

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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AFRICAN LEADERS ECHO URGENCY TO PRIORITISE MATERNAL NUTRITION ON THE CONTINENT

The African Union Commission Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS) through the Health Systems, Diseases and Nutrition (HSDN) Division, convened a 3-day meeting, in Addis Ababa, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to deliberate on critical nutrition issues impacting mothers across the continent. Over 120 representatives from 13 African nations committed to new actions that scale up maternal nutrition interventions across national health systems.

Pregnancy is a critical period of increased nutrition requirements, yet many women struggle to meet these needs through their diets, resulting in vitamin and mineral deficiencies that can have serious health and survival consequences for both mother and baby. In Africa, an estimated 80% of women of reproductive age suffer from one or more vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and 13% of newborns are born with low birth weight. MMS, commonly known as prenatal vitamins, provide a cost-effective solution to increase the intake of essential vitamins and minerals during pregnancy and improve maternal and newborn health.

The convening held from 12 -14 July, united the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Consortium (HMHB) and diverse stakeholders, including representatives from the African Union Commission, national governments, and others on new actions and recommendations for maternal nutrition policies in Africa. They also identified new approaches to address bottlenecks hindering the scale-up of MMS, including local and regional supply constraints of MMS. Country leaders shared knowledge and experiences to elevate best practices to strengthen national health systems to support maternal health by integrating MMS in antenatal care services.

Highlighting the fundamental role of maternal nutrition in the health and prosperity of communities, **Dr. Lia Tadesse, Minister of Health, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia** urged stakeholders to work together to support all mothers by increasing access to proven solutions, such as prenatal supplements during pregnancy, stating *“Ethiopia is implementing a number of national programs that improve maternal nutrition including micronutrient deficiency.”*

Speaking on behalf of the African Union Commission, **Ms. Inas Mubarak, Head of Health Systems, Diseases and Nutrition** stated, *“We want to seize this opportunity to establish meaningful collaborations and set the pace for concrete action to accelerate the women's nutrition agenda, implementing an MMS strategy and nutrition financing.”*

With renewed momentum among mothers, session participants set a new path forward for collective action for healthier pregnancies across the continent. The official meeting report by HMHB is forthcoming.

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