

ALUOKA & GITONGA} Maternal, child health highway littered with broken promises

In September last year, UN member countries met in New York for the UN General Assembly (Unga)

meeting to discuss various issues. One of these issues was the Global Strategy for Mothers and Children's Health. Various member countries including Kenya expressed support for the strategy and made certain commitments aimed at ensuring its implementation.

Kenya committed to recruit and deploy an additional 20,000 primary care health workers as well as to establish and operationalise 210 primary health facility centers of excellence to provide maternal and child health services.

Today, we are witnessing yet another Unga meeting one year later, and as Kenya sends a delegation to New York, it is important that Kenya's get to know the progress made on these commitments. Specifically, how many of the 20,000 promised primary health care workers have been recruited and deployed and

how many of the 210 promised primary health facilities have been established and operationalised?

No doubt if these commitments are met, would significantly contribute towards realisation of MDG 4 (reduction of under-five child mortality) and MDG 5 (improved maternal health).

According to the first Medium-Term Plan (2008 – 2012) of Vision 2030, Kenya should be able to meet these health sector targets by 2012: reduce under-five mortality from 120 to 33 deaths per 1,000 live births; reduce maternal mortality from 410 to 147 per 1,000 live births and; increase the proportion of birth deliveries by skilled personnel from 42 per cent to 95 per cent, among others.

With reference to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) of 2008/09, under-five mortality has reduced to 74 deaths per 1,000 live births while maternal mortality has increased from 410 to 488 deaths per 1,000 live

births. The proportion of birth deliveries by skilled personnel has marginally risen to 44 percent.

Where it is certain that we will not meet most of the first Vision 2030 MTP targets and by extension MDGs by 2015 as already admitted by the minister for Medical Services, the government and other stakeholders can do more to accelerate progress towards attainment of the targets and goals.

KENYA'S COMMITMENT

In this regard, it is commendable that the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation (MOPHS) is laying emphasis on high impact low cost interventions to reduce the disease burden in the country.

As the Kenyan delegation leaves for New York, headed by one of the Coalition principles or their representatives, Kenya should extend her commitment to the UN Strategy for Mothers and Children to allow inclusion of additional ini-

tatives to contribute towards realisation of MDGs 4 and 5.

Most importantly, it is critical for Kenya to honestly declare progress made in line with the above commitments.

It would be worthwhile if the MOPHS and the relevant departments or agencies made this information public through a newspaper supplement or use other appropriate media to tell Kenyans about the same.

The right to information is enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

To accelerate progress towards achievement of MDGs 4 and 5 and Vision 2030, it is important that the country should among other measures: recruit, train, equip and remunerate more community health workers by 2012.

The country must also invest in midwives, the only professionals within the health system whose education and training are dedicated to the care of pregnant women, new mothers and their

newborn babies.

Deployment of health workers to those areas where they are needed most to improve health care coverage for the poorest women and children is key, so is ensuring health workers deployed to hardship areas are adequately compensated so that they are inspired.

This is in addition to guaranteeing health workers are equipped and supported to deal successfully with threats to maternal and child survival, particularly through the first five years of a child's life.

It is our hope that by attending Unga, Kenya will join other Heads of State and Governments as well as global leaders in supporting the Global Strategy for Women and Children's Health. ■

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