

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Shingiro Health Center is situated in a remote location in Musanze District, Northern Province, Rwanda. Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area, population 29,047, consists of 6 cells, 36 villages, and is served by 3 groups of community health workers. A description of these community health workers follows:

1. A total of 78 health animators serve the population of Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area. Each of the 6 cells has one health animator. In addition, each of the 36 villages comprising these 6 cells has one male and one female serving as health animators. Health animators are elected by the population they serve. The Ministry of Health encourages health animators to participate in public health campaigns such as the promotion and distribution of contraceptive methods and mosquito nets, prevention education on intestinal parasites, and advocacy for childhood immunizations, to name a few.

CCHIPS began working with the health animators in Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area in February 2008. In the 1st semester health animators were invited to monthly workshops at Shingiro Health Center. The workshops were facilitated by CCHIPS' Medical Coordinator. Topics were chosen according to learning needs expressed by various stakeholders including health center staff, health animators, and CCHIPS staff. Health animators expressed interest in the topics covered and demonstrated increased knowledge and awareness of topics. In the 2nd semester CCHIPS orchestrated workshops focusing on preventive health topics in each of the 6 cells, one per month. These workshops were facilitated jointly by CCHIPS' staff and the health animators who serve those particular communities. Joint facilitation allowed the health animators to improve their public speaking skills while conveying important preventive health messages to those they serve.

2. Mother's health animators, formerly referred to as traditional midwives, are recognized by the Ministry of Health as integral to achieving a reduction of the maternal and infant mortality rate in Rwanda. The name change results from the effort of the Ministry of Health to encourage these community health workers to ensure the health of pregnant women and their offspring. Thus, it is the responsibility of the mother's health animators to promote the health of mothers by supporting them to partake in pre-natal care

programs, deliver at a health care facility, follow childhood immunization schedule, and raise awareness of family planning methods. Mother's health animators are not elected by the communities they serve. Rather, the road to become a mother's health animator is an arduous one. In most cases it entails many years of working under the guidance and mentorship of experienced mother's health animators, usually a family member.

There are 33 mother's health animators serving the population of Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area. CCHIPS began working with mother's health animators in September 2008. Since then, CCHIPS has facilitated one workshop per month emphasizing maternal/child health topics. Although the partnership between the mother's health animators and CCHIPS is new, the potential exists to precipitate positive change in maternal and child health.

3. Thirty-four traditional healers serve the population of Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area. These traditional healers work under the auspices of an association, registered at both the sector level and district level. As an association, traditional healers operate under the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Local Governance. Regarding their role as community health workers, the Ministry of Health encourages traditional healers to ensure the health of the communities they serve by persuading community members who seek their services to visit the nearest health care facility for all of their health care needs. Similar to mother's health animators, traditional healers are not elected by the communities they serve. Traditional healers achieve their role through years of working under a mentor where they acquire the skills and knowledge of practices and methods particular to traditional healers through hands on experience

Of the 34 traditional healers serving the population of Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area, 33 are also mother's health animators. The dual role served by traditional healers and mother's health animators seems to be unique to this particular health catchment area. In July 2008 CCHIPS facilitated a workshop with community health workers, including traditional healers. The topic of malnutrition was addressed, amongst others. Traditional healers were encouraged to persuade individuals suffering from malnourishment or at risk of becoming malnourished to go to the nearest health care facility for care, education, and treatment when appropriate. In addition, the traditional healers were informed about the services offered at Shingiro Health Center

and the advantages of receiving such services and health related care at a health care facility.

Note: - Community health workers are the invaluable link between Shingiro Health Center and the population it serves. The role of community health workers requires dedication and hard work. They are role models, conveyors of public health messages, ambassadors of the health center, first responders, and much more. It is undeniable that their tireless effort in partnership with Shingiro Health Center will improve the health status of the population in Shingiro Health Center's health catchment area. It is important to note that they are volunteers. Incentives are offered to stimulate and encourage community health workers to continue to serve their communities.

The purpose of CCHIPS is to develop a model for the improved delivery of primary health care. The CCHIPS' approach consists of 5 elements. One particular facet of CCHIPS' strategy involves community health workers. See below:

Engage and empower the community

- Train community health workers (health animators, mother's health animators, & traditional healers) to evaluate health situations and provide basic first aid
- Train community health workers to educate the population on hygiene and disease prevention
- Utilize community health workers to serve as ambassadors for the health center
- Incorporate mother's health animators and traditional healers with health center care delivery
- Train community health workers to promote participation in Mutuelle

In 2009 CCHIPS will work in close collaboration with all community health workers. In the 1st semester (Jan. – June), health animators will meet at a specified site once per month to receive health education information and resources pertaining to identified public health issues. Likewise, mother's health animators and traditional healers will meet once per month to partake in 'train the trainer' workshops. Topics of the monthly workshops will be determined following the end of the year discussion/planning session with all community health workers scheduled for December 11, 2008.

The 2nd semester (July – Dec.), will entail village visits and community education throughout the 6 cells served by Shingiro Health Center. Health animators will facilitate health education activities in the field, one time per month. Similarly, mother's health animators and traditional healers will provide health education activities on topics relevant to their role, on site, once per month. The primary objective of the village visits is to engage and empower community health workers and community members on public health issues, promote community-based health insurance (mutuelle), and advocate for the health center and utilization of the services it provides. Village visits also provide community health workers the opportunity to convey important public health messages to large audiences while fostering goodwill with local authorities, whom are always present at such gatherings. In addition, once every trimester in 2009 (Jan, April, July, Oct.) community health workers will convene to evaluate progress, brainstorm activities, and discuss successes achieved and challenges met.