



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



# South-to-South Technical Assistance Strengthening Midwifery Education Peru to Paraguay

---

## OVERVIEW

The Instituto Andrés Barbero (IAB), which is affiliated with the Universidad Nacional de Asunción in Paraguay, provides pre-service education to student midwives or nurses at the university. IAB updated its midwifery curriculum in 2010 by incorporating a competency-based approach as part of an institutional effort to strengthen education programs and to seek national accreditation. IAB directors asked USAID Washington to support the implementation of its new curriculum.

In early 2011, through the Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP), USAID began collaborating with the Faculty of Midwifery and Nursing (FOE in Spanish) of Universidad de San Martín de Porres (USMP) in Lima, Peru, to provide South-to-South technical assistance among midwifery schools, including IAB. FOE USMP had attained international accreditation at the time and, since 2006, has had extensive experience leading the successful implementation of an updated curriculum in Peru in collaboration with the Peruvian Association of Midwifery and Nursing Schools (ASPEFOBST), which represents 26 members.

During their field visits to Paraguay, FOE USMP professors noted that the Paraguayan midwives, teachers as well as practitioners, had no clear definition of their professional role in Paraguayan society or even within health care teams. In addition, there were no national regulations to guide the structure and quality of training professional midwives (nor was there for the majority of other health care professions). As a result, the Paraguayan midwifery training schools (an estimated 50 schools; no official data available) were each implementing their own customized curriculum and plans, the structure and duration of which were largely designed to meet their own business interests rather than standardized education principles and they did not necessarily meet the needs of the country. As a result, there was a wide range of quality among midwives—from those trained in six months through weekend classroom lectures, and those trained through the four-year training program at IAB. The IAB was the only midwifery school offering free-tuition education in Paraguay and receiving full recognition and prestige from its peers.

When the project started, Paraguay had no specific labor laws regulating employment agreements of midwives working in health facilities, so the duration or the quality of training of midwives was not stipulated. Furthermore, midwives were often hired as nurses and requested to perform a variety of tasks outside maternal and newborn health units, which required them to have some level of training in nursing. Midwifery alumni and faculty were discouraged by the situation, and interest in the midwifery profession waned. As a result, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of new enrollees in midwifery schools. In addition, there was virtually no communication or coordination among midwifery training schools, neither with the professional midwife association nor with the Ministry of Health's midwifery unit.

## STRATEGY

A team of FOE USMP instructors analyzed and revised IAB's curriculum to deliver the training in five years (10 academic semesters) and determined that the updated curriculum needed to be developed based on the definition of the professional midwife profile and global competencies recommended by the International Confederation of Midwives. These recommendations were accepted and incorporated by a team from the IAB faculty.

Once the IAB had begun the process of revising its curriculum, and in order to achieve a greater impact at the national level, five private schools were invited to participate in the process with the IAB, which would lead the activities with support from the midwifery faculty experts from Peru. Each of these six schools had its own curriculum and was unfamiliar with the competency-based methodology for teaching and assessments.

To facilitate the implementation of the updated competency-based curriculum in the schools, all participating schools signed agreements declaring their commitment to implement the competency-based curriculum, with technical support from the FOE USMP and MCHIP.

The five private schools and the IAB recognized the importance of unifying criteria and working together through an association that would serve as a coordinating body and would represent their interests. With assistance from MCHIP and FOE USMP, the schools created the Paraguayan Association of Midwifery Professional Schools (ACUFOPY), which is taking the lead in managing the activities of the six participating schools and is currently filing for legal status.

Overall, the process of updating the midwifery curriculum included the delivery of trainings for school directors, classroom faculty, and clinical preceptors, with an emphasis on reinforcing their knowledge and competency-based skills. The trainings were delivered online, followed by workshops in Paraguay, and field visits and exchange meetings in Peru. All activities engaged representatives from the National Association of Midwives and from the Midwifery Unit of the Ministry of Health in Paraguay.

The design of the new curriculum was completed in stages through participative workshops in which trainees compared the advantages of the competency-based approach to traditional training approaches. Participants worked on developing midwifery competencies and the methodology to assess competencies. Trainees realized the importance of updating the curriculum to better prepare future professional midwives and to have a greater impact on maternal and newborn health outcomes, and they realized the contribution of midwives in improving the quality of health care services in Paraguay. The trainings highlighted the significance of a comprehensive, holistic education to ensure timely and competent professional conduct and the humanization of midwifery care.

The focus throughout the process was the need to improve the quality of midwifery education and to develop a cadre of professional midwives with a distinct identity and set of competencies representing the full scope midwifery practice.

## CHALLENGES

- The midwifery faculties' limited identification as professional midwives and low valuation of the role of midwives as a distinct profession was a poor model for students.
- Paraguay it is not unusual to have multiple jobs, therefore, most of the faculty had other commitments and were not able to participate or commit to regular participation in the trainings. As a result, the transfer trainees' updated skills to their peers through replicated trainings was not always possible.

- The high level of competition among schools to attract new students affected schools' relationships with each other and hindered the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned.
- There was poor or no coordination between classroom faculty and clinical preceptors.
- Training schools lacked anatomic models. Although the IAB did have a few models, they were not being used appropriately within a humanistic laboratory setting.
- Clinical practice sites were difficult to access. Every year, schools must apply for clinical sites in exchange for contributing medical supplies and equipment. Sometimes, clinical sites can only be accessed for a six-month period, which impacts planning and the continuity of clinical practices.
- Faculty had limited competency-based clinical and training skills.
- Faculty were resistant to change, notably among classroom faculty.
- There was a lack of motivation and shrinking enrollment of midwifery students.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- A core competency-based curriculum was developed through a participatory approach with six midwifery schools in Paraguay.
- Participating universities are strongly committed to improving the quality of midwifery education. School authorities have committed to implementing the new curriculum beginning in the second semester of 2014 or first semester of 2015, right after the schools receive approval of the curriculum from the University Councils and the National Council for Higher Education (as required by a 2014 law).
- Teams of directors and midwifery faculty in six schools have been trained in the competency-based methodology and have validated the role of professional midwives.
- University authorities have shown a positive response and are now offering their support in implementing the new competency-based curriculum.
- Through the process of updating the curriculum, there is increased momentum among schools to improve the quality of midwifery education, as reflected through the creation of ACUFOPY.
- The professional midwifery association in Paraguay is adopting a more active role to ensure the quality of midwifery training programs.
- Improved coordination among midwifery schools through the national Midwifery Association and the Ministry of Health.
- The National Agency of Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation has adopted the core competences included in the new curriculum as standards for the process of accrediting midwifery programs.
- A legal framework to protect the labor rights of midwives is currently in the approval process in the national parliament. This is a critical need to retain employees.
- Improved awareness of the importance of team work to promote collaboration and cooperation among institutions key players.
- Four universities signed cooperation agreements with the FOE USMP for further technical assistance, as needed, after MCHIP closes: Universidad Nacional de Asunción, Universidad del Norte, Universidad del Guairá, and Universidad Técnica de Comercialización y Desarrollo.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- The exchange meetings with faculty from different institutions helped strengthen the integration of midwives into the health care system and the understanding of the key role that midwives play within the health care system.
- The fact that most midwifery faculty have two titles and work as a midwife or nurse indistinctively does not contribute towards building students' identity as midwives, particularly in Paraguay where midwives do not have official recognition or a law to regulate their performance.
- The fact that some university directors did not fully identify with the midwifery program and gave priority to the nursing program affected the immediate adoption and implementation of changes at the institutional level.
- The updated curriculum should focus on developing competencies centered on comprehensive care for women and children based on the midwifery model, rather than including the broad range of disciplines required in a nursing approach.
- It is important to establish legal and social mechanisms to ensure the recognition of midwives as key professionals if they are to feel empowered to grow personally and professionally.
- Because only a small proportion of the faculty in the six schools participated in the curriculum update process, and in some workshops different faculty attended, it was difficult to ensure continuity of the process, including the necessary replication needed to transfer skills to the remaining faculty in the schools.
- The lack of commitment or involvement by some leading key players and participating faculty could lead to losing the ground already gained.
- The implementation of the competency-based curriculum requires updating the faculties' teaching skills as well as continuously monitoring their performance until their training competence is assured.
- Curriculum changes imply not only the development of a new curriculum but also a process of change in the way midwives are valued as professionals by their trainers.

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Encouraging self-confidence of future midwives and promoting their empowerment as key professionals within the health care system.
- Matching classroom learning with what students practice at clinical sites.
- Implementing improved norms, adopted by the Ministry of Health, in clinical practice.
- Standardizing clinical procedures and skills across professional training schools.
- Developing better coordination and cooperation between classroom faculty and clinical practice preceptors within the participating schools.
- With the support of the Ministry of Health, creating a framework to facilitate the creation of midwives' positions within health facilities.
- Encouraging the pursuit of excellence within professional midwifery schools to achieve accreditation.
- Maintaining institutional unity, strengthening and empowering ACUFOPY in its steering role to safeguard high-quality training of future professionals.
- Achieving social recognition of midwifery professionals for their key role in improving sexual and reproductive health services.
- Demonstrating the key role of midwifery professionals within health care teams and their potential impact on reducing maternal and child morbidity and mortality.