

Bridge health gap with additional 13,000 midwives

EARLIER this week, the world honoured midwives for their unwavering commitment to ensuring safe births and healthy newborns. Uganda celebrated this year's International Day of the Midwife under the theme: *One Million More Midwives and Thirteen Thousand More Midwives for Uganda* – a clear signal that 13,000 additional midwives are needed to bridge the healthcare gap.

The health ministry performance report indicates that Uganda is on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets, with a maternal mortality rate of 189 per 100,000 live births and a neonatal mortality rate of 22 per 1,000 live births. These achievements are largely a result of the work of midwives, who conduct 75% of deliveries at lower-level health facilities. While this is commendable progress, the shortage of these essential healthcare providers remains a matter of urgency.

Midwifery, according to UNFPA, is one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving maternal health. With a midwife present, a woman giving birth has a far better chance of a safe delivery and of her baby surviving.



EDITORIAL

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However, Uganda faces a devastating shortfall of 13,000 midwives, with regions such as Karamoja suffering acutely. Moroto district alone needs 80 more midwives, against 1,000 needed across the region as a whole. Globally, every two minutes a woman dies from causes linked to pregnancy or childbirth. This state of affairs is preventable and ought to compel all health sector stakeholders to

reflect seriously on the importance of midwives in saving the lives of mothers and newborns. When a skilled midwife is present, a woman's chances of a safe delivery increase dramatically.

Midwives are educators, advocates and frontline responders who guide mothers through life's most vulnerable moments. Yet they bear considerable physical burdens, including severe headaches, knee problems, and persistent backaches, while continuing to work tirelessly.

To make the goal of 13,000 additional midwives a reality, training programmes must be expanded, remuneration and working conditions improved to retain skilled professionals and midwife-led care models, proven to deliver better outcomes, fully implemented. The Government must also prioritise midwifery in the national wage bill and accelerate the drive towards universal health coverage. Furthermore, it must honour its commitments to invest in midwifery education and training, recruit and retain more midwives and improve working conditions, among other pledges.

When midwives cradle newborns, they hold Uganda's future in their hands.