

21 March 2020

## A message of solidarity on Covid-19

**The Rt Hon. Helen Clark**

***Board Chair, The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health  
Former Prime Minister, New Zealand***

At PMNCH, our thoughts are with everyone affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Together with our many partners and the UN Secretary-General's Every Woman Every Child movement, we stand resolute with you, working to get through this difficult time.

PMNCH works with incredible organizations around the world – governments, health services, charitable foundations, the private sector, civil society at large – and we are inspired by the stories we hear about the vital work they are doing right now. Let us continue to stand together, to speak with one voice, and to focus on action – not fear.

We are humbled by the heroism of health workers on the front lines of this crisis. It's striking that, in the war on COVID-19, women make up most of the frontline troops. WHO research tells us that seventy per cent of healthcare workers around the world are women. In China's Hubei province, where the outbreak began, the proportion was ninety per cent. Female healthcare workers on the front lines could be hit hardest by the closure of schools, as women still do over three-quarters of all unpaid care work, which includes the care of children.

And let's not make the mistakes of previous pandemics. Too often, women – along with children, adolescents and the most vulnerable – haven't received their fair share of resources and services. They've been excluded from decision-making. Their needs have too often been overlooked when it comes to emergency services. And the resources for those emergency services have too often come disproportionately at their expense.

Pandemics expose the lack of equity and fairness – in our societies. The Ebola epidemic in Africa, for instance, reduced the capacity of already fragile health systems, setting back progress on women, children and adolescents' health. Research shows that progress on maternal mortality was set back 15 or 20 years in some countries.

Yet times of crisis also give us a chance to redress the balance and to build stronger partnerships for action. We can achieve much more by communicating, planning, and working together in partnership for the wellbeing of women, children, and adolescents. This pandemic is not the way we wanted health to get to the top of the political agenda. But now it's here, let's seize the moment and work together to show why equity matters even more in times of crisis.

PMNCH is working closely with Every Woman Every Child to disseminate Covid-19 related resources, tools, and information, especially focused on the health of women, children and adolescents:

<https://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2020/guidance-on-COVID-19/en/>.  
<https://www.everywomaneverychild.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-covid-19/>.

In doing so, we take our lead from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres:

*"This is a time for prudence, not panic. Science, not stigma. Facts, not fear."*

We will come through this together.

Thank you for all your efforts, and let us continue our efforts to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of women, children, and adolescents.