

NEWS

African Science Academy Development Initiative

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AFRICAN SCIENCE ACADEMY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH; GHANA ACADEMY CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

ACCRA, Ghana — The fifth annual conference of the African Science Academy Development Initiative (ASADI) began today by celebrating the 50th anniversary of the host, the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, and participants vowed to raise awareness of scientific advances that could be better utilized to reduce the staggering mortality rate of women, newborns, and children in sub-Saharan Africa.

"I think it is most opportune that we are dealing with this theme [of maternal, newborn, and child health], especially as it affords participating academies such as ours the opportunity to explore the potential to provide additional support to national policy formation in this area," said Professor Reginald Fraser Amonoo, president of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, which was founded in 1959, just two years after the country gained independence.

The evening's opening ceremony included video messages from former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and leaders of national science academies in the U.S. and Europe, congratulating the Ghana academy on its anniversary and emphasizing the importance of evidence-based advice in the policymaking process, particularly when it comes to decisions affecting maternal, newborn, and child health. In addition, Mary Robinson, past president of Ireland and former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered a video message extolling increased access to vaccines for children in Africa, which is the goal of the GAVI Alliance that she now chairs.

The conference's focus on maternal, newborn, and child health was accented by the release of a new report by the seven African science academies participating in ASADI. *Science In Action: Saving the Lives of Africa's Mothers, Newborns, and Children* says that millions of lives could be saved in sub-Saharan Africa by scaling up well-established, low-cost health care interventions. Even small, incremental increases in the percentage of women and children who are offered these interventions could save hundreds of thousands of lives, the report concludes. Reducing maternal and child mortality rates is the explicit focus of two of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals.

Leading health experts from Africa and around the world will spend the next two days at the conference presenting the latest trends in maternal, newborn, and child health in sub-Saharan Africa. These experts will also join officials from the national science academies as well as members of parliament and other African policymakers to discuss how science academies can play a greater role in informing strategies to reduce maternal, newborn, and child mortality.

(MORE)

ASADI is a multiyear, collaborative effort among the U.S. National Academies and the national science academies of Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda, as well as the regional African Academy of Sciences. The goal of the initiative, which is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is to strengthen the capacity of the African science academies to provide evidence-based advice to better inform policymaking and public discourse.

For more information on ASADI, including links to the conference agenda, presentations, and the *Science In Action* report, visit <<http://nationalacademies.org/asadi>>. The U.S. National Academies are made up of the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council.

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