



THE PARTNERSHIP
For Maternal, Newborn & Child Health

Press Release

The Prime Minister of Tanzania calls on regional leaders to increase health spending to 15 percent of national budgets and to strive for achieving health MDGs

*Global partners gather in Tanzania for the first assembly of
The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health*

17 APRIL 2007—DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA | More than 300 delegates gathered at the first-ever assembly of The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health. Hosted by the Government of Tanzania, the Partners' Forum (17-20 April 2007) declared today that action is urgently required, if high rates of unjust deaths of mothers, babies and children in poor countries are to be reversed.

Improving maternal, newborn and child health around the world has been slow and uneven, due mainly to the lack of political attention and the resources required to scale-up the coverage of essential interventions. More than two-thirds of newborn deaths, for instance, could be prevented by extending the availability and use of existing cost-effective technologies. Although gains have been made in recent years, weak health systems and under-investment continue to mitigate against widespread progress.

Almost 90% of all births occur in 75 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that collectively account for more than 75 per cent of the world's population. Only about 43 per cent of all births in these countries are being delivered by skilled nurses. The countries carry almost 95 per cent of all maternal and newborn deaths worldwide.

This situation is particularly evident in Africa, which represents 33 per cent of maternal, 28 per cent of newborn, and 43 per cent of overall child mortality globally. "The first step for Africa towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 is to translate our political commitment into financial delivery by increasing our budgets for health care to at least 15 per cent of the overall national budget," said the Rt Hon. Edward N Lowassa, Prime Minister of Tanzania in opening the Partners' Forum.

"The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health has grown as a strong alliance of 120 members since its foundation in 2005. The Partners' Forum provides a historic opportunity for all members to meet face-to-face for the first time," said Dr Francisco Songane, Director of The Partnership in his speech. "The timing of the Partners' Forum could not be better; the world needs to focus urgent attention and resources to reverse the state of poor maternal, newborn and child health in developing countries."

The Partnership's governance mechanisms and a new "Global Business Plan" to achieve MDGs 4 and 5, relating to the reduction of child and maternal mortality, will be at the top of discussions of the three-day Partners' Forum.

"We, the members of the Partnership, are facing a tremendous challenge today, which can also be a great opportunity. Never before have such a broad coalition of maternal, newborn and child health partners come together as one, with the aim to address the continuum of care as a shared

commitment. Our common goal is to mobilize global support and the commitment of world leaders to achieve two of the three health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” said Kul Gautam, Chair of the Partnership’s Interim Steering Committee and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. “The Partners’ Forum shall shape the approach and the priorities on how we work together in the coming decade.”

Although some gains have been made over the past two decades in reducing child deaths, maternal mortality rates have remained mostly unchanged worldwide. Tanzania is a striking case in point: the country has achieved a 30 per cent reduction in child mortality and a 20 per cent fall in newborn deaths over the past five years. If this progress is sustained for the next decade, Tanzania could become one of the first countries in Africa to meet MDG 4. However, maternal mortality remains unacceptably high and 57 per cent of pregnant women are still delivering at home without access to health facilities.

In an effort to accelerate the national drive for improved maternal, newborn and child health, the Government of Tanzania and partners from the NGO, research, health professional and UN communities launched the Tanzania National Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. Ambassador Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan-African Parliament, has been appointed as champion of the Tanzania National Partnership.

“In order to ensure universal access to basic health care for mothers, newborn and children, there is a need for leadership at all levels—the leadership to provide voice and revive focus on what matters most—saving the lives of mothers, babies and children from preventable deaths” said Amb. Mongella. “As a fellow Tanzanian and a mother, it is with honor and diligence, I accept the appointment.”

A compelling record of the fight to save lives on the frontline was presented at the opening event of The Partners’ Forum. *Play Your Part*, a video documentary produced by six community nurses and midwives, offers an inside look at the daily reality for women, children and health workers in various areas of Tanzania. With the support of the White Ribbon Alliance for Tanzania and the UK Department for International Development, the six health workers were trained in basic film production techniques and set about to tell the stories of their communities with video cameras in hand. Well-known Tanzanian singer Stara Thomas collaborated on the film and performed the title track of “Play Your Part” at the opening ceremony.

The first assembly of The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health has attracted about 200 international technical experts, program managers and advocates, and more than 150 national delegates from Tanzania.

Note to editors: Established in 2005, The Partnership consists of more than 120 members representing partner countries, UN agencies such as WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, non-governmental organizations, health professional associations, bilateral donors, foundations, and academic and research institutions from around the world, working together to enable unified and effective approaches that promise greater progress in achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 to reduce child mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015. Please visit our website www.who.int/pmnch for full information.

For more information please contact:

Tunga Namjilsuren
Communications Officer
The Partnership for Maternal,
Newborn & Child Health
Mobile in Tanzania: +255 (0) 787 278 063
Email: namjilsurent@who.int

Lori McDougall
Senior Adviser, Advocacy
The Partnership for Maternal,
Newborn & Child Health
Mobile in Tanzania: +255 (0) 787 278 028
Email: mcdougalll@who.int