

# Rotary Scales Up Efforts To Support Maternal Health In Nigeria

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ABUJA, Sept 27, (THEWILL) - Rotary International has commended the German Government's contribution to expand its humanitarian service especially the maternal health and Fistula prevention pilot project in northern Nigeria.

An estimated 36,000 women die each year in Nigeria due to pregnancy or childbirth related complications, Rotary said in statement made available to THEWILL in Abuja.

The funding announcement was made during Rotary's Polio Eradication Summit in Abuja, where the German government committed \$20 million USD to Nigeria for polio eradication – Rotary's top philanthropic goal.

"In addition to our continuous efforts to help eradicate polio, the German government is contributing to the UN Millennium Development Goals, including MDG5 'Improvement of Maternal Health', which calls for a 75 percent reduction of the maternal mortality rate in the developing world by 2015," said Matthias Veltin, Deputy Ambassador of Germany to Nigeria.

Over the last four years, the German ministry for development (BMZ) has provided co-funding for a comprehensive "Safe Motherhood" pilot project in Kano and Kaduna states, supported by Nigerian, Austrian and German Rotary clubs. In cooperation with local stakeholders, this project has reduced maternal mortality in selected hospitals by more than 50 percent.

"We would like to thank all Rotary members involved in this collaborated effort. You have saved the lives of many Nigerian mothers and their children," said Veltin.

Rotary club members agree that healthy mothers are key to sustainable development in Africa. "Maternal health is not a women's issue. It's a human issue," said Jonathan Majiyagbe in a recent report.

As a member of the Rotary Club of Kano and the first African to serve as Rotary International's world president, Majiyagbe said that reaching the MDG5 targets will not happen overnight. "The problem is complex, but innovative, comprehensive approaches like Rotary's project in Northern Nigeria gives us hope. It can provide a blueprint for success in Africa. If we can pull together and scale up these kinds of successful programmes, we can save lives, families and communities."

More than 36,000 women die each year in Nigeria due to pregnancy or childbirth related complications, according to a recently published global health study by the University of Washington – United States. The lifetime risk of a woman dying during childbirth in Nigeria is one in 18, compared to one in 4,800 in the United States.

To address this crisis, Rotary, in close cooperation with local governments and traditional rulers, has rehabilitated ten maternity wards in Kano and Kaduna and provided a solid health advisory system for pregnant women in the surrounding regions. The project also

includes a broad awareness campaign to educate the public about reproductive health issues, including a popular educational radio soap opera in Hausa.

Thanking the German government for their support in expanding Rotary's efforts, German project coordinator and Rotarian Prof. Robert Zinser said the project team aims to further reduce maternal mortality by improving hospital equipment, training staff and educating the public. "Already the maternal mortality rate has been cut by half. In some hospitals from 6,000 deaths per 100,000 deliveries to an average of 790 deaths per 100,000 births," said Zinser. "Our next goal is to scale up the project and replicate the model in the rural areas around Abuja."

For every woman who dies, 20 face serious medical problems or birth injuries. An estimated 800,000 women in Nigeria suffer from obstetric fistula, a birth injury due to obstructed and prolonged labour, which leaves most women with chronic incontinence and often with a stillborn child.

"We've provided fistula repair surgeries for 1,500 women," said Zainab Pawa, the project's chief midwife. "But more importantly, working hand-in-hand with our partners and local stakeholders, we've prevented thousands of women from this dreadful birth injury and maternal death."

Rotary International is a volunteer organization of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service, and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. There are approximately 1.2 million Rotary club members belonging to 33,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas – including 240 clubs in Nigeria.