



# Community Health Workers Improve Hygiene for People Living with HIV

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD: MOMBASA CITY, KENYA

Three stories from community health workers describe how WASH training has empowered them, and one of their HIV-positive clients shares how her CHW helped her improve the overall health of her family.

## CONTACT

Go to: [www.washplus.org](http://www.washplus.org) for more field stories and information on the WASHplus program in Kenya.



Health and community groups to promote healthy WASH practices alongside existing interventions for PLHIV and their households across Kenya.

The project is building the capacity of Kenya’s public health system in WASH-HIV integration at all levels by training health workers in an approach that encourages small doable actions, which are feasible steps that move people toward an ideal behavior.

To reach more people, the training is multi-level. First, public health officers are trained to train others. They, in turn, train community health extension workers, who then pass on WASH knowledge and skills to volunteer community health workers (CHWs).

Since the project started in 2010, more than 8,029 CHWs in charge of at least 400 community units have been trained on WASH-HIV integration and inclusive sanitation. They are now educating communities on how to undertake small doable actions that use local resources to improve health and prevent diseases by promoting hand washing, making drinking water safe, and improving sanitation and menstrual hygiene. The volunteer health workers promote these simple but effective WASH practices to improve conditions for PLHIV and their families in Bangladesh, an unplanned low-income settlement in just outside Mombasa city on the Kenyan coast.

### Robert Mukudi, 40, married with seven children

Robert is in charge of 20 households. He has helped many PLHIV who disclose their status to him after gaining his trust.

“In my households, I pay a lot of attention to making sure there is safe water. The water we use here has impurities, and I advise people to treat it by boiling or using WaterGuard,” says Robert. “I also show them how to store water well.” WaterGuard is a water treatment solution promoted through social marketing.

Robert is also the “expert” in kitchen gardening. He maintains the group’s demonstration garden and regularly tends the vegetables, usually kale

People living with HIV (PLHIV) face a higher risk of getting infected with diseases such as diarrhea and other common illnesses because HIV lowers the body’s ability to fight infections, so healthy water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices are especially important for them follow.

USAID’s WASHplus project is working with the Ministry of



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or cowpeas, that the group grows in the compound of the local dispensary run by the Catholic church.



### **Caroline Oduor, mother of two young children**

As a CHW, Caroline leads by example. She has made sure all the homes she supports have “leaky tins,” water containers that release water slowly from a small hole in the side for hand washing.

Caroline started by hanging her first leaky tin in the compound of semi-permanent houses where she lives with eight other families. “I provided a leaky tin outside the toilet and we all take turns to fill it with water. Everyone uses their own soap. When it’s my turn, I add liquid soap in the container,” says Caroline. The soap is made by the CHWs for sale.

Caroline recalls how she assisted a fellow tenant living with HIV to maintain hygiene. “He used to mess up the toilet and bathroom, making it risky for everyone. I counseled him and encouraged him and his wife to always clean the toilet after use. The man was weak and whenever he visited the bathroom for a bath, he sat on the floor. I got him to start using a stool and his wife cleaned the bathroom well after use.”

In addition, Caroline, noted that “Three-quarters of my households have leaky tins.”

### **Rose Makokha, community health worker**



Rose and other CHWs have been promoting hand washing in schools. “The problem is that the leaky tins are stolen,” she says.

Everyone agrees that theft of leaky tins is a big setback to their efforts to promote hand washing. Young men steal the plastic containers and sell them as waste for recycling. To address

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“We need to help replace stolen leaky tins and continue educating the community,” says Tobias Oduori, a village elder. “We will make it compulsory for all schools to ensure they have leaky tins at all times.”



### **Monica, program beneficiary**

Monica, a 35-year-old mother of four living with HIV, says she has benefited immensely from the advice of her CHWs. Monica lives in the Kenyan coastal town of Mombasa, where WASHplus partners are implementing activities in four districts.

“I was afraid when I found out I was HIV and my health quickly worsened,” Monica says in Swahili language. “Whenever community health worker Benta Awino visited me, I sent her away many times but she persisted.” Today Monica says she is grateful to Awino for helping her to improve her health. “I have benefitted from her advice on health,” she says.

The CHW taught Monica how to avoid diarrhea and other infections. She learned how to treat drinking water and the importance of washing hands, especially after visiting the toilet and before eating or preparing food. Monica says that she has accepted her HIV status and lives a healthier life. She and her children rarely get diarrhea.

The local public health officer, Nelly Tindell, agrees training in WASH has made a difference. “Use of toilets and water treatment at household level has reduced cases of diarrhea in the community. Cholera outbreaks that were common in the rainy season are now history,” says Nelly, and most homes now use leaky tins for hand washing where no running water exists.



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