

Afghanistan's Maternal and Child Health Report to Women of Vision FY2010

Afghanistan is a conservative Muslim country in which most women are unwilling to be treated by male healthcare providers. World Vision's respect for that culture, combined with the country's staggering deficiencies in providing care to mothers and newborns, makes it imperative that more women are trained to be skilled healthcare professionals.

At the Herat Regional Hospital in western Afghanistan, the number of skilled women providers in the maternity unit is not sufficient to ensure that all mothers and newborns receive quality care, and the Ministry of Public Health does not have the resources to increase the staffing and pay for it.



Bamoneh, left, holds her daughter, Atifeh, while vaccinator Ghulam Sahee Mohammadi immunizes the small child in a clinic in Karokh, near Herat in western Afghanistan. His daughter, Paristu, also a vaccinator, helps comfort Atifeh. Twelve years ago, Ghulam Sahee's 8-monthold daughter fell ill with pneumonia. The Taliban, ruling the area at that time, would not permit a male pediatric specialist to examine her, because she was a girl. She died soon after. World Vision is working on behalf of its donors to educate and train more women to be health professionals, particularly midwives.

As a result, there is insufficient prenatal care, a lack of trained assistance during birthing, and little postnatal care for infants or mothers. World Vision is working with the Institute of Health Sciences and the hospital to provide quality education and training to increase the number of qualified midwives and others in the maternity unit.

The unit is a 100-bed facility serving an area with nearly 2 million people. Patients come from surrounding rural areas as well as the city of Herat. Approximately 1,600 babies are delivered in a typical month, and about 10 percent have complications that require time in the neonatal care unit. The maternity unit recently moved into a new, modern building, but the improvement in physical infrastructure and technology can only realize its full potential when enough women are trained to staff it.

With support from Women of Vision and other donors, the maternity unit's staff will be increased and trained to thoroughly assess and monitor the

condition of babies and mothers. It also will provide new mothers and other family members with crucial information and counseling on newborn care, infection prevention, immunizations, and signs of complications that require an immediate return to the hospital. This will help ensure that healthy mothers and newborns who leave the hospital will continue to do well, and that families will recognize signs of complications and seek help quickly.

A complete report on achievements related to this project you so generously support may be available in November.