

## Mobile maternal care for the mothers of Turkana

A Turkana pastoralist organisation is at the forefront of an initiative to improve the health of mothers and new-borns in far-flung parts of the county, working in partnership with Ministry of Health officials and with money from The European Union. “The project aims to help reduce child deaths and improve maternal health targets,” states Eric Oyoo the project manager in Lodwar.

Many people in these communities live more than a day’s walk from their nearest health post. The Turkana development organization for pastoralists, TUPADO, uses mobile outreach services to bring life-saving care to isolated communities. The Turkana programme is one of almost twenty that the European Union is supporting around the country.

Amuria, a mother of triplets from Lokwatubwa in Turkana tells her story: “Had it not been for the availability of the referral car at the Namoruputh health dispensary. I might have been dead by now.” Amuria still cannot remember what occurred to her before she woke up in Lodwar district hospital.

She was told that she fainted on the long walk she had taken to a dispensary in Namoruputh. She adds that when she was told by a health worker what had happened it stuck in her mind and is the major reason why she can now smile whenever she sees her healthy triplets. And it is for this reason that she named one of her babies after the health worker.

Back in good health, she is thankful to the team and her family who saved her life. She is now taking her triplets to an outreach site in Lokwatubwa to be immunised against childhood diseases. Amuria has also received advice and information about how to feed her new-born children. Amuria is vocal in promoting the benefits of hospital delivery to everyone she knows, saying how much safer it is if there are risks or complications in pregnancy.

Amuria is just one of those who is benefitting from the improved civil and government health facilities that is increasing access to better health care for pregnant women, new mothers, babies and children. The project is also supporting nutrition and family planning services in Loima, Turkana central, Turkana South and Turkana North.

“The project supports more than 50 mobile units that provide antenatal care, family planning, nutrition, child growth monitoring, and health education,” Mr Oyoo states. The project is part of a joint strategy between the government and the European Union to improve child and maternal health through ‘accessible, equitable and affordable’ systems.

The project began in 2010 and is working with other healthcare organisations and district health authorities so that they can take over the running of the project over the long term. People in Turkana have also benefited from better water supplies to remote health facilities and more vaccines for children.

Around Kenya there are nineteen such programmes helping the lives of hundreds of thousands of mothers and babies. Residents of Eastern, Kajiado, Tana, Kwale, Turkana, Kitui, Coast, Wajir, Narok and Mandera have all benefited from a total of Shs. 1.7 billion from money for child and maternal health provided by the European Union.