Success Story: Sipatunyana Rural Health Center’s Community Buy-In

Sipatunyana Rural Health Center, Kalomo District.

Community members gather with their midwife around the house they are building for her – dedicating their own time and materials to encourage her to continue her invaluable work of saving their mothers and their newborns.

Saving Mother’s Giving Life (SMGL) is an endeavour to reduce Maternal Mortality by 50% in Kalomo District, Southern Province of Zambia by the end of 2012.

Kalomo District has over 14,000 births a year, only 5 medical doctors, no ambulance, 1 Operating theatre and less than 50% of the health facilities have reliable electricity.

In order to accomplish the goal, given the limited resources, ZCAHRD has employed Clinical Mentors to work in health facilities, alongside the health facility staff, to provide routine on the job training and mentorship in Emergency Obstetric Neonatal Care (EmONC).

One such health facility is Sipatunyana Rural Health Center. Sipatunyana is located 43 kilometers from the nearest hospital – one which doesn’t have an operating theater. There is no electricity. Although there are solar panels, there is no battery to power their life saving equipment. There is one clinical officer, a nurse and thanks to the SMGL Endeavor, there is now a midwife – Mrs Agatha Chizonde. In an average week she will deliver approximately 3-4 babies – many of which will occur at night, by candle light. One of the biggest challenges the Zambia Ministry of Health faces is not finding staff for these remote facilities, but housing for the staff. Since she was recruited for the SMGL project in February, Agatha has been sleeping in a small, cluttered office at the Sipatunyana health clinic – there is no housing in this small, remote community for her. This situation is obviously not sustainable for her, or anyone. Realizing the importance of having a midwife with years of experience to attend to their mothers, Sipatunyana community leaders or headmen gathered to devise a plan on how to retain Agatha at the health center. They combine resources and efforts to build a 3-bedroom house. This is a true example of the power a community can have when they believe in the value of women.