



Hauwa's success on the Foundation Year Programme

Introduction

The Foundation Year Programme was introduced by Women for Health into health training institutions to ensure more rural female students attain the educational qualification required to be admitted and succeed in health training.

The Foundation Year Programme has two strands. The Bridging course is for students who do not have three credits from the National Examinations Council (NECO)/ West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exams; these students follow the secondary school curriculum. The Preparatory course is for students who have five credits, but would benefit from further support in order to pass the health training institution's entrance exam and the 'weeding' exam that takes place at the end of the introductory period in all the institutions. Those who complete the Bridging course also go on to follow the Preparatory course.

This case study aims to explore the background, experiences and impacts of the Foundation Year Programme on one particular girl, Hauwa, and her community. It is drawn from a series of interviews with Hauwa's parents, her community leader, her friend and with Hauwa herself.

Hauwa's story

Hauwa is an 18 year old young woman from Tumfafi, a rural community located 15 km from Kano in northern Nigeria. She lives with her extended family of 18 people – her father has four wives. Hauwa attended the nearby primary and secondary schools. She left school aged 15 with just three Senior Secondary Certificate Examination credits.

Her community is predominantly made up of subsistence farmers, with the main activities in the area being the rearing and keeping of chickens, goats and other animals, farming and trading farm produce. Hauwa and her community are Muslims and the ethnic groups in the village are Hausa and Fulani.

Just one health facility serves the area's 14,000 inhabitants and none of the staff members is from, or based in, the community. This facility – a dispensary – is staffed by a very limited team of two female community health extension workers, one female junior health extension worker, a female dental technician and a male lab technician. There are no midwives or nurses based there and this presents a real problem for the population, particularly for expectant mothers and young babies.



Hauwa with her family

Foundation Year Programme experiences

In 2013, the Foundation Year Programme team came to Tumfafi to recruit potential nurses and midwives from the community to work in the local health facility. Hauwa was delighted to be accepted onto the Foundation Year Programme. This has meant staying about 30 km away from her community during the term as she studies at Dambatta School of Nursing and Midwifery.

She was admitted as a student on the Bridging course, so that she could gain the two additional credits required for her to join the mainstream midwifery programme. The support she received on the Foundation Year Programme included class work, English language tuition and life-skills training. This enabled her to pass all the required subjects and she successfully transitioned onto the mainstream midwifery programme.

Her journey into the Foundation Year Programme was not without challenges. Initially, community members tried to discourage her father from allowing her to enrol due to their belief that once a young girl has access to education, it frees her to indulge in so many vices. However, her father believed in the process and allowed her to proceed. In her own words Hauwa said, *"Initially the community members discouraged my father from allowing me to go with the fear that I might go wayward, but now they are all very supportive because instead they saw positive changes [in me]."*

Current situation and changes – Impact and empowerment

Now Hauwa has moved into second year of the mainstream midwifery programme. She is progressing well with her work and exams. Currently in her clinical year, she has already 'ticked' 15 deliveries. She, and those who know her, identified a wide range of changes in her personally, socially and professionally.



Hauwa at school with her fellow Foundation Year Programme students

On a professional level, the Foundation Year Programme has been invaluable to her, allowing her to develop the skills and qualifications to enable to train as a midwife. Most obviously, it allowed her to obtain the much-needed credits in chemistry and physics, to give her a total of five SSCE credits. Through Foundation Year Programme and the midwifery programme, she has gained knowledge and skills about health and midwifery, but she has also developed greater learning and language skills, which stand her in good stead as she progresses with her studies. In the Foundation Year class, she initially experienced difficulty in understanding her subjects because of her poor English language skills, but with the support of her tutors and extra classes, she improved. Now she understands her lectures and expresses herself with much more confidence than before.

Both Hauwa herself and those close to her have noted ways in which she has grown as a person. In particular, her confidence has increased, she is now more articulate and able to speak in front of others and her parents feel that she now takes greater responsibility in household tasks.

“So many changes have happened, in her attitude, confidence and discipline... as a result of Foundation Year Programme.” (Hauwa’s mother)

Additionally, through Foundation Year Programme she has learned about personal hygiene and grooming, with the result that many of her community commented on how different she now looks. She explained that exposure to other students from different backgrounds has shaped her

to become the woman she is today. *“My exposure in school has helped me to know what is right and wrong... I can speak in the public now, express myself and I am very confident”*

Hauwa’s involvement in Foundation Year Programme has led to some social and community impacts. Although she is not yet qualified, Hauwa is already helping her community with their health needs. The community leader mentioned that community members already consult her on pregnancy cases. Furthermore, her notable changes and successes are breaking down resistance to the education of young girls. The village head who has known her for 18 years said, *“She is now a role model, young girls look up to her...The community is proud of her”*. A number of those interviewed felt pride in Hauwa and acknowledged a change in the way she is viewed and respected.

Her father said *“I feel proud when people come to me thanking me for my daughter’s assistance.”*

While it is still early days for Hauwa and her midwifery career, there are already signs that the Foundation Year Programme programme is empowering her and other young girls. Empowerment can be seen in terms of agency, structure and relations¹ and the impacts outlined above demonstrate Hauwa’s journey in relation to these. Specifically:

- **Agency:** Her own aspirations and capabilities. Hauwa is gaining midwifery and interpersonal skills and abilities.
- **Structure:** The environment that surrounds and conditions her choices. There are practical changes (such as funding and transport) that allow her to attend the midwifery school.
- **Relations:** The power relations through which she negotiates her path. Hauwa is given greater respect and viewed differently by her community.

The future

Hauwa is passionate about her ambition to help others and to save lives through midwifery. She wants to be a registered midwife and a tutor and to be able to be useful to her community and the profession.

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1. <http://www.care.org/our-work/womens-empowerment/gender-integration/womens-empowerment-framework>

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The W4H programme is funded with UK aid from the UK Government. The programme is led by Health Partners International in partnership with Save the Children and Grid Consulting, Nigeria.



Published December 2016