

DATNEWS

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Viwandani voice: Bridging health and sustainable food production systems



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Dear Reader, Welcome to the second issue of the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) Newsletter!

This edition highlights inspiring success stories from Viwandani, Makadara Sub-County, where our shared mission to enhance health and promote safe food production is coming to life. These stories are a testament to the transformative power of the consortium project coordinated by the Alliance Bioversity and CIAT (ABC) and implemented by DAT and Feedback to the Future (FttF), with generous funding from the Biovision Foundation.

At DAT, we collaborated with local health workers and community members to bridge the critical gap between health and safe food production. Our vision has been clear: to enhance the well-being of Viwandani residents by equipping them with knowledge through nutrition education, sensitization forums and exposure learning visits on sustainable safe food production (agro-ecology and organic). The stories documented at end of second year of project implementation and dedicated efforts. We are thrilled to reflect on the significant strides made toward a healthier future.

Through the voices of beneficiaries, this issue celebrates stories of transformation and resilience. From community health champions like Mary Mwendé Kioko, who is empowering women through nutrition education and sustainable farming, to individuals like Christine Wambua, who has embraced safe food choices for her family and inspired others in her neighborhood. These narratives underscore how collective action and education can spark meaningful change.

We hope these stories inspire you as much as they have inspired us. They remind us of the potential for grassroots efforts to transform communities, strengthen connections, and improve lives.

Thank you for your continued support as we journey together toward a healthier and more resilient future.

**Sincerely,
Secretariat Team!**

Cultivating Health and Hope: A Success Story from Viwandani

In the bustling heart of Viwandani ward, Makadara Sub-County, a transformative initiative is changing lives. At its core are Desmond and Judy, two Community Health Officers (CHOs) empowered by the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) in collaboration with department of Health, Nairobi County to lead in promoting safe-produced foods, nutrition education, and the management of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Through their efforts, the community is learning not only to manage existing health conditions but also to embrace healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. Desmond and Judy, Community Health Officers collaborating with DAT in implementation of Project.

Desmond speaks passionately about his role in the project:

"Our work is about connecting the community with knowledge and support. By educating them on the signs and risks of hypertension and diabetes, we're not just addressing diseases —we're helping people reclaim control over their health."

This dedication extends far beyond health talks. Through household visits and community dialogues, Judy has established a vital link between residents and life-changing resources. Reflecting on her experiences, she shares,

Desmond and Judy, Community Health Officers collaborating with DAT in implementation of Project.



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"It's fulfilling to see families learning to create kitchen gardens and make better food choices. Even when challenges arise, like medication shortages, we ensure they know where to seek help and how to manage their conditions."

The transformative initiative is evident across Viwandani. Residents are not only adopting healthier eating habits but also showing increased interest in organic farming and support groups for NCDs. These efforts have redefined health as a community-driven responsibility, where every individual plays a role.

However, the journey has not been without its hurdles. Flooding has swept away demonstration farms, and limited access to essential drugs remains a persistent challenge. Yet, the resilience of CHWs like Desmond and Judy shines through. With support from DAT and other partners, they continue to empower the community

with tools and knowledge, fostering hope in the face of adversity.

The project's ripple effects are undeniable. Improved health-seeking behaviors, functional support groups, and a growing awareness of nutrition underscore a community in transformation. As Judy notes,

"People now understand that health is within their control. They're asking questions, seeking information, and making changes that seemed impossible before."

This success story is more than just a testament to the power of grassroots health initiatives. It's a celebration of how collaboration, knowledge, and determination can bring lasting change to even the most underserved communities. In Viwandani, health is not just a goal—it is a growing reality, one family, one garden, and one conversation at a time.

of people living with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

When the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) launched its project in Viwandani in 2023, it marked the beginning of a transformative journey for Loise and many like her. Loise recalls the moment she first heard about DAT:

"For the first time, it felt like someone was thinking about us—diabetes patients. The knowledge and support they provided gave us hope and a sense of community."

Loise eagerly joined DAT's activities, participating in trainings and sensitization forums that emphasized the importance of nutrition, safe-produced foods, and healthy living. Among these, the nutritional education sessions stood out as particularly impactful. Through these sessions, Loise learned to manage her diabetes effectively and began sharing her experiences with others, emerging as a community champion for managing diabetes and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The Power of Knowledge and Community Support



Desmond and Judy facilitating during DAT activities



From Patient to Advocate: Loise Wambui's Journey to Healthy Living

Resilience and hope thrive amidst urban challenges, as a community embraces a healthier future. Loise Wambui Kariuki, a 34-year-old diabetic, is a shining example of this resilience. Diagnosed with diabetes at just 22, Loise's life took a dramatic turn, forcing her to navigate a health system that often falls short of addressing the needs



Loise Wambui, a diabetic patient

Loise's transformation didn't happen overnight. The DAT project introduced her to the critical link between safe-produced foods and health outcomes, especially for those managing NCDs.

"It now makes so much sense to me," she says. "Knowing where your food comes from and how it's grown is just as important as the medicine you take. For us, organic vegetables are not a luxury - they're a necessity."

However, accessing organic foods in Viwandani remains a significant challenge. Limited availability and high costs often make it difficult for residents to incorporate these into their diets consistently. Despite these hurdles, Loise has embraced the concept of safe-produced foods, advocating for more awareness and accessibility within her community.

Beyond the knowledge gained, DAT's activities have fostered a sense of solidarity among diabetes patients. The experience-sharing forums provided a safe space for patients to discuss their struggles and successes, breaking the isolation that many felt before the project began. For Loise, this network of support has been invaluable:

"Talking to others who understand what I'm going through has made a world of difference. We encourage each other, share tips, and celebrate small victories together."

Challenges in the Health System

While DAT's efforts have significantly improved awareness and management of diabetes in Viwandani, Loise

highlights the systemic challenges that persist. Access to medications and essential monitoring tools like glucometers remains a major concern for diabetes patients.

"We had high expectations when the project started," Loise admits. "We hoped to receive medicines and glucometers, but the health system is still not prioritizing NCDs the way it should."

She attributes this gap to the decentralized nature of Kenya's health system, where county governments play a crucial role in determining healthcare priorities. In some cases, infectious diseases and other pressing health concerns overshadow diabetes and other NCDs.

Inspiring Change

Despite these challenges, Loise remains optimistic and determined to drive change within her community. Her advocacy has inspired others to take charge of their health, from adopting healthier eating habits to seeking regular screenings and medical advice. She also collaborates with Community Health Officers (CHOs) trained by DAT to spread awareness and connect more residents to resources and support groups.



Loise Wambui with white cap, sharing her experience in a group discussion during DAT activity.

Loise's work has sparked a wave of change in Viwandani, where more residents are starting to understand the importance of food safety and nutrition. Some have even started growing their vegetables in small kitchen gardens, a practice promoted by DAT to ensure access to safe-produced foods.

Looking ahead, Loise dreams of a community where every diabetic patient has access to the resources they need to manage their condition effectively. She hopes for more robust support from both the government and organizations like DAT to address the gaps in the health system and make organic foods more accessible.

A Beacon of Hope

Loise's journey from patient to advocate is a testament to the power of knowledge, community, and determination. Through her work with DAT, she has not only transformed her own life but has also become a beacon of hope for others navigating the challenges of diabetes. Her story is a reminder that, with the right support and resources, even the most marginalized communities can thrive.

**"It's not just about living with diabetes—
it's about living well despite it," Loise says with a smile.
"And together, we can make that a reality for everyone in Viwandani."**

A Taste of Change: How Organic Foods Are Transforming Viwandani

Christine Wambua, a mother of four, is inspiring change through healthier eating habits and sustainable food practices. Her journey began with her participation in the Diabetes Awareness Trust (DAT) project, which introduced her to the world of nutrition education and the benefits of agroecological and organic food systems.

The knowledge Christine gained from DAT's training sessions transformed the way she cooked and selected food for her family. Before, she only thought about filling stomachs, but now she considers how food is grown, prepared, and its impact on health. Her children, too, have noticed the difference. Christine smiles as she shares how they often comment on the taste of vegetables, saying that the organically grown ones are fresher and more flavorful.

Christine didn't keep this newfound knowledge to herself. She began sharing what she learned with her neighbors and the women in her social group. These conversations often revolved around the lessons from DAT's training, including the ten groups of foods discussed during the nutritional education sessions. Women who attended the sessions have become ambassadors in their own right, proudly sharing their insights and inspiring others to adopt healthier eating habits.

The discussions sparked by the project have reached beyond the confines of Christine's immediate circle. Curiosity about organic foods is growing among the residents of Viwandani, as more people question where their food comes from and how it is produced. The community is beginning to recognize the connection between the quality of food and overall health, with Christine leading the way in promoting these vital lessons.

Despite these strides, Christine sees room for greater impact. She emphasizes the need for

more training to reach a broader audience in Viwandani. She believes that if more residents understand the value of organic foods, they will begin demanding these options from vendors, creating a ripple effect that could transform local food systems. She also hopes for a stronger focus on market development for organic produce, making it easier for residents to access safe-produced foods consistently.

Her efforts are part of a larger movement that is slowly transforming the community. With Christine's advocacy, the benefits of DAT's work are spreading organically—touching families, neighbors, and friends. Her vision is clear: a Viwandani where everyone has access to nutritious, safe-produced foods and a culture of healthy eating becomes a way of life.

"Good food is not just about taste; it's about health, happiness, and hope for a better tomorrow," Christine says with conviction.

Through her dedication, Christine Wambua is proving that one person can ignite a movement for change, creating a healthier, more resilient community—one meal, one neighbor, and one conversation at a time.



Christine preparing organic vegetables.
On right, Christine feeding her lastborn child

Nourishing health through better food choices in Viwandani



Jacob Mogaka shares during
focus group discussion on
benefits he has noted from
the project initiative

A shift toward healthier lifestyles is gaining momentum in a Viwandani, Nairobi County. Through the Consortium Organic Urban Food project where DAT is leading in Consumer engagement and linkage of safe produced foods (through agroecology and organic) with health, residents are redefining their relationship with food, health, and community. From learning about nutrition and food preparation to establishing kitchen gardens, beneficiaries of the project have found practical ways to improve their lives while inspiring others to do the same.

The lessons from DAT's nutrition education sessions have proven invaluable, reaching beyond traditional roles and sparking change in unexpected ways. Jacob Mogaka, a participant who initially thought nutrition education might not resonate with him, shares his newfound perspective:

"Even though I am a man, and kitchen work in the African setup is often seen as women's work, I am happy to have learned about nutrition, including for children. This has helped me support my wife in sourcing safe foods."

This change in attitude reflects a broader shift within the community. More men are now actively participating in family health and nutrition, a development that has been celebrated by many. The knowledge imparted during the DAT sessions has also empowered residents to embrace farming, even with limited space. Many participants have expressed excitement about learning how to grow food in small kitchen gardens, highlighting the potential these

gardens hold for ensuring safer meals and reducing household budgets. The practical skills gained through cooking demonstrations have further strengthened the project's impact. Carolyn Alouch explains how learning proper food preparation techniques—such as cleaning vegetables thoroughly, avoiding overcooking, and preserving nutrients—has transformed her approach to cooking:

"Preparing vegetables has become more interesting after learning how to do it properly. This knowledge is critical, especially for women like me," she shares.

For individuals managing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the project has been particularly life-changing.

"For patients managing NCDs, eating healthy is critical, and having a kitchen garden is crucial. These gardens can even include herbs, which are a great addition to our meals." John Wachira a patient living with NCD highlights.

The demand for organic vegetables in Viwandani has surged as more residents recognize their benefits. One participant noted that eating organic vegetables has even alleviated health issues like acidity. However, this increased demand has brought challenges. Currently, Only one outlet established by the project's partner, Feedback to the Future, supplies organic produce. The community has called for more outlets to meet the growing need, alongside policies that discourage the use of toxic pesticides in conventional farming.

Participants in the project also see immense potential for its expansion. Many emphasized the importance of involving schools, particularly primary schools, to instill knowledge of nutrition and safe food production at an early age. With Kenya's new Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) incorporating practical subjects like agriculture and nutrition, there is a unique opportunity to create lasting change.

Looking ahead, beneficiaries hope for continued support to establish kitchen gardens that can supplement market supplies and help more families access organic foods. They also appreciate the project's focus on key groups, such as people living with NCDs, lactating mothers, and parents with young children, recognizing the critical role nutrition plays in their lives.

The DAT project has not only educated residents but also fostered a sense of responsibility and agency. By empowering individuals with knowledge and practical skills, it has planted seeds of health and hope in Viwandani. These seeds, nurtured by the community's determination and the project's vision, are growing into a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

"Good health starts with what we eat. Projects like this don't just improve lives—they create lasting change for generations to come."

Bramuel Wanjala concludes.



Carolyn Alouch contributes during DAT meeting with leaders

Growing Together: How Women in Viwandani Are Driving Change Through Nutrition Education;



Mary Mwende's kitchen garden, from the group, they also started Poultry farming as a way of livelihood diversification.

With determination and innovation, a local community is turning challenges into opportunities for growth. At the center of this transformation is Mary Mwende Kioko, a 48-year-old mother of four and an active Community Health Promoter. Beyond her family responsibilities, Mary has dedicated herself to empowering her community, particularly women, through leadership and innovative initiatives.

Mary chairs the Paradise Original Women Group, a collective she established on September 7, 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. What began as a small gathering of 13 women discussing women's issues and saving 50 shillings weekly through table banking has evolved into a vibrant community platform. Initially focused on addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and creating income-generating activities, the group has expanded its mission thanks to the knowledge and support provided through organic Food Project.

Mary first encountered DAT through training sessions focused on nutrition, safe food production, and the connection between diet and managing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Inspired by what she learned, Mary mobilized her group to adopt organic farming practices.

Together, they established a kitchen garden, which now provides fresh, healthy produce for their families and serves as an example of sustainable agriculture in their community. Building on their success, the group diversified further by venturing into poultry farming. Starting with a few local chickens referred "Kienyeji", the women's collective has grown their flock to over 100 chickens. This has not only provided an additional source of income but has also created a sense of shared purpose and pride among the group members.

"Through DAT, we gained the knowledge and confidence to try new things," Mary shares. "The kitchen garden and poultry farming have shown us that even small steps can lead to big changes in our lives and our community."

The group's activities have also strengthened bonds among the women, creating a network of mutual support. Members share experiences, celebrate each other's successes, and offer assistance during difficult times. The support group for diabetes and hypertension, where Mary is a member, has further expanded this sense of community. It provides a safe space for individuals managing NCDs to share their journeys, gain valuable health insights, and find encouragement.

The impact of Mary's leadership and the group's collective efforts extends beyond its members. The kitchen garden and poultry farming initiatives have sparked interest among other residents in Viwandani, inspiring them to explore similar ventures. The group's focus on nutrition education has also influenced household-level dietary choices, contributing to improved health outcomes in the community.

Looking ahead, Mary envisions even greater possibilities for the Paradise Original Women Group. She hopes to expand their farming activities and create more opportunities for training and capacity building. Mary also sees the need for additional support in accessing markets for their organic produce and poultry, ensuring sustainability for their efforts.

Mary and her group have demonstrated that, with determination and the right tools, it is possible to create lasting change—one kitchen garden, one chicken coop, and one empowered woman at a time.

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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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