

PRESS RELEASE

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A Million Stories Untold: The Urgent Need for Stillbirth Data Systems and Accountability in Africa

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Nearly one million babies are stillborn in Africa each year—most preventable, many unrecorded, and too often invisible. A new report, *Improving Stillbirth Data Recording, Collection and Reporting in Africa*, exposes the potential and challenges of counting stillbirths.

The report is based on a study across 33 African Union Member States conducted by Africa CDC, University of Cape Town (UCT), UNICEF and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). Although most countries report recording stillbirths through their health systems, major gaps persist in policy, data quality, and use. Without accurate, consistent data, the true scale of loss remains obscured and progress toward prevention is stalled.

“Behind each stillbirth is a mother, a family, and a story that must be counted,” said Dr. Raji Tajudeen, Deputy Director-General, Africa CDC. “We need stronger data systems and call on countries to integrate stillbirth data into their national systems and accelerate progress towards zero preventable deaths.”

Stillbirths are a sensitive barometer of health system performance, reflecting access to quality antenatal, intrapartum, and emergency care. While maternal mortality receives long-standing policy attention, stillbirths remain underrepresented in national targets and global accountability frameworks.

Professor Salome Maswime, Head of Global Surgery at UCT, said: “We have evidence of what works and where systems are strong. Our next step is to ensure data informs policy, practice, and compassion for families who experience loss.”

There are signs of potential as over two-thirds of surveyed countries now include stillbirths in national health strategies, and more than half have set reduction targets.

“This report shows that progress is possible,” added Dr. Mary Kinney, lead researcher on the study. “Some countries are already using high-quality data to drive action—proving that with the right investments in systems, policies, and accountability, stillbirths can be prevented.”

Dr. Hannah Blencowe, Associate Professor at the LSHTM, emphasized: “Accurate, consistent reporting of stillbirths is essential to guide clinical practice, strengthen surveillance, and target resources where they are needed most.”

Aligned with the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA Plus 2021–2030), the report urges investment in robust health information

systems, respectful bereavement care, workforce capacity, and regional collaboration—so that every stillbirth is counted, reviewed, and drives action.

The report categorises countries by readiness: those with mature systems needing strengthening; those with partial systems requiring support; and those building foundational policies. It calls for integrating stillbirth data into national health information systems and for leadership to embed accountability for results.

The report is being launched at Africa CDC's Conference on Public Health in Africa at a side session on 25 October 2025.

Download the report: <https://africacdc.org/improving-stillbirth-data-recording-collection-and-reporting-in-africa/>

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