

UN plan aims to improve access to life-saving health supplies for women and children



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon administers polio medicine to a baby at a healthcare centre in Viana district, Angola in February 2012. UN Photo/E. Schneider

26 September 2012 – The United Nations today presented a plan to make life-saving health supplies more accessible, while a new report found that, despite impressive reductions in maternal and child mortality in the past decade in some countries, millions of women and children still die every year from preventable causes.

With its new plan, the UN Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children aims to improve access and use of essential medicines, medical devices and health supplies that effectively address causes of death during pregnancy, childbirth and into childhood.

It recommends bulk buying, local manufacturing and innovative marketing to help transform the supply, demand and use of quality life-saving products, according to a news release issued by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)). It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of women's and children's lives could be saved each year with essential supplies, including for family planning.

The Commission was launched in March by UNICEF and the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), and is part of the Every Woman Every Child movement launched by [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon two years ago with the aim of saving 16 million lives by 2015.

"If we take the human right to health seriously, we have to ensure that all people get basic services," Mr. Ban [said](#) last night at a special event held on women's and children's health in New York City.

"I want us to increase and optimize investments in the health of the world's women and children. This demands accountability on all sides. We have to watch how we spend our precious resources and how well we deliver results to the people we serve," he stated.

The Commission, co-chaired by President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway, examined 13 medicines and health supplies, focusing on 50 countries with high death rates among women, newborns, and children under five due to preventable causes.

"It is simply wrong that millions of children and women still die every year when we have the products and the knowledge to save their lives," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, who serves as a vice-chair of the Commission, along with UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin.

"With the Commission's help, we have still more practical solutions. What is needed now is the political will to implement them."

Dr. Osotimehin also stressed the need to implement the Commission's recommendations, particularly regarding maternal health and family planning. "Access to voluntary family planning saves lives. We have to make sure that all women and girls have access to the reproductive health services and supplies they want and need."

The plan comes as the Secretary-General's independent Expert Review Group on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health issued its first report, concluding that while reductions in maternal and child mortality during the past decade have been impressive in some countries, millions of women and children still die every year from preventable causes.

Unless those causes are more urgently addressed, Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) 4 and 5 – on improving maternal health and reducing child mortality – will not be met by most nations by the target year of 2015.

The report finds that there are "worrying" signs that donor and country financial commitments to women's and children's health are declining. Also, the distribution of commitments to countries

with the highest burdens of women's and children's mortality are “disturbingly uneven, revealing deep and troubling inequities in health care,” states a news release on the report.

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