

Cycles take medicines closer to HIV patients

KALANGALA

By Agnes Nantambi

Josephine Akello, who lives at Senero Landing Site in Kalangala district, had given up on taking Antiretroviral drugs because the health centre is far from where she lives.

But an intervention to bring services close to her village saved the situation. She now takes her drugs on schedule.

In partnership with local health centres, Health Access Connect, a non-government organisation which links health personnel to the communities, introduced a Medicycles programme to give comprehensive health services to remote villages.

Under the Medicycles project, motorcycles are used as taxis to implement one-day, integrated-care clinics in remote and HIV-prone villages by transporting health workers and equipment to and from health centres.

"One motorcycle serves two villages with monthly mobile connect serving 160 people living with HIV," said Kevin Gibbons, the executive director of Health Access Connect.

In order to support the project, community groups in beneficiary villages collect sh2,000 from each patient under the programme, to cover fuel costs and health workers' safari day allowances of between sh61,000 and sh76,000 per clinic.

Gibbons noted that fishing communities have difficulty in accessing healthcare. He said the organisation signed a memorandum of understanding with Bugoye Health Centre IV, Kalangala Health Centre IV and Bwendero Health Centre to offer five monthly clinics running in Senero, Bungo, Banga, Kasenyi, and Kagolomolo landing sites.

"We are currently engaging six more communities for expansion as well as



Residents of Kalangala waiting for drugs during the monthly clinic organised by Health Access Connect recently. Photo by Agnes Nantambi

planning to expand to other districts in the Lake Victoria region," Gibbons said.

The deputy district health officer for Kalangala, Edward Mugimba, said the number of people defaulting on the taking of HIV/AIDS drugs in Kalangala district has reduced.

He said the organisation has done a lot in reducing stigma among the patients through continued dialogue with health workers and patients.

Gibbons added that the organisation has helped improve health service delivery on the island, since the transportation of

health workers to communities was one of the major challenges.

Annet Namwanje, a village health team member at Senero landing site, said the major challenge is that most patients have a belief that village health teams are given money to give to the patients.

Alisha Namujumbi, a health worker at Mugoye Health Centre III in Kalangala, said testing people and revealing their status is one of the major challenges at landing sites. This is because after knowing their status, most patients refrain from going back to hospitals.

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