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Reducing stunting through care group methodology in urban slums: A case of Nairobi, Kibera slums

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Statement of the Problem: Globally in 2016, 22.9% of children under the age five of years suffered from child stunting. Child Growth Standards median show a restriction of a child's potential growth. Child stunting can happen in the first 1000 days after conception and is related to many factors including socioeconomic status, dietary intake, infections, maternal age, nutritional status, micronutrient deficiencies and the environment. It is one of the underlying causes for death of 2.2 million children below five years every year worldwide.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The CG approach is a community-based strategy for promoting behavior change. A CG comprises of 10–15 community based volunteers that fortnightly, meet with project staff for training and supportive supervision. It's different from typical mother's groups in that each volunteer is responsible for bi-monthly meeting with 10–15 of her neighbors, sharing, learning and facilitating behavior change at the household level. Behavior change is enhanced through peer support. In Kibera one of the largest slums in Africa adopted the care group approach which was geared to reduce stunting through promoting Exclusive Breastfeeding appropriate complimentary feeding and essential hygiene actions.

Findings: Nationally the stunting rate of children below five years in Kenya is at 26%, Kibera was at 33% when the implementation started in 2015. An impact assessment and midterm evaluation done through a Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition survey (SMART) elucidates a quantitative reduction of stunted growth among children had reduced in the second year of project implementation to 16.2%. Anecdotal feedback from the beneficiary neighbor women significantly showed how effective care group has changed their knowledge, attitude, beliefs and practice towards feeding and hygiene practices in the informal settlements.

Conclusion & Significance: A child is said to be stunted when he/she is too short for their age. If a child is stunted before the age of five, it can slow down the growth of her body and mind. Stunted children with deficiencies of iodine and iron may suffer irreversible brain damage, impeding them from reaching their complete developmental potential. To achieve tangible reduction of stunting and adoption of key nutrition to care group is the way to go as an appropriate methodology in urban and rural settings. Since it has a multiplying effect to a larger population. The behaviours promoted in this model require minimal financial resources to ensure the practices are adopted due to its unique structure.

Biography

John Otieno has his expertise in Nutrition, WASH, Livelihoods and health programing. His passion driven nutrition advocacy, Policy development and health systems strengthening for the last 7 years has put him at better place to head nutrition and implement one of the largest and heavily Funded US AID HIV/ Nutrition Care and treatment program-APHIA-Plus, from 2012-2018. Currently he is the food and nutrition pillar Manager at FEED the Children, an anti-hunger organization based in Kenya, Africa. He is also a board chair for Scaling up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance- Kenya. He has worked in different diverse complex, humanitarian and developmental environments, developing key nutrition strategies and approaches revolving around nutrition demonstration centers for people living with HIV sustainability methodology for Community Health Units and Nutrition Advocacy for adolescents. He is aspiring to be world's leading nutrition programmer.

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