

Giving birth – the most dangerous thing an African woman can do

Training midwives is a simple, cost-effective way of drastically reducing maternal deaths in Africa. By 2015 AMREF wants to train an extra 3,000 midwives, which could reduce the maternal death rate in Africa by 25%.

The birth of a baby, which should be a joyful occasion, too often brings heartbreak and agony for African families.

In Africa, a staggering one in 22 women dies in pregnancy or childbirth. In the UK, it is one in 8,000. And without a mother, this newborn baby is much more likely to die within the first two years of its life.

While conditions such as high blood pressure, breech births and haemorrhaging are easily treated in the UK, African women are likely to die from them because they lack access to good quality health care or a trained midwife.

Many women, particularly in remote areas of Africa, have no choice but to give birth

to their babies at home. With their mother or grandmother at their side, they are lucky if the birth goes smoothly and there are no complications. But if things go wrong, the nearest help can be hours away. With no transport, this means their only option is to walk, often in the middle of labour, to get help.



Midwives are the key to good maternal health in Africa. AMREF is the only organisation in Africa which has trained midwives for over 50 years.

AMREF has trained over half a million community health workers, particularly midwives, who literally provide a lifeline to remote and poor communities in Africa. Access to skilled care from a trained midwife during pregnancy, childbirth

and the first month after delivery is the key to saving a mother's life and that of her child.



'Pesi, my midwife took me to the health centre – I was afraid I was going to die at home, or that my baby would die.'

Tipaiya Nadoonyek, Mother of 6, Kenya

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A Day in the Life of a Midwife in Uganda

32-year-old Esther Madudu is a midwife at the Atirir health centre in Katine, Uganda.

'I am privileged to see a life join this earth, although my heart breaks to watch mothers go through such agonising pain. Not so much the agony of giving birth but the agony of giving birth under very harsh conditions.'



'There are days I have to travel long distances to meet mothers who cannot make it to the health centre, only to find that they have already delivered. Once I found a woman giving birth next to a swamp because she

couldn't walk any further, the baby's head was out and because she was so close to the water, she almost drowned the baby. It was a terrifying sight and no woman should ever have to go through that.'

Esther lives with her family at the Atirir health centre staff quarters, and spends more than 13 hours every day at work. 'I am always here, Monday to Monday, only getting a day off occasionally,' she says. 'Deliveries are unexpected and I have to rush whenever and wherever I am needed.'

Her days begin at 7am with getting her children ready for school and breast-feeding her baby

before starting work. 'My first priority is to check on the mothers in the ward, although sometimes I am met by women in labour on my doorstep.'

'I found a woman giving birth next to a swamp because she couldn't walk any further, the baby's head was out and because she was so close to the water, she almost drowned the baby'

Esther sees clients every half hour for the entire day, only being interrupted by patients who have gone into labour. During her brief breaks, Esther fits in breastfeeding her baby in the staff quarters. 'Our work can be very challenging. We are too few to cope with the demand. A health centre such as this should have at least six midwives yet there are only three of us interchanging between day and night shifts.'



With your support AMREF can train more midwives, ensuring more women have healthy births, where the mother knows she is in safe, trained hands and her family can thrive.

£20

could provide a second-hand bicycle for a midwife, to help them get to their patients more easily and quickly.

£60

could provide a medi-kit, which includes all the equipment a midwife needs to deliver a baby safely, e.g. forceps, syringes and umbilical clamps.

£250

could fully qualify a midwife, who will then return to their community with the knowledge and medical skills to save the lives of many women and children.

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AMREF is Africa's leading health charity, saving and transforming the lives of the continent's poorest and most marginalised communities. To find out more about our work, please visit www.amrefuk.org