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SCOPE SUCCESS STORY

MALAWI



Community Faith Leaders discussing a group assignment from the *Making Our Communities Better Vision Casting Manual* at TA Khongoni

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Andrew Banda.
SCOPE Project Supervisor

NAME AND ROLE

Sheik Jumma, Khongoni Mosque

Pastor Kamwendo, Khongoni Living Waters Church

LOCATION

TA Khongoni, Lilongwe, Malawi

SUMMARY

SCOPE is engaging faith leaders to champion community health issues through the *Making Our Communities Better* curriculum designed to help them understand the critical role that they play in envisioning and mobilizing change in their communities.

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WHEN HEALTH MEETS FAITH: COMMUNITY FAITH LEADERS CHAMPIONING COMMUNITY HEALTH

Community faith leaders play a vital role in championing positive health outcomes in communities. They are often respected and trusted figures in their communities, shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviors related to health initiatives. If you ever have doubts that faith and beliefs can positively impact people's decisions regarding their health, you do not have to doubt anymore. The community faith leaders from TA Khongoni in Lilongwe demonstrate what happens when projects engage faith leaders to champion change by aligning people's faith and beliefs.

THE MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES BETTER VISION CASTING

Through the Making Our Communities Better seminar, Strengthening Community Outcomes Through Positive Engagement (SCOPE), a USAID-funded project under the Ministry of Health through World Relief Malawi, faith leaders have committed to taking a lead drive in promoting positive health-seeking behaviors in their community for positive health outcomes.

Faith leaders are engaged in a 3-day seminar through the "vision casting" manual, designed to help them understand the important role they have in envisioning change and mobilizing community members to engage in community health and development initiatives.

FAITH LEADERS ENGAGING ON COMMUNITY HEALTH ISSUES

"This is the first time that a project has engaged us on issues that affect our health and development in this

community,” said Sheikh Jumma, a Muslim faith leader of the Khongoni Mosque

Despite being an active person in faith and an affluent local trader who operates a grocery store, he has never taken part in the area's health development programs. He claims that before SCOPE, such initiatives only fell in the hands of chiefs and community politicians.

“Am not saying those other leaders are not important, they are, but most people come to us to seek answers to their daily problems, I feel we have a greater role to play to change their mindset and point them to the right behaviors as well as encouraging them to access medical help in time. SCOPE has opened our eyes through this seminar.”

- Sheikh Jumma

SCOPE'S ENGAGEMENT OF FAITH LEADERS

Since its inception in August 2020, SCOPE started with a mapping exercise that identified almost 2,000 faith institutions. A national leadership level meeting for these institutions was held on September 9, 2020. This meeting resulted in national faith leaders granting consent to SCOPE to work with subsidiary community faith leaders. Over 1,338 community leaders were oriented and put in cluster working groups of 40. These clusters are being used as training platforms for the Making Our Communities Better Vision Casting Curriculum. Two hundred faith community leaders are trained every week in the five TAs of Lilongwe in which SCOPE is working. A total of 1,338 community faith leaders were trained by the end of April 2021.

Through positive behavior change initiatives, SCOPE aims to champion health-seeking behaviors among the communities.

Pastor Kamwendo of Khongoni Living Waters Church explained his experience with the Making Our Communities Better training:

“You have cleared some of the myths that bar us from seeking help from community health workers. There is so much misinformation in our community. For instance, people always attribute every miscarriage to witchcraft. I have watched for so long, not knowing if I had the powers to take a step. From what I have learned from the Vision Casting Manual, I now know that I can.”

- Pastor Kamwendo

Pastor Kamwendo went on to explain that he now saw how he could help support his congregation on “the importance of seeking community-based health care from our health workers.”

Pastor Kamwendo and Sheik Juma share similar sentiments and enthusiasm with a hundred other community faith leaders from Lilongwe who have committed to making a positive social step in combating maternal and child health issues in the communities they serve.

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN DEVELOPMENT

Faith communities play a key role in development projects when they see that they can make a difference. Leaders engaged in the Making Our Communities Better training are committed to conveying accurate and appropriate information and skills to their communities and congregations. SCOPE will continue to engage faith leaders in a systematic behavior change exercise that aims to increase improved positive health-seeking behavior.

This story is written by Charles Fwataki, SCOPE Malawi Project Coordinator.