

PRESS RELEASE

FIGO LAUNCHES PROJECT TO IMPROVE MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

London, United Kingdom – January 20th, 2009 - International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics launches project to improve maternal and newborn health in low-resource countries with the support of a Gates Foundation grant.

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) is pleased to announce that it has received a US\$10.5 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve the lives and health of women and newborns in the world's most underserved regions.

Maternal and newborn health constitutes a major international health and development issue in low resource countries. Concerned that Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG 5), improve maternal health, has not made significant progress, FIGO's project "Improving maternal and newborn health in low-resource countries through strengthening the role of obstetric and gynaecological national associations," will work toward the overarching goal of reducing maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity.

The project will focus on fifteen FIGO member associations in low- and middle-resource countries in Asia and Africa. Over five years, FIGO hopes to enable these member associations to play a catalytic role in making positive changes in policy and practice and improve maternal and newborn health services for underserved populations. While the importance of national health professional organizations in tackling maternal mortality in low resource countries has been noted, it could be argued that insufficient consideration has been given to the readiness and capacity of these organisations to take on this role. This project will help address this, allowing FIGO and its member associations to work more effectively toward saving the lives of mothers and newborns.

The first phase of the project will focus on 8 countries with high rates of newborn mortality and morbidity. This phase aims to strengthen the member associations in these countries and develop advocacy activities to raise awareness of maternal and newborn health issues at the national and regional level.

In the second phase of the project, 7 additional countries will be introduced with the goal of developing "South-South" collaborations. This phase will develop communication mechanisms for knowledge and experience sharing, partnership development and exchanges of information, skills and lessons learned.

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Health professional associations aim to support their membership to do their best work, and to have the best skills, knowledge, practices and resources to promote maternal and newborn health effectively. They also have unique roles as advocates for maternal and newborn health at the national and international levels. This project will assist FIGO's membership in lower resource countries to take advantage of this influential position when circumstances make it difficult to do so, ultimately reducing maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity.

FIGO is the only international organisation that brings together professional societies of obstetricians and gynecologists, and currently represents 113 countries and territories worldwide. FIGO's mission is to promote the well-being of women and their children and to raise the standard of practice in obstetrics and gynecology around the world. For the past decade, maternal and newborn health has been a priority area for FIGO and it is actively involved in a series of safe motherhood and newborn health initiatives in a number of low- and middle-resource countries.

FIGO is pleased to have the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate its work by promoting the role of obstetric and gynaecological professional associations in improving the lives and health of women and newborns worldwide.

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