

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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New campaigns on maternal and child mortality buoyed by progress reported on Millennium Development Goals

(UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 23 June) Updated data on mortality rates among mothers and young children are likely to encourage G8 leaders, who at their meeting later this week will make this health issue – long considered a neglected area of international development efforts – a 2010 priority.

According to the United Nations annual assessment of progress on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), released today, the number of deaths among children under the age of 5 has dropped from 12.6 million in 1990 to an estimated 8.8 million in 2008, corresponding to a decline in the mortality rate from 100 deaths per 1,000 live births to 72 in 2008 (a 28 per cent decline). But progress is falling short of the MDG target under Goal 4, for a two-thirds reduction in childhood mortality rates between 1990 and 2015, and millions of children continue to die each year at a tragically young age.

Progress has been recorded by many countries on maternal mortality, and the latest preliminary data indicate that some countries have achieved significant declines. However, the rate of reduction is still well short of the 5.5 per cent annual reduction needed to meet the target under Goal 5, for slashing maternal mortality rates by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015, the UN reports. Hundreds of thousands of women – 99 per cent of them in the developing world – die annually as a result of pregnancy or childbirth.

“For too long, maternal and child health has been at the back of the MDG train,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said earlier this year at the UN, at the 14 April launch of an initiative for a joint action plan among governments, businesses, foundations and civil society organizations. “But we know it can be the engine of development,” he continued, citing women as drivers of progress and healthy children as the starting point for a stronger, better educated and more productive citizenry.

Maternal health is difficult to measure, because of underreporting and uncertainty as to which factors may be most responsible for a mother’s death. But the UN’s *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* shows that the rural-urban gap in skilled care during childbirth has narrowed, and more women are receiving skilled healthcare during pregnancy.

Goal 6 – action against killer diseases

In launching his initiative for a joint action plan, Secretary-General Ban cited progress against HIV/AIDS as an example of what collective effort can achieve, and data from the *MDG Report 2010* backs up this assessment.

“The spread of HIV appears to have stabilized in most regions, and more people are surviving longer,” the Report says, noting progress on the stated MDG target of halting and beginning to turn the tide of the AIDS pandemic. AIDS-related mortality peaked in 2004, with 2.2 million deaths. By 2008, the toll had dropped to 2 million.

Targets for action under MDG 6 include killer diseases such as AIDS, malaria and TB. Prevalence of tuberculosis has dropped in developing regions from 310 per 1000 in 1990 to 210 per 1000 in 2008. But contained within this overall decline is an increase in the sub-Saharan African prevalence rate from 300 per 1000 to 490 per 1000 over the same period. TB mortality rates in sub-Saharan Africa were increasing through to 2003, but since then the tide has turned and the rate has been decreasing, although not yet to 1990s levels, the UN reports.

Half of the world’s population is at risk of malaria. The *MDG Report 2010* indicates that there were about 243 million cases and nearly 863,000 deaths in 2008. Of these deaths, 89 per cent occurred in Africa.

More accurate figures are available for the rapid increase in production and use of insecticide-treated bed nets. Across Africa, the proportion of children under the age of five who sleep under treated bed nets has multiplied between 2000 and 2009 – a factor which is certainly contributing to improvements in the childhood mortality rate.

World leaders to set action agenda to 2015

At a September UN summit, world leaders will seek agreement on an action agenda to build on successes and close the gaps in achieving all the MDGs by the target year of 2015. More than 100 Heads of State and Government are expected, along with leaders from the private sector, foundations and civil society organizations.

First agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, the eight MDGs set worldwide objectives for reducing extreme poverty and hunger, improving health and education, empowering women and ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015.

The *Millennium Development Goals Report*, an annual assessment of regional progress towards the Goals, reflects the most comprehensive, up-to-date data compiled by over 25 UN and international agencies. Produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the report has been designated by the UN General Assembly as an official input to the MDG summit. A complete set of the data used to prepare the report is available at <http://mdgs.un.org>.

For more information, press materials and an inter-agency media contact list, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals

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