



## VAIKOLOA

### Pacific Primary Health Care Treasures

*Vai (water) is a symbol of 'life-source' and koloa (treasures) to share*

## Keeping promises, measuring results: the Pacific Maternal and Child Health Indicators Project

**Fiona Langridge** BHSc, MSc; **Teuila Percival** MBChB, FRACP; **Lani Stowers** BBus Health Admin (HIM)  
Pacific Maternal and Child Health Indicators Project Team, Pacific Health Section, School of Population Health,  
The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

*There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.*  
—Nelson Mandela

The key indicators used to measure maternal and child health globally are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 4 and MDG 5 (see Box 1).<sup>1</sup> These latter two goals are the furthest from being achieved by 2015.<sup>2</sup> All countries that are signatory to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should be aware it is the right of every child to good health and protection from harm. The future of any young and developing nation depends on the wellbeing of its most important resource—the children, who will be the next leaders. Horton<sup>3</sup> outlines 10 reasons why the needs of women and children continue to remain 'invisible'. One of the reasons he cites concerns the importance of evaluation. Not enough time has been spent measuring the effects of policies and there is a deficit of data to assist in decision-making.

*Box 1. Relevant global maternal and child health millennium development goals.<sup>1</sup>*

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger  
MDG 4: Reduce child mortality  
MDG 5: Improve maternal health  
MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

lacking but very much needed.<sup>5</sup> Not a great deal has changed since Finau discussed the challenges for health information systems in the Pacific in 1994 (Box 2).<sup>6</sup> Growing disparities and emerging health problems in the Pacific are not highlighted by generalised global health indicators, such as the MDGs and mortality. More sensitive maternal and child health (MCH) indicators will unearth the hidden and actual MCH issues. This can potentially create a policy environment where investment in MCH will occur in the Pacific.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE TO: Fiona Langridge

School of Population Health, The University of Auckland, PB 92019, Auckland, New Zealand  
f.langridge@auckland.ac.nz

The Pacific region has been neglected with regard to measuring health development and much of the research is anecdotal.<sup>4</sup> There is a paucity of data, highlighted by the need to monitor MDGs. Alongside this, there are challenges such as the rapid transition between communicable and non-communicable diseases in some populations. Civil registration and vital statistics systems are

In terms of child mortality improvements, the Pacific does not appear to be faring well in comparison to the rest of the world. A report from UNICEF and other organisations indicates that of all the MDG regions, Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have the furthest to go to achieve MDG 4.<sup>7</sup> They have only achieved around a 30% reduction in under-five mortality, and are there-

fore not on track to reach this goal. It is worth mentioning that Sub-Saharan Africa has the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This is not a major factor for Oceania. Improving maternal and child health is a priority for Pacific governments, policy makers, and global health and donor organisations.

The United Nations Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health has developed a framework for monitoring and reporting on MCH progress, outcomes and investment.<sup>2</sup> This has included developing a core set of indicators to measure MCH, alongside improving health information and vital statistics.<sup>1</sup>

The Pacific Maternal and Child Health Indicators Project (CHIP) *Keeping Promises, Measuring Results* is reviewing the appropriateness and functionality of the 11 core MCH indicators for the Pacific region. The effectiveness of indicators and government and donors' ability to measure progress and investment in a meaningful way is reliant on the quality of that data and information. Equally, indicators need to be relevant to the Pacific Island nation context reflecting local health profiles. Some indicators may lack relevance in the Pacific context given persisting data gaps and health profiles at variance with other regions in the world. The Pacific CHIP team is looking at available data sources for the 11 core indicators and the relevance and functionality of those indicators for the Pacific. After review and consultation with expert informants, a framework of MCH indicators for the Pacific will be developed. This will build on global indicators, with recommended modifications or additions. The steps in health information systems or policy needed to achieve this will be proposed. This will culminate in an increased focus on and advocacy for the health of Pacific mothers and children.

*Box 2. Finau's comments on the challenges of Pacific health information systems.<sup>6</sup>*

Health statistics and medical records of many hospitals are tucked away in dingy corners with insufficient room, manual card systems and poorly trained staff. Careers in these offices are either temporary until something better comes along or terminal in that no better career options can be found. (p. 165)

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