

Brazzaville, 28 October 2010 - "Malnutrition is an area that requires further progress: in Congo, more than a quarter of deaths among children under five are attributable to malnutrition," said Gianfranco Rotigliano, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) regional director for West and Central Africa, at the launch of a campaign to reduce maternal mortality.

The Act Now, No Woman Should Die Giving Life campaign was launched across the country on 20 October, and involves the government, three UN agencies (the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the UN Population Fund - UNFPA), civil society and private partners. It aims to reduce the maternal mortality rate of 781 per 100,000 live births.

"The mortality rates of children under five, and maternal and neo-natal mortality remain at high levels in Congo, and the rich... have access to faster essential interventions than the poor," said Rotigliano.

"Reducing this inequality is essential if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals related to health," he said.

Congolese Minister for Health and Population Georges Moya said: "Congo is favourably placed to shift maternal mortality trends, among other things, through the adoption of the national roadmap to accelerate its reduction."

To this end, since 2008 pregnant women and children aged 5-15 have been able to access free malaria treatment, and from January 2011 pregnant women will be able to get free Caesarean sections, according to the authorities.

"Moral imperative"

"The fight against maternal mortality is a public health priority and a social, moral and political imperative," said Bounma Makinwa, UNFPA Africa regional head.

According to UNICEF, malaria kills 21,000 children under five every year.

It has often asked the government to allocate at least 20 percent of oil revenues to improving the lives of children. Oil revenue will be US\$4.44 billion in 2011, according to Finance Minister Gilbert Ondongo.

In 2008, per capita health expenditure reached \$53. "This figure hides great disparities. Additional resources must be mobilized to implement specific strategies to benefit the most disadvantaged," said Rotigliano.

UNICEF stated in 2008 that 50 percent of Congolese children (1.2 million) were affected by poverty and suffered hardship in the areas of education, nutrition, health, water, sanitation and housing.

The 2010 report of the International Food Policy Research Institute says 21 percent of the population are undernourished, 11 percent of children are underweight, and the infant mortality rate among under fives is 12.7 percent. It described the food situation as “serious”.

Source: [IRIN](#)