



# What works? What fails?



FINDINGS FROM THE NAVRONGO COMMUNITY  
HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING PROJECT

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Navrongo Health Research Centre

## PAGA WITHOUT BORDERS

This issue of *What works? What fails?* is one in a series of interviews conducted with Paramount Chiefs to hear their impressions of the Community Health and Family Planning Project

**You have been here long before the Navrongo Health Research Centre began. Has the NHRC had any impact on health in your paramouncy? (If yes): Could you explain by giving examples?**

The NHRC has had a tremendous impact on health in the whole district—not just in my traditional area. There are a lot of examples. First and foremost that terrible disease, measles, seems to have been eradicated from our district—I have not heard of any cases for a long time. It alone could have wiped out all our populations because we were helpless when it attacked. Malaria has also significantly gone down. It's still a killer disease but we just can't imagine how things would have been without the intervention of the research centre. Today mosquito nets are readily available at heavily subsidized prices for pregnant women and children. But I think one of the most important achievements is that through the research work in the district our people have come to understand that health cannot be taken for granted.

**Did anyone from the NHRC come to talk to you about the Community Health and Family Planning Project (CHFP)? (If yes): Can you describe the first such occasion when someone from the NHRC came to talk to you about the CHFP?**

Yes I remember very well though it seems so long ago. A message came from the research centre requesting a meeting with my elders and me. We all assembled here in the palace.

**What was discussed at that time?**

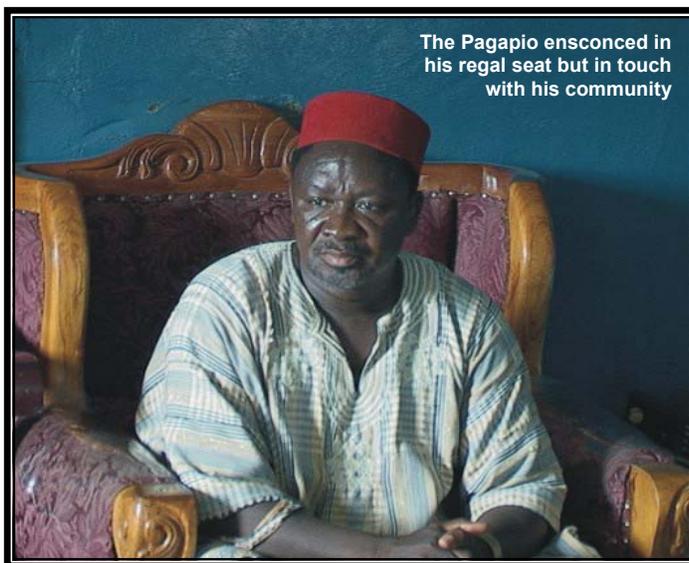
A team came and we discussed health matters generally and then the research team informed us that they were coming to consult us to see what ideas we had with regard to effective ways of improving health care delivery. We put our heads together and came out with suggestions. They said since we were not sure what was the best thing to do we should try out the ideas that came up in an experiment.

**What were your immediate impressions?**

We were excited about it because we had already worked with the research centre and knew quite well what they were capable of doing. They had already tried out a few ideas that worked well—others from far and near are now emulating these examples. But I must confess that some of my people were not very clear about how the health volunteers were going to work. Now so many years down the line we have seen that some of the fears have been allayed.

**Some workers report that there is community apathy about the CHFP. Do you agree with this assertion? (If yes): What have you done to address such issues?**

I am not aware that there have been any disagreements between health volunteers and community members. The people are generally satisfied with the volunteers and they try to facilitate their work in whatever way they can. I am aware that some community members tend the gardens for health volunteers as a way of showing appreciation.



The Pagapio ensconced in his regal seat but in touch with his community

**Have Health Volunteers (YZ/YN) operating in your paramouncy had any impact on health? (If yes): What do you think has been the most important impact of the health volunteers living in the community?**

The most important thing about the health volunteers is that they are available day and night to provide treatment for minor ailments such as headache, abdominal pains, diarrhoea and so on. In the past if one were taken ill in the night you were at the mercy of the disease. But now the health volunteer is close by. He or she will offer first aid and manage the illness until the sick person can reach the nearest health centre.

**A study has indicated that the ancestors are not averse to family planning. As a traditional ruler, do you agree with this conclusion? Why do you agree or disagree with this conclusion?**

As a matter of fact family planning is nothing new to us. Our people have practised family planning since time immemorial. So our ancestors are right. In their time, a woman would normally give birth to a child at four- to five-year intervals. High infant mortality made it almost impossible to maintain that standard. But now more and more children are surviving so natural methods may no longer be enough.

**Are there any aspects of health that you think have not been addressed under the CHFP? (If yes): What do you think should be added to the programme?**

Well, nothing really that I can think of. I would just like to remind you that my traditional area is yet to receive community health nurses who have been sent to live and work in other communities. Even though the volunteers are doing well, if they work together with nurses I think that health would improve remarkably. I also think you need to intensify your message and make your presence felt in some of the most remote villages such as Kulya.



**Your sub-district has a Health Centre. Did you really need health volunteers in your paramouncy?**

Yes we needed them and we still need them. They are a vital part of the health care system. They help in the detection of diseases and epidemics in the communities. They play a vital role in immunization campaigns. But I think it is their role as health mobilisers that makes them really important. They seem to be working well with the health centre staff too.

**The results of the CHFP have been used to develop a national health policy. Generally, how do you feel about your contribution towards this development?**

We are very proud about it but as you know, this is not the first time something good has come from the

research centre to help others. I remember the Vitamin A project and then the Bednet study. The results of these projects are being used for the benefit of others in Ghana and even in other parts of the world. I am very proud that a poor and deprived people like us have been able to achieve such great things for improving the health of people in other parts of the world. I would like to urge the government to pay serious attention to the work you are doing and provide you with all the money and other forms of assistance that you need to continue.

*Send questions or comments to: What works? What fails?*  
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