



VIWANDANI VOICE: BUILDING A HEALTHIER TOMORROW

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Inside this Issue:

- Transforming Viwandani: Bridging Health and Nutrition for a Healthier Community
- A Diabetes Advocate's Journey: Mobilizing Support Groups for Change
- Embarking on a Healthier Lifestyle: A Diabetic Consumer's Perspective
- Cultivating Change: The Impact of Organic Farming on the Kingstone Women CBO

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DEAR READER,

In February 2023, the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) embarked on a mission to transform the Viwandani community in Nairobi County. This is Under a consortium project coordinated by Alliance Bioversity and CIAT (ABC) implemented by DAT and Feedback to the Future (FttF) and Funded by Biovision Foundation. The DAT role while partnering with local health workers and community members, set out to bridge the gap between health and safe food production, with a vision of enhancing the overall well-being of the community. Now, as we celebrate eleven months of dedicated work, we are thrilled to share with you the incredible journey of Viwandani and the significant strides made toward a healthier future.

Our articles in this issue are a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives, partnerships, the impact of education and awareness, and the resilience of individuals like David Mukundi and Robert Maregwa, who have championed change from within. Their stories are both inspiring and informative, shedding light on the transformative potential of knowledge and community support.

We also delve into the heartwarming narrative of the Kingstone Women Community-Based Organization (CBO), where sustainable farming practices have not only improved health but also revitalized the community's spirit. Their dedication to organic farming and the positive changes they have brought to their community serve as a beacon of hope. As you explore these stories, you will witness how Viwandani, once faced with economic constraints and health challenges, is confident to facing the future with hope of empowerment, awareness, and healthier choices. Through collaborative efforts and the relentless pursuit of a better future, Viwandani has embraced the flavors of change on attitude which promising to results we are targeting in the near future.

We invite you to read the stories within these pages and join us in celebrating the remarkable progress of Viwandani. Together, we can continue to bridge the gap between health and nutrition, one community at a time.

Sincerely,
Secretariat Team!

TRANSFORMING VIWANDANI: BRIDGING HEALTH AND NUTRITION FOR A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Viwandani, a vibrant low-income settlement nestled within Makadara subcounty, Nairobi County, is home to approximately 50,000 residents. At the heart of this community stands the Lunga Lunga Health Centre, led by the Clinical Officer in charge, Mr. Murunda, who has been instrumental in spicing up the implementation of our transformative project. This project is a flavorful blend of education and awareness, with the health center serving as a crucial ingredient. Within the walls of Lunga Lunga Health Centre, the project conducts regular NCDs clinics targeting hypertension and diabetes, aiming to empower patients to take the reins of their health. However, Vawandani's unique diets. This is where our project adds the spice, complementing government efforts by seasoning the community with essential knowledge on nutrition and health. Mr. Murunda, acknowledges the efforts of organizations like APHRC, Red Cross, Liverpool, and Save the Children that once spiced up the area's food security and nutrition initiatives. While some of these organizations are no longer active in the area, our current project, implemented by DAT and partners, not only focuses on addressing the needs of

people living with NCDs but also enriches the flavors initiated by previous projects. One particularly exciting aspect of this project is the establishment of an organic kitchen garden within the Lunga Lunga health center, adding a spicy kick to the support groups of people managing NCDs. This garden is a practical learning tool for the community, allowing residents to replicate what they learn at home. Not only does it provide access to fresh organic produce for the clinic, but it also adds a touch of beauty to the facility while serving as a source of education.

The project engages community health workers to deliver key messages to residents, and the community's response has been as spicy as a well-seasoned dish. Many residents have enthusiastically embraced organic farming, even in the tightest of spaces. Additionally, residents have become more conscious of the source and safety of their food, adding extra flavor to their daily lives.

To measure the project's success, our team of health workers proposes evaluating changes in dietary practices through diet history assessments and tracking the growth of organic farming through the establishment of kitchen gardens within

Viwandani settlements. These metrics will help us savor the impact of the project on nutrition and food safety awareness.

Though still in its early stages, the project is already making significant contributions to the health and wellbeing of Viwandani. It has raised awareness about food safety, educated residents on healthier dietary choices, and helped identify new cases of diabetes and hypertension, encouraging residents to visit health centers for early screening. Importantly, it has made healthcare more accessible and shattered the misconception that these diseases only affect the affluent.

Moving forward, health workers suggest collaborating with existing Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) involved in organic farming, organizing medical camps for NCDs, integrating safe food messages into routine client interactions, and distributing flyers with key messages at the facility level. Murunda also emphasizes the need to lobby for access to safe water, which is a pressing concern in Viwandani, and addressing this issue is crucial for the project's success.

In conclusion, the project in Viwandani has added an exciting array of flavors in just eight months. It has spiced up community empowerment and awareness, leaving us craving more. With continued dedication and collaboration between health workers and community members, the journey is ongoing, and the prospects are as promising

>>> A DIABETES ADVOCATE'S JOURNEY: MOBILIZING SUPPORT GROUPS FOR CHANGE

Meet Robert Maregwa, a man in his mid-fifties who has faced the challenges of living with diabetes and hypertension for over 15 years. In 2008, Robert was among the pioneers of support groups for people living with diabetes in Viwandani and Nairobi. These support groups became a driving force in advocating for accessible and affordable medication for diabetics in the country.

Through their collective efforts, they formed a movement called "Kenya Defeat Diabetes" in 2012. The primary goal was to reduce the stigma surrounding diabetes and empower individuals to openly discuss their condition. Their efforts bore fruit, particularly in terms of improving medication accessibility. Additionally, more actors began engaging in NCD (Non-Communicable Diseases) programs, albeit still significantly fewer compared to those addressing communicable diseases. Robert gives an example of an impactful project by APHCR conducted from 2008 to 2010. This project featured documentaries showcasing the lives of diabetics, shedding light on their day-to-day challenges and triumphs. It was a significant step in raising awareness and understanding of the diabetic experience. Red Cross also joined the effort, supporting crucial screening initiatives.

He was narrowing down before coming to the project implemented by DAT and partners that sets the current organic food project apart is its unique approach, linking safe food production with health. Robert emphasizes

how vital it is for consumers and people managing NCDs to be mindful of the food they eat and how it's produced. "Us diabetics," he says, "we don't just eat; we have to be keen on what we eat because it has an impact on our health." Robert expresses his appreciation for the project's efforts in training consumers and people managing NCDs on food preparation. He acknowledges that similar training existed in the APHCR project over a decade ago but laments that only a few from that era remain to pass on their knowledge. He commends DAT for its collaboration with the Department of Health, including nutritionists, local health centers, and community health workers, all of whom have received capacity-building on the connection between food and health. Mr. Robert Murage – Chairperson of Support group of people living with diabetes in Viwandani and Nairobi County.



Mr. Robert Murage – Chairperson of Support group of people living with diabetes in Viwandani and Nairobi County

In Robert's view, raising awareness is crucial yet remains a challenge among the general public. However, he believes that the ongoing project is making strides in reaching out to the public about the importance of safe food production for overall human health. He foresees this playing a critical role in revitalizing existing organic gardens and sparking demand for more in Viwandani. Robert notes a shift in people's perceptions; as the chair of the support group for people living with diabetes in Viwandani and Nairobi County, he has observed a growing curiosity about safe food production.

In closing, Robert suggests the creation of informational flyers to ensure that the knowledge being disseminated can be easily referenced even after the project's conclusion. He also recommends training people in urban farming techniques, especially utilizing small spaces like sacks. This approach would guarantee a continuous supply of organic vegetables, complementing what is already being produced in established gardens. Robert's journey, from support groups to advocating for healthier diets, underscores the importance of community-driven initiatives in transforming lives and building awareness.

EMBARKING ON A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE: A DIABETIC CONSUMER'S PERSPECTIVE

David Mukundi, a dedicated participant in the organic Food Project, has undergone a transformative journey in his pursuit of a healthier lifestyle. His story is a testament to the positive impact of community-driven initiatives in promoting better food choices and practices.

David's engagement with the project began at the Mukuru Skills and Action Day held at St. Elizabeth Church. There, he eagerly immersed himself in a wealth of knowledge about safe food production and the importance of organic foods. Learning about monitoring blood pressure and blood sugar levels became second nature to him. These lessons reshaped his perception of food and dietary habits in profound ways.

One of the notable changes in David's life is his increased involvement in food-related activities at home. He now actively assists his wife in the kitchen, applying the cooking techniques he acquired during the project. Their meals have become a joint effort, with a particular emphasis on healthy food choices. When it comes to food shopping, David has become discerning. He carefully selects foodstuffs, acutely aware of the importance of safe and organic produce. His newfound knowledge has instilled a sense of responsibility when it comes to acquiring and preparing food.

In an effort to further embrace healthy practices, David established his own kitchen garden. Inspired by the training he received from DAT in Keroka, he embarked on cultivating a variety of vegetables, including spinach, amaranth, nightshades, pumpkin leaves, sage, onions, mint, and rosemary. This garden



David Mukundi at his kitchen garden

has become a source of pride and sustenance, providing fresh and organic produce for his family.

However, David acknowledges that adopting healthier food practices isn't without its challenges. He cites the limited variety of organic foods in the market and the constraints posed by limited resources. Additionally, distinguishing between organic and inorganic foods in the market can be tricky. Organic foods, although healthier, have a shorter shelf life, and protecting his garden from theft by neighbors has been a concern.

Despite these challenges, David remains committed to his journey towards better health. As a diabetic patient, he has gained invaluable insights into managing diabetes through diet. He is eager to share his knowledge and experience with others, teaching them about organic farming on his own farm.

David encourages DAT to continue its crucial role in creating awareness about diabetes, hypertension, and safe food production among Vawandani's residents. His journey stands as a beacon of hope, illustrating the power of knowledge and community support in promoting healthier lives. In David Mukundi's story, we find inspiration and a testament to the profound impact that education and community-driven initiatives can have on individuals and their communities.

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CULTIVATING CHANGE: THE IMPACT OF ORGANIC FARMING ON THE KINGSTONE WOMEN CBO

In the bustling heart of Viwandani, the Kingstone Women Community-Based Organization (CBO) has been quietly transforming lives, one organic vegetable at a time. Their story is a testament to the power of sustainable farming and the positive impact it can have on both health and community.

Founded in 2019, the Kingstone Women CBO truly came into its own during the challenging days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. With jobs scarce and food relief mainly consisting of maize flour, the women of the CBO faced a dilemma. How could they access the nutritious vegetables they needed to complement their staple "ugali"?

their vegetables waned. Markets reopened, and people were no longer as focused on health foods. However, the Kingstone Women CBO remained steadfast in their commitment to organic farming. With 28 dedicated members their garden had the capacity to supply fresh vegetables year-round to their households. Out of the 28 members, over three-quarters are women since the CBO is women led with Eight of the members being youth (below 35 years).

While the CBO didn't directly participate in DAT's project activities, they became indirect beneficiaries through the sale of vegetables to diabetic patients seeking organic produce.

In recent months, they noticed a surge in consistent customers, some even placing advance orders. Curious to understand this trend, they discovered that these clients were managing diabetes and had learned about the benefits of safe organic foods through clinics linked to the organic food project.

When asked about their impressive organic farming skills, the Chairperson Ms. Mary Muindi of the CBO attributed their expertise to monthly demo trainings offered by a government program called Agriculture Sector Development Support Program (SDSP). Though the program ended, DAT promised to link them with Feedback to the Future, DAT partner in the ongoing Organic Food Project, for advanced organic production techniques.

However, their journey in organic farming hasn't been without challenges. The most significant hurdle they face is the scarcity of clean water. They must manually fetch water with cans to sustain their crops. Despite these challenges, they are content knowing that their produce is benefiting health-conscious consumers, even if it comes at a slightly higher cost compared to conventional vegetables.

The group takes pride in inspiring positive change in their



The answer came in the form of organic farming. Recognizing the importance of healthy foods, especially during a health crisis, they embarked on a journey to grow their own produce. They were fortunate to secure a spacious area near a local school that had been closed for a year due to the pandemic. It became their sanctuary, a place to keep busy, and most importantly, a space to cultivate organic vegetables.

As the world slowly began to reopen and life regained some semblance of normalcy in late 2021 and 2022, the demand for

community. Their success has motivated the school that hosts their garden to start its own organic garden on its ample grounds. The school's support, including providing a secure and fenced space, has allowed the CBO to sell their organic vegetables at affordable rates. As they see the smiles on their customers' faces, the members of the Kingstone Women CBO know that their hard work is making a difference. The future looks promising, thanks to increased consumer awareness and the enduring dedication of these women to sustainable, organic farming.



About Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT)

Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) is a non-profit organization established on March 2017 and formally registered in 2021. The organization was founded with a purpose to enlighten Kenyans on healthy living to enhance management and prevention of diabetes and other Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). DAT focus areas include;

- (1). Awareness Creation on Diabetes and other (NCDs).
- (2). Consumer Information and Nutrition Education
- (3). Psychosocial Support and Knowledge Sharing.
- (4). Campaigns, Advocacy and Networking.
- (5). Research and Monitoring Systems of NCDs.



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