

X Family tragedy inspires hope

A grief-stricken father donates land where a thriving health facility has taken root

By ELIZABETH MWAI

Seven years ago, Mathew Ofwamba lost his eldest son to malaria because he could not get to hospital in time.

Two years earlier, his second son, Joshua Shikuku, 35, nearly died when he fell ill at night and needed five hours to get him to the nearest hospital.

That prompted Ofwamba, 73, to donate an acre of land for the construction of Emusanda Health Centre in Lurambi Constituency.

"Imagine the pain of watching your son die, and you know it is possible to save him but still cannot because the hospital is too far away," he explains.

Donating the piece of land for the health centre, Ofwamba says, may not bring back his son, Francis Taifa, but it will guarantee that families living in the village do not lose their loved ones for lack of access to a hospital.

Ofwamba's wrinkled face contorts in anguish as beads of sweat line his forehead, trickling down like the tears he shed when Taifa died, leaving behind four children.

He is still haunted by the distress call he received from Taifa's wife at 6pm alerting him that he was very sick. Ofwamba rushed home hoping to carry him on his bicycle, as was the norm, but found the son was in such bad shape he had to look for a car.

SEED CAPITAL

By the time transport was secured to take Taifa to Mumias District Hospital, his condition had deteriorated very much. He was admitted at the hospital but died before day-break.

Coincidentally, Taifa's death happened around the same time as the Lurambi villagers were meeting to discuss the construction of a community health centre. Ofwamba decided to donate his land for construction to what ultimately became the Emusanda Health Centre.

The seed capital of Sh950,000 came from the Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF), but it came in small amounts that stagger through four years.

LATF was established in 1999 through the LATF Act Number 8 of 1998, with the objective of improving service delivery, financial management,



ABOUT THE FUND

- The Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) is a fund that facilitates public project through municipal councils.
- Its equivalent is the parliamentary Constituency Development Fund (CDF).
- LATF has escaped scrutiny in the past and its financial reports are alleged to have been unaudited over several years.



Emusanda Health Centre in Lurambi Constituency. Inset, Mathew Ofwamba during the interview (PHOTOS: TABITHA OTWORI/STANDARD)

ment. This is because there are shorter queues at Emusanda and a variety of drugs available.

In addition, the facility has advanced facilities for blood count, CD4 count, liver function, and those used to diagnose sickle cell condition, among others.

Emusanda has a workforce of 17 medical personnel.

But perhaps what continues to attract many patients there is the fact that it offers comprehensive treatment so that patients receive a care pack which entails HIV and Aids tests, malaria and training on general hygiene.

Medics have raised a red flag on diarrhoea that accounts for 86 babies' deaths daily nationally.

Emusanda clinical officer Ayub Wekesa explains that they stock medicines for ailments that are rampant in the area.

Wekesa says lately there has been irregular supply of medicines from the Government, which has hampered service delivery.

The last time the Government dispatched drugs to the facility was in August last year, which though should last up to three months but only lasted

for one month. The residents of Emusanda are now hoping that a maternity facility will be constructed so that they can stop giving birth at home.

For some reason, most children in Emusanda are born at night when the facility is closed, so opt to deliver at home as the other health centres are too far away.

THREE YEARS

In Kenya 7,000 women die annually due to maternity related complications.

The World Health Organisation has expressed concern over high maternal mortality, which stands at 414 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Emusanda has given ray of hope to community-management in health sector and which should be extended to other areas, especially through Constituency Development Fund.

The private participation at Emusanda is initially intended to last three years, after which the Government is expected to take over its management.

and reducing the outstanding debt of local authorities.

The Fund comprises 5 per cent of the national income tax collection in any year, and currently makes up approximately 24 per cent of local authority revenues.

When the Emusanda facility was almost still incomplete, LATF discontinued funding, and gradually, the facility turned into animals' grazing field.

Emusanda community secretary Rhodericks Maliatso says the nearest health facility was Kakamega Provincial, which was one hour away and had long queues.

Maliatso says to get to Kakamega District Hospital or Mumias would cost almost Sh200, which was out of reach to a majority of villagers. It was even worse for those who fell ill at night.

Maliatso says in 2008 the

founder of an international NGO launched an integrated HIV/Aids, Malaria and Diarrhoea campaign at Emusanda.

Maliatso explained that when the villagers approached Mikkel Vestergaard, he was at first sceptical about the Emusanda project but on realising the importance of the facility, decided to complete it.

AS LOW AS SH20

Today Emusanda is a fully functional dispensary providing a variety of health services.

What is even more remarkable to villagers is that consultation fee is only Sh20 while medicine is for free.

Although it was initially meant for the residents of Emusanda village, people come from as far as Mumias, Butere, Ikolomani, Navakholo and Ingotse areas for treat-