

CAN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION LEAD TO BETTER MATERNAL HEALTH OUTCOMES IN UGANDA? A REVIEW OF EVALUATED PROGRAMS.

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There is evidence worldwide to show that the causes of poor maternal and child health outcomes are the three delays i.e. delay in taking the decision to seek for health care by women, delay in reaching the health facilities and delay in receiving appropriate health care at the health facilities.ⁱ 35% of all neonatal deaths the world over are due to pre term birth complications; 24% as a result of complications during labor and delivery while sepsis accounts for 15%. According to the MDG 2015 report, many neonatal and maternal deaths can be avoided using simple cost effective and high impact interventions that address the above issues especially around the time of birth. However, most women especially in poor resource settings miss out on such interventionsⁱⁱ.

In the year 2008, all WHO member nations marked 30years anniversary of primary health care as a community based strategy for improving general health of people, although there was inconsistency in achievement of better health in those 30yearsⁱⁱⁱ. However since the revitalization of community participation as one of the key principles of the primary health care policy, a number of achievements in health have been realized through integration of community participation strategies.

Such strategies have been implemented by governments and other agencies to address maternal and child health challenges. This study specifically explores community participation as one of the strategies in improving maternal and child health in Uganda based on evidence gathered from programs that have been evaluated.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore community participation strategy and how it can lead to improved outcomes for maternal and child health in Uganda.
2. To establish the factors that determine the success of community participation as a strategy to improve maternal and child health.

Methodology

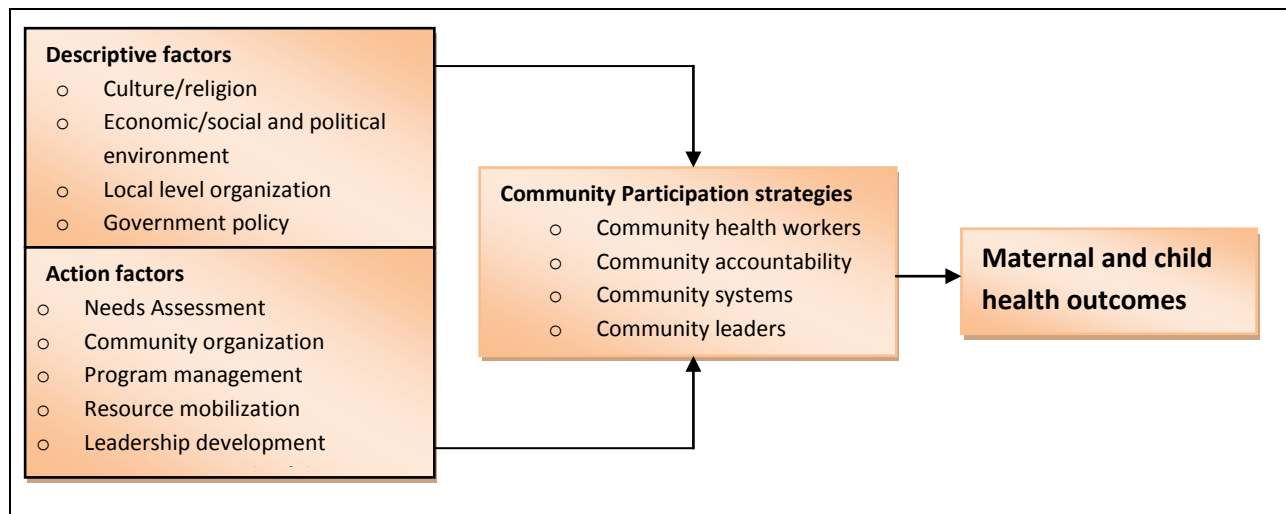
We carry out a systematic internet based search on evaluated maternal health programs that have used community participation as the main strategy, published scientific studies, policy papers and journal articles. We carry out an analysis of how the strategy has been used and what the specific outcomes for maternal and child health aspects were. We develop a database of such programs and explore the specific factors that led to their success so to answer objective 2 of our study. We draw lessons from such experiences and make policy recommendations for programs in Uganda.

The main search words are; community participation and maternal health, community participatory approach to maternal health, community involvement in maternal health.

Preliminary findings

Although evidence shows that it is still difficult to integrate community participation in health programs, there is clear indication that the strategy can yield excellent results specifically among the rural poor^{iv}. There are however a number of factors that need to be considered for the success of this strategy and these provided the basis for the analytical framework of this study below;

Analytical Framework: Factors that determine the success of community participation programs in maternal and child health



Generally there is evidence to show that community participation is effective in the reduction of maternal mortality especially among the very poor rural communities, although the effectiveness of the strategy lies in a number of factors that need to be considered as key. Programs need to establish and maintain a strong relationship with government, because they influence health systems and policies as well as the communities to ensure that their involvement is meaningful which contributes to ownership of programs by communities .

¹ Draft Policy Brief for the International Conference on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) in Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa, 1 – 3 August, 2013- community engagement and reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health- Policy brief)

ⁱⁱ United Nations New York 2015: Millennium Development Goals report, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ Dewi Indriani 2012: Community participation as a strategy in reducing maternal and child mortality in rural areas- A literature review. Centre for International Health Faculty of medicine and dentistry, University of Bergen, Norway

^{iv} Cicely Marston, Alicia Renedo, C.R. McGowan and Anayda Portela, 2013: Effects of Community Participation on Improving Uptake of Skilled Care for Maternal and Newborn Health: A Systematic Review