ONE WORLD ACTION
FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD

Making a Difference

Citizen's and their organisations and networks contributing to change
OWA PPA 2008-9: Case study 33

Title of Case Study:	MEETING THE ZAMBIAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE

1. PPA partner name	One World Action
2. Countries highlighted in case study	Zambia

More than 80% of Zambia's estimated 10 million people live on 1 US Dollar or less per day. HIV and AIDS make the situation even worse and women emerge as the worst victim.

DFID-funded research has demonstrated that Zambian laws are not adequately protecting the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV). The civil society organisations have recommended lobbying for the enactment of a legislation which addresses HIV and AIDS in an appropriate manner.

Backed by the development agency One World Action through its Programme Partnership Agreement with DFID, SALAN – Southern African Legal Assistance Network – took the lead and tried to target decision makers at national level.

Representatives of SALAN managed to meet personally the members of the Parliamentary Committee on Health, Community Development and Social Welfare. They managed to build personal relationships which will lead to an innovative collaboration between government and civil society which will see the women and PLHIV of Zambia as the ultimate beneficiaries.

First time ever

The day-long meeting was held on the 25th of March 2009. The unprecedented event was a success. Five of the eight member of the Committee participated, which represented a very high turnout compared with other parliamentary meetings. Unfortunately, the low representation of

women in parliament, a meagre 23%, explains why of the eight members who participated to the meeting, only one was a woman. This was the first ever such meeting with civil society representatives and the MPs were eager to learn. They were very receptive and ready to digest the information provided.

It was not easy…

The process to get there was not straightforward. SALAN started making arrangements to meet with the Committee in March 2008, but only managed to do so a year later in March 2009. Many issues caused the meeting to be delayed, from legal procedural technicalities to the death of the President of Zambia and the resulting elections.

…but some success

SALAN managed to meet MPs directly, share with them the work that they do on HIV and AIDS, discuss the current legislation as well as the existing challenges regarding HIV/AIDS and the human rights based approach and stress to them the importance of enacting legislation that protects the rights of PLHIV.

One of the key functions of the Committee is to make recommendations to the government and the MPs ensured that they would utilize the information obtained from the meeting with SALAN to come up with a plan of action for the enactment of progressive legislation on HIV/AIDS. They suggested that SALAN and other NGOs could assist them in developing a motion on progressive HIV/AIDS legislation. The MPs also promised that they would assist SALAN and partners in reaching out to the entire Parliament to advocate for better protection of PLHIV's rights.

As most of the Committee's members were representing very rural and remote constituencies, with difficult access to information, they committed to disseminate the information gathered from the meeting to their electorate during meetings in their constituencies. Also, discrimination of PLHIV is rampant in the rural areas which they represent as people are not aware of their rights and are unable to challenge discrimination. The MPs committed to start referring HIV and AIDS legal issues affecting their constituents who are mostly marginalized people.

Closer and better informed politicians

The parliamentarians said that it was very rare for NGOs to approach the committee and they asked SALAN and its partners to meet them on a regular basis. They said that they will now speak more confidently and with authority when they are debating in Parliament issues concerning the rights of the people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. They are now more aware and better informed.

FACTS AND STATS

- According to UNAIDS, in Zambia more than a million people are estimated to live with HIV
- In 2007 more than 50,000 people died due to HIV/AIDS
- Despite Zambia having had the first case of HIV/AIDS more than 25 years ago, (in 1983) the jurisprudence on HIV/AIDS in Zambia is almost non existent.
- One World Action through its Programme Partnership Agreement with DFID, has over the past three years committed more than £44,000 to SALAN to conduct research on HIV/AIDS legislation as well as on women's rights and customary law.