

ACTUEMOS YA POR LAS MUJERES Y LOS NIÑOS, (Deliver NOW for Women and Children), a regional initiative for MDGs 4 & 5

Introduction

Approximately 500,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related complications, and over 9 million children die before they reach 5 years of age. 99% of these deaths occur in the developing world. Most of them are easily preventable with timely action and available basic medical care. Unfortunately, the region of Latin America contributes with about 7% to the total burden of infant deaths.

President Michelle Bachelet of Chile, a pediatrician by profession, is a great advocate for better maternal and child health. She is also one of the members of the Network of Global Leaders (NGL) for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 & 5. This network, created in the context of the Global Campaign for the Health MDGs, is formed by a group of Heads of State and Government committed to supporting progress for goals 4 and 5. President Bachelet led the creation of a regional initiative which she wanted to lead jointly with Brazil. President Lula is the other president in Latin America who is a member of the NGL. The launch of this initiative, took place on September 19, 2008, in the presence of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway, during his official visit to Chile (<http://www.who.int/pmnch/activities/delivernow/en/index5.html>).

The regional initiative fits in the framework of the above mentioned Global Campaign for the Health MDGs, where political commitment and support at the highest level (represented by Presidents of the region) supports the implementation of technical and advocacy activities for south-south cooperation among countries aimed at improving the progress towards goals 4 and 5 in the region.

The Regional Initiative

This initiative calls for the reduction -and eventually eradication- of preventable maternal, newborn and child mortality in the Region. It takes into account that the Latin American region has a relatively low share of the mortality and morbidity of the world, however, it also recognizes that social inequities, very prominent in the region, and social determinants are intimately linked to maternal and child health indicators.

The initiative has been conceived as a south-south cooperation strategy - a Horizontal Cooperation Alliance -, and goes beyond the traditional schemes. It seeks to develop common platforms for cooperation, with innovative and flexible approaches to financing, looking to get sustained financial support between countries in the region and outside, international organizations and the private sector

The initiative was conceived around five major components:

1. **High-level political commitment** (launch event with President Bachelet and Prime Minister Stoltenberg) engaging other Heads of State and Government for support in the political context).
2. **Advocacy and communications** to give visibility to both the problem of maternal and child health in the region as well as to the solution.
3. **Funding** - financing plan that includes the initial donors, with a financing plan and a strategy for resource mobilization in the long term that allows to create a sustainable platform.
4. **Technical** - The first phase of the project details the areas of south-south technical cooperation among countries, from human resources training and models management system to experiences exchange and knowledge in multicultural birth assistance. Monitoring and evaluation of results is an integral part of the plan.
5. **Community Mobilization** - Working with non-governmental actors to develop community mobilization in the countries to enable awareness and increased demand for services generated by the technical cooperation program (i.e. audit of maternal deaths).

The specific activities and programs which will be implemented in the context of this initiative have the following main objectives:

- Building on existing platforms to give more visibility to maternal, newborn and child health and the issues of continuum of care.
- Cooperating with other countries in the region in the political, financial, technical and scientific areas in order to build experience and knowledge which have contributed to the reduction of maternal, newborn and child mortality in the countries of the region.
- Mobilizing communities through media campaigns for public awareness on the problems linked to maternal, newborn and child mortality in the countries of the region.
- Ensuring the financial sustainability of the initiative through innovative financing models.

The development of this initiative has been done in consultation with a group of experts and representatives from different constituencies: officials from the ministries of health and governments from the countries involved, national and international agencies such as the Chilean International Cooperation Agency (AGCI), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), as well as representatives from schools of midwifery and obstetrics, other governmental actors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and some of its members from the civil society and health professional groups.

The strategies developed in this regional initiative build on existing strategies by organizations such as UNICEF and PAHO such as the PAHO regional strategy for maternal and child health in the Americas, or The Partnership against child malnutrition.

Currently the initiative consists of a long-term project (2008-2015) with different phases which starts to outline the technical cooperation platform for the first phase, (2009-2010) between the 4 initial countries (Chile, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia), being the main focus of the activities:

- Brazil and Chile: Strengthening models of comprehensive health systems strengthening for maternal, newborn and child health.
- Ecuador and Bolivia: Strengthening an intercultural process to improve services for mothers, newborn and children in multiethnic societies.
- Brazil and Bolivia: Establishing a dynamic platform for communication to mobilize communities and advocate the political movements to generate demand for maternal, newborn and child health care services.

All these areas have strong elements of advocacy, technical and scientific content, and financial analysis. They also involve a wide scope of constituencies. The advocacy action will be accompanied through wide ranging media campaigns at the country and the regional level.

For the subsequent phases, other countries are involved. The second phase of cooperation involves Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The initiative will expand to other countries in the region, including the ones with the highest burden. The initiative will accompany the MDGs until 2015.