



## Community Influencers and Volunteers in Rural Zimbabwe benefit from COVID 19 Training



Judith Mhuka a VHW from Kazunga Village, Ward 19, Guruve District

“COVID 19 remains a threat to public health, and fresh cases are currently being recorded worldwide sending a message to everyone on the need to fight against the pandemic. More and more awareness messages on COVID-19 and preventative measures are needed in our communities.” said Judith Mhuka.

The Ministry of Health and Child Care in partnership with LGDA through funding from Government of Japan being managed by UNWOMEN embarked on an intensive Infection Prevention Control (IPC) training to capacitate Village Health Workers (VHW), Community Influencers (CI) and volunteers with COVID 19 information that will help reduce the spread of Infection among vulnerable women and girls in drought-affected districts (Guruve and Mbire) of Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. The training programme was designed to cascade COVID 19 information through VHWs and CIs given their important linkage with communities.

Judith Mhuka a VHW from Kazunga Village, Ward 19, Guruve District who was part of the training expressed gratitude and highlighted that, with the added knowledge it will be easier to locate the vulnerable individuals and assist them without delay. “We have been trained to expand our services

beyond engaging communities in prevention of COVID-19 infection to detection and responses, contributing to containing the outbreak.”

Judith attested to a lot of misconceptions and myths circulated, and confirmed how these made it difficult to convince people from her community to get tested or vaccinated. “In my village, some believed that if one gets vaccinated, the vaccine causes infertility, erectile dysfunction, abnormal births, death after two years and elimination of the older generation since they were advised to get vaccinated first”, she added.

“Whereas the community leaders were skeptical about aspects of my work because of the above stated misconceptions, I am convinced with the knowledge I have grasped during this training workshop, they will gradually accept me as a source of accurate public health information and an important link to the health system particularly during this COVID-19 lock down” said Judith.

This training will help build vaccine confidence in our communities. My colleagues and I have been trained on how to address barriers such as Equity, Access, Prevailing Social Norms, Mistrust, Mis- and Disinformation, Cultural Relevance in this fight against COVID-19.” She said.

Despite the challenges brought about by COVID-19, Judith is determined to see her community overcome COVID-19 and is unwavering in her commitment to community health. It’s a journey that was flickered by her zealous determination towards the health and well-being of her community, her family, and herself.

“This training is vital for understanding what the pandemic is, how it is transmitted, how it is prevented and who is at most risk. After the three days of learning and discussions, I now understand how important it is to maintain good personal hygiene standards and social distancing as critical prevention measures to minimize the risk of contracting COVID-19. I have learnt about the signs and symptoms of the disease that I can report immediately to the clinic for timely testing and treatment. Only by following the COVID 19 advice rigorously can we hope to stem the tide of new infections. " said Judith.

Giving the closing remarks of the trainings, Mr. Diaspeed Mandere, Guruve District Environmental Health Office (DEHO) stated, “It is essential for VHWs to receive the training needed to effectively meet the demands of their roles in their communities in the fight against COVID 19.

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