**The Opportunity**

Globally, there is an ongoing burden of 5.4 million deaths annually, including neonatal deaths (2.5 million), stillbirths (2.6 million), and maternal deaths (0.3 million).  Africa, with only 17% of the world’s population, carries nearly half of this burden with 2.3 million deaths per year.  Based on current trends, most sub-Saharan African countries won’t meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals’ target of 12 or fewer neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births and are also at risk of missing targets for maternal mortality reduction.

Key areas that have been identified by which to improve maternal and child health in Africa are: 1) better care during pregnancy, 2) better care at birth, 3) better postnatal care for women and their newborns, and 4) better hospital care of sick newborns (see **[report](https://aasciences.ac.ke/themes/custom/aas/Data/Publications/Maternal_And_Newborn_Health_Report_DIGITAL.pdf)**from the September 2018 policy workshop organized by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) and the UK Academy of Medical Sciences).  Nevertheless, developing and validating approaches to foster maternal and child health is challenging due to the complex interaction of biological, environmental, and social factors. Furthermore, policy recommendations for such approaches frequently lack sufficient supporting scientific evidence, while clinical trials are expensive, time-consuming, and increasingly difficult to implement. There is now a key opportunity to accelerate research in this area by establishing robust collaborative research networks in Africa (especially those focused on pregnancy and the peripartum period) and analyzing data from multiple African sources to guide public health recommendations that are data-driven and cost effective.