

# SCOPE SUCCESS STORY

## KENYA



Community health volunteer Salome Ndungu meets with Caroline during a maternal postpartum care visit.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Stella Odaba, Care Group Supervisor

### NAME AND ROLE

Gichagi, Ngong

### LOCATION

Ngong Ward, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County

### SUMMARY

SCOPE-supported community health volunteers visit new mothers and babies to ensure they are healthy and thrive.

### [WORLD RELIEF.ORG/SCOPE](https://www.worldrelief.org/scope)

## COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEER PROVIDES CRITICAL POSTPARTUM CARE

According to the World Health Organization, in 2020, 47 percent of the deaths of children under five were newborns. Progress has been made in Kenya to reduce maternal deaths, but in the last decade, it has stagnated at 488 deaths for every 100,000 live births. Most of these maternal deaths are preventable due to causes directly related to childbirth, including severe bleeding, infection and obstructed labor.

The most common causes of newborn deaths are early delivery, low birth weight, asphyxia and sepsis. These, too, are preventable with quality newborn care. The health of pregnant women and unborn children is also affected negatively by malnutrition which results in complicated pregnancy and growth challenges. This is why community health volunteers are critical partners in helping to prevent mother and child deaths.

In Kenya, the Ministry of Health embraces a community health strategy whose main focus is empowering communities and households to take on initiatives to promote health and prevent diseases through behavior change. Community health volunteers play an integral role in this strategy. They are trained volunteers who make home visits, deliver health promotion messages, treat common ailments and refer their clients to the facility as needed.

Community health volunteers are particularly critical in helping to provide pre- and postpartum care for mothers and babies as they navigate challenges. Salome Ndugu is one of these community health volunteers who has helped to prevent complications for mothers and newborns in her community.

## LOWERING THE RISK OF POSTPARTUM COMPLICATIONS

Salome Ndungu is a community health volunteer who covers Gichagi Community Unit in Ngong Ward. She is passionate about her work, where she visits homes in her community, initiating conversations with households about their health, sharing health messages and helping families take action. In addition to visiting households, Salome helps communities with health improvement, disease prevention, and screening mothers and children for illnesses and referring complicated cases to the link facility for treatment.

One of the women in her care is Caroline Murugu, a Care Group Volunteer from Baraka Care Group. Caroline recently delivered a healthy baby girl, so Salome meets them for postpartum visits. A week out from the birth, Salome has already made three visits. These postpartum visits are critical to ensure the mother and baby are doing well.

When Salome arrives, she sanitizes her hands before gently greeting Caroline. She inquires about her health and checks her vital signs, including temperature, blood pressure and pulse rate, to ensure they are within normal range. She also inquires whether the mother has had bleeding or if she has experienced any headaches or backaches. In Caroline's case, her vital signs are normal.

Salome also checks on how breastfeeding has been going and whether she has had any challenges. After Caroline expressed that she was not having trouble with breastfeeding, Salome encouraged her to eat a variety of foods rich in protein and energy, lots of dark green leafy vegetables and fruits full of vitamin C. These foods will help with the healing process. Lastly, Salome checks for signs of postpartum depression.

After attending to the mother, Salome sanitizes again and examines the infant. Salome checks the baby's eyes, feet and skin using a doctor's lamp in her kit to rule out jaundice. She then

takes her temperature and observes the umbilical cord. The cord is healing, and the color of the skin and eyes are normal. The baby is healthy and growing well.

## INVOLVING THE BIRTH COMPANIONS DURING THE POSTPARTUM CARE VISIT

Once the mother and daughter are examined, Caroline's husband joins. Salome thanks him for always being supportive of his wife and new baby, and he is advised to ensure that Caroline eats a wide variety of food and avoids hard physical work. She discusses with the husband the danger signs to look out for in the upcoming weeks: high temperature, high and low blood pressure and hemorrhages.

Caroline shares the critical role that her husband has taken throughout her pregnancy, "He stood by me every step of the way. My pregnancy was filled with difficulties right from the first trimester. He has been a good birth companion, being aware of danger signs in pregnancy. He could signal the community health volunteer to rush and examine me whenever I was having challenges, and they would escort me to the hospital. He ensures I have a variety of nutritious food. He ensures I get good rest by finding me a helper."

With the couple together, Salome shares the numerous family planning options, including the pros and cons of each method, to ensure they have time before becoming pregnant again. Options while breastfeeding include male and female condoms, a progestin-only pill and an IUD. The couple promises to decide and then inform her of the method they will be using.

## POSTPARTUM CARE SAVES LIVES

Postpartum visits for mothers and babies are critical in ensuring they get the critical care they need to thrive. By end of 2024, 222 SCOPE-supported community health volunteers will reach women in their communities with lifesaving messages.

*This story is written by Stella Odaba and Adrian Simiyu, SCOPE Project.*