



*A pregnant woman receiving antenatal service at the Yikpabongo CHPS*

## Adisa's Journey to a Smooth Delivery of Twins by Skilled Midwife

**In a remarkable turn of events, Adisa Amadu, a peasant farmer from Yikpabongo in the Mamprugu Moagduri District, experienced a life-changing event that defied the odds. For the first time in her five pregnancies, she had the privilege of delivering her twins in a safe health facility under the vigilant care of a skilled midwife.**

Reflecting on her past, Adisa recalls the distressing ordeal of her first four pregnancies, which were all attended to at home by traditional birth attendants. These trying times exposed her to a host of complications that left her scarred and haunted.

"Those pregnancies were a nightmare," she recalled as she heaved a deep sigh of relief to signal that her ordeal has come to an end.

Adisa's plight wasn't hers alone, as many women in the close-knit farming town found themselves in a similar situation, compelled to give birth at home under the care of traditional birth attendants due to the unavailability of midwives at the Yikpabongo CHPS facility.

However, a welcome change was brought about by the introduction of the Community Engagement for Health and Wellbeing (CE4HW) approach, made possible through the USAID/ASBC Activity.

This transformative initiative stimulated community members in the CHPS zone to eradicate the practice of home births and boost maternal and child survival for the women in their communities.

The Community Health Management Committee, in collaboration with the sub-district head, and community health officers, embarked on a mission to secure a resident midwife for the health facility.

After a series of lobbying the District Health Management Team, their persistent efforts bore fruit when in the last quarter of 2022, as a midwife was assigned to the Yikpabongo CHPS facility.

Adisa's joy was evident as she recounted, "For the first time, the delivery of my twins was smooth, without any complications. It was truly a blessing." She went on to describe her journey towards a healthy pregnancy, emphasising the crucial support she received from the midwife and nurses in overcoming anaemia and swollen legs.



Expressing gratitude for the intervention, Adisa looked forward to a brighter future for women in her community. With access to a skilled midwife, the chances of complications during childbirth are reduced, and the survival rate of newborns is significantly improved.

She passionately advised pregnant women to prioritise clinic visits and take their antenatal care seriously.

However, Adisa expressed her concerns about the midwife's workload, urging authorities to consider posting more personnel to the CHPS facility to further enhance maternal and newborn childcare.

The USAID/ASBC Activity, being executed by a consortium of partners, including Savana Signatures, aims to promote healthy behaviours and practices in 17 districts across northern Ghana, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes for communities.

## Women Empowered in Household & Community Decision-making

**Acknowledging the pivotal role that women play in driving socio-economic development within communities, Savana Signatures has been engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders to spearhead women's involvement in household and community decision-making in the Kumbungu District.**



*Some of the women at one of our community engagements*

Through extensive dialogues in 15 communities in the district in September 2023, the WISE Project is emphasising the wisdom in collective

decision-making, viewing it as a catalyst for sustainable development and heightened resilience among women and girls within these areas.

It forms part of the project's overall objective of promoting the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work among women, which limit their ability to economic independence and participation in household and community decision-making processes.

In June 2023, through Plan International Ghana support, we started addressing the persistent gender inequality caused by unpaid care work in the Kumbungu District through the promotion of equitable sharing of unpaid care work between genders.

Our awareness campaign and educational initiative targeted various stakeholders

such as chiefs, community leaders, women's VSLA groups, and community members in 15 communities in the district.

At Gbulling, Dalun-Kukuo, and Voggu-Kushibo, we emphasised the importance of equal distribution of caregiving responsibilities among men and women, as well as boys and girls, within households.

Our goal has been working to mitigate the gender disparities that have long disadvantaged women in the district. This we have been through a combination of policy advocacy, community mobilization, and capacity-building activities.

A community member, Abdulai Iddrisu, who previously supported his wife with household chores, claimed he was forced to stop because he was given denigrating nicknames by his friends.

“Sometimes, some of us (men) want to support our wives around the house but the stigma and name-calling discourage us from doing so,” he shared during one of our engagements at Dalun-Kukuo.



A member of the Chief's counsel, Mba Yakubu Tuzena, revealed that decision-making in the community excluded the input of women and bypassed engagement with other community members, indicating that decisions were typically made with the approval of elders and the Chief, leading to challenges in upholding certain by-laws in Gbulling.

Mba Tuzena said they now recognise the importance of inclusive decision-making processes in their community.

Tuzena emphasised that involving everyone in discussions is vital to achieving collective consensus before enacting by-laws, fostering a sense of shared ownership and commitment to

their enforcement. Also, some community members, including Fulera Nabla, have experienced instances where their husbands made decisions without consulting them, leaving them with no influence over these choices.

However, Nabla is now happy to observe a positive shift, as some husbands are participating in educational sessions, realising the significance of women's involvement in decision-making. She expressed hopes that more of such sessions will be organised in the community.

These sessions, she said have the potential to transform many lives.

He commended Savana Signatures for the intervention which he said this activity has given him a renewed impetus to support his wife around the house, saying “if not for anything, to lessen her workload so she can get enough rest”.

“Ultimately, the goal is to create a more equal and just society in which women, especially the ones in the rural communities are able to fully participate in decision-making and have equal opportunities to realise their full potential,” Project Officer, Arafat Abass said.

He said it was important to recognise the value of unpaid care work and implement interventions that support women in balancing care work and other responsibilities, such as employment and political participation.

That, he explained, can help “to promote gender equality and enhance women's decision-making power in the Kumbungu District and beyond”.



*A woman contributing to discussions during one of the dialogue sessions.*

## Savana Signatures to Set Up Sanitary Pad Banks Across Ghana



Savana Signatures has launched an initiative to provide a consistent supply of free sanitary pads and offer essential menstrual hygiene education to underprivileged girls across Ghana.

Ghana faces a pressing issue with menstrual product affordability, resulting in women and girls experiencing period poverty.

A significant number of girls, especially in rural Ghana, struggle to afford sanitary pads during their menstruation cycles, often resorting to unsafe materials to collect menstrual blood, risking their reproductive health.

Many girls are compelled to miss school during this period, and some ultimately drop out altogether. Others rely on male partners for financial support to purchase sanitary pads, a situation identified as one of the major challenges leading to early unplanned pregnancies among adolescents.

In response to this critical issue, Savana Signatures in collaboration with Mundo Cooperante launched the 'Sanitary Pad Safe Bank' in August 2023. The initiative will see the establishment of sanitary pad banks across Ghana to offer pads to disadvantaged girls.

The banks will also offer comprehensive menstrual hygiene education to empower girls with the knowledge they need to manage their menstruation.

The initiative embodies Savana Signatures' commitment to facilitating young girls' reproductive health and Mundo Cooperante's "Right to be a Girl" concept of creating a safer, healthier, and empowered future for adolescent girls in Ghana.

The project is being rolled out in phases, with its inaugural phase commencing in the North Tongu District of the Volta Region where three sanitary pad banks will be established, each stocked with essential sanitary products to support vulnerable girls in the district.

A total of 1,000 adolescent girls who face barriers to accessing sanitary products are being targeted in the district.

Beneficiaries will be selected from both educational institutions and communities using poverty levels, those affected by conflicts and disasters as well as girls facing social stigma.

The Gender and Social Inclusion Facilitator at Savana Signatures, Ethel Emefa Ehla, described the Sanitary Pad Bank initiative as a comprehensive resource to empower young girls with the necessary support for their reproductive health.

### Safe spaces for young girls

She emphasised the vital role of committed and reliable volunteers who will ensure the effective distribution of sanitary products to the intended recipients at the last mile.

These banks, she explained, will be strategically established for accessibility, creating safe spaces where female students can engage in open conversations about sensitive topics like Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), seeking assistance to tackle these concerns.

She highlighted the significance of community-level education targeting traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community groups with the view to addressing cultural norms that contribute to issues like child marriage.

Beyond these, she said “We will also link the girls, as well as communities, to Savana Signatures' existing SHE+ Helpline to provide real-time confidential, non-judgemental and convenient support to young people especially girls who are survivors or at risk of SGBV and need counselling or referral services to social justice institutions and health facilities”.

## SavSign TV Promotes AgooSHE+ Helpline in Mamprugu Moagduri



*One of the students making a contribution to discussions*



**In a concerted effort to empower young and vulnerable individuals with knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, Savana Signatures partnered with SavSign TV in July this year to launch a dynamic promotional campaign for the AgooSHE+ Helpline.**

The tollfree helpline is being supported by the USAID/ASBC Activity to advocate and promote sexual and reproductive health among the youth.

Over the course of four days, SavSign TV deployed health screening, informative talks, night video shows, and jingles to educate young people and their parents on the importance of accessing the helpline for making informed life choices and decisions.

The event took place in the Mamprugu Moagduri District, where Savana Signatures, a consortium member of the USAID/ASBC Activity, is actively engaged in fostering healthy behaviours and practices across 11 CHPS zones for improved health outcomes.

At the core of the AgooSHE+ Helpline's mission is empowering adolescents and young people to make informed choices. For more than a decade, the helpline has been a beacon of support, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights for people throughout Ghana.

The helpline is now serving as a linkage to care as part of the IT interventions being implemented by Savana Signatures serves across the 17 districts in northern Ghana where the USAID/ASBC Activity is being implemented.

At Loagri, Kubore, Yagaba and Tuvuu, engaging discussions were held to highlight the benefits of the tollfree helpline and how it can guide individuals in making better family and life decisions. In addition, health screenings for Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS were conducted, ensuring that the health needs of participants were addressed.

As part of efforts in promoting awareness and influencing behavioural change, Season 7 of the Yolo Series, an educative and entertaining show that addresses socio-cultural factors hindering young people's awareness, was showed to trigger discussions.

Producer for SavSign TV, Stephen Kwabena Effah, emphasised that the AgooSHE+ Helpline provides young people with unrestricted access to age-appropriate information, educational resources, counselling, and referral services.

"We not only believe in empowering young individuals to assert their sexual and reproductive rights strongly, but to also support them in navigating the complexities of adolescence and teenage years with responsibility and confidence," he explained.

The District Health Promotion Officer for Mamprugu Moagduri, Victor Oppong, lauded SavSign TV for the campaign, which he described as "educative and empowering", and stressed the need for more of such initiatives.



## One-year postpartum care trial shows positive maternal health outcomes

**Findings from a clinical trial have revealed that mothers who received continuous standardised postpartum education and care for one-year experienced significant improvements in their knowledge of self-care and healthy behaviours.**

These improvements led to enhanced maternal health outcomes, marking a crucial step forward in addressing postpartum complications.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends postpartum care from one hour after delivery to six weeks, recent data has highlighted a concerning trend of postpartum complications and mortality occurring beyond this period.

"As we continue to work in this area and data is coming out, we now know that a lot more women are dying beyond the six-week period," Principal Investigator for the Focused Postpartum Care trial, Dr Joyce Yenupini Adams noted.



Dr. Yenupini Adams

Sharing findings from the randomised clinical trial with the Ghana Health Service in Tamale on July 12, 2023, Dr. Yenupini observed that postpartum care beyond six months was "very important" if Ghana wants to improve on its maternal health outcomes.

"This late postpartum period is very important because mortality isn't just occurring within the six weeks, it's continuing up to one year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth," she said.

She indicated women undergo significant life and mental adjustments during the postpartum period, highlighting the necessity of extended care beyond the traditional six-week timeframe.

"Quality postpartum care is critical so that women and healthcare workers are able to identify and manage complications... postpartum education is also important so that women are empowered to be able to seek care in timely manner and these are the reasons why we developed the Focused Postpartum Care project" she explained.

The Focused Postpartum Care is a model which was developed in 2020 by Dr Yenupini from the ECKS Institute for Global Health at the University of Notre Dame and Savana Signatures through an extensive consultation with the Ghana Health Service and key stakeholders.

The project utilised a randomised control trial model in four facilities – Choggu,

Kalpohin, Gabagaba and Kanvaili – within the Sagnarigu municipality and provided standardised postpartum care to mothers from birth through six weeks up to one year. This care included clinical assessment, postpartum education, and peer support.

The women were recruited during the third trimester of their pregnancy and waited for them to deliver. On the back of a baseline survey, they were randomised into an intervention and control groups.

“This was not selective; this was not biased. Whoever went to the intervention versus control group was by random selection, so that we can actually be able to say the results that we are seeing is due to the intervention and not due to biases,” Dr Yenupini explained.

Women in the intervention group received the focused postpartum care model whereas those in the control group received the usual care or the standard postnatal care already existent in the health facilities.

At each Focused Postpartum Care, participants in the intervention group were individually assessed clinically and counselled after which they met for a group session with the midwives for the postpartum education.

“We ensured that women received the recommended clinical assessment within two weeks, at six weeks and continued to receive measures of vital signs up until 12 months after birth,” Dr Yenupini who is an Assistant Professor at the ECKS Institute said.

### **Focused-PPC Impact**

She explained that the primary outcome of the Focused Postpartum Care project was the knowledge level of the women in identifying post birth warning signs. The results showed a significant difference between the intervention and control groups in terms of their ability to identify warning signs of complications.

Over time, the identification and knowledge of warning signs decreased in the control group, while they increased in the intervention group. By three months, almost 100% of the mothers in the intervention group were able to identify all warning signs, compared to only 30-41% in the control group.

Furthermore, the project positively impacted women's confidence in recognising complications. Confidence level increased in the intervention group for every complication, while it decreased in the control group. Notably, the project also achieved success in promoting family planning, with a higher uptake of family planning methods in the intervention group compared to the control group.

The clinical assessments conducted during the postpartum period also proved essential in identifying issues such as high blood pressure, even beyond six weeks.

Dr. Yenupini stressed the importance of continuing postpartum care beyond this period to effectively manage such cases. She highlighted that if postpartum care stopped at six weeks, a significant number of high blood pressure cases would go unnoticed, posing potential risks to women's health.

“The significance that I want to show here is that at six weeks, we had still about half of participants having high blood pressure. If postpartum care stops at six weeks, we are missing out on managing all of these high blood pressure cases and we don't know what the outcomes will be for women if we don't continue to provide care,” she stated.

The findings also addressed postpartum depression, showing lower stress levels over time in the intervention group compared to the control group. By three months, there was a significant difference in stress levels between the two groups, which persisted at six months. Similarly, the intervention group had significantly lower rates of screening positive for depression compared to the control group.

The findings emphasise the significance of frequent postpartum care contacts for the identification and management of potential complications. Standardised postpartum education has also demonstrated its ability to improve knowledge of warning signs and promote positive health behaviours.

Based on these findings, Dr. Yenupini has called for the strengthening of midwifery education and training in Ghana, making postpartum care a critical component of the curriculum.

Additionally, she highlighted the need to expand accessibility to postpartum care visits, extending them to one year after birth, as a crucial step in improving health outcomes for women during the postpartum period.

## Policy brief



Mr. Stephen Agbenyo

Executive Director for Savana Signatures, Stephen Agbenyo, who was also the co-investigator for the Focused Postpartum Care, said the findings set the tone for conversation around postpartum care in Ghana.

He indicated that postpartum training for midwives was very critical, adding the “question is whether we have a postpartum care delivery training guide at the midwifery training schools”

Mr. Agbenyo wondered whether the various health directorates are adequately resourced to ensure midwives receive either training or refresher courses while on the job. He underscored the need for the eight midwives who benefited from the project to have cascading trainings for their colleagues.

Widespread implementation of one-year postpartum care regimen in the country would require government policy, something Savana Signatures has promised to pursue and push for.

Mr Agbenyo assured that Savana Signatures will leverage the results of the two-year trial to advocate for the implementation of a policy mandating standardised focused postpartum care across all healthcare facilities in the country.

“We'll translate all the learnings into a policy brief which we'll share with the Ghana Health

Service and other higher authorities and to see how this can be crystalised into something bigger than just the four facilities that we worked with,” he said.

## Empowering Healthcare Providers to Enhance Family Planning in Northern Ghana

**In a significant effort to strengthen family planning services in the Northern and Savannah regions of Ghana, healthcare providers from six facilities strategically chosen, have undergone intensive training.**

This training has equipped them with the knowledge and skills necessary to offer invaluable support to women and their partners in making informed decisions regarding family planning.

The intervention, a collaboration between Savana Signatures and the UK-based Maternal Health Initiative, aims at addressing the low uptake of family planning services in the two regions.

Earlier this year, Savana Signatures held a series of inception meetings with the health directorates in Tolon, Savalugu, Tamale Central, Bole, Buipe, and Salaga, where the selected healthcare facilities are located.

These meetings assessed the state of family planning services in the areas and identified areas for improvement.



Women accessing postnatal and child welfare services were also actively engaged at the six health facilities, providing critical insights into the challenges they face and their aspirations for family planning services.

The primary goal was to gain a holistic understanding of the challenges and barriers that impact the effective delivery and adoption of family planning services.

Armed with this knowledge, Savana Signatures developed a comprehensive family planning service delivery manual, a tool that was used for training health professionals on standardized family planning services.



The training sessions, which took place on August 16 and 23, were conducted by Madam Hikmatu, a seasoned midwife-cum-lecturer at the Tamale Nursing and Midwifery Training College.

The participants, consisting of midwives, community health nurses, and general nurses, had their capacities refreshed on the importance of birth spacing and were equipped with the necessary information and skills to assist families in making informed reproductive health choices.

The training also encompassed a thorough exploration of various contraceptive methods, accompanied by strategies for effectively addressing and dispelling common myths and misconceptions that often hinder family planning adoption.

In addition to training, each of the six participating health facilities received a range of educational materials and tools to enhance family planning counselling and service delivery, complementing the efforts of healthcare staff.

Currently, a Savana Signatures team is conducting post-training assessments at the various health facilities to evaluate how healthcare workers are delivering family planning services and to measure the intervention's impact on family planning uptake in these districts.

## **E/R: Savana Signatures Improving Education in Cocoa-Growing Areas.**

**Savana Signatures has enhanced the capacities of School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs) and teachers in cocoa-growing communities in the Suhum and Ayensuano districts of the Eastern Region.**

With support from Edukans and Tony's Chocolonely, Savana Signatures is working to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in the area.

A two-day training was held in July 2023 to equip SISOs with active teaching and learning methodologies, classroom assessment techniques, clinical supervision skills, effective teaching and learning assessment strategies, as well as proficient lesson planning and worksheet creation.

Through our Rural youth catching up on education Project, the trained SISOs are expected to extend their knowledge and expertise by providing cascading training to teachers from 15 selected schools in the districts.

Programme Manager, Raphael McClure Adomey, stated that the programme's ultimate goal is to equip teachers with the essential tools to deliver high-quality education.

“This, in turn, will pave the way for a more engaging and interactive learning environment, ensuring that students are better prepared to tackle the demands of today's ever-evolving world,” he said.

In a follow-up session conducted in August 2023, 45 schoolteachers, along with 15 school managers, five SISOs, and three Training Officers, participated in another intensive training session.

They received comprehensive training in active teaching and learning methodologies, enhancing their abilities to develop effective concept-building strategies. The importance of collaborative group work was underscored, along with the mastery of proficient lesson planning and delivery techniques. Furthermore, the training focused on refining their capacity to enhance pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, recognizing various learning styles,

improving assessment strategies, and optimizing questioning and answering techniques. Additionally, the session placed a strong emphasis on crafting expertly designed lesson plans and engaging worksheets.

## PASPCE Project Ends With Positive Impact



**Savana Signatures with the support of UNICEF, has successfully implemented the Promoting Adolescent SRH through Participatory Community Engagement (PASPCE) Project across 17 districts in five regions in Ghana.**

This project, carried out in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service and the Ghana Education Service, aimed to create safe environments where young people are able to make informed and healthy decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health.

Throughout the project, Savana Signatures worked to facilitate access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services. Our efforts also involved empowering young people to actively seek SRHR information and services.

The project further encouraged community stakeholders, including chiefs and other duty bearers, to support adolescent girls and boys in utilising SRH information and services effectively.

In August this year, the project successfully ended with a dramatic improvement in the accessibility of critical healthcare services and information for adolescents and youth in the Central, Eastern, Oti, Upper East, and Volta regions.

Ms. Ethel Emefa Ehla, Gender and Social Inclusion Facilitator for Savana Signatures, expressed gratitude to UNICEF, acknowledging their pivotal role in driving positive change among adolescents, youth, and vulnerable groups.

"UNICEF has been a great help to Savana Signatures in our quest to ensure positive change among adolescents, youth and vulnerable groups. We could not have achieved this feat without the partnership with UNICEF."

She highlighted the collaboration with the Ghana Health Service Health Promotion Units in the 17 districts, revealing that 45,000 people were reached through face-to-face engagements over the two-year period.

These engagements covered a range of crucial topics, including maintaining good nutrition by improving the uptake of Iron-Folic Acid Supplements and 4-start diets, addressing the SRH needs of young people including sexual and gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancy, all of which impact the lives of young people.

Emphasising the importance of engaging the Ghana Education Service, Ms. Ehla underscored the need to promote safe school environments that support learners' growth.

“We have not only engaged the Ghana Health Service, we also built the capacity of the Ghana Education Service, a key institution where children spend most of their time, where children learn a lot from,” she said.

She explained it was necessary for the project to engage at that level for teachers and school management teams to understand the essence of supporting the creation of safe school environments where students and pupil thrive.

Further, she stressed on the project's advocacy efforts to encourage the uptake of iron folic acid among girls in school, which she said many people initially claimed was a family planning pill.



“People were saying the Ghana Health Service was distributing family planning methods or pills in schools,” she said, adding the advocacy efforts by the PASPCE project, ensured that parents and their wards understood the importance of the supplement to the health of the adolescent girl.

Savana Signatures' SHE+ Helpline also played a pivotal role in providing support to those in need, receiving 5,200 calls

within the period. The callers received valuable information, counseling, and referral services, ensuring they had access to the assistance they required.

The project's outreach extended beyond the face-to-face engagements, as community information centers and community radio stations played a crucial role in educating and engaging over 2 million people. These efforts aimed at fostering safe environments for children, young people, and adolescents to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive health.

One major milestone of the PASPCE Project was the commitment of community leaders in Logba in the Afadzato South District, to provide monthly sanitary pads to in-school adolescent girls. This initiative was a direct response to combat the alarming rate of teenage pregnancy in the area.

The Chief of the Logba Alakpeti Traditional Area, Togbe Adzadiaku V, on the back of the PASPCE engagements, initiated a step-down meeting that brought together key stakeholders from the community including members of the health committee, adolescent girls and boys, motorbike riders, GHS and GES, parents, and community elders.

Discussions revolved around the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products and the involvement of men, especially okada riders, in leading adolescent girls into unprotected transactional sexual activities. To rectify these issues, the chief and his elders instituted a by-law to collect donations for purchasing sanitary pads to periodically distribute in junior high schools within the community.

"I am the chief, and over the past five months, we have been providing free sanitary pads to adolescent girls in all schools," Togbe Adzadiaku V remarked.

As an additional measure to curb teenage pregnancies, community leaders introduced restrictions on adolescent movement within the communities after 9:00 PM, backed by punitive measures for okada riders engaging in sexual activities with adolescents.

In their joint efforts, the community leaders are optimistic that the rate of teenage pregnancies in their communities will significantly reduce over a period even though they note that more comprehensive supportive initiatives will be instituted to maintain progress made, especially as the PASPCE project raps up.

Togbe Adzadiaku V expressed gratitude to UNICEF and Savana Signatures for their support in empowering and protecting the rights of adolescents in their communities.

## From Our Gallery

