



# Report on the launch of the community-based ear and hearing care project

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## Project implementing partners



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## INTRODUCTION

Zambart, in partnership with Brighton and Sussex Medical School, the Malawi-Liverpool Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme, Deaf Kids International and the Cambodia University of Technology and Science, with funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) are implementing a community-based ear and hearing care research project. The research aims to address a key question: How can we best enable community-based ear and hearing care?. The study implementation sites are in communities across Zambia, Malawi, and Cambodia.

On 23rd July 2025, the project in Zambia launched the Community-based ear and hearing care project at Pamodzi Hotel in Lusaka. This launch was only for the Zambian stakeholders (not the entire consortium) to mark the official kick-off in Zambia.

## OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

The event brought together 54 participants, including senior representatives from the Ministry of Health, implementing partners, researchers, academia, clinicians, and community representatives. The Guest of Honour was Honourable Princess Kasune, Member of Parliament for Kembe Constituency (where one project site is located) and Minister of Justice a known long-time advocate for ear and hearing care. Her keynote speech was read by the Central Province Director of Health in the Ministry of Health.

The launch featured presentations on the project's goals, methodology, and implementation strategy. Community members shared testimonies highlighting the need for accessible ear and hearing care, particularly in underserved areas.

Districts in which the study will be implemented highlighted the need for this project following the burden of ear conditions, and challenges they face.



## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE LAUNCH

Hearing loss and chronic ear conditions remain under-prioritised in Zambia's primary healthcare services, despite their profound impact on communication, education, livelihoods, and social inclusion. Addressing this gap is essential to improving the quality of life and participation of individuals, particularly those affected by chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM) and children who are deaf. In response, this project seeks to generate evidence and inform sustainable, community-based solutions for ear and hearing care in Zambia.

This launch marked the official introduction of the project to stakeholders and the wider community, laying the groundwork for meaningful collaboration and collective action in Advancing ear and hearing care in Zambia.

## EVENT DETAILS

Key speakers:

### 1. Principal Investigator's Remarks

Dr. Mohammed Limbada delivered the welcoming remarks on behalf of the Principal Investigator and Country Lead, Dr. Kwame Shanaube. He emphasised the significance of the launch as a major milestone in addressing chronic ear and hearing conditions—an often-neglected area of public health in Zambia. Dr. Limbada highlighted in addition to achieving the project's, the project would help reduce stigma associated with chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM), improve health-seeking behaviour, and promote inclusive and community-based care. He acknowledged the honour of working in partnership with the Ministry of Health, community health workers, and both local and international collaborators. He also extended gratitude to the Guest of Honour (in absentia) for accepting the invitation to officiate, commending her leadership in advocating for inclusive and equitable health services, including ear and hearing care.



*Dr. Limbada delivering the opening remarks*

## 2. Keynote speech

The keynote speech was delivered on behalf of the Guest of Honour by the Central Province Health Director, Dr. Elijah Mutoloki. He emphasised that hearing health is a fundamental human right, essential for communication, education, employment, dignity, and societal participation. He lauded the project as more than a research initiative — a bold step toward bridging access gaps in ear and hearing care, particularly for underserved and rural populations.

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***“hearing health is not a luxury but a human right”***

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He highlighted that the selected study sites symbolise a future where quality health services are brought closer to communities, ensuring no one is left behind. Dr. Mutoloki acknowledged the challenges and stigma faced by individuals — especially children and the elderly — living with hearing loss, CSOM, or deafness. Such stigma, he stressed, exacerbates suffering, delays access to care, and undermines confidence.

He praised the project for promoting inclusion and breaking down barriers through community-based interventions. “This,” he said, “is social inclusion in action.”



He called upon researchers and implementers to uphold the highest ethical standards and generate quality evidence, while also encouraging the communities to open up their doors and participate in this research. He urged more stakeholders to support and amplify the project's efforts, and formally declared the project officially launched.

*Dr Elijah Mutoloki delivering the keynote speech*

## 3. Kabwe and Chibombo District ear and hearing care overview

Mr. Vernon Mungala (Kabwe) and Sister Grace Nyati (Chibombo), representing their respective district clinical care teams, presented an overview of the burden of ear and hearing conditions within the study areas. They emphasised the pressing challenges encountered at the primary care level, including a shortage of trained personnel, limited



diagnostic tools, stockouts of antibiotics, and inadequate community awareness of ear health.

Their reflections highlighted the urgent need to strengthen service delivery for ear and hearing care in rural and underserved settings. Both presenters expressed optimism that the new project would address some of these critical gaps by improving diagnostic capacity, building local healthworker skills, and increasing access to essential treatment. Their contributions underscored the importance of sustained and collaborative action to tackle this often neglected area of public health.

#### 4. Project overview

Dr. Racheal Hapunda, one of the four PhD students leading a work package, presented an overview of the community-based ear and hearing care project. She started by emphasising the significant global burden of CSOM, noting that 1 in 26 people—over 297 million globally—suffer from the condition, with 64 million experiencing bilateral disease and 184 million living with associated hearing loss. She explained the impact of CSOM on individuals' quality of life and societal inclusion.

Drawing from the WHO World Report on hearing, she outlined four major gaps:

1. Lack of community-level data and understanding of lived experiences.
2. Limited access to affordable treatment for chronic ear infections.
3. Inadequate provision of assistive technologies like hearing aids.
4. Scarcity of locally appropriate communication tools, such as sign language resources.

Dr. Hapunda explained how the project addresses these gaps through four interlinked work packages, each led by a PhD candidate. She also highlighted how the initiative aligns with Zambia's national strategy for ear and hearing care and elevates the country's leadership in regional innovation and public health research.

#### 5. DeafKidz International

Agness Nalomba, the Project Manager for DKI Zambia, introduced the organisation's mandate and described its critical role in the community-based ear and hearing care project.



She explained that DKI Zambia will serve as a key local implementing partner, coordinating activities related to deaf children, especially in the work package focused on understanding their lived experiences. She also acknowledged the involvement of Zambia Deaf Youth and Women, another grassroots organisation contributing to the same work package.

Agness emphasised that deaf children in low-resource settings are among the most vulnerable populations, often facing challenges related to access, safety, and inclusion. DKI Zambia is already implementing an innovative project that uses digital games and local sign language to teach deaf children how to stay safe both online and offline.

She expressed DKI's excitement to contribute to this research initiative, particularly in facilitating community engagement, ensuring child-friendly approaches, and supporting implementation. She also highlighted that DKI Zambia looks forward to seeing the outcome of the digital sign-language dictionary developed by Deaf Reach, a highly regarded institution based in Pakistan with over eight years of experience in sign language technology.



*Agness Nalomba, Project Manager, Zambia, at DeafKidz International, delivering her presentation.*

## 6. President Zambia ENT, Audiology and Speech Therapy Society (ZENTAS)

Dr. Dalisto Mwale, President of ZENTAS and an ENT specialist based at Levy Mwanawasa University Teaching Hospital, delivered the closing speech at the event. He expressed his appreciation to Zambart and its partners for initiating a much-needed project focused on ear and hearing care.

Speaking from both personal clinical experience and his leadership role at ZENTAS, Dr. Mwale reflected on the significant burden of ear and hearing conditions seen in health facilities, and the pressing need for increased investment in this neglected area of healthcare.



He emphasised the importance of continued stakeholder engagement throughout the research process and encouraged Zambart and the project team to keep the stakeholders updated with study updates and maintain open channels of communication with professional bodies like ZENTAS.

Dr. Mwale concluded by thanking all the partners, delegates and institutions represented for their commitment and interest in improving the ear and hearing care services in Zambia.

### Event Highlights: hearWHO app



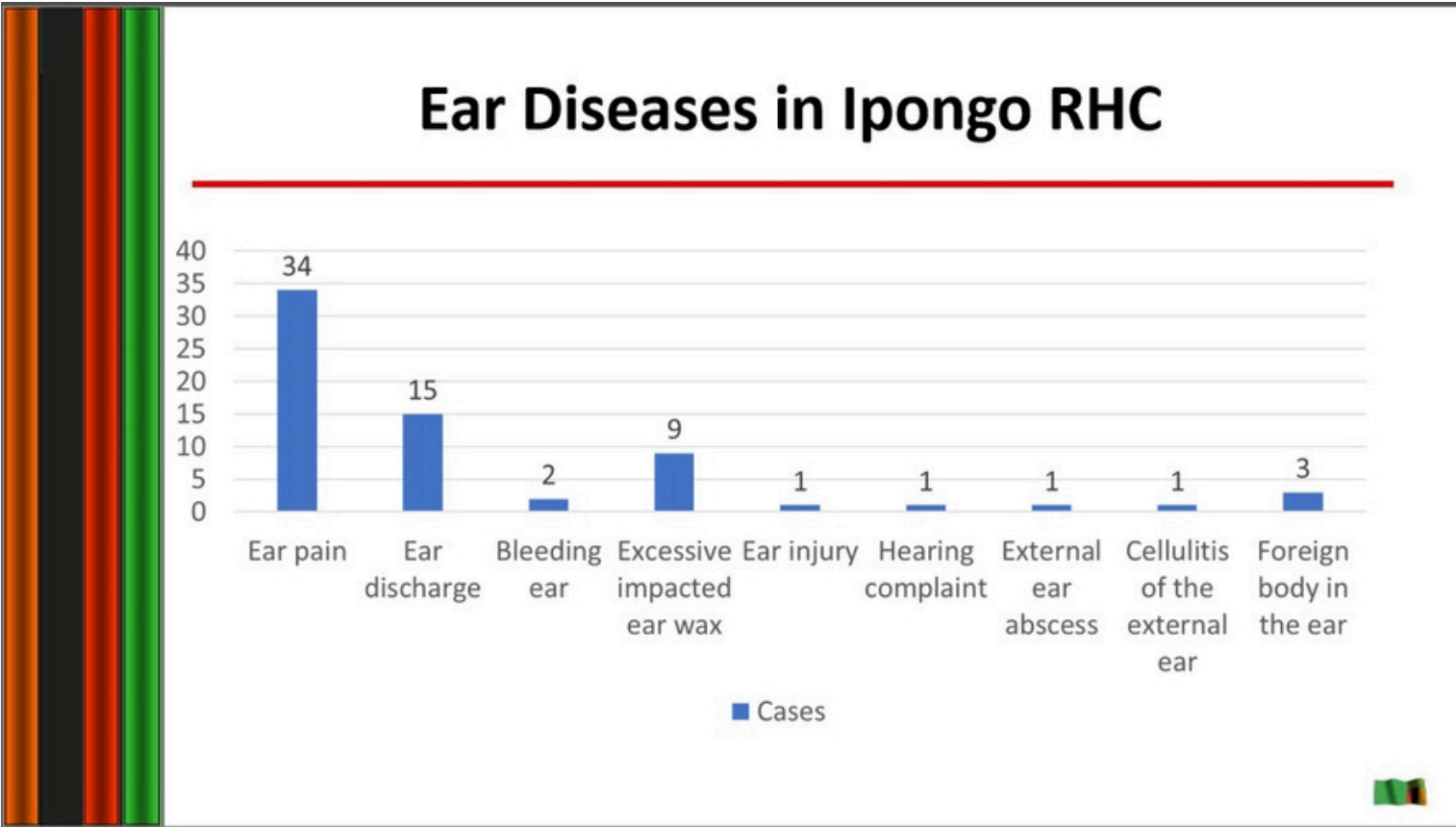
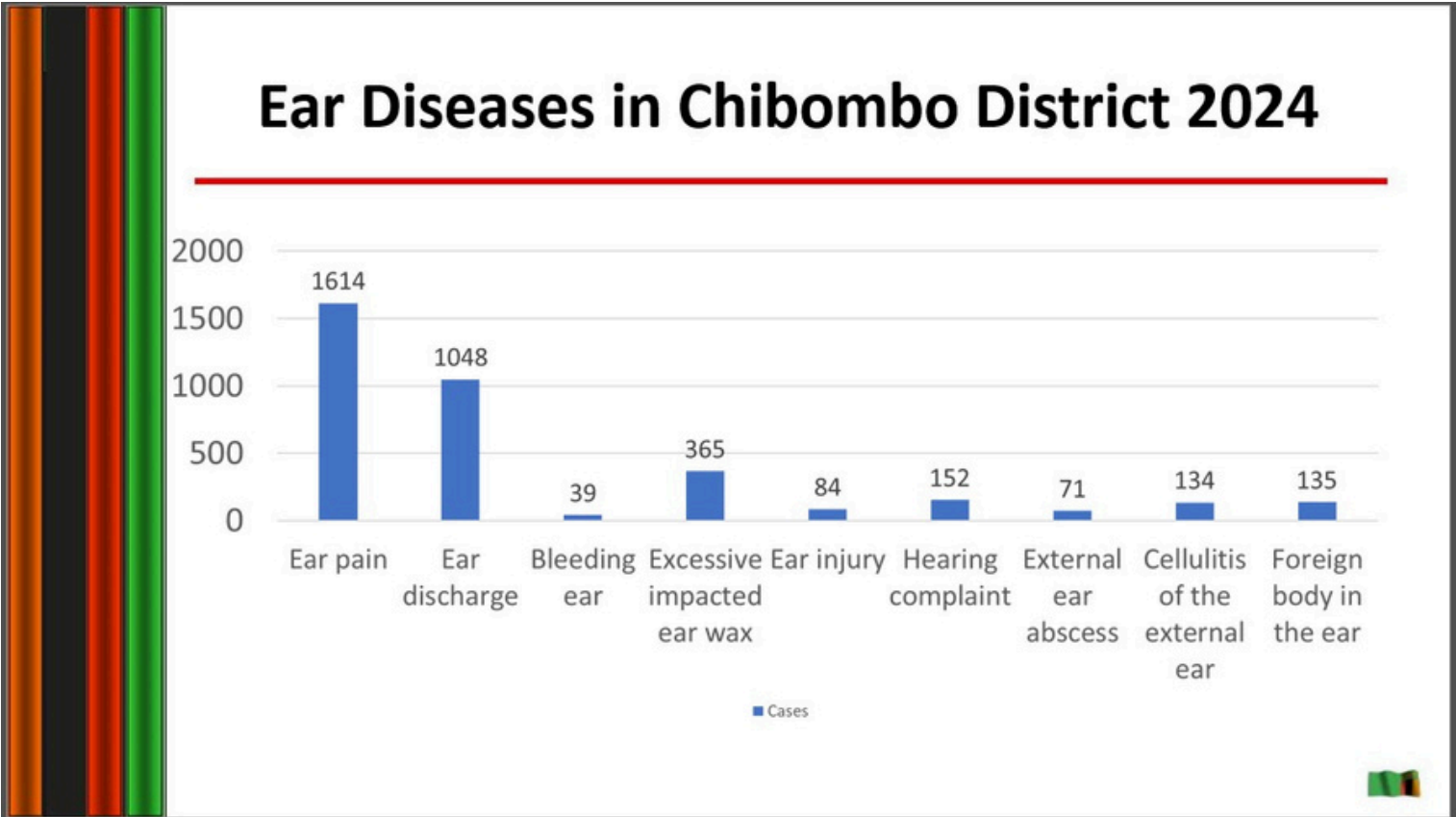
Dr. Alfred Mwaba, the executive director of Starkey Hearing Institute in Zambia, introduced the delegates to the hearWHO app and demonstrated how to use it.

He emphasised the need to make use of this free resource to check for hearing loss and seek professional help early.

He also shared the Presentation on burden, service challenges.



1. Chibombo district



# CHALLENGES

- Inadequate staffing levels
- Facility has no trained staff in ENT
- Geographical location coupled with high cost of transport to the next level of care
- Inadequate information by the community regarding ENT diseases/conditions
- Lack of drugs/commodities to treat common ENT conditions



Kabwe district

## KABWE DISTRICT



### EAR DISEASE TREND IN THE PAST 2 YEARS

DISEASE	2023	2024
Acute otitis media disease (new)	559	391
Bleeding ear disease (new)	69	40
Cellulitis of the external ear disease (new)	96	191
Chronic otitis media disease (new)	376	388
Ear Injury Disease (new)	277	434
Ear discharge disease (new)	1,266	1,259
Ear pain disease (new)	1,364	1,369
Excessive Impacted Ear wax disease (new)	753	622
External ear abscess disease (new)	119	192
Foreign body in the ear disease (new)	318	353
Hearing Complaint disease (new)	556	475
Total	5,753	5,714

## KABWE DISTRICT



### KATONDO URBAN DISEASE TREND IN THE PAST 2 YRS

DISEASE	2023	2024
Cellulitis of the external ear disease (new)	1	
Ear Injury Disease (new)	1	2
Ear discharge disease (new)	58	146
Ear pain disease (new)	52	28
Excessive Impacted Ear wax disease (new)	16	4
Foreign body in the ear disease (new)	17	11
Hearing Complaint disease (new)	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>195</b>



### KATONDO MINI DISEASE TREND IN THE PAST 2 YEARS

DISEASE	2023	2024
Acute otitis media disease (new)	114	118
Cellulitis of the external ear disease (new)	1	2
Chronic otitis media disease (new)		4
Ear Injury Disease (new)	1	0
Ear discharge disease (new)	8	5
Ear pain disease (new)	14	8
Foreign body in the ear disease (new)	6	3
Hearing Complaint disease (new)	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>141</b>

## KABWE DISTRICT

### Challenges

- Low index of suspicion by some health care workers.
- Patients with ear conditions delay to seek medical attention
- Inadequate ENT diagnostic kits/equipment.
- Stock-outs of antibiotic ear drops

### Recommendations

- Orientation on ear diseases/conditions
- Provide on-site mentorship to health care workers.
- Lobby/procure ENT diagnostic kits/equipment for all health facilities.
- Community sensitization on ear diseases.



## Lived experiences



Michelle Musonda lived with CSOM and gave her experience living with it, how it impacted her school and social interaction with her peers. She is grateful that after an operation she is okay. She called for more efforts to have services available for many of her fellow young people affected by CSOM.

## Entertainment by the deaf choir



A small group called deaf set singers provided some entertainment through the performance of two songs during the event.

## 4. KEY OUTCOMES

The following outcomes were achieved from the launch event:

- Raised awareness and visibility of the community-based ear and hearing care project.
- Strong endorsement and support from the Ministry of Health.
- Strengthened stakeholder buy-in and interest in collaborative implementation.
- Improved visibility and awareness of the burden and impact of untreated ear and hearing conditions.

## 5. NEXT STEPS

Following the launch, the project will focus on:

- Finalising stakeholder mapping, as part of community engagement strategies, for the initial phase and then continuously updated as new stakeholders are identified.
- A snowball sampling approach will be used, with each stakeholder invited to recommend.
- Others they considered essential to the project.
- Commencing formative research work in Ipongo and Katondo study sites.
- Rolling out of the main work packages by September 2025.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere appreciation to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) for financial support and strategic guidance. Special thanks also go to the Ministry of Health, community stakeholders, and partner organisations whose support made this launch a success.