MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL # 5: Improve Maternal Health

WHAT IS MATERNAL HEALTH AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
Having a baby should be a happy time in a woman's life, not something to fear, but in reality every year over 500,000 women die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, and more than 50 million women suffer from poor reproductive health and serious pregnancy-related illness and disability. Throughout the world women commonly go through pregnancy and childbirth without the help of any medical professionals. Often the presence of a midwife, like the Dia in Chakori’s story, can mean the difference between life and death.

The United Nations MDG # 5 aims to reduce by 3/4 the number of women who are dying due to pregnancy and childbirth, and it is up to everyone to ensure this happens. This means providing reproductive rights such as education and access to family planning techniques, increasing the availability of medical professionals at births and access to lifesaving medications and vaccinations.

QUICK MATERNAL HEALTH FACTS

- More than 500,000 women in the developing world die during pregnancy and childbirth. 1 in 16 in Africa and 1 in 43 in Asia will die of maternal causes THIS year.

- According to the World Health organization, 99% of deaths during childbirth occur in low income countries.

- Not being able to access birth control is another big problem for mothers, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the caribbean. Many families have more children than they want and can afford to support so the risk of children and mothers dying is higher.

- The risks of dying in childbirth and having poor health in early motherhood are significantly higher for adolescent or teenage mothers.

- Poor infrastructure, terrible roads, lack of education and reproductive rights means women may not be able to have their babies in a health facility where they can get the care they need.

- Countries that have successfully reduced maternal mortality have had high levels of access to a skilled attendant at birth and effective referral to emergency obstetric care when it is needed. Both of these require effective functioning health services.

- In sub-Saharan Africa, a woman’s risk of dying from treatable or preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth over the course of her lifetime is 1 in 22. In a wealthier country, the risk would be about 1 in 7,300.

- Today, more women are attended by a medical professional during childbirth and/or in the days that follow than ever before. There are many improvements needed but it is possible to achieve this goal by 2015 by significantly increasing access to medical professionals, family planning, decreasing adolescent pregnancy, and improving access to safe and clean food and water.

My name is Chakori and I live with my family in the village of Jairajpur in Uttar Pradesh, India.

A year ago...

Chakori! Let's go! You don't want to be late for school!

Did you hear? Her mom died yesterday when she was having the baby...

Something went wrong and she needed a doctor, but they didn't get her to the hospital in time...

Oh no! That's horrible!

Psst! Do you know where Lajita is today?

Sadly, this is not the first time I've known someone who died in childbirth.

I remember when my auntie died when she was having her fourth child. After that, her oldest daughter Ratna had to quit school and work in the clothing factory to help support their family.

Chakori! You are late!

Come here and help me with these buckets! And I need you to watch your brother and sister for a while. They've been giving me a headache all day!
Because I was worried, I went to the person in my village who knows the most about childbirth... the DIA who delivers babies!

Chakori, I understand why you are worried, but your mother is in good health and she has had healthy pregnancies before.

I think she will be okay, but there are some things you can do to help. You can encourage her to take iron tablets, eat lots of fruits and veggies, and get a tetanus shot.

Okay, Dia, I will try to be more helpful. I didn’t know having babies was so complicated!

Now don’t you rush. It is important to wait to have babies until you are ready!

Good evening, mother! Here, let me help you with that. You go rest!

Yuck! I am not getting married or having babies.

I am going to be a Bollywood film star!

What is wrong with you, child? You are never this helpful.
FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS THINGS RETURNED TO ALMOST NORMAL, UNTIL ONE DAY I CAME HOME FROM SCHOOL...

MOTHER, MOTHER! ARE YOU OKAY!

ARE YOU OKAY??

WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING IS FINE FOR NOW. TAKE THIS CHAI TEA THREE TIMES A DAY. IT IS MY OWN HERBAL RECIPE AND IT SHOULD HELP A LITTLE. BUT IF THERE ARE ANY MORE PROBLEMS YOU WILL HAVE TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL.

HOSPITAL! REALLY?!

THAT IS EXPENSIVE AND HOW WILL I GET THERE? IT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. THE GIRLS NEED NEW SCHOOL UNIFORMS AND NEW SARIS AND WE WILL HAVE ANOTHER MOUTH TO FEED SOON.

MOTHER?

NOT NOW, CHAKORI. GO TO BED.

BUT MOTHER, I CAN HELP.

AFTER THAT, THINGS CHANGED A LOT FOR ME.

I DIDN'T GET A NEW SARI DRESS LIKE MOST OF THE OTHER GIRLS IN MY CLASS. I OFFERED TO HELP MY UNCLE WITH SOME CHORES, AND IN EXCHANGE HE SAID HE WOULD GIVE MY MOTHER A RIDE TO THE HOSPITAL IF SHE NEEDS IT.

IT'S VERY Tiring to WORK AND GO TO SCHOOL, BUT IT WAS WORTH IT TO MAKE SURE MY MOTHER WOULD HAVE A SAFE BIRTH.

JUST WHEN I THOUGHT THINGS COULDN'T GET ANY BUSIER, WE HAD TO START PREPARING FOR THE BABY'S ARRIVAL. WE HAD TO CLEAN THE HOUSE, WASH THE SOFT CLOTHS, AND GATHER THE SOAP, STRING, BLADES, AND OTHER THINGS WE NEEDED.
One day I arrived home from school to find my brother and sister covered in mud outside. It turned out the dia was inside helping my mother.

Dia, shouldn’t we be getting to the hospital?

No, not yet.

Everything seems to be progressing nicely.

Come over here, you can assist me... Help your mother drink this water.

That day, my new sister arrived.

She was born, like me, my sister, and brother, at home. She is getting bigger and stronger all the time.

Soon after, there was a naming ceremony for my sister Aditi. And guess what? I got a special gift at the ceremony! My uncle gave me a new sari because I worked so hard to help out.

My mom is also doing well. She is healthy and happy. She and my father have decided not to have any more children.

I am doing well with school and studying hard. I still want to be an actress in Bollywood movies, but I have also started thinking about becoming a dia.
WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

FUNDRAISE FOR MATERNAL HEALTH PROJECTS: Fundraise or join efforts in organizations that work on maternal health efforts such as Million Mums and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood.

BUILD A BIRTHING HUT: Raise money to build a birthing hut by hosting a baby shower for brave mothers in Africa. For more information about the birthing hut project, visit the Cause Canada website at www.cause.ca/node/201

CELEBRATE MOTHER’S DAY EVERY DAY: Celebrate the women around the world who gave us life. Participate in the Mother’s Day Every day campaign at w3.mothersdayeveryday.org

YOUNG WOMEN’S WELLNESS PROGRAM: Started by Planned Parenthood Regina in 2001, the main goal of this program is delaying sexual activity. Programming takes place in Regina inner city schools and in the community. If you’d like to sponsor this program or donate to it call 306-522-0902.

WRITE TO YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT: Let the government know that you appreciate their efforts in improving maternal health through CIDA. Remind them that more needs to be done to meet the target of reducing the proportion of maternal mortality by three quarters.

SOME ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK ON THE ISSUE OF MATERNAL HEALTH

CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE (CFSC): CFSC supports a project in Iraq called care-to-care which works to reduce child and maternal mortality and improve maternal health by training rural physicians, nurses and birth attendants in labour and delivery risk management. They also provide training for these health professionals so that they can continue to deliver trainings to other health care workers to make sure that the program continues even if the Canadian workers are not there.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT (PWSD): PWSD works to empower women and girls to become more active in decision-making and to have more control over their lives. In several countries. They work toward community development and education, keeping women and girls front and centre in all the work they do.

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CIDA): CIDA is the arm of the Canadian government that works on international development issues. CIDA focuses on two major areas in maternal health: sexual and reproductive health, and safe motherhood, and spends $54 million annually on them.

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In Saskatchewan and Canada, like the rest of the world, girls and women have better reproductive health when they are empowered and educated about their bodies. They are also less likely to have children before they are ready. It is very important to be sure that in Saskatchewan, Canada, and worldwide, education about contraception, sex, and sexuality is available to young people.
THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 Governments signed the Millennium Declaration on behalf of the countries they represented. Eight millennium development goals were adopted, committing rich and poor countries to work together in a global partnership to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school, promote gender equality, improve the health of mothers and children, reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and protect the environment—all by 2015.

1. ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER
2. ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION
3. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN
4. REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY
5. IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH
6. COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES
7. ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
8. DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

UN TARGETS for MDG #5:
IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

• Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.
• Achieve universal access to reproductive health.

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