I am pleased to welcome you to the first issue of ‘Communicating as One’, the UN Country Communications Group (UNCCG) Newsletter, which highlights issues that concern the UN as a whole and shares stories about how different agencies in the Philippines are responding.

Apart from being the title of this newsletter, Communicating as One is also an integral part of the UN Development Group’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for countries adopting the ‘Delivering as One’ approach. According to the SOPs, Communicating as One facilitates “coherent messaging and advocacy on normative and operational matters” and inspires a ‘One UN’ voice to tell a compelling story of UN contributions in the country. Through this newsletter, and guided by a Joint Communications Strategy, the UNCCG hopes to do just that.

In this issue, we look back at International Women’s Day and shine the spotlight on women and the ways they contribute to, and benefit from, our programs on the ground. Gender equality and women’s empowerment not only address fundamental human rights but form a foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Indeed, in forging the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the UN recognizes that providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

I congratulate the UNCCG for producing this newsletter, and I look forward to more joint engagements towards truly communicating – and delivering – as one.

“To be truly transformative, the post-2015 development agenda must prioritize gender equality and women’s empowerment. The world will never realize 100 per cent of its goals if 50 per cent of its people cannot realize their full potential.”

- Ban Ki-Moon, 8 March 2015
The Philippines is one of the 68 countries accounting for 95 per cent of all maternal and child deaths in the world. Based on the 2011 Family Health Survey, the country’s maternal mortality ratio went up to 221 deaths per 100,000 live births from 162 deaths in 2006.

The inability to achieve set targets, specifically Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5, is due to a combination of factors that include high fertility, difficult access to modern and more effective contraception, poor maternal education and nutrition, and limited access to a continuum of services by skilled health personnel.

To improve overall maternal and neonatal health outcomes in the Philippines, the Joint Programme on Maternal and Neonatal Health (JPMNH) was launched by the Department of Health (DOH), the United Nations – i.e., United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO) – and the Australian government. Now on its second phase, the JPMNH assists the government in rapidly reducing maternal and neonatal deaths and contributes to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Outcome Area 1: Universal access to quality social services with focus on the MDGs, specifically reproductive, maternal and neonatal health.

By 2016, the JPMNH is expected to improve the access to, and quality and utilization of, intrapartum (IP), postpartum (PP), and family planning (FP) services in covered areas, in line with DOH’s Maternal Neonatal and Child Health and Nutrition (MNCHN) strategy. As of 2014, it has reported progress in maternal and neonatal health outcomes, such as facility-based deliveries, contraceptive prevalence rate and early initiation of breastfeeding. Read more about JPMNH here: bit.ly/1HlkLeB
Around the UN: Stories from agencies in the Philippines

On 8 March, the UN celebrated International Women’s Day with the theme “Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It!”. The theme aimed to encourage everyone to envision “a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices” including participating in politics, getting an education, having an income, and living in societies free from violence and discrimination. The month of March is also celebrated as National Women’s Month in the Philippines. Here are stories highlighting the important contributions of women in the various programs and activities of UN agencies in the country.

Women benefit from post-harvest training & drying racks

(FAO Philippines) After Typhoon Haiyan, women in fisheries, especially wives of fishers, had become particularly vulnerable, not only because their husbands were unable to fish but also due to the extensive damage to the fish markets. Read more from FAO here: bit.ly/1zrGwJF

IDP women take an active role in camp management

(OCHA Philippines) As the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster in the Philippines describes, “Displacement renders people vulnerable and dependent, and if they additionally become passive beneficiaries of support and assistance, their dependency and therefore their vulnerability are further increased.” Read more from the Philippines Humanitarian Bulletin here: ow.ly/2bsLxB

Midwives critical in maternal and newborn care

(UNFPA Philippines) The United Nations Population Fund called for greater investments in enhancing the capacities of midwives and in expanding the reach of their services, in time for International Day of the Midwife. Read more from UNFPA here: bit.ly/1EPU5hP

Wadznalyn’s story

(IOM Philippines) Wadz’s house was totally burned and damaged. Her family was one of the families who were affected by the crisis in Zamboanga last September 2013. Now, Wadz’s family is residing temporarily in the Tulungatung Bunkhouse, while waiting for a permanent shelter that will be awarded to them by the government. Read more from IOM here: bit.ly/1Pt0zi7

Women humanitarian workers contribute to ‘Zero Hunger’

(WFP Philippines) Behind efforts to achieve Zero Hunger are humanitarian staff working tirelessly in the field or behind office desks. Here is the story of two women staff from the World Food Programme (WFP) Philippines, Haydee Balading and Charlyn Pendang, who contribute to addressing food and nutrition security in the country. Read more from WFP here: bit.ly/1EbQ7kt
Women empowerment in artisanal small-scale gold mining communities

(Artisanal small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is one of the main livelihoods in Mt. Diwata, Compostela Valley and in Labo, Camarines Norte. It is an activity dominated by men, with women, who are traditionally responsible for household work, child-rearing and cooking, tasked to guard and process the amalgam formed when artisanal miners combine mercury with gold-carrying silt.

The process involves heating the amalgam with blowtorches or over an open flame, which evaporates the mercury leaving behind pieces of gold nuggets. The inhalation of gaseous mercury poses detrimental health effects, especially to women and children. Women in these areas state that there are few alternative economic opportunities available to them.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in partnership with Ban Toxics!, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Department of Health (DOH), has launched a project that introduces non-mercury technology in gold extraction, and empowers women through changing the community gender dynamics. Women are provided with opportunities to participate in critical and profitable activities in the gold-mining process, thus enhancing their economic contribution and enabling them to better assert themselves. The transformed dynamics not only allows women to have a greater role in the mining process but also become advocates for cleaner and healthier ASGM communities.

To ensure the continuous involvement of women, the project has been actively seeking alliances with existing women’s associations in the area and setting up mercury or environmental committees in the community. Women participate in and lead discussions and assert their views in the decision-making process. This not only allows their voices to be heard, but also helps them to engage in raising public awareness, mobilizing support and monitoring the progress of mercury elimination efforts in ASGM communities. Read the UNIDO Gender Newsletter here: bit.ly/1QWr8t7

‘Communicating as One’ updates from UN headquarters

- The UN Development Group (UNDG) launched “Silo Fighters”, a blog that showcases “Tales of Delivering Sustainable Development Together.” The UNDG also redesigned their website to make it more accessible to all who are interested.

- DPI launched a new portal for the UN’s 70th Anniversary highlighting the past, present and future of the UN.

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared 2015 as “the year of global action.” Visit the UN Action 2015 website for all updates.