

NURTURING CHANGE

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE IN KENYA

Kenya is classified as one of the world's least developed countries by the United Nations and has an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate: for every 100,000 births, 490 women die during childbirth. A major new project in Narok County will improve health for nearly 200,000 women and over 130,000 children under five through a powerful combination of provision and action.

Becoming a mother in Narok County

Mothers and children do not enjoy the same healthcare in Kenya as we do in the UK. In Narok County, where this project is based, only 30 per cent of the population have access to maternal and child healthcare services and only 17.6 per cent of the population actually use them. As well as extremely high maternal mortality rates, there are high rates of stunting in children under-five (an indicator of chronic malnutrition) and high levels of extreme poverty, with more than a third of the population living below the poverty line.

Cultural beliefs and traditions are held to very strongly in this society, some of which are proving to be a barrier to better healthcare. Many women choose to give birth in their village with only the help of traditional birth attendants – local, often elderly women with no formal medical training. When there are complications, it is usually too late to transfer the mother to a clinic and the results can be fatal.

Men dominate decisions around healthcare, and women have to seek permission from men to go to hospital or use family planning methods. Due to a lack of proper health education, this has also proved to be a barrier to women and children getting the healthcare they need.

Potentially damaging cultural practices like forced marriages, early pregnancy and female genital mutilation are also common.



This project will improve the health of nearly 200,000 mothers and more than 130,000 children under-five

Project overview

This is the biggest maternal and child health project that the EU has ever contributed to in Kenya. Over four years, more than 350,000 women, children, young people and men will benefit from a huge range of activities. The project is working for lasting change in Narok County, so these benefits will be felt for generations to come.

Three Christian Aid partners will work in collaboration with each other and the national and local governments to deliver this project: Anglican Church of Kenya Narok Integrated Development Programme (NIDP), Christian Missionary Fellowship (CHP), and Anglican Church of Kenya Transmara Rural Development Programme (TRDP).

Addressing immediate needs

Women die in childbirth every day in this part of Kenya. This project is providing immediate help in the form of medicines, basic medical equipment, and ambulances that can reach the isolated rural communities. Two new maternity wards will also be constructed and another three renovated. Chronic malnutrition is a huge problem in this area, with 65.4 per cent of children experiencing stunted growth. Our partners will provide high-impact nutrition interventions as well as working on longer-term solutions such as starting community 'kitchen gardens' to tackle this problem.

Working with the culture for lasting change

Many of the problems associated with having and bringing up children in this area are compounded by cultural practices. Rather than try to destroy or undermine these traditions, this project will work with the traditional leaders and healthcare workers to improve how things are done. Traditional birth attendants will be employed to bring women into medical centres for antenatal appointments and for births, and will be trained in basic medical care so that they can provide assistance in their communities. Local leaders will be educated in reproductive health and family planning and will play an influential role in getting men to engage with these issues. More than 1,000 community health workers will be trained to provide maternal and child healthcare services out in the communities.

Training and education are key components of this project. Only by changing widespread attitudes to issues such as contraception, maternal healthcare, forced marriage and early pregnancy can our partners secure lasting change for women and children. The project will give young men and women sexual health education, communicate up-to-date health information and advice via radio, and train paralegals to teach communities about sensitive issues such as female genital mutilation, rape and other gender-based violence.

Strengthening the state for a better future

The Kenyan Ministry of Health is currently implementing its 'Community Strategy of Increasing Level 1 Health Services' across the country. However, this has not been rolled out in Narok County due to a lack of funds. The project will work with the government to implement some of those plans – for example by establishing,



Christine Leobaki and others like her will benefit from being part of mother-to-mother support groups



Health clinics like this will be renovated and equipped to make them functional for the community

training and supporting community units and health committees that are responsible for delivering local healthcare. By getting involved at this level, our partners will be able to bring in members of the rural communities on important decision making processes, ensuring that the government is providing the right healthcare services in a format that local people find easy to use.

Other activities

- Forming mother-to-mother support groups and helping members to initiate micro-loans or savings schemes together to provide capital for small businesses or to save for hidden costs of childbirth (such as transport to the health facilities).
- Training leaders for those groups to spot early warning signs of malnutrition or poor health and refer women and children to the community health workers.
- Using SMS technology to send health messages, alerts and announcements to rural areas.
- Legal support from trained paralegals for victims of gender-based violence and early or forced marriage.
- Post-rape care, counselling, screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections for young people in colleges and youth centres.

If there is any way we can help your group, please contact your local Christian Aid office or visit christianaid.org.uk/partnerships



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