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Provisional agenda item 10

**THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN IMPROVING MATERNAL,  
NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH IN THE WHO AFRICAN REGION**

**Panel discussion**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Paragraphs</b>
BACKGROUND .....	1–4
OBJECTIVES .....	5
EXPECTED OUTCOMES .....	6
PANELISTS .....	7
PRESENTATIONS .....	8
PROPOSED AGENDA .....	9



## BACKGROUND

1. In Africa, most of the causes of maternal, newborn and under-five deaths can be prevented with the existing cost-effective interventions. However, ensuring universal access and utilization of the key interventions remains a challenge. Mothers and children continue to die due to the triple delays in *seeking* appropriate care, *reaching* the health facility and *receiving* the appropriate management at the facility.
2. Lessons from maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) services show that community empowerment, participation and ownership of locally-based interventions are essential for increasing utilization and access to services. This calls for the involvement of the community in the planning, implementation and monitoring of community-based health services.
3. Cognizant of the need to improve access to MNCH services, the WHO Regional Committee for Africa organized a round table on safe motherhood and improving access to emergency obstetric care for its fifty-third session in August 2003, in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants noted the importance of linkages between communities and health facilities to improve access to MNCH. This was also underscored at the joint International Conference on Community Health held in October 2006 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
4. Community-based interventions for increasing access to MNCH services are a major component of the “Road map for accelerating the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals related to maternal and newborn health”. The Road map was adopted by Resolution AFR/RC54/R9 as the regional strategy for reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.

## OBJECTIVES

5. The general objective of this panel discussion is to share experiences and lessons learnt in addressing the challenges in the improvement of MNCH through community action. The specific objectives are:
  - (a) to identify key community level actions to ensure timely access and utilization of MNCH services;
  - (b) to identify opportunities and mechanisms for accelerated implementation of cost-effective community actions for MNCH;
  - (c) to make recommendations to Member States on the way forward for improving MNCH through community actions.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

6. The expected outcomes of this panel discussion are:
  - (a) identification of key community level actions to ensure timely access and utilization of MNCH services;
  - (b) identification of opportunities and mechanisms for accelerated implementation of cost-effective community actions for MNCH;
  - (c) recommendations to involve communities in implementing MNCH interventions.

## **PANELLISTS**

7. Proposed panellists:

- (a) Minister of Health of Mali: Chairperson,
- (b) Experts from Guinea, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

8. The experts on the panel will make short presentations on community initiatives for strengthening interactions and linkages between health care levels; overcoming traditions, cultures and beliefs; contribution of the private sector; and birth preparedness.

## **PROPOSED AGENDA**

9. The proposed agenda is as follows:

- Opening remarks and introduction of panellists: Chairperson (5 minutes),
- Strengthening interaction and linkages between health facilities and communities: Dr Ruth Nasanga, Uganda (10 minutes),
- Overcoming traditions, cultures and beliefs in improving MNCH at community level: Prof Cheik Niang, Senegal (10 minutes),
- Contribution of the private sector at community level: Mrs Irene Singogo, Plan International NGO, Zambia (10 minutes),
- Birth preparedness: Dr Sere Kaba, Coordinator, Safe Motherhood Programme, Guinea (10 minutes),
- Discussion (70 minutes),
- Conclusions and recommendations (5 minutes).