

# The Sun Rose More Than Twice on Amina

by Mme. Maiga Amsou Amadou

**A**mina was just 17 and expecting her first baby. She had married at 15 but her husband left soon after Amina found she was pregnant. When Amina went into labor but made no progress, her family took her to the nearest rural dispensary, first by cart, then by dugout canoe. She stayed there for the best part of two days, suffering pain, high temperature and low blood pressure, with no progress. She was referred to a health post, but money was short. So, the family went back home first to try to find more funds.

Selling, borrowing and

seeking gifts took two more days. Amina was now in extreme distress and barely conscious. They put her on a cart and set off again. The health post they decided on was too far, so they went to another rural dispensary. Fortunately, a nurse was visiting from the district medical center. He was shocked by Amina's condition. He wasn't sure he could help her, but he knew she would die if he didn't. He decided he might as well try, although he was short of even the most basic drugs and equipment.

Amina was semi-comatose. Her temperature was over 40 degrees Centigrade,

her blood pressure was dangerously low, the head of the fetus was fast stuck in her vulva, and there was a fetid smell that indicated an advanced state of infection. The fetal heart was not beating. The only choice was to perform an episiotomy as quickly as possible and remove the fetus.

The nurse hesitated, though only for a moment. He had worked in a city hospital and knew what to do. There were no scissors. He made do with a scalpel, removing a dead male fetus that had already begun to decompose. A perineal suture was followed by a massive dose of antibiot-

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## ON THE PULSE

Medical science often fails to recognize the link between women's hormonal balance and the risk of chronic diseases such as breast endometrial and ovarian cancer, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis, says a new Population Council report.

In *"What We Do and Do Not Know About the Menstrual Cycle; or, Questions Scientists Could Be Asking"*, epidemiologist Dr. Sioban Harlow challenges researchers to undertake a comprehensive study of the menstrual cycle that goes beyond questions of fertility.

"The menstrual cycle appears to modulate several aspects of women's physiology, including heart rate, pulse, transit time and blood pressure, energy metabolism, and various aspects of immune function," says Dr. Harlow. "All too often, the menstrual cycle is viewed solely as a mechanism to achieve pregnancy. The continued failure to perceive and investigate linkages between menstruation and women's health carries great cost."

The report calls for more research on certain breast cancer treatments, citing evi-

dence that the timing of surgery during a woman's menstrual cycle may affect her chance of survival. Dr. Harlow also recommends additional research into menstrual dysfunction that causes substantial disruption to women's daily lives.

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