

ALMOST 400 TRADITIONAL BIRTH ATTENDANTS RETRAINED

Kenya maternal and child health project Summer 2015

Our partners in Narok County, Kenya, have been working with the community to retrain hundreds of traditional birth attendants. Through this training many pregnant women are now being supported to deliver safely in hospitals, and the work is spreading further than expected.

Why retrain traditional birth attendants?

Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are ordinary women who conduct deliveries at home using traditional methods. TBAs are trusted and have significant influence in their community. They have the final word on where and how a pregnant woman should deliver. However, although their aim is always to safeguard the wellbeing of both mother and child, they do not always have the necessary skills or tools if complications occur at home. Therefore, one of the focuses of the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) project, led by Christian Aid partner Transmara Rural Development Programme (TRDP) in Narok County, has been to retrain the TBAs.

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Before the project, only 12.5% of deliveries were conducted in health centres, contributing to a shockingly high maternal mortality rate. In Narok, for every 100,000 live births, 435 women die. This statistic is even more sobering when compared to the equivalent figure of just 12 in the UK.

Banning the TBAs – as the Kenyan government tried to do in the past – doesn't work, as pregnant women still turn to them for help and advice. TRDP decided to work with the TBAs and include them in the project where they are retrained to become 'mother companions' who accompany pregnant women to hospital to provide massage and support.



Nalango Neikunyi, a former TBA, retrained as a mother companion in Nturuamenti community unit in Narok North.

Nalango's story...

Nalango used to work as a TBA in North Narok, advising pregnant women and delivering babies in homes. She remembers three mothers who bled excessively, and as she had no medication or intravenous fluids, they died. Nalango was retrained as a mother companion and says that the training has helped her and other TBAs understand the importance of skilled hospital deliveries.

Since September last year, she has referred 13 mothers to the health centre. The babies born are healthy, have received all their vaccinations in time, and their growth continues to be monitored by health workers.

Rodney, project coordinator for TRDP, explains: 'We are seeing women who just a few months ago would have been telling everybody to deliver at home, and



Mother companion Noorkipali holds a child whose mother she referred to a hospital for safe delivery.

now they are walking a pregnant woman to a health facility to deliver. All of this in a period of just two years. It's really happening very fast.'

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Rodney Kaleke

The MCH project covers the cost of training these women, and they support the mother companions, helping them to pay for travel to the hospitals. Nalango was asked whether she has suffered a loss of reputation or livelihood since becoming mother companion. She answers: 'It is not a loss compared to the value that has been compensated, and since there is no life of a mother or child that has been lost, the new knowledge has transformed the community.'

In fact the training we've received has also improved our status in society.'

A total of 4,130 women received skilled assistance during delivery between January and May, many of them thanks to the 395 traditional birth attendants who have been retrained.

The government's reaction

At first, the county government was wary of the choice to work with the TBAs; it would have been easier just to provide tools or ambulances. Yet TRDP recognises the importance of helping communities to become sustainable. It's about putting systems and strategies in place so that communities can keep going and can support themselves. The results of the work of our partners has been so transformational that the government's apprehensions have changed to support and enthusiasm.

Today, a lot of the elements of the MCH project have been incorporated into the county health strategy and the government is beginning to train TBAs too. The training manual the MCH project created is being used by the county government and is now approved at a national level. This is amazing news; not just for the project, but for each and every woman who is now being advised and accompanied to hospital for safe delivery.

Thank you for your continued financial support and prayers that enable the MCH project to keep transforming the lives of women, children and men. It is incredible to see that transformation spread across Narok County, and indeed Kenya, and witness God's power at work.

Please continue to pray for this work:

- Praise God for the response to retraining the TBAs and the impact this is having across Narok.
- Continue to pray for the health of the mothers and newborn babies as they return home from the hospitals.



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