

Claiming rights to health and education

A Voice to the People case study | December 2015

Improving access to vital vaccines



Eucharia Chukwurah, head nurse at Akwu-Ekwu health centre, with the new solar refrigerator.
Credit: Christian Aid/Nneoma Anieto

New mothers in Akwu-Ukwu community faced a number of challenges due to a lack of facilities at their local health centre. Vital vaccines were being stored at the community's local government office, 30 minutes away, or in the refrigerator at the house of a local chief, who was responsible for ensuring the drugs did not spoil before they could be used.

On many occasions, women were unable to wait for staff at the Akwu-Ukwu Community Health Centre to retrieve these drugs and went home without vaccinating their babies. Health centre staff also had to travel some distance to dispose of placentas after delivering babies.

Mike Chukwurah, a community leader in Akwu-Ukwu and a V2P community-based monitor (CBM), says training they received from V2P partner JDPC Onitsha gave them the confidence to approach the head of the local government's health department to explain their difficulties. 'For the first time, the

community took an interest in allocations due to them with a view to ensuring the allocations were indeed delivered,' he explains.

They found out a solar-powered refrigerator could be assigned to their health centre and contacted the local government chairman, who promised the refrigerator would be delivered.

Akwu-Ukwu Community Health Centre now boasts a brand new solar-powered refrigerator, removing the need for long journeys to store drugs and improving new mothers' access to vaccines for their children. In addition, the centre also now has a placenta disposal pit, dug by the local government.

Power is in their hands

Until recently, kerosene lanterns were used as a source of light during late night child deliveries at Ebenator Community Health Centre, while drugs received from the local health department often spoilt due to the erratic power supplies. In addition, community members complained of the poor attitude of the head nurse at the centre.

With training from the V2P project, people in Ebenator formed an advocacy group, initially inviting the head nurse to a meeting to express their displeasure. Then they requested an alternative power supply and a constant supply of necessary drugs and vaccines from their local government.

V2P group leader Eze Eugene Iwuchukwu describes the response they received as 'unprecedented'. He says the head nurse is demonstrating renewed dedication to her duties, while the local government has supplied the centre with a new power generator.

Buoyed by their successes, the community is seeking to establish the V2P group as a formal institution by holding regular elections to elect executive members.

On the road to better healthcare

Iyke Emma Okpala, Secretary-General of Ideani Town Union and a V2P CBM, remembers a time he had to give his mother a piggyback ride to the local health centre because the access road was impassable to vehicles. It was so bad, he says, because there was no culvert to channel water off the road. Pregnant women in labour sometimes had to walk up the undulating road, made irregular by deep water marks, to get to the health centre.

As a CBM, Iyke drew up a petition to the local government to construct a culvert and repair the badly damaged road. Many letters were written to the local government and many advocacy visits were made to further raise the complaint.



There are plans to establish the Ebenator V2P group, pictured above, as a formal institution. Credit: Christian Aid/Nneoma Aniето

Their efforts paid off. A culvert has now been built on the access road, while temporary repairs have been made to make the health centre more accessible. Nurses at the centre confirm that more people are now using the health centre, and birth rates have gone up significantly.

lyke now hopes they can get the government to repair the health centre road permanently and other roads in his community. But for now, he is happy with the progress they have made.



The new culvert at Ideani Community Health Centre. Credit: Christian Aid/Nneoma Anieto

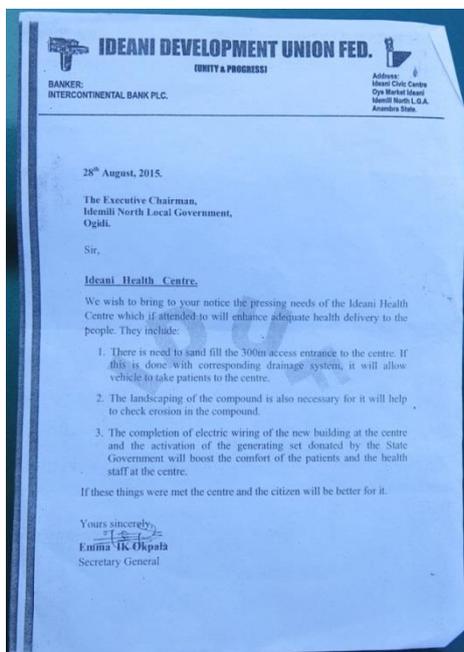
School made secure and sanitary

Alice Orji-Obasi, President General of the Women in Ajali community, isn't certain the advocacy initiatives she led were solely responsible for the renovation of the local primary school.

Security and sanitation for the school was one element of the charter of demand developed in Ajali after training received through the V2P project. Alice was chosen by other members of Ajali's V2P group to take this need up with the local government chairman.

The school had long been neglected and members of the community used it as a dumping ground for refuse. Disreputable characters also used the premises as a meeting ground. Alice asked the local government chairman to clear the school grounds of all refuse and emphasised the need for a security wall to deter members of the community from dumping rubbish.

The letter from Ideani community to their local government. Credit: Christian Aid/Nneoma Anieto



Alice says that although the local government chairman complained of a lack of funds, weeks after her visit the improvements she had recommended started being made. A wall was built and a gate installed, while other repairs were also being made to the school.

Alice cannot believe the changes were made solely as a result of her advocacy visit but she, and other members of the Ajali V2P group, have now resolved to pay more visits to the local government and make more requests from within the community's charter of demand.

Alice Orji-Obasi was chosen by her community to The letter from Ideani community to their local government. Credit: Christian Aid/Nneoma Anieto



Voice to the People (V2P) is a programme supporting vulnerable communities in Nigeria to hold state and local governments and their leaders to account, take part in making the decisions that affect their lives and raise their voices to demand the rights and services to which they are entitled.

The programme will reach 2.4 million people in the south eastern state of Anambra and directly build the capacity and confidence of citizens to hold duty bearers to account.

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