

Millennium Development Goals:

Background on resolutions and declarations related to child health

In its fifty-fifth session, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 55/2 “United Nations Millennium Declaration”. The Declaration was adopted on 8 September 2000 by 147 heads of State and government and 189 Member States in total. The leaders recognized that they “have a duty ... to all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs”. Eight development goals known as the “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs) were established for the year 2015, detailed especially in section III “Development and poverty eradication” of the Declaration: all the 189 Member States pledged to meet the goals. Eighteen targets were set for the eight goals and 48 social and economic development indicators were developed to monitor progress over the period 1990 through 2015.

Of direct relevance to the work that the Child and Adolescent Health and Development unit of WHO’s Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is pursuing in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is goal 4 “Reduce child mortality”, for which the target set is to “reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate”. For this target, three indicators have been selected to help track progress:

1. Under-five mortality rate;
2. Infant mortality rate; and
3. Proportion of 1-year-old children immunized against measles.

Among the total list of 18 targets, other targets of key importance to our work are:

- Target 2 “Halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”, with indicator 4 on “Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age”; and
- Target 8 “Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases”, with indicators 21 on “Prevalence and death rates associated from malaria” and 22 on “Proportion of population in malaria risk areas using effective malaria prevention and treatment measures”.

The United Nations Secretary-General is to issue periodic reports to the United Nations General Assembly on the progress made in pursuance of the MDGs.

Recalling the commitments made in the Declaration, the Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA55.19 of 18 May 2002 recognized that “maternal, child and adolescent health and development have a major impact on socioeconomic development” and urged Member States to “strengthen and scale up efforts to achieve the development goals of the Millennium Declaration”, in particular those related to reduction of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition, and continue to advocate child health and development as one of the public health priorities.

At the United Nations Special Session (UNGASS) for Children on 10 May 2002, the Declaration “A world fit for children” was prepared, reaffirming the commitment to complete the unfinished agenda of the World Summit for Children and to the Millennium Development Goals (A/S-27/19/Rev.1). The Declaration included a plan of action with goals, strategies and actions to be undertaken relevant to children to achieve targets for the decade 2000-2010 as an intermediate step to attaining the MDGs set for the 2015. In both the Health Assembly resolution and the UNGASS Declaration, providing access to high-quality health care services and conducting interventions to help families and communities care for their children were seen as key approaches to pursue.

Relevant to the work of WHO in the Region, especially the implementation of the strategy on integrated management of health (IMCI), are the following UNGASS quantified targets:

- Reduction of infant and under-five mortality rate by at least one-third by 2010, as a step towards achieving the MDG of reducing it by two-thirds by 2015;
- Reduction of deaths due to acute respiratory infection in children under 5 years of age by one-third and deaths due to diarrhoea by one-half;
- Reduction of child malnutrition among children under 5 years of age (defined as underweight below minus 2 SD from median weight for age of reference population) by at least one-third – with special attention to children under 2 years of age – and reduction in the rate of low birth weight by at least one-third by 2010; achieving sustainable elimination of vitamin A deficiency by 2010; reduction of the prevalence of anaemia, including iron deficiency, by one-third by 2010;

- Ensuring full immunization of children under 1 year of age at 90% nationally, with at least 80% coverage in every district or equivalent administrative unit; reduction of deaths due to measles by half by 2005; elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus by 2005;
- Reduction of the burden of disease associated with malaria by one-half and ensuring that 60% of all people at risk of malaria, especially children and women, sleep under insecticide-treated bednets.

WHO and UNICEF have been designated as the main agencies responsible for the data estimates related to the Millennium Indicators Database. Information on the Millennium Declaration and statistics on the achievement of the MDGs that form the database are available on the internet at www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html. The database shows estimates for the concerned indicators by country.

STRATEGY ON CHILD HEALTH

The Fifty-sixth World Health Assembly, having considered the report on the strategy for child and adolescent health and development, in resolution WHA56.21 of 28 May 2003 urged Member States to strengthen and expand efforts to meet international targets for the reduction of maternal and child mortality, and malnutrition, and make improvements in child survival a priority. It requested the Director-General to report to the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly in 2006 on WHO's contribution to the implementation of the strategy, with particular emphasis on actions related to poverty reduction and the attainment of internationally agreed child-health and development goals.

The Child and Adolescent Health and Development (CAH) unit of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has urged countries to identify specific strategies and develop a plan of

action for the achievement of the child health-related MDGs, similar to the action taken after the World Summit for Children in 1990, when 155 countries prepared national programmes of action to implement the Summit goals.



Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

We have “‘put children first’, giving children’s health high priority, and adopting an integrated strategy to achieve ‘healthy life for our children’-the Integrated Management of Child Health”. “This strategy... one of the key approaches to achieve the Millennium Development Goals”

(Introduction of the Annual Report to the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, 2002)

Jong-wook Lee, Director-General, WHO

“Now it is time for policy makers and public-health leaders to respond, and to transform this knowledge into action.”

(The Lancet, 2003)

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