Women and Children First works to improve maternal and newborn health in some of the poorest communities in the world. We currently manage programmes in Malawi, Bangladesh and India where we support local organisations to develop solutions to maternal and newborn health problems and encourage women to seek skilled healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth. Our programmes establish women’s groups which empower women to identify and address their health needs and support health service improvements. We also advocate locally, nationally and internationally to improve government policy and funding for maternal and newborn health. This newsletter tells you about our work since the summer of 2008.

Did you know:

- Ninety-eight per cent of maternal and newborn deaths occur in poor countries.
- Providing timely, accessible, quality care could prevent almost three of the four million infant deaths each year and substantially reduce maternal deaths...

**Fundraising and volunteers**

Women and Children First has gone strength to strength with new fundraising initiatives.

During the second half of 2008 we benefited from the expertise of two fundraising consultants, Giles Meyer and Lian Bradley, and a volunteer, Laura Hancock. We have prepared proposals for a number of UK and US trusts and established some networking activities to interest more people in our work. We will intensify our fundraising in 2009 as it is vital that we secure additional funding to enable us to reach more poor communities with our life-saving work.

**Bangladesh Update**

Our Big Lottery Fund project with the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (BADAS) came to a successful conclusion in September 2008. By the end of the project, 162 women’s groups have successfully developed and implemented low-cost strategies in their communities to improve their maternal and newborn health; we have seen a reduction in newborn mortality by 12% and there have been no maternal deaths in the women’s groups for the last two years.
Regional programme update, Bangladesh and India

This new programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund and being implemented in collaboration with the University of London’s Centre for International Health and Development (CIHD) and NGO partners in Bangladesh and India will continue and expand work to date in both countries.

In Bangladesh, BADAS will scale up the community mobilisation activities into areas of the Districts of Bogra, Faridpur and MaulviBazar which do not yet have women’s groups, as well as continue to support the 162 groups which have been meeting for four years. The existing groups are now discussing other problems that impact on their lives and well-being, for example poor nutrition, domestic violence and family planning. In India, the programme will work with in the States of Jharkand and Orissa. Our Indian partner, Ekjut, has been working with CIHD for four years and will continue to mobilise communities to address the health needs of mothers, newborns and children. Women and Children First is working with both BADAS and Ekjut to develop advocacy strategies to ensure maternal, newborn and child health is a key component of local, national and international health policy, and we will work with the BBC World Service Trust to develop the programme’s communication plans.

Malawi Programme Story

Irene lives in a village in Ntcheu where there are no project activities, but the local leader ruled that all the villages in this area should copy what the project is doing because improvement in maternal and newborn health are evident. So Irene was trained by a health worker on how to record pregnant women, births and the deaths that take place in her village, and she and a friend now advise pregnant women to go for antenatal care, await labour at a hospital and receive postnatal care.

Malawi update

The Health Foundation Consortium project which runs across the Districts of Kasungu, Lilongwe and Salima, has been rebranded with a new local name – Maikhanda – meaning mother and baby. Maikhanda was the winning entry to a competition run by the local staff, which asked all 729 women’s groups to enter a relevant and meaningful name to them. The women’s groups continue to become more aware of maternal and newborn health issues in their villages and are being encouraged to demand improved healthcare with the support of other community members.

Sadly, The Big Lottery Fund grant that was contributing towards our other project activities in the Ntcheu District came to an end in August. The end of grant survey showed excellent results including increased knowledge of danger signs, increased uptake of antenatal care and hospital deliveries, and a very welcome 14% decrease in newborn deaths. We are actively seeking funds to continue the project for another year to enable existing activities to become firmly embedded in the local healthcare system and are delighted to announce that we have secured two small grants from the Hilden Charitable Fund and CIHD. However, more funding is needed to ensure that more lives will be saved throughout 2009.
Advocacy

With funding from UNFPA, we have successfully built on the workshop we held in March 2008 to harness UK advocacy expertise on maternal, newborn and child health by facilitating improved communication among advocates and stimulating joint working. We have developed an internet-based communications hub focusing on the two Millennium Development Goals which address maternal and child health (MDGs 4 and 5) and produced a newsletter. Both of which are designed to keep UK advocates up to date on the developments of the past year, important upcoming events in 2009 and provide access to resources and tools. In December we hosted a meeting at which UK advocates began to work on a joint advocacy strategy and plans for 2009 and beyond.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Population, Reproductive Health and Development (APPG) held Parliamentary Hearings on Maternal Morbidity in December 2008 to which Women and Children First submitted written evidence. The Chief Executive, Ros Davies, was on the Hearings Panel and the Programmes Officer, Rosey McDonald, gave oral evidence based on Women and Children First’s work in the field. Building on success and feedback at the March workshop, we will convene a similar meeting on 6 May 2009. Planning is underway in collaboration with the Royal College of Midwives and the White Ribbon Alliance and the APPG’s Report on the Hearings into Maternal Morbidity will be launched after the meeting.

Upcoming

**WCF to benefit from February V-Day performances**

*Tickets on sale now!*

V-Day is a global movement to end violence against women and girls that raises funds and awareness through benefit productions of Playwright/Founder Eve Ensler’s award winning play The Vagina Monologues and other artistic works.

How you can help

Additional funding will enable us to meet the maternal and newborn healthcare needs and save the lives of more women and children in Asia and Africa. There are lots of ways to support our work from making a donation or remembering us in your will to holding fundraising events and introducing Women and Children First and our work to people you know. Call us to discuss your ideas!

Women and Children First are delighted to be selected as a beneficiary of the V-day events. The performances make for a thought provoking and entertaining evening. Please invite your friends and colleagues!

The performances will be held at the New Players Theatre in central London between 17th and 21st February 2009. Further details and links to purchase tickets are on our website, or visit [www.vdaylondon.com](http://www.vdaylondon.com)

HQ NEWS

**New office**

Women and Children First finally has a home to call its own! The team is settling in well to the new North London office. Please note our new contact details at the foot of this newsletter.

**Farewell**

We are sad to say that Rosey McDonald is leaving Women and Children First for pastures new. Since joining Women and Children First in March 2006, Rosey has been a key player in our achievements thus far. We wish her a warm and fond farewell and all the best for her future career.

**New roles**

Recruitment is underway for the new roles of Programmes Manager and Fundraising Manager, both of whom we hope will join in early 2009.

Donations can be made at [www.wcf-uk.org](http://www.wcf-uk.org) or by cheque to Women and Children First (UK). Join our e-information list by emailing us at [info@wcf-uk.org](mailto:info@wcf-uk.org) and we will keep you updated on our progress.