

THE MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH THEMATIC FUND

Saving lives and mitigating the impact of
COVID-19 on mothers and newborns

ANNUAL REPORT 2020





DELIVERING A WORLD WHERE
EVERY PREGNANCY IS WANTED,
EVERY CHILDBIRTH IS SAFE,
AND EVERY YOUNG PERSON'S
POTENTIAL IS FULFILLED

Cover photo:

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Women and girls from White Nile State in Sudan have to travel dozens of kilometers to reach health facilities to give birth. The region is responding to the needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees, an extra challenge for an already fragile health system. Sarah travelled 50 kilometers from her village on a *tuktuk*, a three-wheeled motorized vehicle, to give birth at Kostı Maternity Hospital. Its maternity ward was rehabilitated and expanded as part of the national EmONC response plan.



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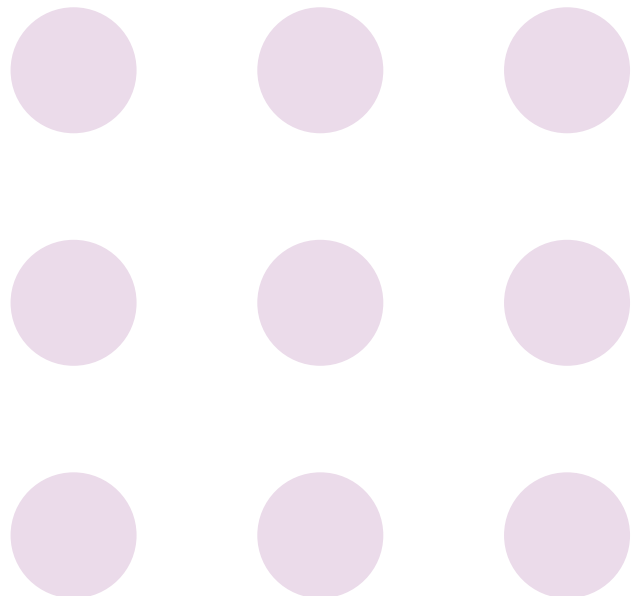
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We look forward to building on these productive and valued collaborations.

ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| EmONC | Emergency obstetric and newborn care |
| FIGO | International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics |
| GIS | Geographic information system |
| H6 | UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, World Bank Group and the WHO |
| ICM | International Confederation of Midwives |
| Jhpiego | Johns Hopkins University Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics |
| MHTF | Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund |
| MPDSR | Maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| PPE | Personal protective equipment |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SRHR | Sexual and reproductive health and rights |
| UN Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WHO | World Health Organization |



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) wishes to extend its sincere appreciation to all its close partners and stakeholders in countries and regions, national governments, donor agencies, implementing partner organizations, United Nations sister entities, civil society organizations, and development and private sector institutions. Their support has enabled the Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund (MHTF) to contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We acknowledge with gratitude the generous support of multiple UN Member State donors. In particular, we would like to thank the governments of Germany, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Sweden. With their support, the MHTF was able to focus support on 32 high-priority countries to improve equitable access to quality sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. Yielding a significant return on investment, this wide-reaching support produces a multiplier effect, extending impacts beyond these core countries to over 100 nations in total that benefit indirectly from MHTF-supported interventions. This saves and transforms the lives of women, girls, newborns and families across borders.

We also thank our private sector partners, especially Johnson & Johnson, Takeda and Friends of UNFPA, for their generous support.

Our sincere appreciation extends to UN colleagues around the globe who join UNFPA in a strong partnership through the H6 (UNFPA, the World Health Organization [WHO], the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], the United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women] and the World Bank Group) and initiatives like Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality and Every Newborn Action Plan. We are grateful for their collaboration and coordination in advancing global sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health. In continued partnership, we will build synergies, support national governments, and demonstrate our leadership, commitment and strong partnership for the future.

Our thanks also go to our UNFPA colleagues, whose continuous efforts at the country, regional and global levels help support and strengthen the delivery and quality of integrated maternal and newborn health programmes grounded in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Finally, our academic and advocacy partners play significant roles as champions and technical experts, and we greatly appreciate their many valued contributions. These partners include the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), the International Society of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons, Operation Fistula, Columbia University's Averting Maternal Death and Disability Program, the Maternity Foundation, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Laerdal Global Health, the Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics (Jhpiego) and the Woodrow Wilson Center. A list of our Campaign to End Fistula partners is included in Annex 1; we gratefully acknowledge their contributions.

FOREWORD

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed health systems across the globe and severely impacted the global health workforce. The pandemic threatens to derail progress in advancing sustainable development, jeopardizing the health, rights and well-being of women and newborns, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Within this challenging environment, the UNFPA Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund continued to rise to the challenge, with a strong focus on promoting equity in access, universal health coverage, and improving accountability and quality of care. It supported 32 high-priority countries to ensure that past gains in integrated sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health and rights are safeguarded and that pandemic recovery measures prioritize these essential services.

In 2020, the MHTF supported the education and training of more than 34,000 midwives, strengthened networks of emergency obstetric and newborn care facilities, and bolstered maternal and perinatal death surveillance to improve quality of care. The Fund also supported nearly 8,000 fistula repair surgeries and provided psychosocial and mental health services to help fistula survivors overcome the social stigma associated with the condition, regain their dignity and reintegrate into their communities.

These are some of the achievements, which show that efforts to save and improve the lives of women and newborns can be effective even during a global health crisis. They also highlight the need for such efforts to be comprehensive and rights-based, so that the most vulnerable in society can continue to access the quality services they need.

UNFPA appreciates the collaborative efforts of all its partners in promoting the rights, health and choices of women and girls, including governments, United Nations partner agencies, civil society organizations, academic institutions, development agencies and private sector partners. With donor support and commitment, the MHTF continues to advance its mission to build inclusive, high-quality health systems capable of both responding to the ongoing pandemic and ensuring that every woman and newborn receives the care they need and deserve.

We can end preventable maternal and newborn deaths in our lifetime. We know what needs to be done to promote the health, rights and well-being of mothers and newborns so that no one is left behind. Working together, I am confident that we will deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Natalia Kanem'.

Dr. Natalia Kanem
Executive Director,
United Nations Population
Fund (UNFPA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2008, the MHTF has served as UNFPA's flagship programme on maternal and newborn health. In Phase III of the MHTF Business Plan (2018-2022), the fund focuses on a people-centred, rights-based, life course approach to delivering integrated, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to mothers and newborns. This approach is based on realizing equitable access to SRHR information and services, quality care and human rights-based accountability.

The MHTF in 2020 supported 32 countries with among the highest rates of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity across five regions (the Arab States, West and Central Africa, East and Southern Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean). The fund continued to focus on building capacities to provide maternal and newborn health care; improve the quality of care through quality midwifery services, emergency obstetric and newborn care (EmONC) and maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response (MPDSR); and prevent and treat obstetric fistula to ensure the most marginalized women and girls realize their human right to a healthy life.

Upon the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the WHO on 11 March 2020, MHTF-supported countries quickly adapted their programmes. MHTF partners took opportunities to adapt and sustain critical support for maternal and newborn health services. As the pandemic exposed and deepened gender, socioeconomic and geographical disparities, negatively impacting equity in care access and quality, and accountability for sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health care, the MHTF set new priorities

In 2020, the MHTF supported the pre-service and in-service education and training of over 31,500 midwives and the further higher education of over 2,900 midwives who graduated from bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree programmes. More than 500 midwifery schools have been accredited across MHTF-supported countries, aligning with WHO and ICM standards. Nineteen countries have mainstreamed midwifery in their national human resources for health policies or have existing stand-alone midwifery policies. While resources were shifted to support country responses to the pandemic, the MHTF's global midwifery workplan was nearly fully implemented. A study supported in 2020 showed that 2.2 million lives could be saved per year over the next 15 years if midwifery coverage in line with international standards increases by 25 per cent.

The start of a new decade, while presenting challenges, also offered opportunities. The inaugural advisory board to the MHTF established in 2020 provides new continuity and perspectives on the catalytic impact and direction of the fund. In 2020, the MHTF saw diverse and unique collaborations, including with the ICM, the WHO, Jhpiego, Johnson & Johnson and Takeda. Advocacy for MHTF-supported initiatives to improve sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health care reached global and national audiences. The commemoration of the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife and the International Day to End Fistula featured remote discussion panels and webinars that called for greater awareness, regulation, innovation and investment.

The MHTF supported progress towards establishing

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