



Press Release

Government of Japan commits US\$ 1.3 million to help save lives of pregnant women in Zimbabwe

...support comes in the context of COVID-19 which has stretched health resources

Harare/Tokyo , 22 April 2021 – The Government of Japan and the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, have signed a US\$ 1,3 million partnership grant in a project that will help save the lives of pregnant women in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing a humanitarian crisis caused by multiple factors, including recurring droughts and a dire economic situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis by further straining an already weakened health system, particularly maternal health, negatively impacting on the achievement of Universal Health Coverage. As of 2019, the country had an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate of 462 deaths per 100,000 live births, a number which is expected to have risen due to COVID-19.

In particular, the urban centres of Harare and Bulawayo have seen a marked increase in maternal and perinatal deaths. This is because referral hospitals located in these cities receive some of the most critical cases from around the country, including delayed referrals. In addition, there has been a disruption in the availability of resources and other factors beyond the control of the institutions. During the first wave of COVID-19, the provision of maternal health care, including emergency obstetric and neonatal care services, was severely disrupted.

Through the project “*Strengthening Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care in COVID-19 Hotspots in Zimbabwe*”, Japan will provide support to improve the provision of maternal health care services within the context of COVID-19, specifically strengthening the referral system and ensuring the continuity of assisted delivery care in Harare and Bulawayo.

The support includes the procurement of medical equipment and expendable supplies to manage obstetric emergencies and prevent and control infection, including personal protective equipment (PPE). It also includes the procurement of ambulances for several hospitals in order to strengthen emergency care, and the training of maternity care providers in emergency obstetric care and management of COVID-19 during pregnancy.

“During a crisis, it is often women and children who suffer the most. Japan decided to provide this support to help ensure that maternity services are prioritised, and mothers and new-born babies receive the care that they deserve”, said the Ambassador of Japan to Zimbabwe, Mr Satoshi Tanaka.

“This project aims to reverse the negative tide in maternal and perinatal outcomes, and increase the resilience of the health system in Harare and Bulawayo to cope with the impact of COVID-19”, said UNFPA Zimbabwe Country Representative, Dr Esther Muia. “This will help to avert preventable maternal and perinatal deaths through strengthening the capacity of the central hospitals and maternity polyclinics to provide effective and efficient comprehensive emergency obstetric and neonatal care. We are extremely grateful for this support by the Government of Japan and look forward to even greater cooperation in the future to change the lives of women, children and families as a whole.”

There are an estimated 15,000 and 45,000 deliveries annually in Bulawayo and Harare respectively. Of these about 9,000 (15%) women have obstetric complications and require access to emergency obstetric care services. An estimated 60,000 women will be reached through the proposed interventions.

About UNFPA:

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. UNFPA's mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA calls for the realization of reproductive rights for all and supports access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services, including voluntary family planning, quality maternal health care and comprehensive sexuality education. With a focus on Leaving No One Behind.

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