

Bodabodas help improve maternal health in Pader district

PADER

By Arnest Tumwesige

Health workers in Pader district are happy about the increase in the number of mothers who are delivering at health centres since the beginning of 2015.

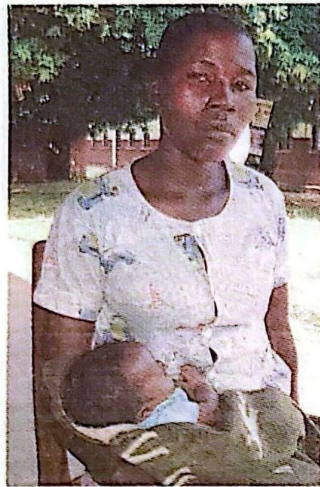
They say credit goes to the voucher system, where bodabodas in villages carry expectant mothers and bring them to deliver at health facilities.

Anna Apiyo, the district health officer, said the system that was initiated by AVSI, a non-governmental organisation working in partnership with the district, also targets children born in villages, but are facing challenges such as breathing.

"In some cases, the mothers deliver in villages and in case they have complications of severe bleeding, they are quickly referred to health centres for proper medication," she added.

Apiyo said in some busy health centres, they are now delivering seven babies in a day and some midwives are already complaining about heavy work.

Apiyo said deliveries have more than doubled from 23% to 48% since the beginning of



Auma with her baby

the 2015 when the voucher was introduced.

Pader district has four ambulances out of which three are grounded. The functional one also keeps breaking down.

Apiyo also noted that there is a high number of babies born with HIV on Nevirapine syrup, which is essential in the prevention of HIV transmission to newborn babies.

"When mothers deliver from villages, the babies whose mothers have HIV/AIDS do not get the required treatment. This system has helped us to eradicate the traditional birth attendants," she added.

Oliver Akello, 30, an



A bodaboda cyclist taking Aceng, a mother who had just given birth, for post-natal care at Puranga Health Centre III. Photo by Arnest Tumwesige

enrolled midwife at Puranga Health Centre III, commended the voucher system.

Akello said it has been a challenge for mothers who cannot afford two meals a day, to travel to health centres and wait for their delivery for days because it requires a lot in terms of upkeep. With the voucher system, they wait from their homes, until the

labour pains start.

The midwife observed that as long as the mothers are expectant, bodaboda riders keep watch and in case of any complication or illness, they are rushed to hospital.

"I am the only midwife at this facility and in case I am off duty, nurses stand in for me, but in case of an emergency, I also step in to save the

Cyclists who bring a pregnant or newly born babies for treatment are offered a payment voucher depending on the kilometres travelled.

Every month, AVSI, working with health workers, effect the payment in a lump sum. The programme is being implemented in Acholibur and Puranga sub-counties in Pader. The system is also in force in Kitgum and Agago districts.

HOW THE VOUCHER WORKS

situation. More manpower is needed," she added.

Just like Akello, Scovia Laker Franka, a midwife at Atanga Health Centre III, said deliveries in one quarter by 2015 were at 80 babies, which have increased to 110.

However, Akello expresses disappointment over the poor road network, especially during the rainy season.

Mothers applaud the system

Vicky Auma, 24, and a mother of five, started producing at the age of 17 and whenever she had to deliver, it had to be through a cesarean (C-section) which Atanga Health Centre III cannot perform.

Auma says it was previously hard to reach Kitgum Hospital for a C-section as her husband, who is a peasant, can hardly support her during delivery time.

In the same situation is Winnie Aceng, a 19-year-old mother from Lamin-cwida parish in Puranga sub-county. She accessed the services through a village health team.

Bodaboda riders speak out

Lamek Ocet, 41, from Oret parish in Puranga sub-county is among the 12 cyclists who were first trained to handle cases of mothers that can deliver on the way during referral.

Ocet started work in 2015 and he says every month, he transports an average of 15 mothers. He said even when they deliver on the way, they ensure that the mother and the baby reach the health centre for medication and immunisation.