

The Dark Clouds Have Lifted

Midwife-Traditional Healer Partnership Saving Lives in Takalar, South Sulawesi

Presenter

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**Mothers hold their children's hands
for a short while, but their hearts forever.**
Anonymous

An unborn baby asks God, "People say that tomorrow you will send me to earth, but how will I be able to survive as I am so small and can't do anything for myself?"

"Your angel will wait for you and guard you with love."

The child asked many other questions of God and the answer was always the same, your angel will look after you. As it became apparent that the birth was near, the child turned to God and asked, "Lord, if I have to leave and go to earth now, may I ask the name of my angel?"

"Her name is simple...Mother."

Is there a more saddening event than the departure of an 'angel' called mother? Many people see a death of a mother as being a death like any other, however, this is not the perspective of the child left behind. The grave stone will crumble, covered with moss and dust, and the person will be forgotten as time goes by, but the voice and the love of a mother are forever stamped in the heart and memories of the children left behind.

The death of a mother is ironic as maternal deaths continue despite constantly increasing budget allocations for health. The placement of midwives in villages, training of health workers, provision of medicine and equipment, and other approaches have an impact but are not enough to reduce maternal deaths. Young midwives are looked at askance by the community who prefer the traditional healers. The traditional healers, or dukun, are considered to be more experienced, have a better understanding of local conditions and also provide holistic services. Therefore, the dukun are preferred despite the existence of a midwife in that village. To fulfill the demands of the community, is the solution to train the dukun? Many articles in scientific journals prove that this does not decrease maternal mortality. The era of training traditional birth attendants in the 1980s and 1990s ended because there was no real contribution to decreasing the maternal mortality rate. Dukun continued to exist and help the birthing process and the problem of maternal mortality continued. With or without dukun training, the maternal mortality rate held steady despite the fact that midwives and dukun existed side by side in remote areas. This was the case until 2006.

An innovative solution emerged in Takalar at the beginning of January 2007. The two poles began to melt and blend. The Bupati of Takalar led the process with support from UNICEF. It's called a smart practice because the district government of Takalar was able to leave behind the old mindset and do something that was beyond imagination. The Bupati of Takalar was able to tear down a thesis that stated that health problems could only be overcome using a classical medical approach. According to DR H Ibrahim Rewa, MM, health issues must be approached from many aspects, including from a cultural perspective. Thus was born the Midwife-Dukun Partnership, which brought together these two polar opposites. This win-win solution was inspired by the cultural norm of sipakatau (mutual respect) which is very vibrant in South Sulawesi. The results include a cultural shift of births at home (before over 80%) to births in health facilities (almost 100% after the intervention). Maternal deaths have dropped from 8 (2006), to 2(2007), to 1(2008) and this year: 0..

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