This is the second in a series of four stories about how strong health systems improve the health of women and children.

Nine countries, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and other partners, launched the Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health last week.

The new Network aims to improve the quality of care that mothers and babies receive in
health facilities while supporting countries in achieving their targets agreed under the Sustainable Development Goals to end preventable maternal and newborn deaths.

Despite remarkable progress in improving access to health services proven to reduce maternal and newborn deaths, every year worldwide, 303,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth, 2.7 million babies die during the first 28 days of life, and 2.6 million babies are stillborn. Most of these deaths could be prevented with quality care during pregnancy and childbirth.

However, the provision of care is uneven within and between countries, and often fails to respect the rights and dignity of those who seek it.

At the launch event, delegations from Bangladesh, Cote D'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda committed to improving quality, equity, and dignity for every woman and newborn and halving preventable deaths of pregnant women and newborns in their health facilities within the next five years. The Network takes forward implementation of the Standards for Improving Quality of Maternal and Newborn Care in Health Facilities [6] published by WHO in 2016, and supports the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health [7].

The FCI Program of MSH [8], in collaboration with the White Ribbon Alliance, Save the Children, and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, has been leading the advocacy efforts of the Network and is working with civil society groups at the national and global level to develop an action framework for improving Quality, Equity, and Dignity (QED) for every woman and newborn.

Catharine Taylor, vice president of the health programs group at MSH, attended the Network launch February 14-16 in Lilongwe, Malawi, along with representatives from MSH offices in Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire, and Malawi. The meeting convened close to 300 representatives from governments, health care professional associations — including midwives and nurses — civil society organizations, UN agencies, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other partners.

The Quality of Care Network supports governments to strengthen their national institutions, identify quality of care focal points at all levels of the health system, accelerate and sustain the implementation of quality-of-care improvement packages for mothers, newborns, and children, and work with all groups involved to facilitate learning. Through a global learning platform, the Quality of Care Network will bring together a community of health practitioners from the facility level and up to develop evidence-based, context-specific strategies to improve quality of care, harvest implementation ideas, and collect information about what is working.

At the country level, in Malawi, Nigeria, and Cote D'Ivoire, MSH is participating in national steering committees, led by the ministries of health, to align contributions toward improving quality of care and engaging key partners and stakeholders in advocating for quality, equity, and dignity through stronger health systems. Country plans will seek to build, strengthen, and sustain national institutions and methods for accountability for quality of care.

“For too many pregnant women, giving birth in a health facility does not mean a safe and healthy delivery,” said Catharine Taylor. “To ensure quality services during pregnancy and childbirth we need strong health systems that listen and respond to the needs and voices of women, health workers – particularly midwives and nurses – and the community itself. MSH
joins country governments, the WHO, UNICEF, and partners under a common vision to improve quality, equity, and dignity for all.”

Read more about the network [9]

Related: MSH will support maternal, newborn, and child health in Malawi through the USAID-funded ONSE project [10]


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