White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) formed over a decade ago to give a voice to the women at risk of dying in childbirth. Our mission is to inspire and convene advocates who campaign to uphold the right of all women to be safe and healthy before, during and after childbirth. We help citizens recognize their rights and hold their governments to account for commitments made to maternal and newborn health.

**THE PROMISE**

More than 24 women and 144 newborns die each day in Tanzania due to labor complications and lack of quality care. Many of these deaths can be prevented with adequate investment in Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (CEmONC).

In 2008, the Government of Tanzania committed to ensuring that 50% of health centers provide CEmONC by 2015. However, the government has failed to operationalize this commitment and has made insufficient progress in improving maternal and newborn health.

**THE EVIDENCE**

Official government data on the availability of CEmONC and progress on the government’s commitment is not available because this information is not tracked through official channels. However, WRA Tanzania decided to conduct health facility assessments in one of Tanzania’s 30 administrative regions, Rukwa region, serving a population of more than one million citizens. In the initial assessment in 2013, WRA Tanzania found that none of the health centers were providing CEmONC.

Health centers lacked critical infrastructure, equipment, and supplies, and most health centers did not have the health workers necessary to provide emergency services. Only one health center was equipped to provide blood transfusion and only two were providing cesarean section. When women faced complications, they were referred to the regional referral hospital located an average of 94.5 kilometers (59 miles) from the local health centers.

After speaking with community members, health workers, health facility leaders and district, regional, and national officials, WRA Tanzania identified three major barriers impeding the delivery of the government’s commitment:

- A lack of reliable baseline information on the availability of CEmONC at all levels;
- Lack of plans and budget allocated to operationalizing the commitment at the regional and district levels;
- Weak social accountability, with citizens unaware of commitments and lacking opportunities to engage in planning and monitoring.

**THE CAMPAIGN**

WRA Tanzania’s campaign, “Be Accountable so Mothers Can Live,” set out to address these barriers by building on the work of member organizations (JHPIEGO, PLAN, and Africare) and accelerating progress in Rukwa region. This approach allowed WRA Tanzania to demonstrate that the impact of their activities that could be replicated in other regions and also provided evidence and an entry point for national advocacy.

**Focus on Rukwa**

WRA Tanzania’s campaign in Rukwa began by addressing the lack of reliable information on the availability of CEmONC. WRA Tanzania’s National Coordinator, the Rukwa Regional Health Management Team, and WRA Tanzania’s Rukwa Regional Focal
Mobilizing citizens & amplifying the demand for accountability

Equipped with information from the assessments, WRA Tanzania set out to address the lack of citizen engagement and accountability and advocate for district and regional plans. WRA Tanzania worked with member organizations, religious leaders, and village health teams to raise awareness amongst citizens of the gap between what had been promised and what was available. WRA Tanzania then mobilized more than 16,500 citizens to advocate for what was needed via petitions to their district and regional officials asking for the government commitment to be upheld. WRA Tanzania also played an essential role ensuring that citizens’ frustrations were channeled into constructive advocacy efforts. In December 2013, citizens began demonstrating after a woman died in childbirth due to a lack of blood stock at one of the health facilities in Rukwa. WRA Tanzania worked with citizens to ensure that their experience was heard and responded to by the regional and national policymakers. Throughout the campaign, WRA Tanzania focused on providing platforms for citizens to engage in monitoring the government’s responses and for their voices to continue to be heard. Through media partnerships, WRA Tanzania was able to ensure that health officials and other government leaders heard the stories and evidence collected from mothers and their families and that community demands were discussed and addressed. With the help of the media, the gap between what had been promised and what was available became evident and policy makers were forced to respond to their constituents.

Supporting Policymakers to respond to citizen demand

While supporting citizens in advocating to district and regional policy makers, WRA Tanzania also worked to support district and regional policy makers and planners to respond and act on the citizens’ demands. WRA convened meetings in conjunction with the Regional Administrative Secretary and Regional Medical Officer to present its assessment findings and recommendations to Rukwa officials. With buy-in from regional officials, WRA Tanzania moved to each district and convened technical meetings with each council health management teams to review the assessment findings, identify priorities and set plans and budgets to address the gaps.

WRA Tanzania worked with these officials to use evidence from the health facility assessments to plan the immediate upgrades needed at each facility and to budget for future upgrades that could not be completed with available funds. Once budgets were prepared, WRA Tanzania convened a meeting with all the district health officials from Rukwa to compare each district’s budget with the findings from each health facility assessments to ensure all gaps were covered and reflected in the budget. Throughout the campaign, WRA Tanzania continued to support district councils in monitoring CEmONC spending and advocating at the national level when funds were not disbursed on time and in full.

Campaigning at the National Level

While advocating for the fulfillment of the government’s commitment in Rukwa, WRA Tanzania knew that national level advocacy was essential to accelerating progress. The first order of business was to persuade the Prime Minister to require districts to
include a specific line item for CEmONC in their annual budgets, so that allocation and spending on CEmONC would be transparent and could be monitored. In fact, Rukwa councils would not be able to budget for CEmONC until this directive was included in the budgeting guidance. In order to persuade the Prime Minister, WRA Tanzania built on the 16,500 signature petition from Rukwa and persuaded 96 Members of Parliament to join the citizens of Rukwa in calling for a specific budget line for CEmONC.

Once again, WRA Tanzania played an important role as convener, liaising between citizens and government. They invited the Prime Minister to serve as the guest of honor at the annual White Ribbon Day, which provided a platform for the Prime Minister, who was responding to the citizens’ and the parliamentarians’ call for action.

Throughout the campaign, WRA Tanzania ensured that citizens were consulted, shared their stories, suggested improvements, and engaged with their leaders. Photo ©WRA Tanzania

WRA’s strategic partnership with Tanzania’s most popular radio and television stations (IPP Media’s ITV and Radio One) played a critical role in building the pressure on government officials to respond to citizens’ needs. WRA Tanzania involved several national media channels that promoted their campaign messages. The partnership between the Alliance and its media partners helped generate interactive programing to showcase the challenges within health centers, and placed issues related to maternal health at the heart of news programing. Each year WRA Tanzania organize a White Ribbon Day to commemorate all women who have died in childbirth, and to publicly discuss how to prevent other deaths. This year, the event was widely covered by the media, resulting in 4 TV appearances, 2 radio talks, and 9 articles that reached 90% of people countrywide. The media partnerships forged by WRA over many years allowed them to report on the outcomes of meetings with government representatives and on any further commitments that were made as a result of WRA advocacy.

**GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE**

The government responded to WRA Tanzania’s campaign at various levels, reflecting the shared responsibility for operationalizing the government’s commitment to CEmONC.

In Rukwa, WRA Tanzania addressed all three major barriers to the government’s commitment. Citizens, health facilities, district and regional planners were equipped with necessary information and they planned and budgeted to fulfill the government’s commitment. As of April 2015, Rukwa region has succeeded in ensuring that 50% of health centers provide CEmONC. Thanks to the work of WRA Tanzania, member organizations, advocates and supporters, women in each district of Rukwa now have access to life saving care. Moreover, citizens remain engaged and are working with health facility managers and officials to monitor progress and improvements in CEmONC.

The results and influence of WRA Tanzania’s campaign reached beyond the borders of Rukwa. As a result of the campaign, Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda directed all district councils to “allocate an adequate budget for CEmONC, including operating facilities, a safe blood supply, and adequate equipment and human resources.” In response to this directive, all 169 districts of Tanzania included a specific budget for CEmONC in their 2015 Comprehensive Council Health Plans. WRA regional teams and member organizations are now scaling up the work from Rukwa, conducting health facility assessments and supporting district health and management teams to plan and budget appropriately.

“As the government, we have to ensure that there is a special budget that will enable the majority of poor women to access comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care near their homes.”

- Prime Minister Pinda (March 2014)
At the national level, WRA built such strong support for CEmONC amongst Members of Parliament that they were able to influence key priorities, such as adding maternal health to the Government’s Big Results Now strategy and securing an additional 82 billion Tanzanian Shillings (48 million US Dollars) for maternal health supplies despite a significant reduction to the annual health budget.

WRA Tanzania’s campaign has addressed the barriers to the implementation of CEmONC in Rukwa and demonstrated that progress can be accelerated in a short period of time with concentrated effort, community engagement and political will.

“We are not ready to see women die while President Jakaya Kiwete says maternal mortality is decreasing. We have yet to implement the Abuja Declaration. Are you saying this is optional?”
- Zaynabu Vullu, Member of Parliament

THE IMPACT

The ultimate impact of this campaign is that women and newborns have access to life saving services that were previously unavailable. Once CEmONC was in place in Rukwa, 59 women received Caesarean sections and blood transfusions at health facilities that in the previous two months could not provide CEmONC. In addition to the impact on mothers and newborns, the availability of CEmONC has affected the broader community, as health centers are better equipped to provide for their needs - surgical theaters are now operational, health facilities are better staffed, and equipment, drugs and supplies are more widely available. A community member whose wife suffered severe burns was recently treated at one of the upgraded health centers and her husband expressed his gratitude and explained that without such services, his wife would not have survived.

Underlying the ultimate impact is a stronger health delivery system. Citizens are aware of their rights and the government’s commitments and policy makers are listening and responding to citizens’ needs.

The impact in Rukwa is clear and with the support of civil society organizations and political champions this impact can be scaled countrywide.

The voice of community members has been at the center of the WRA campaign in Tanzania, and is central to achieving lasting change and impact. Photo ©WRA Tanzania
## Problem

The Government of Tanzania committed to ensuring that 50% of health centers provide CEmONC by 2016. However, the government failed to operationalize this commitment and made insufficient progress in improving maternal and newborn health.

## Barriers

| A lack of reliable information on the availability of CEmONC at all levels. | Lack of plans and budget allocated to operationalizing the commitment at the regional and district levels. | Weak social accountability; citizens unaware of commitments and lacking opportunities to engage in planning and monitoring. |

## Campaign

| Mobilize citizens and amplify demand for accountability. | Support policymakers to respond to citizen demand and deliver on commitments. | Campaign at the national level. |

## Government’s Response

| Rukwa region succeeded in ensuring that 50% of health centers provide CEmONC. | All 189 districts of Tanzania included a specific budget for CEmONC. | Maternal health added to government’s Big Results Now strategy; plus $48 million for maternal health supplies. |

## Impact

More women and newborns have access to life saving services that were previously inaccessible or unavailable.