

# Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies and Family Planning

Successful Approaches and Community Voices from Garba Tulla, Kenya

## BACKGROUND

Since 2014, through a grant by the USAID-funded Advancing Partners & Communities (APC) project, World Vision Kenya has led the Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies (HTSP) project in Garba Tulla in northern Kenya, home to about 50,000 people. The project works with the Ministry of Health to improve maternal and child health by increasing access to and use of voluntary family planning (FP) in five predominantly Muslim, pastoralist communities. In Garba Tulla, people have traditionally valued large families and held negative perceptions of FP, but this is slowly changing. Challenges to accessing FP include long distances to facilities, poor roads, and unreliable mobile networks, exacerbated by frequent drought, food shortages, and political insecurity.

## APPROACHES

The project uses complementary, community-centric approaches to reaching women and couples with quality FP information and care.



Religious forum for men and women in the community of Sericho.  
Credit: Qabale Huka Adan, World Vision

### ENGAGING RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO PROMOTE HTSP AND FP

In Garba Tulla, more people use the phrase, “healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies” than “family planning” because it aligns with teachings from the Qur’an about the benefits of birth spacing for maternal and child health. The project trained more than 80 male and female religious leaders about the complementarity of health and religious messages, the benefits of HTSP, and modern FP methods, including natural FP methods. Leaders shared this information at **493 religious gatherings and community fora** over the years. Some religious leaders have even shared with fellow community members that they personally use a FP method.



A CHV trains community members on HTSP.  
Credit: Martin Ndichu, World Vision

### SUPPORTING HEALTH WORKER AND COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS TO DELIVER FP

The project trains and supports facility-based health workers and community health volunteers (CHVs) on HTSP and FP. CHVs use home visits, community dialogues, and mobilization activities to reach women and couples with education, certain services, and referrals. In 2018 alone, health workers and CHVs gave HTSP and FP information to **13,752** people, counseled **5,393** people, and made **2,062** FP referrals. In 2018, they reached an average of **524** FP users each month—up from **139** people per month in the project’s first year.

## INVOLVING MEN IN THE CONVERSATION

Because men are important in household decision-making, the project engaged them to be supportive partners for HTSP through male-only dialogues and other community activities. Men learned more about the importance of FP and how to help their wives stay healthy, such as by accompanying them for health facility visits. At each facility, the project introduced male-friendly corners where men can hear more about health topics from CHVs and other facility staff while they wait for their wives.

## STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

World Vision also supports a mother-to-mother savings group in each community that meets monthly to discuss priority community issues. These groups provide an opportunity for women to learn more about HTSP, FP and health; participate in a group savings scheme; and develop skills for conducting income-generating activities, such as gardening, poultry farming, tailoring, and craft-making.



Male CHVs have been crucial to reducing stigma around family planning by reaching out to other men.  
Credit: Kristen Devlin, JSI



A mother-to-mother savings group makes brooms.  
Credit: Qabale Huka Adan, World Vision



During an immunization visit for their new baby, this couple received FP counseling, and selected to use an implant to space their next birth.  
Credit: Kristen Devlin, JSI

## INTEGRATING HTSP AND FP INTO MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH SERVICES

At the facility level, the project incorporates HTSP and FP information and care as part of routine maternal and child health services, such as postpartum care and immunization. Over the course of the project, **13,480** women and men received voluntary, integrated FP care.

## IMPROVING HEALTH SERVICE ACCOUNTABILITY

To cultivate civic engagement in health and development, World Vision involves the Garba Tulla communities in a process called Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), which trains and engages community members, health workers, and county officials on social accountability, advocacy, and action planning to prioritize and monitor activities to improve their communities. This strategy led to a range of improvements, such as upgrading health facility infrastructure.



## COMMUNITY VOICES



Nuria and Said with the nurse at the Malkadaka facility.  
Credit: World Vision

**Nuria Boru and Said Mohamed, married couple**, Malkadaka community  
Nuria and Said first heard about HTSP at a sensitization forum in their village, and they decided to choose a family planning method suitable for both of them. A CHV referred them to the nearest health facility for more information, where the nurse discussed the range of methods and possible side effects. After initially opting for the lactational amenorrhea method, they discussed their decision back home, and agreed that they wanted to try an injectable contraceptive, a longer-term method. They returned to the facility, where Nuria received the injection. She states that she is comfortable with the method, and emphasized that spacing her children will ensure that they receive good parental care.



Asili and Salad Guyo discuss family planning at the Barambate health facility. Credit: Qabale Huka Adan, World Vision

**Asili Guyo and Salad Guyo, married couple**, Barambate community  
Asili Guyo is a 22-year-old woman who has been married since 2015. She and her husband have one son together.

Asili is currently using an implant to help space her next birth. "I came to know of this [family planning method] from my husband, he was sensitized on healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies/family planning by World Vision during religious fora. [I] am happy that he positively decide[d] to adopt the messages and discuss it with me, unlike most of the men around Barambate who are not welcoming the idea of modern contraceptives," explains Asili. She says that soon she will be ready for a second child, as it has been two years since her son was born.



Safia Wario Dida with her daughter, Zulfa, and World Vision Kenya HTSP Project Officer, Qabale Adan Huka.  
Credit: Melanie Lopez, World Vision

**Safia Wario Dida, CHV and mother-to-mother savings group member**, Barambate community

"In our group, we have tailors, goat herders, chicken owners, and farmers... I am a tailor and I make school uniforms for elementary school children. With my 2,000 shillings every 40 days, I'm able to buy the materials for the uniforms. I'm the only person making uniforms in town, so my business has been doing well," Safia says. She adds that her husband has struggled to find work but is very supportive of her involvement in the mother-to-mother savings group, and is actively engaged in helping to support her in the community.

"I'm very thankful to receive reproductive health training and to be a part of these groups. I feel very well respected in the community and people have confidence in me and trust me. I'm also happy I'm able to support my family by making school uniforms."



Fatuma washing her hands at the Sericho dispensary.  
Credit: Qabale Huka Adan, World Vision

**Fatuma, CHV and CVA member**, Sericho community

CVA members from Sericho successfully lobbied for funds to repair the lighting and install a direct water connection to the Sericho health dispensary.

"For the first time in years we have electricity connection at our facility. The maternity wing at night has been a nightmare because we used to use a torch during delivery," states Fatuma. "Some mothers come with pregnancy complications and handling this with a torch light makes things more difficult and complicated."