

## **Nigeria launches initiative to save one million lives by 2015**

**ABUJA, Nigeria, 16 October 2012** - Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan today launched Saving One Million Lives, an ambitious and comprehensive initiative to scale up access to essential primary health services and commodities for Nigeria's women and children.

"I feel elated as I launch this initiative," President Jonathan said in Abuja today. "Saving One Million Lives will be the new yardstick for measuring health sector performance in Nigeria."

Through the initiative, the Government of Nigeria has pledged to save one million lives by 2015. Nigeria's Minister for Economic Coordination and Finance, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, highlighted the significance of investing in women and children.

"Today is a call to action," Mrs. Okonjo-Iweala said. "Nigeria needs to invest in human development or we will have to deal with an enormous bulge of jobless youth. Saving One Million Lives will enhance Nigeria's chances to grow and become part of the 20 biggest economies in the world."

Saving One Million Lives builds on growing international momentum behind child and maternal survival, including the UN Secretary-General's Every Women, Every Child campaign; the June child survival Call to Action in Washington, DC; Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed; the recommendations and implementation plan of the UN Commission on Life-saving Commodities for Women and Children delivered in September in New York; and the recently concluded Abuja conference on essential commodities.

The Commodities Commission recommendations and implementation plan – issued in New York on 26 September – stated that with increased supply and demand, as well as correct use of 13 specific commodities, more than six million lives of women and children across the world could be saved by 2015.

Today in Abuja, Nigeria took the bold step of announcing an official commitment to lead the way and save one million lives by 2015.

The launch of Saving One Million Lives was attended by Ministers, Governors, traditional leaders, Nigeria's private sector health alliance, the Nigeria Development Partners' Group on Health, representatives of UN agencies and the unsung heroines at the frontline of saving the lives of women and children: Nigerian midwives.

Day after day, Nigeria's midwives make the difference between life or death of women and their children.

"Midwives are doing an excellent job and I am honoured to be in their midst today," UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Geeta Rao Gupta said during the launch. "I am also really happy to witness the growing momentum behind child and maternal survival. The ten action points in the Commissioners' Report are ambitious, as they should be, and they are achievable. The important thing now is to stay focused, on the 2015 targets and beyond."

### **Getting commodities into the hands and homes where they are most needed**

Preceding the launch of Saving One Million Lives, from 14-15 October, Abuja played host to a meeting of the Chairs (President Jonathan and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg), Vice-Chairs (Executive Directors of UNFPA and UNICEF), and Commissioners of the UN Commission on Essential and Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children. A follow-up meeting to the Commission's 26 September report launch in New York, the Abuja conference was attended by Health Ministers and representatives from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania. Attendees were collectively tasked to review draft implementation plans and develop milestones and targets for effective country and global level monitoring of progress against adopted plans.

The technical and ministerial meeting focused on practical and sustainable ways forward and pushed for shared accountability for African health sector performance in the spirit of South-South cooperation. Strategies to reach the poorest of the poor and get commodities into the hands and homes that most need them will be critical to saving the lives of women and children.

The Health Ministers agreed to meet again in April 2013 to measure progress in access to essential commodities and lives saved as a result of improved access and overall health sector performance. Aside from Government action and commitments, communities and families are also encouraged to take action and demand access to essential commodities.

“There is a strong push to realize the right of every mother to have a healthy child, and for every child to have a healthy mother,” Dr. Gupta said at the launch. “We want mothers to be able to say ‘thank you’ for the medicine that brought down my daughter’s fever and the ORS that saved my son’s life from diarrhea.”

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