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# SUMMARY

**Improving Integrated Sexual  
and Reproductive Health and  
Reproductive Rights to build  
resilience in health systems  
in West and Central Africa**

West and Central Africa faces huge challenges in ensuring equitable access to maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services.

The region has the highest total and adolescent fertility rates in the world and unacceptably high maternal mortality rates, at 679 deaths per 100,000 live births.

It also has the highest population in sub-Saharan Africa but an insufficiently skilled health personnel to meet the demand for health services. The recent 2014 Ebola outbreak clearly underlined the weakness of existing systems in a significant number of countries.

In response, UNFPA has adopted a holistic and integrated approach to these challenges and is working with governments and other partners towards its goal of delivering a world where 'every pregnancy is wanted and every childbirth is safe'.

UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) implements the organization's **four modes of engagement**, namely advocacy and policy dialogue, knowledge management, capacity development and service delivery to achieve this goal.

The Campaign to Accelerate the Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) involves all West and Central Africa countries, with the exception of Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe, in high-level **advocacy and policy dialogue** at both continental and country levels.

UNFPA WCARO has played a pivotal role in reviewing existing plans and frameworks in the region as well as encouraging initiatives such as the Ouagadougou Partnership and the Global FP 2020 Initiative and taking an active role in encouraging dialogue between the three countries most affected by the Ebola outbreak.

It organizes and supports **capacity building** workshops and trainings across the region and has focused on improving Emergency Obstetric and

Neonatal Care (EmONC) by developing a new rapid model for assessment and revising recommendations for clinical practice.

It also helped developed a five-year regional plan to end obstetric fistula and supported governments in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to deploy more than 5,500 community health workers for contact tracing.

The organization boosts **service delivery** in the region by taking advantage of existing funding, such as the French Muskoka Fund, to develop partnerships which support countries as they work to strengthen their health systems.

It also fast tracks procurement procedures in response to emergencies, such as the Ebola outbreak, in which it provided modern family planning methods and life-saving commodities to affected countries as well as playing a leading role in the essential contact tracing programme.

UNFPA WCARO promoted **knowledge management** in the region through a number of initiatives: the revision and update of EmONC clinical practice recommendations; updating the obstetric fistula situation analysis; co-organizing regional workshops on midwifery education and training and collaborating on a multi-media public awareness raising campaign on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In 2016, these initiatives will continue to be a priority for the organization, which will also focus on high impact interventions in the six countries making up the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project.

These include strengthening existing health systems to provide better coverage of contraception and maternal and child health care to underserved communities; strengthening surveillance and information systems, particularly using new technologies such as mobile phones, and addressing youth and adolescent health needs.