

## **Report of the Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting on Women and Health for the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council**

### *Summary*

As part of the annual ministerial review process of the Economic and Social Council, an Africa regional preparatory meeting on the theme “Women and Health” was held in Dakar, Senegal from 12-13 January 2010. It was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Senegal, in collaboration with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. Organized as a multi-stakeholder event, with the participation of high-level representatives, the consultations consisted of plenary meetings and panel discussions, which were attended by more than 100 delegates.

Participants, including several ministers, examined the disproportionate health burden women face with regards to maternal health and HIV/AIDS; and how women’s empowerment is crucial to overcoming inequalities in health and meeting the MDGs. Participants also exchanged best practices.

### **Key policy messages**

The following key messages emerged from the discussion:

#### **Maternal Health**

- Provide an integrated continuum of maternal care: improved antenatal care, timely lifesaving emergency obstetric care and adequate post partum care;
- Complement maternal care with investment in improved family planning services, promotion of contraception usage and efforts to reduce adolescent birth rates;
- Strengthen the role of midwives and fully tap their potential as trusted providers of maternal health services as well as family planning services within communities

#### **HIV/AIDS**

- Integrate HIV services with health services to strengthen synergies between the AIDS response and the achievement of other MDGs;
- Invest in health literacy campaigns, including through the use of ICT, to actively engage young people on seeking safe health behaviour and strong social identities;
- Engage boys and men in changing gender stereotypes, addressing violence against women, and achieving gender equality.

#### **Empowerment of Women and Women’s Health**

- Complement public health programmes with efforts to empower women in all spheres of life – legally, economically, socially and politically – so to enable them to improve their own lives;

- Make progress on property rights, gender responsive legal protection, access to formal finance, increased political participation, change in social attitudes all of which are necessary components of improving women's health status;
- Promote sustainable health funding, including by moving from user charges to pooled funding, to ensure equitable access for women and man to affordable and appropriate quality health services throughout their life-cycle.

## **I. Introduction**

In June 2010, the Economic and Social Council will hold its fourth Annual Ministerial Review in New York. The review will focus on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

On 12-13 January 2010, the Government of the Republic of Senegal, with the support of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) hosted the Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa on Women and Health.

The meeting brought together more than 100 delegates, including several Ministers, senior representatives of African Governments, experts from the United Nations system and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the private sector.

The meeting provided an important opportunity for African countries to contribute to the Annual Ministerial Review, including by sharing best practices and lessons learned.

## **II. Proceedings of the regional preparatory meeting**

### **A. Opening session and keynote address**

The meeting was opened by **H.E. Ms. Ndèye Khady Diop, Minister of Family, Food Security, Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Republic of Senegal**. In her welcoming remarks, she said thanked the United Nations Economic and Social Council for choosing Senegal as the host for its African Regional Meeting on Women and Health. She recalled the personal commitment of Mr. Wade, President of Senegal and the great importance that he has been attaching to girl’s education and to the inclusion of women in all areas of society. She said that it was hence befitting for Senegal to host this AMR regional meeting.

**H.E. Ms. Sylvie Lucas, President, United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations, New York** said that with only five years left until the deadline for the achievement on the MDGs, ensuring greater gender equality and empowerment of women was more important than ever. She recalled message that emerged from the 2009 AMR on global public health which are of particular relevance to the AMR preparatory meeting on women and health.

Firstly, the MDGs can only be realized through integrated development policies and health-related MDGs should hence be pursued in all polices. Secondly, at a time of multiple crises, policy makers should maintain or even increase social expenditure, in particular for the most vulnerable, in order not

to jeopardize past gains. Third, there is a need to widen and strengthen collaborative partnerships. Fourth, Africa faces the biggest risk of failing to meet a number of MDGs. Finally, health improvements require a trained and skilled health workforce.

Turning to the specific focus of the AMR regional meeting she noted that women's particular vulnerabilities stem from social, political and economic disadvantages and from the fact that they were often unable to make their own choices. She said that as a global high-level forum ECOSOC can develop integrated response that can help women break the vicious cycle of disempowerment.

In his keynote address, **H.E. Mr. Souleymane Ndene Ndiaye, Prime Minister of Senegal** recalled the past work of the AMR on poverty and hunger, sustainable development and on global public health. On the theme of women and health, he highlighted that President Wade was the primary defender and protector of women in Africa. As President he has adopted a twin track strategy: Firstly, protecting women from their vulnerabilities; Secondly, empowering women to shape their own future. The Prime Minister noted that in today's world women continue to be more exposed to poverty, violence and social exclusion than man, often arising from public perception. Attitudes that put women at a disadvantage can and must be changed.

**Ms. Rachel N. Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, UNDESA, New York** said that equality and empowerment of women has for too long been relegated to the sidelines. In 2010, the 15-year Beijing Review and the 2010 AMR provide an opportunity to redress this neglect. Regarding, maternal health, she pointed out that it is the MDG that the world as a whole is lagging most behind. What makes this so unacceptable is that medical solutions to prevent maternal death are well understood and that the underlying factors of poverty, inequity, women's low status and societal attitudes are the principle drivers of maternal death. Regarding HIV/AIDS, Ms. Mayanja noted that women are not only more susceptible to HIV but that they are also more heavily impacted by the spread of HIV/AIDS given that they are often employed in less secure informal sector jobs. Even when not infected themselves they often carry a heavy care burden.

Ms. Mayanja said that the cases of maternal health and HIV/AIDS show that significant progress in women's health outcomes can only be achieved if we empower women economically, politically and promote the removal of stereotypical attitudes that perpetuate the marginal status of women in societies. She therefore advocated for an approach that is not narrowly focussed on technical and medical solutions but also addresses the underlying economic, social and cultural drivers of ill-health of women.

**Dr. Isabelle de Zoysa, Senior Advisor, Family and Community Health, World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva** said that the WHO report on Women and Health, released in November 2009, showed that not all had

benefited equally from the considerable progress in the area of global public health. Large social and gender inequalities and health system inequities remain both within and between countries. Indeed while women in all other regions have seen their life expectancy rise, African women face reduced life expectancy, largely due to HIV/AIDS.

Research shows that maternal health is a good proxy for both overall women's health and the status of women in societies. The high incidence of maternal death therefore suggests that many women lack access to comprehensive care and have limited opportunities to shape their own future. She pointed out that while SSA as a whole is lagging behind individual countries show that innovative approaches coupled with strong leadership can lead to impressive improvements in health outcomes.

In his statement **Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)**, which was delivered by Dr. Monique Rakotomalala, Director of the African Centre for Gender Equality and Social Development of the Economic Commission of Africa, identified the following aspects for priority action in the five remaining years till the target date for the achievement of the MDGs: Provide equitable access to family planning and obstetric care through the use of innovative schemes; Stop the feminization of HIV through better access to prevention and by addressing women's vulnerabilities; Stop violence against women including by supporting the United Nations Secretary-General UNITE against violence against women campaign and the African Union (AU) campaign to be launched by the AU summit; Empower women economically, socially and politically to enable them to take charge of their own health; Ensure that the multiple crises do not threatened past social improvements; Raise awareness and ensure that data is disaggregated by gender; Mobilize domestic, regional and international resources.

## **B. Session 1: Maternal Health – Towards a comprehensive approach to reducing maternal mortality in Africa**

During the session participants reviewed trends in maternal health in Africa and shared examples of best practice to reduce maternal mortality. Participants agreed that a continuum of improved ante-natal care, timely lifesaving emergency obstetric care and adequate post partum care, complemented by access to improved family planning services, is crucial. The skills of midwives need to be better utilised and enhanced. Participants also called for an elimination of economic, social and cultural barriers to empower women to make their own decisions.

In his keynote address, delivered by Dr. Mamadou Daff on behalf of **H.E. Mr. Modou Diagne Fada, Minister of Health and Prevention**, the Minister highlighted the achievements of Senegal in the area of maternal and child health. The maternal mortality rate decreased from 510 per 100,000 live births in 1992 to 401 in 2005. The infant mortality rate decreased from 70.1 per 1,000 live births in

1997 to 61 in 2005. The use of family planning increased from 5 per cent in 1993 to 10.3 per cent in 2005. These improvements have been especially made possible through the national “Badienou Gokh” Strategy. This strategy, which exists in every neighbourhood or village, is based on the nomination of women leaders, which raise awareness among the female population on maternal health issues. The Minister also stressed the many challenges ahead, in particular bridging the maternal health gap between rural and urban areas. In addition, the use of contraceptives remains weak, especially due to a lack of social acceptance for such measures. The Minister therefore underscored the need to include more men in reproductive health education and services to change the existing social norms. Another important challenge is the persistence of health literacy among many women. The prevalence of poverty also figures among the most important obstacles for women's access health services. The Minister undercored that maternal and child health is a priority for the Senegalese Government, which aims to engage all relevant stakeholders, including communities, civil society and the private sector, to make further headway on this front.

In her presentation, **Dr. Isabelle de Zoysa, Senior Advisor, Family and Community Health, WHO, Geneva**, said that the large inequalities in women's health not only between countries but also within countries, suggest that efforts to improve maternal health need to be pursued in the broader context of women's health and women's empowerment. Ms. De Zoysa noted that the actions that need to be taken are well known and understood: access everywhere to skilled attendants at birth, combined with prompt referral in case of complications; emergency obstetric care; family planning and other measures to reduce adolescent pregnancies. These medical interventions must be coupled with efforts to empower women, families and communities to take timely decisions and related actions. This requires health systems that cater for the special needs of women; financial protection for poor women through a transition from user charges to pooled funding and; investment in knowledge sharing and more disaggregated data.

**Mr. Faustin Yao, Director, Sub-Regional Office for West and Central Africa, UNFPA** provided practical examples on how UNFPA has helped countries to reduce maternal mortality. He presented the experience of a poor rural community in Cameroon which introduced a financing scheme whereby every pregnant women that comes to the Health Centre provides a CFA 100 fee independent of the health services provided. The fee enables the community to cross finance caesareans for those who need them a service that was previously out of reach for most women in the community.

Mr. Faustin also reported on a UNFPA project to reduce the cases of obstructed labour by identifying pregnant women early on and ensuring that they are brought to the hospital well before they go into labour. Today, for every woman that dies during pregnancy, 30 others suffer from lifelong health complications, mostly due to obstructed delivery. The UNFPA project aims to change these statistics. Mr. Faustin also highlighted that countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda who allowed births to be supervised by

specially trained birth attendants rather than fully qualified doctors have made remarkable progress in reducing their maternal mortality rates.

**Dr. Jemima Dennis-Antwi, Regional Adviser for Anglophone Africa, International Confederation of Midwives** called for a repositioning of African midwives to achieve MDGs 3, 4, 5, and 6. She said that midwives, as trusted and culturally sensitive members of their community, can make a great difference in health outcomes. She informed delegations that, in March 2009, UNFPA and the international confederation of midwives, with the support of the Swedish and Dutch governments had started a campaign to strengthen the role of midwives. The campaign, which will be expanded to Asia and Latin America in 2010, aims to improve the ability of midwives to provide three key interventions: (1) adolescent and reproductive health services and family planning; (2) skilled antenatal care, and (3) emergency obstetric and newborn care.

Insufficiently comprehensive curricula, small sized labs, too few tutors for an ever growing number of students, and limited opportunities for continuing education and career progression are the immediate challenges that the campaign aims to help overcome. The uneven distribution of midwives both between and within countries is another major challenge.

To make headway, in the short run, the initiative calls for greater involvement of midwives in decision making processes and a repositioning and strengthening of the role of midwives through financial schemes. In the long run, Dr. Jemima Dennis-Antwi would like to see insurance schemes for every mother and child, a vibrant community that holds those responsible accountable; improved education of the girl child; and the emergence of a standardized competent cadre of midwives and schemes to ensure their effective deployment, redistribution and retention.

During the interactive discussion there was general agreement among participants that what was needed are integrated one-stop maternal health packages based on multisectoral approaches that provide a continuum of appropriate maternal care. Such packages should include improved access to family planning services notably for adolescent girls for whom early pregnancy and unsafe abortion continue to be a major cause of premature death in SSA. There was also agreement that economic, social and cultural barriers that continue to prevent women from accessing maternal health services need to be eliminated.

Given that delayed delivery continues to be the leading cause of maternal mortality, participants also discussed how to reduce delays for getting women in labour to health facilities. In this regard, the new opportunities which ICT has to offer were discussed. The discussion was enriched by country specific examples including from Mauretania, Niger and Senegal.

### **C. Session 2: Women, girls and HIV/AIDS**

## **Scaling-up efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa**

The panel addressed the main trends in regard to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in Africa. Panellists considered to what extent gender considerations have been integrated into AIDS policies, and whether they have been sufficiently funded. Recommended actions by governments and civil society were given to address violence against women, their economic vulnerability and other key drivers of HIV infections.

**Dr. Meskerem Grunitzky-Bekele**, Director, UNAIDS Regional Support Team for West and Central Africa (RST/WCA), moderated the first session and explained that the continent is the hardest hit by the epidemic and also has the highest rate of HIV infection among women (60%). She noted that due to strong political commitment, progress has been made in addressing the epidemic.

**Dr. Ibra Ndoye**, Executive Secretary, National AIDS Council, Senegal, presented some of the lessons learned from his country's experience in dealing with HIV/AIDS, helping to keep the prevalence rate low (0.7%) for more than 25 years. He noted the importance of a united multi-stakeholder approach: in Senegal, the AIDS response benefited from the engagement of the President, the First Lady, the public sector, civil society and the private sector. He also stressed the importance of a multi-sectoral response to HIV - beyond health alone. This is essential in addressing the social and economic drivers of the epidemic, which underlie the increased vulnerability of women and girls to HIV. In Senegal, the Ministry of Health is working closely with the Ministry of Family, Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Youth, Education, which has enabled a more effective response to HIV, and also led to improvements in maternal and child health. Dr. Ndoye also mentioned the unacceptably high rate of HIV among young women and called for greater engagement of young people in the AIDS response.

**Mr. James Kamau**, Executive Director, Kenya Treatment Access Movement-KETAM and an HIV-positive father who has successfully raised two children, called to an end of paediatric AIDS, which requires concerted efforts in the areas of HIV, maternal and child health. He noted that the current 30-40 per cent coverage rates for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and paediatric treatment services fall far short of the globally agreed target of 80 per cent.

**Mr. Kamau** discussed some of the main challenges that impede progress: reliance on donor funding and the resultant threat posed by the financial and economic crisis, especially with regard to treatment sustainability; food insecurity and climate change; bureaucratic conflicts and corruption. He also outlined several measures for the way forward: integration of services; addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination which impede uptake of services; and strengthening human resources. In conclusion, he stated that African Governments are accountable for the commitment they made in



Abuja to allocate 15 per cent of their national budgets to health, and stressed the need to further allocate a share of those resources to maternal and child interventions so that no child is born with HIV.

**Ms. Juliet Tembe, Chair of the AIDS Support Organization (TASO),** discussed how different gendered expectations, interactions and norms contribute to the contraction and impact of HIV. She described how gender plays a role not only in HIV/AIDS susceptibility, but also in the impact of the disease on everyday life. In Uganda, women account for over 60 per cent of HIV infections, while young women account for 80 per cent of all young people infected with HIV. TASO recognizes that men and women, boys and girls have different needs when treating and preventing HIV/AIDS, and uses a gender mainstreaming approach for all HIV prevention, care and support services provided.

Ms. Tembe made a number of recommendations on gendered-responses to HIV based on TASO's own experience. Increasing male involvement has increased condom usage, family planning and the prevention of parent-to-child transmission. Couple-counselling, working with discordant couples and peer-to-peer education have brought significant benefits. Sensitizing cultural leaders, religious leaders and communities to address gender issues affecting the transmission of HIV is more effective than working with individuals. Overall, increased focus on gender-based programming will address gaps in development planning.

**Ms. Mary Crewe, Director of the Centre for the Study of AIDS at the University of Pretoria,** discussed the global challenges of addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa. First, access to health care can only be guaranteed with a firm supply of drugs. The provision of drugs should be funded through both the health department and through donor funding.

Next, Ms. Crewe raised the issue of engaging men. Women's empowerment programmes will fall short unless patterns of patriarchy, paternalism, the construction of masculinities and the social pressures men face are addressed. From questions of concurrency, to issues of circumcision and testing, men must be engaged and included in campaigns and programmes.

According to Ms. Crewe, young people are unlikely to seek responsible health behaviour on their own. Young people have been alienated and bored by AIDS campaigns that espouse prohibition and denial. Instead, they must be reached through new technology, and be equipped to better understand their behaviour and how to channel their desire and needs.

**Mr. Wasai Jacob Nanjakululu, Director, Oxfam Global HIV and AIDS Programme, Pretoria,** began by recognising efforts made by governments in response to the HIV epidemic, and noted some of the positive results, such as increases in the coverage of anti-retroviral treatment, including paediatric ARTs, and PMTCT. However, he pointed to many remaining challenges, which require open and candid discussions.

For example, Mr. Nanjakululu questioned whether - despite its catastrophic proportions - the AIDS epidemic has been met with an adequate response, especially at the international level. He suggested that the debate on allocation of resources for health should focus on how to “increase the pie” to meet all needs and how to use the available resources more efficiently. A specific example of increasing efficiency is the approach aimed at promoting synergies between HIV interventions and other social services: i.e. through a “one-stop shop” model of integrating sexual and reproductive health and HIV services (provision of antenatal care, HIV testing, PMTCT etc), especially in resource poor settings; provision of incentives for volunteers at community level to help revive community health workers programme.

According to Mr. Nanjakululu, gender consideration in policies is another important but sensitive issue. He noted that it was critical to engage men and boys in order to be able to end gender inequality. However, that would require going beyond traditional gender stereotypes, including comprehensive sexuality education for young people.

During the discussion participants raised questions about the lack of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning for HIV-positive women; the relationship between HIV and property rights of women (i.e. AIDS-widows suffered from property grabbing after their husbands passed away, while on the other hand lack of property rights by women increases their vulnerability to HIV infection) and the need to ensure legal equality and non-discrimination between men and women; the need to address HIV-related stigma and discrimination, which has a far greater impact on women due to gender inequality (i.e. many women face domestic violence once they disclose their status), and impedes access to life-saving HIV services, such PMTCT; the need to ensure sustainable treatment access against the stock out of ARVs in most of the African countries as a result of the financial and economic crisis.

### **D. Session 3: Empowering women to improve their health**

The session reviewed how women’s empowerment in the economic, political, social and legal spheres can be a means to improving their health. Panellists discussed how inequalities in the allocation of material resources, political participation, legal protection and social services are strongly associated with poor health and reduced well-being.

**Ms. Souad Abdennebi-Abderrahim, Regional Advisor for the Promotion of Women’s Human and Legal Rights, African Center for Gender and Social Development**, moderated the third panel discussion.

**H.E. Mrs. Mamatou Meba Bio Djossou, Minister of Family and National Solidarity of Benin**, stressed in her keynote address that the empowerment of women is paramount to improving their health. In Benin, the pandemic is characterized by the feminization of HIV/AIDS, the persistence of female genital cutting, restrictions on family planning, inadequacy of health centres, and increases

in maternal mortality. These issues are being addressed by a national policy that promotes gender issues across all spheres. At the institutional level, women are being promoted in agriculture and the setting up of village committees is helping women who are victims of violence. At the economic level, microcredit is being allocated to women for income generating activities and processing material equipment. At the legal level, legal codes have been instituted to ensure women's access to land and fight genital cutting. Politically, women are being encouraged to participate in political parties. However, quotas and training are needed to incorporate more women into both the national and local levels of political leadership.

**H.E. Ms. Ndéye Khady Diop, Senior Minister of Family, Food Security, Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Senegal**, reiterated Senegal's national commitment to women and health. Despite significant gains in Senegal, many challenges remain to improving the health of women. A gender-based approach, along with the relevant infrastructure, is necessary for the empowerment of women. She emphasized five strategies to better involve women in their own health management. First, adequate infrastructure must be in place to reduce the workload of women. Drinkable water must be made readily available, along with a reliable supply of energy so that women are empowered to pursue activities outside the home. Second, providing access to education for all girls is critical, because educating a girl means educating a whole nation. Third, the creation of a Ministry of Female Entrepreneurs and Microfinance provides small savings and credit systems to women members of grassroots community organizations. Fourth, female leadership is required to fight the impoverishment of women. This requires that women are provided with professional learning and literacy programmes so that they can carry out community and development activities. Fifth, information must be made available on health issues that women face, as well as on gender-based violence.

**Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General, Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, UNDESA**, discussed the use of ICT as one of the rapidly growing areas in health today. Women's health can be improved by providing health literacy programmes so that they are empowered to make informed decisions about their own health. Secondly, she proposed that information be disseminated as widely as possible regardless of geography or level of education. Many member states are increasingly disseminating information on women's reproductive health and non-communicative diseases to better inform women, with some countries launching websites to reach rural women. Third, more investment must be made in awareness raising programmes, especially on reproductive and sexual health, and HIV/AIDS.

Governments should recognize that failure to reach commitments to women, will affect all other commitments. Training is one of the ways in which countries are dealing with maternal mortality. Training courses for both men and women demonstrate how they can play a part in the reduction of disease, particularly sexually transmitted infections. In order for women to have a say in the decisions that affect their health, they must be at the decision making tables and must participate at the local, regional, national and global levels. Women's labour force

participation increases their ability to take better care of themselves and their families.

**Ms. Catherine Mumma, Senior Programmes Adviser, Kenya Legal and Ethical Network on HIV**, discussed the link between access to justice and comprehensive health for women. She observed that MDG 5 is about improving the health of women, but it cannot be achieved without the simultaneous investment in the achievement of the other MDGs. To achieve true enjoyment of human rights and achieve principles of equality and non-discrimination, there is need for States to have effective laws, policies and systems that facilitate implementation of these laws.

According to Ms. Mumma, the feminization of HIV in Africa has a direct link to the level of vulnerabilities faced by women, which in turn are directly linked to the political, social, economic and cultural injustices that they suffer. The case of sexual and gender based violence best demonstrates the link between the lack of access to justice and poor health for women. Physical, psychological and sexual abuse endured by women compromises their ability to benefit from the right to information and the right to choose, therefore making them more susceptible to HIV/AIDS and other illnesses. The lack of property rights endangers women to take risky behaviour. When countries provide women with the right to protection and real access to justice, they remove the associated vulnerabilities and the need for some of the public health interventions.

**Ms. Fatime N'Diaye, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, Dakar**, presented ILO's Decent Work Agenda for a Fair Globalization, which aims to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in obtaining work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The Decent Work Agenda can be captured in four strategic objectives that are mutually reinforcing: 1) Increasing employment opportunities and salaries for men and women; 2) Expanding social protection; 3) Promoting social dialogue; and 4) Implementing fundamental principles and rights at work. Given the fact that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the contribution of both sexes, ILO puts the goal to advance gender equality at the centre of its Decent Work Agenda.

**Dr. Nestorine Sangare, Executive Director of the Centre for Research and Intervention in Gender and Development, Burkina Faso**, talked about the positive and negative impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the spread of HIV/AIDS. She explained how ICT can help to remedy women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS by increasing access to information and health education. She cited significant global, regional and local ICT initiatives as successful examples in the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, she also emphasized that the large majority of African households still do not have access to ICTs.

Dr. Sangare cautioned that ICTs can also constitute a major factor in increasing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They risk contributing to a vulgarization and trivialization of sex, especially through growing pornographic content and cyber criminality on the internet. She argued for penalizing the use of ICTs for the production and diffusion of pornographic content at the national level. She further

highlighted the risk of ignoring gender issues in ICT policy and argued for the inclusion of women's specific needs in universal access policy.

#### **E. Session 4 - Examples of best practice**

The session was chaired by **H.E. Ms. Moulaty Mint Elmoctar, Minister of Social Affairs, Children and Family, Mauritania** and moderated by **Dr. Faustin Yao, Director, Sub-Regional Office for West and Central Africa, UNFPA, Dakar**.

Following introductory remarks by the chair of the session, **Dr. Souleymane Diallo, UNICEF Representative, Benin** presented the efforts of Benin in providing free caesareans for all those giving birth in public hospitals and who do not have insurance coverage. The free caesareans and the accompanying medication needed are seen as a first step towards a comprehensive free maternal health package. Both families that could not afford caesareans before as well as families which were pushed back into poverty by having to pay for a caesarean benefit from the new policy. He explained that by providing free caesareans the government has created a demand for maternal health services making which helps to attract more qualified personnel into the field.

**Professor Jean Charles, Moreau, Chair of Gynecology and Obstetrics, University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar**, reported on the lessons learned from the Gynaecological and Obstetric Clinic (CGO) and the Regional Centre for Education and Research on Reproductive Health (CEFOREP). He said that maternal mortality was only the tip of the iceberg of inadequate maternal health care. He identified the lack of gynaecological surgeons and midwives and their geographical concentration in urban centres as a key constraint for the provision of obstetric services. CGO and CEDROP are aiming to improve obstetric and emergency infant care through a three pronged approach. Firstly, providing initial and continued training in reproductive health; Secondly, clinical, epidemiological and social research. Finally, providing maternal health services to mothers and newborns. Based on comprehensive clinical research CGO and CEFOREP have developed an integrated model called REDUCE. In Senegal, the model has been jointly implemented by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economics and Finance, development partners and NGOs and has led to a significant reduction in maternal mortality. REDUCE has also been implemented in Mauritania, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Cameroon and Uganda.

**Ms. Molly Melching, Executive Director, Tostan International, Dakar** reported on the efforts to promote the abandonment of the traditional practice of genital cutting by promoting community based attitudinal change. The TOSTAN programme is a three-year community driven programme that aims to reinforce what communities do best. The first year is dedicated to a broad discussion on human rights and to empower communities that become agents of change. The second and third years are devoted to improving the community's literacy and management skills.

To effectively promote an abandonment of the traditional practice of genital cutting there is a need to promote attitudinal change not only in the community but also the

broader social network which often extends beyond the community. TOSTAN therefore promotes inter-village meeting, the use of mobile phone, conversations and films produced by the communities. Once a social norm has changed, which can take several years, the community adopts a declaration to abandon practices that are disrespectful of human rights such as genital cutting. TOSTAN, which started its work in Senegal, has extended its work to several other African countries.

**Ms. Dorothy Gordon, Director, African Center for Gender and Social Excellence in ICT**, discussed the need to use innovation to reach the critical mass that would support real progress towards the MDGs. Given the very serious resource constraints in delivering health services, it makes sense to invest in prevention and for women to be empowered to stay healthy. She highlighted mobile technology as a change agent, as it can be used to reach people in locations who were previously out of reach.

Ms. Gordon discussed the issues around dissemination. Information can be collected and sent via mobile telephony using national languages. This can facilitate distance learning, particularly with people under 20. Video phones can also be used to gather and spread opinions.

Ms. Gordon stressed the need to build internal capacity in terms of assessing which technologies work. She encouraged policy makers to get involved in social messaging, and understand the impact of communications policies, i.e. costs associated with bandwidth, call dropping, nationwide service, and ways to reduce the cost of use and access. She encouraged sharing of content and regional cooperation of information, to ensure policy frameworks and the implementation at the national and regional levels to use new technologies effectively.

**Dr. Monique Rakotomalala, Director, African Center for Gender and Social Development, UNECA**, discussed the inadequacy of health human resources in Africa and the potential of non-physician clinicians (NPCs) to strengthen health systems. By training and deploying NPCs to provide emergency obstetric care, they can significantly contribute to reducing maternal mortality by giving emergency help, especially in rural and remote deprived areas.

She highlighted the experiences in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania, where around 90 per cent of all caesarean sections are carried out by NPCs. She noted the retention rate of these NPCs has been much better than rates for professional doctors, which showed better retention rates of NPCs than for professional doctors, lower training costs, lower costs of deployment and remuneration, and improved access to skilled health personnel during delivery.

While major obstetric surgery by NPCs are allowed in only a few countries, Dr. Rakotomalala stressed the need to influence countries to adopt the practice, design supportive policies, and allocate adequate resources for increasing the number of trained NPCs.

### **III. Conclusions and recommendations**

In her closing statement, **H.E. Amb. Sylvie Lucas, President, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations**, identified the key messages that emerged from the meeting. In order to meet the MDG on maternal health, more and better health care is essential to reducing maternal mortality. A continuum of improved ante-natal care, timely lifesaving emergency obstetric care and adequate post partum care, complemented by access to improved family planning services, is crucial.

To stop the feminization of HIV/AIDS, women must be empowered through equal legal rights, education and economic opportunities. They must also be relieved from the disproportionate burden of home-based AIDS-related care, as these responsibilities limit women's opportunities for advancement.

These efforts must be complemented with concerted energy to break down economic, social and cultural barriers. This requires holistic policies that ensure that the gender issue is mainstreamed across all national policies and development plans as well as national budgets.

**H.E. Mr. Modou Diagne Fada, Minister of Healthcare and Prevention, Republic of Senegal, Dakar** said that despite the fact that the solutions for improving women's health are well known women mortality remains high. He said that this situation was dramatic, traumatising, intolerable and unacceptable and had the potential of not only putting a risk the harmony of families but the very foundations of societies. Against the backdrop he cited the following key messages that had emerged during the meeting to address the situation:

Ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, especially the most vulnerable ones; Ensure women's independence in accessing health services, seeking employment and accumulating wealth; Make better use of synergies between efforts in the health sector and other sectors, such as efforts to improve infrastructure and telecommunication networks, reduce poverty, involve women in decision making processes, reduce illiteracy, ensure access to decent work; Cooperate with the private sector and civil society; Ensure sufficient financing through meeting the Abuja commitment of allocating 15 per cent of the country's budget to health; Improve coordination of health policies at the sub-regional level, in particular relating to maternal health and the fight against HIV/AIDS; Improve the access to quality health care everywhere through the recruitment qualified personnel, without excluding the delegation of specific tasks to other service providers; Promote participatory approaches that tap the potential of communities; Address emerging diseases such as cervical cancer

## Recommendations

- **Improve antenatal care, increase attendance of skilled personnel at childbirth, provide timely lifesaving emergency obstetric care, and promote quality facility-based deliveries and post partum care and ensure that these essential services are available in an integrated easily accessible way;**
- **Strengthen the role of midwives in health systems and make better use of their skills as trusted members of their community;**
- **Make a key package of essential HIV related services, including sexual and reproductive health services, family planning, PMTCT and a response to gender-based violence available in an integrated manner in one location;**
- **Ensure a multi-sectoral approach in the AIDS response to help address the socio-economic vulnerabilities of women and girls to HIV infection and eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination**
- **Stop physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence and female genital mutilation, which not only negatively affects the individual health of women, but also affects their families and communities, including as an integral part of HIV prevention programmes;**
- **Engage young people to provide comprehensive sexuality education, empowering them to be critical thinkers and leaders, seeking healthy behaviour and stronger social identities;**
- **Address the gender-gap in the response to HIV/AIDS, including by engaging boys and men in changing gender stereotypes, addressing violence against women and achieving gender equality;**
- **Eliminate inequities and inequalities which women face in all spheres of life such as labour market participation, political representation, legal protection and social stigmatization that make them more susceptible to falling ill and contracting disease;**
- **Develop and enforce gender-responsive legal frameworks that are CEDAW compliant, empower women to access and manage productive resources and provide them legal protection against violence and discrimination in their households, communities and workplaces;**
- **Ensure that gender perspectives are mainstreamed in health-related policy frameworks and health budgets and scale-up health services specifically targeted at women to ensure that women benefit equally from appropriate and affordable quality health service throughout the life-cycle;**
- **Reduce inequities due to financial barriers through social programmes and safety nets, such as cash transfers and health insurance schemes and**



**empower women economically through improved access to finance, entrepreneurship training and guarantees to land ownership;**

- **Improve women access to full employment and decent work through legislation and policies and address gender-based horizontal and vertical segregation, discrimination, and gender wage gaps including through training programs and public work programs;**
- **Work towards equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels, including the design, implementation and monitoring of strategies, to ensure that policies and programmes are gender sensitive;**
- **Involve civil society, the private sector, religious leaders and traditional practitioners at the community level;**
- **Invest in gender-sensitive health literacy campaigns and widely disseminate free information on women's health, including through ICT, to help women to make more informed health decisions;**
- **Redouble efforts to ensure adequate external and domestic funding, including by making good on the Abuja commitment to invest 15 per cent of the national budget on health, especially at a time where the global economic and financial crisis is threatening progress on gender equality;**
- **Strengthen the capacity of health professionals to provide quality health care and health services to women, including through reviewing recruitment and retention policies, health workforce plans that address shortages in rural areas and the development of codes of practice;**
- **Address the increase in non-communicable diseases which disproportionately affects women.**