Govt seeks help to cut maternal deaths

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The Health Minister has solicited help in identifying expectant mothers at risk to cut maternal deaths further.

“We have to do a lot more so that they (would-be mothers at risk) come to the health centres,” AFM Ruhal Haque said. “If they come, we have facilities to save them.”

The minister made the comment while launching of a Japan International Cooperation Agency’s (JICA) publication ‘Narsingdi Model in Bangladesh’ that tells the story of how mothers and newborns can be saved with the available resources with the help of local people.

With 32 newborns die against 1000 births, Bangladesh is one of the few developing countries that are on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4. The 194 deaths per 100,000 mothers giving birth also put the country on MDG-5 track.
But experts say to cut the deaths further, would-be mothers, particularly those at risk, should be brought under the health coverage.

The minister stressed on people’s participation in the safe motherhood programme as lessons learnt in Narsingdi and said, “It’s not always money. It is the willingness, it’s cooperation and concerted effort that can save mothers.”

JICA started its Narsingdi safe motherhood project in July 2006 and after it ended in 2011, the project has been taken by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as a ‘Narsingdi model’ for its ‘significant’ reduction of maternal deaths with ‘simple’ approach.

The project could cut maternal deaths to 0.4 percent from 1.7 percent with the help of local government bodies in Narsingdi district.

Under the project, a support system at the homes for pregnant women and newborns in any emergencies has also been developed.

It is claimed to have empowered local people, enhanced hospital management within the given resources and linked them together with the local government’s support.

Due to its ‘success’ stories, the project was expanded to two more districts – Satkhira and Jessore, apart from Narsingdi two years back.

The expansion was designed with the neonatal activities as the reduction of neonatal deaths was slow in Bangladesh.

JICA says it launched the publication on Wednesday to share its Narsingdi experiences and serve as a reference for ‘advocacy, policy planning and monitoring’ of safe motherhood programmes.

JICA Chief Representative Takao Toda said the model can be demonstrated as a ‘Bangladesh model’ in the world.
He said many countries were stunned to see Bangladesh’s progress in cutting maternal deaths. “The Secretary of Kenya came to learn from this model,” he said.

Toda expected that the Bangladesh government would ‘continue its efforts’ to expand the project’s achievements.

Chaired by the Health Secretary MM Neazuddin, Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Shiro Sadoshima, WHO Representative Thushara E I Fernando and Director General of family planning services AKM Amir Hossain spoke in the launching ceremony.

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