



CASE STUDY

Bridging the gap with recruitment of front line health workers to save lives in Jigawa State

Jigawa • September 2012

Blessing Agbemuko is a trained midwife who has been working at Sankara Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Jigawa State in northern Nigeria since March 2012. She currently conducts two to three deliveries each day. Though the number might look minimal at first sight, this represents marvellous progress taking place in this health facility. Before, many women in Sankara community gave birth at home, since there was no midwife working in the health facility. The nearest health facility is Ringim General Hospital, which is 15 kilometres away from the community, so that women often had to travel for miles to reach a trained midwife.

Blessing is one of the health workers newly recruited and deployed to work in rural health facilities through Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase 2 (PATHS2), a programme funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development. Sankara PHC now has four midwives.

For Blessing, who came from the southern part of Nigeria to work in Jigawa, it's inspiring to see pregnant women visiting the health facility for delivery. She says: "Before, there was no midwife or nurse working in the health facility. They were not conducting delivery; pregnant women were being referred to Ringim General Hospital. But since we came, we started conducting deliveries in the facility and on average per month we can have up to 40 deliveries. Last month we had 41 deliveries. This



Blessing Agbemuko, newly recruited midwife in Sankara PHC

month we are hoping to get at least 50. Antenatal attendance too has greatly improved. Before, in a month, there used to be only 50 women, but now we have over 100 women attending antenatal care. We teach them the danger signs of pregnancy, and the women are very happy with us."

Jigawa is predominantly rural, and access to healthcare is limited. Jigawa has the highest maternal mortality rate in Nigeria. The rate of deaths among women related to complications in pregnancy and birth is 2,000 per 100,000 of the population.

Not having enough skilled health workers contributes

significantly to Jigawa's high maternal and infant mortality rates. For many years Jigawa State has been affected by chronic shortages of trained, competent and skilled midwives and other health professionals. In 2009 there were 29 midwives in Jigawa serving a population of nearly five million people. With support from PATHS2 the state government began an emergency recruitment drive early this year to employ health workers with competencies in Maternal and Child Health Care to serve in remote, rural health centres.

This was in line with a memorandum of understanding signed between the state and PATHS2 to co-fund recruitment of health workers. PATHS2 supported the state with the recruitment of 20 medical doctors and 40 midwives/nurses. This arrangement took effect from February 2012 and is already yielding positive results, including a significant increase in the number of assisted deliveries in primary health care centres.

The shortfall in healthworkers is a major obstacle to the implementation of health reforms in the state. Jigawa State Commissioner for Health Dr. Abubakar Tafida said the state is happy to partner with PATHS2.

"I was at Sankara PHC two weeks ago," says Dr. Tafida, "and I was very happy to see midwives posted there. Sankara and so many places are benefitting from the partnership with PATHS2.



Jigawa state commissioner for health, Dr. Abubakar Tafida

The Jigawa State Government has shown great political will to improve the density of health workers in the state. Data available from the Gunduma Health Systems Board shows that the government has increased the number of midwives from 29 in 2009 to 268; medical doctors from 40 to 140; pharmacists from 13 to 28; and nurses from 211 to 500.

Indeed, the state now has a holistic and sustainable HRH policy and strategic health plan that is guiding interventions, investments and decision making in the planning, management and development of human resources for health in the state.

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The Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase Two (PATHS2) is a six-year development initiative that aims to ensure Nigeria achieves important health-related Millennium Development Goals.

Funded by UKAID from the Department for International Development, PATHS2 is working in partnership with the Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders to improve the planning, financing, and delivery of sustainable health services for those most in need. In addition to its work at the Federal level, the PATHS2 programme is implemented in the five states of Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos. PATHS2 follows the successful PATHS programme, which was implemented from 2002 to 2008.

PATHS2 is managed by Abt Associates, in association with Options, Mannion Daniels, and the Axios Foundation.



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