

Harnessing the power of ICT to serve women's and children's health

UN Commission delivers recommendations

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I am pleased to report that the United Nations Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health has agreed on a set of recommendations designed to improve the monitoring and delivery of health services in the developing world. The Commission recognizes that information and communication technologies (ICT) will be instrumental in collecting, sharing and analysing health data.

Mobile connectivity is now widespread, even in the world's poorest countries. This enables ICT to deliver an effective way of bridging the health development gap. Platforms such as the Internet and social media can be used as tools to facilitate data analysis and provide accurate, up-to-the-minute health information.

Essentially, the Commission's 11 recommendations include specific approaches that will help countries develop:

- ▶ better ways of gathering important health data to improve understanding of health needs and where resources should be focused;
- ▶ a coordinated system for tracking health spending on women and children;
- ▶ a feedback mechanism that supports continuous improvement in delivery of health services for women and children.

The Commission, delivered its recommendations at the close of its second and final meeting, held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 1–2 May 2011, where I served alongside Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), as co-Vice Chair. This highly successful meeting was presided over by Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete and attended by, among

other dignitaries, high-level staff representing Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper (co-Chair of the Commission with President Kikwete).

To quote President Kikwete: "All partners are mutually accountable for the promises they make and the health policies and programmes they design and implement. Tracking resources and results of public health spending is critical for transparency, credibility and ensuring that much-needed funds are used to save the lives of women and children."

And as Dr Chan says, "What gets measured gets done. Timely, reliable and accessible health information is critical for improving health outcomes for women and children. One of our top priorities must be assisting countries to build the capacity needed to gather this vital health information."

ITU is currently working alongside WHO to develop a modular e-health toolkit that will help countries develop and implement scalable and sustainable programmes for integrating ICT into national health strategies.

The final report of the Commission will now be submitted to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It will also be presented at upcoming international meetings, including the World Health Assembly in Geneva in May 2011, the G8 Summit in Deauville, France, and UN meetings in New York in September. The Commission's work is a key element in the UN Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, which aims to save the lives of 16 million women and children by 2015, as a step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.