

FIGO Congress News: The FIGO-Gates Initiative On Maternal & Newborn Health

Thursday, 8th October 2009

Imagine three Jumbo jets filled with pregnant women crashing daily

The aim of the fifth United Nations Millennium Developmental Goal is to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent by 2015.

Little or no progress has been made towards achieving this goal in low- and middle-resource countries, with over 500,000 women dying yearly from pregnancy and delivery-related complications, equivalent to three Jumbo jets full of pregnant women crashing daily.

Although child mortality under the age of five (the fourth United Nations Developmental Goal) has fallen by a quarter, the annual number of newborn deaths remains unchanged and unacceptable.

The national obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery associations in these countries are viewed by leaders, such as UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank, as being pivotal in the global efforts to ensure safer pregnancy and childbirth.

At this XIX World Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, organised by the International Federation of Gynecology & Obstetrics (FIGO), FIGO will launch an initiative to improve maternal and newborn health in low-resource countries through building the leadership, advocacy and organisational capacity of national obstetric and gynaecological associations. The initiative is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The five year initiative will begin with a phase of development in eight African and Asian countries i.e. Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, India and Nepal, and will be extended to a further seven countries in a phase of South-to-South collaboration. Eighty-six percent of all maternal deaths occur in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with 25 percent of all deaths occurring in India.

Further information:

Project Goal: To improve policy and practice by strengthening FIGO member associations (MAs) and using their position and knowledge to facilitate and contribute to these improvements, leading to better maternal and newborn health (MNH) for under-served populations in low- and middle-resource countries.

Project Objective One: To strengthen the organisational capacity of FIGO MAs in eight African or Asian low- or middle-resource countries with high maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity. This objective establishes the MA in national policy dialogue aligned with and influencing the national MNH plan, and includes a review of human resources and a plan for necessary policy changes to meet the country needs. National commitment for and implementation of maternal death review committees and national level evidence-based guidelines are part of this objective.

Project Objective Two: To enable the FIGO MAs to undertake advocacy activities aimed at raising awareness and influencing policy on issues related to MNH at both

national and regional level. This objective is concerned with the advocacy required for the implementation of action plans and policy set in objective one. A national level committee that will develop partnerships in the country and a plan to disseminate information to the public, giving prominence to the MA in the media, is a key strategy.

Project Objective Three: To promote South-South collaboration. The initial eight countries will support a further seven countries to develop their organisational capacity to undertake similar activities as in objective one and two.