

## Ex-Peace Corp man delivers joy to expectant mothers in village

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A nurse emerges from the labour ward to announce the birth of a bouncing baby girl.



**Mr Walter Dean inspects a community project funded by Habitat Aid Initiative in Khwisero. Photo/ JOHN SHLITSA**

This is the 15th delivery at Munyanza Community Nursing Home — a health facility in the remotest part of Khwisero — since its inception.

The six-month-old home is one of the projects initiated by Mr Walter Dean in appreciation of the residents' kindness to him 23 years ago.

As a young American on Peace Corp mission, Mr Dean arrived in Khwisero in 1974 as part of the movement founded by former US president John F. Kennedy — to go out in the world and serve.

But little did Mr Dean know of malaria that is endemic in tropical Africa where he had come to serve.

He was soon to suffer from a bout of malaria and typhoid.

mark in his life.

The hospitality, kindness and prompt attention he received from villagers left an indelible

### Medical centres

Through a civil society called Habitat Aid Initiative, the nursing home is changing the villagers' lives.

His aim is to offer residents quality and affordable health care services, provide a conducive learning environment for children, reduce poverty levels by building classrooms, medical centres and dissemination of information.

Mr Dean has funded the construction and furnishing of a 60-bed dormitory, a classroom, and a computer lab. He has also sunk a borehole and donated a plough and oxen to Khwisero Girls Secondary School.

Other schools that have benefited are Ekambuli Secondary and Emulanda, Munyanaza and Mushinaka Primary.

Mwihila mission and Butere district hospitals have also received medicines. Women have been engaged in income generating ventures such as cultivation of vegetables for sale. With the construction of Munyanza Community Clinic, mothers have become more enlightened.

Nurse Jenifer Omuhuyi says more than 70 per cent of deliveries take place at the home.

This, she says, is a major improvement, in an area where 80 per cent of pregnant women opted for traditional mid-wives.

The home deliveries are unsafe and endanger babies and their mothers, says Ms Omuhuyi.

"Last week, we had a complication when a woman in late pregnancy term was rushed here and we had to refer her to the Kakamega Provincial Hospital."

A Sh500 fee is charged for the service, but only for those who can raise the amount. Munyanza Community Clinic organises free medical camps and attracts an estimated 1,000 patients.

This, they explain, is a clear indication that many of them preferred to be nursed at home rather than in hospitals where they pay. "It means local people die slowly in their homes because they cannot afford quality health care," Ms Omuhuyi adds.

Butere public health officer Arthur Shikanda says many malaria patients initially ignored their condition and hardly visited hospitals for treatment.

Instead, he says, they took drugs without doctors' counsel and ended up succumbing to the disease.

"Most people prefer buying painkillers, which worsen the situation and we hope Habitat Aid Initiative will help in dissemination of information to enlighten our people," said Mr Shikanda.

With a bed capacity of 12, the clinic is among other projects initiated by the Habitat Aids Initiative funded by Mr Dean and his friends in Butere and Siaya districts.

In Siaya, Yier Ngima (Choose Life) HIV/Aids project seeks to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

It has also set up water projects in the area. “Unlike in the past when we used to fetch water downstream many kilometres away, we can access clean water without walking long distances,” says Ms Ruth Alwang’a, the chairlady of Chlorine Self Help Group.

A water point at Ikolomani village serves more than 80 households. Ms Alwang’a says that every household pays a Sh20 monthly fee for maintenance and treatment of water to help sustain the project noting that cases of water borne diseases have since reduced.

Mr Sammy Ndukwe, the chairman of initiative, says the organisation will build more classrooms and health centres.

“Education is the best investment for growth of any country,” he notes.

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