Improving surgical quality in low-income and middle-income countries: why do some health facilities perform better than others?


ABSTRACT
Background  Evidence on heterogeneity in outcomes of surgical quality interventions in low-income and middle-income countries is limited. We explored factors driving performance in the Safe Surgery 2020 intervention in Tanzania’s Lake Zone to distil implementation lessons for low-resource settings.

Methods  We identified higher (n=3) and lower (n=3) performers from quantitative data on improvement from 14 safety and teamwork and communication indicators at 0 and 12 months from 10 intervention facilities, using a positive deviance framework. From 72 key informant interviews with surgical providers across facilities at 1, 6 and 12 months, we used a grounded theory approach to identify practices of higher and lower performers.

Results  Performance experiences of higher and lower performers differed on the following themes: (1) preintervention context, (2) engagement with Safe Surgery 2020 interventions, (3) teamwork and communication orientation, (4) collective learning orientation, (5) role of leadership, and (6) perceived impact of Safe Surgery 2020 and beyond. Higher performers had a culture of teamwork which helped them capitalise on Safe Surgery 2020 to improve surgical ecosystems holistically on safety practices, teamwork and communication. Lower performers prioritised overhauling safety practices and began considering organisational cultural changes much later. Thus, while also improving, lower performers prioritised different goals and trailed higher performers on the change continuum.

Conclusion  Future interventions should be tailored to facility context and invest in strengthening teamwork, communication and collective learning and facilitate leadership engagement to build a receptive climate for successful implementation of safe surgery interventions.

INTRODUCTION
Access to quality surgical care remains a critical gap in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs). Perioperative and anaesthetic mortality is over twice that of high-income countries (HICs) and largely attributed to common procedures like caesarean sections, surgical injuries and anaesthesia-related complications. Postsurgical infections also contribute to high morbidity and mortality. For caesarean sections, postsurgical infections are estimated at 3%–24% in LMICs, compared with 3%–11% in HICs. Advancing surgical quality in LMICs is therefore a pressing global health concern.

Recent evidence suggests surgical quality interventions with multiple components have heterogeneous
performers for rich learning and insight on scaling. Since surgical providers contribute significantly to the shape and form of quality improvement interventions in different facilities, their experience can be critical in understanding variability in facility performance. This in turn is critical for improving and scaling interventions, as well as ensuring their replicability and sustainability.

We used the positive deviance framework recommended by Bradley et al to undertake a detailed qualitative analysis of provider experiences to understand factors driving facility level variations in the performance of Safe Surgery 2020 (SS2020), a surgical quality intervention based in Tanzania’s Lake Zone. SS2020 sought to improve adherence to safety practices, teamwork, communication and completeness of documentation in patient records in the short term. Its medium-term goals included reduction of postsurgical infections, including SSI, sepsis and maternal sepsis. We had the following specific aims: to identify higher-performing facilities based on predetermined SS2020 metrics; to use qualitative analysis to compare the implementation experiences of higher-performing and lower-performing facilities; and to distil lessons for safe surgery interventions that may be applied to other low-resource settings.

METHODS

Study design
We designed a qualitative study using a positive deviance framework to explore factors distinguishing higher-performing and lower-performing facilities in the SS2020 intervention. Positive deviance analysis can improve quality by highlighting the best practices of organisations that demonstrate exemplary performance under similar constraints. While the approach focuses on higher performers, we also studied lower performers for rich learning and insight on scaling surgical quality. To ground the results in data and minimise confirmation bias, the research team was blinded to performance during data collection, coding and initial data analysis. We followed the Consolidated criteria for Reporting Qualitative research.

Setting and intervention
Our setting included 10 SS2020 intervention facilities located in Tanzania’s Mara and Kagera regions. The population is largely rural (59%) and below the poverty line (49.1%). The 10 facilities included regional hospitals, district hospitals and health centres (table 1).

The multicomponent SS2020 intervention was implemented in three phases (figure 1). The first phase focused on changing organisational culture through engaging surgical teams in a week-long training on leadership, teamwork and communication. The second phase focused on building capacity in evidence-based practices in safe surgery and anaesthesia, equipment sterilisation and data quality. The third phase, which is ongoing, focuses on facilitating the sustainability of the first and second phase through inperson and virtual mentorship using the Project ECHO platform, the Touch Surgery smartphone application with videos of surgical procedures, and infrastructure support through a grant of up to US$10 000 per facility and a perioperative equipment package.

Sample and data collection
We conducted 101 interviews with 105 providers at the 10 facilities at 1 month (baseline), 6 months (midline) and 12 months (endline) following the start of the SS2020 intervention (figure 1). We purposively sampled a facility leader and two or three surgical team members identified by the facility to obtain diversity in perspectives, maximise theoretical saturation and ensure their replicability and sustainability.

Table 1: Characteristics of intervention facilities and respondents, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility characteristics</th>
<th>Higher performers</th>
<th>Middle performers</th>
<th>Lower performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of beds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–150</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>150–400</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of operating rooms</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public, mission</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Private, mission</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent characteristics</th>
<th>Higher performers</th>
<th>Middle performers</th>
<th>Lower performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility leader</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical team leader</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical provider</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaesthetist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Years of experience in present role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of experience in present role</th>
<th>Higher performers</th>
<th>Middle performers</th>
<th>Lower performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Years of experience was not collected for 14 respondents.*
validate information from multiple sources (table 1). The hour-long interviews were semistructured and conducted in a private space by two research team members (SA and AM or MS) in English. SS2020 Tanzanian physician data collectors familiar with the local context set up interviews and provided Swahili translation when needed. SA holds a doctoral degree in health policy and management with experience in surgical quality and implementation science research. AM was a medical student and MS holds a Master’s in Public Health; both were research assistants.

Three semistructured longitudinal interview guides (online supplemental appendix 1) to understand providers’ experiences with SS2020 were developed based on experience from SS2020 implementation in Ethiopia, exploratory fieldwork in Tanzania and input from SS2020 partners, supplemented with literature on implementation of interventions. The interviews explored visions for safe surgery, the surgical team’s buy-in, facility’s approach to implementation including leadership engagement, facilitators and barriers to implementation, and lessons learnt. Verbal consent was obtained before each interview. No interviewees declined to participate or asked to stop. The interviewers maintained detailed field notes that were updated daily. The interviews were transcribed from taped recordings and imported into NVivo V.11 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) for coding. The accuracy of transcription was verified by proofing a random sample of transcripts.

Identification of higher-performing and lower-performing facilities

We used SSC adherence to identify higher-performing and lower-performing facilities since evidence demonstrates its correct use can reduce postsurgical infections, improve teamwork, promote a safety culture and reduce mortality. We did not use postsurgical infection rates because baseline cases were low and therefore the difference between preintervention and postintervention rates was not a robust measure of performance.

We developed a composite index of 14 safety and teamwork and communication indicators based on scientific literature (online supplemental appendix 2). We trained Tanzanian medical data collectors in the identification and classification of study measures and placed one data collector at each facility for 3 months preintervention and 3 months postintervention. The data collectors observed surgeries using an adapted SSC observation tool and recorded surgical teams’ adherence to safety and teamwork and communication measures.

A review of the literature demonstrated no standardised cut-offs for high and low performers related to the SSC. Thus, we used change in...
percentage points from preintervention to postintervention on the composite index to identify higher and lower performers. Performance was characterised using preintervention data collected from February to April 2018 and postintervention data collected from March to May 2019. Higher-performing facilities (n=4) were defined as intervention facilities with improvement above 60 percentage points on the composite index. The four top-performing facilities improved by 76, 74, 65 and 60 percentage points from preintervention to postintervention, respectively. We defined lower-performing facilities (n=3) as those with improvement below 35 percentage points on the composite index. They improved by 31, 30 and 19 percentage points, respectively (table 2). We eliminated middle performers (facilities 5, 6 and 7). We eliminated facility 3 (higher performer) from analysis since it only had 18 SSC observations during the postintervention period, compared with an average of 221 SSC observations per facility.

### Table 2 Improvement in average adherence on a composite index of 14 safety and teamwork and communication indicators from preintervention to postintervention based on quantitative indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher-performing facilities</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Endline</th>
<th>Average improvement in percentage points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facility 1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-performing facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-performing facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility 10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We used a grounded theory approach to factors distinguishing higher-performing from lower-performing facilities.44–46 Grounded theory is a systematic, inductive approach to generate themes reflecting the perspectives of interview participants. Our data analysis unfolded in successive stages, using the constant comparison method.18–47 First, the research team (PC, NZ, SA, AM) reviewed three different transcripts each and had discussions to arrive at a unified preliminary codebook. The four coders tested the unified codebook on the same two transcripts separately, coming together to compare their coding after each transcript. This process allowed the merging of similar codes and fine-tuning code definitions, until no new codes emerged, that is, we reached theoretical saturation.18–20 Any disagreements in coding were resolved through discussion. The inter-rater reliability was found to be kappa=0.85 (‘almost perfect agreement’).48 The research team then divided the coding of the 101 transcripts (NZ 42%, PC 36%, AM 16%, SA 6%). All transcripts were de-identified, labelled with alphanumeric code and randomly assigned. After completing the coding, the team identified themes emerging from the data while still remaining blinded. Then, unblinded, we compared key themes across higher-performing and lower-performing facilities to identify distinguishing practices including deviant cases.8 49

### RESULTS

Higher performers were facilities with 40–150 beds and publicly owned, barring one faith-based organisation. Lower-performing facilities were larger (150–400 beds) and all publicly owned (table 1). Six themes and 14 constituent subthemes emerged from experiences of higher-performing and lower-performing facilities (table 3, online supplemental appendix 3). Since all facilities showed substantial improvement in surgical practices (table 2), ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ performance refers to relative differences in experiences. Quotes are edited for language and flow.

#### Preintervention organisational orientation

##### Facility characteristics

Providers in higher-performing and lower-performing facilities expressed constraints including staff shortage, inadequate infrastructure and poor infection control. Higher performers discussed these weaknesses as demoralising and detrimental to team relationships and surgical outcomes; lower performers described them as barriers to clinical goals.

##### Team orientation

Higher performers had a strong prior culture of teamwork, with references to surgery as a team effort, collective problem-solving and support of coworkers. They capitalised on SS2020 to further strengthen teamwork. Lower performers were less teamwork-oriented before SS2020. While individual providers in these facilities saw SS2020 as an opportunity to improve skills for better patient care, team improvement was not expressed as a target in itself.

#### Higher performer

We work as a team. We were using a problem solution tree before SS2020. If there was an issue, team members came together, suggested solutions and picked solutions which scored highest and were easiest...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preintervention context</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facility’s preintervention context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preintervention physical infrastructure as described by providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preintervention perceived team relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preintervention perceived organisational learning strategies, extent of experimentation and willingness to learn from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with SS2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement and learning from the SS2020 intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership and SSC training</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived learnings from the leadership training intervention, particularly in the implementation of the SSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived learnings from the capacity building interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived learnings from the sustainable learning interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork and communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention team relationships, mutual support between team members and extent of open communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention involvement and participation of providers in the SS2020 intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy and open communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention extent of imbibed hierarchies including perceived comfort of junior team members in expressing opinions to seniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extent of collective ownership of SS2020, including sharing of responsibilities with non-surgeon providers in surgical teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention group learning, including the balance of individual learning aspirations against team learning goals, translation of knowledge to colleagues, use of data as a learning tool, extent of learning together as teams and evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge translation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention sharing of knowledge by SS2020 training attendees with colleagues who did not attend trainings and new recruits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data and monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived need for and nature of use of data for learning, monitoring and decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived need for and nature of use of data for learning, monitoring and decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention leadership engagement with SS2020 and staff expectations about leadership support for intervention functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations from leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention staff expectations about leader’s involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention leader’s engagement with SS2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived impact and beyond SS2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Postintervention perceived impact of SS2020 and suggestions for improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to implement. The SSC made it easier to coordinate. (Anaesthetist, Facility 2)

**Lower performer**

Everyone is focused on their jobs. If I am busy, the nurse or surgeon can see that the BP is low. But they say this is the anaesthetist’s job. If patients suffer, they will blame me. But they were in the room and did not say anything. If key staff do their jobs well, SSC can be implemented to help patients. (Anaesthetist, Facility 8)

**Learning orientation**

Higher performers were agile in experimenting with learning methods and adapting them. When one facility realised that SSC forms were being retrospectively filled to meet targets, they swiftly introduced direct observation to situate SSC as an ‘active tool’. They had clear targets and assessed progress pragmatically, identifying gaps such as lapsed SSC utilisation during emergency procedures. In lower-performing facilities, at an individual level, providers were enthusiastic about learning skills like suturing techniques and spinal anaesthesia methods. Organisational learning seemed less purposeful, with less specific targets, and still developing monitoring strategies. Providers in two facilities claimed overwhelming success at midline with ‘100% SSC usage’. While lower performers did not experiment with the SS2020 toolkit, they were very focused on implementing practice changes as per SS2020 instructions.

Engagement with SS2020 intervention

**Leadership and SSC training**

In higher-performing facilities, the SSC was described as a tool to strengthen teamwork and communication. One provider said the SSC identified gaps in individual performance for the benefit of teams. Lower-performing facilities also implemented the SSC enthusiastically, but for clinical goals such as infection control and instrument counts after surgery. In one lower-performing facility, the SSC’s clinical improvements were praised for their ‘immediacy, clarity and visibility’. Thus, while SSC implementation was prioritised, it was aimed at clinical rather than cultural overhaul. This changed at endline in two lower-performing facilities. One surgeon underlined that SSC could encourage ‘smooth and open communication’.

**Higher performer**

The SSC is about communication and learning together while doing. We don’t have to hide mistakes to be graded as good providers. If you expose your mistake, you can be corrected. And ultimately the team benefits by learning from your mistake. (Surgical Provider, Facility 3)

**Lower performer**

Everything in the SSC is about improving surgical outcomes so we are spending much energy on SSC. Communication is fine, but if I use the form, I am forced to check everything. We will never leave a gauze behind again. (Surgical Provider, Facility 10)

**Capacity building interventions**

Both higher and lower performers undertook similar practice changes such as optimised antibiotic use and improved sterilisation practices. Higher performers described these as parallel to strengthening teamwork and communication, and implemented these changes sooner, so that by midline, improving data quality and monitoring were prioritised more. Providers in lower-performing facilities appreciated how these trainings augmented their skills and enhanced clinical practice. One anaesthetist underlined the ‘transformative’ changes such as reduced costs from optimal antibiotic use and improved care from distinguishing SSIs from sepsis.

Sustained learning interventions

Higher performers perceived these trainings as opportunities for continued advancement. In two lower-performing facilities, three providers appreciated the practical learnings of Project ECHO. However, as facilities, they seemed less engaged with these interventions, possibly since they were still focused on goals from earlier trainings. Inperson mentorship was an important exception in all three facilities. A surgeon in a lower-performing facility said a mentor’s visit would serve as a reminder to “ensure we practice more, because we will be watched.”

**Teamwork and communication**

**Provider buy-in**

Higher performers identified and tackled resistance to SS2020 early on, particularly from staff who did not attend SS2020 trainings. Two facilities prioritised periodical team check-ins and participative problem-solving. An anaesthetist described how senior staff strategically assigned key roles like supervising completion of SSC forms to dissenters to encourage them to ‘take ownership’. In lower-performing facilities, while some providers were very motivated to implement changes, some who did not attend SS2020 trainings were less enthusiastic. Mechanisms to manage dissent emerged at endline, with providers in two facilities suggesting authoritarian approaches like making the SSC compulsory and penalising errant staff. While generally aware of shortcomings, nurses in two facilities said they could only follow instructions of senior staff. At endline, surgeons in two facilities called for more buy-in from nurses.
Hierarchy and open communication

In higher-performing facilities, non-surgical providers communicated freely. In two facilities, they felt their opinion was respected by seniors. A nurse took pride in how surgeons trusted her with managing the SSC. In lower-performing facilities, non-surgical providers expressed fear of rebuke in ‘talking up’ to seniors. They were referred to as ‘subordinates’ and ‘low-cadre’. Importantly, a surgical team leader from a higher-performing facility also referred to colleagues as ‘subordinates’. At endline, surgeons in two lower-performing facilities identified hierarchy as a barrier to clinical goals and encouraged nurses to communicate with them by name, ask questions and identify gaps in SSC use.

Higher performer

Since I am controlling the checklist, I say attention please and read the points. Then all staff answer according to the questions asked. The doctor waits for me because he trusts that I will remind him if he has forgotten something. There is trust. (Anaesthetist, Facility 1)

Lower performer

The surgeon was looking for the defective part, which looked like the patient’s intestine. I told him what he was trying to remove was actually part of the intestine. The surgeon asked if I had more knowledge than him. He said as a surgeon he knew the difference. After opening, he realized he had cut the intestine. (Nurse, Facility 9)

Collective responsibility

In higher-performing facilities, non-surgeon providers were entrusted with more SS2020 responsibilities, which motivated them to take ownership. In all facilities, nurses managed postdischarge care. Anaesthetists taking special interest in SSC were designated ‘champions’ and became its informal drivers in three facilities. In all lower-performing facilities, surgeons were perceived as responsible for SS2020. Other providers, while appreciative of SS2020 practice changes, identified their roles as ancillary. They also tended to hold surgeons responsible for lapses. An anaesthetist in one facility who oversaw SSC utilisation was an important exception. At endline, recognising their fatigue was hindering SSC utilisation, senior staff in two facilities encouraged more involvement from other providers.

Collective learning

Knowledge translation

Higher performers emphasised knowledge transfer from providers who attended SS2020 trainings. All facilities convened debriefing meetings within a week of trainings, with biweekly or monthly follow-up, and focused agenda items, such as distinguishing SSIs from sepsis and completion of SSC forms. In one facility, an anaesthetist described efforts to break SS2020 lessons in ‘bite size pieces’ and ongoing conversations with reticent colleagues. Lower-performing facilities also convened knowledge translation meetings, but around 3 weeks post-training. Providers felt their time was better used in implementing changes than convincing reticent colleagues and requested SS2020 trainings for all staff in early stages. A surgeon suggested SS2020 could be expedited if responsibilities were restricted to trainees. At endline, there was a gap between training attendees and non-attendees.

Higher performer

Those of us that went for leadership training found time to teach others within a week. People argued that they knew their jobs, or that it would be impossible to complete the SSC while operating. But what we did, and it is a continuing process, was to sit down and explain research on surgical errors, and the importance of each step in the SSC. (Surgical Provider, Facility 2)

Lower performer

Staff who attended leadership and clinical training are champions of SS2020. But others feel it is a waste of time. And unless there is pressure from above, why should they listen to us? (Surgical Provider, Facility 8)

Data and monitoring

Providers in three higher-performing facilities discussed how SS2020 sensitised them to leveraging data for improving surgical quality. By midline, one facility triangulated preoperative, operative and postoperative care data to ‘catch our mistakes’. In another facility, a provider said data made providers feel responsible for every postsurgical infection. Providers in two lower-performing facilities articulated the need to improve monitoring of clinical outcomes at endline. Importantly, one facility leader appreciated the importance of data earlier at midline, but said his team needed more time. At endline, providers across lower-performing facilities sought more training to effectively use data.

Team learning

Surgical teams in higher-performing facilities came together to learn as collective units, identifying strategies such as role designation and rotation of responsibilities, to ensure ‘no one was left behind’. In lower-performing facilities, while improving patient care was described as the end goal in two facilities, learning was focused on improving individual skills. In the third facility, a provider described team improvement as the aggregate of individual providers’ improvement. Importantly, teams began to emerge as units of learning at endline in two facilities, with the recognition of the importance of teamwork, open communication and
sharing of responsibilities with junior providers as necessary for improving patient outcomes.

**Role of leadership**

**Expectations from leadership**

Staff in two higher-performing facilities sought active everyday leadership involvement such as managing resistance. In all lower-performing facilities, while facility leaders were described as committed to SS2020, they were perceived as too occupied for routine involvement. In two facilities, leaders were appreciated for administrative requirements like SSC forms and supporting infrastructural improvements.

**Leadership engagement**

In higher-performing facilities, leaders were aware of their facility’s progress. In two facilities, leaders and surgical team leaders selected resisters as training attendees to motivate them. Leaders also prioritised training of new hires. Leaders in lower-performing facilities helmed larger facilities. While they were very supportive of SS2020, with limited time they performed supervisory roles, managed purchases and renovations. In two facilities, leaders said they communicated with surgical team leaders, who were driving SS2020, and intervened when asked.

**Higher performer**

I monitor daily reports. Every morning we have reports from each department, they tell us how many surgeries they have done and how. I also speak with dissenters. There is a very stubborn nurse who does not like the SS2020 changes. So, I insisted that she attend the training. Special effort is needed for those who are disturbing others. (Medical Officer-in-Charge, Facility 2)

**Lower performer**

I am too busy to check if one-third files aren’t available or one-third aren’t documented. I ask them to come to me with specific problems. They were having problems with purchasing antibiotics since our routine antibiotics were not ascribed by SS2020. So as management I intervened. (Medical Officer-in-Charge, Facility 10)

**Perceived impact of SS2020 and beyond**

Providers in higher-performing facilities appreciated how SS2020 helped overhaul surgical ecosystems by strengthening team relationships, promoting data-driven decisions and improving surgical outcomes. In lower-performing facilities, providers praised SS2020 for improvements in infrastructure and gains in provider knowledge and skills. Suggestions for improving SS2020 interventions from higher-performing facilities included translating the SSC to Swahili and a shorter version for emergency surgeries.

In lower-performing facilities, providers suggested SS2020 trainings for all staff and inperson mentorship.

**Higher performer**

Everyone is a watchdog and mentor to each other. Our golden strategy was focusing on everyone, the head of the OR, the anaesthetist and the nurses. If I am not following the SSC, someone will always remind me. We previously collected data to send to the government, but now we know it belongs to us, to help us know where we are and where we want to go. (Surgical Provider, Facility 1)

**Lower performer**

We have made good progress in infrastructure with modern equipment and renovation of ORs. Doctors and nurses have been trained in sterilization and better surgical skills. Now we need more trainings or mentorship. If you know that next month a mentor will come, it makes you practice more and achieve more. (Anaesthetist, Facility 9)

**Conceptual framework**

A facility’s preintervention context, including its physical, cultural and learning characteristics, set the foundation for its engagement with SS2020 and subsequent advancement in organisational culture and organisational learning (figure 2). Lower performers showed substantial improvement in surgical safety practices (table 2). Differences in performance trajectories of higher and lower performers were relative. For all facilities, immediate changes in safety practices were interlinked with cultural changes in teamwork and communication, which in turn helped create structures and processes for sustainability of changes. Higher performers targeted surgical ecosystems holistically on team communication and organisational learning. Lower performers prioritised improving surgical safety practices in the short term. At endline, they had just begun initiating change on non-clinical aspects. While showing definite improvement in surgical practices, lower performers trailed higher performers on culture and learning on the change continuum.

**DISCUSSION**

We identified factors distinguishing higher-performing and lower-performing facilities in an intervention to improve surgical quality in Tanzania, filling a critical knowledge gap about drivers of variation in outcomes across facilities. The terms ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ performance refer to relative performance outcomes within the context of our study design. In actuality, lower performers achieved substantial improvements in their surgical safety practices.

While our analytic approach deliberately focused on deviance, there were common themes among higher and lower performers. Both valued improving knowledge and surgical practices through the SSC, capacity...
building interventions and inperson mentorship. Lower performers also recognised the importance of data monitoring, teamwork and open communication towards endline. Our findings provide important lessons for policymakers, funders and practitioners interested in scaling surgical quality.

Non-technical aspects of surgery may be central to performance. While efforts to improve surgical quality often focus on clinical interventions, we found focus on teamwork and collective learning differentiated higher-performing and lower-performing facilities. Our findings echo those of Bradley et al.,6 who found non-clinical skills differentiated higher performers in an intervention to improve primary care quality and access in Ethiopia. A growing number of studies in surgery have also found performance is influenced by teamwork and collective learning capabilities.49–54 While non-technical skills required for surgical providers in LMICs are not different from those required in HICs, providers in LMICs must address constraints related to insufficient personnel, equipment or supplies.55 The Non-Technical Skills for Surgeons behavioural assessment tool can be used to develop teamwork training tailored to the LMIC context.56–58 Strategies such as using data for improvement, creating spaces for reflection and a culture of psychological safety can foster collective learning.50 59 60

Furthermore, tailoring interventions to meet the needs of individual facilities may be beneficial. Higher performers in our study were smaller-sized facilities. This finding is consistent with a US study which found small facility size was associated with a fourfold increase in the odds of reporting successful implementation of a surgical checklist.61 The literature suggests possible reasons. All surgical team members were able to participate in trainings, which possibly facilitated greater buy-in and lower resistance to change.62 Training the team as a whole may also have contributed to improved outcomes.63 64 Implementation may also have been aided by better communication, flexibility and fewer people to bring on board with changes in smaller facilities.61 65 Since facilities had different starting points in their physical and cultural contexts, a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to interventions may not be optimal. Future safe surgery initiatives should consider preintervention assessments of organisational culture and readiness to tailor interventions for each facility.66–70 For example, lower-performing facilities may benefit from training all surgical team members rather than a few staff, focusing on clinical interventions before emphasising cultural change, leadership engagement and tailored coaching by mentors.

Implementation has been suggested as the ‘critical gateway’ between adoption and routine use of an innovation, and therefore requires attention.71 72 We found that leaders in higher-performing facilities were more engaged in the implementation of SS2020. Engaged leaders understand the requisites for successful implementation of interventions, can frame implementation for learning and address provider resistance.49–51 73–75 Future trainings for leadership and data quality should include facility leaders and regional health management teams. Lower-performing facilities in our study struggled with engaging dissenters. As experience in HICs has shown, raising awareness about safe surgery among stakeholders, internal training, adapting interventions to local context and learning collectively from performance monitoring can foster a receptive implementation climate.24 61 Finally, the context for implementation in LMICs requires focusing on the whole surgical system, including strengthening infrastructure, changing culture, building capacity of surgical teams and senior leadership support.34 64 76 77

Figure 2  Framework and theory of change.

Pre-intervention organizational context
- Physical
- Cultural
- Learning

Immediate changes in surgical practice and culture

Sustainable changes in surgical practice and culture

Engagement with interventions

Evolution of organizational culture

Evolution of organizational learning
Our findings have important limitations. First, our sample size was small. Additional investigation in diverse contexts is necessary for generalisability. Importantly, higher and lower performers could have been different in ways not captured in our themes. Our measurement of higher-performing and lower-performing facilities was limited to one composite measure of 14 indicators on the SSC. Measures outside the operating room on surgical outcomes as well as cultural and learning aspects would have strengthened it. We also treated all improvements (eg, 25–45% vs 75–95%) to be of similar significance even though greater adherence to the SSC might lead to better outcomes.\(^7\)\(^7\) We could not pilot-test our interview guide due to time constraints, but we did not encounter problems with interpretation of questions. Interviewee responses may be subject to recall and social desirability biases. The majority of the interviewees attended SS2020 trainings so we do not know enough about the perspectives of those not trained. Finally, further quantitative research in larger samples is required to assess whether our findings apply in different contexts.

CONCLUSION

While interventions to improve surgical quality are growing, knowledge on how best to improve surgical quality in LMICs is scant. Our results suggest that investing in non-technical skills including teamwork and communication and collective learning may be critical to improving surgical quality. Building these capabilities in surgical teams, tailoring interventions to facility context through preintervention assessments and strong leadership engagement to build a receptive climate can facilitate successful implementation of safe surgery interventions.

Author affiliations

1Program in Global Surgery and Social Change, Harvard Medical School
2Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
3Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard University T H Chan School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
4Department of Epidemiology, National Institute for Medical Research Mwanza Research Centre, Mwanza, Tanzania
5GE Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
6Safe Surgery 2020 Project, Jhpiego, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
7Department of Surgery, Bugando Consultant and Referral Hospital, Mwanza, Tanzania
8Dalberg Implement, Dalberg Group, Nairobi, Kenya
9Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
10Department of Global Health, Assist International, Ripon, California, USA
11Department of Health, Social Welfare and Nutrition Service, President’s Office – Regional Administration and Local Government, Dodoma, Tanzania
12Department of Adult Non-Communicable Diseases, Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, Dodoma, Tanzania
13Department of Plastic and Oral Surgery, Boston Children’s Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
14Dalberg Advisors, Dalberg Group, New York, New York, USA
15Safe Surgery 2020 Project, Jhpiego, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
16Dalberg Implement, Dalberg Group, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
17Department of Global Health, Assist International, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
18Departments of Anesthesiology and Surgery, Boston Children’s Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
19Pritha Chatterjee
20ELMA Philanthropies
21Eliezer Mystal
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Contributors

SA, DB, EB, IC, FE, AH, SrK, SaK, NAK, GM, SM, EM, JGM, CheR, VS, AT, FT and JV conceived the study. SA designed the study methods. SA, AM and MS collected the data. PC and NZ analysed the qualitative data. SS, TW, SSA and DZ analysed the quantitative data. SA, PC, NZ and GCG interpreted the data. SA and PC drafted the manuscript. JGM, EB, CheR and JV obtained funding. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

SA, SSA, EB, MC, PC, IC, ADM, EE, LF, GCG, MG, AH, DTJ, AK, LI, SrK, SaK, TNL, EM, SM, AM, GM, ChaR, CheR, HS, DS, VS, CS, MS, LT, AT, JV, TW and NZ had financial support from GE Foundation for the submitted work. EE, AH, GCG, AK, LF, SM, DS, LT, AT and JV declare financial support from ELMA Philanthropies. DB is employed by GE Foundation, which funded this work. NAK reports that he is the Director of Health, Social Welfare and Nutrition Services at PO-ALG in Tanzania. SM reports that she is the Acting Assistant Director NCDS, at the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children in Tanzania. Both institutions are party to the MoU under which the Safe Surgery 2020 intervention (the subject of the study/assessment) is implemented.

Patient consent for publication

Not required.

Ethics approval

We received ethical approval for the study from Harvard Medical School and Tanzania’s National Institute for Medical Research.

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

De-identified data are available upon reasonable request and approval by the Tanzania Ministry of Health officials per the data sharing agreement.

Supplemental material

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**ORCID iDs**
Shehnaz Alidina http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4403-7871
Pritha Chatterjee http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6766-9401
John G Meara http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4369-3209
Steven J Staffa http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7588-7596
David Zurakowski http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3610-6942

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Supplementary Appendix 1: Interview questions at baseline, midline and endline

Safe Surgery 2020 – Tanzania

Baseline questions

Background

1. What is your position at the hospital/health center?

Prompts
   a. How long have you been with the hospital/health center?
   b. What are your main responsibilities at this hospital/health center?

Vision for surgery

2. What is your vision for surgical services at your hospital/health center?

Prompts
   a. How would you like to see surgical services improve at your hospital/health center?
   b. How might these improvements affect surgical outcomes?
   c. Is surgery a high priority at your hospital/health center? Why or why not?

3. Tell us what it is like to work in this hospital in general. How would you characterize the organizational culture, the way people interact, what it feels like to be in this facility?

Safe Surgery 2020 initiative


5. In your opinion, how do you see this initiative affecting your surgical services here?

6. What is your facility’s plan for implementing the Safe Surgery 2020 interventions at your hospital/health center? (When will you start, how will the work be organized? Who will be involved?)

7. Which factors do you feel will be most helpful in your surgical team’s efforts to improve the quality of surgical services in your facility?

8. Which factors do you feel might hinder your surgical team’s efforts to improve the quality of surgical services in your facility?
Quality improvement projects

9. I would like to ask you about the quality improvement project(s) that you and your team have chosen to work on as part of the leadership course you participated in.
   a. Can you describe the quality improvement project(s) you selected to work on?
   b. How were these quality improvement projects identified?
   c. What outcomes are you hoping to achieve through the quality improvement projects?
   d. Is there commitment within the hospital/health center for this work?

Prompts

i. Is the leadership (CEO, Medical Director) committed to this work?
ii. Who on the surgical team is committed? How motivated are they to make the changes required?
iii. Do you have a champion to lead this work?

b. How will you approach your work (structure, who will be involved, how will you go about your work)?

f. What are the factors that will help facilitate the success of your work?

g. What challenges do you anticipate? How are you planning to address these challenges?

Surgical Safety Checklist

10. As part of the SS2020 initiative, your hospital/health center will be implementing the SSC. What are your thoughts on how the SSC will affect surgery in your hospital/health center?
   a. How do you think the SSC will affect how surgery is performed by the surgical team?
   b. Can you describe how you think the SSC will affect the outcomes of surgery?

11. How committed is the leadership and surgical team to implementing the checklist?

12. What will be your approach to implementing the SSC?

13. What do you think are factors that will facilitate the implementation of the SSC in your hospital/health center?

14. What challenges do you anticipate in successfully implementing the SSC?

15. What would make the implementation of the SSC a success at your facility?
Mentoring

16. In your own words, can you describe what the mentoring intervention is and how it is structured?

   a. In what ways is mentoring different from traditional supervision?

17. What areas of mentoring would help strengthen surgical services at your facility?

18. What current barriers or challenges could mentors help surgical staff overcome?

19. What are your expectations of your mentors? The mentor program?

   **Prompts**
   
   a. Clinical mentoring expectations
   
   b. Mentor-mentee relationship expectations
   
   c. Communication expectations

Data Quality Improvement

20. Can you describe what the data quality improvement intervention is?

21. How has your understanding about the importance of accurate, complete and timely data for surgical services changed since the training?

22. What are your plans for strengthening data collection and reporting at your facility for SSIs/sepsis and for referrals out?

23. Do you feel supported by your hospital leadership in these improvement interventions? How?

24. What will be the most helpful to your accomplishments (e.g., training, resources provided by the project, cultural changes, learning orientation, operational changes)?

25. What will be the most challenging aspects of your efforts to strengthen data collection and reporting at your facility? How will you get around these challenges?

Leadership and Development training

26. Did the surgical team participate in the leadership training? What were your most important takeaways from the training?

27. In what ways do you think the leadership training will influence your facility?

28. What are your next steps following the leadership training?

SPECT and Anesthesia

29. How important is equipment sterilization in creating an environment for safe surgery?
a. What kinds of processes do you currently use to sterilize equipment?

b. Are there ways in which your sterilization processes could be improved?

30. What barriers do you have in providing safe anesthesia?

c. Are there ways in which your current anesthesia practices could be improved?

Closing

31. What is the most important message you want us to take away from this interview?

32. Is there any other subject or topic you think we need to discuss to better understand how to successfully implement the Safe Surgery 2020 initiative in your facility?

Thank you for your time and participation in this interview
Safe Surgery 2020 – Tanzania

Midline Interview Questions

Background

1. What is your position at the hospital/health center? How long have you been with the hospital/health center?

Safe Surgery 2020

1. What are your priorities for improving surgery at your facility?

2. How is the suite of safe surgery interventions helping you to achieve these priorities?
   a. Are there aspects or components of this initiative that seem more or less beneficial to your facility than you thought/hoped?

3. What impact has the Safe Surgery 2020 project had on your hospital?
   a. Are there things you are doing differently now than you were before you started the project?
   b. What has been the impact on providers, if any?
   c. What has been the impact on patients, if any?

Quality Improvement Project

4. I would like to ask you about the quality improvement project that you and your team chose to work on as part of the leadership course you participated in. Can you describe the project(s) you chose?

5. What outcomes are you hoping to achieve through the project?

6. Tell us about the work you have done over the past year on your quality improvement project to improve [outcome].
   a. How was the work organized?
   b. Who is involved (To what extent has the project engaged the surgical team and other physicians and staff at the hospital? How have project mentors been involved?)
   c. What specific activities are ongoing or have been completed as a result of the project?
d. What kinds of changes do you believe are still required for you to achieve your outcome?

7. What has been most helpful to your accomplishments (e.g. leadership support, surgical team buy-in, training provided, perceived importance/relevance of project, accountability & feedback mechanisms, resources provided by the project, cultural changes, learning orientation, etc.)

8. What have been the most challenging aspects of your efforts to improve [outcome]? (e.g. lack of leadership support, lack of buy-in, provider resistance to change, low relevance, lack of customization of intervention to local context, lack of culture for change, skepticism about the benefits of the project, lack of accountability, infrastructure challenges, etc.)

Surgical Safety Checklist

9. The last time we spoke, we discussed the Surgical Safety Checklist. What have you done to date towards implementing the checklist?

   a. How did you go about its implementation?

   b. How has checklist usage worked so far?

   c. How have your practices changed as a result of this initiative?

   d. What are the factors that have facilitated implementation of the surgical safety checklist in your facility?

   e. What are the biggest obstacles you have faced? How did you address them?

Interventions

Leadership training

10. Do you feel that you learned any lasting lessons from the leadership training? If so, what were they?

11. What are some of the changes you’ve seen/implemented as a result of this training?

Mentorship
12. What are the areas that you have received support in so far? Of the areas of mentoring discussed, which would you say are the most and least valuable and why?

13. In what ways do you think the mentoring program will contribute to the strengthening surgical and anesthetic services? (e.g. facility benefits, provider skill benefits)

14. What changes have been made as a result of the mentoring program? (e.g. changes in your professional practice, changes at the facility level)

15. Can you describe your overall experience with the mentorship program?
   a. General attitude around adopting the mentoring program in your facility
   b. Relationship and communication with mentor
   c. Characteristics and traits of mentor

Data strengthening intervention

16. What actions, if any, have you taken to improve data collection and record keeping? If no, why not?

17. From your perspective, how has the new OR logbooks, which were added earlier this year, affected data collection for surgical patients? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way you are currently collecting data for surgical patients?

18. What challenges, if any, are you facing in implementing the recommendations provided at the clinical training session or during mentorship for collecting and using data at your facility? How are you addressing them?

19. What support, if any, are you receiving from leadership to improve data collection and record keeping?

SPECT training

20. How have your sterilization practices changed as a result of sterilization training?

WFSA training

21. How have your anesthesia practices changed as a result anesthesia training?
Facilitators/barriers

22. What has been most helpful to your accomplishments (e.g., resources provided by the project, leadership training, cultural changes, learning orientation, operational changes)?

23. What have been the most challenging aspects of your efforts to strengthen surgical services at your hospital/health center? Given the barriers that you faced, why do you think you were successful?

24. What are the most important lessons we can learn about successfully implementing surgical strengthening initiatives? If you were giving advice to another hospital in another region, what would you tell them?

Thank you for your time and participation in this interview.
Safe Surgery 2020 – Tanzania
Endline Interview Questions

Background
33. What is your position at the hospital/health center?

Prompts
a. How long have you been with the hospital/health center?

b. What are your main responsibilities at this hospital/health center?

Safe Surgery 2020
34. When we spoke at the beginning, you described your vision for surgery.

a. How much progress have you made to achieving that vision?

b. Has the Safe Surgery initiative helped you in achieving that vision? If yes, how?

c. Are there aspects or components of Safe Surgery 2020 that seem more or less beneficial to your facility than you thought/hoped?

Quality Improvement Project
35. I would like to ask you about the quality improvement project that you and your team chose to work on as part of the leadership course you participated in.

a. What outcomes are you trying to achieve through the project?

b. What specific activities are ongoing or have been completed?

a. How would you assess your progress to date relative to where you thought you might be when you began your project?

b. What kinds of changes do you believe are still required for you to achieve your outcome?

c. Which of these do you intend to undertake in the near term?

36. What has been most helpful to your accomplishments (e.g., resources provided by the project, leadership training, cultural changes, learning orientation, operational changes)?
37. What have been the most challenging aspects of your efforts to improve [outcome]? The most surprising?

38. Do you feel supported by your hospital leadership in these improvement interventions?

Surgical Safety Checklist

39. How is the implementation of the checklist going today?

40. What do you think are the factors that have facilitated implementation of the surgical safety checklist in your hospital/health center? (e.g. education, training, leadership support, SSC champion, data feedback, tailoring of SSC, coaching, etc.)

41. What were the biggest obstacles you faced in implementing the checklist? (E.g. lack of medical drugs, supplies or equipment, checklist barriers (E.g. lack of medical drugs, supplies or equipment, checklist barriers (design issues, items not appropriate for Tz context, etc.), lack of leadership support, lack of provider buy-in, approach to implementation, lack of education and training, etc.)

42. Given the barriers you faced, why do you think you were successful?

43. If you could improve checklist use, what would you try to improve?

44. In comparison to before implementation of the checklist, how would you describe your safety practices in the operating room? What about teamwork?

45. If you were coaching another hospital/health center about surgical safety checklist implementation, what are the key things that you would recommend to them?

46. How active, if at all, would you say senior leadership (e.g. hospital administrator, medical director) were in the checklist implementation process? Was there a champion? What was your role in implementation of the checklist?

SSIs, sepsis and maternal sepsis

47. What outcomes were you trying to achieve?

48. What progress have you made?

49. What has helped you achieve that progress?

50. What are some of the barriers that you have faced?
Impact

51. Do you feel this suite of interventions, all of these trainings we’ve talked about, have addressed some of your challenges with regards to surgery? How? (SPECT, WFSA, FAF, Touch Surgery, Project ECHO, Leadership, mentorship, clinical training)

52. What impact has the Safe Surgery 2020 project had on your hospital? Are there things you are doing differently now than you were before you started the project?

53. What has been the impact on providers, if any (culture, teamwork, communication, roles, satisfaction, OR space, equipment, satisfaction, sterilization procedures, anesthesia, surgical skills, etc.)?

54. What has been the impact on patients, if any (e.g. patient/staff interaction, SSI rates, sepsis rates, volume, referrals, etc.)? Do you have any stories of patient outcomes that were directly affected/changed by what you learned?

Facilitators/barriers

55. What has been most helpful to your accomplishments (e.g., resources provided by the project, leadership training, cultural changes, learning orientation, operational changes, skills training, remaking surgical or sterilization spaces,)?

56. What have been the most challenging aspects of your efforts to improve [outcome]? The most surprising?

57. What are some interventions or processes you’d like to see changed to improve surgery that haven’t yet?

Lessons learned

58. In your opinion what are the most important lessons we can learn as SS2020 about successful implementation of surgical strengthening initiatives in Tanzania?

a. If you were giving advice to another hospital seeking to do the same, what would you tell them?

b. If you were leading a strengthening initiative in another hospital, what major elements would you be sure to incorporate?
c. What advice would you give the people who designed and implemented these programs about how to make it effective in hospitals like this one? (Probe for successful implementation approaches).

d. In your opinion how can we make these programs more effective in the future?

Closing

59. What is the most important message you want us to take away from this interview?

60. We are trying to understand the experience and impact of the Safe Surgery 2020 initiative on your hospital; is there anything we should have asked to understand this issue better?

Thank you for your time and participation in this interview.
Supplementary Appendix 2. Composite indicator of 14 safety and teamwork and communication indicators on the Surgical Safety Checklist

Patient safety process adherence:

1. Use of pulse oximetry at the time of initiation of anaesthesia
2. Administration of prophylactic antibiotics within 60 minutes before incision
3. Oral confirmation, immediately before incision, of the identity of the patient, operative site, and procedure to be performed
4. Completion of an instrument, sponge and needle count at the end of the procedure
5. Appropriate operative site cleansing (skin preparation with chlorhexidine-alcohol or iodine-based solution)
6. Vaginal preparation with povidone-iodine

Teamwork and communication discussion adherence:

7. Rate of eight discussion items on risk for airway difficulty/aspiration
8. Risk of blood loss
9. Surgical provider’s discussion on patient-specific concerns
10. Anaesthetist’s discussion on patient-specific concerns
11. Sterility of instruments and equipment
12. Anticipated procedure level of difficulty and duration
13. Equipment/instrument problems that arose during surgery
14. Patient’s post-operative recovery
**Supplementary Appendix 3: Quotations Illustrating Themes and Sub-themes in Higher- and Lower-Performing Facilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distinguishing themes</th>
<th>Description of theme/sub theme</th>
<th>Illustrative quotes</th>
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<td><strong>Pre-intervention context</strong></td>
<td>Facility’s pre-intervention context.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Facility characteristics</td>
<td>Pre-intervention physical infrastructure as described by providers.</td>
<td>“If you tell someone to work on something and they are lacking instruments, the infrastructure isn’t good, the ORs are inadequate, they become demoralized and teams suffer, because we want to support each other, but we can’t, and patients suffer. This happens because we have problems with equipment like suction machine, the OR lamp is not working, space is not enough.” (Surgeon, Facility 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team orientation</td>
<td>Pre-intervention perceived team relationships.</td>
<td>“We always work as a team. We were using a problem solution tree before SS2020. So, if there was an issue, team members came together, suggested solutions and picked solutions which scored highest and were easiest to implement. The SSC made it easier to coordinate.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Learning orientation | Pre-intervention perceived organizational learning strategies. | “We practice low dose high frequency learning every day before starting our duties, because we | “Physically as a surgical team if we are not given the forms, it becomes difficult. How do we
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement with SS2020 intervention</th>
<th>Engagement and learning from the SS2020 intervention.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership and SSC Training</td>
<td>Post-intervention perceived learnings from the leadership training intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The SSC is about communication and learning together while doing. We don’t have to hide mistakes, just to be graded as good providers. If you expose your mistake, you can be corrected. And ultimately the team benefits by learning from your mistake.” (Surgical Provider, Facility 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Everything in the SSC is about improving surgical outcomes and observation so we are spending so much energy on SSC. Communication is fine, but if I use the form, I am forced to check everything I may forget after a five-hour surgery to give quality care to the patient. We will never leave a gauze behind again.” (Surgical Provider, Facility 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building interventions</td>
<td>Post-intervention perceived learnings from the capacity building interventions.</td>
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<td>“For eclamptic patients we used to use general anesthesia. But we learnt that if we have arrested the convulsions and managed the blood pressure, then we can do with spinal anesthesia. These new updates help us work better as teams because everyone in the OR is learning, and surgeons and nurses and anesthetists take decisions together.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 1)</td>
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<td>“I can say practical training which was very nice for us. Now we are learning new techniques like using Joel-Cohen incision from what we were using, the Pfannenstiel incision. This is minimizing infection, letting patients go home, and we use less suture. Our practice is improving every day and we are learning so much.” (Surgeon, Facility 10)</td>
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| Sustained                         | Post-intervention |
|                                   | “I like the continuous |
|                                   | “I find mentorship to be |

extent of experimentation and willingness to learn from others have to make sure that everybody has gained something new. I think this continuing learning is better, because it is hard to retain information the first time. We experiment with learning strategies but currently this is going well for SS2020.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 2)

improve SSC use? We also have other duties so we can't keep reminding each other. If the focal person can print the checklist and provide it in all ORs, if leaders and matron can check this, it would be better.” (Surgeon, Facility 8)

Engagement with SS2020 intervention

Leadership and SSC Training

Post-intervention perceived learnings from the leadership training intervention.

“Everything in the SSC is about improving surgical outcomes and observation so we are spending so much energy on SSC. Communication is fine, but if I use the form, I am forced to check everything I may forget after a five-hour surgery to give quality care to the patient. We will never leave a gauze behind again.” (Surgical Provider, Facility 10)

Capacity building interventions

Post-intervention perceived learnings from the capacity building interventions.

“I can say practical training which was very nice for us. Now we are learning new techniques like using Joel-Cohen incision from what we were using, the Pfannenstiel incision. This is minimizing infection, letting patients go home, and we use less suture. Our practice is improving every day and we are learning so much.” (Surgeon, Facility 10)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>learning interventions</th>
<th>perceived learnings from the sustainable learning interventions.</th>
<th>training just like they are doing the ECHO. To me, in project ECHO, you present real cases and how you managed them. So it is not the books and records, you present a real case which is very helpful for long term improvement.” (Surgeon, Facility 3)</th>
<th>better than project ECHO because when you talk to someone face to face on health education is better than using the screens. They catch your procedure on the spot and learning is fast and immediate and we are supervised in-person.” (Surgeon, Facility 8)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teamwork and communication</strong></td>
<td>Post-intervention team relationships, mutual support between team members, and extent of open communication.</td>
<td><strong>Provider buy-in</strong></td>
<td>Post-intervention involvement and participation of providers in the SS2020 intervention.</td>
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<td>“People may argue that they know what they are supposed to do, but we know they can be motivated today and lose interest tomorrow. So, we have team meetings every week, every two weeks, whatever is possible to check progress and let people showing less interest speak up. If someone is having problems, they know we want to all help them, so everyone wants to participate.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 3)</td>
<td><strong>Hierarchy and open communication</strong></td>
<td>Post-intervention extent of imbibed hierarchies including perceived comfort of junior team members in expressing opinions to seniors.</td>
<td>“Since I am controlling the checklist, I say attention please and read the points with a sign-in. Then all staff answer according to the questions asked. The doctor waits for me because he trusts that I will remind him if he has forgotten something. There is trust.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 1)</td>
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| “No one listens to staff. But when the SSI was going up, the medical officer ordered that if staff refused to use the checklist, they should be removed from the OR. So everyone thought that they will be noticed if they resist the checklist. So, they started to use it. I think orderly decisions to make SSC use compulsory helps.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 10) | “The surgeon was looking for the defective part, which looked like the patient’s intestine. I told him what he was trying to remove was actually part of the intestine. The surgeon asked if I had more knowledge than him. He said as a surgeon he knew the difference. After opening, he realized he had
Collective responsibility | Extent of collective ownership of SS2020, including sharing of responsibilities with non-surgeon providers in surgical teams. | “A patient does not belong to a person. If person is brought in the theater, everybody gets busy. Earlier everyone did what they felt obligated to in the OR. So if there was a problem in the anesthesia site, the surgeon would just wait for you to go through the complication. But now the surgeon works with us, and in turn, if the surgeon faces problems due to complications during surgery, the anesthetist helps.” (Anesthetist, Facility 2) | “If surgeons are not motivated and don’t drive the ward nurse and skip the SSC in a hurry, we can’t remind them in the middle of surgery. The higher educated have to instruct the lower educated subordinates. And sometimes the staff with low cadres can ask questions, but with caution to not offend staff with higher education.” (Nurse, Facility 8) |
--- | --- | --- | --- |
Collective learning | Post intervention group learning, including the balance of individual learning aspirations against team learning goals, translation of knowledge to colleagues, use of data as a learning tool, extent of learning together as teams, and evaluation. | “Those of us that went for the leadership training found time to teach others within a week. People argued that they knew their jobs, or that it would be impossible to complete the SSC while operating. But what we did, and it is a continuing process, was to sit down and repeatedly explain research on surgical errors, and the importance of each step in the SSC.” (Surgical Provider, Facility 2) | “Staff who attended leadership and clinical training are champions of SS2020. But others feel it is a waste of time. And unless there is pressure from above, why should they listen to us?” (Surgical Provider, Facility 8). |
Knowledge translation | Post-intervention sharing of knowledge by SS2020 training attendees with colleagues who did not attend trainings and new recruits. | “In the past we didn’t have time to discuss our data and never knew the | “Data is important, but we can do it after surgery improvement. We need |
of data for learning, monitoring and decision-making.
importance of the data we collect. We thought we collected data to send to the government, nowadays we know this data belongs to us, they help us catch our mistakes to know where we are and plan targets for where we want to go.”
(Surgical provider, Facility 3)

Team learning
Post-intervention extent of mutual support and collaboration in intervention tasks to achieve common goals.

“We knew helping each other was good but after SS2020 we channelized growing together because we know how critical it is. We divide roles frequently so everyone is familiar with tasks. We were bad with emergency cases. But nowadays since people have seen each other’s jobs, we are like a machine, there are no delays with emergency cases and people respond quickly to their role.”
(Surgical provider, Facility 2)

“Our attitude has changed and we are now sensitive to see complications. It has changed our thinking about surgery- sterilization training, Project ECHO, antibiotic use. Now we only give antibiotics when we suspect sepsis. I did not know you could do safe surgery without antibiotics. So, we have gained so much knowledge and training, it is a great opportunity.”
(Surgeon, Facility 8)

Role of leadership
Post-intervention leadership engagement with SS2020 and staff expectations about leadership support for intervention functions.

Expectations from leadership
Post-intervention staff expectations about leader's involvement.

“The hospital management has to make time for daily problems in a big project. We go to discuss strategies about how people are performing, if someone is resisting. Another example is when a staff is missing from the theater team or there are two procedures at the same time, the hospital

“He cares but he usually cannot concentrate because he has so much to manage. But if you convince him that I will take only ten minutes he will listen but beyond that is hard. Or we can discuss while we are walking. Even if we have so many things, we can discuss one issue, and
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<tr>
<th><strong>Leadership engagement</strong></th>
<th><strong>Post-intervention leader’s engagement with SS2020.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Perceived impact of SS2020 and beyond</strong></th>
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<td>Management may assist to call another member of the staff to assist.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 3)</td>
<td>“I am monitoring the daily reports. Every morning we have reports from each department, they tell us how many surgeries they have done and how. I also speak with dissenters. There is a very stubborn nurse who does not like the SS2020 changes. So, I insisted that she attend the training. Special effort is needed for those who are disturbing others.” (Medical Officer-in-Charge, Facility 2)</td>
<td>“We have made good progress in infrastructure with modern equipment and renovation of the ORs. Doctors and nurses have been trained in sterilization and better surgical skills. Now we need more trainings or mentorship. If you know that next month a mentor will come, it makes you practice more and achieve more, so we need supportive supervision.” (Anaesthetist, Facility 9)</td>
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*Quotes edited for language and flow.