

## Amina's\* story - Mother with a Hearing Impairment

Amina began losing her hearing in 1985 when she was 9 years old. As a child with a hearing impairment, Amina struggled in school. To make her way through school and home life, she invented her own sign language. After graduating, she joined the organisation and learned standard Kiswahili sign language through their programmes.



Amina became pregnant soon after and struggled immensely in her attempts to access maternal healthcare. "Our community has no awareness about disability. They didn't think that I needed to have maternal health education...I missed so much", she shared. "I didn't go to my first prenatal appointment until I was seven months along. When I got there the nurses chastised me for coming in so late-- but I didn't know I was supposed to go in earlier! Even then when they were talking to me I didn't understand because no one there knew sign language".

At that point, Amina was afraid of delivering. "I felt so angry and bad because I didn't understand anything about how it was supposed to work". When her water broke Amina went to the hospital. She registered at the desk and signed that she had a hearing impairment. The secretary gestured for her to sit down in the waiting room. As her pain increased and she was still unattended, Amina took matters into her own hands. She made her way directly to the doctor's desk to show him that she was ready to deliver. "When he realised who I was he told me they had already called me several times!" Of course Amina did not hear her name being called, and this inaccessibility put her life and her baby's life in danger. She gave birth minutes later on the doctor's table.

After delivering a healthy boy, Amina knew she was not ready to have another child. She went to the local health clinic to get birth control pills. Because of the communication barrier, she did not understand how to take them. Six months later she returned for a check-up and was told she was pregnant again, less than a year after giving birth. "I was so confused", she remembered. This experience led Amina to stop having sex for many years because she feared becoming pregnant again.

Luckily, a few years after having her second child, Amina saw billboards that illustrated how to use condoms properly. She then attended a training about HIV/AIDS for people with disabilities where she received comprehensive family planning and reproductive health education. She was recruited to serve as an ambassador, sharing these messages with youth with hearing impairments in her community. "Now I know how to keep myself and my partner safe, and I am making sure young people with disabilities know too".

In 2016, Amina was ready to have another baby. This time she made sure to attend a hospital where she already had connections with the nurses who were aware of her impairment. As she went into labour, she unfortunately got complications and was taken to the operating theatre for a caesarean section. Inside the theatre, when the service providers were wearing surgical masks, she could no longer lip-read and understand what they were communicating to her. Amina panicked and tried for half an hour to make herself understood. "Finally the doctor understood the problem I was facing. After that all went well and I delivered a healthy baby!"

\* Not her real name, changed for privacy reasons