

The global development framework—where are mothers and newborns in the post-2015 era?

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While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) underlined the necessity of better policies and programs to improve maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other health conditions, the approach had significant flaws. Having separate goals for mothers and children may have been a disservice, fostering the persistent

segmentation of service delivery.

The era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recently started. With their focus on universal health care, equity, and integration, the new policy framework represents a historic opportunity to build on progress, while addressing the limitations of the MDGs. It is critical, however, not to let an emphasis on maternal and newborn health wane in this new broad agenda.

The maternal health landscape is rapidly evolving, mostly for good. Evidence shows substantial decline in [maternal mortality](#) and growing utilization of maternal health services. But in some countries, the challenge of limited progress or even a reversal of progress casts a shadow. Large inequalities in the coverage of [maternal health](#) interventions persist and poor quality of care is the only option for far too many women.

Between 2000 and 2012, the newborn mortality rate declined at a slower pace than maternal and child mortality and the stillbirth rate remained stagnant. These trends require attention to reduce deaths during the first month of life. Furthermore, the high number of preventable stillbirths is a clarion call to improve the quality of antenatal and intrapartum care.

In October 2015, the global maternal newborn health community gathered to share emerging evidence, ask hard questions, and learn from those doing vital work within countries. A thousand delegates from more than 75 countries reflected on the newly adopted SDGs, and shared critical lessons about successes and persistent challenges in maternal newborn health. Researchers, implementers, advocates and representatives from the development and donor communities outlined a roadmap for maternal newborn health in the post-2015 era that included ten critical actions:

Countries where political leadership acts on strong scientific evidence and the public demands better maternal newborn survival make progress. Governments and societies of countries lagging behind are morally obliged to embrace and implement an active and evidence- based maternal newborn health agenda and continuously monitor its progress.

Global and national health communities must integrate strategies, services and funding streams to avoid unnecessary and harmful silos. Maternal newborn health offers a proven platform to strengthen the entire health system.

Weak national healthcare systems fail too many individuals; reaching the most vulnerable, including adolescents, is an urgent priority.

Efforts to improve maternal newborn survival should include attention to maternal morbidities, stillbirths, and child development outcomes; they are essential proxies for inequality and poor quality care.

Increasing the investment in better quality maternal newborn health services is a fundamental response to health and rights imperatives.

Care with dignity does not cost any more. At any resource level, a provider has the opportunity and the obligation to treat clients with compassion and respect.

Universal access to integrated sexual and reproductive health care, including contraception, is essential to ensure maternal newborn health.

It is time to address the gap in measurement, information, and accountability. In order to assess progress in the next 15 years, countries and the global community need to address these complex challenges now.

Sharing good news in human development is not a risk, but an opportunity to build stronger health programs. This is the time to acknowledge important gains made as strategies are created to implement the SDGs.

Supporting all providers, including midwives, to address maternal newborn [health](#) is imperative to realize the ambitious post-2015 agenda.

Collective action, with a renewed commitment to accountability and governance, is needed to deliver sustainable solutions and give mothers and newborns the central place they deserve in all efforts to achieve sustainable development. Now is the time to stop the injustice of needless deaths and deliver integrated, quality, and equitable care that reaches all women and newborns.

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