

RUSUTSU, Japan, July 9—The Group of Eight summit here is over and people are counting wins and losses. As usual there's good news and sort-of-bad news for us in the maternal and newborn health community—but I'm an optimist and my glass is always a bit more than half full.

The big issues here were climate change, the global food crisis and the political situation in Zimbabwe, but the NGO Health Group press conference this morning was very well attended. We're in the game, we made progress – more than most expected, less than some had hoped. Now to take things forward – faster!

First the good news:

- This was the first time the G-8 agenda addressed maternal, newborn, and child health (MDGs 4 and 5).
- Host country Japan championed our issues and recognized the importance of taking action on maternal and newborn health as key to reducing poverty.
- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gave impressive early prominence to maternal health in his statement to the press at the opening. Considering the issues competing for attention, this was monumental.
- The final G-8 communiqué (in paragraph 46c) spells it out: “Progress toward achieving MDGs 4 and 5 is **seriously** off track...the continuum of prevention and care...should include a greater focus on maternal, newborn and child health. Reproductive health should be made widely accessible.” That's just what we want the world to hear.
- An accompanying document, The Toyako Framework for Action on Global Health, outlines recommendations from the G-8 Health Experts Group to the G-8 leaders, and includes better, significant, and stronger language related to maternal, newborn and child health. The reference there follows the call for strengthening health systems.
- Sarah Brown, wife of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, confirmed her status as a major advocate for our issues. At the Ladies' Lunch yesterday, she talked about maternal ill health and mortality and said she hoped others would join in. And last night, she stood out when the G-8 leaders wished upon a star, marking the Tanabata festival. [A legend says two stars normally separated by the Milky Way are allowed to meet only once a year, on 7 July. The Japanese make wishes on that day, writing messages on strips of paper and tying them to bamboo branches.] Brown's wish was to see the end of mishaps related to pregnancy and childbirth. Go, Sarah Brown!
- The G-8 concluded with a commitment to accountability and to including global health as a standing agenda item in the G-8 summits.

Now the not-so-good news:

- Related language in the whole health section of the final G-8 Communiqué is weak and convoluted: “G-8 will take concrete steps **to work toward improving** the link between HIV/AIDS activities and sexual and reproductive health and voluntary family planning programs, including preventing mother-to-child transmission, and to achieve the MDGs by adopting a multi-sectoral approach and by fostering community involvement and participation.” Really, couldn't they have done better than “work toward improving”??
- The financial commitment needed to achieve MDGs 4 and 5 (\$10.2B additional annual spending for maternal, newborn, and child health) is missing.
- We lost important language calling for universal access to reproductive health services, the very language that is unpopular with the U.S. government.
- The expected commitment of US\$60 billion over three years to fight HIV and AIDS was revised to be \$60 billion over five years. This was a major frustration and disappointment to the HIV and AIDS people here, who surround me where I work.

As I said, now comes the adding-up. We'll be posting a scorecard that our NGO Health Group devised, a tally of G-8 achievements and failures that got major attention at our press conference this morning. Overall, the conference was a good start for us. The groundwork has been laid and the door is open—we just need to pick up the speed of our walk through it.

Related resources:

[The Final G-8 Communiqué on Development and Africa](#)

[The Toyako Framework for Action on Global Health](#)