

# THE LANCET



## STILLBIRTHS

### When quality care for mothers and babies fails

**2.6  
MILLION  
STILLBIRTHS  
EACH YEAR**

**Of the six million deaths in pregnancy and around birth every year, 2.6 million are stillbirths.** Every woman should be able to have a baby that is alive and well after months of pregnancy. In some countries, stillbirths are not recorded, or investigated to uncover what went wrong or what could prevent it happening again.

**Women, and their families, who experience stillbirths are profoundly affected.** Some can have prolonged grief, compounded by stigma and a lack of societal recognition of this loss.

**QUALITY  
OF  
CARE**

**1.2 million babies begin labour alive and die before birth.** The vast majority of these deaths are easily preventable with access to skilled birth attendants, and appropriate facilities for basic and emergency obstetric care.

**The stillbirth rate is a highly sensitive indicator of quality of care in pregnancy and at birth.** 98% of stillbirths occur in low and middle income countries. There is a huge inequity gap - the intrapartum stillbirth rate is 140 times higher in the worst performing country than in the country with the lowest rate.

**Intervention at the critical time around birth would result in a triple return on investment, preventing maternal and neonatal deaths, as well as stillbirths.** Around a third of deaths averted are stillbirths - if we counted them all, we could measure the true impacts of interventions during pregnancy. With this data, we could properly evaluate what works and determine whether we have invested in the right strategies.

## COUNTING STILLBIRTHS POST-2015 WILL TRACK AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF CARE FOR WOMEN AND BABIES

### WHAT WILL YOU DO TO ENSURE STILLBIRTHS ARE NO LONGER LEFT OUT AND LEFT BEHIND?

Coming early 2016: *The Lancet* Ending Preventable Stillbirths Series

#stillbirth

#everynewborn

#Commit2deliver

This brief was prepared by *The Lancet* Stillbirth Series 2015 team with support from:

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SCHOOL of  
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international  
stillbirth alliance



Save the Children



Mamaye!  
evidence for action



International  
Confederation  
of Midwives  
Strengthening Midwifery Globally

Stillbirth refers to all pregnancy losses after 22 weeks of gestation, but the WHO definition for international comparison refers to those with a birth weight of at least 1000g or a gestational age of at least 28 weeks (third-trimester stillbirth). This definition was used for the WHO/Lancet stillbirth rate estimates which went through WHO country clearance process (Cousens et al Lancet 2011)

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