



Judith Draleru (centre), is a midwife and serving UN Volunteer with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She trains local personnel in life saving skills to reduce maternal and child mortality in South Sudan. (UNFPA/TT, 2017)

## My goal as a UN Volunteer in South Sudan is to save lives

My name is Judith Draleru Maturu. I am from Uganda. Since March 2014, I serve as an international UN Volunteer midwife with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in South Sudan. I worked as a nurse volunteer and clinic coordinator with a community based organization before starting my current assignment in the Juba Teaching Hospital and Juba College of Nursing and Midwifery (JCONAM). I give my time and energy to help reduce the high numbers of childbirth deaths (2,054/100,000 live births) in this country.

UN Volunteer midwives together with local volunteers help reduce preventable deaths and improve maternal and child health in South Sudan. We further our goals through mentoring, training, classroom teaching, and leading by example. We provide gender sensitive reproductive health services that range from care before family planning and pregnancy, antenatal care, labour, delivery, and postnatal care.

In South Sudan, high maternal mortality is due to several preventable factors including

prolonged obstructed labour, haemorrhage, infection, eclampsia, and complications of unsafe abortions that need skilled attendance. We need more volunteers to bring skills and knowledge and support the people here working toward a common goal. Estimates now show a reduction in maternal deaths, and I believe I am part of this, but we need to train more midwives to continue this work.

“ My biggest success is in the number of mothers and their children who have escaped death thanks to our teamwork and our skills. I praise the volunteers for their hard work in difficult times even though they do not receive a regular salary—saying that they work for their people and country. I encourage volunteering as the way to go, especially in places of scarce resources.

I use my weekends to work with other volunteers to improve the social welfare of orphans and other vulnerable groups. We do home visits, advocate to support the adolescents, empower young girls to stay in school, and create awareness on gender-based violence. We tell them where to get help for material support and financial contrition to buy food for the orphanage. We also give career guidance to the adolescents.

I obtained a Bachelor’s of Science in Public Health (BSc: PH) while working here in South Sudan and secured a scholarship with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) for an International Masters in Conflictology—a dream that would have been impossible without joining the UN Volunteers.

“ This has been a wonderful experience. I learned that the desire to help others is the best gift we can offer to those in need. If we understand the people we work with, they will never abandon us.

Being in South Sudan was not destabilizing to me because Uganda shares a border and has a similar community setting. Language barriers were easily broken down as I speak Ma’di and Acholi, languages of Central Equatorians that are common where I work in Juba, though I had to learn Juba Arabic terms to communicate with mothers. Without the welcome of the people of South Sudan, we would not be here. Respect of diversity and valuing the contribution of every individual regardless of status is the key to success.

*This story was prepared with the support of [UN Online Volunteer Erika Morris](#).*

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