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Healthy Baby Voucher Program – The Path to Improved Maternal Care in Uganda

Uganda has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world at 438 deaths per 100,000 live births, with death during childbirth accounting for 18 percent of all deaths among women ages 15 to 49. Only 58 percent of births are attended by a skilled provider.

To address this issue, the Strengthening Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) project implemented a maternal health voucher program in four Western Region districts from 2012 to 2014. As part of the Saving Mothers, Giving Life initiative, SHOPS partner Marie Stopes International, through its local affiliate, served as the voucher management agency. Voucher programs have been found to be an effective demand-side financing tool to increase access to clinic-based services. During this program, over 36,000 women gained access to skilled care, women who otherwise may not have been able to afford these services.

The goal of the Healthy Baby Voucher Program was to increase access to affordable, comprehensive obstetric care for poor women through the private sector, while improving and maintaining the quality of obstetric care. Women below the poverty level purchased vouchers at 3,000 Ugandan shillings each (approximately \$1.20) from a community-based distributor. The voucher gave them access to a package of services at no additional cost, including antenatal clinic visits, delivery (normal, complicated, or cesarean), and postnatal clinic visits. In addition, the voucher covered testing, care, and treatment for other complications in pregnancy, such as malaria and urinary tract infections, and included transportation to a health facility for delivery. For complicated deliveries, the voucher also covered additional transportation to and services at referral facilities.

SHOPS trained participating providers in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, enabling them to provide HIV testing and treatment on-site, instead of referring women to another facility. All women were tested for HIV during antenatal visits, and those who tested positive received lifelong antiretroviral treatment. The program linked the private providers with the public sector. For the first time, these providers were able to pass on government-provided antiretroviral drugs to their HIV-positive patients.



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A mother holds a voucher allowing her to access affordable, comprehensive obstetric care.

Program Results

Of the over 36,000 women who purchased a voucher, 94% received antenatal care, 74% delivered with skilled birth attendance, and over half of those who delivered with a voucher returned for postnatal care. The voucher program contributed to the focus areas of the Saving Mothers, Giving Life initiative by:

- Increasing awareness and demand for maternal and newborn services.
- Extending quality health services to women in poor, remote areas.
- Improving the skills of providers and enabling immediate and affordable emergency obstetric care.

A Voucher's Journey

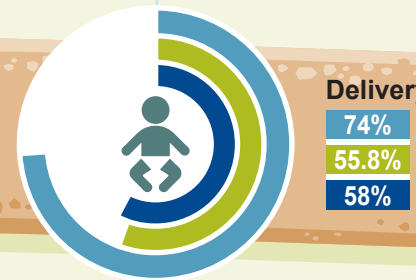


Pregnant women purchased **36,888 vouchers**.

Community mobilizers are critical for community-level voucher distribution and encouraging women to seek maternal health services and give birth in a health facility.

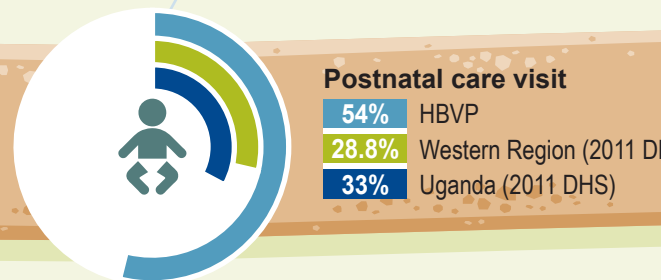


Most women who purchased a voucher at a facility with a skilled birth attendant took a step toward healthier mothers and babies.



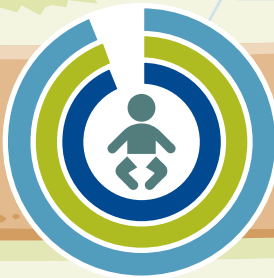
"Had I not gone to the skilled attendant at a health facility, I wouldn't be with this baby. I have managed to have her because I bought a voucher that enabled me to attend antenatal care. [With the transfer coupon] I also went on a boda boda for delivery at the health facility, which is 11 miles from home. When the midwife examined me, she told me that I could not manage to deliver from there. An ambulance was called and it took me to [a higher level facility] where I was operated on"
 — Prossy, a Healthy Baby Voucher client

Over half of voucher clients who delivered with a voucher returned for postnatal care following their delivery.





Nearly all women who purchased a voucher (94 percent) attended at least one antenatal care visit, in keeping with regional and national averages.



Antenatal care visit

- 94% Healthy Baby Voucher Program
- 95.4% Western Region (2011 DHS)
- 94% Uganda (2011 DHS)

"Their efforts led to a 62 percent increase in the number of women giving birth in health facilities."

— Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, Director General, Uganda Ministry of Health

er delivered
nt—a critical
abies.

During antenatal visits, nearly 700 women tested positive for HIV and began free antiretroviral therapy facilitated by the private sector.

y by skilled attendant
HBVP
Western Region (2011 DHS)
Uganda (2011 DHS)



"I am happy my baby is HIV negative, and I am on family planning so my baby will grow well."
— An HBVP client who had a safe delivery

The popularity of the voucher program greatly increased client volume for the 48 participating providers. Sister Hellen Nkojo, proprietor of the Nightingale Domiciliary, used funds from claims reimbursements to add a new wing to the facility and offer additional services beyond maternal health to her community, including training in self-reliance.

Vouchers lead to healthy babies and healthy mothers.

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Program Implications

- The Healthy Baby Voucher Program demonstrated that vouchers can act as a crucial health financing tool to maximize access to maternal health services.
- The program facilitated public-private linkages, which eased referrals and enabled private sector facilities to receive public commodities and supplies for essential services.
- The Uganda Ministry of Health is in the process of scaling up a similar maternal health voucher program.
- Programs such as this one demonstrate a successful approach to health financing, which can lead to universal health coverage.

The Strengthening Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) project is a five-year cooperative agreement (No. GPO-A-00-09-00007-00) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The project focuses on increasing availability, improving quality, and expanding coverage of essential health products and services in family planning and reproductive health, maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS, and other health areas through the private sector. SHOPS is led by Abt Associates, in collaboration with Banyan Global, Jhpiego, Marie Stopes International, Monitor Group, and O'Hanlon Health Consulting. The views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.

For more information about the SHOPS project, visit: www.shopsproject.org



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