



# For Safer Motherhood in Zimbabwe



2013 United Nations Day in Zimbabwe

Chitungwiza • 30 October 2013

The United Nations and the Ministry of Health and Child Care jointly organized the 68th anniversary of the United Nations at Chitungwiza Central Hospital with a call “For Safer Motherhood in Zimbabwe” – a theme that seeks to address the country’s high rates of maternal mortality.

The choice of Chitungwiza Central Hospital as venue was in recognition of the hospital’s successful model for building strategic partnerships and effective delivery of public and maternal health services to communities.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Unanimous call for urgent action from all speakers to address the high maternal mortality in Zimbabwe.
- Raised awareness on maternal health in Zimbabwe among Government, UN, Diplomatic Community, Civil Society, Communities, Health Workers, and the Press.
- Commitment for strong partnership to mobilise resources to ensure that no woman should die from preventable complications during child birth in Zimbabwe.
- Highlighted current efforts made by Government, UN, & other development partners to reverse the negative trend of high maternal mortality in Zimbabwe.



Mr. Alain Noudehou,  
UN Resident Coordinator



Hon. Dr. David Parirenyatwa,  
Minister of Health and Child Care



Chief Nyamukoho,  
Representing the President of the Council of Chiefs



Ms. Edna Masiwa,  
Director of Women’s Action Group



Dr. Obadiah Moyo,  
CEO of Chitungwiza Central Hospital.



Over 500 people, including representatives from Government, the Diplomatic Corps, Donor Agencies, Civil Society Organisation, Community Representatives, the Private Sector and the Press took part at the 2013 UN Day event.

“Zimbabwe will continue to look to the United Nations family to play that bridging role, to bring together and facilitate innovation, partnerships and collaboration.

Hon. Dr. David Parirenyatwa, Minister of Health and Child Care

Pregnancy is not a disease and yet it is killing women in our communities at this alarming rate. It is our individual responsibility and our collective duty as families and as communities to reverse this trend.

Mr. Alain Noudehou, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator



## MATERNAL HEALTH IN ZIMBABWE

Maternal conditions are the leading cause of death and disability among women globally. The 2013 Global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Progress Report points to maternal health as one of the MDGs that is lagging behind.

Between 1990 and 2010, the global maternal mortality rate declined by 47%, down approximately from 4 to 2 maternal deaths per 1000 live births.

During this same 20 year period, the rate in Zimbabwe increased by almost one third. In Zimbabwe, the maternal mortality rate stands at close to 10 maternal deaths per 1000 live births. Furthermore, for every woman who dies giving life, roughly 20 women suffer serious injury or disability during delivery.

Some studies have shown that children who lose their mothers in child birth are 10 times more likely to die prematurely. Such a loss also significantly reduces the likelihood of immunizing surviving children.

In addition, the World Health Organization's estimates indicate that at least 130 million USD is lost annually in Zimbabwe due to current maternal complications. This is over 1% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

## KEY CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED

The guest speakers at the 2013 UN Day event highlighted that the major challenges contributing to the high maternal mortality in Zimbabwe include:

- Inadequate funding to the health sector. The 2013 budget shows that per capita allocations towards health is about half of the recommended USD 34 per person by the National Health Strategy (2009-2013) and stands at half of the 15% Abuja Declaration target.
- The inability to retain health care professionals in health institutions due to brain drain.
- The decline in drug stock levels, including life-saving drugs.
- Some social norms, beliefs and practices which act as a barrier for women to accessing health care.
- The issue of maternity fees, no matter how low, which pose a major barrier to accessing skilled care.
- The distribution of health facilities, with many communities a long distance away from their nearest health care institution.
- The lack of a reliable communication and transport infrastructure.

## WAY FORWARD

The UN day event highlighted that national leadership, effective coordination, and strong partnerships are key elements required to address the challenge of high maternal mortality in Zimbabwe.

As such the following highlights were identified as effective and applicable solutions to ensure safer motherhood in Zimbabwe:

- Enhance partnerships among all sectors of society including: local administration, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, private sector, and development partners to strengthen the health systems and address the social, cultural and religious dimensions of maternal health issues in a coordinated manner.
- Allocate adequate funds to health and maternal health in particular through the national budgeting processes.
- Intensify ongoing joint efforts such as through the Health Transition Funds, Integrated Support Programme, Maternity Waiting Homes Programme, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Programme.
- Put in place special measures for effective implementation of the national policy of no user-fees for pregnant women to access maternity care across the country.
- Strengthen the civil registration vital statistics system to generate timely, accurate and reliable data for planning and implementing targeted programmes.
- Provide family planning programme to ensure that individuals and couples have the information and services to plan the timing, number and spacing of pregnancies.
- Provide Antenatal Care Services to prevent complications where possible and ensure that complications of pregnancy are detected early and treated appropriately.
- Create environment for safe delivery to ensure that all birth attendants have the knowledge, skills and equipment to perform professional delivery and provide postpartum care to mother and baby.
- Strengthen essential obstetric care to ensure that essential care for high-risk pregnancies and complications is made available to all women who need it.
- Understand and address the underlying causes and consequences of societal attitudes and behaviors, including gender inequalities.