



# Community Agency in Maternal Health: A Case Study of Local Engagement in Medical Initiatives in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Abstract

Maternal mortality remains a critical challenge in sub-Saharan Africa. Externally driven medical interventions have often demonstrated limited sustainability. This case study examines the integration of local community agency within a maternal health initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The study aimed to analyse the role and impact of structured local engagement in the design and implementation of a maternal health programme. It sought to identify the mechanisms through which community participation influenced programme uptake and health outcomes. A qualitative, single-case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with community health workers, traditional birth attendants, programme staff, and local women. Focus group discussions and a review of project documentation were also conducted. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Active community involvement in programme planning was associated with a notable increase in facility-based deliveries. A key finding was the critical role of respected female elders as cultural mediators, who helped adapt medical protocols to local practices. Their involvement was credited with reducing distrust in formal healthcare services. Sustainable improvements in maternal health outcomes in this context are contingent upon meaningful community agency. Integrating local social structures into medical initiatives enhances cultural relevance and programme legitimacy. Maternal health initiatives should allocate dedicated resources and time for participatory planning with community representatives. Training programmes for external medical staff should include modules on collaborative engagement with local leadership structures. Maternal health, community participation, Democratic Republic of Congo, qualitative research, health systems,

cultural mediation This case study provides evidence for a community-integrated model of maternal healthcare delivery in a complex, resource-limited setting, offering practical insights for policymakers and practitioners.

**Keywords:** *Maternal health, Community engagement, Democratic Republic of Congo, Participatory action research, Health systems strengthening, Sustainability, Sub-Saharan Africa*



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