In Uganda, Citizens’ Hearings (organised by White Ribbon Alliance and World Vision) were held in 11 districts: Lira, Kabale, Busia, Oyam, Kole, Amuru, Kampala, Butaleja, Kiboga, Kitgum and Pader. Each of the hearings brought together over 400 citizens, including women and children, members of parliament (MPs) and local leaders in each district to share views on accountability and delivering government commitments for women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health.

Citizens discussed the impact of recent citizen-led accountability that has had strong results, with the government accelerating the delivery of its commitment to the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health to provide emergency care for pregnant women in health centres nearer to their homes. Citizens made clear recommendations on immediate priorities such as the need to strengthen social accountability, improve emergency services as part of the package of care and improve access to health services for children and adolescents. They called on the leaders to ensure citizens are engaged in priority setting in the future, as well as budget tracking and monitoring of services. These recommendations were taken to the Prime Minister on International Women’s Day (8 March 2015). A National Citizens’ Hearing took place on a national television programme named ‘The People’s Parliament’ where findings were presented from the Citizens’ Hearings at district level to parliament.

An example of the importance of citizen activism was shared at the Lira hearing, where a petition by residents to their MP, Hon. Joy Atim Ongom, was taken to parliament. The parliamentary health committee subsequently came to visit the district to listen to citizen concerns on health care for women and newborns, the results of which were shared on a community radio programme. The MPs were shocked at the state of health facilities in the district. Since the visit of the health committee, there has been significant improvement in health service delivery in the district.

The Minister of Health and the Prime Minister welcomed the recommendations and both made commitments to support citizen participation. The Prime Minister agreed that “funding for health centres is inadequate,” and promised: “We will review funds to ensure these are increased in the budget for Financial Year 2015/16.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Strengthen social accountability: by integrating social accountability in the new health goal framework so that citizens are empowered to monitor implementation and progress on health service delivery.
- Improve emergency services as part of the package of care: by improving and increasing the availability of emergency obstetric and newborn care services, especially at health centres at county and sub-county levels, which are nearer to the community. This should be supported by increased availability of piped water and electricity at the health facilities, and improvement of the referral system, adequate medicines, supplies and equipment.
- Invest in increasing the number of high quality health workers: by prioritising training, recruitment, equitable deployment, motivation and retention of health workers to enable provision of quality health care (and emphasising the importance of this in delivering the health goal in the SDGs).
- Realise women’s rights in the delivery of services: by integrating a rights-based approach to health service delivery. Rights of both patients and health-care providers should also be upheld through respectful maternity care. Both health workers and citizens need to know their rights and obligations.
- Increase accountability in quality health-care provision: by strengthening information sharing and introducing a feedback mechanism for citizens to know what is available at the health facilities and what their entitlements are.
- Improve access to health services for children and adolescents with a specific focus on child and youth-friendly services at all health facilities.
- Provide services across the continuum of care for RMNCAH, including family planning and universal access to lifesaving medicines and supplies, and ensure integration with other health services including HIV and AIDS and non-communicable diseases.
- Strengthen health infrastructure: by reviewing the procurement system of goods and services for health infrastructure development to facilitate faster procurement and delivery of services.
- Galvanise male champions for RMNCAH.
- Ensure adequate financial support to deliver on these critical areas for RMNACH.

Ms Betty Akullu, Deputy Speaker of Lira District

“We need to involve citizens in our work. We are going to sit together as a committee and prioritise the issues raised by citizens... I encourage reporting from the community. I will ensure we have dialogue meetings and talk shows to get the citizens’ views.”