

United Nations, 25 May 2011 – Visiting health workers in Ethiopia today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spotlighted the progress made in improving the health of women and children, while also stressing the need to do more to avoid needless deaths.

“We have seen so many women and children dying needlessly from preventable diseases,” Mr. Ban told reporters at the Ambo Mesk health post in Bahir Dar, in Ethiopia's northern state of Amhara.

“Training good health workers [and] training good midwives can save a lot of women's and also children's lives.”

The Horn of Africa nation knows all too well the challenges associated with ensuring maternal and child health. Every 25 minutes, another Ethiopian woman dies from complications related to child birth. Most are in rural areas, far from any clinic.

At the health post, Mr. Ban met with the staff providing essential services to communities previously living without ready access to such care.

He also visited a larger health centre, a few kilometres away, which supports the health post by providing it with supplies and on-the-job training. There he spoke with doctors and nurses about their work, as well as with some patients.

“I hope that the Government will try to expend these posts, clinics and centres and also hospitals,” said the Secretary-General, who also spotlighted maternal health when he visited Nigeria earlier this week.

At a major UN development summit in New York last September, participants adopted the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, committing \$40 billion in resources to a global effort to save the lives of 16 million women and children by 2015.

The strategy identifies the finance and policy changes needed, along with vital interventions to help improve health and save lives. It is expected to prevent, between 2011 and 2015, the deaths of more than 15 million children under five, as well as 33 million unwanted pregnancies and the deaths of 740,000 women from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Mr. Ban commended Ethiopia on its commitment to improve maternal and child health, including its goal of quadrupling the number of midwives. The country is a good example of how a little investment can go a long way in saving many lives, he added.

The UN chief is now in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, where he is attending an African Union meeting on peace and security. On the sidelines of that meeting, he met with the Vice President of South Africa, the President of Equatorial Guinea, the President of Senegal and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

Yesterday, while in Nigeria, he told a national forum of governors that the country deserved credit for its efforts to improve health care, especially for women and children.

“But much more can be done,” he said. “In particular, I urge you to remedy the gap between the provision of health infrastructure and the quality of service. Address inequities in accessing care, and ensure that funding for women's and children's health is available and smoothly disbursed throughout the country. Make commodities, drugs and supplies more readily available.

“I urge you, too, to work towards equal participation of women and men in public life. This will go a long way to improving women's and children's health. I also encourage you to expand the successful Midwives Service Scheme and deploy community health extension workers to rural areas.”

Source: [UN News](#)