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## **Piloting diabetes communication in Kenya**

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### Introduction

Poor access to accurate and reliable information on diabetes impedes community awareness, early diagnosis and optimal management of diabetes in Kenya. A pilot project was implemented to bridge this information gap.

### Methodology

The public communication platform 'tuzungumzie kisukari' was launched as a two-month pilot project in October 2012. The platform incorporates a web portal (calendar, forum, resource and blog pages); a free subscription text messaging service (SMS); social media networks YouTube, Facebook and Twitter; and Ushahidi platform mapping diabetes services. Community members were recruited via healthcare facilities, diabetes support groups, and community awareness events then self-subscribed onto the SMS service. Subscribers chose to receive messages in either English or Kiswahili under the following categories: Diabetes (awareness/alert messages, events); Patients (self-management messages) or Research (new advances/treatments). The SMS messages were dispatched via a predetermined daily schedule. Feedback from subscribers was collated and responded to via SMS. Weekly blogs were posted, relevant diabetes resource materials uploaded and the events calendar updated.

### Results

Policy documents and 11 blog posts were among materials uploaded on the web portal. More than 3000 community members subscribed onto the SMS service by the end of the pilot. Categories of SMS messages dispatched included myths and misconceptions, signs and symptoms, types and management, complications, prevention of and risk factors for diabetes. Feedback from subscribers included requests for information on diabetes management, prevention and complications; diet and nutrition; access to and adverse effects of diabetes medication. The socioeconomic challenges of managing diabetes were among the issues highlighted by the subscribers. Queries of a clinical nature were referred to clinicians and subscribers advised to report to their medical facility for follow up. Persons with diabetes were referred to support groups. Subscribers valued the service and indicated they would like to learn more so that they can help their community.

### Conclusion

The project was well-received by the target audience. Feedback from subscribers underscored

the dearth of diabetes information among community members and the challenges of diabetes management. It is anticipated that the project will be scaled up to the next level.