

Mirelaine: Pregnant Women Need Me

I am Mirelaine. I live in one of the poorest and least developed countries of the world. 78 percent of my people live on less than \$2 per day, and more than half live on less than \$1 per day. Half of our children under 5 are malnourished. 80 out of every 1,000 children never see their first birthday. One-third of girls over six never go to school. Sixty percent of our schools do not have drinkable water and less than 80 percent of the schools do not have electricity.

Do you wonder where my country is? Perhaps on the other side of the world? Actually, I only live 700 miles from the coast of the United States, in Haiti.

These numbers are shocking and reflect a heartbreaking situation, but there is one more number that haunts me most: for every 100,000 births in Haiti, 523 women die! Compare this to only 13 deaths in the United States! We have the highest maternal mortality rate in the Western Hemisphere. I want you to remember that these numbers represent lives, and deaths, and broken hearts, empty homes, and children without mothers.

I am the head nurse at the Oliver Health Center in Petit Goâve. My work focuses on pregnant women, and I am determined to reduce our national maternal mortality rate! We have few doctors, and most are men. Women do not feel comfortable seeing a male doctor. 90 percent of births take place at home. This is often in a remote village far away from help if complications arise. Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), or Matrons as we call them, come when it's time for another baby to enter this world. I believe that if more matrons are trained and supported, then pregnant women can get the care that they need in Haiti.

I am grateful for our friends from Global Women who are helping us work toward this goal. Their funds provide monthly training for 64 TBAs in this region. They come together at my clinic to gain additional knowledge, share experiences, and to be encouraged. These monthly meetings are very important to them! Some travel by foot 3 hours each way to attend! We are also so very thankful for the hundreds of birthing kits Global Women friends have sent over the years. The TBAs use the supplies to provide a clean area where the women can deliver, which increases the chances of survival for the mother and the newborn.

One of our great challenges is identifying and training a new generation of young Traditional Birth Attendants. Despite all the efforts that we are undertaking now, many pregnant women still lose their lives because they don't have access to proper care. We need to have more TBAs in the field. Last year our trained matrons helped over 2500 women and children through delivery or referrals to our health center. There are many people and organizations that are truly committed to the work we do in Haiti. This keeps my hope alive that one day the maternal mortality rate in Haiti will be among the lowest in the world!

We look forward to the team of global women coming to meet with us in March. We want them to see the work that we are doing, understand the situation facing the pregnant women and pray for us! As you pray, please pray for me and my family, and especially for our health. And, pray that we will reach our goal of having one of the lowest maternal mortality rates in the world!