



The cover of the maternal and child health handbook in Angola features both parents interacting with their baby to encourage cooperation in child rearing.



## Japanese Know-how Supporting Angolan Mothers and Children

After a long civil war, Angola has been enjoying continued growth. However, access to healthcare services, a fundamental human need, is still insufficient. As part of efforts to improve this situation, Angola has adopted the Japanese “maternal and child health handbook” system to protect the health of pregnant women and children. Angolan authorities are now working to encourage wider usage of the handbooks.

### MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH A SERIOUS ISSUE

Angola’s civil war lasted 27 years following the country’s declaration of independence from colonial rule until the 2002 ceasefire. However, even a decade later, Angola’s health indicators remained

poor. At this point Japan started offering support to enhance healthcare by building medical facilities and training doctors, nurses, and other medical workers. Adding South-South cooperation to these activities, Brazil has been a strong partner to Japan, leveraging its experience of overcoming similar issues and its shared language of Portuguese with Angola.

The country faces various health problems, but maternal and child health is a particularly serious issue in Angola. The maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) was 450 in 2010, compared with just 4.1 for Japan, while the infant mortality rate for children who die before age five (per 1,000 live births) in 2011 was 158, the eighth highest worldwide. Giving birth carries a serious risk of fatality for women, and children’s health faces constant threats.

### INTRODUCTION OF HANDBOOKS

One factor behind these dire statistics is the lack of a system to manage the health of pregnant women and young children on an ongoing basis. There were prenatal handbooks for recording details of checkups before birth and child health cards for



Mothers line up to have their children immunized (above). Committee members discuss the content of the maternal and child health handbook.



the child becomes five years old. “I felt that if we had them in Angola, we could protect the health of mothers and children,” he remembers.

### TARGETING A CHANGE OF THINKING

The first stage was to form the Maternal and Child Health Handbook Committee with members from the Ministry of Health; the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and other international organizations active locally; and local bodies including the Angolan Pediatric Society. The committee designed the Angolan maternal and child health handbook based on the prenatal handbook and child health card currently in use, UNICEF educational materials, Ministry of Health documents, and other materials.

A year of discussion led to completion of a trial version. According to Sadamori: “My colleagues at the Ministry of Health told me, ‘We don’t want money; we want to learn knowledge and skills.’ I could sense they would do anything necessary to make things better.” With the handbook in his hands, Dr. Costa displayed his determination. “I want to spread usage of this maternal and child health handbook further throughout Angola.”

The next stage is to instruct health professionals in how to use the handbooks and conduct a trial distribution to mothers in the capital, Luanda. Based on feedback from users, the committee plans to improve the handbook. In Angola, childbirth and raising children are traditionally thought of as women’s work only; one of the project’s aims is to change this way of thinking by encouraging fathers to play a more active role through widespread use of the handbooks. Project members from Angola, Brazil, and Japan are looking forward to a day when handbooks in all Angolan households improve the safety of mothers and children nationwide.



Specialists from Brazil provide instruction in medical techniques. Brazil has been an important partner in helping promote the handbook.