



SUCCESS STORY

Neighbors Supporting Neighbors

Health assistance brings empowerment and cooperation



Photo: ZIHP

Members of Mupeta's neighborhood health committee display knitting and sewing of community members.

“When we help someone at their home we ask them to help others,” says Peter. “We teach someone how to build a proper pit latrine, and for ‘payment’ we ask that they teach their neighbor. That way the knowledge keeps going.”

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Like many villages in northern Zambia, Mupeta is poor. Poverty prevents people from doing many things, including obtaining proper healthcare. It is hard to stay healthy when you are malnourished, and it is hard to buy medicines or see a doctor when you have no money.

But with support from USAID, the people of Mupeta are taking action and learning how to help each other. As part of an effort to strengthen rural healthcare, USAID is training volunteers of neighborhood health committees about health issues and supplying them with informational materials and medical supplies to share with their community.

Mupeta residents say that the greatest benefit they have gleaned from the assistance is a sense of individual empowerment and collective responsibility. They have targeted poverty as their greatest challenge, and are finding ways to overcome it. “Poverty hurts,” explains Peter Kaoma, the chairman of his neighborhood health committee. “Some people can’t afford to buy soap. Even if they know they need to wash their hands before cooking, they can’t afford to.”

So the people of Mupeta help each other. Neighbors pool money to pay the fee when someone needs to visit the clinic. Instead of paying back the borrowed fee in cash, the beneficiary may return the support with manual labor or food. The neighborhood health committees have also set up income-generating associations and conduct training sessions in fish farming, beekeeping, knitting, sewing and agriculture. With these skills, residents are more able to earn enough money and provide for healthcare and other needs.

Peter wants his community to learn the joy of volunteering. “When we help someone at their home we ask them to help others. We teach someone how to build a proper pit latrine, and for ‘payment’ we ask that they teach their neighbor. And for their payment, their neighbor teaches someone else. That way the knowledge keeps going.” Peter’s neighbors, empowered to help themselves, learn better health practices and income-earning skills — as well as how easy it is to help someone else.

“I’ve been involved for two years, and I’ve seen a reduction in the spread of diseases like malaria. Great things are happening in Mupeta.”