Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing the Unmet Obstetric Need and of the accessibility of Emergency Obstetric Care in Tanga Region, Tanzania

Version: 1 Date: 8 September 2006

Reviewer: Julia Hussein

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper reports an important field experience of using the UON indicators

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. Introduction - there is too little discussion of the background of the UON indicators and the justification for their use. The authors may have got away with this five years ago when there was little published about the use of these sorts of indicators. Today, with extensive and independent field reports of the use of the UON and "UN process indicators" (see Guidelines for monitoring the availability and use of obstetric services http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/unicef/index.html), I think the introduction (and discussion) needs to place other options in the context of this study.
2. Methods - (a) the glaring omission here is that there is no mention of eclampsia or abortion complications in the AMI. The former may be rarely seen, and the latter perhaps not "obstetric", but an explanation is required.(b) the concept of "thresholds" needs further explanation
3. Findings - The sample is relatively small to report maternal and perinatal mortality without qualification.
4. Discussion - This section is weak. Apart from superficially reporting on the interpretation of the indicators, the vast majority of the discussion on page 14 and 15 does not really use the findings to develop a cohesive argument about how the findings may have implications on policy and practice. The existing discussion is just a general series of statements which are commonly advocated for. I suggest the discussion includes a more critical but constructive view of the practical experience of using the UPN indicators. The development of the UON indicators is an important one. There are a few articles now written about field experiences of using the indicators - but too little critique of how the method can be improved, what difficulties were experienced in training, what lessons were learnt, how the methods or the indicators could be used and how the indicators can help to change practice or policy. Again, the rather superficial discussion provided may have been of interest when there was little experience of using the UON indicators, but today in order for the paper to add to the body of knowledge, a more in depth assessment of the utility of the indicators is required (b) The eventual exclusion of blood transfusion as an MOI is important. The authors only explain that it was not included because they found it was not reliably recorded. Some discussion on why it was not reliably recorded, how the unreliable recording was ascertained, how to get around this pope recording, etc would all help others to do work that might improve use of the UON. Also, this exclusion must have introduced some biases and limitations to the findings - the authors should have discussed these issues. Also, the authors are working on the 1260 returns - to what extent did this number match the expected numbers returned? Could there have been some biases in what was returned and were there possibilities of incomplete returns affecting the findings?

In the conclusion on page 17, the authors state that the UON is a good district monitoring tool, and that its findings can "revitalise" discussions - but unfortunately there was little in the discussion to convince me of these conclusions.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
1. Sequence of tables in the text needs reordering - Table 4 is mentioned earliest
2. Column headings in text do not match the tables (e.g. "municipality") - which one? Tanga, probably, but should be consistent.
3. Page 1, first paragraph - "These varying figures....are not conclusive." Of what?
4. Some repetition between 1st para page 8 and the paragraph on threshold of 2% on page 6...but the concept of the threshold and its utility still needs more explanation.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None

**What next?**: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest**: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**: Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review**: No

**Declaration of competing interests**: I declare that I have no competing interests