



HEAL Africa uses the Brazilian dance *capoeira* to act as a bridge between the tumultuous life of the street and the social reintegration of the young people in their children's group. The philosophy of capoeira advocates the protection of women and children. "*We are protected inside the circle of capoeira*", we can hear the practitioners of this dance say. This martial dance combines fighting movements with dance. It is a physical activity involving mainly the legs and arms. Two dancers stand face to face inside a round composed of their peers who, meanwhile, chant songs punctuated by a rhythmic flapping of the hands and instrumental accompaniment.

Capoeira has its origins in Brazil. The story goes that this martial dance is inspired by the fighting techniques of the kingdoms of Central Africa dating back to the time of the slave trade. Black slaves had to conceal their dance training to deceive the vigilance of their masters on the American continent.

Since 2016, Capoeira has been integrated into the activities of the Child and Youth Friends Space at HEAL Africa, a wonderful health care partner in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a country which claims one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world.

HEAL Africa was founded in 1994 by Congolese orthopedic surgeon Dr. Kasereka "Jo" Lusi, and his wife, Lyn Lusi. They have developed a comprehensive, community-based approach to increase access to maternal health care. The program works through multiple layers: traditional birth attendants, health professionals, women and their families. Thousands were given micro-grants in groups of 8-10 to invest in producing more income through their farms and small commerce. At the end of every month, each woman in the group contributes \$1 to a maternal insurance fund. This fund is then used for medical care including pre-natal checkups, delivery at a health center and any other necessary medical care relating to pregnancy and birth. This gives women who normally could not afford healthcare, the opportunity to receive treatment throughout their entire pregnancy. 356 women in the groups have given live births with no maternal or neo-natal mortality.



As many women prefer to give birth at home, HEAL Africa has trained 96 traditional birth attendants (TBAs) to identify warning signs of a complicated birth where a woman must be taken to a health center for medical care. If a woman is taken to a health center, she pays \$5 to deliver, which comes out of the maternal insurance collective. \$4 stays with the health center and \$1 is given to the TBA for the referral.

HEAL Africa has also worked with the personnel of 15 health centers to provide training in emergency obstetric care, including the use of partographs and other simple interventions known to reduce maternal and infant mortality.

IMPACT: HEAL Africa's Safe Motherhood Pre-Natal and Micro-Insurance program is successfully combatting maternal and neo-natal mortality.

[Watch this video to learn more about Heal Africa's history and work.](#)

Information from: [Eastern Congo Initiative \(ECI\)](#) and [Heal Africa Website](#)