



Session Two: Women's empowerment through RMNCH

Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (RMNCH) services constitute a significant portion of UHC and covers the health concerns and interventions across the life course involving women before and during pregnancy; newborns, that is, the first 28 days of life; and children to their fifth birthday.

Over the past three decades, women's and children's health has gained momentum globally, but many countries are far from achieving the national-level goals for maternal and child health - particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 300,000 women die from pregnancy-related causes every year - 74% from complications during delivery. An estimated 2.5 million newborns died in the first month of life in 2017, which makes up nearly 50% of all under-5 deaths.

- Ensuring the availability of certain services -such as family planning, prenatal care, skilled care at birth, reproductive health care after delivery and a range of services for adolescents - is key to preventing maternal deaths and improving the quality of life for woman and children.
- Access to services for contraception, prevention and management of sexually transmitted diseases and care in pregnancy are key to better health and quality of life for adolescents. However, coverage for many of these interventions remains low in many countries.
- Many children still die from easily preventable diseases, such as malnutrition (the underlying cause of 45% of all under-five deaths), pneumonia and diarrhea.

Women's and children's health are acknowledged as critically important to the health and wellbeing of a population - both as an indicator of general population health, and as a determinant for achieving broader development goals, including those outside of the health sphere. Investments in women's health, and particularly family planning, are considered "best buys" for global development in terms of value for money, generating savings through reduced maternal mortality, increased economic development, improved child health and education, and even decreased vulnerability to climate change.

The focus on RMNCH has been demonstrated by political commitment, relevant Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, and increased levels of funding. Additionally, several global initiatives have been developed to accelerate progress towards the SDGs set out for maternal and child health. Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) is a United Nations initiative, hosted by UNFPA, that mobilises action by governments, multi-laterals, the private sector and civil society to address global challenges facing women, children and adolescents.

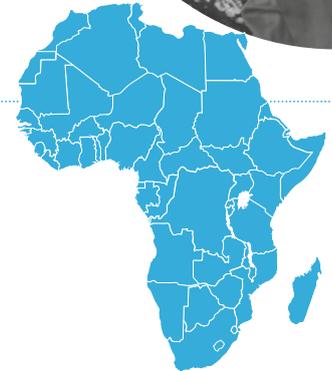
However, many countries are still falling short of the SDG targets set for RMNCH, and the situation has been made more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures. On a country specific level, to improve RMNCH outcomes, we need an integrated health system approach that looks for the best solutions, regardless of whether they are provided by the public, private sectors or both in meaningful collaboration with each other.

There is a clear opportunity for governments to expand effective coverage of RMNCH services to the poor by leveraging private sector capacity. Health systems need to be better regulated, less fragmented, and more efficient to offer basic and essential healthcare to mothers and children at affordable prices. This can be done for example by strengthening the collaboration of the public sector with the private sector - not only as a source of funding, but also as a source of innovation, expertise, and business-minded best practices and models - for better RMNCH outcomes.

Within-country distribution of RMNCH services also remains uneven, with insufficient progress on equity dimensions such as wealth, gender, age, maternal education, ethnicity, and urban/ rural residence. Achieving meaningful progress in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health requires delivering essential health services to all population groups.

The private health sector is increasingly realizing the value of the woman in the African health system and is introducing more women-centered health solutions and innovations into the continent's healthcare space. However, it is vital that the public sector provides appropriate stewardship based on the national health sector strategies - detailing where, who and with whom the private sector should focus their efforts to maximise the impact of their solution or service.

To participate in this session or the event get in touch with **Dr. Shadrack Opon** on +254 704 838 150 or e-mail info@ahb.co.ke



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The Session

The session seeks to provide an advocacy and action framework for radically improving progress toward women's empowerment through better RMNCH services in Africa. An important conceptual framework is the continuum-of-care approach in two dimensions. One dimension recognizes the links from mother to child and the need for health services across the stages of the life course. The other is the delivery of integrated preventive and therapeutic health interventions through service platforms ranging from the community to the primary health center and the hospital.

Key areas of discussion will be:

- National and regional strategies supporting RMNCH services under the UHC frameworks
- Awareness of RMNCH services among women and the challenges they face in access, quality and finance.
- The expanding role of the private sector in advancing women's health with a focus on RMNCH services