



Midwives: In good hands

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Safe childbirth – letting actions follow words



Dr. med. Niklaus Labhardt,
President of SolidarMed

Well-trained and properly equipped midwives lower the rate of maternal and neonatal mortality by two thirds. They save many lives and reduce human suffering – and do not cost the earth. For this reason, the recruitment and training of midwives was declared a priority by the WHO in 2014¹. In the five SolidarMed project countries, only about half of all deliveries take place under the minimal standards defined by the WHO. This is why mothers and newborn babies often die as a result of easily preventable complications. In Zambia, Zimbabwe and Moçambique, SolidarMed has let actions follow the words of the WHO. We have invested a great deal of work in recent years to ensure that women living in extreme poverty can also give birth safely.

From 2012 to 2016, 307'400 births took place in SolidarMed's partner hospitals and in the surrounding health centres. SolidarMed has made it possible for these women to have a safe

delivery by training staff and investing in infrastructure. But training and medical equipment are not enough. Midwives like Fatima in Moçambique (page 7) or Constance in Zambia (page 3) also need professional and private prospects. By building staff houses and providing professional development opportunities, SolidarMed makes working at these remote hospitals more attractive and so counteracts the brain drain.

This is how SolidarMed makes the leap from the strategy defined by the WHO to its practical implementation in rural, remote and hard-to-reach parts of Africa, which are otherwise often forgotten. With your help, we are committed to giving all women and newborn babies in our project areas access to safe childbirth.

¹The state of the world's midwifery 2014, accessible under <https://www.unfpa.org/sowmy>

SolidarMed is the Swiss organisation for health in Africa and improves health care for 1.5 million people. SolidarMed strengthens and expands existing medical services sustainably and meaningfully. The projects pay particular attention to the health of mothers, pregnant women, newborns and children.



Impressum «SolidarMed aktuell» 89/2017

Publisher and editorial offices: SolidarMed, Obergrundstrasse 97, CH-6005 Lucerne

Phone +41 41 310 66 60, contact@solidarmed.ch, solidarmed.ch

Texts: Benjamin Gross Layout: Tiziana Pittini Cover photo: Olivier Brandenburg Printers: Brunner AG, Druck und Medien, Kriens Print run: 15'000 (only in German)

„SolidarMed aktuell“ is published four times a year - the next issue will be published in March 2018. An annual print subscription costs CHF 5.— and is deducted as a one-off from your donation. For members it is included in the annual fee.

Membership: CHF 50.— for individual members; CHF 80.— for families and institutions. Donations and membership fees can be transferred with the appropriate reference to: Postal account 60-1443-9, made out to: SolidarMed, CH-6005 Lucerne. IBAN: CH0909000000600014339, BIC: POFICHBEXXX Online donations: solidarmed.ch «Get involved» Thank you for your support!



Photo: Olivier Brandenburg

Half of the midwives needed in Zambia are missing

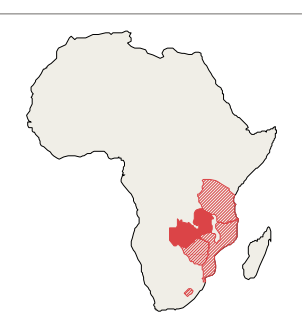
Zambia Constance Mwela works at the remote hospital in Mpanshya, where SolidarMed supports the training of midwives.

Constance Mwela is a qualified nurse and recently received her midwifery diploma. She completed her training at the rural hospital of St. Luke's – at “her hospital” – as she proudly points out. She spent the previous five years working there as a nurse. Thanks to the additional training made possible by SolidarMed, she now works for the hospital both as a nurse and as a midwife.

And she is passing on her knowledge to the next generation of students. With joy and enthusiasm, Constance now trains young people as nurses – this is her third vocation. In this way, Constance Mwela helps reduce the chronic lack of health professionals in the rural areas.

Thanks to her training as a midwife, she is now also an expert on childbirth and this means the most to Constance. “As midwife, I have learnt to understand the birth process. I know that simple manoeuvres can help if the baby gets stuck.”

Constance is grateful that she is able to carry out this task in her district, so far from the capital. The area around Mpanshya is home to 65'000 people and is one of the poorest regions of the country. Here, close to the borders of Moçambique and Zimbabwe, electricity is only available via diesel generators or a few solar panels. For most people, what they harvest from their simple fields is barely enough to feed them.



Zambia:
Inhabitants 16'212'000
Doctors per 1000 inhabitants 0.08
Life expectancy 62 years



Photo: Olivier Brandenburg

Photo above
A male birth attendant washes a six day old baby.

Photo page 3
Constance Mwela training young midwives and birth attendants.

Photo below
Newborn babies also need proper care after birth: in higher regions, a warm bonnet protects the baby from hypothermia.



Photo: Olivier Brandenburg

A lack of health workers

SolidarMed has supported St. Luke's hospital in a number of areas since 2012. Constance was one of the first occupants of the newly built staff hostel. This provides 12 hospital staff members with a place to live and was built by SolidarMed. The lack of housing and the poor standard of the housing stock is one of the core problems of the health system in Zambia.

"This accommodation is wonderful", enthuses Constance. In their simple quarters, Constance and her colleagues have access to clean drinking water and solar electricity. "This is an important reason why it is good to work here", she says. Thanks to this intervention, the health workers remain here in the rural areas and do not leave for the capital.

Training pays off

For Constance, this is not the only reason to stay. "My work here inspires me and fills me with positive energy", she says. "In this place, I can work, I can develop professionally and even pass on my knowledge to others at the same time." So far, this is still a rarity in Zambia.

Since 2009, St. Luke's hospital has been betting on education. It was the first hospital to open a school of nursing and midwifery outside the capital. It has been worth it. Since then, the number of patients and births has been rising. Word is getting around about the good quality of treatment and the population is gaining trust in the hospital. Constance knows the value of her work. Too often, she witnessed how a birth turned into a tragedy.

Dangerous childbirth

The main reasons for maternal mortality are:

- Insufficient knowledge about obstetrics
- Inadequate equipment
- Poor state of infrastructure, often no separate delivery room
- Home births without a midwife or doctor
- Childbirth complications due to HIV

SolidarMed helps with MAMA

In 5 hospitals and 71 remote health centres in Moçambique and Zimbabwe, SolidarMed ensures that medical personnel can offer expectant mothers safe care. In obstetric training courses, nurses and midwives learn how to resuscitate newborn babies or care for mothers in an emergency. Throughout the year, a gynaecologist from SolidarMed visits the health professionals at work and offers support and advice.

The doctors and midwives of the four partner hospitals in Zimbabwe learn how to monitor a high-risk pregnancy using a CTG and ultrasound examinations. In the health centres, which do not have an ultrasound machine, SolidarMed provides Doppler devices. The health professionals use these to monitor the baby's heartbeat and can react on time in case of oxygen deficiency.

Learn more about health staff:

solidarmed.ch/en > topics > health staff

For every 250 births in Zambia, one woman will die from complications. In Switzerland, this happens only once in 20'000 births. Thanks to support from well-trained health professionals, Charity Mwanza will be able to deliver her twins safely.



Photo: Olivier Brandenburg

An expert opinion

"Midwives save lives every day."

Claudia Liedtke spent 15 years delivering babies on several continents. Since August, she works as a Public Health expert for SolidarMed.

SolidarMed: Claudia Liedtke, how does the work of a midwife in Switzerland compare to the work in Zambia?

Claudia Liedtke: Fundamentally, obstetric care is the same the world over. The circumstances make the difference. One does not need a high-tech delivery suite. Well-trained midwives can achieve a lot just by using their ears and hands. What is crucial is regular antenatal care and advice during pregnancy, as well as competent monitoring during the birth itself.

How does a midwife react to complications before or during a birth?

A well-trained midwife recognises the risk factors of a birth early on. Using manual techniques, she can deliver a child safely, including a breech presentation for example. She also recognises when a caesarean section is medically necessary. This is based on good training. In Zambia, we not only have a problem with the standard of training. There are also simply not enough trained midwives.

What role does SolidarMed play here?

SolidarMed invests in the training of personnel in rural areas. This has high priority. The rural areas lack medically trained midwives. Every second midwife position is currently vacant. We target our support to training programmes. As a result, we not only achieve a better level of training, we also train the staff where they are most needed.



Claudia Liedtke,
expert in Public Health and
Desk Officer for
Zambia & Lesotho



Photo: SolidarMed

SolidarMed is heard

Zambia In April, the Ministry of Health invited SolidarMed to a high-level exchange meeting to introduce our “housing associations for health staff” project. This project is a model for innovative and sustainable health system financing. It develops urgently needed housing for health staff at rural health centres and hospitals. All key partners of the Ministry of Health were present at the meeting. It takes place four times a year to discuss health policy guidelines.

Press play for family planning

Zimbabwe For one month, a local film team spent their days and nights living with the population of a village in Bikita district. Their goal:

To research and create a 30 minute long documentary on the subject of family planning.

The film makers gained exciting insights. Many villagers automatically associated family planning with limiting the size of their family. They showed little awareness of other aspects of family planning, like birth spacing. Men were not aware that mothers need complete physical recovery before another pregnancy. Furthermore, the health of existing children benefits when a mother can look after them for longer before giving birth again.

A dramatic insight was gained around condom use. Many men only use these for extra-marital sex. Religious reasons for forgoing condoms were also mentioned. The film also opens a dialogue with the many followers of conservative churches in Zimbabwe. In the film, a priest speaks out in favour of active family planning with the statement: “My people are suffering due to a lack of knowledge.”

Because the film was created locally, people find it easier to identify with the content. After the viewing, they discuss family planning and its impact on the health of family members for over an hour. Further viewings are planned in 15 health centres for a total of around 2000 visitors.



Zambia
SolidarMed is heard

Zimbabwe
Press play for family planning

Moçambique
A visit from the mountain kingdom



Photo: SolidarMed

A visit from the mountain kingdom

Moçambique Kamele Mashaete, Phofu Masethothi and ‘Me Ratikoane work for SolidarMed in Lesotho. In August, they visited their colleagues in Moçambique. The challenges of these two countries are comparable yet different: In the north of Moçambique, maternal mortality is three times as high as in Lesotho. However, the HIV rate in Lesotho is twice as high as in Cabo Delgado province. During their visit to Moçambique, the visitors were exposed to the constant threat of malaria infection – something which does not exist in the mountains of Lesotho.

The purpose of the visit was to share knowledge about new approaches in health promotion. Under the heading of “male champions”, men in Ancuabe district join discussion groups where they are encouraged to dedicate themselves to the health of their families and to combat HIV. Similar efforts are being made in Lesotho. Here too, it is a challenge to convince men to have an HIV test and if necessary begin treatment.

The exchange between the two SolidarMed teams was highly motivating. In their respective countries, Papa Nanjolo from Moçambique and ‘Me Phofu from Lesotho both work closely with village populations. For both, the highlight of the visit was the meeting with traditional midwives and the discussion around safe childbirth.



Photo: Maurice Haas

On the road with ...

Nurse-midwife Fatima cares for 50 pregnant women every day

It is 8 o’clock in the morning and already rush hour in the district hospital of Chiùre in Moçambique. Over 50 women, often accompanied by their husbands or relatives, queue in front of the out-patient-department. Today, 19-year-old Louisa and her 20-year-old husband are among the first to visit Fatima for antenatal care. They’re already expecting their second child. Both seem nervous. Fatima, a nurse and midwife, asks a lot of questions. She records the expectant mother’s health notes in a small booklet. This document will accompany Louisa until the birth of her baby.

Time is short. Fatima has set herself the target of not sending home any of the waiting women without examining them. Sadly, this is a daily reality. She has just under 10 minutes for every examination. Determined yet calm, she evaluates the health condition of the mother. She also gives them both important tips on nutrition during pregnancy. They’ve barely risen from their seats when the next expectant mother makes her way into the examination room.



Photo: SolidarMed

SolidarMed doctor as trainer

The gynaecologist Dr Marielle Jousse offers close support to midwives and nurses like Fatima in all the health centres in Chiùre district. Dr Jousse provides regular supervision and shares important medical knowledge on all questions of maternal health care and obstetrics.

Nino Schurter is e-bike patron

Keep up to date with all developments around the first e-bike ambulance in Moçambique on our social media channels.



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The best gifts bring triple the joy! Joy not only for the receivers and the givers, but also for people in southern Africa. Our gift certificates enable emergency transport for pregnant women, protect babies from malaria and so much more. In the name of your loved ones, you make urgently needed help possible. The perfect gift for everyone.

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Donate your old Apple device!

The joy about a new iPhone or iPad often comes with a guilty conscience. As popular as they are, these devices waste precious resources. Reveno.ch, a firm from Basel, gives your old smartphone, tablet or computer (only Apple) a second life. And it gets better. You can donate the proceeds to the SolidarMed projects. Many thanks!

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In memory of Peter Schubarth

SolidarMed bids farewell to the late Peter Schubarth (1947 – 2017). Peter carried out a number of expert project visits for SolidarMed and was a member of the Board from 2008 to 2017. We appreciated his quiet, thoughtful, analytical and deeply humane manner. We benefited from the rich experience he gained in many long-terms deployments in the countries of the South, among them Nepal, Chad and Namibia. We will miss his subtle and affectionate sense of humour.



Photo: SolidarMed

Many thanks for your support!

With your help, we were once again able to achieve a lot and strengthen basic medical care in our project regions. This means better health for many families in southern Africa. Without your trust and the generous support of many private individuals, as well as public, church-based and private institutions, this would not have been possible. Your commitment means health for Africa. Many thanks!