



## POLICY BRIEF

# MULTI-SECTOR DETERMINANTS OF REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH



Photo: UN Photo/Stuart Price

## BACKGROUND

Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided a framework for prioritizing and accelerating initiatives aimed at improving the health and welfare of the global population. Improvements to reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health are the focus MDGs 4 and 5, but other MDGs (e.g. eradication of poverty and hunger, access to primary education, promotion gender equality, and prevention of HIV and other infectious diseases) have indirect influence on RMNCH, and progress towards health and development are closely linked.

With the deadline for the MDGs fast approaching, there has been extensive consultation on the development of a Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. Building on the MDGs, the development community has proposed a framework based on the four core dimensions of sustainable development: inclusive economic development; environmental sustainability; inclusive social development; and peace and security.

Figure 1: Building Blocks of Sustainable Development



## Poverty Reduction

These core dimensions are also critical determinants of RMNCH, and improvements in RMNCH contribute to improvements in these

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areas as well. For example, studies show that poverty reduction leads to increased uptake of contraception, decreased fertility rates, reduced incidence of infectious disease, and higher rates of child survival. Increasing women's income can improve family health since women tend to spend a greater proportion of their income on healthcare, food, and education. Healthy, well-nourished children have better cognitive development, educational attainment and, as adults, higher productivity and lifetime earnings.

## Environment

Environmental degradation also has consequences for RMNCH. Lack of clean drinking water increases the burden of diarrhoeal disease in children under five. Changing weather patterns may lead to food insecurity and malnutrition. Women are exposed disproportionately to environmental hazards such as pesticides and solid fuel contaminants due to higher participation in the agriculture, cooking, and household work.

## Socio Cultural Inequities

Women and children are also vulnerable to sociocultural inequities that exclude them from political representation, legal protection, educational opportunities, and reproductive choice. A higher level of education and literacy has been associated with positive health outcomes among both sexes, as well as greater political and economic participation. Without civil registration and other information systems, data to support policy, legislation and programs for women and children remains incomplete.

## Conflict & Insecurity

Lastly, conflict and insecurity are often associated with increased sexual violence. Health consequences include unwanted pregnancy, obstetric fistula, increased prevalence of STIs and HIV, and mental health issues. The disruption of girls' schooling also has been proven to have cross-generational health consequences, while conflict-related environmental degradation has been shown to impact access to clean water, food security, and female livelihoods.

## CHALLENGES

- Political insecurity not only create the conditions that exacerbate RMNCH-related health conditions, but also can prevent policies, services and interventions to ameliorate such conditions from reaching vulnerable populations.
- High population growth, especially in urban areas, means that gains in water, sanitation, livelihoods support, human resource development, and food security are often quickly eroded. Population growth is partly dependent on family planning, the uptake of which has been slow in Africa.
- African countries are struggling to meet their MDG 1 on reducing the proportion of people suffering from hunger, as not all food shortages can be anticipated, and infrastructure for the storage and marketing of foodstuffs is still weak. This also affects progress on maternal and child nutrition.
- Inclusive social and economic development is often dependent on changing strongly-held attitudes and behaviour related to women and children at the grassroots level. Such initiatives are often difficult to implement, incentivize, sustain, and measure.

- Mechanisms and institutions for redistributing economic resources in a more equitable and inclusive manner – as well as targeting them toward health - are often weak at national level. This is especially true in countries reliant on mineral resources, as are many of the fastest-growing economies in Africa.

## CASE STUDY: GHANA

Achieving post-2015 sustainable development goals will require integrated strategies, a focus on strengthening systems and cross-sectoral partnership. In many instances, inputs targeted at one core area – such as environmental sustainability – can be leveraged to support other areas. For example, Ghana has been working toward rehabilitating and expanding its water infrastructure by investing in small town water supply, irrigation, and hydropower infrastructure. Between 2003-2008, Ghana increased the proportion of population with access to improved drinking water from 83% to 93% in urban areas, and 55% to 76.6% in rural areas. Improving access to



potable water can reduce water-borne disease in children under 5 years, as well as lessen the distances travelled by women and children for water collection thereby increasing physical safety. Irrigation improves access to water by small farmers – many of whom are women. This, in turn, may improve rural female livelihoods, food security and household nutrition. Hydropower can lead to rural electrification, and therefore support better health service delivery.

## STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

- Universal access to quality healthcare and other social protection schemes can mitigate the effects of poverty and social inequality, and shield families from catastrophic health expenditures. Free RMNCH services encourage service utilization and can lead to improved health outcomes for women and children (Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa).
- Universal access to education, the abolishment of school fees, investment in educational infrastructure and human resources,

and schemes for promoting and incentivizing school attendance, can improve children's attendance and completion rates, especially those of girls (Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia). Adopting legal frameworks can help guarantee 8-10 years of uninterrupted education, and reduce the incidence of child marriage and early pregnancy.

- Community-led total sanitation (CLTS) is an integrated methodology aimed at achieving open defecation free (ODF) status in communities. CLTS utilizes upon a combination of participatory research and monitoring, sustained attitude and behaviour change, and community mobilization for research and project implementation. Evidence has shown that CLTS can achieve rapid, and highly cost-effective, progress in community sanitation indicators, including those related to child health (Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zambia).
- Creative means of integrating RMNCH with economic development by engaging the private sector in service delivery, information systems, and commodity supply-chains can support entrepreneurship and economic development, as well as lead to improvements in maternal and child health indicators. Examples include social franchising of health clinics, value chain initiatives for essential medicines, and innovation labs for eHealth and other mobile technologies (Uganda, Kenya, Zambia).

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## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

### Environmental Sustainability

- Financing is now available for climate resilient agriculture initiatives from many donors (e.g. the World Bank, IFAD, the ADB). Technical support is also available (e.g. IFPRI, FAO). Many of these initiatives support closer integration of agriculture with both gender issues and nutrition for RMNCH.
- The Global Water Forum is the key forum for stakeholder dialogue, capacity building, and information dissemination on global clean water issues. The Forum has not yet been fully engaged on MNCH issues, but it could be an important future platform. [www.globalwaterforum.org](http://www.globalwaterforum.org).
- The IDS-supported CLTS resource centre - <http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/resources> - now provides a central portal for access to and sharing of resources on best practices in sanitation. World Toilet Day is a primary advocacy platform at national and community level for integrating sanitation and MNCH.

### Economic Development

- A new global investment framework based on recommendations by the independent Expert Review Group is being coordinated by PMNCH, WHO and the University of Washington. This framework will help guide national investments in a way that is more strategic, aligned, accountable, and targeted toward MNCH.
- The African Union's Comprehensive Agricultural Development Programme is seeking to integrate food security with poverty alleviation and employment generation via the development of agricultural value chains. This effort should help improve overall availability of foods, but also could tie in to improvement in women's livelihoods.

## Social Development

- The African Union already supports women and children's health across a number of policies, conventions and statements - in particular those focusing on the rights of women and children, and advocacy for improving maternal and child health. Regional efforts, such as the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA), as well as acts of legislation by national parliaments, have also helped establish a policy frame for MNCH in African countries.
- African Union Heads of States have committed to a second decade of education with the aim of increasing access to education, improving the quality and relevance of education, and ensure equity. The plan calls in particular for the attainment of full gender equality in primary and secondary education which will have a strong impact on health outcomes.
- The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement was launched in 2010 to campaign for improved coordination and leadership on nutrition. In Africa, 26 countries are involved in SUN.<sup>a</sup> SUN seeks to ensure that donors, governments, industry, and civil society invest in scaling up a package of nutrition-specific and -sensitive, cost-effective, evidence-based interventions, such as the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding, access to supplements and fortification, and therapeutic feeding for severe undernutrition.

## Peace and Security

- Regional Peace and Security Initiative Policy Frameworks such as the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction & Development Programme seek to improve timeliness, effectiveness and coordination of activities in post conflict countries and to lay the foundation for sustainable development in line with the reconstruction and stabilization of national governments.
- The African Union Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) collects and analyses data in collaboration with UN agencies,

a. SUN African Countries (2012) Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

other relevant international organizations, research centres, academic institutions and NGOs in order to advise the Peace and Security Council on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa and recommend the best course of action.

- The Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) is an initiative by bi- and multi-lateral agencies and those national governments with large internally-displaced populations (IDPs) to improve livelihoods in areas affected by conflict. In Africa, TSI is working with the Government of Sudan to promote sustainable livelihoods, access to financial services, and self-reliance among refugees and IDPs. The initiative has led to an increase in refugees' income in eastern Sudan. Opportunities exist to extend the TSI framework to other conflict areas, improve gender responsive programming, and to integrate MNCH issues into IDP livelihoods strategies.

## FRAMEWORKS FOR MULTI-SECTORAL ACTION

### African Union Multi-Sector Framework on MNCH

- Ensures continental, sub-regional and country level integrated policy and budget action across all health and social determinant sectors that impact on RMNCH.
- Based on Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda on Aid Effectiveness, facilitate alignment of Global Strategy commitments and resources with pre-existing inter-sectoral African MNCH continental, sub-regional and country policies.

## Dialogue on post-2015 Sustainable Development

Will be driven by five transformative shifts: 1) ending extreme poverty in all its forms, 2) put sustainable development at the core of all efforts; 3) transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; 4) recognize peace and good governance as core elements of wellbeing and 5) a new partnership to promote cooperation, and mutual accountability to underpin the post-2015 agenda.

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