Healing the Healthcare System in Murang’a County Through Public Participation

In February 2020, during the International Day of Nurses and Midwives, nurses in Murang’a County warned that Universal Health Coverage (UHC) would remain a pipe dream, with the shortage of nurses in public hospitals. County Nursing Officer, Salome Kimani, observed the county suffers a shortage of more than 1,000 nurses.

In Murarandia Ward in the county, residents chose to take the matter into their hands and petition the county government. The maternity wing at the Murarandia Dispensary is now fully operational as a result.

“The maternity wing was there… but there was no activity going on because there were no personnel. Expectant women would walk to Muriranjas Sub-District Hospital, 8km away, to access maternity services,” observes James Waiguru, a community trainer from Murarandia Ward.

Waiguru is one of 70 community trainers in the county who benefited from a governance and public participation training conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Murang’a funded by USAID through the Agile Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI) program.

The training covered the Public Expenditure Management (PEM) cycle, i.e. county budget cycle, budget formulation and monitoring of budget execution; public participation in the county development processes; social accountability techniques; the right to access to information; policy analysis and advocacy; and devolution and the functions of national and county governments.

As a result of the petition submitted by Waiguru and members of the Murarandia Ward, the County Health Executive Committee Member made a fact-finding visit to the dispensary. As a result of this visit, the committee member authorized the costing and recruitment of key staff, including a lab technician, a clinical officer and two nurses.

“We are very impressed at what we, the residents, have been able to achieve by agitating for change.”

Elizaphan Mbuthia, resident Murarandia Ward

Similarly, residents of Kinyona Ward wrote a petition to the county government complaining about the poor health service delivery at
Gikoe local dispensary. They cited among others, lack of enough health personnel.

The petition was, however, stalled due to bureaucracy, but with persistent nudging and visit with the county administration the matter was resolved and in December 2019, the dispensary was staffed with one nurse, a laboratory technician and a clinical officer.

Civic education has empowered communities to appreciate their roles in county governance and the importance of active participation.

“Initially, the residents would not engage with the county government. But now they understand they have to take charge of their development. They understand the county government must provide quality service. Therefore, they are boldly writing petitions to the government, and action is being taken.” Tom Kariuki, community trainer in Kamahuhua Ward concludes.