Rationale
Countdown to 2015 tracks the coverage of key interventions focused on reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH). It aims to stimulate and support country progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through promoting accountability from governments and development partners, identifying knowledge gaps and proposing new measures/actions.

Country Countdowns are a key component of the Countdown to 2015 mandate. Organizing a Country Countdown event is a two-step process which involves conducting in-depth analysis of national and sub-national RMNCH data leading to the production of a country profile; and organising national workshops to build stakeholder commitment on the policy implications of the data findings. Country Countdowns can help policy makers, health programmers and advocates to:

- build country capacity to enhance the quantity, quality and use of national and sub-national health data;
- increase financial flows to RMNCH from domestic and overseas sources;
- refine evidence-based national strategies and allocation of financial resources to achieve equitable, accelerated improvements in RMNCH; and
- increase the visibility of coverage statistics to strengthen political commitment and accountability for the fulfilment of RMNCH objectives.

Getting Started
A first step would be to assess the current country progress in improving RMNCH. Countdown to 2015 produces annual country profiles in 75 countries, which includes the most recent information on measures of maternal, newborn, and child survival and nutritional status; coverage rates for priority interventions across the continuum of care; and selected indicators of equity, policy support, human resources, and financial flows.

The next step would be to start developing the Country Countdown in accordance with a number of guiding principles:

- Consider full continuum of care: Recognise links across RMNCH and nutrition.
- Align with country processes: Countdown approaches should be aligned with country processes for data collection and monitoring to maximise efficiency and avoid duplication.
- Build capacity: Strengthen national institutions and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Involve all stakeholders: Involve government, technical experts and civil society to ensure inclusion and accountability.
- Use flexible approaches: Adapt existing Countdown to 2015 templates and tools to country circumstances.
- Ensure adequate funding: Mobilise sufficient financial support for a successful Countdown process.

Approaches / Steps
While each country can tailor its approach to the Countdown process, there are a number of common steps:

1. Preparation and planning:
   - Establish a national organising committee, led by the government and with participation of civil society, to oversee the planning process, ensure stakeholder buy-in and increase accountability for results.
   - Form sub-committees (including government departments, academic and research institutions, civil society, donors and UN agencies) for the analysis of data, development of advocacy materials, events planning and fundraising.

2. Analysis of country-level data:
   - Establish a scientific sub-committee to identify and analyse coverage data of proven interventions at national and district/provincial levels, with a focus on equity and quality, as well as provide recommendations for solutions.

3. Development of advocacy materials and implementation of Countdown events:
   - Create national and sub-national profiles with key findings from data analysis, including coverage levels, equity analysis and trends, to engender additional understanding, engagement with key stakeholders and provide opportunities for evidence-based action.
   - National conferences/workshops allow information and data analysis to be presented clearly and comprehensively to stakeholders from a range of sectors. This should include working group discussions and key findings should be shared with the media and public.

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November 2012
• Provincial/local events also provide an opportunity to engage with civil society and citizens, and foster community learning.

4. Build stakeholder commitment for action:
• The preceding steps, including the discussions and debates at Countdown events, serve to build consensus around priority areas, which should be converted into stakeholder commitments for action, accountability and follow-up.

5. Document and share the experience:
• Clear documentation of the findings, discussions and commitments encourages information sharing, improved understanding and effective monitoring.

Role of actors
This summary may be of use to various national government departments, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), bilateral and multilateral organisations and professional associations. In particular, the government should be responsible for general oversight, with the Ministry of Health and other in-country partners being responsible for the analysis and dissemination of data and advocacy materials, convening stakeholders and building commitment. Countdown to 2015 should provide technical support as needed, and mobilise South-South learning through sharing experiences and lessons learned.

Toolkit

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<th>STEP INVOLVED</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
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| Analysis of country level data | • Countdown indicators, data sources and methods used to select indicators and collect data: www.countdown2015mnch.org
• Data for national indicators: www.childinfo.org, including from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data |

Case study
Nigeria’s experience with developing national and state level profiles to highlight and tackle MNCH challenges

To improve MNCH and accelerate progress towards the MDGs, Nigeria developed the Integrated Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (IMNCH) strategy, which urges states to accelerate actions that will ensure universal coverage of MNCH interventions.

A first step was to establish the Nigeria Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (NPMNCH) to assist in the coordination of the strategy and advocate for resources. Analysis was then undertaken of national and state level intervention coverage, mortality and causes of maternal, newborn and child deaths. This resulted in a widely-endorsed publication detailing the national profile and profiles for 36 individual states, which was launched at a national paediatrics conference.

In addition to the publication itself, a range of supporting activities ran alongside, including the publication of more accessible short-reports and handouts, media briefing and press releases, DVDs and technical briefs.

The publication and subsequent activities raised awareness of Nigeria’s progress on MNCH and the challenges faced by stakeholders. The process also resulted in enhanced coordination, greater consensus on progress, and agreement on constraints and future directions.

More specifically, the process in Nigeria resulted in:
• Agreement by Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) to include a budget line for newborn health.
• Evidence which was used in the approval of a Health Bill by the National Assembly.
• Agreement to address human resource equity issues.
• Signed letters of commitment from partners specifying how they will contribute to improving MNCH.

Nigeria has since made plans to use Countdown approaches for continued monitoring and problem solving.

(None of the countries in the Asia Pacific region have completed a country countdown till date. The case of Nigeria is therefore presented to provide an overview of the process to develop a country countdown and on how the country countdown can be used for evidence based advocacy.)

Opportunities to engage
Countries can engage with the global countdown process through regional linkages and Countdown conferences, as well as receive technical support, for example to assess data quality and availability. For more information on Countdown to 2015, including further Country Countdown case studies and more information on how to develop a Country Countdown, please visit www.countdown2015mnch.org.

Resources

Acknowledgements
Developed by Cambridge Economic Policy Associates based on key resources included in this summary and inputs from members of the Advocacy Thematic Committee for the Asia-Pacific Leadership and Policy Dialogue for Women’s and Children’s Health, 2012, co-hosted by PMNCH, WHO, ADB, AusAID and UNICEF.