

Advocating for improved health services

A V2P story of change | July 2017



Community Based Monitors in Oshiri were instrumental to the posting of a doctor to the Primary Health Care facility, along with the planned upgrade of the facility by the Ministry of Health

About Voice to the People (V2P)

V2P is a project supporting vulnerable communities in Nigeria to hold service providers, local authorities and state governments to account, take part in the decision-making that affects their lives and raise their voices to demand the rights and services to which they are entitled.

Location: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Kaduna state.

Duration: July 2013 - March 2018

Funded by: UK aid

Partners: It is delivered by a consortium of national and state organisations, led by international development agency, Christian Aid.

Hard-to-reach communities, surviving with minimal public services

“Living in hard-to-reach, interior communities in Nigeria typically creates a barrier to accessing quality public services such as health care and education, especially given that the lack of infrastructure such as good road networks cuts them off from the major towns and cities where government presence is usually found. A consequence of this is usually the lack of human resource even in areas where structures have been erected and sometimes equipped to deliver services. Therefore, it is a rare and significant occurrence when such communities are able to attract some improvement in service delivery,

either on the man-power or infrastructure end.

For Oshiri, a somewhat remote community in Onicha LGA of Ebonyi state, the series of events that have happened in a bid to improve the quality of health services attainable in the Primary Health Centre (PHC) could only be as a result of the increase in knowledge about their rights as citizens. This knowledge along with skills gained through their interaction with V2P led to a successful engagement with the Commissioner for Health about the provision of a medical doctor in their Primary Health Centre (PHC).

Beyond a doctor being stationed in the PHC, the Commissioner also led a team to inspect the facility, and decided that in line with the plans of the state government for healthcare, this once overlooked facility should be upgraded.

Describing the problem with the PHC, Chief Elebe, the traditional Prime Minister (Onowu) of the community said:

“We didn’t have trained doctors or nurses to work there, and we couldn’t procure drugs because of finance. Women die when they go to deliver and when they have bad illnesses, they cannot be treated and before you take them from here to Abakiliki it is a long way out and most of them die on the way or get very weak.”

Ngwuta Ogonnaya, a Community-Based Monitor (CBM) attests that although there was a standard structure for the clinic, it was going to waste due to the lack of adequately qualified personnel to attend to patients. The facility for the last three years have not had a doctor, and had as its personnel only two Community Health Extension Workers (CHEWs) who provided basic first aid and referrals as is their mandate. Unable to get treatment for severe illnesses or drug prescriptions, community members resorted to travelling for long distances; with one hour being the shortest time to access healthcare despite having a health facility within reach.

In addition to not having any doctor, there have been no nurses in the facility, at least for the last 7 years, and this lack of personnel has affected the women more adversely than the men as a number of women have lost their lives during childbirth, complicating the already high maternal mortality rate the country faces.

‘The CHEWs have been able to take care of the sick, but a lot of women have ‘gone’ because of the lack of doctor. The time it would take to carry a woman in labour to the general hospital is long, and the woman may die before that time – it takes up to 1 hour,’ says Chinyere Alo, a member of the community.

Building capacity is key

‘They taught us so many things about our rights. Before then, we never knew that we could reach the government,’ says Ngwuta.

A key strategy in the V2P project, is the use of power analysis. Communities have been taught to carry out simple power analysis activities to identify where the power lies, and those who can cause a change in the situation they are faced with. For the members of Oshiri community, this was key to achieving result with this process.

‘We were taught about power mapping, and told that

there are some people that can help us to solve such problems. We mapped some people that can help; both visible and invisible,’ Ngwuta continued.

Going a step further, the community, led by the CBMs worked together to write an advocacy letter to the Commissioner of Health, something they had not tried before. To give more credence to the letter, the Eze of the community and deputy speaker of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly who is from the community signed off on it.

Working hand-in-hand with V2P partner, Hope Givers Initiative (HOG-I), the community paid an advocacy visit to the Commissioner through their community leaders in addition to submitting the letter, and as Ngwuta and Chinyere attested, these processes were the differences between success and failure in their experience with other efforts they had made to engage with the government concerning this issue. However, through the direct support provided by HOG-I, they were able to address this systematically, and the knowledge and skills they gained from this process will ensure sustainable development as they can continue to engage on their own.

‘We can do the process without HOG-I now, because of the power analysis training given to us; knowing the different people that can help with the issue,’ says Ngwuta.

The Ebonyi state Commissioner for Health, Dr. Daniel Umezurike, attests that the engagement he had with the community members and V2P through HOG-I led to the posting of a doctor to the facility.

‘When they approached me, I told them that if we can work together, we can post a Corp doctor to help man that facility. So far so good, we have done that, and the state is making effort to ensure that all the things needed to work are provided,’ he said.

‘If other communities start demanding for doctors, yes, my office will support them if we have enough and they demonstrate with evidence that they will be able to take care of doctor with government support,’ he added.

Although the government had begun to make plans to improve service delivery in the sector, the Oshiri engagement leveraged on these plans to attract an upgraded health facility, making the work of the government easier, and strengthening a relationship between both sides.

‘The state has a set target to upgrade one primary health centre per ward, and we had multi-ministerial committee headed by the Ministry of Health to go round and do a

needs assessment of what we need to upgrade the facilities to make at least one primary health centre functional 24/7. The selection criteria were based on the best health facility, the location; whether people live close by and activities. Oshiri health centre is the best in that ward and that was why we selected it to be upgraded and

that was what we did in the other 171 wards,' says Dr. Umezurike.

Besides the doctor, a pharmacist and a lab technologist have also been posted to the facility reported Akpuede Innocent, the Officer-in-Charge of Oshiri PHC.

