The World Health Organization, Office of the Americas’ Safe Motherhood Initiative (SMI) in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Why do women die in childbirth?
- Leading causes of death include hemorrhage and hypertension.
- Indirect causes: malaria, HIV/AIDS, and heart disease.
- Direct causes: obstruction of labor, anesthesia, or caesarian section complications, ectopic pregnancies.

More Facts From UN Report
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- Lack of progress in expanding the use of contraceptives.
- Use of contraception is lowest among the poorest women and those with no education.
- Inadequate funding for family planning is a major failure in fulfilling commitments to improving women’s reproductive health.

Visibility as a Form of Advocacy
- Panel on Safe Motherhood and discussion of universal access to reproductive health care at the 51st Annual Directing Council.
- Calendar of the winning photos was sent to country offices and collaborators.

Methods
- Literature review for background information.
- WHO internship in fall 2011.
  - Observations during meetings, teleconferences, and daily work activities.
  - Interview WHO experts on MDG 5.
  - Attended the 51st Annual Directing Council.

Findings
- Short term objectives of the initiative were accomplished (i.e. Photo contest and Best Practices contest).
  - Accomplishments show to be sustainable through online portal.
  - However, long term objectives, such as decreasing maternal mortality by 75% have not yet been accomplished.
  - Maternal mortality is difficult to measure because not everything is recorded.
  - Increasing social protection, especially for adolescent girls and marginalized women still needs to be accomplished.

Visibility as a Form of Advocacy
- Safe Motherhood portal created on the web to facilitate discussion of “Best Practices”.
- Coffee table book is in the works to be sent to the Presidents and Ministers of Health of the Region.

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Conclusion
- One initiative in one region can accomplish tasks, but cannot change behavior in a short period of time.
  - Change in behavior is complicated due to political, economic, and cultural dimensions.
  - Lack of progress towards MDG 5 could be due to:
  - Turnover in governments.
  - What health topics are a priority on the political agenda.

The Safe Motherhood Initiative: A Contest for MDG 5
- Proposes action and advocacy in:
  - Guaranteeing comprehensive reproductive health services.
  - Improving quality of prenatal, delivery, and post-partum care through investment and training for providers.
  - Reducing unsafe abortion.
  - Adding contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives, to the list of essential drugs.
  - Amending laws on sexual and reproductive health.

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