

Call to help improve Sierra Leone maternal healthcare

A CHARITY dedicated to saving the lives of pregnant women and their babies in Sierra Leone is calling for support.

The appeal from Aberdeen-based MedicAid comes just weeks after a major United Nations summit in New York – the Millennium Development Goal Summit – found the west African country is unlikely to meet targets set to improve maternal healthcare by 2015.

MedicAid founder Mohamed Yilla, a doctor at Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, said Sierra Leone remained one of the worst countries in the world for pregnancy-related deaths, with one in eight women dying during pregnancy or childbirth compared with one in 8,000 in western countries.

About 80% of the country's healthcare facilities were destroyed during nearly a decade of civil war in the 1990s.

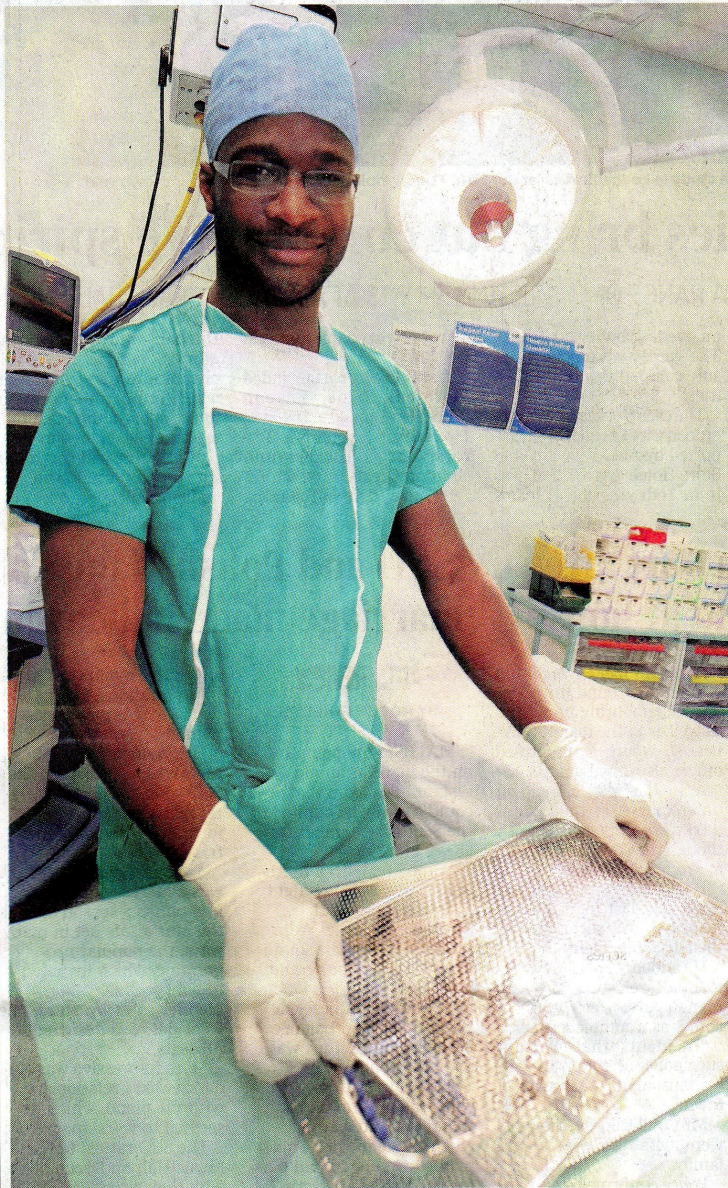
Just one in four women currently have their babies delivered in healthcare facilities, which are often poorly equipped, and the majority of births still take place at home with unskilled attendants.

FACILITIES

Many hospitals also lack the facilities to perform life-saving caesarian sections, and in some rural areas the caesarian rate is 10 times lower than the recommended rate required to reduce maternal deaths.

Since it was founded seven years ago, MedicAid has donated a CT scanner, the first in Sierra Leone, to the Choithram Memorial Hospital in Freetown, as well as an ambulance and equipment, including ultrasound technology, to improve obstetric care at Kindoya Hospital, in the Bo district.

The charity is now calling for help to improve access to emergency obstetric care at Kindoya Hospital, increase routine antenatal screening so that life-threatening complications can be diagnosed early enough, and strengthen the ambulance service so that more women can access good-quality ma-



APPEAL: Dr Mohamed Yilla says delivering emergency obstetric care in Sierra Leone is vital

ternal health services in time.

Dr Yilla said delivering a free emergency obstetric service to the most vulnerable, poor and inaccessible communities was vital.

He said: "With a huge shortage of specialist doctors,

we are also keen to engage volunteers who may value contributing to resource-poor healthcare development while experiencing an international perspective on health."

Aberdeen Central MSP Lewis Macdonald, who is a

supporter of the charity, said: "One of the things Aberdeen has always done really well is to support work, especially in health and nutrition, in poorer countries."

To get involved in the charity's work visit www.medicaidafrica.org

