**Community Walls of Good Health:**

**Community-led monitoring and advocacy tools to improve maternal and child health outcomes in rural Ghana**

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**Background** In the year 2000, Ghana Health Service (GHS) adopted its flagship Community Health Planning and Services (CHPS) concept. With community engagement as a key component, the CHPs initiative utilized participatory tools to monitor and advocate for improved health with a focus on maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the GHS in collaboration with target communities implemented the Community Walls of Good Health (COWAH) strategy. COWAH is used in CHPS as part of the community decision system. In each community, a five-member committee rallies and empowers community members to support MCH data collection for planning and decision-making purposes. It also provides mechanisms for these communities to advocate for quality MCH service and availability.

**Methods** CRS carried out a baseline (October 2011) and end line survey (September 2015) in 240 communities to measure change in MCH outcomes where the COWAH, a participatory community-led monitoring and advocacy tool from the CHPS initiative were used.

**Results** Skilled assisted deliveries increased from 30% to 88% (p =0.002); Initiation of breastfeeding increased from 48% to 75% (p<0.001); exclusive breastfeeding improved from 47% to 92%-p>0.001; proportion of children(6-23months) fed on appropriate complementary foods increased from 55% to 98%: P <0.000); proportion of children (0-23 months) with diarrhea who received ORS/home fluids increased from 42% to 66%; p =0.005). Also, the COWAH concept contributed to reduction in maternal mortality from 258 to 81 per 100,000 livebirths as well as under five and infant mortality reduced from 98 and 72 per 1000 livebirths respectively to 26 and 32 per 1000 livebirths respectively. Among children 0-23 months, stunting rates reduced from 17% to 13%, p>0.001; underweight reduced from 43% to 11% and wasting reduced from 26% to 8%; p<0.001.

**Conclusions** COWAH strategy contributed to improved community ownership and engagement for primary healthcare provision and utilization. Also, COWAH appears promising as it impacts positively on MCH outcomes. Additionally, COWAH was found to strengthen community health systems as it served as a participatory community-led monitoring and advocacy tool. The strategy has since been adopted by some districts in its northern and upper east regions of Ghana as well as other CRS Country programs including Burkina Faso and Niger. COWAH has the potential of contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3.