

# Leaders Unite to Accelerate Progress on Maternal, Newborn, and Child Survival at HLPF 2025

Every two minutes, a woman [dies](#) during or after childbirth. This translates to nearly [800](#) mothers, daughters, sisters—and future leaders—lost each day to complications we know how to prevent. These are not just numbers. They are lives cut short, families broken, and communities left behind.

These figures are amid slowing momentum toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The maternal mortality rate is [three times](#) higher than the SDG target, and a staggering [80%](#) of countries are not on track to meet their national goals. Reversing this trend will require a strengthened focus on scaling proven interventions and ensuring that women, children, and adolescents remain central to global efforts to achieve health equity by 2030.

In response to this challenge, the Global Leaders Network (GLN) for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health (WCAH)—a unique, Southern-led platform for global health diplomacy chaired by H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa—convened a high-level dialogue on the sidelines of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the United Nations' central platform for reviewing progress on the 2030 Agenda. Held under the theme **“Accelerating Progress on Maternal, Newborn, and Child Survival: Political Leadership and Evidence-Based Solutions,”** the session brought together political leaders, global health experts, donors, and youth advocates to assess progress, share best practices, and galvanise action.

With just five years remaining to reach the SDG targets, the event served as a pivotal moment to reaffirm shared commitments and spotlight strategies to end preventable maternal, newborn, and child deaths. The urgency of the discussion was amplified by mounting pressures on health systems, including reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA), and the growing impacts of climate change, conflict, and economic instability—all of which threaten to reverse hard-won gains in maternal and child survival. Amid these escalating threats, participants delivered a unified message: **no woman or child should die from causes we have the tools to prevent.**

While global progress has been made, including halving the under-five mortality rate since 2000, speakers warned that these gains are stalling. Today, the risk of death before age five is [80 times](#) higher in the highest-mortality country than in the lowest. A child born in Sub-Saharan Africa is 18 times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than one born in Australia or New Zealand. Moreover, children born in conflict-affected settings are [three times](#) more likely to die than their peers in more peaceful countries.

Yet, this downward trajectory is not irreversible. Evidence presented at the GLN event showed that sustained investment and political commitment can save lives. Catherine Russell, Executive Director at UNICEF, highlighted the critical role of midwives, nurses, and community health workers in expanding access to essential services that prevent and treat leading causes of child mortality, including malnutrition, pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhoea. She noted that immunisation alone has saved [154 million lives](#)—mostly children—over the past 50 years. Andrew Saberton, Deputy Executive Director at UNFPA, also shared promising gains from the UNFPA Maternal and Newborn Health Fund, which has contributed to a 40% decline in maternal mortality since 2010. In 2024 alone, over 6 million women accessed safer delivery services, supported by a strategy centred on midwifery and primary health care. More than 226,000 midwives were trained, 751 schools accredited, and countries like Ethiopia, Somalia, and Zambia expanded digital midwifery and emergency obstetric care. Additionally, in West Africa, enhanced services supported safer deliveries for 4 million women. [Learn more here.](#)

Echoing this call for continued investment, Tendai Mtawarira, UNICEF Regional Ambassador and former South African rugby champion and legend, urged the private sector to step up, warning that **failure to invest in maternal and child health is not only a moral failure—but an economic disaster**. Mtawarira's call to action reinforced the urgency of the issue and helps bridge the gap between policy and public engagement. Voices like Tendai Mtawarira's are vital—not only for amplifying the message but for inspiring broader action across sectors and communities.

As the world races toward the deadline for the 2030 SDG goals, the session sent a resounding message: political leadership, bold investment, and evidence-based interventions are essential to protect the lives and futures of women and children. Now is the time to act decisively and collectively.

*The GLN event was co-hosted by South Africa, Nigeria, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, PMNCH, Every Woman Every Newborn Everywhere (EWENE), Child Survival Taskforce, and the Child Survival Action (CSA) Advocacy Action Team and the Global Leaders Network.*