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Weighing less than three pounds at birth, tiny Mardochet Ulunga might have become another infant mortality statistic, but for one thing: he was born in a health facility where the staff just been trained in kangaroo mother care (KMC).

Low birth weight babies are not uncommon in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In January 2012, for example, 24 of 536 babies born at the Dipeta Health Center in the Fungurume health zone were low birth weight. These infants—often born prematurely—are at increased risk for complications including respiratory problems, impaired vision or hearing, and other issues. Such babies must often spend weeks in an incubator while they struggle to gain weight, and in communities like Dipeta, incubators are scarce and often hooked up to unreliable sources of electricity.

KMC takes the emphasis off technology and places it on the human touch—especially that of the baby's parents. Mardochet's mother, Imukalayi Eponga, was taught the basic principles of

KMC—that skin-to-skin contact helps keep an infant’s body temperature stable, promotes mother-to-baby bonding, and provides easy access for regular breastfeeding.

Born two months premature on January 11, at just 2 pounds, 7 ounces, Mardochet was soon snuggled against Imukalayi’s bare chest, wearing just a diaper and a knitted cap. Imukalayi would then close her generous cloth pagne (wrap) around herself and her son, holding him there for hours, shifting him only when he needed to nurse. His weight stabilized and he started gaining slowly but steadily, reaching 4 pounds, 13 ounces by February 5, just three weeks later. Imukalayi and her son are now at home, and his weight will be monitored regularly until his first birthday.

Health workers in Dipeta were trained in the kangaroo mother care [2] approach in October of last year, as part of the USAID-funded Democratic Republic of Congo Integrated Health Project [3] (DRC-IHP). Led by Management Sciences for Health with partners the International Rescue Committee and Overseas Strategic Consulting, DRC-IHP is working to improve the basic health conditions of the Congolese people in 80 health zones across four provinces, including access to, and quality of, maternal and child care services.

Source URL: <http://www.msh.org/news-events/stories/kangaroo-mother-care-saves-lives-of-smallest-babies>

Links:

[1] <http://www.msh.org/users/lucie-zikudieka>

[2] http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/9241590351/en/

[3] <http://www.msh.org/global-presence/integrated-health-program.cfm>