CITIZENS’ HEARINGS: BANGLADESH

A total of six Citizens’ Hearings were organised by White Ribbon Alliance and World Vision in Bangladesh in April 2015, in Khulna, Mymensingh, Joypurhat, Cox’s Bazar, Bhandaria and Dhaka. Various groups, from NGOs and civil society, child forum leaders, teachers, local government representatives and community leaders through to government officials, academics, journalists, and religious leaders all took part in the hearings.

The issues discussed at Citizens Hearings’ included the need for action on child marriage, the current lack of resources at health facilities, the scarcity of physicians, the lack of awareness of RMNCAH in rural areas, poor accountability of health service providers, and the role of the media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be a strict monitoring system in place to watch over the functioning of community clinics. Lack of resources and the poor accountability of community clinics sometimes discourage people from attending them. There should be a qualified doctor at every community clinic at least once per week. The government should focus on improving existing clinics and community groups should be activated and strengthened to increase the accountability of health-care facilities.
- Enhance the accountability of health officials.
- Take action to increase institutional delivery through community skilled birth attendants and the establishment of child-friendly and breastfeeding spaces and establish a severe acute malnutrition corner in every regional and district-level hospital (Mymensingh).
- Special day-care programmes should be introduced in the garment sector where a large number of women work in close proximity.
- Nutrition, child and maternal health issues need to be included in curricula of schools and madrasas because teachers play an important role by teaching students about healthy living and proper nutrition.
- Special programmes should be provided for indigenous people and those who live in hilly areas, the coastal belt and char areas.
- The poor should be provided with a health card to enable them to get free treatment while those with money should bear the expense for their treatment.
- Every woman and every child should receive free access to treatment, health, nutrition and other needs.
- Increase coordination between ministries and with NGOs around child and maternal health issues (Bhandaria hearing) for example through accountability mechanisms comprised of health service users, physicians, researchers, government, and civil society representatives, including media personnel and public representatives (Dhaka hearing).
- Ensure better responsiveness to irregularities in health service provision.
- Comparative studies should be conducted to estimate a fair budget allocation for the health sector. Citizens will need to gather information and findings from across society and disseminate this.
- Parliament will be the central force driving the implementation of the SDG targets in the health sector. The parliamentary standing committee on health can make the government and the health ministry accountable by conducting similar hearings in the parliament.
- Lawmakers should pursue the need for an increased budget allocation for the health sector.
- Qualitative analysis of the budget expenditure should be prioritised to assess the progress of government programmes.
- We must ensure accountability of the NGOs in the health sector.
- Child marriage has a direct bearing on women’s and children’s health. Therefore greater efforts are required to reduce the child marriage rate, including introducing a national database for birth registration.
- Ensure discussion about child and maternal health in every faith-based institution so that people become aware of these issues.
- Ensure health insurance for every citizen (Joypurhat hearing).
- Launch E-health services (skype, other forms of telemedicine).
- Ensure food safety and security. Strengthen measures to control foods that threaten child and maternal health.
- The media should help create public awareness on women’s and children’s health.
- Increase accessibility of health services and increase human resources for health services.
- Increase budget allocation (10-15%) on health issues, especially women’s and children’s health issues.
- Strengthen community groups and support groups for ensuring the availability of health services at primary level.
- Ensure well-functioning community clinics with doctors.