

Maternal mortality remains high in Malawi—research

BY DICKSON KASHOTI

GOVERNMENT in collaboration with Unicef yesterday launched the Malawi Multiple Indicator Cluster (MICS) 2006 survey, a nationally representative survey of children, women and men, which alarmingly show that more women are still dying when giving birth.

The maternal mortality still remains at 807 per 100,000 live births, which means Malawi has one of the highest maternal mortality in the world.

Unicef representative Aida Girma said during the MICS launch in Lilongwe that there was much to be done to improve lives of children and women in the country.

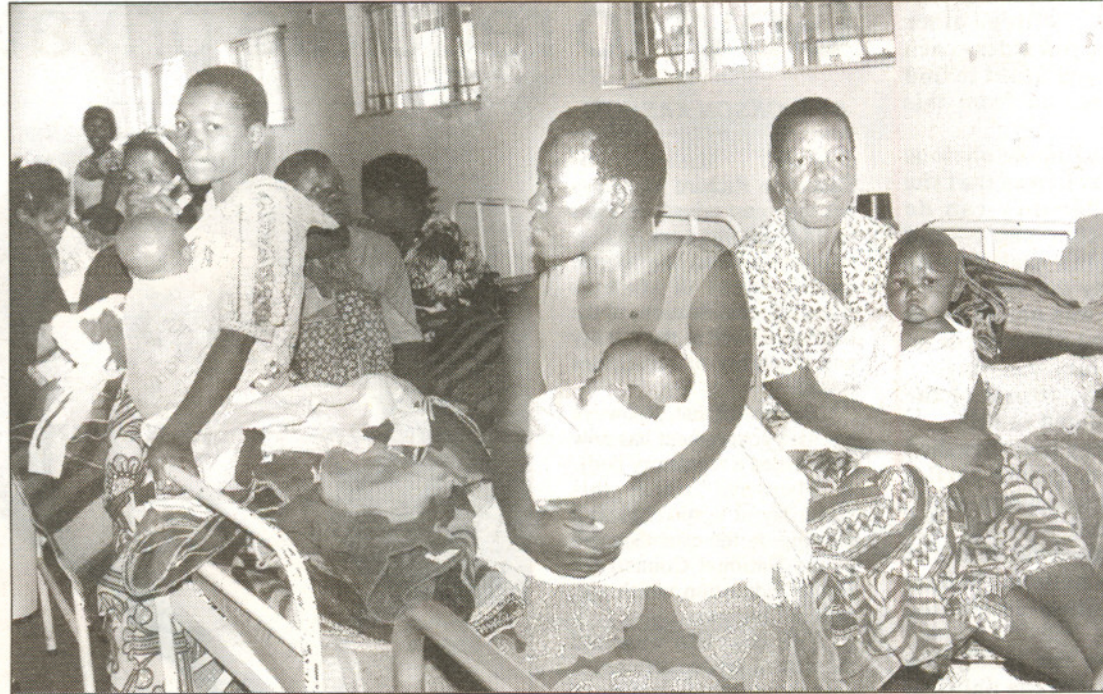
"It [the survey] particularly highlights the dire situation for children and women living in rural areas. It shows that children and women in these areas are most likely to be deprived of access to basic information, health, education, water and sanitation," she said.

The survey shows that maternal mortality for urban is 861 and for rural areas is 802 and the Southern Region reported the highest rate of maternal mortality of 1029 compared to the Central Region at 678 and Northern Region at 543.

But Girma, on a positive note, said the 2006 MICS results show that remarkable progress has been made in some areas like child health and access to safe water supply and that Malawi is on course to achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals.

MICS is the largest nationally representative household sample survey that aims at obtaining the latest and most up to date data at district level on key indicators of the well-being of children and women in the country, according to Unicef and NSO officials.

On fertility, the survey shows Total Fertility Rate in Malawi for one year preceding the survey was 6.3, which means a woman in Malawi would have on average 6.3 children during her reproductive years but the rate in rural areas is 6.6 whereas in urban it is 4.5.



SURVIVORS—Lucky mothers who survived childbirth showcase their babies--File Photo

The survey also says the median age at first birth is 20 years for women in all age groups and women in Malawi space their births on average every two years although the length of birth intervals increases as the mother gets older.

"Teenage pregnancies are reported at 35 percent. Eight percent of teenagers are pregnant with their first child and 27 percent have had a live birth."

The infant mortality rate, according to the survey, is estimated at 72 per 1000 live births, while the under five mortality is 122 per 1000 live births, according to estimates for five years preceding the survey.

The nutritional status for children is not encouraging according to the survey as more than one in five children under the age of five in Malawi are underweight (21 percent), more than two in five under five are stunted (46 percent) and four percent of children in the same age group

are wasted.

"Close to four percent of children under the age of five are severely underweight, 21 percent are severely stunted and one percent severely wasted. In Malawi, six percent of children under five are overweight," says the survey.

Other indicators of the survey, among others, say contraceptive prevalence rate is at 41 percent, condom use rate of contraceptive prevalence rate is at two percent.

Minister of Economic Planning and Development Ken Lipenga, who officially launched the survey report, said government has been developing and implementing long and medium term strategies that translate the national and international goals into reality.

"In 2000, government launched the Malawi Vision 2020. This policy framework sets out a long term development perspective for Malawi. In

May 2002, government launched a three year Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS), which presented a first attempt to translate long term strategy of the Malawi Vision 2020 into medium term focused action plans," said Lipenga.

He, therefore, said the lessons learned in the implementation of MPRS has resulted in the development of a more comprehensive policy namely the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), which Lipenga said aims at stimulating the economic growth.

Lipenga said MICS serves as one of the main monitoring tools by providing necessary data at national, regional and district levels and the information gathered in MICS could also serve as baseline for various intervention programmes under MGDS and other initiatives and help in measuring the progress and success of the ongoing programmes.