



TECHNICAL BRIEF

Improved Maternal and Child Health Indicators through District-Level Vital Statistics

The USAID-funded Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) has been designed to assist the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH) to achieve its health-related United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 & 5 of reducing child mortality rates and improving maternal health.



Photo: USAID / PHCPI

On-job training course of District vital statistics in Al-Ameer MC in Maysan

Background

Within the field of public health, information obtained from Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) is essential, allowing accurate recording of live births as well as tracking mortality rates and causes of death. These data play a fundamental role in planning and monitoring public health outcomes, plus a wide-range of outcomes in other policy domains.

Maternal and child health is a critical issue in Iraq. Declines in maternal and under-five mortality rates have been slowed by years of conflict and the impact of sanctions. Currently, Iraq's maternal mortality ratio is 35 per 100,000, while the rate for children under-five is 39 per 1000 according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The availability of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) services – healthcare to ensure mothers and infants survive and stay healthy during childbirth and early childhood – is limited and remains a major factor contributing to the high-levels of maternal and child mortality in Iraq.

In an effort to address some of the structural barriers affecting the quality of MNCH services in Iraq's Primary Health Care (PHC) clinics, the USAID-funded Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) has helped to design strategies to strengthen the quality and expand the dissemination of maternal and child health data from the district-level to the Ministry of Health (MoH). Since complete and accurate CRVS systems are the preferred data source to measure indicators for both maternal and under-five mortality rates, the project has identified quantitative indicators that enable local health districts to more effectively collect data needed by the MoH.

PHCPI Activities for Accurate Birth and Mortality Rates

In partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, USAID/PHCPI has helped to strengthen district-level vital statistics through the following activities:

- Following the release of the Ministry's Vital Statistics Databases to

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Photo: USAID / PHCPI

District vital statistic system workshop at Ibrahim Ahmed model PHCC in Sulaimaniyah

- District Health Offices in early 2014, the project conducted a series of regional workshops in Baghdad and Erbil to guide District Health Officers and Department of Health (DoH) Health & Vital Statistics Sections (HVSS) staff on how best to document key maternal and child health indicators. Specifically, guidance was given to clarify which conditions should be considered underlying causes of death.
- These trainings also introduced participants to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) – a standardized tool to guide the collection, coding, tabulation and reporting of mortality statistics based on civil registration.
 - In collaboration with the MoH, workshops were also conducted in each governorate targeting a wider group of District Health, DoH and PHC clinic staff. Since January 2014, 42 of these workshops were held each month (on average) reaching over 354 trainees.
 - Four regional training-of-trainers workshops were conducted, promoting 82 new trainers to continue teaching this program.
 - In May and June 2014, USAID/PHCPI conducted two, three-day workshops with relevant staff from the Ministry's Vital Statistic Department and statistical officers from each Health District to evaluate the results achieved by following the ICD-10 tool, obstacles encountered in data collection and strategies to sustain this process going forward.

Impacts and Looking Forward

In collaboration with USAID/PHCPI, the Ministry of Health has made steady progress in standardizing the reporting of statistics on maternal and child mortality from the district-level. These improved data will help guide health care interventions and ensure a more efficient allocation of resources. A comprehensive overview of the size, distribution and causes of maternal and child mortality - based on reliable data - is fundamental to Iraq's ability to address this urgent problem. Given the early success of this program, the MoH has issued a formal letter to continue this effort to include all 128 health districts across the county after the end of the project on September 30, 2014.