



Maternal mortality in Malawi is amongst the highest in the world with 807 deaths per 100,000 live births. Neonatal mortality is also high and accounts for almost half of all infant deaths. High mortality rates are partly a result of poor health care for mothers and their infants caused by a lack of drugs and supplies, high turnover of health service providers, variable service quality and lack of ownership of health programmes by local communities.



**MaiMwana Project**

Research, funded by the Wellcome Trust and Save the Children - Saving Newborn Lives Program, and supported by the DFID funded Towards 4+5 Research Programme Consortium, is assessing the effectiveness of community-based health promotion interventions to reduce maternal and neonatal deaths and illness. The MaiMwana project is the first such programme to take place in Africa where issues such as HIV/AIDS and malaria have an impact on maternal and child health. Interventions include women's groups, who meet monthly with trained female facilitators to discuss maternal and child health problems and solutions; and volunteer counsellors who are trained in nutrition and breastfeeding counselling and also provide advice and support on family planning, birth-preparedness and the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.

MaiMwana has also been working in partnership with the District Health Office and community representatives to promote maternal and child health issues to the wider community through a radio programme called Phukusi la Moyo (Bag of Life), aired at Mudziwathu community radio station and funded by Commonwealth of Learning. The weekly programme consists of interviews with community members who share real life experiences on maternal and child health problems and encourage other people to seek medical care if they experience these problems.



Members of the Kamangilira group are listening to a Phukusi la Moyo programme on the radio

The information disseminated through the radio programme has provided communities with knowledge to identify several health issues including danger signs during pregnancy, signs of hypertension and malaria during pregnancy. Information is also provided about the rights and responsibilities of health workers and the importance of attending antenatal and postnatal care services. The radio programme, in conjunction with the women's groups and voluntary counsellors, has had important benefits to communities who now seek medical attention as soon as complications arise.

In August 2009, MaiMwana participated in the launch of a Campaign for Accelerated Reduction in Maternal and Neonatal Mortality Action (CARMMA) at Mchinji Community Centre. At the event, volunteer counsellors and women's group members met with the Vice President and Good Will Ambassador of Safe Motherhood, Hon Joyce Banda, who praised MaiMwana's activities as effective ways of sharing knowledge with women and empowering them to "take charge of their own lives!"



Vice President Hon Joyce Banda is accompanied by delegates at the CARMMA launch