

Women and Children First

Improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes in Freetown, Sierra Leone



Communities supported
140
Women, children and adolescents benefiting
156,284

Problem

Sierra Leone has amongst the world's highest maternal and child mortality rates. Over 25% of childhood deaths occur during the neonatal period and a woman in Sierra Leone has a 1 in 17 risk of dying in pregnancy, childbirth and after birth.

Approach

Two complementary, inter-linked interventions: 1) community engagement and mobilisation through [Participatory Learning and Action \(PLA\) groups](#), and 2) health systems strengthening through Quality Improvement (QI) teams.

PLA groups

- 140 PLA groups were established and facilitated by trained, local volunteer women.
- Problems prioritised: malaria, diarrhoea, haemorrhage, anaemia, prolonged labour, and pneumonia.
- Strategies implemented by groups were: sensitization activities, environmental cleaning campaigns, by-laws and penalties, transport funds for emergencies.

QI teams

- 9 QI teams were established to improve quality and accessibility of maternal and neonatal care in peripheral health units.
- Strategies implemented by QI teams were: sensitization activities, rehabilitation and construction of ANC units, training of health workers, and logistics management.

Results

- Improvements in care-seeking: attending 4 or more ANC appointments (80% - 91%), delivery with skilled attendant (76% - 86%), receipt of postnatal care within 2 days after birth (52% - 86%).
- Improvements in service quality: 84% perceived that overall health facilities have improved, although negative staff behaviour is the most prevalent reason for a bad experience.

Lessons learned

- PLA groups are a relevant and effective way to stimulate community action on MNCH care and care seeking behaviours in a peri-urban setting.
- QI teams improved the communication and coordination between community members and health facilities.

Partner

Wellbodi Partnership

Funder

DFID and Comic Relief

Dates

2014 – 2018

Project population

200,000

Eastern Freetown, Sierra Leone



Figure 1: PLA group membership

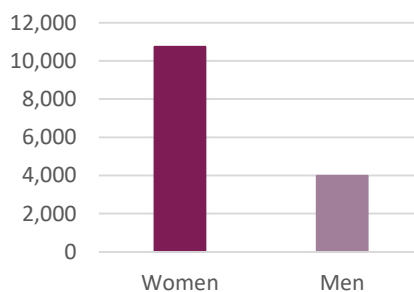
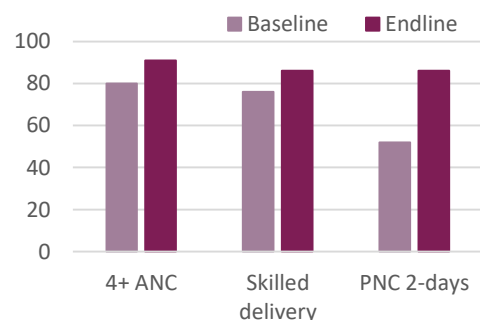


Figure 2: Care-seeking practices



Group facilitator:

"Most of the pregnant women are getting more knowledge about the danger signs during pregnancy [through the PLA groups] and because of that they now prefer to go to the health centre to deliver their baby."

Group member:

"Wellbodi Partnership, [QI teams], have improved the services in the health facility, the place is clean and when you deliver [at the health facility] you feel happy to deliver there."