Monitoring Health Equity in the MDGs: A Practical Guide

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Preface

The global consensus represented by the MDGs is a new point of departure for the development community. The UN Millennium Project and scores of other decision-makers, activists, bilateral aid organizations, and communities are already deeply immersed in efforts to reach the (Sachs et al. 2004, UNDP 2003). Yet this global effort could still benefit from explicit and systematic commitment to equity at the country level. Well-defined, equity-sensitive targets—linked to relevant data sources—are necessary to ensure that poor, marginalized, and vulnerable groups are given opportunities for improved health and access to health services (Freedman et al. 2004, Gwatkin 2003).

The original purpose of this analysis was to show how to monitor the maternal and child health MDGs in an equity-sensitive manner. Using data from broad-scale, international household-level surveys—the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)—that analysis (which examined six countries using 20 health indicators and six social strata to ground recommendations in current data) demonstrated that in order to understand and promote equity, it is necessary and feasible to establish a baseline using a variety of indicators and stratifiers, even in very low-income, data-poor countries.

This Practical Guide builds on the previous work and addresses a wider audience, providing specific technical advice on how to undertake a simple equity analysis using population-based surveys.

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1 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight poverty alleviation goals set forth by the United Nations at the Millennium Summit in 2000. Goal Four is to reduce child mortality by two thirds and Goal Five is to reduce maternal mortality by three-fourths. All of the goals have a target date of 2015, using a 1990 baseline. Other goals are also relevant to maternal and child health. For example, ‘proportion of underweight children’ is the indicator used in Goal One (‘to halve extreme poverty and hunger’).

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