

Progress made, but work to do in maternal, newborn health

October 19 2015, by Christopher Sherman



Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, speaks in front of an image of a healthy baby being born, during the opening plenary of the Global Maternal Newborn Health Conference in Mexico City, Monday, Oct. 19, 2015. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Eight hundred women die every day globally from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, despite great strides in that area, philanthropist

Melinda Gates said Monday.

Gates spoke at the first Global Maternal Newborn Health Conference in Mexico City. Public health experts from around the world were to discuss research and policies that could continue to drive those numbers down.

"All the data proves that helping a woman plan and space her pregnancies is the most effective way to save mothers and newborns," Gates said.

The conference aims to develop strategies to achieve development goals launched last month at the United Nations. Preventable complications related to pregnancy, childbirth and other causes still claim 7,400 newborns each day.

Maternal mortality has fallen almost 50 percent since 1990 globally. But the new U.N. goal is to have fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births globally by 2030, down from 210 per 100,000 in 2013.

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, said the reason they have not achieved more in the area of mothers' health is because of a lack of empowerment of women worldwide.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has an ongoing project in southern Mexico and Central America. It is collaborating with The Carlos Slim Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank, as well as the governments of Spain and Central American countries to reduce health inequities.



Melinda Gates listens to a speaker during the opening plenary of the Global Maternal Newborn Health Conference in Mexico City, Monday, Oct. 19, 2015. Gates says much progress has been made in the health of mothers and newborns, but 800 women and 7,400 newborns die every day globally from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

The project is working in Mexico's Chiapas state to increase access to health facilities with prenatal and postnatal care.

"In Chiapas I think the big challenge is really meeting so many peoples' needs who are in these communities, these remote communities, that aren't not easily accessible ... with health services," Gates said. She said the project did not initially achieve its goals, but was now on track and making progress. She said access to those services had increased from 3 percent to 46 percent. More progress is expected in a second phase and

then a final stage will measure childhood mortality reductions.



Melinda Gates, left, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, smiles at Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of UNFPA and under-secretary-general of the United Nations, as they applaud during the opening plenary at the Global Maternal Newborn Health Conference in Mexico City, Monday, Oct. 19, 2015. The conference aims to develop strategies to achieve development goals launched last month at the United Nations. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Dr. Pablo Kuri Morales, Mexico's deputy health secretary for preventative health and [health](#) promotion, said he considers the Chiapas project a laboratory whose lessons will be implemented throughout Mexico.

"Quite frankly the whole Mesoamerica [project](#) is about different countries learning from one another," Gates said. "And that's why we're

making so much progress around the world."



Melinda Gates, second from left, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, listens through a translation earpiece during the opening plenary at the Global Maternal Newborn Health Conference in Mexico City, Monday, Oct. 19, 2015. Seated beside her are Ana Langer, left, director of the maternal health task force at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of UNFPA and under-secretary-general of the United Nations. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

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Citation: Progress made, but work to do in maternal, newborn health (2015, October 19)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-10-maternal-newborn-health.html>

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