



“Harnessing the Power of the Local Communities on Driving Sustainable Changes”

Afya *Plus* Community-Led Monitoring Model and its Impact Towards a Healthy Community and More Equitable Health Services for All

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including Tanzania, have made significant strides towards attaining the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets (a set of goals established by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to measure progress in combating HIV/AIDS. However, certain challenges persist, hindering further progress.

Addressing some of these challenges can be as simple with the service recipients' involvement and seeking their opinions on how to improve access and quality of HIV/AIDS services. This is precisely where community-led monitoring becomes crucial.

Community-led monitoring (CLM) is a dynamic-citizen driven approach which puts the voices of the service recipients at the center of quality improvement efforts. Community-led monitoring involves meaningful engagement and participation of community members in providing their feedback, experiences, and reflections in a structured manner purposely for improving access and quality of the services that directly impact their lives. This method aims to empower communities by giving them ownership of the continuous quality improvement process and holding stakeholders accountable for the outcomes.

Throughout community-led monitoring, community members are actively involved in various stages, from data collection and analysis to decision-making. Their pivotal role includes identifying indicators, collecting pertinent data, interpreting findings, and utilizing the information to advocate for change and make informed choices.

This approach highly values the expertise, knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of the community, ensuring their voices are not only heard but also addressed to meet their priorities.

AFYA PLUS'S COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING MODEL

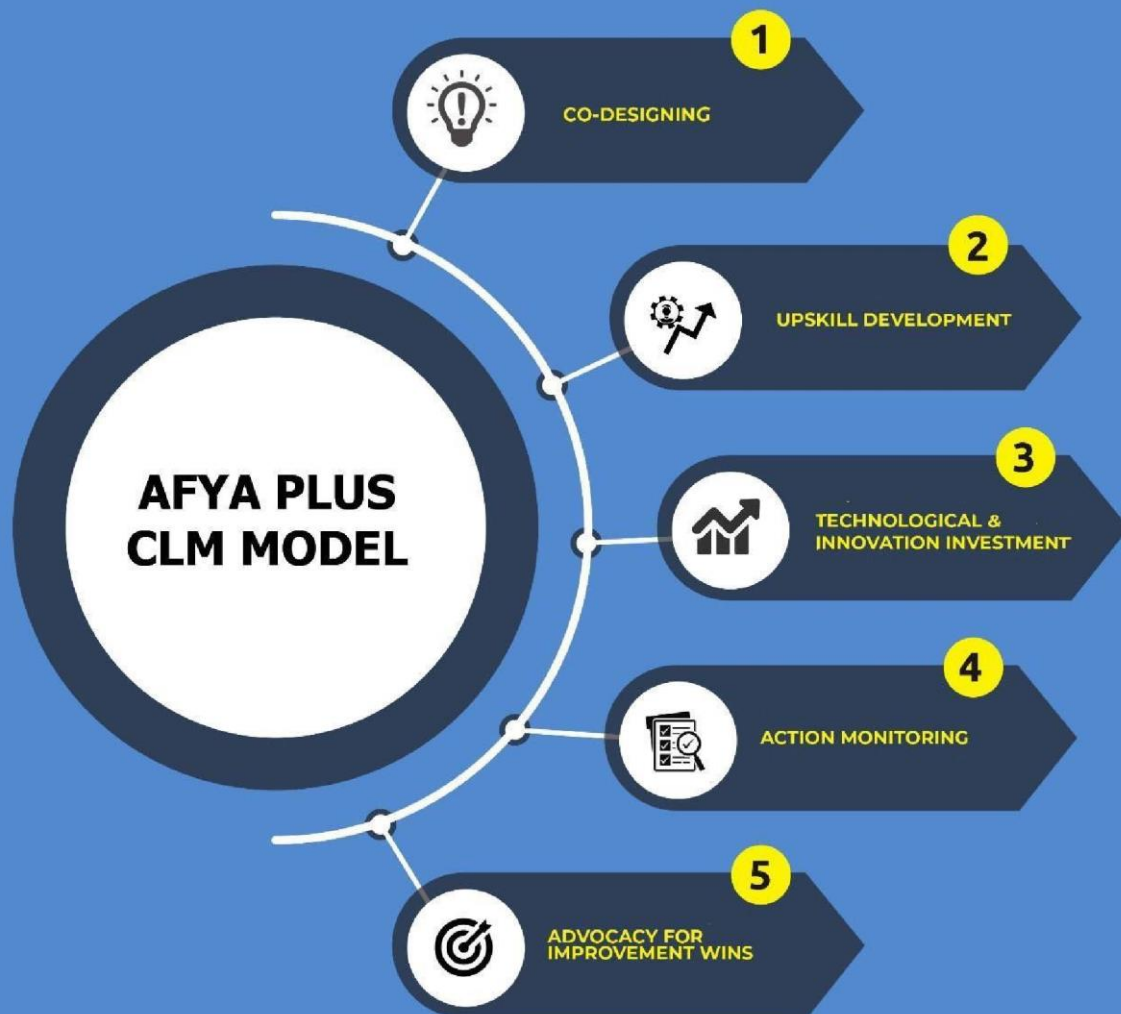
Afya Plus, with support from PEPFAR through the Ambassador's Fund for HIV/AIDS Relief (AFHR), undertook a transformative health initiative known as the "IMARISHA" Project in Mara region. The "IMARISHA" Project was implemented in collaboration with the regional and council health management teams and had a primary goal of improving the quality and accessibility of HIV services. At the heart of this endeavour was the concept of community-led monitoring, which emphasized placing the voices of service recipients at the forefront of continuous quality improvement initiatives, ultimately aiming for better health outcomes.

Afya Plus employed a client-centered approach where the needs and voices of communities are at the center of improvement efforts. Our community-led monitoring model has been designed in such a way service recipients are at the "driving seat" of continuous quality improvement efforts where their experiences, reflections, and feedback on the received services inform joint locally led solutions on encountered challenges related to quality and accessibility of health services.

We support setting up functional health systems to pinpoint persistent problems and identify solutions to address both quality concerns and barriers to service uptake with consideration of service recipients' perspective.



"Harnessing the Power of the Local Communities on Driving Sustainable Changes" - Afya Plus CLM Model and its Impact towards a Healthier, Safer, and More Equitable World for All



COMPONENT 1: CO-DESIGNING

At Afya Plus, we believe in involving the community of practice in designing the community led monitoring initiative is “*instrumental*” to ensure its relevance in addressing community needs and expectations. This process also determines what data and information need to be collected strategically to inform key stakeholders’ decision-making processes on improving access and quality of health services. We prioritize citizen-driven accountability and sustainability approaches within the health system to ensure the wins are long-term.

COMPONENT 2: UPSKILL DEVELOPMENT

Our community-led monitoring experts engage and collaborate with local community leaders, influencers, monitors, health service providers and data analysts to ensure they understand the scope, course and expected outcomes of community-led monitoring initiatives. We value the quality of information collected and aim to empower and improve the skills of everyone involved in the process of health system improvement.

COMPONENT 3: TECHNOLOGICAL & INNOVATION INVESTMENT

We invest in technologies and innovations that support the entire process of the community-led monitoring data journey. We prioritize the appropriateness, user-friendliness, affordability and acceptability of these innovative technologies. Our main goal is to ensure that community-led monitoring data is continuously collected at the possible lowest cost, fed, and utilized in real-time to improve the quality of healthcare services.

COMPONENT 4: ACTION MONITORING

Our community-led monitoring model formalizes monitoring of specific actions that will directly affect the desired changes within the healthcare delivery system. This process aligns the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of each service improvement investment. To ensure progress is measured accurately, the approach emphasizes taking time to pause and reflect for both our teams and the community of practice.

COMPONENT 5: ADVOCACY FOR IMPROVEMENT WINS

Afya Plus believes that the “*SMART*” advocacy approach to achieving service improvement is a crucial step towards catalysing positive and sustainable changes that the community expects to receive from the health system. This process involves deploying skilled health advocates who work within the health system to influence decision-makers in translating inputs from service recipients into actions in favour of the desired changes in the delivery of healthcare services.





COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING IMPACT ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Our community-led monitoring (CLM) model facilitated joint actions from decision-makers, service providers and service recipients that led to immense and sustainable changes in the health system.

- One of the notable impacts of community-led monitoring is vividly seen at Murangi health center in Mara region on improving diagnostic and other healthcare services. Prior to the implementation of community-led monitoring, individuals seeking ART treatment had to bear the cost and inconvenience of traveling long distances to the regional hospital in Musoma Municipality for baseline investigations before commencing their treatment. However, with the introduction of community-led monitoring, a “*market-based solution*” was found whereby the facility’s viral load testing machine was repaired, enabling service recipients to undergo this crucial test at the health centre. This significant improvement alleviated the burden on the service recipients, many of whom faced financial constraints and difficulties in making frequent trips to Musoma Municipal for essential tests.
- The implementation of community-led monitoring had a profound positive impact to functionality of the medical equipment at this facility, particularly the laboratory machines essential for routine investigations to monitor treatment outcome. Initially, the haematology analyser and the biochemistry analyser were non-functional, posing challenges for patient care. However, thanks to community-led monitoring efforts which were made to repair and restore these machines to their proper working condition. As a result of this initiative, both individuals living with HIV/AIDS and those without the

condition benefited significantly. The repaired medical equipment enabled Murangi health center to provide comprehensive and timely diagnostic services to all patients, leading to improved healthcare outcomes for the entire community served by the facility.

- Another significant impact of community-led monitoring is on improvement of the facility's revenue which is basic for sustaining service delivery. Generated facility revenue following implementation of "*market-based solutions*", increased by three folds which attributed to the repair and functionality of the biochemistry and haematology analysers because of the community-led monitoring initiative. As a direct impact of these machines being operational again, a wider range of diagnostic tests can now be conducted, leading to an overall increase in revenue at Murangi health center. The increased revenue has been channelled towards supporting various quality improvement efforts at the facility. This includes upgrading medical equipment, expanding healthcare services, and implementing initiatives to enhance the overall quality of patient care. The positive financial impact of community-led monitoring not only benefits the health center but also translates to improved healthcare accessibility, quality, and ultimately better health outcomes for the community.
- Community-led monitoring also supported facility-led infrastructure improvement using locally available resources. With the implementation of community-led monitoring, service recipients were no longer required to publicly seek services, as a spacious waiting room was designated for their use that guarantees privacy and confidentiality. This private space offered them a sense of comfort and security, where service recipients could receive essential services without feeling judged or misunderstood. By prioritizing confidentiality and creating a non-judgmental environment, community-led monitoring facilitated better access to healthcare services for individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other service recipients at the facility.



LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The implementation of Afya Plus's community-led monitoring model has demonstrated the significance of harnessing the power of the local communities as service recipients, on driving sustainable changes to the health system for a healthy community. ***Engagement and collaborations among decision-makers, service recipients, and health service providers is fundamental in identifying challenges and service barriers in the health system, implement and jointly monitoring improvement plans to move toward the broad definition of health.*** To ensure a complete and reliable cycle towards improved health services, we recommend the health stakeholders to: -

- **Strengthening Collaboration:** We encourage regular and meaningful engagement between decision-makers, service recipients, and health service providers on implementing sustainable quality improvement efforts. It is vital to advocate and foster an inclusive environment where all stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process to facilitate joint actions that will lead to changes on the quality and accessibility of healthcare service for better health outcomes.

- **Data-Driven Approach:** We emphasize the use of data and evidence to identify areas for improvement in the whole cascade of health system. Collect and analyse relevant data to guide decision-making and monitor progress effectively.
- **Community Awareness:** Increase awareness and understanding of community-led monitoring within the community to ensure active participation and ownership of the monitoring process. Encourage community members to take an active role in pinpointing persistent problems and identify locally led solutions on shaping healthcare services.
- **Continual Evaluation:** Regularly evaluate the community-led monitoring process to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for refinement in the whole cascade of the healthcare services. Incorporate feedback from all stakeholders to make necessary adjustments and improvements.

We emphasized the adoption and scale up of the Afya Plus's community-led monitoring model that can foster a collaborative and data-driven approach to sustainable health system improvements. Afya Plus model guarantees inclusive and community-driven efforts which ensure ***"all stakeholders are actively involved in leading sustainable improvements within health system while leaving no one behind for the benefit of the entire community as we move towards a healthy community and more equitable health services for all"***.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to the local communities, service recipients, and healthcare workers who actively participated in the Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) initiatives, demonstrating their dedication towards improving the quality of healthcare services.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable funding support provided by PEPFAR through the Ambassador's Fund for HIV/AIDS Relief (AFHR), which made the IMARISHA" Community-led monitoring project a success story.

We appreciate the support and collaboration from the regional and council health management teams which played a crucial role in the successful implementation of this transformative community lead initiative in Mara region. We are also grateful for the cooperation and input from decision-makers who recognized the importance of placing service recipients at the forefront of quality improvement efforts.

Additionally, we express our appreciation to the dedicated Project teams for being instrumental in driving the success of this community-led monitoring initiative for a healthy community in Mara region.

DISCLAIMER

"The information and insights presented in this success story are the perspectives of the Author(s) and may not necessarily reflect the official stance of the funding agencies or the Government of Tanzania."





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