



Why Are Goals 4 and 5 so important?

Goals 4 and 5 on child and maternal health are vital if we are to halve global poverty.

Goal 4 - reduce child mortality by 2/3

Goal 5 - reduce by 3/4 the number of women dying in childbirth.

A BBC News article quoting a British parliamentary committee says "of all the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, the aim of reducing maternal mortality has seen least progress".

Many analysts confirm the key role that women play in improving the health, education and economic productivity of their families and communities, IF they have the opportunity. Kofi Annan, the former General Secretary of the United Nations put it this way, "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."

Yet it is women and children who are the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world:

- Around 70% of people living on less than US\$1 a day are women

- Women own only 1% of the world's assets
- Every minute around the world, a woman dies in childbirth and 20 are injured or disabled.
- Every minute, 40 teenage girls become pregnant
- Every 90 seconds, a woman is raped
- Every minute four babies die because they are not adequately breastfed
- A quarter of all child deaths (under 5 years) are due to easily preventable diseases - diarrhoea and malaria
- Every minute, four infants under 2 years die because they have not been vaccinated against diseases like measles and tetanus
- Children with disabilities are four times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than those without a disability.

Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 aim to change these shocking statistics.

(Statistics from UNICEF, WHO and World Bank)

How does poverty affect the health of mothers and children?

Julia's story demonstrates the key link between disability and child health:

Julia has polio: her legs are badly twisted and she is unable to walk. So she crawls around her village and she cannot attend school.

Julia's parents died in the Niger famine and like so many children, Julia was left vulnerable and alone. Sadly, she lives with a disability that that increases the risk of her dying - in fact, Julia is four times more likely to die before her 5th birthday than other children her age.

There is good news - with financial assistance from Australia, Julia will receive surgery, calipers and physiotherapy to strengthen her tiny legs and help her reach her full potential. (Story courtesy of CBM). [Click here for more on disability and the MDGs.](#)

Poverty and poor health stalk millions more women and children affecting every area of life.

A story from Sierra Leone illustrates the myriad connections:

On Christmas Eve 2007, Salumatu Sankoh was born by candlelight in a clinic at Kroo Bay, a slum outside Sierra Leone's capital Freetown. The clinic has one rusty delivery bed and a cot with three wheels. There is no electricity, no sterilizer and no doctor. Sierra Leone is the poorest country on earth. It ranks 177th out of 177 on the UN Human Development Index. One in 4 children dies before their 5th birthday.

Women have a one in six chance of dying in childbirth.

If Salamatu or her mother had birth complications it would have been nearly impossible to get treatment. The nearest hospital, four km away charges US\$39 admission, a huge sum for slum dwellers like Salamatu's mother. Three quarters of Sierra Leone people earn less than US\$2 a day, slum families earn as little as US\$1.

Already Salamatu has overcome challenges but the home she returns to will bring more threats to her health and life. Kroo Bay is a slum of 6,000 people in the middle of rubbish and mud. There is just one latrine so human waste goes into the river which is used for washing clothes. Only 39% of people in Sierra Leone have adequate sanitation. The risk of serious illness from dirty water, rats, mosquitoes and the piles of rubbish means Salamatu will get ill many times and will rarely feel strong.

The natural protection against disease provided by mothers' breast milk could save lives but only 4% of babies in Sierra Leone are exclusively breastfed to six months (which is the time recommended by UNICEF). Mothers may be unwell and find it hard to produce enough milk. There is also the pressure from baby food companies to use milk formula even though it is expensive and almost impossible to keep sterile.

The solutions are often simple but need action at all levels. A new health clinic with better equipment

Micah Challenge

**“What does the Lord require of you? Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God”
Micah 6:8**

www.micahchallenge.org.nz
info@micahchallenge.org.nz

would help Salamatu and her mother. The government could provide free health care for the poorest citizens, which would save the lives of 7,000 children a year but they need help from international groups like the IMF and the World Bank to make health care free.

National action is also needed to clear the rivers and drains so that homes are not flooded, to improve rubbish disposal and provide clean water and sanitation. The government of Sierra Leone has promised to target corruption so that scarce funds reach poor communities like Kroo Bay.

For Salamatu, these long-term goals may help her when she is a teenager, but for now, it is chance that keeps her alive when so many other little children die.

On an individual level we can:

1. Contribute funds to projects which provide immediate improvement - things like clean water, midwife training or breastfeeding education.
2. Intercede for communities and countries, praying specifically and consistently
3. Sponsor a child so that s/he can receive an education and health care
4. Talk with our friends about the issues
5. Give our time and expertise to an overseas aid agency by volunteering here or overseas
6. Find out about poverty issues - the causes, the current situation, biblical teaching on justice
7. Live our lives more simply so that our attitudes to money, career, success are transformed by Jesus
8. Send a 5th Birthday e-card to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, calling for more funding towards child and maternal health.
9. Speak out on poverty and injustice issues, e.g. sign the Micah Call, speak to your local MP about poverty issues.

As a church community we can:

1. Pray together in crisis situations, pray for countries in the news, pray especially for places and people we know
2. Hold events to raise community awareness, e.g. Hold a SURVIVE PAST FIVE 5th Birthday party to advocate for child and maternal health.
3. Support church projects to raise money to build a school or a clinic or provide training

4. Link with another community e.g. in the inner city, in an indigenous community, in a migrant area, in a poor community overseas
5. Speak out - invite your local MP to a special morning tea or event, pray for them, encourage them and remind them about the importance of caring for the poor.
6. Take part in the Offering of Letters campaign and add your voice to thousands of others who want to see our government act for justice.
7. Have preaching and bible teaching series on God's heart for the poor.
8. Encourage generosity
9. Take small steps to live more justly - have fair trade tea and coffee at all your events, encourage ethical investment of church funds
10. Download the Micah Challenge Health Flyer featuring information on maternal and child health and three simple actions you can take to support Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.

What can we do to bring hope?

We can act to bring hope. As individuals there is lots we can do and we can also see the importance of acting together. As a church, our actions can be multiplied in significance. We can also see the importance of action at a government level. Some issues to do with poverty e.g. free education for all, overcoming corruption, proper sewerage systems or protection for workers in factories need action by national leaders and churches can lead the way in standing up for integrity and justice.

As citizens we can ask our leaders to:

1. Keep our commitments to the global poor made in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
2. Work towards committing 0.7% of our national income (GNI) to overseas aid. This is the target level needed to meet the MDGs.
3. Encourage truthfulness, integrity and service in all government dealings with other nations.
4. Stand up for fair trade rules, protection of the resources of poor nations and protection of the environment of poor nations.

How can we influence our leaders?

1. There is power in numbers - the more people who sign the Micah Call, the more influence we can have.
2. Pray for God's power and wisdom to prevail at times of crisis or important meetings. Pray against spirits of violence, selfishness and greed which seek to rob and destroy.
3. Build a relationship with your local and national politicians by writing a letter once or twice year about justice issues.

HALVE POVERTY BY 2015

Micah Challenge is a global campaign to encourage Christians to pray, act and speak against poverty injustice, and to be prophetic voices in our community and with our leaders.