CITIZENS’ HEARINGS: MALAWI

The Citizens’ Hearings in Malawi were organised by White Ribbon Alliance and World Vision, bringing together a total of 3,000 participants. The hearings built on existing structures in which communities work with members of parliament and councillors to present their health care needs, including those relating to maternal health care.

The first hearing was held in Kasungu District on 24 April 2015, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Kasungu District Health Office, and the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). The member of parliament for the area, Chief Wimbe, the Kasungu District Health Officer, and the ward councillor all participated alongside citizens at the hearing. The second hearing was held at the national level in Blantyre on 30 April at Senior Chief Somba’s headquarters and was supported by the Blantyre District Health Office. Participants at the Blantyre hearing included the Blantyre District Health Officer, the ward councillor, and Senior Chief Somba. It was broadcast live on Zodiak Broadcasting Station (Radio), enabling listeners from all over the country to participate in the hearing through text messages.

At both hearings, citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of fulfilment of promises and commitments, including those that were made the previous year during election campaigns. At the Kasungu hearing, citizens engaged the member of parliament to track progress on promises he had made to build a health centre in the area. Citizens also raised their concerns with the District Health Officers in both districts, including poor services provided by health workers (mainly due to understaffing), lack and misuse of supplies, lack of infrastructure and the long distances people travel to access medical care, including basic care and emergency obstetric care.

A health facility will be constructed in these five years - if not never vote for me again.

Signed Hon. Madalitso Kazombo, Member of Parliament for Kasungu East Constituency

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Citizens will engage the government to make sure it prioritises their needs, including construction of health facilities and improving the road network.
• Citizens will engage local authorities (District Assembly and District Health Office) to make sure that action plans developed in conjunction with citizens are implemented.
• Political leaders (members of parliament) and local leaders (chiefs) will promote citizen-led accountability by providing guidance to citizens on how to engage government and track promises and commitments.
• At the hearing, local leaders promised to establish, strengthen, and empower accountability structures (citizens’ forums, and hospital/health centre advisory committees) to effectively engage government and be involved in maternal and newborn health policies and plans that are targeted at them.

Kasungu Citizens’ Hearing:

• The hospital should be constructed in the area as soon as possible.
• The member of parliament (MP), councillor, chiefs and District Health Office should follow up and engage the district chief’s office.
• The MP and councillor should frequently come to this area so they can discuss their campaign promises with the community.
• The MP said enough is enough; the area needs a health facility. He said he will make sure that the health facility is constructed in the area in his tenure of office, and that if he fails, people should not vote for him as a MP of the area again. The MP signed for his statement in presence of the community and stakeholders at the hearing.

Blantyre Citizens’ Hearing:

• Mpemba Health Centre should have an ambulance and adequate resources.
• Health workers should start working at stipulated civil service working hours.
• The District Health Office should deploy adequate staff to the health centre and there should be a staff on call during weekend or public holidays.
• A health centre advisory committee should be elected as soon as possible to follow up on all activities at the facility.
• The district health management team should conduct supervisory visits to the health centre.
• Every community should take part in safe motherhood issues; we should all support pregnant mothers to seek health care in time.

Jeremy Nkhambule, Kasungu District Health Officer (DHO) at the Kasungu District Citizens’ Hearing