



A nurse gives a lady a birth control injection. BELOW: Some of the contraceptives available locally.

Access to contraceptives still a tall order for urban poor in Kenya

Only an estimated 39 per cent of people living in the urban settlements are using contraceptives. This is mainly because they are unaware of family planning options, lack access or are influenced by myths on the methods, writes MAUREEN NG'ANG'A

Family planning methods have had a remarkable growth in the country as people's awareness and use increase over the years.

According to the The Kenya Demographic and Health Service (KDHS) of 2009 the level of awareness for both men and women is at an average of 95 percent.

"Men are only slightly more likely to have heard of a specific method than women. Ninety-five percent of women and 97 percent of men aged between 15 and 49 know at least one method of family planning," says KDHS.

Despite the positive trend, family planning among the urban poor has not been catered for adequately.

Large families have been valued in some communities as a sign of wealth and stature thus the idea of limiting births was slow to catch on.

Maternal mortality rates in the country is high in the urban settlements with a mortality ratio of 631 deaths per 100,000 live births as compared to 488 deaths throughout the country. Women of reproductive age living among the urban poor communities bear this heavy burden.

Almost half of these births are unplanned for or mistimed.

The late 1990's however saw a de-

cline in birth rates with an estimated 4.7 children per woman as compared to 8.1 in the late 1970's. The decline was attributed to the acceptance of family planning and increased availability of contraceptives.

However the total fertility rate (TFR) has stagnated with an estimated 4.6 children per woman in 2008.

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In order to increase their knowledge in family planning methods, the government in collaboration with the Tupange Project, the Kenya Urban Reproductive Health Initiative, a Jhpiego led initiative, has therefore embarked on a process that aims at increasing the use of contraceptives in the urban areas by 20 percentage points by 2014.

Tupange aims at increasing and sustaining contraceptive use by 20 per cent in the populated urban areas of Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa to see the reduction of child and maternal mortality rates and the improvement of maternal health. According to the Program Director, Nelson Keyonzo, Tupange will engage in various outreach and reach activities in the target cities and will be

carried out to ensure that citizens in the urban areas understand their family planning choices.

"While Kenyans living in these urban areas are targeted, emphasis will be on the youth aged between 15 and 24," he said.

"Tupange will also conduct a review of selected facilities in the targeted cities where monthly consumption of contraceptives will be established and the information used to quantify quarterly city and facility needs," he noted, adding that the project will further extend to

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— NELSON KEYONZO



Kakamega and Machakos.

Over the years, health experts have estimated that the use of family planning saves women's lives.

Family planning could prevent as many as one in every three maternal deaths by allowing women to delay motherhood, space births, and avoid unintended pregnancies and abortions. A woman can stop childbearing when they have reached their desired family size.

"The use of family planning also saves the lives of children. After giving birth, family planning can help women wait at least two years before trying to become pregnant again, thereby reducing newborn, infant, and child deaths significantly," said Keyonzo.

Family planning can help young women avoid having children during this high-risk time and also avoid the social and economic consequences of early childbearing.

The use of family planning further reduces deaths from HIV/AIDS. The consistent and correct use of condoms can significantly reduce the rate of new HIV infections.

Many HIV-positive women and couples want to avoid becoming pregnant and many effective methods are available to assist them.

By averting unintended and high-

risk pregnancies, family planning reduces mother-to-child transmission of HIV and the number of AIDS orphans, whose life chances are seriously diminished because they have lost a parent, particularly the mother.

Furthermore, family planning helps governments achieve national and international development goals.

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Family planning can contribute to nearly all of these goals, including reducing poverty and hunger, promoting gender equity and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

According to the KDHS, it states that 36 percent of family planning users in the country discontinue a method within the first year of beginning its use.

"Discontinuation rates are highest for users of condoms at 59 percent and the pill, 43 percent and the lowest for injections, which is at 29 percent."

Despite these deplorable trends, Tupange, a five year project, will promote both spacing and limiting methods of FP, focusing on increasing access to FP methods and will significantly increase the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) in the selected urban centers of Kenya by 2015.