



Youth Healthline



Kabul University



Population Development



Gender

Feature Story: In a remote mountain village, a UNFPA-supported community midwife successfully delivers quadruplets

Kabul, Afghanistan – Late at night in the remote Afghan mountain village of Balakoh, Zainab was deep in the throes of labour.

Anaemic, malnourished and in severe pain, the 37-year-old woman faced a stark choice: risk birth at home without proper care, or make the tough, long trek to a professional at a [Family Health House](#).

Until recently, one in every 17 newborn babies died, and one in almost 110 mothers did not survive pregnancy and childbirth in Balakoh, which had some of highest maternal and neo-natal mortality rates in Afghanistan.

Zainab's family swiftly fashioned a stretcher from a wooden bed, hoisted her up on their shoulders and headed out across the mountains.

When they reached the Qaramat Family Health House, they were met with shock and surprise.

"When Zainab arrived, I examined her and found out that it was a quadruplet pregnancy," says Safia, the community midwife posted there.

"At first I was very nervous. It was time for the babies to be born," she says.

While two of Zainab's babies were in safe birthing positions, one was in breech (bottom-first) and another in an unsafe shoulder-first position.

"I did what was necessary to help her, and finally the uterine contractions began," Safia says.

"It took an hour but finally, all four babies were born healthy. I was so relieved," she adds.



About UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNFPA is the United Nations agency which leads global efforts to help ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA is mandated by the [International Conference on Population and Development \(ICPD\)](#), held in Cairo in 1994, to reduce infant and child mortality, reduce neonatal, maternal mortality, and increase access to reproductive health services including family planning. The Cairo Consensus placed these population and development issues within a human rights based framework, and UNFPA is committed to integrating human rights into its work globally.

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According to Dr. Bannet Ndyabangi, Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Afghanistan; "Without a skilled birth attendant, it's less likely that the birth of Zainab's quadruplets would have been such a success."

"In any pregnancy and child birth, having a professional midwife present cuts the chance of serious complications, such as fistula, by a third, and with such special cases like Zainab's, the chance of things going wrong is far higher."

In the Afghan capital Kabul, Dr Nazifa Hamrah Heads the Obstetric Fistula ward at the Malalai Maternity Hospital. She confirms that bringing quadruplets into the world is tough, under any circumstances.

"Such cases make the best of us nervous, but I see that Safia has been successful in managing the case and helping the babies come into this world. This is just brilliant," she says.

Since 2009, UNFPA has helped train 135 community midwives across the country and helped set up 115 health facilities to ensure locally recruited, fully trained midwives provide vital reproductive, maternal, newborn

and child healthcare to communities with little or no access to healthcare.

The midwives also help tackle damaging cultural norms that restrict women's access to care in Afghanistan.

"Each family health house typically serves between 1,500–4,000 people nearby," says Dr. Ahmadullah Molakhail, UNFPA Afghanistan's sub-national coordinator.

"Our aim is to make sure every family, within two hours walking distance, can get access to these facilities across the four provinces of Herat, Bamyan, Faryab and Daikundi in the next two years," he says.

"The plan is that within ten years all areas that now have no health coverage will be covered by Family Health Houses," Molakhail explains.

Back out in Qaramat, Safia is hugely relieved, and just a little bit proud.

"I could see appreciation in the eyes of the mother I helped," she says.

"She said that I helped keep her babies alive – and gave her a new life as well."

Strengthening Demography Studies at Kabul University

UNFPA, under its Population and Development Programme, works with the Economics Faculty of Kabul University to include demographic studies in the Faculty's structure through a needs assessment for demographers in the country.

The assessment, through a workshop, brought together government staff from different ministries responsible for policy making to work together and identify the need for demographers and propose preference between a BA or an MA degree programme or alternatively include demography studies in the current curricula of Statistics and Econometrics Department of the faculty.

The main objective of the project is to strengthen Demography Studies at the Kabul University in particular and the availability of demographers in the country in general.



The outcome of the workshop suggested that there is need for UNFPA to supports the Economics Faculty to strengthen the current theoretical principles and practical foundation of statistics and demography programmes under the existing Statistics and Econometrics Department that has minimal content in demography studies currently.

With technical and financial support of UNFPA, the project will generate a critical mass of graduates capable of analyzing socioeconomic and demographic data and applying the information generated for planning, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes.

UNFPA Afghanistan Supports Toll Free Youth Health Line 120

A toll free youth health line (120) was established in 2012 by the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) with the technical and financial support of UNFPA. Since then the youth health-line is growing and so is the number of callers.

In the first quarter of 2016, the centre received 19,000 calls.

The callers are adolescent and youth from all over Afghanistan. They call in to discuss health related issues that they wouldn't otherwise discuss with anyone in the family or the community.

Youth health line is a trustful, non-judgmental and fully confidential counselling friend for youth.

The health line counselors are also available to meet with the callers and provide such counseling in person if need be.

"Youth call us with different issues. At first they are hesitant to speak, but as soon as they understand that we keep everything confidential and we don't judge anything they relax. We merely provide them the needed information. After that, they feel comfortable and become regular callers." Says, Dr. Abdullah Shahid, one of the youth health line counsellors.

The youth health line will be complemented by youth health corners in regional hospital including in the capital city of Kabul. Youth that call from different parts of Afghanistan and would like to get face to face counseling, will be referred to the youth health corners health facilities closest to them. Currently they are being referred to health facilities where the Basic Package of Health Services and Essential Package of Health Services are available.





Afghanistan's First ever National Youth Policy and National Youth Strategy

The Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs of Afghanistan with the technical and financial support of UNFPA developed the first National Youth Policy, endorsed in August 2014.

In line with the implementation of the recommendations made in the National Youth Policy, UNFPA and other United Nations agencies supported the development of a National Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020.

The development of the National Youth Strategy was overseen by a technical committee chaired by the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA) with

the support of UNFPA and other UN agencies. DMoYA organized multiple consultative workshops throughout the country with the Afghan youth, national and international stakeholders, including Afghan Civil Society, relevant Ministries and the United Nations sister agencies to include the voices of Afghan Youth and the expertise of different partners in the strategy.

The strategy has been approved by the Second Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with inputs from other Ministries.

National Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020

National Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy and Action

National Youth Education Strategy and Action Plan

National Youth Employment Strategy and Action Plan

National Youth Sport Strategy and Action Plan

National Youth Participation Strategy and Action Plan

Cross-cutting; Gender Equity, Environmental Sustainability, Peace and Security

Provincial Socio-demographic and Economic Survey

The Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey (SDES) is the largest survey ever conducted in Afghanistan. The survey reflects a module similar to a census and is designed to fill data gaps in the country. In the light of the insecurity in the country and as funds become available, the SDES is being conducted province by province in Afghanistan.

The survey first began in Bamiyan province in 2011, followed by Ghor and Daikundi in 2012. Since then the survey has covered Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa, Samangan, Takhar, Balkh and Herat respectively. As of June 2016, the survey field operations are going on in Nimroz and Khost provinces.

The Survey covers every household in the target province for enumeration, and for every other household, detailed questionnaires that gather socio-demographic and economic data disaggregated by sex and age are filled out.

The findings from the survey will fill the current data gap in the country and will inform development policy and planning at national and subnational levels.

Central Statistic Organization (CSO) of Afghanistan as the main partner in this activity, supported technically and financially by UNFPA.

CSO and UNFPA plan to ensure that all provinces undertake the SDES by 2019.



Commemoration of UN International Days

UNFPA and Its Partners Call for Greater Efforts to Step up Gender Equality: More Women Needed in All Roles in the Health Sector

All partners on the day highlighted women's crucial contributions to improving healthcare and called for actions to step up gender equality and increase the number of women working in the health sector.

UNFPA, on this day, recommitted to support MoPH to increase the presence of female health workers in both service delivery and in management of the health sector. UNFPA flagged early/child marriage as one of the barriers to girls' education and participation.

Currently, in partnership with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs, UNFPA is developing a National Action Plan to End Early and Child Marriage.

The partners recognize that Afghanistan faces severe shortage of female health workers, where out of Afghanistan's 5,858 doctors only 22% are women, and women comprise only 21% of the country's 5,599 nurses.





Community midwifery education at the Zawul Institute of Higher Education and at Kabul Medical University, supported by UNFPA, is meant to improve reproductive health outcomes.

On the other hand, UNFPA family health houses and family protection centres provide essential health services for women and support the goal of increased educational and employment opportunities for women.

International Day of the Midwife

"Women and Newborns: the Heart of Midwifery"

On the 4th of May 2016 UNFPA, Afghan Midwives Association (AMA), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and USAID funded Jhpiego-HEMAYAT project commemorated the International Day of the Midwife #IDM2016 under the theme of "Women and Newborns: the Heart of Midwifery".

All partners recognized the role of midwives, stressing that if midwives work in an enabling environment guided by clear regulations, they are able to provide more than 87% (Lancet Series) of essential maternal care needed.

Afghanistan currently has 3500-4000 midwives, (WHO East Mediterranean Regional Office). However and in order to meet the 100% need for midwives by 2030, Afghanistan needs an extra 15,217 midwives.

UNFPA and partners urged the Afghan government to ensure that midwifery regulation in Afghanistan is a priority and to take necessary steps to pass the midwifery and nursing council bill that has already been presented to the Ministry of Justice.



“Ending Fistula within a Generation” International Day to End Obstetric Fistula



UNFPA and the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan commemorated the [International Day to End Obstetric Fistula](#) under the theme “[End Fistula within a Generation](#)” at Malalai Maternity Hospital (MMH).

MMH accommodates the only public [Fistula Centre](#) that is supported by UNFPA financially and technically.

“It is a grave injustice that in the 21st century, in Afghanistan women still suffer from obstetric fistula. This is the time to work together with all partners both in government and non-government to “end fistula within a generation”, said Dr. Bannet Ndyanabangi UNFPA Representative.

Obstetric Fistula, the hidden tragedy - is one of the most serious of pregnancy and child delivery related disabilities. UNFPA and partners have worked in more than 50 developing countries to end fistula since 2003, when the [Campaign to End Fistula](#) was first launched.

Obstetric Fistula is a hole in the birth canal caused by prolonged obstructed labor in the absence of timely and adequate medical care. It is a devastating social and personal harm to the women affected, since continuous leakage of urine or feces or both causes the woman to be marginalized and ostracized.

The [Fistula Centre](#) at MMH was established in 2007. Currently the centre annually repairs 150 fistula cases through surgeries.

The centre was complimented by the establishment of reintegration ward, with financial support of UNFPA and the Islamic Development Bank.

The ward helps fistula patients regain their personal and social life and also supports their reintegration in their families and communities and become potential advocates for other women who suffer the same disability.

Additionally, these advocates will work to change behaviors that are the main causes of fistula, such as child marriage and early and/or frequent childbearing.

UNFPA also trains around 150 health workers from different parts of the country in diagnosis and referral of obstetric fistula cases. UNFPA supports improved access to quality reproductive health and family planning services in a culturally sensitive manner. Such services will help not only to reduce maternal mortality but also prevent fistula.

UNFPA

Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled

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UNFPA Appoints

Dr. Bannet Ndyanabangi

as the New Representative for Afghanistan Country Office

Dr. Bannet Ndyanabangi, a national of the Republic of Uganda took over office at the UNFPA Country Office in Kabul early 2016. Before coming to Afghanistan, Dr. Ndyanabangi served as the UNFPA Representative in Sierra Leone and prior to that as the Deputy Representative for UNFPA in Nigeria and the Republic of South Sudan.

Dr. Ndyanabangi, is a public health physician with 28 years of leadership, management and strategic planning experience in international health and development. He has an MD from the University of Heidelberg Germany, an MSc in Community Health and Health Management and a Doctorate in Public Health from the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health of Heidelberg University

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