Author's response to reviews

Title: How many births in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia will not be attended by a skilled birth attendant between 2011 and 2015?

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors,

We thank the reviewers for their useful comments and submit a revised manuscript accordingly. We respond to individual points below and note that the revisions in the manuscript have been made using the ‘track changes’ facility in MS Word.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Sonya Crowe
Professor Martin Utley
Professor Anthony Costello
Dr Christina Pagel

Reviewer 1

Discretionary Revisions:
Since this paper is addressed mainly to policy makers, the Authors could discuss a bit more on the interventions to increase SBA, and on the possible alternative (outreach) interventions to reduce maternal deaths among those unattended by SBA- what are these interventions and the expected impact on maternal mortality?

We have added the following paragraph to the discussion section (p11) in order to incorporate this suggestion:
“For example, efforts to increase SBA coverage may include training traditional birth attendants\textsuperscript{17,18} or greater national support for nurses, midwives and doctors\textsuperscript{25}. Interventions to reduce adverse outcomes in births unattended by an SBA may include, for example, provision of oral uterotonic\textsuperscript{18,26} and/or clean delivery kits\textsuperscript{27} to mothers or postnatal home visits\textsuperscript{28} to identify problems.”

Reviewer 2

Discretionary Revisions:
This is an important study with major implications for policy makers with an interest in safer motherhood and reduction of stillbirths and neonatal deaths related to intrapartum events (suggestion: stillbirths and neonatal deaths in relation to SBAs - next to maternal mortality - could be mentioned and discussed as well).

We thank the reviewer for this positive comment and suggestion. Accordingly, we have added the following sentence to the introduction (p3):
“In addition, SBA attendance at birth may impact on rates of stillbirths and neonatal mortality related to intrapartum events.”

We have also amended the following paragraph in the discussion section (p9):
“Our intent was not to estimate the impact of policies aimed at increasing SBA attendance, but rather to estimate the extent to which targets for reducing maternal mortality, stillbirths and neonatal mortality related to intrapartum events, will depend not only on improving SBA attendance but also on preventing these adverse outcomes in unattended births.”

We have also amended the following paragraph in the discussion section (p11):
“New efforts and strategies are needed to accelerate the rate of progress in increasing SBA coverage and to evaluate alternative interventions to reduce maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths related to intrapartum events in unattended births.”

Minor essential revisions:
p8 last sentence...that in all scenarios at least 90% (85%) of non-SBA births in South Asia (sub-Saharan Africa) were projected....should this not be ....in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa?
The authors intended the 90% to correspond to South Asia and the 85% to sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. in all scenarios at least 90% of non-SBA births in South Asia were projected to take place in rural areas, and in all scenarios at least 85% of non-SBA births in sub-Saharan Africa were projected to take place in rural areas.
We therefore feel that it may be misleading to alter the manuscript in the manner suggested and so leave this unchanged.

p9 last sentence in the paragraph under the heading 'key findings' similarly....in South Asia (sub-Saharan Africa)...to be replaced with...in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa?
See comment above.

p9 last paragraph...here discussion not only about maternal mortality reduction but also stillbirths and neonates related to intrapartum events?
We have amended the manuscript accordingly, so that we now state:
“Our intent was not to estimate the impact of policies aimed at increasing SBA attendance, but rather to estimate the extent to which targets for reducing maternal mortality, stillbirths and neonatal mortality related to intrapartum events, will depend not only on improving SBA attendance but also on preventing these adverse outcomes in unattended births.”