



Partnership
Network
Advocacy
Consortium
Papua New Guinea



HOW TO PROTECT OURSELVES FROM COVID-19

**MESSAGES & EXPERIENCES FROM PAPUA
NEW GUINEANS OF THEIR EXPERIENCE IN
HELPING COMMUNITIES PROTECT
THEMSELVES FROM COVID-19**

Brought to you by Key Population Communities and friends



Spreading the Message



*Lesley Bola
Director of KPAC*

On behalf of KPAC, I convey our condolences to all our friends and family members who passed away due to COVID related issues. These included our own loved ones who gave us the strength and motivation to save lives.

Many living with HIV encountered social stigma and were often blamed for bringing COVID-19 into communities. Others lost their jobs due to COVID related issues while others continued to face further stigma and discrimination in communities, health settings, workplaces and within their families.

However, our peer networks and peer groups provided support through this rough journey. We demonstrated to the world that we are not alone and our inner strength and love kept us going.

One important lesson I learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to empower oneself with basic information about COVID-19 and translate this information into our local languages in a very simple form for our less literate communities.

I wish to thank all our partners and community leaders who stood with us and encouraged us to be strong and to continue to help protect our communities.

Advocating for the Rights of Others

A message from Cathy Ketapa, Chairlady for the Key Population Advocacy Consortium (KPAC) PNG

I'm Cathy Ketapa, current chairlady for the Key Population Advocacy Consortium PNG. I am also the prime delegate to KPAC for Friends Frangipani – the sex workers network in PNG. **One of my major achievements has been supporting the KP communities to establish the KP Advocacy Consortium PNG (KPAC) who are now able to access funds and resources from partners.**

KPAC is an advocacy organisation which comprises Friends Frangipani (sex workers), Kapul Champions (MSM/TG) and Igat Hope (People Living with HIV).

As we grew, we welcomed Hetura Transgender Association network, Youth Lead PNG, NCD Consumers Network and Kumul Morobe Trans community. The COVID-19 pandemic actually strengthened the network to work harder for their communities. Everyone was able to support each other mentally, socially, physically and psychologically. During the lock down everyone shared food and kept in touch through social media.

Friends Frangipani was so privileged to receive support from Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) by accessing food and other basic needs. The support came at the right time when sex workers were unable to do their work due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Most sex workers also faced social stigma and were often accused of bringing COVID-19 into the community. There were even reports of girls being rejected from their families with nowhere to go. I was able to obtain some funds and resources to undergo training on social protection to prepare the girls when they were threatened.

I would like to thank all those who supported the KPAC members including their partners who were strong supporters during this challenging period.



Bringing Services to the Doorstep

A message from Mathew Densil, HIV Co-ordinator, NCDPHA

Meet Mathew Densil who is the HIV Program Co-ordinator in the National Capital District. Mathew has vast experiences working in the HIV field mainly working closely with People Living with HIV and Key Population. His exposure to working with vulnerable communities has strengthen his passion and love in this field.

Mathew says that during the COVID-19, the health system was overwhelmed with lots of complex issues. The restriction of accessing health facilities and closure of public transport posed big challenges to everyone. PLHIV communities struggled to access food due to lock down of shops and markets. Most community people were unable to do their gardening and even continue their small business enterprises eg, selling garden food.



The leadership of Mathew & NCD PHA team ensured that People Living with HIV and Key Population were cared for during the COVID-19 response. Mathew ensured training sessions and information sharing about COVID-19 was shared with vulnerable communities.

NCD PHA ensured our grass roots communities understood the basic rules around the COVID-19 New Normal. In addition, with the extra support from NCD -PHA, food supplies were delivered to the NCD Health clinics so that PLHIV and other patients could access their basic health requirements.

Mathew says that one big lesson learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic is the value of the government working in partnership with business sectors and civil societies to support vulnerable communities.



Surviving the Pandemic while fighting another cause

A Message from Manu, Advocate Sepik River

The world came to an abrupt halt in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world. I am Manu and I have always lived a segregated life in PNG, but I am leading the fight to protect the Sepik River from possible destruction and so there is always an element of risk in this space. I live in Wewak which has a high crime rate.

Before the impact of COVID-19 I was already on lockdown but on my terms. My 11-year-old son has suffered from acute asthma and he has been in and out of hospital many times. COVID-19 affected mainly those who suffered from breathing bronchial related medical conditions and other underlying health issues.

Even though children were not affected severely at that time, my son was at risk, hence the draconian measures I put into place. I asked my visitors to sit outside the gates of my house, they had to wash everything including thongs and shoes if they went to town or outside of the fence of their yard. Soap and buckets of water were everywhere around the house. It was a bit extreme for PNG, but I had to do it.

I suffered back lash and was called names like chicken, acting Whiteman, too afraid, believers of conspiracy theories, gullible to believe the illness and more. It was a bit worse when people heard that I got vaccinated and boosted. I was able to guide the members of staff of my organisation to get vaccinated. Family, extended family acquaintances and allies looked at me with measured scrutiny.

As an applied Science Graduate from a University, I understood a little bit about the virus and bacteria. I was also an experienced Community Development worker, so was able to understand why the people were terrified of the virus but were reluctant of vaccination. I communicated with them using words they could understand and feel. I never said vaccination but “banis sut”, just like the immunisation injection given to babies.

I went on to explain that when parents were sick with chicken pox, their bodies learned to produce antibody to fight it off and then pass this knowledge to the newborn baby. I did this for his son as I did not want my son to die. I asked people to list those who were obese, or had existing health conditions and older family members. I also asked them how much they loved them and then pleaded with them to get the banis sut for their loved ones. This helped the reprieve from the antagonism.

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The COVID-19 impact has subsided. People who have lost their loved ones will relive those moments of goodbyes and farewells. **The lessons we have learnt from this may be lost too as we all try to rush and rebuild our lives. Two things I believe that have become a part of our lives is the wearing of masks and use of sanitizers.**

My son is no longer prone to asthma. This is a relief for me and for him.

Young People Can Make A Difference

A Message from Junior Nepal, Western Highlands Provincial Advocacy Delegate

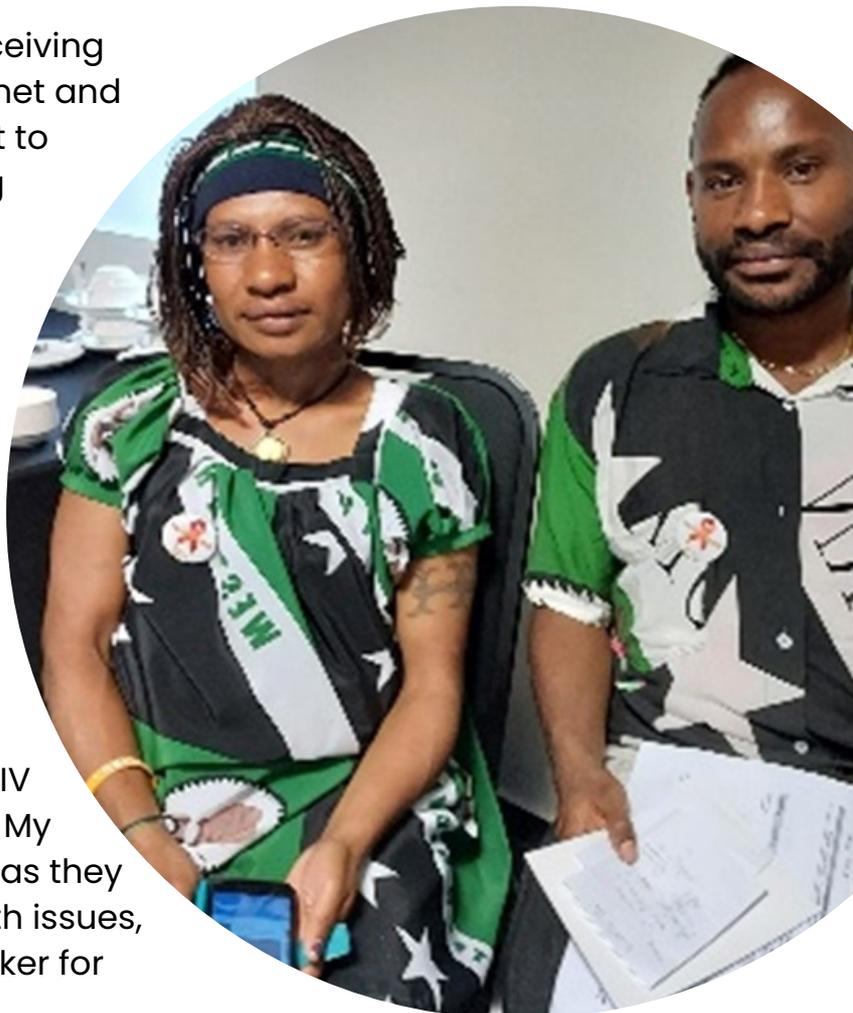
“Covid-19 Pandemic was one of the worse disasters the world encountered. As a young person, I was concerned about my peers and my own future. The closure of our schools and no public transport made me worried about our future.”

I'm Junior Nepal is a focal prime person for the Western Highlands provincial advocacy delegates and I work as a HIV peer outreach worker. As a young person I have been very active getting young key population to get tested and treated for HIV/STIs. Most of the youth population have access to smart phones and were able to access information about COVID in Mt Hagen.

A big challenge was young people receiving misleading information from the internet and social media platforms. I tried my best to correct the misinformation with young people and encouraged them to get vaccinated.

The KPAC team played a key role in translating key COVID-19 messages into simple language in the local vernacular and this helped the dissemination of correct information to young people.

I was asked lots of questions, but always tried to be well prepared. For example, someone asked if a young HIV positive person would die of Covid-19. My reply was “They would not die as long as they didn't have any other underlying health issues, and they should also see a health worker for professional advice”.



Supporting the Vulnerable

A Message from Mathew Audi, National Delegate for Kapul Champions

I am Mathew Audi and I was recently elected as the national delegate for Kapul Champions with the Key Population Advocacy Consortium PNG. I represent those Kapul Champions who face self-stigmatization in communities. I act as the bridge between them and the health centres or other social services. As a representative of CCM, I ensured that resources funded under the Global Fund reached all communities to plan, implement and monitor HIV programs.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, most of the HIV peer outreach workers faced challenges going into the communities to do peer outreach work. The Kapul Champions team ensured basic commodities like masks, basic materials and information were passed onto those in need.

The team also supported the transgender communities in Morobe through having them share their challenges and achievements through KP Forums and Leaders Sensitization workshops.

One important lesson that my little son (Mathew Junior) and I learnt was adhering to the basic COVID rules to prevent becoming sick. We both lived through the COVID pandemic without being severely affected and my son has been my main motivation to live a healthy lifestyle.

I would like to thank the Global Fund, UNAIDS and other partners for supporting Kapul Champions during the pandemic period.



Breaking Barriers

*A Message from Robyn Daroa, Response Social Media Officer
KPAC*

I am Robyn Daroa and I am currently working as a Response Social Media officer with KPAC.

I previously worked as a HIV tracker with six-mile clinic in national capital district. **I have broken barriers supporting a challenging health system in NCD. She knows her communities well with networks around PNG.**

I have been able to create a trusted and friendly relationship with clients and health workers that many clients who stopped accessing services were able to return to their treatment. During the Covid-19 lockdown, with support from the clinic, I brought ART drugs to clients who could not travel and played a key role in distributing food to hungry community members.

I am blessed to have a very supportive husband who understands my job. He supports our family by cooking food and taking care of the children.



During the Covid-19 lockdown, with support from the clinic, I brought ART drugs to clients who could not travel

COVID-19 has actually helped me prepare in advance by supporting a government service who had had its fair share of challenges.



Motivated by Family

A Message from Janet Kilei, Jiwaka Provincial Advocacy Delegate

I'm Janet Kilei and I'm very passionate and vocal person who has been working in the HIV field for over 15 years. I am the provincial prime delegate for the Key Population Advocacy Consortium in Jiwaka province.

I love doing community work with the Key Populations in Papua New Guinea. My family motivates me to work hard and I have assisted many young girls who are powerless and need support and guidance.

I played a crucial role in empowering and mentoring the Jiwaka provincial advocacy delegates to support their advocacy interventions in the province.

I was also was able to empower provincial delegates with information on Covid-19 and encouraged them with the 'word' to help each other. The actual test for the team was when the country went on lockdown with public transport halted, shops closed, and health workers leaving their place of work. The first people the I thought of was people living with HIV who needed their ART drugs. The Jiwaka provincial delegates used their initiative and creativity to access ART drugs on behalf of their PLHIV friends, therefore bringing the service to their doorsteps.

When I saw them secretly receiving their ART drugs in plastic bags or parcels, they had tears rolling down their cheeks. I reflected, if we were not here for them, who would have done this job?

I love doing community work with the Key Populations in Papua New Guinea. My family motivates me to work hard and I have assisted many young girls who are powerless and need support and guidance.

I would like to commend the provincial delegates in Jiwaka for being brave to break these barriers to support our communities.

COVID-19 has taught us to build our networks, empower our family and work colleagues and to think outside the box when faced with challenges as well as to tackle these challenges by being strong and determined to solve any issues that may rise. I want to thank my children and family for giving me strength.

Information is Vital in a Pandemic

A Message from Mary Berobero, Key Population Advocacy Consortium Western Highlands Delegate

I am Mary Berobero, a female delegate of Key Population Advocacy Consortium PNG based in Western Highlands province. Like everyone in my community, I was concerned about the Covid-19 pandemic. I recall watching sick patients rushed into emergency clinics on TV. As the days passed, I noticed that patients were refused treatment at the nearby hospital because there were no beds available.

This motivated me to support the team in the fight against the spread of COVID. I attended a workshop on basic facts of COVID and how to prevent COVID from spreading. The information empowered me to get vaccinated and work in the community doing Covid-19 prevention work. My KPAC team and I

were very strategic and invited all the community leaders to give basic

information on COVID-19. **The result was five very influential leaders and their families got vaccinated with their families.** These leaders

then encouraged their communities and more of their communities were also vaccinated.

Two things that I learned from this journey was to gain as much information about COVID from reliable sources.

I empowered myself and was able to pass on the necessary information to her networks. I also used influential leaders to support my advocacy work in Western Highlands.

If there is another disaster in the future, I would like to get our authorities more involved in our communities as they have the network and connections on the ground.



The Importance of Community Based Testing

A Message from Kila Yamo, Advocate for Community Based HIV Screening in PNG

I am Kila Yamo, a strong advocate for the Community Based HIV Screening in Papua New Guinea. **KP communities often face a lot of stigma and discrimination and MSM are often embarrassed to access clinics for services.**

Community Based HIV Screening is conducting HIV testing in communities with key population communities who are self-stigmatized.

I am proud to be one of the first community workers who has been trained on how to do community screening for HIV with key populations. I completed the necessary training and has been certified by the National Department of Health.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, I shared that most MSM and transwomen could not access health facilities due to the Covid-19 lock-down and public transportation was severely affected. Due largely to the closure of these vital health clinics, I stressed that this presented an ideal opportunity conduct the testing in the communities.

I am making a plea for the PNG government to roll out community-based HIV testing as it has proven to be a very effective intervention to reducing HIV amongst key population.



I am proud to be one of the first community workers who has been trained on how to do community screening for HIV with key populations.

Feeding the Key Population Communities

A Message from Kinivanagi Karo, Distribution Coordinator, NCD Food Bank 2020

The National Capital District (NCD) Food Bank was the brainchild of a handful of good ordinary citizens led by Rex Paura, who initially thought up the idea of mobilizing donations from various companies, business houses and generous individuals and distributing it for a good cause to assist disadvantaged communities including the Key Population during the pandemic.

Due the lockdowns, many of these communities were unable to provide for their families or have access to the necessities including food and clean water.

Kinivanagi Karo, who occasionally provides capacity support to the KPAC, and a team of eager volunteers put their hands up to volunteer help coordinate the storage and distribution of the donations.

They ensured that the donations reached especially those most in need.

The key population communities were fortunate to have benefited during this difficult time. Other vulnerable groups included PWDs, widows and intellectual disabilities.



Surviving the Pandemic with correct advice and information

A Message from Charlie, Advocate for Key Population and People Living with HIV Eastern Highland Province

As an advocator for key population and PLHIV Charlie reported that his community was extremely stressed and worried about getting infected with COVID. Charlie recalls "I had sleepless nights attending to phone calls and messages from my community asking all sorts of worrying questions."

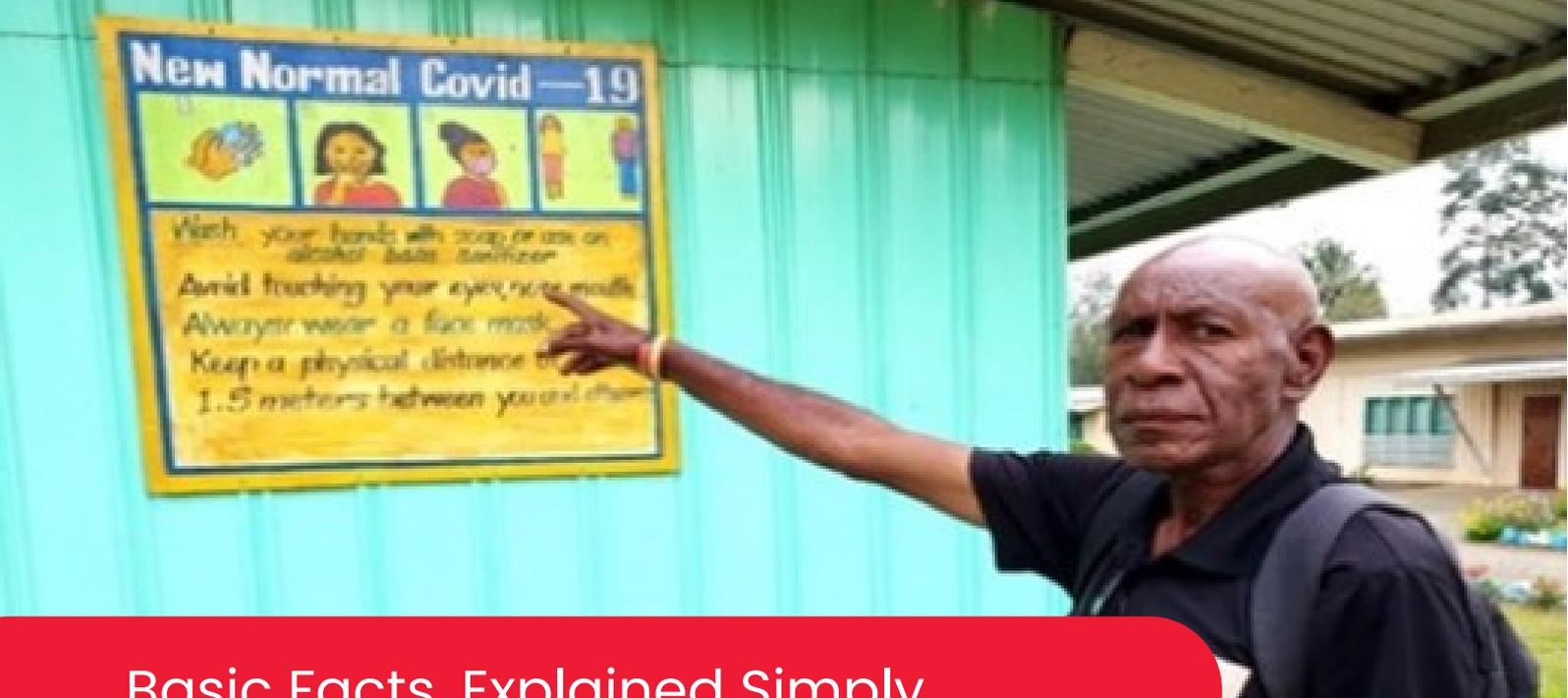
I became a counsellor overnight supporting my community giving advice and information. I realized there was no support by mainstream services to help our helpless vulnerable communities.

When I received calls from our PLHIV community, the first line I was greeted with was: "Mi gat HIV binatang, bai mi kisim COVID kwik taim na bai mi Dai same speed." (I have HIV, it looks like I will get COVID and die instantly).

This is one example of the misconceptions messages my peers in the community had when COVID-19 struck Papua New Guinea. I needed a lot of patience including accurate information to educate my peers. A big part was also dealing with everyone's stress and uncertainty.

One thing I learnt was giving out the correct information about COVID-19 and HIV was very critical for my peers' mental health. I thank Goroka PHA, UNIADS WHO & KPAC for providing us with all the necessary vital information we needed on the ground.





Basic Facts, Explained Simply

A Message from Rex Boski, HIV Peer Outreach worker Eastern Highland Province

My name is Rex Boski who has been working in Eastern Highland for the past 10 years. I was afraid when I first started telling men of diverse sexualities to get tested for HIV in the Eastern Highlands Districts. **It was hard to reach this target population due to cultural, religious and self-stigma amongst men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgenders (TG).**

I eventually felt at ease and developed confidence reaching out to my peers to be checked for HIV or STI. With my experience, I was one of the first community-based workers in Eastern Highlands province selected to be trained. My team was assigned to go to Lufa and Okapa districts to do COVID-19 awareness. I was impressed with what I heard and saw when observing the community. They were very worried about outsiders coming in to their peaceful community and spreading COVID-19. I felt everyone feared COVID-19 after seeing news headlines, hearing gossip and watching social media news. I reinforced all the basic prevention messages in their local languages so people understood the messages.

I took this opportunity to meet men of diverse sexualities and encouraged them to be safe. **It was encouraging that my own peers stayed safe and were loved by everyone.** The COVID-19 experiences has taught me to be well prepared about the basic facts about the epidemic and not to be bombarded with the information from social media. Finally, connect with the level of our illiterate communities and explain in simple terms so they understand.

Thank you KPAC for giving me this opportunity to tell my story.

We acknowledge the support of APCASO
to share these Covid-19 stories