The importance of reducing maternal mortality for women's health in Africa

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Isabelle de Zoysa
Senior Adviser, HIV/AIDS
Office of the Assistant Director-General
Family and Community Health
World Health Organization
Geneva
Structure of the presentation

- Maternal health within the broader context of women's health
- Maternal health issues in Africa
- Key interventions to reduce maternal mortality
- Policy responses
Life expectancy at birth is increasing—in most, but not all parts of the world.

Female life expectancy at birth by country income group and region, 1950–2005

- High-income countries
- Middle-income countries
- Low-income countries*
- East and Southern African countries

* Excluding East and Southern African countries.

Source: United Nations Population Division.²
Inequities in access to health care are seen in most countries.

Births attended by skilled health personnel, by household wealth quintile, selected countries

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys in selected countries, 2000–2007.
Adolescence (10-19 yrs): a time of risk

- Too often, societies are failing to provide the support that adolescent girls need.

- In developing countries, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in young women between the ages of 15 and 19.

- About 15% of all maternal deaths worldwide, and 26% in Africa, occur among adolescents.

- Adolescent girls in Africa account for one in every four unsafe abortions.
Leading causes of death among women of reproductive age (15-44 yrs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Deaths (000s)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maternal conditions</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Self-inflicted injuries</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Road traffic accidents</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Maternal health situation in Africa

- Every year in Africa...
  - at least 30 million women become pregnant
  - 265,000 mothers die of causes related to pregnancy and childbirth
  - 1.16 million babies die in the first month of life
- The majority of these deaths could be prevented!
Millennium Development Goals

Goal 5: to improve maternal health

- Target 5a: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
  5.1 Maternal mortality ratio
  5.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

- Target 5b: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health
  5.3 Contraceptive prevalence rate
  5.4 Adolescent birth rate
  5.5 Antenatal care coverage (at least one visit and at least four visits)
  5.6 Unmet need for family planning
Africa as a whole is not making progress towards achieving MDG 5

[Bar chart showing progress towards MDG 5 in different regions: Global, African Region, South-East Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, Western Pacific, Americas, Europe. Numbers represent goals in 1990 and 2005.]
Maternal mortality ratios are high to very high in African countries.
Causes of maternal deaths

Causes of maternal mortality in the African Region, 2004

- Maternal hemorrhage 24%
- Maternal sepsis 12%
- Hypertensive disorders 8%
- Obstructed labor 5%
- Abortion 14%
- Other direct causes 10%
- Indirect causes 27%
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Effective interventions

- Access to skilled attendants at birth, combined with prompt referral in case of complications
- Emergency obstetric care
- Family planning
- Other measures to reduce adolescent pregnancies
- Addressing links between HIV, malaria and maternal health
- Empowering women, families and communities to make timely decisions and carry out appropriate actions
Ensuring skilled care at every birth

Health professionals with midwifery skills (promoting utilisation, pregnancy care and providing care for normal deliveries and Obstetric First Aid, newborn care)

Referral

Health professionals with skills to provide Basic Essential Obstetric and newborn care

Health professionals with skills to provide Comprehensive Essential Obstetric Care

Policy

Equipment

Supplies

Transport

Drugs

Management and supervision

World Health Organization

Family and Community Health (FCH)
Improved coverage is needed along the Continuum of Care

Figure 3: Coverage estimates for interventions across the continuum of care in the 68 priority countries (2000–06) Source: Lancet Countdown Coverage writing group, Lancet Countdown special issue, 2008
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A shared agenda for women’s health

- Building strong leadership and a coherent institutional response
- Making health systems work for women
- Leveraging changes in public policy to build healthier societies
- Building the knowledge base and monitoring progress
Thank you!