



*"She helps to deliver 25-30 babies per month effectively giving birth to about 300 babies per year and cumulatively (for the 50 years of active practice) over 15,000 babies"*

*Mayi Nayere-*

# Committed to Health

MAYI NAYERE JEKETE is a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA). She comes from Mbewa village in Traditional authority Chadza in Lilongwe. Mayi Nayere does not know her age. She does not know how to read or write. According to her recollection, she has been working as a TBA from as early as the 1950's. When asked when she started working, Nayere said, "I worked for one year before Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda (The First President of the Republic of Malawi) came to Malawi". This puts the possible year to be 1957 implying that she has been in the profession for 50 (fifty) years today.

Mayi Nayere operates from her home about 20 Kilometers from Lilongwe town, on the Lilongwe-Blantyre road at a place called Nayere Turn-off just after Nanjiri Trading Center. She has mentored her daughters (who are now mothers) the skills of being a TBA. Her wonderful work attracted the attention of Dr. Bullow an Obstetrician, then working at Kamuzu Central Hospital, who together with the Ministry of Health trained her. Kamuzu College of Nursing hatched a project to utilize Mayi Nayere's clinic for students community health clinical experiences. The project which Kamuzu College of Nursing is doing with the Malawi Scotland Millennium Project (Counterparts from Scotland), has led to the construction of a decent Clinic for Mayi Nayere.

People from across the country go to Mayi Nayere for assistance. Those from neighboring countries such as Mozambique and Zambia also go there for similar assistance. Besides assisting pregnant mothers to give

birth, Mayi Nayere has a special gift. She can tell the sex of the unborn baby with 100% precision without using a scanning machine. She actually uses an old small mirror as her scanner. Furthermore, she gives traditional herbs and treats infertility for both men and women.

Mayi Nayere Jekete is an unsung hero and achiever who deserves a place in the Traditional Birth Attendants History. Current statistics show that she delivers 25-30 babies per month effectively giving about 300 babies per year and cumulatively (for the 50 years of active practice) over fifteen thousand (15,000) babies. She has lost only one patient and this was due to her difficulty in calling an ambulance in time. She is on call 24 hours and 7 days a week.

Perhaps the conflict that may not permit her recognition is the notion that she is a mere Traditional Birth Attendant whose practice is not encouraged by modern Maternal Health Advocates. But the irony is that this woman, just like so many others in the country and elsewhere, handles numerous cases besides this line of thinking. Furthermore the population comprises mostly of people living in the rural villages who may find it easier to go to the nearest TBA than to a Health facility due to various reasons ranging from financial, confidentiality, beliefs and so many more. This is a woman who hardly sleeps since clients visit her at anytime of the day. She has a cell phone which was donated to her by people of Scotland to facilitate referrals. She refers her clients to Kamuzu Central Hospital.