

Impediments to a healthy SA society

Millennium Development Goals in jeopardy

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HEALTH experts have warned that South Africa is unlikely to meet its targets for two key Millennium Development Goals: reducing child mortality and improving maternal health care.

The UN General Assembly is in session in New York discussing the agenda to be followed after the Millennium Development Goals' 2015 deadline. Countries are taking stock of the progress they have made.

According to an international report, "Countdown to 2015: Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival Report 2014", South Africa's under-5 mortality rate was 61 deaths among every 1 000 live births in 1990.

This has dropped to 45.

The Millennium Development Goal, however, is less than half of this: 20 deaths among 1 000 live births.

Professor Heather Zar, head of the department of paediatrics and child health at UCT, said: "South Africa has seen good progress with prevention of mother-to-child transmission, with strong immunisation programmes, and with good national guidelines.

"Breast-feeding, immunisation and good nutrition alone could eradicate two thirds of child deaths."

Neonatal causes, pneumonia and diarrhoea led to most deaths among children under 5.

"For maximum impact, we need improvement in antenatal and obstetric care (with prevention of pre-term deliveries, use of antenatal steroids and growth



Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi.

PICTURE: ANTOINE DE RAS

ened prevention of mother-to-child transmission for HIV), good management of pneumonia in children and effective oral rehydration for diarrhoea," Zar said.

The Countdown 2015 report said South Africa in 1990 had 150 maternal deaths among every 100 000 live births.

This had dropped to 140.

The Millennium Development Goal is 38.

Unicef says the maternal mortality rate is "of concern". It is "evident maternal mortality is dependent on a range of other factors, including education, decent work, safety, clean water and sanitation, and adequate transport facilities".

Marion Stevens, a research associate at the African Gender Institute, said: "There has been some change, but nothing substantial. We are concerned about how the department isn't addressing some of the economic issues"

Stevens said not enough was being done to encourage women to book in for check-ups before 20 weeks of pregnancy.

"From what we have seen, women don't feel welcome in the clinics, and often the health workers' own religious beliefs or conservative thinking influence how they deal with contraception and abortions.

"We are not addressing the profound system issues that result in four in 10 women having pregnancies they didn't plan."

Joe Maila, spokesman for national health, said the ministry would prefer not to comment on whether the Millennium Development Goals had been achieved until an audit had been done.

Child mortality and maternal health care remained "key priorities and an essential part of the work in our department".

"We will continue to work towards the targets"