

Demand for health services continues to grow in previously inaccessible Jamame district as WHO sets-up first temporary health camp in a decade. Credit: WHO/Somalia

Kismayo, 12 February 2023 – "God has listened to our prayers and for the first time in 10 years we are seeing public health professionals supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) providing life-saving health services to our elderly, women and especially children suffering from multiple health problems," said one of the village elders Hassan Sheikh Yusuf hailing from Warooky village of Jamame district in Jubaland state.

Jamame is an agrarian district situated 60 kilometres northeast of Kismayo. Locations west of Juba river in Jamame district are part of the newly liberated areas in Somalia where the population has not seen any regular medical help in years. The authorities recently reclaimed part of this district from non-state actors and requested the international organizations to extend humanitarian services to the population on an urgent basis. Working under an Integrated Response Framework (IRF), endorsed by the humanitarian country team in October 2022, WHO, UNICEF and the World Food Programme immediately started joint health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition support in parts of Jamame district, primarily focusing on Baarka, Warkooy and Sanguuni towns and its nearby villages.

Residents of Jamame district confirmed that the medical teams supported by WHO are the first one to arrive in their district in more than a decade. "Provision of health services in these God-forsaken areas is critical and as soon as we could manage to get access to the area, we sat down with the elders, established our mobile camps and started providing life-saving consultative and referral health services to the locals. We believe that every single life saved is like saving the whole of humanity and we literally did that in the shortest span of a few months," said Abdullahi Hussein, WHO Public Health Officer for Jubaland.

Soon after deployment of WHO-supported teams revealed that the district had no immunization coverage, no tuberculosis (TB) or maternal, newborn, child and adolescent programme and communities were living without any public health services. Drought seems to further complicate the situation for the locals as an estimated 70% of inhabitants of Jamame district are affected by drought following 4 consecutive seasons of below average rainfall.

WHO, in collaboration with the State Ministry of Health, deployed 3 mobile medical teams consisting of 5 medical professionals each in Warkooy, Baarka and Sanguuni villages. Initially the teams were deployed for 4 days a week for 6 weeks but owing to the severity of the situation and demand from the locals, WHO had to extend the mission for another 6 weeks and is likely to continue this because more nearby villages have started reaching out to Jamame for consultations and various available health services.

"The main goal was to assess and ensure the provision of medical services to the affected communities in these previously inaccessible areas. Circumstances were not ideal and residents, including women and children, were suffering from multiple diseases, including diarrhoea and measles, intestinal worms, pneumonia, and bronchitis. Our teams had to set up a temporary camp inside the district to immediately start outpatient consultations, vaccination of children and provision of various supplements to children and women. We also had to send our teams to run a door-to-door campaignto raise awareness on preventive measures against epidemic-prone diseases and for adopting a healthy lifestyle besides establishing their linkage with nearby health facilities," said Munira Aden Saleh, one of the first medical professionals providing life-saving treatment to locals.

Since the deployment of the WHO-supported teams in the first week of October, medical teams have provided medical consultation to 3861 residents of Jamame, including 1955 children under 5. More than 8917 children were screened for malnutrition, of whom 1865 were diagnosed as severely malnourished and 826 were referred to an outpatient therapeutic feeding programme and stabilization centrers in Kismayo General Hospital. Another 2592 cases with diarrhoea were treated with oral rehydration salts, 4281 received supplements like vitamin A and deworming tablets while 5706 children were vaccinated against various childhood diseases, including polio.



WHO-supported outreach vaccinator administers vaccine to one of 5706 children in Jamame district. Credit: WHO/Somalia

Initial consultations with locals also resulted in referring patients with suspected pneumonia, severe cold, worms and infection, skin infection and scabies to Kismayo general hospital for further case management, including oxygen therapy. "We are trying to connect these recently accessible populations to nearby established health facilities to not only provide them much needed medical treatments but also to help restore their confidence in public health facilities and make them part of various health interventions initiated from these health facilities," said the Director of Kismayo General Hospital Arab Ibrahim Yasin.

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