Women and Children’s Health in the post-2015 Development Agenda

Food Security and Nutrition

Executive Summary

This document has been prepared by The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) as the Partnership’s contribution to the thematic consultations which are part of the UN-led process to establish sustainable development goals post-2015. The executive summary aims to highlight the relevance of women’s and children’s health to the thematic consultation on food security and nutrition.

Malnutrition in all forms is a major contributor to disease and early deaths for women and children. It is the underlying cause of 2.6 million child deaths each year.¹

Undernutrition can lead to health problems across generations, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. Children who are stunted are at a greater risk of having difficulty learning, playing, engaging in normal childhood activities and being productive members of society later in life. They are also more susceptible of getting repeated illnesses due to a weakened immune system. A child’s nutritional future begins with the mother’s nutritional status in adolescence and during pregnancy.

Overnutrition leading to overweight and obesity is increasing rapidly among low and middle-income countries, increasing the prevalence of chronic noncommunicable diseases and associated healthcare costs. For pregnant women, overweight and obesity increase the risk of gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, pregnancy-induced hypertension, and large babies, which in turn raises the chance for induced labour, caesarean sections, stillbirths and preterm births as well as development of type II diabetes for the mother.

Poverty is still the major reason for food and nutrition insecurity. In general poor households, especially in rural area, are far more likely to lack access to sufficient and qualitative diets. At the same time they also lack formal education as well as health information, services and supplies, including for sexual and reproductive health. Higher rates of fertility among women living in poor and rural households will tend to increase the share of those experiencing food and nutrition insecurity unless their income rises fast enough to move them out of poverty. Young women and mothers are faced with many underlying challenges to fulfilling their nutritional needs. These include; poverty, a lack of education on healthy diets and infant care, poor access to a diverse variety of affordable, nutritious and safe foods, as well as inadequate healthcare and sanitation. Gender inequality and restrictive cultural practices exacerbate women’s unequal access to appropriate nutrition.

Rapid progress in improving food and nutrition security is needed to reach health and development goals beyond 2015. Evidence-based, cost-effective, and relatively simple solutions to reduce malnutrition, together with nutrition-sensitive development strategies, need to be scaled up.

See the following PMNCH Knowledge Summaries for more detailed recommendations.
Food and nutrition security will come under additional pressure due to the adverse impacts of climate change on global food production, increasing unequal distribution of available food. This is only one of the many challenges that continue to make access to nutritious foods difficult. It is imperative for the Post 2015 agenda to address food and nutrition security with a lens pointed at their impact on women’s and children’s health. As such the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health proposes that the Post MDG agenda should adopt a multi-sectoral approach to improving health and in particular, women and children’s health.

This note proposes some principles which need to be followed in selecting post-MDG health goals, and indicators. These include political intelligibility and acceptability; universality; rigor and flexibility; measuring resources and results; taking into account equity and social dimensions; honoring existing agreements on metrics; including a multi-stakeholder accountability mechanism; and a continued focus on the unfinished MDG agenda.

In this context, the Partnership proposes a hierarchy of health goals and indicators post-2015, including eliminating preventable deaths and morbidity amongst women and children, affordable access to care and protection against impoverishment caused by unaffordable health costs, monitoring of key life-saving interventions, accountability and girls’ education.
Women and children’s health remains as an essential component for consideration within the thematic consultation on Food Security and Nutrition.

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<th>Proposed women’s and children’s health related goals and indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
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| Eliminating preventable deaths and morbidity amongst women and children | • Maternal Mortality Rate  
• Under 5 Mortality Rate,  
• Stunting of under 5 children  
• Indicators of morbidity |
| Affordable access to health care and protection against catastrophic health events | • Universal Health Coverage  
• Access to key reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent interventions  
  o Met need for contraception  
  o Antenatal care coverage  
  o Antiretroviral prophylaxis among HIV-positive pregnant women, and antiretroviral therapy for women who are treatment-eligible;  
  o Skilled attendant at birth  
  o Postnatal care for mothers and babies  
  o Exclusive breastfeeding for six months  
  o Three doses of the combined diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine  
  o Antibiotic treatment for pneumonia  
• Access to additional reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent interventions  
  o Select, based on country mortality and morbidity factors, from e.g.39 indicators used by Countdown to 2015 for Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival, or PMNCH 56 essential interventions |
| Accountability | Based on Commission on Information and Accountability targets, introduce metric to measure progress on civil registration and vital statistics to record neonatal, infant and maternal mortality |
| Girls’ Education | Proportion of girls graduating from secondary education |

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