

# Human Security and Quality Growth

Introducing concrete examples that highlight the two pillars of JICA's mission.



## SCENE 1 Health Maternal and Child Health handbooks (MCH handbooks) providing the strength to live

Whether it be for a mother nurturing a new life, a child preparing to be born, or a father carefully watching over them, Maternal and Child Health handbooks (MCH handbooks) are found to be very useful all over the world as health records of mother and child. These handbooks are a guide filled with essential knowledge for a mother to raise her child, secure their health, and protect them from threats to their life.



Maternal and Child Health Record Books in Ghana feature various illustrations to make them easier to understand for mothers and family members. Fathers are intentionally included in the illustrations to encourage them to provide care and support during pregnancy, birth, and thereafter.

Distribution of MCH Record Books has only just begun in Ghana. Currently 1,000 health workers throughout the country are undergoing training on how to use MCH Record Books in order to provide quality services.

### Delivering information that anyone can understand and put into practice

The MCH handbook is a tool that Japan has introduced to the world. With the cooperation of JICA, 9 million of these books are now issued annually in 29 countries. The MCH handbook is an important document for recording the health of mother and child from early pregnancy to infancy. However, the MCH handbook that JICA is helping to promote in developing countries is more than just records. As you flip through the pages, you can see what to do while pregnant, understand warning signs of danger to mothers and to infants, get information on the importance of fathers participating in rearing children, and see other contents provided with various illustrations. It is a book designed to casually look through and learn. Akiko Hagiwara, JICA Senior Advisor, explains the reason for creating the book:

“All the information in the MCH handbook is very important,

but it can only be useful if presented in a way that anyone can understand, and if health workers also provide a solid explanation of the contents with a sincere attitude and simple language. We took care to provide content that can encourage mothers to understand and give them the confidence to say, ‘I can do this, too. I’ll give it a try.’”

Human security includes the concept of protecting people from a lack of social services such as health and medical care. Along with providing protection, empowerment of the beneficiary is another important aspect of human security. Mothers and family members can take active roles and make decisions on ways to improve their own health.

Dr. Hagiwara is currently promoting the use of the new combined Maternal and Child Health Record Books with the Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service. For many years, pregnant women in Ghana had received two books: “Maternal

Health Records” for themselves and “Child Health Records” for their children. However, there was room for improvement because pregnant women and mothers didn’t know what to do if something happens with their physical condition or that of their children.

“If mothers learn the essential information on what to do and what the danger signs are, they can then make their own decision on when to go in for an exam or treatment in addition to the fixed schedule. It instills a sense of confidence and responsibility. They will then keep scheduled visits to health facilities and consult with a health worker to protect their lives. MCH Record Books help close the gap between mothers and health services, and serve as a tool of empowerment so that they can live healthier lives. In Ghana, health workers are being trained in how to explain to mothers in a respectful manner how to utilize the new combined MCH Record Books. They are expected to disseminate its usefulness in understanding current health conditions of mother and a child, as well as the impor-

ance of seeking appropriate services and care on time. At first, approximately 1,000 health workers will be trained as facilitators, and then the trained facilitators will train other health workers throughout Ghana.”

International conferences on the MCH handbook were held in Kenya and Cameroon, and the handbook is being promoted in Uganda and other African countries. In collaboration with JICA, WHO issued guidelines for home-based records for maternal, newborn and child health in 2018. The MCH handbook will play an important role in connecting households, medical institutions, and government agencies.

Digitalization is being considered in order to expand the role of MCH handbooks in the future. If they are digitized, the records can be integrated into lifetime health records. For the multilingual nation of Ghana, digital applications may open up avenues to provide information to mothers and family members in various languages. MCH handbooks are evolving as a passport to a life with safety and security.