

# WOMEN DELIVER

## AS MOTHERS, INDIVIDUALS, FAMILY MEMBERS, AND AS CITIZENS

A woman's health is critical to the well-being of her family and to the economy of her community and her country.

- When a mother dies or is in ill health, children are more likely to be stunted and to receive less schooling and healthcare.
- A child whose mother has died is up to four times more likely to die than a child who has not lost a mother.
- The total value of women's unpaid house and farm work adds one-third to the world's GNP.
- Where women lack education, economic opportunities, and power over the decisions that govern their lives, the health of mothers is poor. That is why the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) give a central place to both maternal health and to gender equality.
- MDG 5, improving maternal health, is often called "the heart of the MDGs," because if it fails, the other MDGs will also fail.

## THE UNFORTUNATE FACTS

- More than 40% of all pregnancies everywhere have a complication, and in 15% of all pregnancies it is life-threatening.
- Every minute of every day, a woman dies needlessly during pregnancy or childbirth, most in the developing world.
- Four million newborns die each year, and a similar number are stillborn. Most of these deaths are related to the mother's poor health.
- The number of maternal and newborn deaths has not dropped significantly in the past 20 years. In some regions, it has actually worsened.
- Huge disparities in maternal health exist between rich and poor countries, and between the rich and the poor within all countries.
- South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have the poorest maternal health. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounts for 51% of the world's maternal deaths.
- Shattered health care systems and high fertility in the poorest countries raise women's lifetime risk: One in 6 women will die of pregnancy-related causes in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. In Sweden, only one woman in 29,800 will die of such causes.
- The risk of dying during pregnancy or delivery is five times higher for girls under the age of 15 than for women in their 20s.
- Complications of pregnancy and childbirth leave 10 to 20 million women with physical or mental disabilities every year.

## ▾ WE KNOW WHAT TO DO

Practical solutions must come in the context of broad efforts to improve women's legal rights and economic status. Education that creates options in life for women and girls is key. The most cost-effective health strategies to prevent maternal and newborn deaths are:

- Access to comprehensive reproductive health services;
- Skilled care by nurses, midwives, or doctors during pregnancy and childbirth;
- Emergency care for all mothers and newborns with complications.

## ▾ PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

With greater political will and financial investment, most women and newborns can survive so that their families, communities, and nations can thrive.

- Sri Lanka and Vietnam substantially reduced maternal mortality despite gross national incomes equal to Yemen and Cote d'Ivoire, where maternal mortality remains high.
- Egypt, Honduras, Malaysia and Thailand all halved their maternal mortality ratios over the last several decades.

## ▾ INVESTMENT IN WOMEN PAYS OFF

Potential returns on investment in women are enormous.

- Women are the sole income earners for 25 to 33 percent of all households.
- Women's income is more likely than men's to go for food, education, medicine, and other family needs.
- Educating women and girls increases their use of maternal health services and opens doors to higher wages and production, as well as improved family health.
- The global economic impact of maternal and newborn mortality is US\$15 billion lost in potential production every year.

## ▾ WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Maternal health is ultimately related to whether societies invest in and realize the potential of women—not only as mothers but as critical contributors to sustaining families and transforming nations.

- A package of maternal health services costing less than US\$1.50 per person could make significant improvements in women's health in the 75 countries where 95% of maternal and child deaths occur.
- Total international assistance for maternal and newborn health was US\$530 million in 2004. In order to reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters, an additional US\$4.1 – US\$6.1 billion would be needed in 2015.
- Saving women's lives saves money:  
An investment of US\$5.5 billion would return three times as much—US\$15 billion in productivity.
- That US\$5.5 billion is well within the grasp of donor countries only 0.016% of total GNP or 2% of total aid.

# Invest in women – it pays!