grief, hope and rise: a woman from gombe

A photo story
Rukayya Ahmed is a woman, a mother, and an entrepreneur from Jeka Dafari, Gombe. She now lives a joyous life with her husband Ahmed Shehu, her three children: 9-year-old Hasiya, 5-year-old Abdullahi, and 2-year-old Abdulrahman. She is also the owner of a retailing business.
But she could have four children. When Rukayya was 25-year-old, she was pregnant again. At that time, she already had Hasiya and Abdullahi. She decided to give birth to her third child at home, like all the other children before, she was sure everything would be fine. Unfortunately, the baby was born with serious health problems and by the time they arrived at the hospital, it was already too late.
Rukayya joined her Mother’s Group (MG) in 2015. Through friends in her community, Rukayya learned about a Mother’s Group (MG) supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded State Accountability for Quality Improvement Project (SAQIP) in 2015. This was a new MG model that incorporated Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health (MNCH) education and a Birth Preparedness Scheme (BPS) into Pact’s WORTH model. Rukayya grew interested and decided to join.
Mother’s Group fulfilled her need for MNCH education. In her MG, Rukayya participated in education sessions on topics such as the danger signs of pregnancy and personal hygiene. The MG meets four times every month and comprises 3.5 hours of learning: 1 hr. literacy, 1 hr. banking, and 1.5 hr. MNCH education. MNCH facilitators employ an interactive approach and use self-explanatory visual aids to guide the session. Rukayya especially enjoyed learning about birth spacing and decided to take family planning pills under her husband’s support after her next delivery.
Rukayya also learnt numerating, writing and reading from her Mother’s Group. The literacy sessions, provided 4 times a month, use a series of education materials adapted and translated into Hausa. Rukayya uses her books to practice her numerating and writing skills, as well as learn MG governance and a healthy banking system.
Rukayya delivered her last born in a quality-improved facility. In 2017, Rukayya was pregnant again. With the MNCH knowledge she got from the MG, she attended 5 Antenatal Cares (ANCs) during her pregnancy and gave birth to her last child at the Jeka-da-fari Town Maternity, a facility in which the health workers underwent clinical training and mentorship provided by SAQIP. On Jan 5th, 2018, Abdulrahman was born. Although born with breathing difficulty, he was immediately referred to the Federal Teaching Hospital where he received 8 days intensive care and was fed through a nasogastric tube. This time, her baby was saved.
She also received financial empowerment from her Mother’s Group. Rukayya has been saving N100 per week as obligated by her participation in the MG, and was therefore eligible for a loan, twice the amount of her savings. With her second loan, worth N10,000, Rukayya expanded her business from selling vegetables, to cold drinks, wrappers and cosmetics. She received a 130% return on her investment in the second year.

Today, 1,872 Mother’s Groups have been established under the advocacy and support of SAQIP; 46,800 women have benefitted. Over N158 million has been saved in SAQIP supported MGs and about N1 million extra has been saved in the BPS accounts. With its self-sustaining mechanism, the women in Gombe will continue to rise and thrive.