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**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE WOMEN'S HEALTH COMMISSION FOR THE AFRICAN REGION**

**Information Document**

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## BACKGROUND

1. The Commission on Women's Health in the African Region was established in 2009. It published a report entitled '*Addressing the Challenge of Women's Health in Africa*'<sup>1</sup> in 2012. The report was endorsed by the Sixty-third session of the Regional Committee for Africa in September 2013 and the related Resolution AFR/RC63/R4<sup>2</sup> was adopted. The resolution called on Member States to give a high priority to women's health by implementing the recommendations of the report.

2. The report proposed six clustered recommendations to improve the lives of women in the African Region, covering the areas of good governance and leadership; policy and legislative initiatives; multisectoral interventions; empowering girls and women; improving the responsiveness of health systems; and data collection for monitoring progress towards achievement of women's health targets.

3. This report summarizes the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Commission between 2013 and 2015 and proposes the next steps.

## PROGRESS MADE

4. The Commission's report and a documentary film entitled "*The Mothers of Africa*" were disseminated to all Member States, civil society organizations and development partners for advocacy and policy-making.

5. A tool to monitor progress in implementing the Commission's recommendations was developed and 30 countries<sup>3</sup> used it to submit reports. Twenty-five countries<sup>4</sup> reported having mechanisms to ensure women's financial protection through universal health insurance, health care subsidies or free health care at the point of service delivery.

6. Regional political commitment to women's health has increased. During the first meeting of the African ministers of health jointly convened by WHO and the African Union Commission, a commitment on ending preventable maternal and child deaths in Africa by 2035 was adopted.<sup>5</sup> This was endorsed by African Heads of State and Government at the African Union Summit held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in 2014.

7. In the area of accountability and information for women's and children's health,<sup>6</sup> 21 countries<sup>7</sup> established multi-sectoral mechanisms tasked with promoting and monitoring progress

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<sup>1</sup> WHO Regional Office for Africa; *Addressing the Challenges of Women's Health in Africa: Report of the Commission on Women's Health in the African Region*. 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution AFR/RC63/R4 on Addressing the Challenges of Women's Health in Africa: report of the Commission on Women's Health in the African Region. In: *Sixty-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, 2–6 September 2013, Final Report*, Brazzaville, Congo, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Africa, 2013 (AFR/RC63/16), pp. 10–12.

<sup>3</sup> Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

<sup>4</sup> Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, , Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia.

<sup>5</sup> AUC/WHO/2014/Doc.4, 17 April 2014.

<sup>6</sup> UN Commission on Information and Accountability (CoIA) for Women's and Children's Health, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan and Zambia.

made. All countries have adopted maternal death surveillance and response to promote routine identification and timely notification of maternal deaths and quality improvement processes.

8. Botswana, Sao Tome and Principe and Zambia developed gender policies in 2013-2014, bringing the number of countries with gender policies to 29.<sup>8</sup> The proportion of women in parliament increased from 20%<sup>9</sup> in 2012 to 23%<sup>10</sup> in 2014.

9. Despite the progress made, maternal mortality remains high at 500 deaths per 100 000 live births, and only four Member States have achieved Millennium Development Goal 5A while 32 countries are making progress.<sup>11</sup> The quality and coverage of life saving interventions remain low and unevenly distributed across and within countries. Financial investment in health and health enhancing sectors such as education, gender equality, water and sanitation remains inadequate, community involvement insufficient and tracking of progress still low as 17 countries are yet to submit their reports.

## **NEXT STEPS**

10. To effectively implement the recommendations, Member States should:

- (a) increase coverage of high impact interventions for reducing maternal mortality, including access to family planning commodities, and medicines that are of vital importance to the health of mothers, newborns and children with a focus on unreached and vulnerable population groups;
- (b) empower women through education and professional training for girls, promote women's participation in social, economic and political affairs and improve water and sanitation services; and
- (c) remove all restrictive policies and laws that limit women's access to financial resources, property and health care services; strengthen regular monitoring and evaluation of the status of implementation of the Commission's recommendations by using the monitoring tool developed by WHO and take appropriate actions to address gaps.

11. WHO and partners should continue to support countries to develop and implement evidence-based policies and strategies for women's health and development.

12. The Regional Committee is requested to take note of this progress report and endorse the proposed next steps.

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<sup>8</sup> Reports from countries.

<sup>9</sup> The UN Millennium Development Goals report 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The UN Millennium Development Goals report 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Trends in maternal mortality 1990-2013, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank.