MeTA Zambia Holds first Information sharing meeting

MeTA Zambia chairperson Hon Lazarus Chota on March 6 opened the first Information sharing meeting for focus group leaders at Mika Lodge in Lusaka. He reminded the participants of the meetings held previously and encouraged them to share what they had learnt in the past two months in order to plot the future of the CSO Coalition for Transparency in Medicines within and without MeTA Zambia.

The meeting was attended by Dr Tim Reed from the International MeTA Secretariat while participants were from eight focus groups from North western, the Copperbelt, Lusaka and Southern provinces. Mr Masautso Phiri, the coordinator, outlined the following objectives of the information sharing meeting as aimed at assessing where we are to see whether we are moving together or not, giving an opportunity to each focal person to tell the story of their focus group and raising the question of understanding the project and learning to embrace the social media as an advocacy tool.

All focal persons made their presentations and spirited discussions followed. Mr Zindaba Ngwenyama the MeTA Zambia communications assistant reviewed facebook pages while Dr Tim Reed discussed experiences from other MeTA countries and those of Health Action International on the use of social media, facebook and twitter. Below if the chairperson’s full speech:
“I am happy to welcome all of you to this information sharing meeting. It is more than six months ago that we last met on 27 August 2014 and on 29 August 2014. Then we discussed the setting up of the CSO coalition for transparency in medicines. We also discussed how to handle coalition meetings in preparation for the start of our monthly meetings.

On 27 August we discussed a number of issues, namely

1. MeTA core principles
2. CSO coalition building
3. Experience of other countries
4. Outline of the CSO Coalition for Transparency in Medicines
5. Developed and discussed a Charter for the CSO Coalition

We followed these discussions with our participation in the MeTA Zambia Forum at Chrismar hotel on 28 August 2014. This was an important part of our education as CSOs as the forum marked 50 years of pharmaceutical services in Zambia.

We had presentations from the medical stores who discussed distribution of Essential Medicines, the private sector on local manufacturing over the past 50 years and the ministry of health on pharmaceutical services in the public sector in the past 50 years.

It cannot be over emphasised that that week in August was very fruitful for the CSO. On 29 August our training included

1. Coalition monthly meetings – identifying issues, attendance and drawing up a program of action
2. The Essential Medicines List – what it contains and why it is important
3. Data collection, the list of medicines to be monitored and the way forward

That way forward started with the monthly meetings that I believe you have been hosting. Without those meetings we would not be here but you had your meetings and now we are here to share our experiences.

We are here today to share information and learn from each other. We are here to discuss our problems, difficulties and challenges in what we were tasked to do. But, however, apart from this conversation, MeTA Zambia wants you to move beyond that by embracing social media as a very
important tool for engaging the community in which you live, the staff running the health institutions you use and policy makers in your midst.

MeTA Zambia has already introduced you to facebook. as part of this information sharing we will review what you were able to do with this tool. you will also be given enough information on how and why you should use facebook.

At MeTA Zambia we see social media and facebook in particular is the way our people will be able to participate in determining the direction their health services go. We hope everyone in the district will look to your facebook page for the latest information on health services and on all issues pertaining to their health.

But all this cannot happen without your input. for us to reach a stage where your facebook page will be the most important source of news and information about health needs your dedicated approach, your persistence and commitment to getting your communities, officials and policy makers to appreciate your efforts.

In this regard MeTA Zambia is introducing you to three very important words relating to information on social media. The three words are

1. Accuracy
2. Accessibility
3. Acceptability

I am sure that these three words will be discussed and their importance explained.

Now I am not forgetting that we have in our midst Dr Tim Reed from the international meta secretariat. This shows the importance the IMS places in CSO capacity to advocate on medicines issues. Dr Reed will re-emphasise the importance of social media in advocacy. His topic – CSOs, Social Media and Advocacy – the health action experience in other meta countries and elsewhere – will give you an insight in what is happening elsewhere.

I have not forgotten our local experiences. we have topic that we will always discuss because it is part of the reason we exist as meta. This topic is – essential medicines list and focus group activity. You have heard about the essential medicines list but to day we are looking at this document from the activities we undertake. What is it you need to know and do?
The next local experience describes the old saying – you cannot teach your grandmother how to suck eggs or in modern talk – you cannot re-invent the wheel.

I am looking at the project that was undertaken by Transparency International Zambia on health. Mr Goodwell Lungu, who is the MeTA Zambia Secretary General will share with us their experience in the topic – Transparency in health delivery the TIZ experience.

I am sure we need this information to help us develop and map out a path for ourselves. Where is our focus group heading? How is it going there? Why is it going there?

With that i again welcome you to this information sharing meeting and implore you to participate effectively.

Thank you