

Maternal Health: Keep the Heart of the MDGs Pumping



At tomorrow's summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), world leaders will review progress on the MDGs, identify gaps and pledge concrete actions to bridge these gaps. The Development Goal lagging the most behind is the one on maternal health, MDG 5, which aims to reduce maternity death. Estimates show that each minute, a woman dies of complications of pregnancy and childbirth. This adds up to more than 500,000 women annually and 10 million over a generation. Almost all of these women – 99 per cent – live and die in poor countries.

Improving maternal health (MDG 5) is often called the heart of the MDGs because if it fails, the others will, too. Most maternal deaths can be prevented -- and this would save lives and bring an enormous gain in world productivity. Every year, the world loses \$15 billion in productivity because women die in childbirth. It would only cost \$6 billion to provide the health services to save women's lives.

UNFPA's Executive Director, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, calls on Member States to speed up efforts for reproductive, maternal and newborn health; for countries with high maternal mortality to devote 15 per cent of their national budgets to health by 2015; and for donor countries to devote 0.7 per cent of national income to official development assistance.

Below, and for your use, please find some declarations and appeals by UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, on how to achieve the MDGs by improving maternal health (MDG 5) and reducing child death (MDG 4).

- "We will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals unless we invest more in the health and rights of women and ensure universal access to reproductive health. The MDGs were designed to put our world on a more secure and sustainable path. And it is hard to envision a safe future without safe motherhood."
- "Every year, the world loses \$15 billion in lost productivity by letting women die in childbirth. It would only cost \$6 billion to provide the health services to save women's lives. It pays to invest in women. The benefits extend beyond the woman herself to her family, community and nation."
- "We can save the lives of hundreds of thousands of women by getting midwives in communities. Every minute, another woman dies in childbirth and 20 more experience serious complications leading to permanent injuries, such as obstetric fistula. Investing in midwives is an effective way to improve maternal health and I call on governments to make this urgent and life-saving investment."
- "It would cost the world \$6 billion, less than a day-and-a-half of military spending, to stop women from dying in childbirth. We urge all governments to step up funding for reproductive health and save women's lives."

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- "We will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals unless reproductive health and the rights of women become a political and financing priority."
- "In the countdown to 2015, we call on Member States to accelerate efforts for reproductive, maternal and newborn health. We call on countries with high maternal mortality to devote 15 per cent of their national budgets to health by 2015, and donor countries to devote 0.7 per cent of national income to official development assistance. Together, we can achieve Millennium Developments Goals 4 and 5."
- "During the next five years, we will enhance support to the countries with the highest maternal mortality. We will support countries in strengthening their health systems to achieve the two MDG 5 targets to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by 75 per cent and achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Our joint efforts will also contribute to achieving MDG 4 to reduce child mortality."
- "Now is the time to strengthen prevention efforts and reduce the impact of AIDS. For every two persons who receive treatment, five get newly infected. At this rate, we will never reverse the epidemic. Prevention remains the first line of defence and governments and development partners must take action to ensure universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support."
- "It is time to promote women's leadership in our collective efforts to achieve the MDGs. To eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, improve health and protect human rights, we must eliminate gender discrimination and violence. We must ensure that women's voices are heard and women are full and active partners in development. Men and boys, too, can take the lead in fostering equal opportunity, shared responsibilities and mutual respect."

For more details on the High-level Event, go to: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/>.

For a Safe Motherhood media kit, go to: <http://www.unfpa.org/safemotherhood/mediakit/>

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