



FIRST PERSON Learning About Healthy Living

Rural communities take control of disease prevention and treatment



Photo: ZIHP

“With the training and materials, I’ve been able to share this knowledge with my neighbors, and I have kept my family healthier,” said Rodina Kasalue.

It’s mid-morning in Kawama, a village in northern Zambia near border of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Barefooted children play near small homes with thatched roofs, chickens run around and a basket of fresh fish wriggles, waiting for a vehicle to take them to a larger town for sale. Farming and fishing is the way of life for people in Kawama, where an average household earns about \$20 a month.

Rodina Kasalue has just returned from harvesting groundnuts in her field. Visible just above her shirt collar are scars left by a traditional treatment of a past illness. She volunteers as secretary of her local neighborhood health committee, and is part of a USAID-supported effort to empower people to educate themselves about healthier living and strengthen health care for people in rural areas. USAID provided Rodina with training and informational materials about health issues, which she has shared with her community.

“I can now tell if diarrhea is dysentery or cholera, and can teach someone how to treat it,” said Rodina. “With the training and materials, I’ve been able to share this knowledge with my neighbors, and I have kept my family healthier.” Neighbors now seek her out with health questions before going to the clinic. “I used to help three people a day. We have been able to educate most of our neighbors and now I only see a few people a week.” Often, the solutions for things such as treating diarrhea are simple and can be handled from home, lessening the burden on the rural health center. She explains how malaria and cholera used to be endemic in Kawama, but with knowledge gained from educational materials and training provided by USAID, they have been able to control it.

“We have a great relationship with the clinic staff now. People were afraid of going because they thought they might get someone else’s sickness, or they might not come home. The neighbors are now willing to seek out treatment there.”

In sharp contrast with the scars she bears, Rodina now knows to treat herself and her family with proven medical practices, and to stay healthy by changing behavior. Like Rodina, the people of Kawama village are staying healthy due to active participation and a desire to learn and change practices.