

# Townhall Meetings: An Effective Tool for Health and Family Planning Action

This brief describes the use of town hall meetings to build community confidence in their leaders, open up communication between leaders and citizens, and strengthen family planning and health programmes.

## BACKGROUND

Since 2015, the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative 2 (NURHI) has supported the states of Lagos, Oyo and Kaduna to increase use of modern contraception for optimal birth spacing through a combination of service delivery strengthening, demand generation, and advocacy. NURHI's advocacy efforts aim to address three key challenges: 1) underfunding and poor accountability for family planning and other health programmes, 2) communication gaps between citizens and their leaders, and 3) negative perceptions of family planning among the public and its leaders.



Town Hall Meeting in Ibadan SW

“Community members have increased trust in their government after hearing of the good things [their leaders] have been doing, and what more is yet to come, thus building confidence in [their leaders],” NURHI 2 Senior Program Officer-Advocacy, Demand Generation, Lagos, after town hall meetings in Lagos state.

NURHI has trained Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and Advocacy Core Groups (ACG) to influence policy implementation, increase financial support for family planning and other health programmes, and hold leadership accountable to its commitments. WDCs are comprised of community members who are advocates for health and family planning while ACGs are civil society organisations interested in the well-being and health of their communities. NURHI has also helped open up lines of communication between communities and their leaders through support for town hall meetings.

## TOWN HALL MEETINGS

An existing platform in most Local Government Areas (LGA) in Lagos, Kaduna and Oyo states, these one-day meetings of 40 – 80 people are called by government and attended by local government chairmen, council executives, health workers, faith based leaders, and community members. During the meetings, community members raise concerns, while leaders share progress on their commitments and answer questions. In LGAs where NURHI operates, ACGs assist leaders to organise townhall meetings focused on family planning.

Townhall meetings are advantageous to both leaders and communities, providing opportunities for community members to raise questions and seek answers from their leaders. This raises the visibility of policy leaders, builds trust and improves relations with their constituents. By giving leaders and advocates an opportunity to voice support for family planning, townhall meetings also boost couples' confidence in family planning.



The Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative (NURHI 2) is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and a private philanthropist to increase the use of modern contraception in Kaduna, Oyo and Lagos states. It is a five-year follow-on to the successful NURHI project which increased contraceptive use in six Nigerian cities between 2009 and 2015.

ACGs organise the townhall meetings in government-provided venues, working closely with elected leaders. In Lagos state, where townhall meetings are regularly convened for all manner of issues, it was a matter of getting government officials to make family planning and childbirth spacing the issue of discussion during regularly scheduled meetings. ACGs also help leaders to invite community members, council executives, chairmen, family planning service providers, and traditional and religious leaders. WDCs and community mobilisers follow up invitees and make communities aware of the meeting to ensure attendance.

Town hall meetings have been indispensable advocacy tools. They have inspired leaders to publicly commit to strengthen services, and provided a stage for leaders and community advocates to endorse family planning and allay fears and concerns.

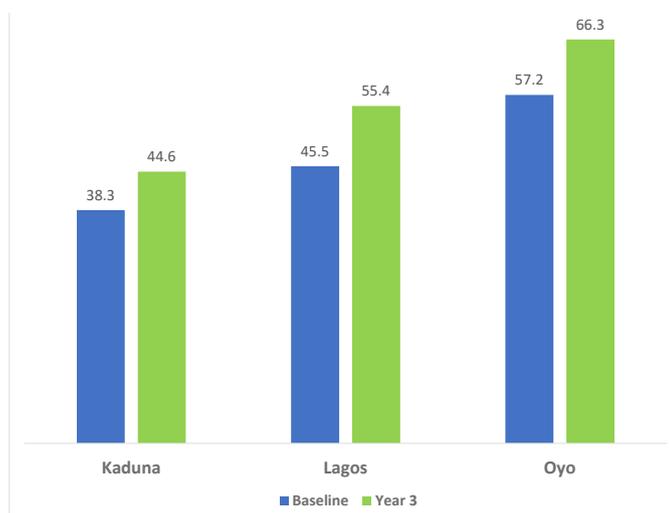
According to findings from omnibus surveys conducted by NURHI 2 in 2016 and 2018, women in Lagos, Kaduna and Oyo had greater confidence in local government leaders' efforts to improve access to good quality FP services in 2018, after town hall meetings about family planning and child-birth spacing were conducted.



"Bringing the community together at the town hall meetings gave us the platform to remove a lot of myths and misconception about family planning. We were able to reach the people with the correct information about FP especially from the religious aspect. The myths were obliterated,"

**Sheikh Salahuddeen Busairi**  
**Chief Imam Ajimofowoku**  
**Ibadan Oyo State.**

**Percent of women who believe that their local government is doing enough to promote access to quality family planning services (Flexitrack Survey Reports 2016 and 2018)**



Townhall meetings also contributed to increased LGA expenditures on family planning services between 2016 and 2018 in 10 LGAs in Lagos and 15 LGAs in Oyo state. In Oyo state, LGA expenditures on family planning more than doubled between 2016 and 2018.

