PERIODIC INTENSIFICATION OF ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION (PIRI)
Measles and rubella are highly infectious viral infections that cause eye infection, diarrhea, rashes, eye infection, and respiratory infections and in some cases lead to death. The Kenya Red Cross Society, in partnership with Tharaka Nithi County Government, rolled out a pilot program on Periodic Intensification of Routine Immunization (PIRI) targeting residents in Tharaka North Sub-County.

The program focuses on improving the immunization indicators in the county with a focus on measles and rubella.

“As a county we are very grateful to Kenya Red Cross for your continued support. We remain committed to ensuring that children are immunized against diseases and infections as required,” Kenneth Muchemi, Deputy County Nursing Officer, Tharaka Nithi.

Joseph Mureithi, a Nursing Officer at Kathangachini Health Centre in Tharaka North sub-county confirmed that since the commencement of the PIRI program, there has been a rise in the number of children brought to the health center for immunization.

The programme is implemented through Community Health Workers (CHWs) who visit households educating them on the importance of vaccinating their children. Households and educating them on the importance of vaccinating their children as scheduled.

The CHWs equally collect contact information to enable short message reminders sent through their cell phones. The pilot project funded by the American Red Cross targets a total of 45,671 children spread in three counties: Tharaka Nithi, Nairobi and Meru County.
The Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability & Learning (MEAL) unit conducted a Trainer of Trainees (ToT) Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Training from 18th to 20th September 2018 at the Boma Hotel in Nairobi.

The training targeted KRCS volunteers and Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Officers (RMEALs) from all the 47 counties. The training is to enable them cascade CEA to regions and branches in pursuit of transparent communication as one of the pillars of Accountability to Communities (AtC). Speaking during the session, the head of the Kenya Red Cross Society Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning, Lydia Atiema said that the unit has put into practice an initiative that provides a framework of minimum standards intended to support National Society pivot towards greater Accountability.

“Transparency, participation, feedback mechanisms, and community-led monitoring and evaluation represent the four minimum standards or pillars of the Accountability to Communities Framework. Each pillar of accountability is designed to provide a common goal for all programs and is expected to be integrated across all program lifecycles and emergency operations,” Lydia explained.
The Health NGOs Network (HENNET), whose vision is to have a healthy Kenyan Society, held a Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) breakfast meeting on the 18th September 2018 at the Boma hotel Nairobi. The high level meeting was attended by Kenya Red Cross Society, Universal Health Coverage Panel, PATH, Rockhealth, AMREF Africa, Morris Moses Foundation among other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who are part of the Health Benefits Taskforce.

This meeting set the stage for discussions around the Health sector is Universal health Coverage (UHC) so as to ensure that CSOs contribute to this discourse and help shape the UHC agenda in this Country. The participants also had discussions on the Sustainability for Health Non-governmental Organizations to learn and develop one another in this area.

HENNET as a network continues to play a very crucial role in amplifying the voices of the Civil Society in the Health sector through very structured and targeted advocacy.

The Kenya Red Cross has over the years been a member of HENNET and has seen the network grow into a robust platform for engagement.

The Network’s vision is to have a healthy Kenyan Society and was formed in 2005 to bring together CSOs whose core mandate is to promote health in Kenya. HENNET stimulates linkages and strategic partnerships among health NGOs, government, development partners and the private sector in order to enhance their responses towards health needs of Kenyans.
The Disability Mainstreaming project by Kenya Red Cross Society and CBM is one that is loaded with testimonies of transformation, a project that has changed the lives of primary school pupils, high school students, widows, couples, the youth, teachers and members of the community. From Cheptais in Mt. Elgon to Chesikaki, all the way to Bukembe, Kendu Bay and Siriti in Bungoma county, Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWDs) are full of appreciation and hope for a brighter future. Their smiles, vigour, unity of purpose and elevation within their respective environments is an indicator that the project is achieving its objectives.

"Kenya Red Cross has helped us a lot. When they called us to a meeting in Kendu Bay, Bungoma branch, we were told about the Disability Mainstreaming project, taught about leadership and government policies, successful enterprises, finance issues and how to manage a business," said Godfrey Wafula Simiyu, Chairman, Sio Sub Location People Living with Disabilities.

"We were also taught on agriculture after Kenya Red Cross asked us what we can do and we proposed chicken rearing, goat and cow keeping. We were taught how to do this commercially, about record keeping, feeds, disease management and even access to markets." The project seeks to contribute towards improved quality of life for PLWDs through sustainable development in Bungoma County. It strives to reduce stigma and discrimination and increase acceptance of PLWDs among members of the community.

"Kenya Red Cross also taught us our rights as enshrined in the constitution something most of us did not know. This was a big eye opener. After the training, we were asked to submit our proposal for funding and thereafter we got very good news that we were to be given Ksh50,000," added Mr. Wafula. The Sio Sub Location People Living with Disabilities is among 34 groups targeted by the project in Bungoma county. Most are located within Bungoma South Sub county and Cheptais Sub county. In Bukembe ward, we met Kongoli Sub Location People with Disabilities, a 35 member group engaged in chicken rearing, pig keeping, fish selling and maize business. "As people abled differently, we are extremely excited because we had been forgotten in the past. We were not viewed like other people but when Kenya Red Cross reached out to us, we are now empowered and even capable to educate our children," said Gentrix Namukuru Wafula, member of Kongoli Sub Location People with Disabilities.

"We are very happy because we no longer beg from people. We are content as we have money to meet our needs," the group is sub-divided in smaller group of five members. Gentrix's group rears pigs and their vision is to see them populate and eventually expand the enterprise. Another subgroup is involved in chicken rearing and currently doing it from one of the member's houses. Once the projects picks up, they plan to empower each member to set up own chicken houses. "We started this project a long time ago but it collapsed. We thank the Kenya Red Cross team for coming to our rescue by giving us capital. We now have eight chickens and our plan is to see them populate so that we are able to sell them and get money for school fees, medical care and other needs," added Miriam Marani, another member of Kongoli Sub Location People with Disabilities. In Cheptais -Mt. Elgon, the joy on the faces of the beneficiaries was as fresh as when they received the Ksh50,000 seed money. The group bought 11 goats the justification being the multiple benefits they will get from the goats namely milk, food and their high value.

"The project has given us strength. When we look at these goats, we get encouraged to go on with life. When they all give birth and we sell some, we believe we can even buy cows and keep growing," narrated Pamela Shobata, Secretary, Cheptais Disabled Group. The group is further lucky to have a youth member with a smartphone who googles tips on livestock keeping and disease control.

"When I walk out there because I am well educated, I collect information and share with the group members. For instance on Facebook, I can get any information on agriculture, share with the group and we implement the tips," lamented David Simiyu, the youthful member of Cheptais Disabled Group. The disability mainstreaming project further strive to increase participation of PLWDs in school curricular and extra-curricular services. Sensitization sessions are conducted to both teachers and students, which advocate for inclusive learning. Peter Simiyu a class eight pupil at St. Mary's Kibabii Boys Primary School confessed to us the shame he felt for once discriminating and labelling students with special needs. The moment of reckoning happened after a sensitization session by the project team.

"Kenya Red Cross asked us how we were interacting with students who are abled differently. We realised we had been doing wrong because we previously had negative attitudes towards them. We gave them names such as moss-moss (slow-slow), purkwas (zombie), mwendawazimu (mad person), but after the sessions, we felt very ashamed of ourselves. We regretted that we had been doing wrong things then we changed our attitude," said Peter. Inclusive learning was also on-going at Bungoma High School and Chesikaki Primary School when we visited both schools. At Bungoma High, the foundation for inclusive learning had already been put in place and the sensitization sessions were a great refresher moment for the school as well as offering new perspectives. In Chesikaki Primary School, the administration admitted to have learned a lot from the sessions especially on the importance of inclusive learning.

"The Kenya Red Cross team came in first term and really taught us on how to integrate students with special needs with the rest. At the time the community and even teachers had a negative attitude towards them. As a school, we took the training very positively that is why you see our class population is high with students of special needs," said Wincate Mukami, teacher, Chesikaki Primary School.

"Previously the other students could not even allow those with special needs to be in their games and even abandoned them but since the sensitization, they now interact both in class and during games, continued teacher Mukami. More training was conducted for 80 Community Health Volunteers and even 30 Community Health Assistants on disability inclusion. The project successes are evident from the testimonials and implementation progress that continue to achieve the project goal and objectives.
On Thursday, 14th September 2018, the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) Youth Program with Support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and African Youth Network, embarked on a fact finding mission to establish how effective the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) has been. YES was initiated 3 years back. This process was piloted with over 40 Red Cross Youth from Nairobi County taking part in the process, led by 8 trained YES Self-Assessment Toolkit Facilitators. KRCS, aims to have this assessment done with youth representation from all the 47 Counties in an effort to better provide youth relevant programming and meaningful engagement while impacting young people in Kenya for humanitarian, socio-economic, civic and personal/professional development.

The KRCS Youth Program will continue to conduct these assessments in an attempt to reach a larger number of youth in Kenya.