

Shaping the Future of SRHR: Emerging Trends and Research Directions

A Strategic Overview

Dr Moazzam Ali MBBS, PhD, MPH

Department of Life course, Health and Reproduction (LHR)



The Unfinished Agenda: A Snapshot of Global SRHR Challenges



❑ **Maternal and Infant Mortality:**

- ~152,000 maternal deaths annually (2020).
- 2.4 million neonatal deaths & 1.9 million stillbirths annually (2021).
- 98% of stillbirths occur in LMICs.

❑ **Child Marriages:**

- ~39,000 girls married every day.
- 32 million adolescent girls living in countries with high child marriage rates.
- Nearly 1 million girls under 15 give birth each year, mostly in low- and middle-income countries

❑ **Unmet Contraception Needs:**

- 164 million women of reproductive age have an unmet need for modern contraception (2024).

❑ **Induced Abortions:**

- ~73 million induced abortions occur annually worldwide.

❑ **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):**

- ~376 million new infections annually of chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and trichomoniasis.

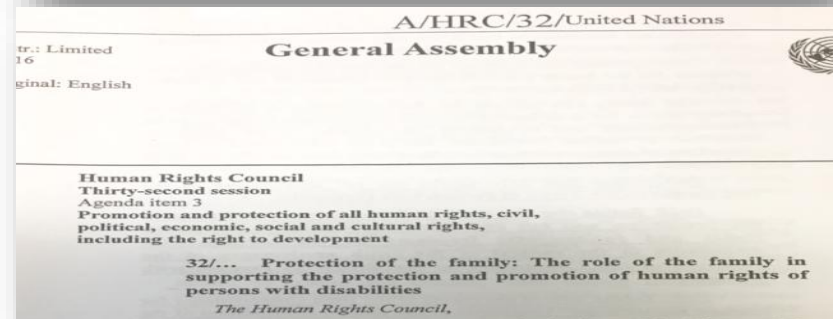
❑ **Intimate Partner Violence:**

- ~1 in 3 women globally have experienced physical and/or sexual IPV.

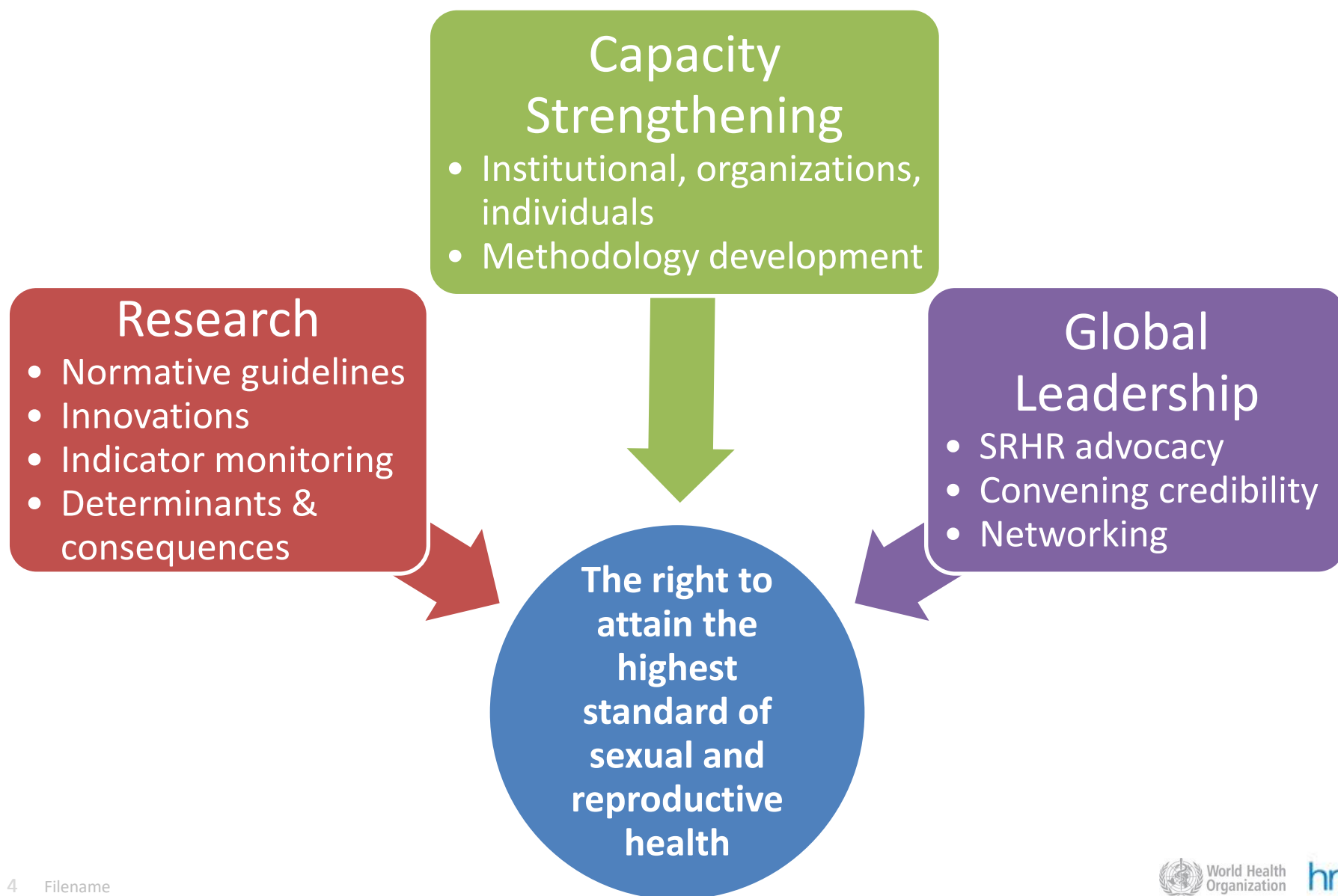


The Evolving Landscape: Persistent and Emerging Challenges

- ❑ **Political & Social Barriers:** Addressing comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and gender equality remains politically contested. Recent policy trends show both advancement and retrogression in SRHR globally.
- ❑ **Humanitarian Crises:** Integrating SRHR into humanitarian responses is complex but essential. Clear modalities and frameworks are still being developed to ensure effective implementation in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- ❑ **Systemic Gaps:** Weak health systems, inadequate financing, and a shortage of trained health workers in many LMICs hinder progress.
- ❑ **Data & Accountability:** A lack of timely, high-quality, and disaggregated data makes it difficult to track progress, ensure equity, and hold decision-makers accountable.

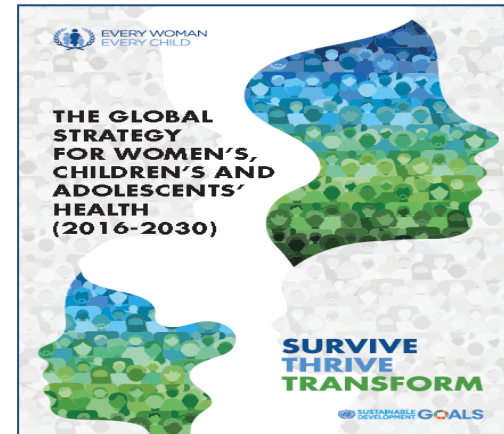


WHO's core functions



Strategic Alignment: WHO's Core Functions & the SDGs

- **WHO's Core Functions:** Leadership, research agenda, norms and standards, policy options, technical support, and monitoring health trends.
- **Alignment with SDGs:** Direct contributions to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), specifically indicators 3.1, 3.2, 3.7, and 3.8.
- **Guiding Principles of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health:**
 - **Equity:** Reach the most vulnerable and leave no one behind.
 - **Universality:** For all countries, with a specific focus on humanitarian settings.
 - **Adolescents:** The "SDG generation" (a 10-year-old in 2016 will be 24 in 2030).
 - **Life-course approach:** Health and well-being are interconnected across ages and generations.
 - **Multisectoral approach:** Joint progress across sectors like nutrition, education, and WASH.



Contributing to SDG indicators related to SRHR



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3.1.1	Guidance on increasing access to contraception and improving maternal health services to reduce maternal deaths and improve well-being
SDG 3.1.2	Guidance on strategies to increase access to SBA and quality of SBA services
SDG 3.2	Research to improve quality of perinatal care and development of normative guidance
SDG 3.3	Implementation research to support implementation of the global STI strategy and to strengthen SRHR-HIV linkages
SDG 3.7.1	Implementation research to support scaling up of effective interventions to satisfy demand for contraception
SDG 3.7.2	Implementation research to support reduction of unintended pregnancy among adolescents

5 GENDER EQUALITY



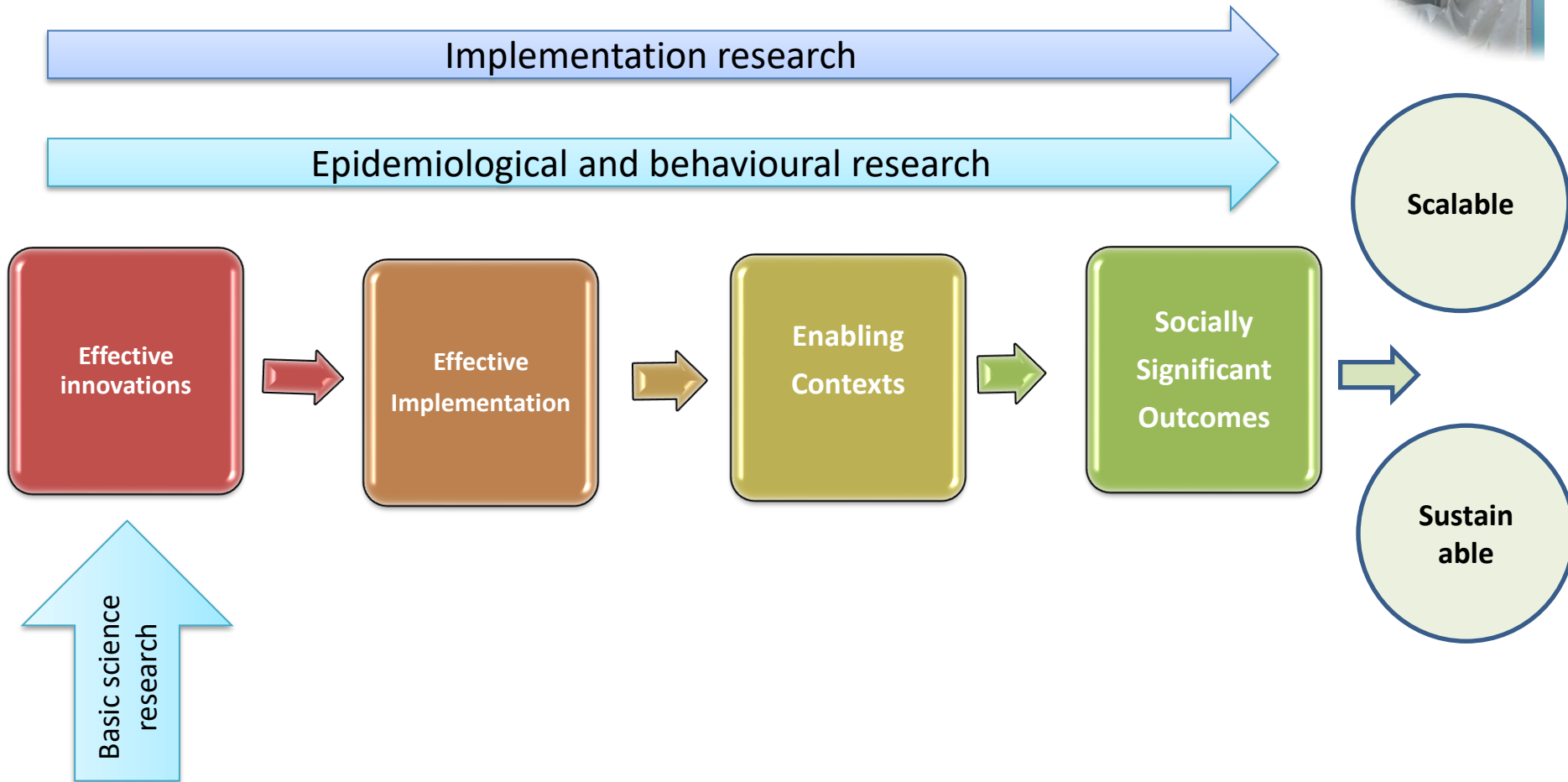
SDG 5.2	Implementation research to support the global plan of action to strengthen health systems response to violence against women, girls and children
SDG 5.3.1	Research and technical support to parliamentarians to determine how to legislate effectively against CEFM
SDG 5.3.2	Research to improve medical care and management of girls & women with FGM in accordance with WHO guidance
SDG 5.6	Technical support to enable states to safeguard rights to universal access to SRH services

Strategic directions for WHO: Transitions to align with trends



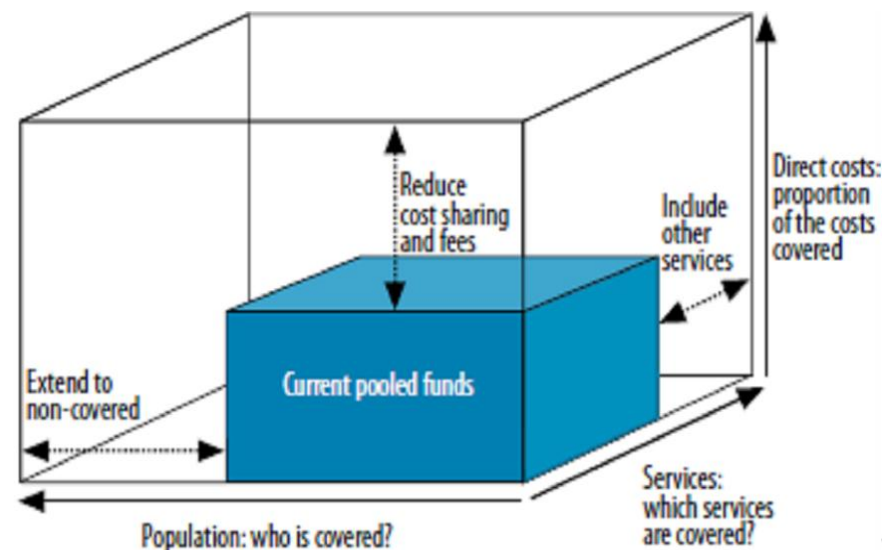
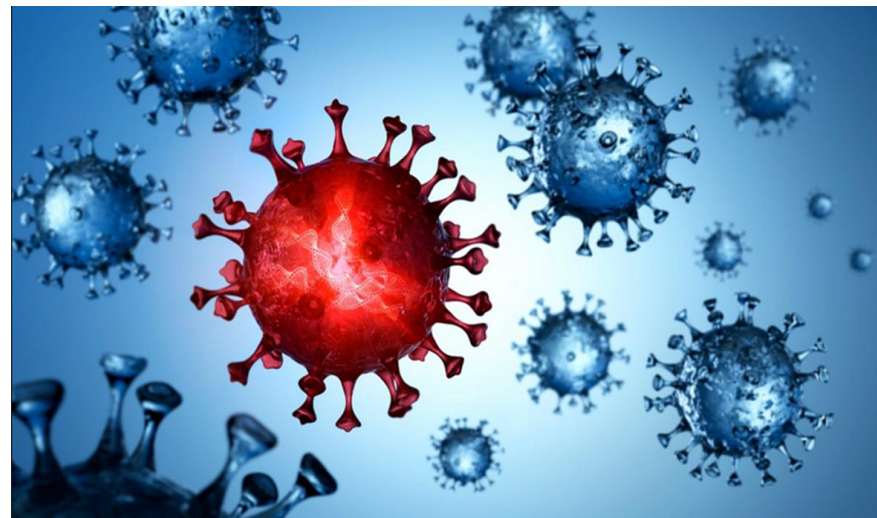
- Global  National **LEVEL**
 - Application of norms & standards, best practices
 - Implementation research for institutionalization
 - Capacity-building for production and use of evidence
- *Supporting countries in adapting global norms and standards to local contexts.*
- Medical  Systems **INTERVENTION**
 - Building blocks, especially financing (UHC)
 - Integration, wherever appropriate
 - Total Market Approaches
- *Strengthening the health system building blocks, with a focus on Universal Health Coverage (UHC).*
- Protection  Well-being **OUTCOMES**
 - Mortality, morbidities and rights
 - Personal / couple desires
- *Moving beyond preventing mortality and morbidity to ensuring comprehensive sexual and reproductive well-being.*

Framework of Evolution of SRHR Research: Discovery to Delivery



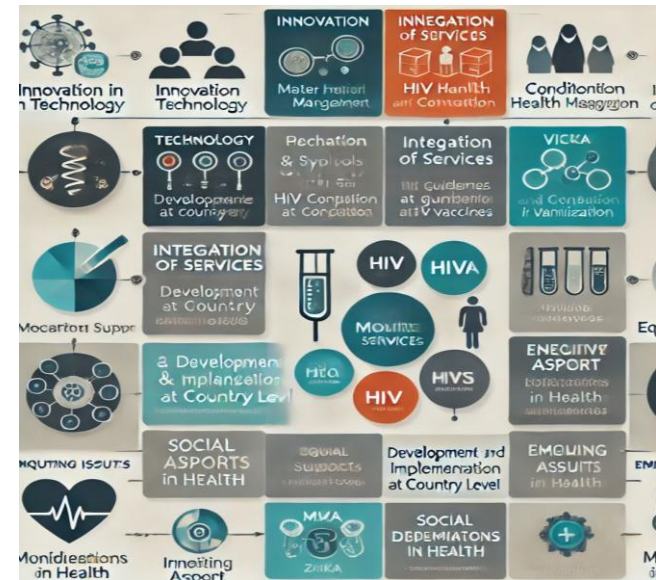
Refining Focus: Key Strategic Priorities

- **UHC as a Platform:** Using UHC as the primary platform for integrated SRHR service delivery, ensuring financial protection and access for all.
- **Intersectoral Action:** Stronger integration with economic, social, and environmental determinants of health.
- **Equity:** A critical focus for all countries. We need to act on sub-national data to address within-country disparities.
- **Gender Equality & Human Rights:** Deeper and more systematic integration of gender-transformative approaches and human rights-based principles.
- **Financing Shifts:** A push toward greater domestic financing, particularly in middle-income countries, while ensuring ODA continues for LDCs and fragile states.
- **Robust Monitoring & Accountability:** Meeting the enormous requirements for a strong monitoring and accountability framework, with an enhanced role for research.



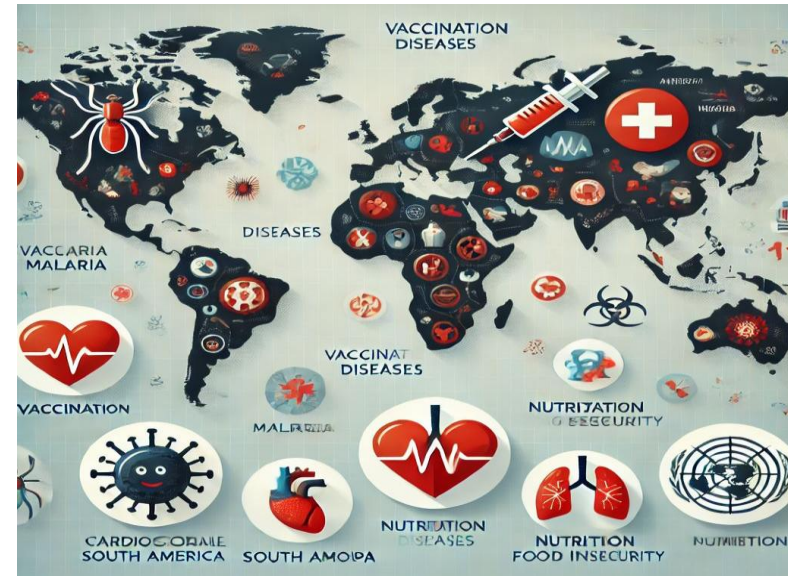
Emerging Research Frontiers in SRHR

- **Technological Innovation:** Research on point-of-care diagnostics (POCT), digital health (mHealth/eHealth), self-care interventions, and new technologies like HPV self-sampling and new contraceptives.
- **Service Delivery & Integration:** Research on best practices for integrating services (e.g., HIV/syphilis, HIV/contraception, non-communicable diseases/SRHR).
- **Guideline Development & Implementation:** Research to generate evidence for new guidelines and support their effective, context-specific implementation at the country level.
- **Innovative Financing:** Evaluating the impact of financing mechanisms like results-based financing, vouchers, and conditional cash transfers.
- **Health Systems & Workforce:** Research on task-shifting, capacity building (e.g., multipurpose health workers), staff retention, and improving quality of care.
- **Social & Structural Determinants:** Research focusing on the equity aspect of adolescent health, gender-based violence, and intersectional vulnerabilities.
- **Outbreak & Emergency Response:** Research on maintaining and delivering SRHR services during public health emergencies (e.g., Zika, Ebola, COVID-19).



Key public health issues

- 1) **Infectious Diseases** Managing pandemic threats (COVID-19, Mpox), the persistent burden of HIV/TB/malaria, and the escalating threat of antimicrobial resistance (projected 10M deaths/year by 2050).
- 2) **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** The rising burden of heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory illnesses, and cancers (including HPV-related) – driven by lifestyle, environmental, and behavioral risk factors.
- 3) **Mental Health Disorders** The growing prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicide – exacerbated by social determinants, conflicts, economic instability, and the lingering effects of the pandemic.
- 4) **Health Inequality** Widening gaps in health outcomes and access – disproportionately affecting marginalized groups, rural populations, ethnic minorities, refugees, and people in fragile states.
- 5) **Environmental Health** Climate change exacerbating food insecurity, water scarcity, forced displacement, and expanding the geographic range of vector-borne diseases (e.g., dengue, malaria).



Key public health issues

- 6) **Global Health Security** Gaps in early warning systems, laboratory networks, and supply chains. Only half of countries are fully prepared for the next pandemic.
- 7) **Aging Population** Rapid demographic shifts increasing the demand for integrated chronic disease management, long-term care, geriatric mental health services, and age-friendly primary care.
- 8) **Malnutrition and Food Insecurity** The coexistence of undernutrition (stunting/wasting affecting 149M children) and overnutrition (39M overweight/obese children) – driving intergenerational cycles of poor health.
- 9) **Access to Healthcare** Persistent barriers to UHC – including catastrophic out-of-pocket spending, supply chain failures, and a projected shortage of 10 million health workers by 2030.
- 10) **Emerging and Re-emerging Diseases** The growing risk of spillover events driven by land-use change, urbanization, and biodiversity loss – requiring robust, multisectoral "One Health" surveillance systems.

thebmj covid-19 Research ▾ Education ▾ News & Views ▾ Campaigns ▾ Jobs ▾

Medical milestones



ABED RAHIM KHATIB/ DEMOTIX/ PA

In 2007 *The BMJ* asked readers to nominate the most important medical milestones since the forerunner of *The BMJ* was first published in 1840. A panel of editors whittled 70 suggestions down to 15 and then asked readers to vote. This was the shortlist:

- The discovery of antibiotics
- Imaging
- Tissue culture
- Anaesthesia
- Chlorpromazine
- Sanitation
- Germ theory
- Evidence based medicine
- Vaccines
- Contraceptive pill
- Computer technology
- Oral rehydration therapy
- Monoclonal antibody technology
- Discovery of smoking risks
- Discovery of the structure of DNA

h n 

Shaping the Future: Key Imperatives

- ❑ **Invest in Implementation Science:** Move beyond knowing what works to understanding how to make it work at scale and in diverse contexts.
- ❑ **Strengthen Health Systems:** Prioritize SRHR integration within UHC pathways and build resilient health workforces.
- ❑ **Embrace Intersectionality:** Design research and interventions that address the overlapping vulnerabilities of individuals and communities.
- ❑ **Champion Equity and Rights:** Make gender equality and human rights the foundation of all SRHR efforts.
- ❑ **Foster Innovation:** Harness the power of technology, new financing models, and community-driven solutions.
- ❑ **Collaborate:** Multisectoral, multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential for achieving the SDG targets.