19):

- **Overarching Goal:** To mitigate the negative health and socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable children, adolescents, and their families in sub-counties of Bukulula, Lukaya, Kyamulibwa, Lwabenge, Kalungu town council and Kalungu rural, while continuing to provide essential health support.
- **Adapted Objectives:**
 - To provide remote drug adherence support to at least 210 children and adolescents living with chronic illnesses through phone calls and physical visits
 - To ensure the delivery of essential medications to at least 80% of identified beneficiaries through modified, community-based strategies despite transport limitations.
 - To provide essential health information related to COVID-19 prevention and management to at least 250 families through remote channels and limited, safe community outreach.
 - To address the increasing food insecurity among vulnerable families by facilitating access to food aid and information on available support.

2.3 Target Beneficiaries:

The program continued to target the same vulnerable population of approximately 700 individuals. However, the methods of reaching and supporting them were significantly altered due to the pandemic. Only 55% were reached physical and the 45 were reached through remote communication and prioritizing the most critical needs.

3. Program Activities and Achievements (During COVID-19 Restrictions):

3.1 Drug Adherence Support:

- **Activities:**
 - Conducted 1,500 phone call and SMS follow-up sessions with children and adolescents to provide medication reminders, adherence counselling, and address concerns related to their health during the pandemic.
 - Developed and disseminated 300 simplified SMS messages and phone-based information on managing medications and maintaining health during lockdown.
- **Achievements:**
 - Maintained an average of 75% adherence rate among those receiving remote support, demonstrating the feasibility of remote adherence strategies.
 - Feedback from beneficiaries indicated that the regular phone calls and SMS messages helped them feel connected and supported.

3.2 Drug Delivery (Under Movement Restrictions):

- **Activities:**
 - Collaborated with a limited number of essential service transport providers and utilized Para social workers within their immediate localities to facilitate drug delivery.
 - Established 5 central, easily accessible (within permitted movement zones) community pick-up points for medication distribution on designated days with strict safety protocols.
 - Prioritized delivery to the most vulnerable individuals who were completely unable to travel due to age or severe illness.
- **Achievements:**
 - Successfully delivered essential medications to 82% of identified beneficiaries, despite significant transport limitations.
 - Reduced the risk of treatment interruptions for the most vulnerable individuals.
 - The community pick-up points provided a safer alternative to traveling long distances to health facilities during lockdown.

3.3 Access to Immunization (Limited Outreach):

- **Activities:**
 - Focused on disseminating information through phone calls and SMS on the importance of maintaining routine immunizations and encouraged families to visit health facilities when movement was permitted and safe.
 - Collaborated with local health facilities to schedule specific, appointment-based immunization slots to avoid overcrowding.
 - Provided limited transportation support in emergency cases where infants required urgent vaccination and movement restrictions were a major barrier.

- **Achievements:**

- While overall immunization rates saw a decline compared to pre-pandemic levels, 60% of eligible children still received essential vaccinations, highlighting the continued efforts to promote immunization despite challenges.
- No major outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases were reported in the target communities during this period.

3.4 Addressing Food Insecurity and WASH (Focus on Essential Support):

- **Activities:**

- Conducted phone-based assessments of food security among beneficiary families and linked those in critical need with local food aid initiatives and government support programs.
- Distributed 50 emergency hygiene kits (soap, hand sanitizer) to the most vulnerable households with specific instructions on COVID-19 prevention.
- Shared information on safe water practices and hygiene through phone calls and SMS, emphasizing their importance in preventing both waterborne diseases and COVID-19 transmission.

- **Achievements:**

- Facilitated access to food aid for 30 families facing severe food insecurity due to market closures and loss of income.
- Increased awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures and the importance of handwashing among 70% of the families reached through remote communication.

4. Challenges Faced (Exacerbated by COVID-19):

- Severe movement restrictions and lockdowns significantly hampered in-person activities, monitoring, and outreach.
- The poor transport system was further strained, making drug delivery and reaching beneficiaries in remote areas extremely difficult.
- Lack of physical meetings and community gatherings severely limited participation of families in support groups and health education sessions.
- Widespread food insecurity due to closure of food markets and limited business activities made it harder for families to afford food and, consequently, medication and other health needs.
- Limited income-generating opportunities in rural areas made it challenging for families to earn money for basic necessities, including healthcare.
- Fear of contracting COVID-19 led to reluctance among some beneficiaries to visit health facilities even when permitted.
- Difficulty in monitoring the well-being of beneficiaries remotely compared to in-person interactions.

5. Lessons Learned (During the Pandemic):

- Remote communication strategies (phone calls, SMS) are crucial for maintaining contact and providing essential support during movement restrictions, but they cannot fully replace in-person interactions.
- Flexible and adaptable drug delivery systems are essential to ensure continuity of care during crises. Leveraging local networks and community-based solutions is vital.
- Addressing basic needs like food security is integral to supporting health outcomes, especially during economic shocks. Partnerships with food aid organizations are crucial.

- Clear and consistent communication about health risks and preventive measures is vital in a pandemic context. Utilizing multiple channels is important to reach diverse populations.
- Strong community trust and pre-existing relationships are invaluable in facilitating remote support and adapting program activities.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring shifted primarily to remote methods. Volunteers provided weekly reports via phone calls. Adherence was tracked through beneficiary self-reports during phone calls and pharmacy refill data where accessible. Food security and hygiene practices were assessed through phone-based questionnaires. Limited in-person monitoring was conducted only when movement restrictions allowed and with strict adherence to safety protocols.

7. Sustainability Plan

The focus shifted towards building resilience within the community to cope with future crises. This included strengthening local support networks and exploring sustainable remote service delivery models.

8. Conclusion

The community health program demonstrated remarkable adaptability in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While the lockdowns significantly impacted traditional program delivery, the shift towards remote support and prioritization of essential services ensured continued assistance to vulnerable families. However, the challenges of limited reach, economic hardship, and social isolation underscore the need for strengthening remote service delivery models and building community resilience for future crises.

9. Recommendations

- Invest in strengthening remote communication infrastructure and providing mobile phones/airtime to volunteers and vulnerable families.
- Develop more robust community-based drug distribution networks that are less reliant on centralized transport.
- Integrate food security assessments and referrals into routine program activities.
- Enhance digital literacy among volunteers and beneficiaries to facilitate more effective remote engagement.
- Advocate for policies that ensure access to essential health services and food security during pandemics and other crises

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