The Citizens’ Hearings in Zambia, organised by World Vision, took the form of focus group discussions in two districts: Mbala and Kasama. These hearings were held in March 2015 and included members of the community senior nursing officers. A total of 48 participants attended the discussions in Mbala District and 85 participants joined the discussions in Kasama District.

Communities shared the challenges they face in accessing quality RMNCAH services. This was illustrated by Mr Mwansa, one of the citizens at the Kasama hearing, whose wife and baby died shortly after childbirth. At the hearing he recalled, “My wife delivered the child successfully with the help of neighbours but unfortunately my child died a few seconds later. While mourning the loss of our child, the placenta was stuck in my wife’s womb and eventually she died after five hours of trying so hard to remove it.”

He shared with participants the knowledge that his wife’s and child’s deaths could have been prevented if there had been a rural health centre (RHC) nearby, with certified health workers. Many people, especially pregnant mothers, are still dying because of long distances entailed in reaching the nearest RHC.

Participants acknowledged that the government has been implementing a range of reforms over the past 20 years in an effort to reduce both under-five and maternal mortality. However, much remains to be done. High levels of under-five malnutrition was also raised as a key challenge at the community discussion in Mbala.

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The government needs to provide important services like health as no one can do anything in this world unless they are healthy... We are dying when something can be done by our government... We need a health centre nearby, nothing else. We can’t afford to see our loved ones dying when these deaths can be avoided. I still cry now when I think of my wife and child.


Cephas Mwansa, citizen at the Kasama District Citizens’ Hearing, Zambia

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure access to health facilities, particularly for those living in rural areas, by increasing the number of RHCs. This is critical to help women access health facilities for childbirth as well as antenatal care and postnatal care visits, and immunisation.
- Improve under-five nutrition.
- Traditional leaders agreed to support improvements in the uptake of health services by community members by encouraging women to deliver at health centres.