



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PAKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Better Birthing in Rural Pakistan

USAID project transforms traditional birthing practices for healthier communities



Photo: John Snow, Inc. \ John Snow

USAID trains traditional birth attendants to more safely deliver children in remote villages.

USAID has trained more than 250 traditional birth attendants who now implement more evidence-based, medically safe care for expectant mothers in their communities.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

On a rural road in Taxila, Pakistan, three USAID-supported health trainers waited in their car for Taxila's traditional birth attendant, a woman named Naseem. Their meeting with Naseem should have begun two hours earlier but she was nowhere to be found. Should they take Naseem's absence as a hint that she didn't want to meet with them? They did not anticipate an easy visit, but this meeting was imperative to them, as well as to the community of Taxila.

As a traditional birth attendant, Naseem provides the only obstetric care in Taxila. She assists pregnant women during birth, and presides over deliveries. Most women in Pakistan deliver using a traditional birth attendant, but few attendants have been formally trained and almost all lack proper medical tools. Traditional practices at times result in the death of a mother or newborn. While families continued to experience the anguish of losing a child, little has been done to deal with the country's high infant mortality rate.

In response, USAID established the Pakistan Initiative for Mothers and Newborns (PAIMAN) to address the country's lack of quality obstetric care. Supported by USAID, PAIMAN collaborates with community-based organizations all over the country to renovate and establish clinics, distribute medical supplies, educate the public through various media, and train traditional birth attendants and midwives. When Naseem finally arrived for the meeting, the USAID workers explained the contents of the upcoming workshop for traditional birth attendants and convinced her to attend. The workshop would provide her with much-needed knowledge and skill in obstetric and prenatal care.

After 15 years of practice, Naseem was reluctant to change the way she practices midwifery. But, after an hour-long discussion she was convinced to attend the workshop. Once the workshop got underway, Naseem's reluctance softened. During the eight-day workshop, she learned a client-centered approach, clean delivery practices, recognition of danger signs, and the importance of timely referrals for women who need hospital care.

By the end of the workshop, Naseem, along with the 20 other attendants, renounced their previous methods as dangerous for both mothers and newborns. "I will stop practicing all harmful practices while conducting deliveries," she said. "I will only observe and apply skills that have been taught to us in the training."

Naseem is one of more than 250 traditional birth attendants and 2350 community midwives in rural Pakistan who have taken part in the USAID training and now implement safer medical care for expectant mothers.