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AFRICA/MADAGASCAR - Traditional midwives help save women in childbirth

Betraka (Agenzia Fides) - Madagascar is facing a triple challenge: rapid population growth, increasing poverty and political instability. This is what emerges from the report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the State of obstetrics in the world. In the African country there are about 3,000 health centers, but many have been abandoned or closed due to the political crisis. There are only 4 professional midwives per 1,000 live births, and although there are 21 schools of obstetrics, where they teach hygiene to give birth and to deal with any complications, the number of graduates does not meet the requirements. In many areas of the country women rely on traditional midwives, known as 'matrons', who are often accused of being unable to cope with the complicationsm threaten the safe birth or are giving birth in unhealthy environments.
However, in the Centre Sante de Base (CSB II) in Betraka, a small village 50km north of the coastal town of Manakara, currently the matrons are recruited for a campaign in favor of childbirth in a clinic or hospital, with the aim of reducing the maternal and neonatal mortality. To cope with poor infrastructure and lack of qualified personnel especially in the provinces, the Government of Madagascar has made maternal and neonatal health a top priority. In 2008 it launched a national plan that provides free health care at birth, including the expensive caesarean sections, in addition to the increase in skilled midwives. Many areas are still far from this goal, and convincing 'matrons' to promote childbirth in hospitals, health care professionals have found a valuable ally. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 13/12/2012)

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