



AFRICA/RWANDA - Maternal and infant mortality rates are improving but there is still a long way to go for health care in the Country

Gicumbi (Agenzia Fides) - In Rwanda, one of the countries with the worst indicators in the world for maternal and child mortality, the government is working to ensure access to lifesaving medical care for mothers and their children. Among the objectives is to vaccinate more than five million children and more than 300,000 mothers against tetanus and to administer them with vitamin A. The country has recorded significant success in maternal and child health programs, reducing the mortality of children under five years from 152 per 1000 live births in 2005 to 103 in 2008, and the mortality rate of those less than one year of age from 86 per 1000 live births in 2005 to 62 in 2008. Maternal mortality declined from 750 per 100,000 live births in 2005 to 383 in 2009. By comparison, nearby Uganda has a mortality rate for children under five years of 130 per 1000 live births and a maternal mortality rate of 440 per 100,000, while Kenya recorded 130 per 1000 live births and 560 per 100,000 respectively.

Also, in Rwanda there are about 60,000 health agents and thanks to their work to raise awareness, disease numbers are falling. The country has 97% vaccination coverage for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. In 2009, it was one of the first African countries to introduce a vaccination program for the combined pneumococcus vaccine to prevent pneumococcus disease, which kills nearly 800,000 children under five every year, particularly in poorer countries. In 2011, Rwanda also plans to include vaccines against the rotavirus, which each year kills more than half a million children around the world, and against the human papilloma virus (HPV), which may predispose women to cancer of the uterus. However, there is still much to do for the health system to improve. For example, the District of Gicumbi, which has a total population of about 300,000 people, has 21 health centres unevenly distributed. In all of Rwanda there is any one doctor per 12,000 persons and one nurse per 1,690. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 07/12/2010)