White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood Nigeria in partnership with Save the Children and the Population Reference Bureau held a National Citizens’ Hearing in Nigeria on 19 March 2015 to review and develop a pathway for citizens and civil society engagement in accountability mechanisms and national priority setting around the updated Global Strategy and SDGs.

The hearing brought together 125 citizens, representatives from government, the private sector, donors and women’s and children’s health professionals to develop citizen-led recommendations for national health priorities and improved accountability to RMNCAH in Nigeria. There was a strong call for an increased focus on how citizens can meaningfully engage with these issues. The next steps will be to ensure the newly elected government listen to these recommendations.

The following recommendations were made by citizens:

- Strengthen community-based maternal deaths surveillance and response mechanisms so that every woman who dies during pregnancy and childbirth within the community can be accounted for and the cause of her death can be identified and addressed.
- Strengthen accountability in maternal health-care delivery through the use of quality assurance/quality improvement tools.
- Establish a clear accountability framework for the updated Global Strategy. This framework should incorporate social accountability and budget tracking.
- Implement legislative policies that will ensure respectful maternity care, to uphold the dignity and rights of women during pregnancy and childbirth.
- Remove financial barriers to maternal and child health care encountered at service delivery points. Such barriers include user fees and purchase of consumables for childbirth.
- Scale up rights education in RMNCAH to enable women to understand their rights and demand them.
- Ensure effective service delivery at health centres.
- Educate citizens on the tools and strategies that will enable them to engage the government in RMNCAH social accountability and budget tracking.
- Provide platforms where citizens can engage with the government, advocate for better quality care and channel concerns about the quality of care received in both public and private health care facilities.
- The government should hold a Citizens’ Hearing in collaboration with civil society on a quarterly basis. Ward development committees should be strengthened to monitor progress at the community level and address gaps identified in government-led interventions.
- Civil society and the National Human Rights Commission should have periodic meetings to share government commitments to citizens and educate them on their rights and entitlements.
- Civil society questionnaires should be created in hospitals for citizens to document their experiences and be collated by citizens and forwarded to appropriate channels (parallel to a government mechanism).
- Ensure universal access to family planning.

Specifically on SDGs:

- Incorporate accountability as one of the SDGs to emphasise civic participation in governance and accountability.
- Institute mechanisms that will allow citizens to participate in the country-level implementation of the SDGs.
- Incorporate mainstream environmental sustainability into the SDGs.
- Ensure youth involvement is an important part of the process in reproductive health in the updated Global Strategy and SDGs.
- Establish an accountability framework alongside every commitment made.
- Ensure a strong link between civil society representatives and parliamentarians for continuous dialogue.
- A good communication structure should be created in the new SDGs where citizens can voice their complaints and experiences.
- We can’t hold leaders responsible for what we don’t know; knowledge dissemination should be a strong component of accountability mechanisms.
- Include a goal to curb issues affecting adolescents globally especially in Africa which has the largest youth population in the world relative to other regions.

This Citizens’ Hearing is needful at this point in time and I am happy to be a part of it. Citizens are becoming well informed to hold their leaders accountable and become part of decision-making processes.

H.E. Hon. Justice Mary Odili, Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria