

InCiDAnT - Malawi

The title for the project in Balaka is InCiDAnT, which stands for Increasing Citizen Demand for Accountability and Transparency.

The aims of the project are:

- To support women and men, and community leaders, to have an increased awareness of maternal health issues, and address the socio-cultural barriers that prevent women and children from accessing appropriate health services.
- To empower communities and actively hold duty-bearers accountable for improved service.
- To enable citizens to engage in budgetary and accountability processes actively, and influence the government of Malawi to increase health funding.
- To lobby and monitor the government of Malawi in terms of its transparency, responsiveness and accountability regarding health resource allocation, setting priorities and service provision at country, district and health facility level.

The project will run from May 2015 until March 2018.

The project is receiving £600,000 of funding from the Scottish Government and Christian Aid Scotland, through supporting churches will add £50,000.

The partners, FOCUS and MHEN have set about making plans to deliver the aims. It should be noted this planning phase has taken longer than initially envisaged but action is now being taken. For example partners have met with Health Action Groups, where they exist, and sought their views on how they operate at present, what involvement they have in the decision-making process particularly in relation to District Implementation Plans and how their influence could be improved.

The response from members of the Health Action Groups was:

- They do not know what District Implementation Plans are.
- They are not involved in the development of the District Implementation Plans
- They are not involved in the budget process.

This is not the most positive response but nor is it unexpected. As Health Action Groups are representative of the community, this lack of engagement means the community is not involved in the decision-making or planning process.

Using this information from the Health Action Groups the partners identified a stream of work that would need to take place, to enable them to fulfil their role. There is a very clear need for training on:

- How to participate in the planning process
- How to monitor the implementation of plans
- How to match budget and plans

One more positive piece of feed-back came from one of the community leaders who attended the partner's initial meetings. He said "Communities are waking up – they know their rights. They have every right to ask questions, they have a right to answers."

The InCiDAnT project is very much about supporting people to ask the right questions and get answers, about the services they want and how they are delivered – in this case maternal and child health services.

The partners have identified next steps as:

- Training and mobilisation of the Health Action Groups – helping them to analyse policy and budgets
- Encouraging the use of scorecards to rate services
- Gather evidence on present service provision and improve the collection of data
- Learn how to engage
- Specifically look at the involvement of women
- Improve the complaints process, and people's awareness of it.