The Unified Accountability Framework: Supporting country-led efforts with the *Global Strategy for Women's Children's and Adolescents' Health*

Introduction

In September of 2015, UN Secretary-General and world leaders launched the updated *Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2016-2030 (Global Strategy)*[1] alongside the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[2] Based on scientific evidence and country experience, the SDGs and *Global Strategy* recognize the interconnectedness between health, the economy and the environment. Healthy people are key to achieving all of the SDGs and all SDGs contribute to better health and wellbeing.

Women, children and adolescents are at the heart of the comprehensive change the SDGs envisage. For this reason, the UN Secretary-General characterized the *Global Strategy* as a front-runner platform for the implementation of the SDGs. The 'Survive, Thrive and Transform' agenda envisioned in the *Global Strategy* prioritizes a people-centered movement to end preventable deaths, improve health and wellbeing, and drive the universal agenda for sustainable development to 2030.

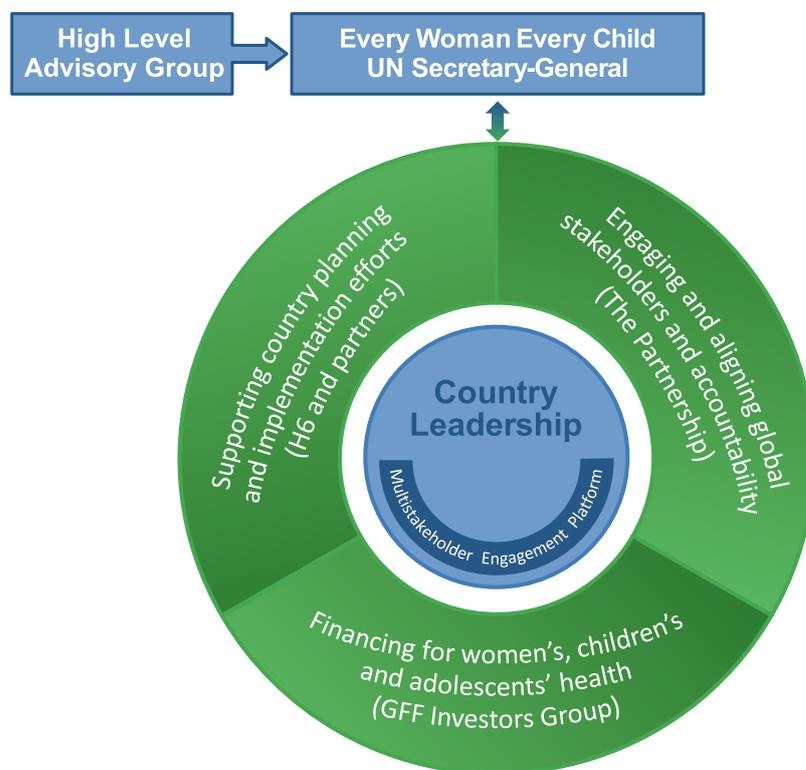## Country leadership to increase accountability beyond 2015

Over the previous two decades, countries that made the fastest progress in improving the health of women, children and adolescents demonstrated effective country leadership at all levels. Effective country leadership ensures the prioritization of national plans to create effective health systems, functioning infrastructure, sufficient funding, a well-equipped workforce, robust data collection for decision-making, transparency and accountability. While the SDGs are not binding, strong political leadership and country commitment are needed to ensure gains in health and development will continue and accelerate.

Essential to accelerating progress for women's, children's, and adolescents' health is accountability. The *Global Strategy*'s key accountability principles prioritize the role of national leadership and ownership of results, strong country capacity to monitor and evaluate, and a reduction in the reporting burden by aligning multistakeholder efforts with the systems countries use to monitor and evaluate their national health strategies. As such, accountability includes not only the tracking of resources but also prioritizing results and rights as set out in the *Global Strategy*. When accountability works well, decision makers have the information required for their planning, investment and implementation.

A multi-stakeholder accountability framework to help countries drive results, resources and rights

Accountability is one of the three pillars of the *Every Woman Every Child* architecture to support country-led implementation of the *Global Strategy* towards achieving the SDGs. This work is coordinated through the *Unified Accountability Framework* (UAF) and supported by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health. The other two pillars are *Technical support* provided by the six organizations responsible for promoting and implementing the global health agenda across the UN system (H6) - UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO, and the World Bank Group, and *Financing* with the Global Financing Facility and others.

Figure 1. EWEC Architecture in support of country-led plans to implement the Global Strategy

Accountability is defined by the Commission on Information and Accountability (CoIA) for Women's and Children's Health[3] as beginning with national sovereignty and the responsibility of a government to its people and to the global community. However, all partners are accountable for the commitments and promises they make and for the health policies and programmes they design and implement. Accountability comprises three interconnected processes – monitor, review and act – that are aimed at learning and continuous improvement.

Countries have taken forward the work under the CoIA framework (Box 1) and the UAF will build on this work, addressing new challenges and opportunities in the SDG era including the improvement of equity, multistakeholder engagement, and multisector action. In 2016, member states of the World Health Assembly in a resolution[4] requested regular reporting in progress towards women's, children's and adolescents' health.

Box 1: Country achievements with CoIA[5]

Nearly 70 low-middle income countries received funding under CoIA since 2010 with over half of those funds going to countries to strengthen long-neglected basic systems, such as those tracking births and deaths, maternal death surveillance and response and civil registration and vital statistics. Results have been impressive: as of 2015, Fifty-five countries were implementing facility-based maternal death surveillance and response systems and 30 countries were implementing community-based death reviews. Likewise, the number of countries with data under the System of Health Accounts 2011 nearly doubled, from 18 to 33 countries, providing a clearer picture of domestic health expenditures and improving prospects for harmonizing with donor and partner funds.

The purpose of the UAF is to provide a way of organizing and bringing together diverse stakeholders and critical elements to streamline the monitor, review and act elements of accountability at all levels (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Global Strategy's Unified Accountability Framework[6]

Key functions of the UAF will be to:

i. *Facilitate tracking of resources, results and rights*, including through multistakeholder commitments and multisector action, to achieve the *Global Strategy* objectives and the SDGs

ii. *Promote alignment* of national, regional and global investments and initiatives in support of the country accountability system and plans, and improve multistakeholder engagement at all levels including through citizens' hearings

iii. *Contribute to national and SDG monitoring through the Global Strategy indicator and monitoring framework[7]* that covers 9 SDGs and prioritizes 60 indicators: 34 from the SDGs and an additional 26 drawn from established global initiatives to help avoid duplication

iv. *Support the critical independent review function through the Independent Accountability Panel (IAP).* The IAP will produce an annual 'State of the World's Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health' report and in so doing identify areas to increase progress and accelerate action

v. *Harmonize with other accountability initiatives,* such as the Health Data Collaborative (HDC), the Countdown to 2030 and others; including to strengthen country information systems as required and support reporting for national planning and on progress towards the *Global Strategy* and SDGs

The value added of the UAF is thus to streamline and strengthen accountability processes by helping countries drive accountability across results, resources and rights in three important ways (Table 1):

Table 1: Focusing on results, resources and rights via the UAF

1. Support for country-lead plans and investments	2. Improve multi-stakeholder engagement and harmonization	3. Strengthening accountability at all levels
• Scaling up activities to a national level is a long-term process: in looking beyond 2015, the UAF is a key vehicle to sustain the momentum and investments towards achievements already made	• Strengthen both the alignment of reporting with the SDGs, and intersectoral-accountability to promote full implementation and harmonization for the *Global Strategy* • The UAF calls for citizens' hearings for the free, active and meaningful participation of citizens at all stages	• Improve linkages between SDG monitoring mechanisms, UN agencies, and other established global monitoring processes such as the IAP, and in health and other sectors • Provide technical support, such as for Countdown 2030, to inform the review and updating process

Accountability is key to achieving the world we want in 2030

Despite tremendous progress made over the previous two decades, there is still a great deal to be done in further reducing preventable deaths, while working to create the conditions for a healthy, prosperous, sustainable future for every person, everywhere.

Accountability is central to human rights and in particular to ensure constructive, corrective change. Country leadership in support of the UAF is thus essential to monitoring and implementation, as well as tracking progress towards the SDGs' transformative agenda.

By supporting the *Global Strategy* and SDGs, countries and global stakeholders have committed to not only stop preventable deaths, but also create lifelong opportunities for health and wellbeing for all women, children and adolescents and ensure that no one is left behind. Engage in the UAF to help make these commitments a reality.

For further information on the UAF and its implementation, please contact The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health Secretariat, pmnch@who.int.

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