The Citizens’ Hearing in South Africa was held in Nseleni in Umvoti Municipality on 9 June 2015. It was the first time that an event of this scale on RMNCAH outcomes had taken place in the community. Government, members of civil society, local pastors, men, women and children came together in Nseleni, Umvoti Municipality to learn and talk about neonatal, child, adolescent, and maternal health. A total of 138 participants attended the hearing and discussed the current problems with the health system and the urgent actions required.

During the hearing a range of different stakeholders – activists, children, youth, women and men, ward committee members, community care-givers, church leaders, créche teachers, health-care professionals, Intsika Yethu Support Group members, students from Hermannsburg School, World Vision South Africa staff, Umvoti Area Development Programme (ADP) committee members, and education specialists joined together with officials from the Umvoti Local Municipality, Umvoti AIDS centre, South African Social Security Agency and the departments of Health, Education, Social Development, Justice, and Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. Participants jointly discussed the challenges the Nseleni community faces in accessing health services, water quality and the difficulties faced by low-income families trying to access even the minimum nutrition their children need.

Participants were split into different stakeholder groups: children’s, youth, women’s and men’s groups. Youth representatives identified the use of unprescribed medication as a major issue in the community, noting that with the mobile clinic only available on certain days, many resort to other forms of medication or traditional medication. The women’s group highlighted the problems of poor transport. One participant said, “If you are pregnant and you happen to experience complications on the day when the mobile clinic is not there, it is highly likely that you might lose your baby, especially if you cannot hire a car to take you to the nearest hospital.” The men’s group shared that engagement or collaborative problem-solving between citizens and duty bearers was lacking. They noted that information dissemination from both the government and civil society was absent; even information meant for communities often fails to trickle down to those who need it.

The following recommendations were reached between citizens and government officials, focused on the implementation of existing policies and improving RMNCAH services:

- Ensure that the most vulnerable groups are entitled to and are effectively provided with equitable access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health, health prevention and mental health.
- Ensure that all pregnant women and children, irrespective of their status, are entitled to and effectively benefit from social protection.
- Promote policies allowing all adolescents and women including children to fully enjoy their fundamental rights, in particular their right to health.
- Strengthen information sharing and a feedback mechanism for citizens to know what is available at health facilities and what their entitlements are.
- Improve access to health services for adolescents with a specific focus on youth-friendly services at all health facilities.