



SNAPSHOT

Birthing Change in Wajir County through Public Participation

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Mohamed Turanem, Program Officer, Arid Lands Development Focus (ALDEF)

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Wajir county accounts for over 60 percent of maternal deaths in Kenya, which is extremely concerning. In Tarbaj Ward, residents travelled over 80 kilometres, to Wajir town for maternity services. The poor state of the dispensary’s maternity wing discouraged women from seeking skilled delivery services. Most of them would opt for home deliveries, increasing the risk of maternal mortality.

To resolve this and other numerous challenges Wajir residents face, one community-based organisation, Arid Lands Development Focus (ALDEF), stepped in. With financial support from UKAID, through the Agile and Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI), ALDEF implemented a project to promote public participation in county governance and interrogate performance. This would help residents actualize the change they desired to improved service delivery.

ALDEF trained community trainers, who in turn built the capacity of their communities to effectively take part in development decisions and oversight in the implementation of projects. Through the training of trainers (ToT) model, communities selected representatives across wards in the County who were trained by ALDEF, and in turn, would train their communities on the various areas of governance and public participation.

The community trainers were trained on; public participation and benefits, county budget planning process, and devolution; Public Expenditure Management (PEM) cycle; and social accountability using social audits and the community scorecard. The training also involved trainers leading their communities to file specific demands with the relevant county government authorities. In so doing, the trainers demonstrated the processes and channels to be followed in demanding certain actions.

The ward’s public participation committees led residents to visit the duty bearers, including the chief officers and County Executive Committee Members (CECMs), to fast-track their demands. The Tarbaj maternity, which serves more than 6,000 mothers and children, became operational by May 2019 as a result of this process.

“I am very relieved. I do not have to travel to Wajir to deliver. The maternity wing, which is a walking distance, is well equipped and

clean,” exerts Fatuma Hirsi, a resident, who delivered at the facility in June 2019.

“This improved facility will contribute to a reduction in mortality rate by more than 70 percent,” exerts Mohamed Turane, program officer at ALDEF.

Just as in maternal healthcare, communities in Lafaley Ward drafted a memorandum to the county government, to urgently address a water contamination crisis and severe water shortage. Residents persistently visited the Wajir County Executive Committee to demand a borehole. The government heeded the request and the borehole was drilled. It is yielding high volumes of clean water.

“Before the borehole was drilled, we depended on massive shallow wells, which were dangerous in case one slipped in while fetching water. We frequently got cholera from using this water. But now the situation has changed,” states Halima Isnino Issa, a resident.

The citizen engagement committees established by ALDEF in Wajir have committed to continue in their work. They now understand and see the benefits of residents’ holding the county government accountable and staying actively engaged in public participation in development projects that serve them.