



SUCCESS STORY

Promoting Family Planning in Rural Kenya

USAID program helps Susan Kajuju make an impact as a family planning nurse



Photo: The Capacity Project/Linda Fogarty

Nurse Susan Kajuju, Ijara District Hospital

“You really have to sacrifice a lot of time. You have to go down into the community, then become very known,” said Susan Kajuju, a nurse tasked with educating patients about family planning.

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In Kenya’s remote North Eastern Province, a woman nervously approached the Ijara District Hospital. She wanted to learn about family planning but feared for her privacy. In her deeply religious community, comprised mainly of ethnic Somali Muslims, households have an average of eight children and family planning is viewed with suspicion. “Are you going to keep the secret?” she asked the young nurse.

Nurse Susan Kajuju accepted a post as a family planning nurse at Ijara through a USAID program aimed at helping solve Kenya’s severe shortage of health workers. Already certified as a nurse, Kajuju received additional special training through USAID; she was among 830 health workers recruited and deployed to 219 key sites across the country. Kajuju began by meeting with local groups, visiting people in their homes and attending social events.

Since she heard that the men in the community needed to be involved in family planning decisions and men would be more likely to accompany their spouses to the clinic during the evening, she started an evening shift—and even sheiks started to show up with their wives. But Kajuju faced many challenges. In North Eastern Province (population: 1.3 million) only 7% of women and just 0.6% of men approve of family planning, according to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey.

However, Kajuju knew that both women and men were interested in her services. Local men began to confide, “My wife has had this number of children and I want you to assist, but I don’t want people to know.” Confidentiality was clearly a major concern. To earn clients’ trust, Kajuju offered services at her home and at unusual hours. She also shared her own story with clients, “I can tell the mother I also have this, I show them—and they take the method.”

Kajuju has vastly increased the number of women taking family planning methods at Ijara District Hospital. “I have gone up to 100, sometimes 170 a month,” a huge jump from five or 10. “You really have to sacrifice a lot of time. You have to go down into the community, then become very known,” she said.

Dr. Nancy Kidula, a former USAID-funded advisor to the Division of Reproductive Health, lauded Kajuju’s achievements. “She is doing health talks, she is sensitizing people about the methods and she is available.” Above all, Kidula said, Kajuju has discovered a major key to success in Ijara: “She maintains confidentiality.”