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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SNAPSHOT

# Saving Newborns in Rural Afghanistan

### **Imparting simple tactics protects the lives of babies born at home**



Photo: USAID/BASICS

*A community health worker provides basic information on newborn care to Miriam from Bamyán Province.*

***Through efforts in many small villages and communities, health workers are reducing the unnecessary infant deaths that occur throughout Afghanistan.***

Miriam has four children, although she has given birth six times. Two infants unfortunately died within days of birth. However, her most recent birth was different in that Miriam and her female relatives had learned from the local female community health worker (CHW) about the importance of keeping the baby warm.

An old custom of washing a newborn soon after birth is being discounted with the knowledge that infants were becoming sick. Instead, a baby should be gently dried with a towel and placed next to the mother's skin. Washing should wait until later.

"Until I received training about the care of newborn babies, I followed our old customs. I did not realize how important it is to keep the baby warm after birth," said a CHW. "Embracing a newborn against the mother's warm skin is so simple, and the mothers like it, too."

With nearly nine out of 10 births in Afghanistan still occurring in the home, USAID is training local health workers in essential maternal and newborn care. They then teach pregnant mothers and their families the simple but important actions they can take to preserve the lives of newborns.

Although general health has improved since 2002, Afghanistan remains a country with some of the poorest health indicators worldwide. Afghanistan has one of the highest mortality rates of any nation: about one in five children die before the age of five. Approximately 80 percent of women in rural Afghanistan give birth outside a health facility without a skilled birth provider. Consequently, teaching basic newborn care along with other basic health skills to community care providers is a vital part of the Ministry of Public Health's national strategy.

Together, USAID and the Afghan Ministry of Health are helping save the lives of babies born in rural homes by ensuring that local health workers know the key newborn care skills to share with pregnant mothers and their families. Families can be more confident and better prepared for their babies' births.