

UN report: Campaign has reduced mother and child deaths (Update)

March 10 2015, by Edith M. Lederer

A U.N. initiative to improve the health of women and children that attracted \$60 billion over the past five years has led to a decrease in maternal and child death rates in all 49 targeted countries, according to a report released Tuesday.

It cited declines in mortality rates for children under age 5 between 2010 and 2013 in the target nations ranging from 58.3 percent in Haiti to 16.3 percent in Bangladesh, 13.2 percent in Liberia, and 7.5 percent in Afghanistan. It also reported drops in the maternal mortality rate in the same period ranging from 22.9 percent in Zimbabwe to 16 percent in Ethiopia, 9.1 percent in Myanmar, and 3.9 percent in Vietnam.

Despite "historic progress," the report said, more than 17,000 children died before the age of 5 every day in 2013 around the world, which meant an annual total of 6.3 million. And it said 289,000 women died from complications from pregnancy or childbirth that year.

Globally, the report said, 60 percent of maternal deaths and 53 percent of under-5 deaths occur in countries affected by conflict, displacement and natural disasters.

"Through continued political commitment, an increase in innovative financing and strong partnership we can realistically end the preventable deaths of women and children within a generation wherever they live," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a meeting to launch the report.

The report credited the U.N.'s "Every Woman Every Child" campaign for many of the gains in the 49 priority countries. Those gains include 870,000 new health workers, a 193 percent increase in treatments to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission, and a 25 percent rise in skilled care at births and in post-natal care for women.

"Since 2010 alone, the world has saved the lives of some 2.4 million women and children," Ban said. "More children are receiving medicines to combat diarrhea, more babies are receiving proper nutrition and the health benefits of exclusive breastfeeding."

The U.N. chief said more women are also giving birth at health facilities and more women and girls are receiving sexual and reproductive health services that "they want and need."

Ban said the goal now is to end "the appalling tragedy of preventable deaths" and keep investing in the health of women, children and adolescents.

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