

The First Mile:

The Potential for Community-Based Health Cooperatives in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Outline

1. Persistence of serious health problems in Sub-Saharan Africa
2. Underlying cause of high mortality
3. Key features of a cooperative health care program in Kenya
4. Recommendations
5. Conclusion

Persistent Health Problems

Sub-Saharan Africa has the most serious health problems in the world:

- Highest child mortality rate
- Highest maternal mortality rate
- Highest incidence of HIV-AIDS
- Lowest median income

Underlying Cause of High Mortality

- Health care delivery systems don't reach those most in need of health services – over 400 million rural residents.
- Often referred to as the “last mile” problem
- The potential for community-based health cooperatives to be the “first mile” solution

Key Features of a Cooperative Health Program in Kenya

1. Efficient organizational structure
2. Systematic development process
3. Low cost per village
4. Rapid mobilization
5. Village-led approach
6. Autonomous and democratically-run local organizations
7. Village-based, volunteer community health workers

Key Features of Cooperative Health Program in Kenya

8. Health plans and priorities determined by villagers
9. Implementation of health plans led by villagers
10. Additional community-based organizations
11. Multi-village coordinating organizations
12. Positive health and family planning outcomes
13. Sustainability
14. Adaptability

Results: Improved Treatment

- Trained community health workers in every village
- Improved access to medical supplies
- Links to health care system



Results: Improved Prevention

- Water sanitation
- Maternal and other health education groups
- Mosquito controls



Results: Economic Development

- Poverty: biggest health problem
- Cooperatives and assistance with individual business activities a major part of the solution



Recommended Next Steps

1. Continue the cooperative health program in Kenya
2. Implement the model in other Sub-Saharan African countries.
3. Rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the model.

Conclusion

Health researchers estimate that millions of children and adults die each year in Sub-Saharan Africa of health problems that could be prevented or treated easily and inexpensively.

Village-based co-ops have the potential to be a key part of a “first mile” health delivery strategy that could be put in place quickly and on a broad scale to greatly reduce these needless deaths.