

# Evidence for Action: Strengthening research capacity for effective implementation of maternal and perinatal death reviews in Tanzania



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## 1. Introduction

Evidence for Action Tanzania (E4A) is a DfID-funded programme to accelerate progress in maternal and newborn survival, through improved use of evidence, sustained and locally-driven advocacy efforts, and strengthened accountability mechanisms, to ensure that government, leaders and providers deliver effective health systems change. The E4A Theory of Change (Figure 1) hypothesises a relationship between strengthened use of research for improved advocacy and greater accountability, for improved planning and decision-making.

**Tanzania has an estimated 7900 maternal deaths and 90,000 newborn deaths and stillbirths each year.**

One mechanism for improved evidence-based decision-making with accountability is through maternal and perinatal death reviews (MPDR). Tanzania institutionalised MPDR in 2006, yet there is inconsistent evidence on the extent and quality of implementation and a recognised need for local capacity to improve and evaluate the process. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare announced plans to revise the national guidelines on MPDR. E4A sought to develop and strengthen capacity within Ministry of Health and safe motherhood stakeholders for an analytical approach and an evidence-based policy process.

## 2. Approach and Results

E4A and LSHTM performed a series of activities for strengthening the analytical approach for evaluation of MPDR, and for research-led decision-making in MPDR, including:

- An analytical review of national MPDR guidelines.
- Catalysing consensus around the need for an evidence-based revision process for the national guidelines.
- Conducting an evaluation of the effective implementation of MPDR, involving qualitative research with key informant interviews across hospitals and administration in one region (Mara), and with national level stakeholders.
- Facilitating an MPDR Evidence Workshop (October 2013) with delegates from Ministry of Health, civil society, UN agencies and health providers to disseminate E4A evaluation results and present evidence from other partners with experience in MPDR in Tanzania.
- Conducting a global review of maternal death review systems implementation.
- Providing technical support to (i) generation of new national guidelines in MPDR based on evaluation of existing challenges and opportunities, and (ii) to the implementation of new national guidelines including generation of training manual and support to training process.

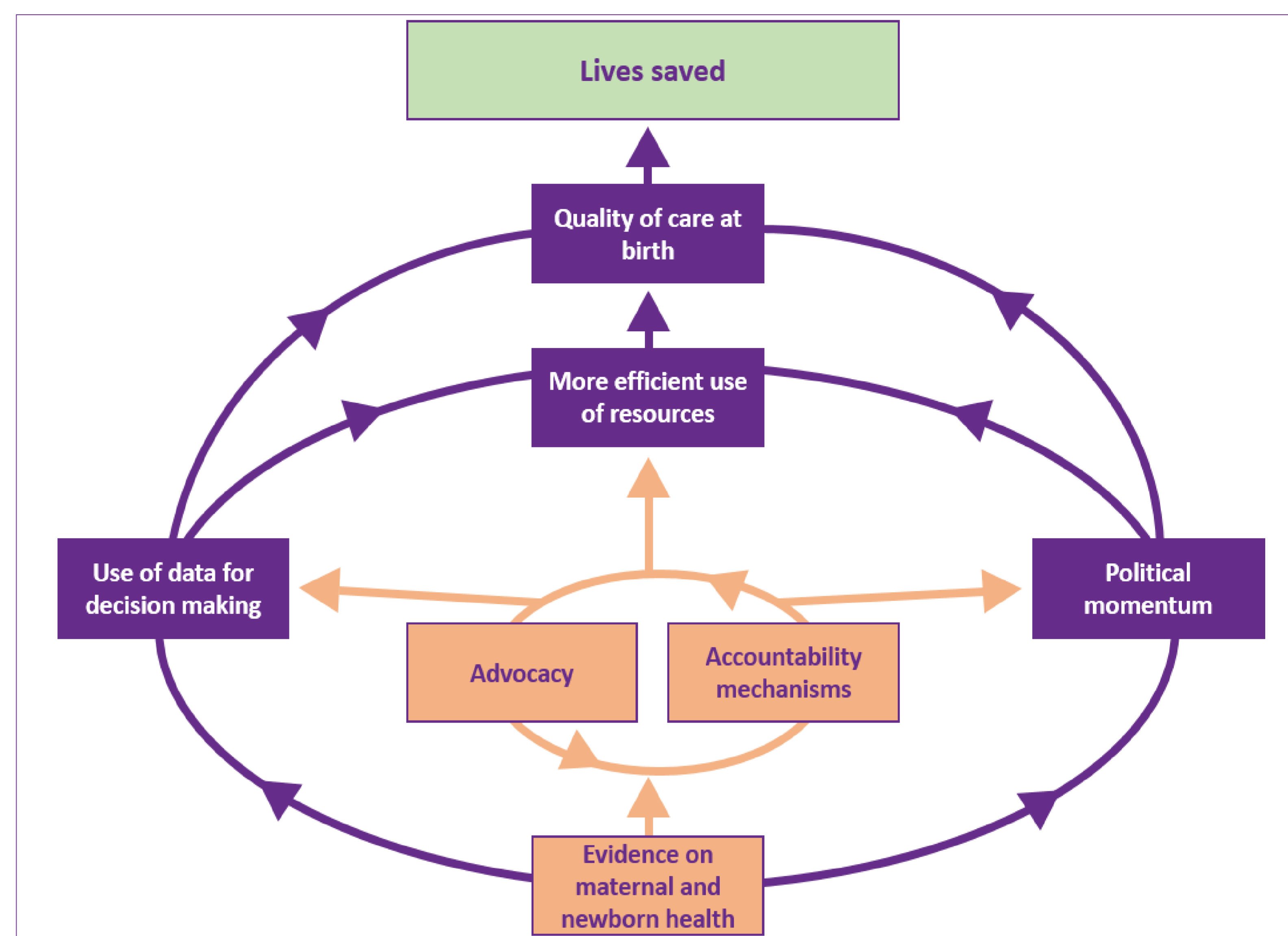


Fig. 1 Evidence for Action Theory of Change

## 3. Lessons Learned

E4A and LSHTM applied an integrated capacity strengthening approach, building an analytical understanding and sustainable political momentum for safe pregnancy and childbirth through wide stakeholder engagement and evidence-based consensus-building. E4A and LSHTM led the drive for gathering primary data on the effectiveness of the existing MPDR system, as well as drawing together evidence from national MPDR partners, to build a collaborative process. Importantly, and for greater sustainability, the process was owned and led by the Ministry of Health. Local research capacity was strengthened through a Tanzanian obstetrician (also LSHTM PhD alumnus) who collaborated in the qualitative evaluation study. As well as strengthening research capacity, this approach fostered an understanding of the need to improve and use regional and national evidence for decision-making.

LSHTM are providing ongoing technical capacity-building for design and implementation of the new MPDR approach. It is too early to attribute success to this approach as the new national guidelines are still under revision. Challenges and barriers have risen in the form of individual power-holders resisting parts of the process, and logistical difficulties of ensuring all key stakeholders are present at workshops and meetings. Future sustainability will be evident through ongoing leadership from Ministry of Health, continued use of an evidence-based approach for decision-making and an analytical approach for evaluation of implementation.

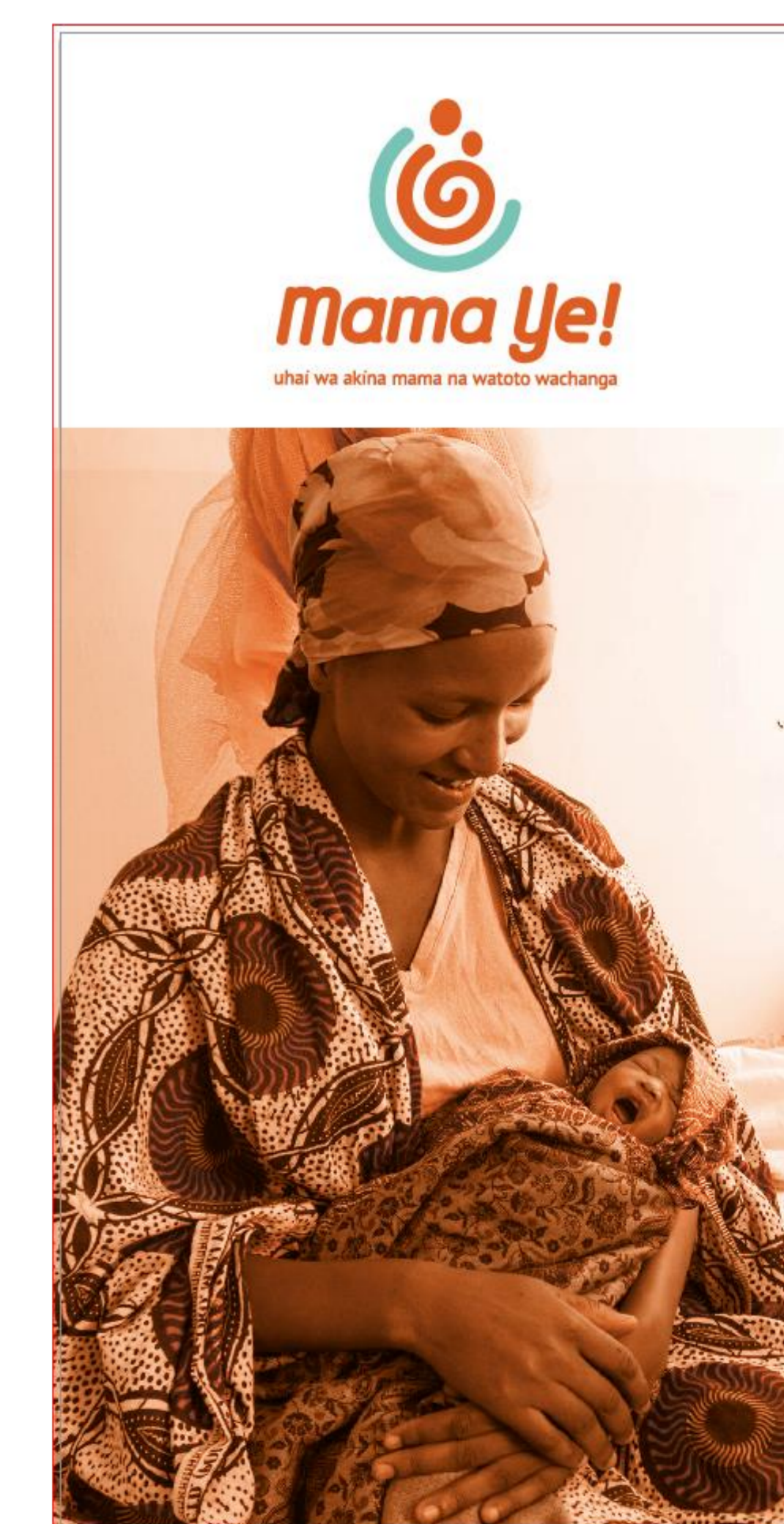


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