Overworked, underpaid midwives diligently serving Ugandan women

By Gloria Nakajubi

She looked into her face, eyes barely open. The contractions were becoming rather painful. In a soft, reassuring voice the woman said, “Yes, you can do it! Just hang in there a little longer.” With clenched teeth, heavy breath, she murmured inaudibly.

This was a conversation between two women, a mother and a midwife. When the baby finally popped out, the beam on the mother’s face was unmistakable. The relief was palpable. “Yes, you can do it! Just hang in there!” It was a reassuring voice, becoming rather warm.

Every time she thinks of quitting, the cries and smiles of the newborns pull her back to the labour suite. “How do you expect me to use my bare hands to deliver a baby?” she asks.

This, she explains, not only puts the mother’s life at risk but the baby’s and hers too. And yet if anything goes wrong, they are the ones who take the blame.

The last time Namaganda received a uniform and a pair of shoes was in 1996. Twenty years down the road, she has had to use her meagre salary to buy these necessities over the years.

A midwife for the past 20 years, it’s only passion for her calling that makes her stay. “Our lives hardly change in this career. You will earn shs450,000 from the time you join until you retire or choose to quit,” she said.

The midwife workforce, it states, is actually our day. “To ensure that there are enough qualified midwives to care for all women and newborns, countries must continue to increase investments in the education of midwives now and in the future. Midwives have a key role to play as the global community strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of reducing maternal and newborn mortality and ensuring universal access to health care services.”

To ensure that there are enough qualified midwives to care for all women and newborns, countries must continue to increase investments in the education of midwives and growing the midwifery workforce, it states. Currently, some institutions in the country are offering a Bachelors of Science Degree in Midwifery and midwives are calling upon the Government to sponsor them for such career advancement programmes.