Public Health in Meru District, Tanzania

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Environmental Health and Waste Collection in the Meru District

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Access to clean and safe water in urban and rural areas of Tanzania, including the Meru District, is in decline, due to increased solid waste accumulation and improper waste collection service. In the Meru District, the government has made efforts to implement a trash collection service and cleaning days, which are run by environmental health officers (EHOs). However, the problem of solid waste accumulation persists.

Observational Findings:
- Villagers collect trash in fields, burns it, and use it for fertilizer.
- Some people participate in the garbage collection service, but due to the variability of the trash collection, people also dispose of their trash in other ways.
- There is a lack of communication between the trash collectors and the villagers who are responsible for the collection of garbage from the main road.

Research Team Recommendations:
- We propose that each village have a community Davidson where residents can put their trash for the truck to come and collect them.
- We propose that villagers understand the benefits of maintaining cleanliness and educate people on the importance of proper disposal of waste.
- We propose that the government regulate and minimize plastic trash, like done in Zanzibar, so that it is observed to be the main problem in all villages.

Conclusions:
In the Meru District, solid waste pollution is a prevalent issue that may facilitate the spread of diseases and pose a threat to public health. The action of an individual dumping trash in a public space or near water can spread disease just as easily as failing to dispose of trash properly.

Food Security in the Meru District

Maya Krasnow (Northwestern University Global Health Studies Program)

The goal of this research project was to determine the impact of food insecurity on individuals and households in the Arusha region of Northern Tanzania.

Background:
- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Methodology:
- Interviews with 6 villages over the course of 4-5 weeks
- Translated from Kikuyu to English

Findings:
- Lack of knowledge at government health facilities
- Poor quality of service
- Lack of knowledge about GIT

Acknowledgements:
Professor Noelle Sullivan; Dr. Kesava Bhargaraju; International Program Development (IPD); Our colleagues from the University of Dar es Salaam; The staff at Usa River Rehabilitation Center; Everyone in Tanzania who made our projects possible.

Maternal Mortality in Meru District

Heather Weidmann (University of Dar es Salaam Medical School Department)

While the world has made progress in reducing mortality, Tanzania’s program has been much slower. Despite several government initiatives, including providing maternal health services free, maternal mortality rates continue to be a significant challenge in Meru District. Our partner’s evaluation project aimed to understand the barriers and limitations that influence when a woman decides to give birth, while also gaining an understanding of what actually occurs during the birthing process.

Observational Findings:
- Women often lack education, consistent referrals, economic capability, and entailment at the number of children they have, and entanglement of over maternal age were major factors contributing to women in villages to choose to forgo health services.
- Women’s preference for health care professionals, as well as a belief in corrupt health professional decreased women’s trust in health facilities.
- Lack of healthcare professionals decreased the majority of health decisions to be made by other family members.

Research Team Recommendations:
- Villagers should increase their knowledge of health professionals through unmanned random evaluations of health facilities and establishing an anonymous patient reporting system.
- Village leaders and health facilities should work together to provide more educational opportunities for women and families surrounding maternal care. Seminars and advertisements on the importance of prenatal and postnatal care will provide women the adequate knowledge needed to handle their pregnancy.

Conclusions:
- The quality of maternal healthcare services, as well as maternal mortality continues to be a major public health concern in Meru District. It is clear that so dramatic changes can occur rapidly, we believe that while the above recommendations, support from village youth members and the induction of the community. Meru District has the potential to meaningfully improve the quality of care in this region, which would have lasting effects on reducing the incidence of maternal mortality while improving the rates of births within health facilities rather than in the home.

Community Health Fund in the Meru District

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What is it?
- A government-sponsored health insurance plan intended to insure non-government workers (majority of Tanzanian residents)

Cost:
- 10,000 Tanzanian shillings ($6) per year

Background:

Results:
- 64 interviews and 4 focus groups conducted from July 11th, 2014 to August 1st, 2014, we learned that certain populations were vulnerable including the elderly, women, single-parent households, and those without consistent jobs. We also found that while the issue of food insecurity is related to education, climate factors, and often of resources necessary for community health facilities and surrounding areas, the main reason for food insecurity was poverty, reducing food intake, selling assets, borrowing and dependence on inconsistent religious and governmental aid.

References:

Abstract

This collaborative research project aimed to come to a better understanding of four relevant public health issues in Meru, Tanzania. Each research team was to work with two Northwestern University students and one University of Dar es Salaam student to choose a research topic based on recommendations from community leaders. The four teams completed qualitative research projects on maternal mortality, solid waste pollution, the community health fund, and food insecurity through interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Each team sought to understand their topic in the context of the cultural, medical, and social landscape of northern Tanzania. Research findings and practical recommendations were presented in both oral and written form to community leaders and local government officials.

Methodology

- All research topics selected by community and health sector leaders in Meru District, Tanzania
- Research teams consisted of 1-2 Northwestern University students and 1 student from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania
- Each group spent four weeks collecting, coding, and analyzing data from July 11th, 2014 to August 1st, 2014
- Data was collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups, and participant observations in various wards throughout Meru District
- Each research team compiled a final report and presented their findings to the local community and health leaders in Meru District