

# Health system strengthening with a focus on reproductive health in Malawi

## Improved health care for mothers and newborns

### The challenge

Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to ensure healthy lives and well-being for all. A crucial aspect for this is maternal and newborn health. Malawi has made great progress in improving the likelihood of maternal and newborn survival. But even today, the risk of dying during birth is unacceptably high. For every 100,000 live births, 439 mothers and 3,500 babies die. Access to obstetric and neonatal care is not the problem. 91% of women deliver their babies with a trained birth assistant. Malawi's problem is the low quality of services provided.

The root causes for low quality are spread across the health system. Infrastructure, equipment and medicines are lacking. Health care workers are too few and their knowledge and skills vary. Weak management processes and practices reduce attitudes and motivation. Data for quality improvement is insufficient, not accessible and analytical capacities for its use limited.

These problems have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivering routine services as well as COVID prevention and treatment for the population is pushing the system to its limits.

### Our approach

The Malawi German Health Programme (MGHP) supports the Ministry of Health and four District Health Offices to strengthen the capacity of the health system to provide high quality maternal and newborn care.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Project name	Health system strengthening with a focus on reproductive health
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Dedza, Lilongwe, Mchinji and Ntcheu Districts and support to policy level
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Health
Duration	01.08.2020 – 31.07.2021

To improve the quality of care, MGHP supports the development and implementation of modern quality management approaches in Malawi. Both standards- and quality-cycle based approaches are used. Support to data availability and literacy ensures that this can happen based on evidence. By strengthening the human resource management in the district health systems, MGHP contributes to a higher motivation and performance of managers and front-line staff. By supporting strategic and quality management of the central region's main tertiary referral hospital, MGHP ensures that the population of the target districts has access to improved care at all levels.

Since the COVID pandemic has hit Malawi, MGHP has also supported the Ministry of Health, District Health Offices and faith-based hospitals in fighting the disease. It conducts awareness and prevention activities, builds capacity for vaccination and case management and strengthens epidemic preparedness.



L. to r.: Enter description of photos here.

## The benefits

Quality management has become a routine activity. The Ministry of Health with support of MGHP has put in place a quality management policy and structures in health facilities to implement the policy.

Quality standards guide service provision. Between 2017 to 2020, 8 hospitals participated in an accreditation pilot using standards of the Council of Health Service Accreditation in Southern Africa. Local capacity was developed to carry out assessments. Hospitals improved their scores on a quality index by nearly 50%, from 28 to 41 points. With continued support from MGHP between 2020 and 2023, it is expected that they will further improve to 57 points. MGHP will support the Ministry of Health to develop its own accreditation standards tailored to local circumstances.

Patients' experience of care will inform quality improvement. MGHP has also supported the development of a new approach to measuring how. Between 2020 and 2023, all target districts will be supported to assess patient experiences and feed findings into their quality improvement strategies.

Improved maternal and neonatal care moves closer to where women in need live. MGHP will support 60 of the 105 primary care facilities in the target districts to implement quality improvement projects with inputs from and under supervision of local communities.

Health care workers will gain skills to collect, analyse and interpret health information. The national health information system has been enabled to automatically generate reports on the most important maternal and neonatal health data. Programme coordinators will be trained on how to use them. A feasibility test of an open-source electronic patient register prepares the Malawi health system to move into a paperless future.

The know-do gap is tackled by initiatives to improve motivation of health care workers. MGHP trains managers and supervisors in health facilities to use staff performance appraisals and continuous professional development, especially for nurses and midwives. By

2023, 17 of the 86 public facilities in the target districts are meant implement HR management tools.

Access of the target districts population to improved referral care is strengthened. MGHP also supports the Ministry of Health and central hospitals to extend the decision-making authority of central hospitals and improve information-based hospital management.

It is expected that through the combination of these activities, MGHP will contribute to further reduce health facility-based maternal and neonatal mortality in the target districts, specifically to a reduction in the rate of stillbirths and neonatal deaths from 14.8 in 2020 to 11.8 in 2023.

## Success factors

The Malawi German Health Programme is built on strong relations with partners on the national, the district and the health facility level. It helps to transfer policy and regulation from top down and lessons in implementation from bottom up. It combines dissemination of tried-and-tested approaches like quality management based on PDSA cycles with development of cutting edge digital systems – with the patient at heart and the health care worker in mind.

## An example from the field

- Story from health care centre XYZ and its quality improvement project, incl. quote from HC I/C and quote from patient if possible
- Story from Bilira health centre – e-register

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany  
  
'Name of sector programme'  
GIZ Office or Address line 1  
Address line 2  
Phone +49 (0)00 123 456 789  
Fax +49 (0)00 123 456 789  
'function-specific email address'  
www.giz.de/xxxxxx  
  
As at 'Month' 'Year'  
  
Printed by Name, City  
  
Design Name, City

Photo credits List of photographers in alphabetical order  
Photographer a: page 1  
Photographer b: page 2  
  
Text Name  
  
GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.  
  
On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic  
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)  
  
In cooperation with

**Delete this box and position the  
logo of your cooperation partner or  
enter name of cooperation partner  
in text if necessary.**