**Significance of Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) to the health systems of SSA**

By Rachael Nagaddya, 18th August 2025.

Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), is expressed as the number of deaths within the first 28 days of an infant’s life, per 1000 live births. [WHO](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/newborn-mortality#:~:text=Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20had%20the%20highest%20neonatal%20mortality%20rate,Asia%20with%2021%20deaths%20per%201000%20live%20births.) reports that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest burden of neonatal mortality with an estimated 27 deaths per 1000 live births mainly caused by; prematurity and low-birth-weight, infections, lack of oxygen at birth, and birth trauma, poor socioeconomic households, and lack of maternal education among others. It is an indicator for SDG 3.2.2 (End preventable deaths of newborns and infants under the age of 5 years), the health environment into which children are born and the effectiveness of prenatal and postnatal care. As such, this rate reflects a country’s maternal health, quality and accessibility of medical care, and public health practices.

Low NMR often is indicative of effective healthcare systems and vice versa thereby helping in assessing the impact of health policies and interventions over time to guide necessary adjustments. With the 2030 SDG NMR target at 12 or fewer deaths per 1000 live births, even the better ranking countries of Malawi, Uganda and Zambia are at risk of missing this target if there is no additional investment in health care.