Simavi aims to structurally improve the health of ten million people in low and middle-income countries. Therefore we are working in marginalised communities on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Our programmes focus on getting WASH and SRHR services in place; empowering communities to demand quality services and to practice healthy behaviour; and creating an enabling environment, consisting of groups from government, private sector and NGOs.

Advocacy

Advocacy is an indispensable element in Simavi’s Theory of Change. Together with our partners, we promote the recognition of WASH and SRHR within the new United Nations Development Framework: we participate in global networks such as Sanitation and Water for All and we bring private sector groups and NGOs together to come up with sustainable solutions. More specifically, we advocate with the Dutch government in order to maintain the country’s lead position on WASH and SRHR, and we collaborate with our partner organizations to keep their national governments accountable for adequate policies, laws and investments in WASH and SRHR. But it all starts in the community. This is where knowledge, empowerment and mobilisation lead to greater accountability between communities, service providers and governments - indispensable to improving access to WASH and SRHR services.

Social accountability

Simavi’s advocacy strategy at community level has a specific focus on social accountability. Social accountability is an interactive process that aims to increase citizen influence (voice) and to strengthen the response of the local WASH and SRHR providers and decision-makers. Social accountability breaks social and systemic barriers in contexts where national policies seem to be adequate, but where, in reality, these policies are insufficiently implemented and where inequality prevails. Communities are mobilised and empowered to understand their right to, for example, clean water or a safe and staffed birth facility. Knowing their rights and being aware of effective methods to voice their needs, helps communities to create an environment where governments and service providers implement policies and improve services. This contributes to structural improvements in WASH and SRHR, and less inequality.
Simavi’s Citizen Report Card (CRC) approach is a good example of how social accountability contributes to the structural improvement of WASH service delivery in a marginalized area. In Kajiado county in Kenya, Simavi applies this approach to advocate with the Kenyan government to adequately implement existing WASH policies or when necessary adapt these policies. The CRC approach builds on increased and meaningful citizen participation as a basis to enhance accountability and transparency, which are indispensable to this process.

Problem
Despite clear policies stipulating the right to water in Kenya, the WASH sector is grappling with inefficiencies, corruption and unnecessary bureaucracies. Due to these problems people have been denied adequate access to clean water, sanitation services and hygienic living conditions. This results in a heavy disease burden and deaths particularly among young children. Existing policies envisage that citizens should be actively engaged in the provision of WASH services, although little of that is put into practice. Most people are neither aware of their rights nor of national WASH policies, and therefore do not hold their government accountable to provide or facilitate provision of WASH services. Although people are largely dissatisfied with the current provision of services, they do not launch their complaints or demand improvements. And when they do, services providers often hardly respond.

Citizens Report Cards
To address these challenges, Simavi has implemented the Citizen Report Cards (CRC) approach. Local citizen groups are formed and mobilised to collect qualitative and quantitative information on people’s satisfaction with the available WASH services. This leads to comprehensive and representative insights about the current status of such services. It shows the areas where improvements are required, and the extent to which local governments and providers fulfil their responsibilities. The outcomes are an important advocacy tool as they are presented to, and critically analysed with, the service providers and government officials. As they are discussed with local, regional and national level government officials, accountability and transparency is created from bottom to top.

Results
The findings that came out of the CRCs were compiled in an extensive policy brief with concrete recommendations. It shows that 75% of the population did not receive water from the company responsible for the supply in the area and that more than half of the people in the rural areas had to walk five kilometres to fetch water. Moreover, a third of the people reported to be suffering from water related diseases such as diarrhoea and typhoid. All these results were presented to the Kenyan government, other CSO’s and local water service providers. This way, the problems, opinions and demands of consumers are effectively voiced, which is a major improvement compared to the previous situation. Service providers are held accountable and pushed to make progressive steps to ensure peoples adequate access to WASH services.