



Mariam Diarra, a UN Community Volunteer Midwife with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), at the Koke village health centre.

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## Improving the quality of health services in remote areas of Mali

Mariam Diarra is one of 49 UN Community Volunteer Midwives improving the quality of health services in community health centres in six rural communities of Mali. She serves with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which supports the efforts of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to improve the accessibility and quality of reproductive health services.

Mariam Diarra is one of the 49 UN Community Volunteer Midwives recruited by UNFPA to improve the quality of health services in community health centres located in six rural communities in Mali — Koulikoro, Ségou, Sikasso, Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu. The programme aims to achieve three key outcomes: zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet needs for family planning and zero gender-based violence and other harmful practices, such as child marriage.

Before the arrival of Mariam, the community health centre had no longer been functional since 2012 due to a security crisis, which caused a massive departure of health workers. For pre/postnatal consultations, villagers had to travel to Markala, a health district located 15km away, under challenging conditions, especially during the rainy season when access to roads is severely limited.

“ UNFPA's initiative to deploy midwives has strengthened the country's humanitarian strategy. By reducing the shortage of qualified human resources and correcting the geographical inequality between rural and urban areas and between humanitarian and non-humanitarian zones, Mariam has contributed to the resilience of the population, particularly women, youth and children in the six regions covered. --Yves Sassenrath, UNFPA Representative in Mali

As a community midwife, Mariam examines an average of twenty patients a day for consultations ranging from family planning to pre/postnatal care to awareness-raising on gender-based violence and unsafe voluntary termination of pregnancy. Her presence in this village of 7,000 inhabitants, which covers the health services of three other villages in Koke, is a great relief for the population.

"We cannot thank Mariam enough for her crucial contribution and commitment to her role as a midwife for our people. She is available 24 hours and even comes to private homes for consultations, always with a smile," says Bokary Doumbia, the village chief of Koke.

“ We are very pleased with Mariam Diarra, who, thanks to her competencies and commitment, has been appointed the Technical Director of the community health centre. She has integrated quickly and is,

“ above all, reliable and always available. Her presence in Koke helps to improve health indicators and significantly reduces maternal and neonatal mortality. --Dr Fomba, Chief Medical Officer, Markala Health District

Since she started her assignment, the maternal and neonatal mortality rate has dropped by about 35 per cent in 10 months.

“ My greatest pride is the change in the general behavior of young women and girls in the village in terms of family planning. With the support of the village chief of Koke and the youth association, I frequently organize awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence and the dangers of early marriage for young girls. --Mariam Diarra, UN Community Volunteer Midwife

"Mariam's presence has been very beneficial for our village, especially for our girls and wives. The monitoring of pregnant women and deliveries are now done on the spot," says Bah Diarra, the President of ASACO.

Currently, 51 UN Volunteers, including 39 with UNFPA and 12 with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), are working in the health sector in Mali.



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