



# Mothering by the Book

Japan has one of the lowest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world, and one reason behind this is the introduction of the maternal and child health handbook system. In recent years, Japan has taken the initiative in advancing this handbook system in developing countries. Osamu Sawaji of the *Japan Journal* reports.


**T**he maternal and child health handbook system in Japan started as a system for pregnant and parturient women in 1942. The introduction of the handbook system made it routine for women to have health checkups during their pregnancy, which contributed to reducing the maternal mortality rate. In later years, the handbook for pregnant and parturient women was transformed into the maternal and child health handbook, including mothers and their children. The handbook records the health status of pregnant women, as well as the baby's delivery date, height and weight, and vaccinations received. It also covers topics such as feeding infants, infant diseases, and childcare advice.

Japan is now working on disseminating the maternal and child health handbook system in developing countries.

In one such country, the Philippines, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has since 2010 been working on the Project for Strengthening Maternal and Child Health Services in Eastern Visayas with the aim of reducing the infant and maternal mortality rates. As part of the activities, the project worker compiled a Philippine version of the handbook, translated the text into the local language and provided capacity-building assistance to Community Health Teams (CHT) to educate and

support pregnant and parturient women using the maternal and child health handbook as a tool. In 2011–2012, about 55,000 copies of the handbook were printed and distributed to healthcare centers to ensure that all prospective pregnant and parturient women in the project's coverage area would receive one.

“The maternal and child health handbook develops an awareness among pregnant women that they themselves as mothers need to take responsibility in safely giving birth to their child,” says Satoko Ishiga, chief adviser of the JICA project. “The handbook is also used to help plan and confirm the finances and goods which pregnant women must prepare, as well as to plan their health checkups.”

Through JICA's assistance, use of the handbook is now spreading among many countries and regions, including Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Laos, Bangladesh, East Timor, the Dominican Republic and Palestine. 



BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY OF JICA

A mother reads her maternal and child health handbook in a healthcare center in Otmac, Leyte island, the Philippines.