

## SEDIBENG DISTRICT PROFILE

## Supporting enhanced child health services

With support from BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities, PATH's Window of Opportunity project is supporting stakeholders in Sedibeng District, Gauteng, South Africa, to enhance child health services. Interventions are focused on improving health and development during the window of opportunity between pregnancy and two years of age—the most critical time to shape long-term physical, cognitive, and emotional health and development of children.

Sedibeng's children, living in both urban and rural areas, face high rates of infectious diseases, diarrhea, and lower respiratory tract infections. Significant pockets of malnutrition in some parts of the district put children at increased risk for childhood illnesses, stunted growth, developmental delays, and death.

### Maternal and child health indicators, Sedibeng

Early antenatal care use	35.8% <sup>1</sup>
Maternal mortality ratio	156.3 (per 100,000 live births) <sup>2</sup>
Infant mortality rate	45.9 (per 1,000 live births) <sup>3</sup>
Low birthweight rate	14.3% <sup>4</sup>

### ASSESSING NEEDS FOR CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

PATH conducted a rapid qualitative assessment to understand challenges and opportunities for improving child health and development in the district, including key informant interviews with government and nongovernment stakeholders at the provincial, district, and subdistrict levels; focus group discussions with nurses and users of primary health care services; and community dialogues with stakeholders and beneficiaries. Findings include:

#### Needs for earlier, comprehensive antenatal care

Participants noted that pregnant women visit health facilities for antenatal care (ANC) too late—often when they are



seven months pregnant or already in labor, adding that any complications or treatment required for the safe delivery of a healthy baby are difficult to manage by that time. Community members mentioned long waiting lines, nurses' poor attitudes, transport costs, and pressure from grandmothers as reasons for delays in seeking ANC services.

***"We try to get women onto the Wellness Programme in order to get early bookings, but low literacy levels keep them from coming to the hospital. Stigma is also still a big issue."*** Key informant, Sedibeng District Health

#### Need to enhance breastfeeding practices

According to participants, many mothers do not practice exclusive breastfeeding because of lack of knowledge and contradicting messages. Several community members felt that exclusive breastfeeding for six months is very difficult and impractical. Conflicting pressures from home, leaving the baby with another caregiver while at work or in school, and confusion about what to do in the case of inadequate breastmilk supply or what to feed when the baby has diarrhea are some of the reasons that mothers practice mixed feeding (giving other foods or fluids in addition to breastmilk before six months of age), which has been shown to increase the risks of HIV transmission and malnutrition.

#### Health systems facing significant challenges

Participants discussed a range of health systems challenges, including lack of supplies, pharmaceuticals, and equipment

such as neonatal resuscitators; poor communication between health facilities; and inadequate emergency medical services. They described inadequate space for mothers and children at health facilities as a key challenge. For example, at Heidelberg Hospital, antenatal and postnatal patients share a crowded ward, making observation difficult. The practice of keeping newborns and other pediatric patients together results in an increased risk of infection, especially for premature babies.

Participants also noted the need for more health workers trained in Integrated Management of Childhood Illness, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT), and other protocols. This has resulted in inappropriate referrals for mothers and children.

#### Challenges in integrating nutrition services across the district

District health officials cited the need to integrate nutrition services into health and early childhood development programming. The district requested a preliminary nutritional survey and training of health and early childhood development staff on nutrition and nutritional services.

#### COMBINING HEALTH, NUTRITION, AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

PATH collaborated with district and national stakeholders to develop a targeted package of interventions based on findings from the assessment. Activities are building on the district's success in improving PMTCT services as well as systems enhancements that have been implemented at Kopanong Hospital. The project will support improvements to the district's child health services, emphasizing early diagnosis of malnutrition and strengthening the integration of nutrition services throughout the district.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

PATH will start implementing activities in Emfuleni and Lesedi local municipalities. Over the next four years, the project will expand to other areas, reaching more mothers and children with interventions that aim to improve nutritional status, enhance health and development, and save

lives. The project will support the district to improve the integration and quality of health and development services, build the capacity of supervisors to train and mentor health providers, and implement continuous quality improvement plans. Building community ownership and capacity and tailoring activities to local needs will help to ensure that improvements in child health and development outcomes are sustained beyond the life of the project.

#### ABOUT THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

The Window of Opportunity project is a five-year initiative led by PATH, with support from BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities, that focuses on improving the health and development of children younger than two years in South Africa and Mozambique.

#### ABOUT BHP BILLITON SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

In support of BHP Billiton's commitment to its host communities to invest one percent of its pre-tax profits (a rolling three-year average), the company developed BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities (BSC). BSC is designed to promote improved quality of life through conservation of the environment, relief of poverty and hardship, and development of communities' resilience and capacity to advocate for and manage effective change. BSC partners with key nongovernmental organizations to support social and environmental projects that directly address the Millennium Development Goals in developing countries where the company operates. Projects are funded for a minimum of three years. BSC operates independently of BHP Billiton and does not seek to further BHP Billiton commercial interests.

#### References

1. District Health Plan 2012-2013, Sedibeng.
2. Saving Mothers 2008-2010: Fifth report on the confidential enquiries into maternal deaths in South Africa; South Africa Department of Health, 2012.
3. StatsSA, 2008, as reported in 1st Triennial Report of the Committee on Morbidity and Mortality in Children Under 5 Years (CoMMiC), South Africa; 2011.
4. District Health Information System; 2011.

*Photo: PATH/Vongai Makamure*



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