**Midwives: Delivering Amidst Climate Crises**

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[Pio Smith](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/pio-smith)

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Every year, on this day, we pause to celebrate the invaluable contributions of midwives worldwide. Their unwavering commitment to safeguarding lives and promoting the well-being of women and newborns is nothing short of heroic.

Indispensable in routine healthcare, midwives are evermore important during emergencies.

Amidst increasingly frequent natural disasters across Asia and the Pacific, midwives stand as lifelines, ensuring safe childbirth and maternal well-being for millions of women. In the face of adversity, they ensure health services are more accessible and can quickly reach women in need. In low-resource settings, midwives as frontline workers often serve as the only source of help for a woman to give birth safely.

Consider the story of Shakila, a midwife serving in a remote village in Bangladesh prone to major flooding. Despite the looming threat of disasters, Shakila remains steadfast in her mission to help mothers and babies in her community. When non-stop rain caused flooding in her village, the maternity ward, pharmacy, and storage room were submerged by water. She still continued to deliver babies, without electricity, even supporting emergency cesarean sections as needed with the doctors on call. During disasters, Shakila is a beacon of hope, offering critical assistance to women in labor despite the chaos and destruction. Through her resilience and resourcefulness, she embodies the spirit of midwifery, serving in the most challenging of circumstances.

Wading through water or the rubble of earthquakes, midwives save lives. Standing by the side of a woman before, during, and after childbirth, midwives offer critical support and provide life-saving care during complicated deliveries. They can help prevent fistula by identifying and managing prolonged or obstructed labour promptly, and promoting timely access to emergency obstetric care when needed.

Midwives also provide essential sexual and reproductive health services and information, including family planning, and often serve as the sole healthcare provider for women and girls in hard-to-reach communities. In fact, in any given setting, skilled midwives can provide 90 percent of all essential sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health services.

Recognizing the lifesaving role of midwives is not just a moral imperative; research suggests that facilitating universal access to midwives is a strategic investment that represents the most effective and cost-efficient solution to end preventable maternal and newborn deaths.

Yet, there is a global shortage of close to 1 million midwives, including a shortage of 200,000 midwives in the Asia and Pacific region – a reflection of the systemic undervaluation of their critical role in healthcare. With 66,000 women dying in pregnancy or childbirth every year across Asia and the Pacific, the need for more trained and qualified midwives is crucial. By closing the deficit in the number of midwives, the world could prevent two-thirds of maternal and newborn deaths, saving millions of lives, especially in the face of climate disasters.

The evidence is clear. Investing in midwifery is not just a matter of healthcare; it is a cornerstone of climate and disaster adaptation and resilience. By strengthening midwifery education, training, and support systems, governments and stakeholders can bolster the resilience of communities facing the impacts of climate change. Equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate emergencies, midwives can ensure continuity of care even in the most challenging of circumstances, saving lives and mitigating the impact of disasters on maternal and newborn health.

Midwives also serve as advocates for climate justice, highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women and girls. By amplifying the voices of midwives, we can advance gender-responsive approaches to climate adaptation and resilience, ensuring that the needs and rights of women are central to our efforts to build a sustainable future.

As we confront the realities of a changing climate, let us pay tribute to the pivotal role of midwives in safeguarding the health and well-being of communities across Asia and the Pacific, and beyond. On this International Day of Midwives, we urge for increased recognition of their contribution to society and greater investments in their education, deployment, and empowerment as we celebrate their achievements. For in the hands of midwives lies the power to build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

Pio Smith
The writer is the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.