



ENFANTS DU MONDE AND THE IFC APPROACH TO HEALTH CARE: *Working with Individuals, Families and Communities to Improve Maternal and Newborn Health*

“The health of mothers and newborns is everyone’s responsibility”

To implement this vision, Enfants du Monde has been developing health programmes for several years in tandem with governments and local and international organisations. The goal is to work together and create an effective approach for achieving sustainable results at the national level.

Enfants du Monde bases its work on *the IFC approach working with individuals, families and communities to improve maternal and newborn health*, advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The major health care issues in disadvantaged countries are as follows:

- Health care facilities are inaccessible to a majority of the population (lack of transportation, large distances between villages and medical facilities, expensive medical fees, etc.);
- The emphasis is on disease and its prevention (building hospitals, vaccination campaigns, etc.) instead of on the importance teaching people to take care of their own health;
- Scarce health care resources are not being used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The IFC approach addresses these issues by assuming that everyone – including individuals, families and communities – has the ability to take care of their own health, and that networking together contributes to improving the health of mothers and children.

The IFC approach is primarily about creating relationships, social networks and collaborations between health services, communities, families and individuals, thereby fostering more efficient care for mothers and babies. At the same time, it gives individuals, families and communities more control over their lives. The quality of medical services, as well as their accessibility, is improved.

Maternal and newborn health initiatives are defined by working together with the local population and authorities using a participatory community-based diagnostic process.

The IFC approach is based on the concept of health promotion that was defined in the 1986 Ottawa Charter as *“the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.”*

Examples of the IFC approach at work:

- **Information and awareness-raising activities** are offered to pregnant women and mothers, to their families and to local authorities. They learn to recognize danger signs during pregnancy and to go to the hospital in case of an emergency. They also learn simple things that can be done to keep themselves healthy and take better care of themselves and their newborn babies.

Results: More women come for follow-up exams during pregnancy, and they can recognize emergencies and take swift action. They can also take better care of their newborn babies. Husbands become more involved in their wives’ pregnancies and more births occur in the hospital (which greatly reduces mortality).



- Medical facilities are offering **free periodic examinations** for newborns.
Results: Babies are healthier and there are fewer deaths from pneumonia and diarrhea.
- Contracts have been arranged with taxi drivers and the police for **free emergency transportation** (paid by local authorities).
Results: The hospital is accessible to families who live at a distance, or who lack the resources to pay for transportation.
- **Health information brochures written in the local language** are offered to women and their families.
Result: Villagers can take better care of their own health.
- **Local staff is better trained** for handling emergencies and monitoring pregnant women and newborn babies. Obstetricians are available more often for prenatal and postnatal examinations, and provide more information to pregnant women and mothers.
Result: The quality of health care has improved.
- **Simple and inexpensive changes** have been made in health care facilities – for example, the creation of a maternity ward has reduced waiting time for pregnant women and mothers.
- **The local population, organisations and authorities are working together.**
Result: Programmes that are effective and tailored to the needs of the population have been established. Long-term local health programmes have been integrated into the national health care plans and implemented throughout the country.