The United Nations Country Team, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Child Care, dedicated 2013 UN Day with a call for safer motherhood in Zimbabwe - a theme that highlights the need to tackle the country’s high maternal mortality rate.

The celebration was held at Chitungwiza Central Hospital on 30 October 2013. The event was attended by over 500 people from Government, the UN, Diplomatic Corps, Donor Agencies, Civil Society Organisations, Community Representatives, Health Workers, the Private Sector, and the Press.

The UN Day event highlighted current efforts made by Government, the UN, and development partners to reverse the negative trend of high maternal mortality in the country, echoed unanimous calls for urgent action from all speakers, and reiterated the need for enhanced commitment and stronger partnerships to ensure that no woman should die from preventable complications during child birth in Zimbabwe.

Attributing Zimbabwe’s high maternal mortality rate to challenges such as inability to retain health care professionals, decline in drug stock levels, and some beliefs and practices to accessing care, the Minister of Health and Child Care, Dr. David Parirenyatwa said, "The Government is committed to resolve these challenges through various policies, strategies and programmes aimed at promoting safer motherhood".

Statistics in Zimbabwe indicate the maternal mortality rate in Zimbabwe is among the highest in the world and is double the average rate in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, according to WHO estimates, maternal health complications are costing the country at least USD 132 million a year.
In his remarks, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Alain Noudehou decried the high maternal mortality: “Pregnancy is not a disease and yet it is killing women in our communities at an alarming rate... On our part, as the United Nations Country Team, we stand ready and committed to continue working under the vision and leadership of the Government to help tackle this issue of maternal mortality,” added the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator.

Terming pregnancy as a “national duty,” the Director of Women’s Action Group, Ms. Edna Masiwa called for measures which ensure the effective implementation of the national policy of no user-fees for pregnant women to access maternal care. Also speaking at the UN Day, Chief Nyamukoko, representing the President of the Council of Chiefs said, “All beliefs and misconceptions that have been contributing to the death of mothers during child birth have to change”.

Through effective partnerships, United Nations agencies, with generous financial support of over 20 donors, are supporting the Government in the implementation of key programmes aimed at addressing maternal mortality – including mechanisms such as the Health Transition Fund, the Integrated Support Programme, Maternity Waiting Homes Programme, and the Global Fund to fight HIV & AIDS, TB and Malaria. These initiatives, and many others, are providing a wide range of support, some of which are also benefiting Chitungwiza Central Hospital.

The choice of Chitungwiza Hospital as venue for this year’s UN Day celebration was in recognition of its outstanding model for implementing systemic solutions and building strategic partnerships to successfully deliver public health services to disadvantaged communities.

The UN Day event marked a culmination of year-long UN led advocacy activities with emphasis on maternal health. During October and November 2013, the United Nations also launched youth awareness outreach activities in 53 high schools in Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, and Masvingo with interactive sessions on sexual and reproductive health, as well as implications of teenage pregnancy.


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The 2012-2015 Zimbabwe UN Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF), continues to provide an agile framework to respond to the evolving national development context.

To assess the second year of implementation of the ZUNDAF, a High Level Annual Review meeting was held on 26 November 2013 in Harare.

The review meeting was co-hosted by the Deputy Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet, Dr. Ray Ndhlukula and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Alain Noudehou. It was attended by some 120 participants representing Government, United Nations, the Diplomatic Corps and implementing partners.

At the meeting participants reviewed, discussed and endorsed the six ZUNDAF Thematic Group progress reports for 2013. It also provided an opportunity to identify lessons learned in policy, strategy and programming for 2014.

Discussions further highlighted the need to align the ZUNDAF with the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim ASSET), the new economic blueprint for Zimbabwe.

At the review meeting, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Alain Noudehou said, “The review will allow us to determine how best to implement the ZUNDAF in support of evolving national priorities. And, at the same time, ensure that the ZUNDAF continues to espouse globally agreed goals, such as the MDGs.”

Dr. Ray Ndhlukula said, “We are confident that the ZUNDAF agenda will be fulfilled, contributing to the transformation of the people of Zimbabwe.” He further noted that a deeper appreciation of the Zim ASSET will allow ZUNDAF Thematic Groups to identify other areas for inclusion into the ZUNDAF programming as we go forward.

Through the ZUNDAF, and with continued financial support from donors, the UN delivered approximately USD 430 million in 2013.

The ZUNDAF is designed to adapt to the evolving national development context & espouses internationally agreed development goals.

Approximately two-thirds of resources delivered by the UN were channelled towards basic social services, covering health, education, water and sanitation, HIV & AIDS, and social protection.

Major ZUNDAF Supported Programme Results in 2013

- New National Constitution adopted.
- Women in parliament increased to 35% from 18%.
- Over 3 million children reached with vaccination.
- 1.4 million people received food assistance.
- Climate change adaptation and early warning systems in place.
- 1 million people accessed improved water supply services.
- Over 35,000 returned migrants assisted.
- 33,200 households received bi-monthly cash transfers.
- 3,860 youths trained for self or wage employment.
- 16,000 children, and 700 adults accessed victim friendly services.
- Over 635,000 adults and children accessed free Anti Retroviral Treatments.
- 81% of HIV infected pregnant women and 74% of infants received treatment.
- Five years National Housing Delivery Programme in place.

The ZUNDAF is designed to adapt to the evolving national development context & espouses internationally agreed development goals.

Strong Partnerships Deliver Concrete Development Results
A Call to Enforce the Law to Curb All Forms of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is widespread in Zimbabwe. It is one of the major violations of human rights and one of the largest barriers to gender equality in the country.

According to the 2011 Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey, 1 in 3 girls experience sexual violence before they turn 18 years old, and a majority of these girls are aged between 14 and 17 years.

Zimbabwe has a relatively strong legal framework to prevent all forms of gender based violence in the public and the private sphere as enshrined in the new Constitution - Section 25(b) which calls upon the state to take measures to prevent domestic violence.

To address the high levels of Gender Based Violence in Zimbabwe, the United Nations, with the generous financial support from development partners such as the governments of Sweden and Denmark, supports national efforts, including the expansion of services for survivors and the provision of support to change norms, practices and attitudes.

On the occasion of the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, the United Nations in Zimbabwe supported a series of advocacy activities aimed at triggering public action. The annual advocacy campaign was held nation-wide from 25 November – 10 December 2013 under a localized theme, “From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: End Violence Against Women”.

Noting that the Government enacted the Domestic Violence Act and adopted a national strategy to end Gender-Based Violence, the Minister of Gender, Women Affairs and Community Development, Honourable Oppah Muchinguri said, “Government would use existing legal instruments to curb incidences of all forms of violence against women.” She emphasized this while launching the 16 days campaign in Gweru, Midlands Province.

Makanje Aalbaek said, “The UN in Zimbabwe works to change attitudes and practices that promote and perpetuate all forms of Gender Based Violence, especially violence that is perpetrated against women and girls in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has laws outlawing violence against women and these should be effectively enforced”

Meanwhile the United Nations in Zimbabwe joined an online Ring the Bell campaign, which calls globally on men to commit and collaborate with partners to end violence against women and girls.

On behalf of the UN in Zimbabwe, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Alain Noudehou pledged, “The UN in Zimbabwe will intensify its school outreach program in Zimbabwe to encourage young men to stand up to end violence against women and girls.”

During a half marathon dubbed “Walk the Talk”, launched as part of the 16 Days campaign, UN Women Deputy Representative, Ms. Revai
“In every region of the world, impoverished, poorly educated and rural girls are more likely to become pregnant than their wealthier, urban, educated counterparts,” states the 2013 UNFPA State of World Population Report.

To address this, the United Nations globally works with governments and development partners to ensure that adolescents have accurate information and skills to enable them to make and act on informed sexual and reproductive health choices.

According to the 2011 Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey report, the fertility rate among teenage girls aged 15-19 in 2010/11 was 115 girls per 1000 girls; a significant increase from 99/1000 girls in 2005-6. A worrying trend is the comparison between rural and urban girls where girls living in the rural areas are twice as much affected by teenage pregnancies (144/1000 girls) compared to 70/1000 urban girls.

The causes of teenage pregnancy are multifaceted. Lack of adequate, medically accurate information on puberty leaves young people dependent on uninformed sources. Some cultural and religious norms, such as child marriage, also contribute to teenage pregnancy. Other social issues are inter generational sexual relationships, sexual coercion, and transactional sex.

Noting the need to equip young people with life skills, UNFPA Representative, Dr. Basile O. Tambashe said, “The United Nations has supported the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to develop policy on life skills education and continues to support curriculum revision and teacher training to ensure the life skills curriculum meets the current needs of young people.”

In addition, with financial support from the governments of Canada, Ireland, Sweden, and UK, the United Nations has been supporting the multi-sectoral national Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme.

This programme is implemented by the Ministry of Health and Child Care in partnership with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization and Economic Development, and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.

The programme covers the age groups 10-24 years with specific programming interventions that empower young people to make informed choices at each stage of development. In early adolescence (10-14 years) the focus is on comprehensive sexuality education that has emphasis on understanding biological changes in puberty, personal hygiene and debunking myths around puberty and reproduction.

In middle adolescence (15-19 years) the focus is on skills such as life planning, delaying sexual debut, decision making, negotiation skills and career management.
Promoting the Achievement of MDGs as Basic Human Rights


Delivering the UN message at the event, Prof. Luc Rukingama, Regional Director and Representative of UNESCO said, “The establishment of independent commissions under the new Constitution, including the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, is a major victory for the promotion and protection of human rights in Zimbabwe.”

Over 300 people representing Government, United Nations, Diplomatic Corps, Civil Society Organizations, the media and different human rights organizations participated at the event.

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Noting that one of the major global achievements in advancing human rights is the agenda articulated under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by all UN member states, including Zimbabwe, Prof. Rukingama said, “The MDGs, aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty, embody basic human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and they must be achieved comprehensively.”

Zimbabwe’s new constitution provides wide scope for human rights protection

At the occasion, Deputy Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Hon. Fortune Chasi said that Zimbabwe is party to major human rights instruments at regional and international levels. The Minister further noted, “The new Constitution [of Zimbabwe] has widened the scope of fundamental rights proving its commitment to promoting the rights of all human beings.”

Underscoring that human rights and rule of law constitute core principles of the European Union, Ambassador Aldo Dell’Ariccia, Head of European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe, urged the Government of Zimbabwe to ratify pending international conventions and treaties related to the optional protocols against torture, and death penalty. He recognized the Government’s effort in protecting the rights of women and girls by establishing preventive mechanisms such as the Gender Act.

“Unless human rights are promoted in schools, there is little hope of them being applied in society”

Meanwhile the United Nations in collaboration with the Zimbabwe United Nations Association (ZUNA) and ZUNA affiliated schools celebrated International Human Rights Day on 4 December 2013 at Ellis Robin High School.

At the event, over 400 students from 17 high schools participated in promoting human rights through sport tournaments, debates, arts and entertainment as well as through recitals of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Speaking at the school event, UNICEF Representative, Mr. Reza Hossaini said, “Schools shape the present and future generation ... unless human rights are promoted in schools such as in Ellis Robins, they have little hope of being applied in society.”

Through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, the United Nations support to national efforts on promoting human rights with the generous financial support of donors, include: the constitution making process that led to the adoption of new Constitution through national referendum in 2013, the development of Zimbabwe Human Rights Act, and the facilitation of the Universal Periodic Review National Plan of Action to align national human rights issues with international standards.
Achieving Sustainable Food Systems

More than 70% of Zimbabweans depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihoods.

However, farmers in Zimbabwe continue to face a wide range of challenges which include: low productivity, limited market integration, low soil fertility in some regions, impact of climate change, limited irrigation systems, and lack of credit.

According to the 2013 Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee report, some 2.2 million rural Zimbabweans need food assistance in the pre-harvest period which runs until March 2014.

At World Food Day commemorations held in Lupane on 16 October 2013 under the theme “Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition”, stakeholders highlighted the need to invest in food security to unlock a better future for Zimbabwe.

Noting that sustainable food systems depend on effective utilisation of available resources, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Ringson Chitsiko said, “We in Zimbabwe have to make sure we get the most food from every drop of water, plot of land, speck of fertilizer and minute of labour”.

Recognizing the role played by agriculture in food security and levels of nutrition, FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for Southern Africa and Representative, Mr. David Phiri called for, “increasing agricultural production, productivity as well as diversification of crop production with higher nutrient value”.

In an effort to address recurrent food insecurity and ensure sustainable food systems, the United Nations in Zimbabwe in 2013 supported the development and launch of the national food and nutrition security policy, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy. Concurrently, in 2012/2013, the United Nations, with generous financial assistance from donors, has provided seasonal food assistance to some 1.4 million people.

Due to heightened food insecurity levels, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been preparing to scale up food assistance to reach 1.8 million people at the peak of the lean season. With generous contributions from the governments of Australia, Japan, UK, USA, as well as the EU and the UN Central Emergency Relief Fund, half of the required USD 86 million has been mobilised.

The United Nations continues to work closely with the Government of Zimbabwe, donors and partners to raise the additional funds required.

“USD 86 million required to provide food assistance to 1.8 million people”

Wednesday@UNIC: Achieving MDG Target on Food Security

“The United Nations food assistance programmes are shifting from emergency response to longer term development initiatives whilst maintaining the capacity to respond to emergency needs”, WFP Representative and Country Director, Mr. Sory Ouane has said.

Addressing some 60 participants on 18 September 2013 at the 6th edition of the “Wednesday@UNIC” forum on MDG targets of reducing hunger and malnutrition in Zimbabwe, Mr. Ouane said that the United Nations supported programmes are “focusing on creating productive community assets that enable people to better cope with future shocks, such as droughts and floods.”

To achieve the MDG target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, participants at the “Wednesday@UNIC” discussion emphasized the need to prioritise irrigation rehabilitation and development schemes.

The importance of expanding irrigation methods to smallholder and communal farmers to reduce reliance on rain-fed agriculture was also stressed. In addition, it was noted that small scale farmers, particularly women and youth should be supported to access key agricultural inputs by facilitating access to affordable credit.

The availability of free HIV treatment has saved over 70,000 lives in 2012/2013 alone. This success has been made possible through effective partnership among many development partners which include the Ministry of Health and Child Care, the United Nations, the Global Fund, the EU as well as the governments of UK and USA.

“The scale of treatment expansion has been one of the largest and fastest in the world. Today, circa 630,000 Zimbabwean adults and children are on Antiretroviral therapy”, UNAIDS Country Coordinator, Mr. Michael Bartos said at the World AIDS Day event held on 1 December 2013 in Chivhu.

The event held under the theme, “Getting to Zero: Zero New Infections. Zero AIDS Related Deaths. Zero Discrimination” highlighted that Zimbabwe has achieved a massive decline in HIV prevalence – falling from 24% in 2001 (when global targets were first set) to 15% in 2012.

Describing the fight against HIV as a marathon, Mr. Bartos noted, “We can see the finish line, but it is still a long way off ... Zimbabwe is leading the pack in the AIDS marathon.”

Despite the reduction in the prevalence rate, 69,000 new HIV infections registered last year is far too many – that is the 8th highest number of new infections globally. The main message delivered during World AIDS Day, was the need for Zimbabwe to continue fighting the deadly disease to reduce new infections.

In her key note address at the event, the Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Hon. Sithembiso Nyoni said, “The government is committed to addressing the problem of HIV and AIDS in the country by making sure we eradicate all new HIV infections through scaling up provisions and the availability of prevention services that have proven to work.”

In 2013, with the support of the United Nations, through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, 81% of HIV infected pregnant women and 74% of infants received Antiretroviral treatment to reduce risk of Mother to Child Transmission (MTCT). As such, according to the Ministry of Health and Child Care, the MTCT rate decreased from 18% in 2011 to 8.8% in 2012.

Over 600,000 Zimbabwean adults and children receive free Antiretroviral therapy

In addition to providing free Anti-retroviral therapy, the United Nations provides nutritional support to those who cannot afford it.

In 2013, with the support of the United Nations, through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, 81% of HIV infected pregnant women and 74% of infants received Antiretroviral treatment to reduce risk of Mother to Child Transmission (MTCT). As such, according to the Ministry of Health and Child Care, the MTCT rate decreased from 18% in 2011 to 8.8% in 2012.

Zimbabwe is leading the pack in the AIDS marathon

The existing effective partnership between Government, the United Nations, and development partners has ensured the availability of free HIV treatments, reduction of mother to child transmission, availability of condoms, and free voluntary male circumcision services to help reduce risk of infection. These effective interventions and partnerships are contributing to getting Zimbabwe to achieve the three zeros.
With only about 700 days left to the target date for MDGs, there has been good progress in the fight against HIV, Malaria and TB; but MDG targets related to child and maternal health are lagging behind in Zimbabwe and across Africa, Dr. David Okello, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Zimbabwe has said.

“Despite some progress made, most of the MDG targets, particularly the health MDGs have yet to be achieved” stated Dr. David Okello. He was speaking at the 8th session of the Wednesday@UNIC public discussion that was held on 29 January 2014 on “Health in Post 2015 Development Agenda” at the UN Information Centre in Harare.

Articulating the position of Africa on health goals in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, in May 2013, the African Union suggested that the focus should be to “Ensure quality, adequate, affordable, accessible and comprehensive health services for all”.

Participants also suggested the need for the media to highlight ongoing debates and discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to inform and engage the public. Other issues raised were related to grassroots engagement, generating up to date development data, as well as the need to further advocate for social protection. Participants voiced the need to keep the Post-2015 Development Agenda simple, convincing, clear, and easy to communicate, especially at policy makers and community levels.
International Migration; a Powerful Tool for Reducing Poverty

During the social media campaign held from 13-18 December 2013 to mark International Day of Migrants, the United Nations in Zimbabwe highlighted migration as one of the key issues at international, regional and national levels.

Alluding to the global migration phenomenon and its role as a tool for poverty reduction and enhancing opportunities, the UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon in his message said, “There are now some 232 million international migrants bringing consistent benefits to countries of destination and origin through their essential labour and remittances...International migration is a powerful tool for reducing poverty”.

Zimbabwe has become a source, transit and destination country for migrants, a situation which calls for effective management of migration. The country continues to receive migrants as well as asylum seekers coming in mixed migration flows from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Ethiopia among others.

On the occasion of the International Migration Day, IOM Chief of Mission in Zimbabwe, Mr. Martin Ocaga said, “In order to maximize the development potential of migration while minimizing its adverse impacts consequent to the emigration of both skilled and unskilled migrants, the United Nations has been supporting the Government of Zimbabwe to formulate migration management policies.”

“Over 11,500 asylum seekers supported with humanitarian assistance”

To date, the United Nations with support from the governments of Canada and Sweden, the EU as well as the UN Emergency Response Fund has provided humanitarian assistance to over 11,500 asylum seekers. Assistance and services rendered to asylum seekers at the reception centre range from safe migration advice, protection assistance, and access to basic social services.

Commending the Government for ratifying the Palermo Protocol, which seeks to prevent trafficking of women and children, Mr. Ocaga noted, “IOM, together with the United Nations family, remains committed to protect migrants and manage migration to contribute in the fight against poverty and for the benefit of all”.