Case study: The Health NGOs Network (HENNET)’s capacity building of Safe Water and Aids Project (SWAP) Field Coordinator results in structured engagement in the health sector and with Community Health Workers.
Name: Penina Ogendo  
Organization: Safe Water and Aids Project (SWAP)  
Health Intervention area: HIV/AIDS, Water-borne diseases  
Position: Field Coordinator  
Age: 31 years  
Location: Kisumu – Nyanza Province  

‘Through attending training workshops and review of policy resource documents in health sector, being a member of HENNET has made me understand my role in the health sector, encouraged and given me confidence in engaging in local District Health Stakeholder Forums and imparting the same information to my field officers…HENNET organized activities has become a standing agenda in SWAP and has ‘kept everybody on their toes’.  
Penina Ogendo  

The SAFE water and AIDS Project (SWAP) is a non governmental organization based in western Kenya that engages HIV support and self-help groups to promote and sell water treatment and other health products as an income generating activity that also benefits the wider community. SWAP aims to improve the health and socio-economic status of Kenyan people through disease prevention and socio-economic empowerment of the target population. SWAP joined HENNET in December 2009. 

Even before their organization became a member of HENNET, SWAP staff were attending health stakeholders’ meetings on the invitation of the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation (MoPHS). Despite this, the organization’s field staff in particular, were not pro-active in seeking engagement with health partners in their districts of operation and were working closely in partnerships in the district only during health emergencies, especially cholera outbreaks. Collaboration with the MoPHS and other health partners was not viewed as an important activity for SWAP field staff, and most of them lacked basic knowledge of the health policy in Kenya and therefore lacked confidence during health stakeholder meetings.  

Penina is an employee of SWAP working as the Field Coordinator where she supervises and monitors all field activities for a team of 12 staff operating in Kisumu, Nyando, Rachuonyo, Rongo, Migori, Suba, Homa Bay, Bondo, Rarieda, Siaya districts and Kakamega (in Western Province). SWAP’s field staff mobilize and engage community self help groups as vendors at the local level for preventive health products that counter HIV/AIDS and water borne diseases.  

In early 2010, SWAP realized that there was need for Penina, her field staff and indeed all SWAP staff to better understand their role in the health sector. With support from DFID, in March 2010, HENNET organized its first District Focal Point (DFPs) Persons meeting for members; the objectives of the meeting was to have a clear understanding on the concept of DFPs, their specific roles and HENNET’s expectations, build consensus on how to better operationalize the DFPs and share experiences from various districts to pick out the best practices that all the districts can replicate.  

SWAP took this opportunity to nominate Penina to represent SWAP. She attended the one-day meeting and was able to fully understand the rationale, purpose and objectives of District Health Stakeholder Forums (DHSF) in the health sector. She was also able to engage with other HENNET DFP persons with whom she was able to share her experiences and challenges.  

HENNET Secretariat also provided her with reader friendly popular versions of Community Health Services (CHS) policy documents, popular versions of the National Health Sector Strategic Plan II, booklets on SWAP processes in the health sector and the basis for the joint programme of work and funding. Penina asked if she could be in the HENNET mailing list to receive HENNET member’s regular briefings of proceedings from monthly CHS Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) meetings in Nairobi. She has thus kept abreast of developments in the CHS, the most important of which she says is the proposed composition of the Community Health Worker (CHW) Kits that was finalized in July 2010.  

1 DFPs : HENNET member organizations at the district level who fill the gap in the flow of information from the district level to national level and thus mitigate against uncoordinated emergency response, and uncoordinated support to the local level  
2 DHSF: Is a mechanism set up by the MOH to allow participation of all stakeholders in health at the local level in planning  
3 CHS-ICCs: Mechanism set up and chaired by MoPHS to involve Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations in national level planning and policy making process for the CHS.
One of the 900 groups that SWAP is currently working with is the Maseno (HIV/AIDS) Support Group located in Maseno, about 35 km North-West of Kisumu town. This group is a SWAP vendor of safe water and reproductive health (RH) products and is composed of 36 members all of whom are locals in the community living positively with HIV/AIDS. Penina has not kept her new found knowledge and benefits of the capacity building from HENNET to herself. She has since March 2010 shared her knowledge with the SWAP Field Officers under her supervision and who also work directly with the various support groups/health product vendors. The SWAP Field Officer for Kisumu is Jane Pauline Oloo.

‘SWAP has been a key partner in this district in disseminating health information about HIV, AIDS and water borne diseases and also since April 2010 about the community health strategy.....in addition, I am grateful that SWAP has since last year consistently invited MoPHS staff including myself to their forums; through this kind of partnership I am aware of SWAP activities in the district, and this helps strengthen health facility-community linkages which is an important objective of the community health strategy.’

Nicholas Solomba Makotsi, District Public Health Officer-Nyando District

Tangible results:

- Through the DFPs SWAP has developed a closer working relationship with MoPHS, represents HENNET at the District level during health meetings, provide regular feedback to the District Health Stakeholders Forums that feeds into the local overall health annual operation planning (AOPs) process in the 12 districts with SWAP operations.
- More than 200 HENNET Ministry of Health (MOH) policy briefs distributed by SWAP in Nyanza province
- 900 Self Help Groups of persons distributing preventive and promotive health products (vendors) understand their role under the CHS both as CHWs (where it applies) and as opinion leaders in the community.

All 36 members of the Maseno (HIV/AIDS) Support Group are CHWs in the community and most have a relatively clear understanding of their role as CHWs and the overall aim of the CHS and they attribute this to SWAP staff. Though they feel a bit frustrated by the lack of proper incentives for CHWs under the CHS thus far, it is clear that their understanding of their individual and collective roles in health service at level one motivates them to work for the benefit of their community.

In addition to DFP meetings and the CHS, the HENNET Secretariat has also coordinated other capacity building forums such as those on health financing (Budgeting), health sector reform and training in HENNET advocacy strategy from which other SWAP staff have benefited.

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4 The MOH was split into the MOPHS and the Ministry of Medical Services (MoMs) in 2008

5 One of which is ‘Taking the Essential Package for Health to the COMMUNITY: A strategy for the Delivery of LEVEL ONE SERVICES Popular Version’-Ministry of Health 2007