Voices for the Newborn

Who are newborn champions?

PATH’s Making Every Baby Count Initiative (MEBCI) pooled credible persons who represent groups of people and have their own platforms as newborn champions. These champions believe in newborn survival and willingly accepted to be advocates for newborn survival. Among the champions are social leaders including traditional and religious leaders, broadcasters, musicians and health personnel. Some champions have had personal experience with saving or losing a newborn, which experience they share with others to bring about positive change of attitude and knowledge.

The MEBCI project has mobilized and orientated 67 active newborn champions in its areas of implementation. There are 15 champions in Ashanti Region, 16 in Brong Ahafo Region, 12 in Volta Region, and 15 in Eastern Region. There are also 10 national newborn champions who provide support to the regional champions. In addition to these social leaders, there are a number of health facility-based champions. These are pediatricians, pediatric nurses and midwives who advocate for effective structures, equipment and skills in the health facilities where they work, and provide peer support. They also provide the social champions with information and take part in social education on newborn care.

The role of the newborn champions has been paramount in bringing to light the need to improve newborn care in communities. Through community durbars, radio and television programs, focus group meetings, social media and personal interactions, champions are actively and steadily increasing the attention given to the care of newborns.

National newborn champions campaign launched

Easter Monday 2017 took on a different turn when national newborn champions launched a national campaign to support newborn care. The objective was to set off national interest and action in newborn care, to seek public support, and to gather products and items to support newborn care. The launch took place in Dormaa Ahenkro in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. Among the newborn champions who spearheaded this activity are Dr. Adoma Dwomo-Fokuo who is a Pediatrician at Dormaa Presbyterian Hospital and a newborn champion, and Nanahemaa Adjoa Awindor who is TV personality, traditional ruler and Prefect of the national newborn champions. Nana Awindor said various newborn care advocacy efforts had taken place in the four regions where PATH’s Making Every Baby Count Initiative (MEBCI) was being implemented. “It is time to take the campaign to the rest of Ghana to save as many
newborns as possible through education and better socio-cultural practices”, Nana Awindor said. She encouraged all persons to join the drive by donating blankets, cot sheets, socks and other items that will keep newborn babies warm, alive and well.

Some youth of Dormaa Ahenkro displaying placards in support of newborn care
The Minister of Health who is also the Member of Parliament representing Dormaa Central, Honorable Kwaku Agyemang Manu, was the guest of honor. He was very happy to learn about the activities of the newborn champions in Dormaa and other parts of the country. He donated GH₵2,000 (US$500) to support the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of the Dormaa Presbyterian Hospital, and pledged to gather more support for newborn care.

Among the activities held at the launch was a photo show of newborns and who they grew up to become, a meeting of traditional rulers in the Dormaa traditional area to develop a plan of action on newborn care, and a float through the principal streets of Dormaa Ahenkro to raise awareness about newborn survival.

Newborn champions of Eastern Region orientated
The MEBCI project, in collaboration with the Eastern Regional Directorate of Health, mobilized and orientated 15 persons in the Eastern Region of Ghana as Regional newborn champions. The orientation took place on March 8th, 2017 at Koforidua. The champions include nine Queens, a media person and a businessman. The Eastern Regional Director of Health, Dr. Charity Sarpong, was present at the orientation and encouraged the champions to be active. She stressed that it is possible, with the MEBCI intervention, to significantly reduce newborn deaths in the region if only the society would recognize the best care for newborns.

Dr. Jocelyn Asibey, Pediatrician at Eastern Regional Hospital, Koforidua, demonstrated to the champions how to place a newborn in skin-to-skin contact with the mother. She stressed that Kangaroo Mother Care could save many preterm and low birth weight babies. The Regional Chief Nursing Officer encouraged the champions to partner with health personnel to take the message of effective newborn care to the communities.
With love on St. Valentine’s Day

February 14th is observed as St. Valentine’s Day, a day of love. Newborn champions in Brong Ahafo Region observed the day with a very special initiative. Some two weeks before the day, they appealed to individuals to donate socks. The champions painstakingly washed and sterilized the socks and redesigned them into little caps to protect the heads of the newborns. This initiative was based on the observation that many women came to the hospital to deliver without adequate warm clothing for the newborn, especially caps. The little sock-caps which are called socaps were donated to all newborns and babies on February 14th, 2017.

Mothers and hospital staff showing red hearts in solidarity with newborns in their beautiful “socaps”.

One of the Brong Ahafo Region newborn champions spoke to a gathering of mothers and other persons in the Regional Hospital. She stressed the need for newborns to be kept warm as a way of keeping them alive. She encouraged parents to prepare enough warm clothing before a baby is born.

“If Jesus was born with moderate asphyxia at KATH”

Staffs of the Mother Baby Unity (MBU) of Kumasi’s Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) were worried about the loss of over 100 newborns every year, together with nearly 200 mothers. The problem was that the MBU has only enough space for a few cots and no space for mothers of sick newborns. Considering that KATH serves as the referral hospital for Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Western, Central, and even Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions in Ghana, this situation was simply unacceptable. Mothers sleep on bare floors in open spaces at the mercy of mosquitoes, bed bugs and the weather. Worse still, a cot intended for one baby sometimes holds up to seven sick babies, leading to cross infection and needless newborn deaths.

The Ashanti Region newborn champions therefore launched the “one baby, one cot manifesto” on November 17th, 2016 (see PATH’s publication titled Stand Purple for Pre-terms). On December 22nd, 2017, the KATH MBU staffs in collaboration with regional newborn champions staged a musical, mannequin challenge-style drama titled “If Jesus was born with moderate asphyxia at KATH” at St. George’s Interdenominational Church in Kumasi. The occasion was used to raise awareness about problems at KATH MBU that lead to newborn deaths, and to raise funds to purchase urgently needed equipment to save newborns. Nearly GH¢10,000 was raised with pledges for the purchase of pulse oximeters and infusion pumps. The champions and MBU staffs stressed the need for a spacious MBU where there would be enough cots and space for each baby to have a cot to himself.
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A scene from the KATH MBU with 8 babies in a cot

KATH MBU staffs and Ashanti newborn champions saying “One baby, one cot” at the musical drama program

Following this program, Joy FM in Accra produced a documentary titled “Next to die” in which the problems at the KATH MBU were recounted. The documentary raised an alarm which led the President of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, to visit the KATH MBU. On May 4th, 2017, Ghana’s First Lady, Mrs. Rebecca Akufo-Addo, and the Second Lady, Mrs. Samira Bawumia, collaborated with Joy FM to organize a fundraiser dubbed “Save Them Now”. The aim was to raise GHC10 million to build a one-storey MBU for KATH. By the end of the fundraiser, GHC8 million had been realized, together with pledges of cement, incubators and other equipment. The project is expected to be complete before the end of 2017.

“No mother should lose their life giving life to another. No child should lose their life before they have a shot at life.”

Mrs. Rebecca Akufo-Addo, First Lady of Ghana

The new KATH MBU will make this difference:

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Your kind support to save mothers and newborns is most appreciated.

Media Coverage

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