



# Traditional midwife speaks

**M**y name is Annemarie/Uiras. I grew up in Namaland, near Kalkrand. I was born in the times of the big rain.

I came to Windhoek as a young woman and my work as a midwife started here. The first birth I assisted with was the one of a white woman. I was working for her as a domestic worker.

After that first birth my work went from strength to strength. I think I have a special calling to do this work. I am respected in my community.

I learned a lot from working with other midwives and by asking the women themselves about their birth experiences, about pregnancy and breastfeeding. I usually talk a lot to the women who come to see me because what I know I can only pass on by word of mouth.

My hands can feel when the baby is not thriving because the mother is not thriving. There might be some personal problems and we can talk about them.

I was present at the birth of so many babies that I have lost count.

Many women prefer to give birth in their own homes and sometimes it happens so that they give birth here in my house on a mat.

Hospital births are unknown to many black women. It is only in towns that some black women are giving birth in hospital. I don't force anyone to give birth at home. The woman herself must choose. Sometimes I go with a woman to the hospital but I don't have any function there. The doctors and nurses are doing everything.

In my culture men have never been part of the birth process. Men had to stay away from the hut or house where the birth took place. It was a sacred place and only women were allowed

to be there.

I tell women that giving birth is natural and that our bodies know how to do it.

The latest trend in towns is that black women are bottle-feeding. This is not traditional.

There are factors forcing women to bottle feed their babies such as white women who do not want their servants to bring their babies to work.

But I tell women who come to me about breastfeeding, how they should do it and not to be ashamed. I tell them while they are breastfeeding they won't get pregnant too soon again.

I am an old woman now but there are many other women who will take over my work. They are women I have trained.



Me. Annemarie /Uiras with her sister's child.