



Optimising Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response to Prevent Deaths

NIHR156746

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Community Engagement and Involvement Showcase Event, 25th November 2025



Strengthening Research on Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) in Ghana, Ethiopia and Uganda through Community Advisory Boards

Mary Mbuo- CEI lead, OptiMaP Project



125
YEARS
1898 - 2023

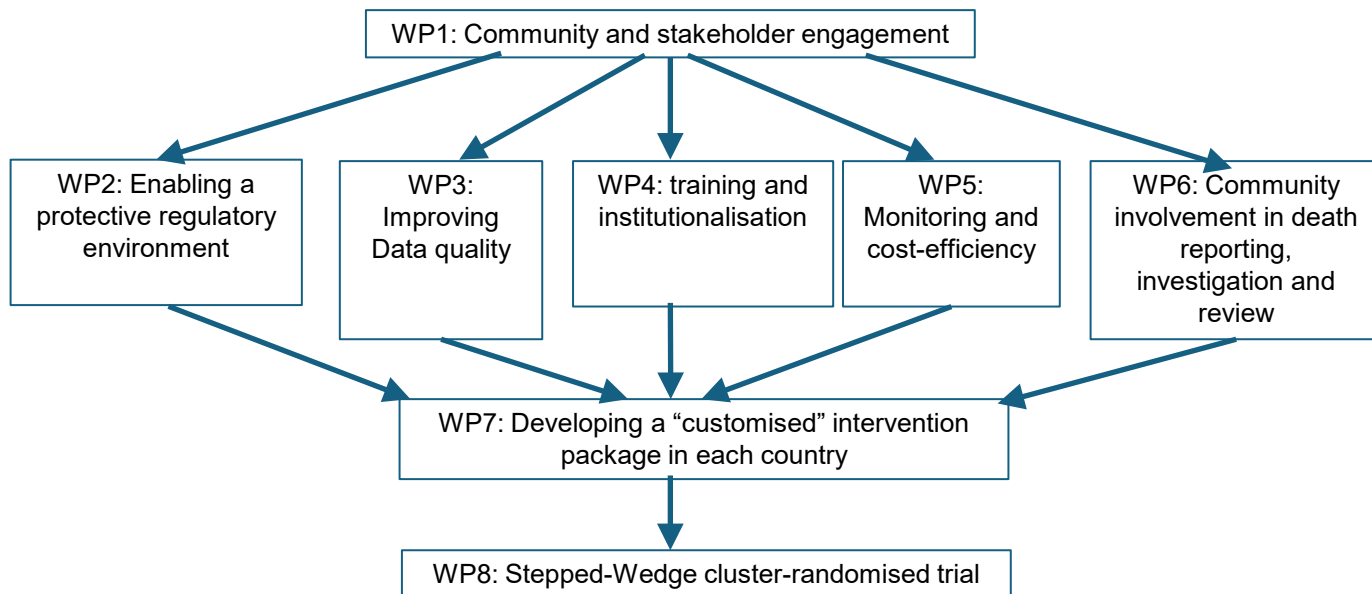


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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK government.

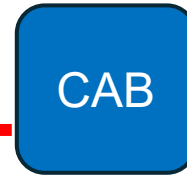
Optimising MPDSR to Prevent Avoidable Future Deaths (OptiMaP Project)



Linking Researchers to Community



OptiMaP Research team



Community (*source online CC licence*)

Selection Criteria for CAB Members



- Existing national guidance on working with CABs
 - Uganda- 5 CAB members
 - Ethiopia- 11 CAB members
 - Ghana- 36 CAB members
- Involved local and district leadership in their selection
- Community representation, acceptance and respect
- Knowledge of local systems and culture
- Independence and impartiality



CAB members-Ghana



Opti-Map

How we work with CABs

- Provided training on principles of community engagement in research
- Explained their roles and responsibilities
- Sought their feedback on how to strengthen feedback between researchers, CAB members and the community
- Research team meet CAB members quarterly
- CAB members complete reflective diaries on their experiences in the project

As CABs we have been informed of the different stakeholders in the study at different levels right from the community up to national level. The facilitators shared with us our specific roles in the different work package right from community and stakeholder engagement up to developing a customized intervention package in our country Uganda. My communication skills have been enhanced where we were guided on how to accommodate divergent ideas/views among stakeholders in this study.

Excerpt reflective diary

What or on whom was the effect was demonstrated



Who was targeted

Hard to reach groups

- Traditional birth attendants
- Bereaved family members
- Socially isolated communities
- Community health volunteers
- Health workers
- District level administrators and health leaders
- National level policy makers

How was impact demonstrated

Strengthen community death notification and reporting

Working with district leaders and policy makers at national level to create a conducive environment for accurate death reporting

Providing clear pathways on strategies to protect MPDSR data

Advise on how to set up community death review as this is new in all the countries

Stakeholder buy-in at all levels to adapt an electronic system for death reporting, review and tracking recommendations in the three countries

Researcher access to MPDSR reports in health facilities

Tracking the feedback from CABs



Opti-Map

“When I was invited, I thought it would be one of the usual meetings where I’d hear about what you had done and be told how to report it back to my community. I did not expect to become part of your team from the very beginning to help research our health problems” (CAB chair, Ethiopia)

You said	We did
Provide CAB members with an ‘identification letter’ for legitimacy in the community	A letter of identification provided
Provide CABs with a work plan for the coming year.	A detailed work plan was shared with CAB members. CAB members updated on project progress quarterly
Advised utilizing VHTs and community leaders in identifying bereaved families (research plan was different)	Bereaved families identified using VHTs, community leaders and hospital database
CHEWs the better option for bereavement counseling	Yet to be decided on who is better placed to give the counseling

Key learning for impactful CEI



CAB member-Ethiopia

- Build CAB members' confidence to give feedback, challenge and advise researchers on research plans
- Create multiple opportunities for feedback and reflection
- Use visual tools such as “you said- we did” and ensure that it is a ‘living document’ that is discussed and updated regularly

Researcher Reflections ...

“At first, it was challenging to help the CABs think beyond being passive recipients of our ideas. One of our earliest gains from that process was their wisdom about how to balance political pressures and interests with the realities on the ground” ([Opti-Map Ethiopia lead](#)).



“CABs share useful advice on protecting TBAs who report deaths [...] They are very open in their feedback and do not sugarcoat it” (OptiMaP Uganda-lead)

“The CABs bring extensive knowledge on community life. Their views on how to set up community death reviews- which is new for Ghana is invaluable” (Ghana research team member)