

Voice of America

Nigeria Recruits Midwives to Save Lives

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Nigeria has one of the highest maternal death rates in the world and an ambitious plan to 'save one million lives' through health programs that target mothers and children. Officials say supporting midwives - often the only medical specialists available to women in labor - is a cornerstone of the program. But, midwives say they still need more resources.

Patience Afor Abdullahi, a midwife and the head of nursing at Abuja National Hospital in the Nigerian capital, has lost track of how many babies she has delivered and she would not trade her job for anything.

"It's a wonderful sight to behold," she says. "You just see God at work because the first time I took the baby all that we were taught in the classroom came into play."

Last year, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan said his government plans to save a million lives by 2015 through health initiatives for women and children. These initiatives will focus on, among other things, preventing mother to child transmission of HIV, expanding malaria treatments, establishing child nutrition and vaccination programs, and training more midwives.

Abdullahi says, the program for midwives hasn't yet materialized and many women continue to die in childbirth because they give birth at home without a trained medical expert.

The United Nations says 14 percent of all deaths related to childbearing in the world are in Nigeria.

Abdullahi says part of the problem is the shortage of seats for those interested in attending schools that train midwives. And with salaries often as low as a few hundred dollars a month, midwives stationed in the countryside, where there is often little to no electricity and hardly any medical supplies, often migrate back to the cities.

"When you have one midwife to about 20 women [and The World Health Organization] says one to four patients. It becomes difficult when you have to manage a large number of patients," she said.

Other midwives, like Bola Babadele, the chief of nursing at Abuja's National Hospital, say basic development problems across Nigeria, like lack of running water in many villages, makes the job

difficult and sometimes even dangerous.

"And, you know you can't imagine a midwife, with both hands dipped in the blood, and we're talking about HIV, infections, sexually-transmitted diseases and you don't have water to wash with. And, you don't have a running tap," she said.

Babadele says the government is currently recruiting retired midwives to get more health workers in the field which, if it happens, could help alleviate some of the problems. She says, in the meantime, many women do not know the benefits of having medically trained people on hand when they are in labor.

Babadele maintains health officials need to spread the word among mothers in the countryside that the services of a midwife could save their life.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)