

Midwives: Critical in every crisis

Established in 1992 by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), the world celebrates the International Day of the Midwife (IDM) on 5 May yearly to celebrate and raise awareness about the midwifery profession. This year's theme is "Midwives: Critical in Every Crisis."^[1]

In many countries, midwives are the first contact a pregnant woman makes for antenatal care. Midwives are critical in identifying, preventing, and/or managing and referring complications or problems as they arise, as well as delivering the baby and providing postnatal care for the mother and newborn. Early identification of complications ensures early intervention by skilled medical providers to prevent maternal morbidity and mortality.

According to the World Health Organization, South Sudan "reports one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally, with 692 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. For newborns, the burden is equally severe, with about 40 deaths per 1000 live births. Many factors play a role, including a volatile context of humanitarian crises and climate-related health emergencies."^[2]

The theme is significant in South Sudan, which has had perennial conflicts and displacements for many years. Midwives in these conditions are also the main providers of essential sexual and reproductive health services.

In their Op-Ed marking IDM, the South Sudan Ministry of Health (MoH) and UNFPA acknowledge the health system barriers hindering midwifery potential, including "chronic underinvestment [which] has left many health facilities with limited electricity, water, equipment, or medicines. Insecurity disrupts supply chains and endangers health workers."^[3]

As the MoH aptly concluded, "the health and future of the women, girls, and newborns in South Sudan depend on them [midwives]."

Thus, the MoH should ensure the provision of funding, training, and supplies for midwives to enable them to provide critical services in every crisis and every birth.

References:

1. UNFPA, Midwives: Critical in every crisis, May 5 2025. <https://www.unfpa.org/events/midwives-critical-every-crisis>
2. World Health Organization, International Day of the Midwife 2025, 5 May 2025. <https://www.afro.who.int/regional-director/speeches-messages/international-day-midwife-2025>
3. Mou, A and Mandong, S. Op-Ed: Midwives in South Sudan: Critical Health Anchors in Every Crisis. 4 May 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/op-ed-midwives-south-sudan-critical-health-anchors-every-crisis>

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