Engaging Traditional Birth Attendants in Guinea

In rural villages of Guinea, women prefer to deliver at home assisted by Traditional Birth Attendants who lack any formal training. In collaboration with the local hospital, Guinea Red Cross has mobilized and formally trained the Traditional Births Attendants, thereby increasing facility based deliveries considerably.

**Barriers to maternity care**

It takes 10 hours by car to reach the main town of province Moyenne Guinee in the highlands of Guinea. Reaching rural villages can take much longer and many are not even accessible by road. Health facilities are often non-existent or in a poor state and deploying qualified staff to such remote areas is another challenge.

As most of the health staff is male, women prefer to deliver at home with a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) from their own community. Only 22.4% of women in Moyenne Guinee deliver at a health facility and just as few make it for antenatal care visits during their pregnancy.
Red Cross action
Recognizing that TBAs are the entry point for improving women's health, Guinea Red Cross gave them formal training so they could detect risks during pregnancy and child birth and accompany women to the nearest health center for antenatal care and deliveries. The training also focused on improving hygiene and assisting during home-based births.

For 18 years, Aissata Bah, a TBA has accompanied pregnant women: “Before I became a Red Cross volunteer I was ready to assist pregnant women although I never had any training. Now that I have been trained and equipped by the Red Cross, I feel vested in helping”.

To improve the quality of institutional health care, health centers were provided with basic equipment and access to clean water. Moreover communities increased ownership of health facilities through establishing health committees to manage the centers.

TBAs supported by volunteers played a crucial role in the sensitisation of the population through different means including group discussions and home visits. The volunteers are already trusted members of the communities which contributed to gaining the confidence of the local population.

Achievements
TBAs in Moyenne Guinee are now better qualified to advise women. They provide the missing link to the formal health system and have gained recognition for the role they play in ensuring safer deliveries.

Through the work of the 22 TBAs in the period 2011-14, attended births have increased from 39% to 82% in the project area. Furthermore, reproductive health knowledge has improved, especially amongst women of reproductive age, regardless of literacy skills.

Aissatou Bhoye, who delivered her fourth child in a health center, said: “During my first three pregnancies, I did not consult the health post. My deliveries went on for many hours and each delivery was very hard work. During my fourth pregnancy the TBA accompanied me to the health post. After 9 months of pregnancy, I gave birth to my child without much difficulty and only after 3 hours. Following the birth, the TBA also accompanies us for vaccinations which resulted in my child was much less sick.”

The TBAs have also created more demand for family planning services, although these are not always consistently available at the health centers. Still, the use of family planning has increased from 5% to 36%.

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KEY ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS
• Utilizing the strong local Red Cross Branch and their relationships with local leaders and remote communities
• Educating TBAs to function as intermediaries between women in the community and the health facility

LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL GAINS
Breaking barriers, improving women’s health