

Midwives: health heroes for women, adolescent girls and newborns

International Day of the Midwife 2016

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On this International Day of the Midwife, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, salutes the contribution of midwives to saving the lives of women, adolescent girls and newborns, sometimes under very difficult circumstances, in hard-to-reach communities, in humanitarian emergencies, and in fragile and conflict-torn countries.

Well-trained and supported midwives working in communities are uniquely positioned to provide the compassionate, respectful and culturally sensitive care a woman needs during pregnancy and childbirth. Midwifery is equally important for newborns during the critical first month of life, and is a significant contribution to sexual and reproductive health in general.

Midwives are, therefore, essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In the past 25 years, the world has almost halved maternal deaths, but every year, some 300,000 women still die during pregnancy and childbirth, and almost 3 million babies do not survive their first four weeks of life. A vast majority of these largely preventable deaths take place in developing and crisis-affected countries. If deployed in larger numbers, trained midwives could avert approximately two thirds of these deaths. Significant investments in midwifery are essential if the world is to achieve its ambitious goals of reducing maternal and newborn deaths.

UNFPA is helping train and support thousands of midwives in more than 100 countries. A recent survey estimated that in 57 of these countries, UNFPA has trained 66,000 midwives over the past seven years. These critical health-care providers can help more than 11 million women to give birth safely each year, but much more needs to be done.

On this International Day of the Midwife, we at UNFPA renew our commitment to working with global partners and countries to strengthen midwifery skills and capacities. We call on countries to acclaim and reward midwives who are working in challenging and hard-to-reach areas, where their services are most needed. We also urge countries to invest in quality training, good working conditions, decent salaries, adequate workforce policies and possibilities for professional growth.

Midwives are our heroes and the backbone of sexual and reproductive health. Let us support them and the women and newborns at the heart of their care.
