

February 2011  
Issue 23

## MCC News

An e-newsletter about male circumcision for HIV prevention in Kenya

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Maurine Auma, a volunteer community mobiliser, talks to a client about male circumcision.

*Photo by Kenneth Owino Odiwuor*

### **Nyanza woman mobilises men to get circumcised**

In Usenge Township, in western Kenya's Nyanza Province, Maurine Auma, 23, speaks with ease to a group of young men about the benefits of voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC). She never thought this would be possible two years ago, when she first volunteered as a community mobilisation officer.

"I was thinking to myself how a woman like me would convince men to go for circumcision," she said. "I thought many of them would just mock me and dismiss my efforts."

Now Auma looks back with pride on what she says has been an enriching and rewarding experience. In the past two years she has encouraged 250 men to go for

the “cut.” Many of them have told her that they appreciate both her efforts and the benefits of VMMC as an HIV prevention method.

Auma is one of the hundreds of community mobilisers in Nyanza trained by the VMMC programme to inform their communities about the benefits of VMMC and encourage men to go for the “cut.” These mobilisers, most of whom are volunteers, have helped the programme reach more than 230,000 men and boys since October 2008.

Auma’s day starts at nine in the morning. “I either conduct door-to-door visits, or I reach out to clients at the VCT [voluntary HIV counselling and testing] clinic, where I get to share with them the benefits of male circumcision,” she explained.

She educates people about the benefits of medical male circumcision as both an HIV prevention method and as a way of improving men’s reproductive health and hygiene. She also tells them that male circumcision can help protect the female partners of circumcised men from some sexually transmitted infections, such as human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical cancer.

Auma, who serves as a VCT counselor as well as a community mobilisation officer, says many young men and women easily comprehend the messages she conveys about VMMC.

Nevertheless, Auma admits, her work as a community mobilisation officer has not been without challenges. Perhaps the greatest challenge is addressing men’s fears that male circumcision will be painful. Concerns about lost income during the healing period after the procedure and the reluctance of married men to consider circumcision are also challenges.

She is quick to add that these challenges are not insurmountable. “I believe with consistency in delivering the positive messages about medical male circumcision, these challenges can be overcome,” she said.

Auma says her desire to see reduced HIV infections amongst her community fires her resolve to continue her work as a community mobilisation officer, peer educator, and counsellor. She comes from a community that has long experienced high levels of HIV infection.

Auma advises those who have already been circumcised to continue using condoms consistently and to be faithful, “because male circumcision is not a solution on its own.” She urges those who are not yet “cut” to consider the procedure to reduce their chances of getting infected with HIV, improve their hygiene, and protect their loved partners from cervical cancer.

## **Male circumcision now available in seven divisions of Nairobi**

Free voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) services, offered since August 2010 in Kibera division, have been expanded to six additional divisions of Nairobi as part of the government's efforts to curb the spread of HIV infection.

The ministries of health (MOH) and the City Council of Nairobi are collaborating with development partners to offer VMMC services in Nairobi with support from the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR).

The Nyanza Reproductive Health Society (NRHS) is providing the services at the Kibera and Loco health centres, serving clients from Dagoretti, Lang'ata, and Makadara divisions.

Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief (EDARP), another partner in the programme, serves those seeking VMMC at its clinics in Kasarani, Embakasi, and Starehe divisions, with plans to expand to MOH facilities in the future.

At all of these sites, VMMC is offered as part of a comprehensive package of services that includes the male circumcision procedure, counselling on HIV prevention, voluntary HIV counselling and testing, condom provision and promotion, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

NRHS is one of the partners that have been instrumental in expanding VMMC services in Nyanza Province, where more than 230,000 men became circumcised in the past two-and-a-half years. In Nairobi, as in Nyanza, NRHS will train its own staff and those of its partners to provide VMMC services. It will also give the Nairobi Provincial Male Circumcision Task Force technical support in supervising staff to help maintain the safety of the services.

The task force coordinates the activities of the various partners in the Nairobi VMMC programme to ensure that the population has access to the services and that those services are integrated with other HIV prevention and care services.

“The coordination is done through quarterly supervisions conducted to all sites offering VMMC in the province,” said Dr. Sam Ochola, provincial director of public health and sanitation for Nairobi. “And an exploration of other potential sites is done during the supervision, depending on demand for the services.”

Dr. Ochola adds that the task force convenes quarterly meetings with key stakeholders to share progress made and address challenges encountered in rolling out the VMMC programme in the province.

When another key partner in the Nyanza programme, the Impact Research and Development Organisation (IRDO), began offering VMMC services in Lang'ata last year, Nairobi became the second province to offer VMMC services. This expansion of services beyond Nyanza is part of the Kenya's strategic plan for VMMC, explains Dr. Athanasius Ochieng', male circumcision manager at the National AIDS/STI Control Programme (NASCOP).

The government adopted VMMC as part of its HIV prevention strategy after studies in Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda showed that being circumcised reduces a man's chances of becoming infected with HIV during vaginal sex by about 60 percent.

The MOH has taken a phased approach to rolling out the VMMC programme. In the first phase, from 2009 to 2013, the strategy is to prevent as many HIV infections as possible by focusing on parts of the country where the prevalence of male circumcision is low and the prevalence of HIV infection high. These areas include Nyanza, Nairobi, Western, and Rift Valley provinces.

## **Resources**

### **USAID E-Learning Course on Male Circumcision**

This course provides health policymakers and program managers with an overview of the scientific evidence of male circumcision's protective effect against HIV transmission. It focuses on public health issues, with a brief overview of surgical techniques, and on the delivery of medical male circumcision services to adult and adolescent populations in settings with high HIV prevalence and low prevalence of male circumcision.

### **The Clearinghouse on Male Circumcision for HIV Prevention**

Developed by the World Health Organization, AVAC, and FHI, this Web site is a comprehensive source of information and resources about male circumcision for HIV prevention.

**The Male Circumcision Consortium (MCC)** works with the Government of Kenya and other partners—including the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which supports service delivery—to prevent HIV and save lives by expanding access to safe and voluntary male circumcision services. FHI, EngenderHealth, and the University of Illinois at Chicago, working with the Nyanza Reproductive Health Society, are partners in the Consortium, which is funded by a grant to FHI from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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**Please send questions or comments to Silas Achar at: [mccinfo@fhi.org](mailto:mccinfo@fhi.org); also, please indicate whether you want to continue receiving this e-newsletter regularly.**

