

Fact Sheet

Maternal and Child Health

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Globally, women suffer disproportionately from hunger, disease, and poverty. Especially in developing countries, the low status of rural women—social, economic, and political—contributes to high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition among children as well. Where there is hunger and poverty, there is almost always poor access to maternal and child health care.

- Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children and are at risk of death during childbirth.¹
- Malnutrition increases the risk that a pregnant woman who is HIV-positive will pass the virus on to her baby.²
- Women suffer twice the rate of malnutrition as men. Girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys.³

The opposite is true too:

- A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past her fifth birthday.
- Each extra year of a mother's education reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5 percent to 10 percent.

- In Africa's poorest countries, an estimated 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved if their mothers had a secondary school education.

(2010 U.N MDG Report)

Child Malnutrition

The level of child and maternal undernutrition remains unacceptable throughout the world, but 90 percent of the developing world's chronically undernourished children live in Asia or Africa. (*ChildInfor.org*, http://www.devinfo.info/pfc/mdg_4/mdg_4_u5mr_overview.html)

18 Countries with the Highest Prevalence of Stunting

Country	Prevalence of Stunting (%)
Afghanistan	59
Yemen	58
Guatemala	54
Timor-Leste	54
Burundi	53
Madagascar	53
Malawi	53
Ethiopia	51
Rwanda	51
Nepal	49
Bhutan	48
India	48
Lao People's Dem. Rep.	48
Guinea-Bissau	47
Niger	47
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	46
Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	45
Zambia	45

90 percent of the developing world's chronically undernourished (stunted) children live in Asia or Africa

Note: Estimates are calculated according to the WHO Child Growth Standards, except in cases where data are only available according to the previously used NCHS/WHO reference population; Estimates are based on data collection in 2003 or later, with the exception of Guatemala (2002) and Bhutan (1999).

Source: MICS, DHS and other national surveys, 2003–2008.

- Globally, more than one-third of child deaths are attributable to undernutrition.
- Among children in the developing world younger than 5, an estimated one third—195 million children—are stunted, and 129 million are underweight.

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- Eighty percent of the developing world’s undernourished (stunted) children live in just 24 countries.
- In Africa and Asia, stunting rates are particularly high, at 40 percent and 36 percent respectively.
- In the developing world, 13 percent of children under 5 years old are wasted (they weigh too little for their height). Five percent, or about 26 million children, are severely wasted.
- In developing countries, 16 percent of infants, or one in six, weigh less than 3.3 pounds (2,500 grams) at birth.

The Role of Women in Reducing Child Malnutrition

Women, as primary caregivers to children, are the critical link in improving children’s nutritional status. Efforts to reduce extreme poverty and hunger around the world must emphasize better nutrition for women and children.

- The 1,000 Days initiative focuses on the importance of the right nutrition for mothers and children during the first 1,000 days of a child’s life (from pregnancy to the child’s second birthday). Research shows that the consequences of malnutrition during this critical time period are irreversible. The United States and other countries should focus foreign assistance in this area.

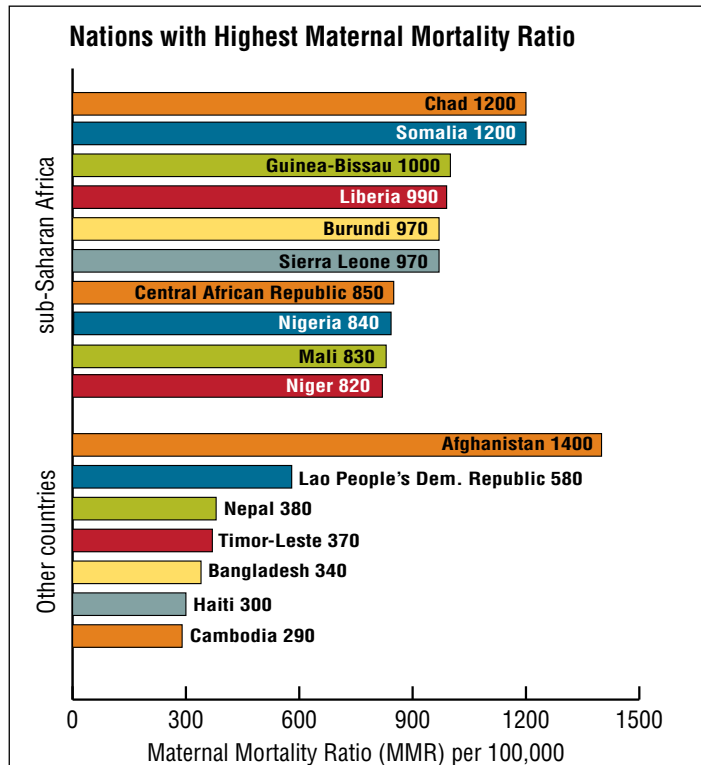
Maternal Mortality

Hunger and poverty also mean poor access to prenatal care, leading to high maternal mortality. Maternal mortality has a precise definition: the death of a woman while pregnant or within six weeks of the end of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy.⁴



U.N. Photo/Christopher Herwig

Tonglewin (Liberian) village elder Kou Pealea is a midwife. Every day she works in the field with other women in the Ganta Concerned Women’s Group. Before the war she was a midwife in a clinic but it was burned to the ground by soldiers. Now she delivers babies inside her home.



Source: WHO, Systematic Review of Causes of Maternal Death (preliminary data), 2010.

Although most sub-Saharan African countries had high MMR, Mauritius and Cape Verde had low MMR (defined as MMR 20–99 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births), while Namibia and Botswana had moderate MMR (defined as MMR 100–299 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births).

- In 2008, the maternal mortality ratio in developing regions was 290 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births—a 34 percent decline since 1990.
- For every woman who dies during childbirth, approximately 20 suffer injuries, infection and/or disabilities.
- Most maternal deaths can be prevented when births are attended by skilled health personnel who are regularly supervised and have the proper equipment and supplies.

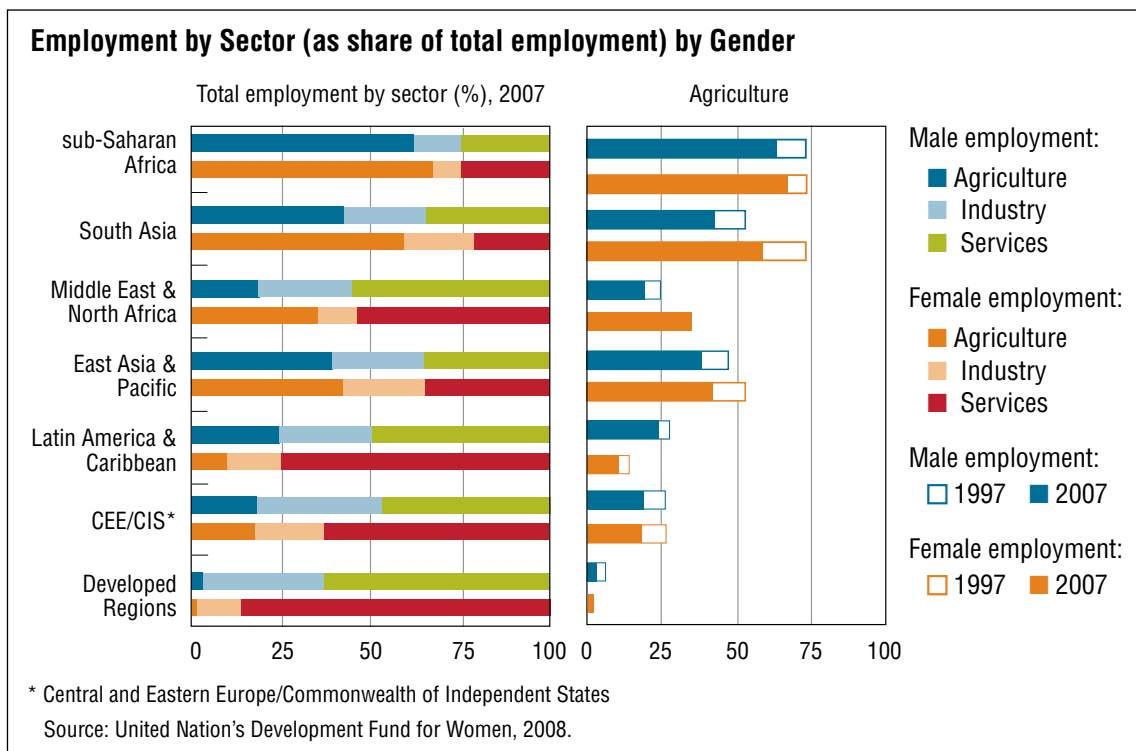
Gender and Employment

Increasing women's income and status helps ensure better health and nutrition for their children.

- Women are more likely than men to spend any additional resources on their children—in one study from Brazil, 20 times more likely.⁵
- Half of the world's smallholder farmers are women.
- The share of women employed outside agriculture remains as low as 20 percent in South Asia, West Asia and North Africa.
- Even when women are employed, they are typically paid less and have less financial security than men.

- Globally, only a quarter of senior officials or managers are women.
- In West Asia, South Asia and North Africa, women hold less than 10 percent of top-level positions.
- The global share of women in parliament continues to rise slowly and reached 19 percent in 2010 – far short of gender parity.
- Parliamentary elections in 2009 contributed to gains for women in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America/Caribbean, where 29 percent and 25 percent respectively of the renewed seats went to women.

Source: U.N Millennium Development Goal Report Card, 2010



U.N. Photo

Endnotes

¹ *The Lancet* (January 16, 2008), "Maternal and Child Nutrition," Special Series.

² Rebecca Holmes, Nicola Jones and Hanna Marsden (August 2009), Gender, Vulnerabilities, Food Price Shocks and Social Protection Responses, Background Note, Overseas Development Institute.

³ Gender section on website of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: <http://www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/genderprogramme/gender-food/en/>

⁴ WHO: <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/indmaternalmortality/en/index.html>.

⁵ Duncan Thomas (1990), "Intra-household Allocation: An Inferential Approach," *Journal of Human Resources*, 25 (4): 635-64.



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