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Background

The regional initiative on Saving the Lives of Mothers and Children was launched by WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF jointly with Member States in a high-level meeting held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in January 2013. The meeting concluded with the Dubai Declaration: Saving the lives of mothers and children: rising to the challenge. In the Declaration, Member States committed to: develop and implement maternal and child health acceleration plans; take measurable steps to strengthen their health systems related elements; establish sustainable financing mechanisms and mobilize domestic and international resources through traditional and innovative approaches; and improve coordination and accountability between all partners.

The Declaration was endorsed by the 60th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in October 2013 in resolution EM/RC60/R.6. In the resolution, the Committee requested the Regional Director to support the efforts of Member States to implement their national acceleration plans and to report to the Regional Committee on progress in implementation of the national acceleration plans annually until 2015.

Key achievements & progress in 2015

All eligible countries implemented the priority activities of the maternal and child health acceleration plans 2013–2015 using the start-up funds allocated by WHO, with an overall implementation rate of 99%.

The Regional Office held an intercountry meeting in March 2015 to discuss a preconception care framework and health core interventions to be adopted by Member States for developing national health strategies and policies. The meeting concluded by outlining strategic directions for preconception care and highlighted key indicators to be adopted by countries to facilitate monitoring and evaluation. Technical support is currently focused on developing country plans of action for strengthening national preconception care programmes using the regional framework and prioritizing cost-effective and culturally sensitive health care interventions.

An intercountry meeting of national maternal, neonatal and child health programme managers was held in Amman, Jordan, jointly with UNFPA and UNICEF. The meeting aimed to address

the main causes of maternal, neonatal and child mortality and to highlight the use of cost-effective and lifesaving interventions to avoid preventable deaths. Member States prioritized the key interventions for 2015 and discussed strategic directions for maternal and child health for the post-2015 agenda.

WHO allocated US$ 700 000 to support the implementation of the priority activities planned during the Amman meeting, focusing on key evidence-based and cost-effective interventions with a high impact on maternal, neonatal and child health.

WHO in collaboration with UNFPA and UNICEF developed a survey tool to assess maternal and child health risk behaviours and barriers to access health care services. The tool, which will be pilot-tested in two countries, aims to promote health literacy, community-based actions and lifesaving practices among mothers and their families.

The way forward

The 2015 Global strategy for women's, children's and adolescents' health will be launched at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 with a draft five-year implementation plan. It will be proposed for formal endorsement at the World Health Assembly in May 2016.

The 2015 strategy builds on the 2010 strategy, incorporating lessons learnt from the Millennium Development Goals and focusing on the evidence for effective investment and action. The global strategy was updated through a consultative process involving all partners in maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health. The updated global strategy targets equity, human rights and social determinants of health.

Countries of the Region need to align their strategic directions and priority actions for maternal, child and adolescent health with the global strategy. In the Amman meeting in April 2015, countries agreed to develop their strategic plans addressing maternal, neonatal and child health with emphasis on the six health system building blocks, infection control, quality control, capacity-building and prioritization of cost-effective and lifesaving interventions.

The global strategy highlights new evidence including the need to focus on critical population groups such as newborns, adolescents and those living in fragile and conflict settings and indicators developed for the sustainable development goals framework and means for

implementation, including innovative financing and the Global Financing Facility.

In line with the global strategy, Member States are expected to prioritize reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health programmes in the post-2015 era with the following requirements: strong country ownership; highest-level and broad-based political support; a human-rights based approach; and alignment with sustainable development goals and related processes and mechanisms.

During the development of their national maternal, child and adolescent health plans, Member States need to target actions that: realize and expand opportunities; sustain progress through country leadership and resources; strengthen health systems; partner across sectors; tackle inequities and vulnerabilities; accelerate progress with innovation and research; and amplify accountability with country data and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

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[1] This article is an abridgement of the progress report “Progress report on saving the lives of mothers and children” presented at the Sixty-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in Kuwait 5–8 October 2015 (EM/RC62/INF.DOC.7). The full report is available on the Regional Office web site at: http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_technical_papers_2015_Inf_Doc_7_16485_EN.pdf

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