

The Capacity Project in Ethiopia

The second most populous nation in Africa, Ethiopia faces numerous health challenges in caring for its population of 78 million. One of these challenges is to prevent women who are HIV-positive from transmitting the virus to their babies. Through prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programs, mothers receive antenatal counseling and testing for HIV, and—if positive—follow-up and antiretroviral therapy; babies receive antiretroviral prophylaxis within 72 hours of birth.

The Capacity Project began expanding PMTCT services in Ethiopia in October 2007. This work is a continuation of USAID's bilateral PMTCT project, in which IntraHealth International and partners supported 248 public health centers and increased PMTCT coverage from 0% in September 2003 to 39% of the 635 public health centers in September 2007.

Currently the Capacity Project is expanding PMTCT services to additional sites; strengthening the Mothers Support Group program; providing support for PMTCT in private facilities; and conducting training for pediatric HIV/AIDS linkages and referral.

Activities in Brief

Expanding Access to Comprehensive Maternal and Child Services

In Ethiopia, 84% of women deliver their babies at home. Among the mothers that go to a health center at least once for antenatal care, a large portion never return after learning their HIV status. This is why the Capacity Project is fostering community action and advocacy for behavioral change. It is also supporting the delivery of PMTCT services at 258 sites, bringing PMTCT coverage to over 60% of health centers in the targeted regions.

The Project participated in the finalization of the national PMTCT guidelines and training curriculum, and assisted in disseminating the guidelines in Oromiya and Addis Ababa regions. In Amhara, Tigray and Oromiya regions, as well as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR), the Project conducted training workshops and on-the-job training for providers, focusing on comprehensive antenatal care and PMTCT.

Looking ahead, the Project will complete the training of health workers on the national PMTCT curriculum and adult and pediatric preventive care package; continue integration of PMTCT as a key component of safe motherhood interventions at health center and community levels; and strengthen supervision through training and coaching of Regional Health Bureau and Zonal/Woreda supervisors.

Scaling Up Access to Mothers Support Groups

The successful Mothers Support Group (MSG) program empowers HIV-positive pregnant and postpartum women to access

peer-based psychosocial support and make linkages to critical services such as family planning, infant-feeding counseling, nutritional support, antiretroviral therapy and a financial empowerment program to create self-help support groups in partnership with local agencies.

The Capacity Project led the development of an MSG training manual that has been formally endorsed by federal and regional Ministry of Health officials for dissemination and use throughout the country, and has provided supervision to all existing MSGs. To engage members in income-generating activities, the Project is orienting MSGs to form or strengthen small self-help groups and training facilitators to assist the groups with business activities.

To help with advocacy, the Project launched a series of radio programs on PMTCT challenges such as mothers who don't return for follow-up after learning their HIV status. One such program, focused on the contributions of MSGs, was recently co-produced with the BBC World Service Trust and aired on Ethiopia National Radio. Similar issues and themes were addressed in Amharic-language newspaper articles and at a nationwide workshop in conjunction with World AIDS Day 2007. The Project also produced a short film on MSGs for use in advocacy and as an educational tool for antenatal care sites.

In September 2007, MSG programs were operating at 34 sites. Since that time, the Capacity Project has expanded MSGs to an additional 50 facilities. The Project has trained 135 mentor mothers and 60 site coordinators, enrolled over 1,500 mothers in the program and graduated more than 200 women from the support groups.

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Strengthening the Reach of PMTCT Services to the Community Level

Many Ethiopian mothers do not go to health centers for antenatal care, or don't return after their initial visits. This is a major challenge in increasing PMTCT service coverage and impact. In response, the Capacity Project is training community action facilitators to mobilize pregnant women and their partners for PMTCT services including routine HIV counseling and testing as well as delivery at a health facility. Health care providers will be trained on mother-to-child transmission prophylaxis and safe-delivery practices.

The Project will continue to strengthen community mobilization efforts for behavioral change, empowering communities to identify local resources and responses to health issues. In addition, the Project will provide training, supervision and job aids to build local capacity.

Increasing PMTCT Services in Private-Sector Facilities

For the large portion of women—especially urban dwellers—who seek services at private-sector health facilities, the Capacity Project is helping to initiate and support antenatal care and PMTCT services in private clinics.

The Capacity Project has launched PMTCT services in five clinics in Awassa, the regional capital of the SNNPR, and has expanded PMTCT services in an additional six private clinics and two Family Guidance Associations of Amhara

regional state, totaling 13 private health institutions. These are among 15 private clinics identified to start the service in four regions, including higher-level clinics with antenatal care and delivery services as well as maternal and child health clinics in urban areas.

Current and upcoming efforts include conducting policy dissemination and advocacy activities in selected facilities providing maternity services; training private-sector providers, administrators and supervisors in comprehensive antenatal care and PMTCT services; and conducting supportive supervision.

Expanding Pediatric HIV Case Detection and Referral Services

The Capacity Project is working to train families, caregivers of orphans and vulnerable children, staff of community organizations and health workers to detect HIV in children and to refer them for early diagnosis and timely initiation of antiretroviral treatment.

The Project has trained 126 providers in 58 health centers, as well as over 100 health extension workers. Selected providers are receiving training in Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illness (IMNCI), a strategy that includes identification and referral of HIV-infected children; training provided to health extension workers focuses exclusively on case detection and referral.

Other activities include conducting baseline assessments and resource mapping; training health workers on IMNCI, HIV case detection and referral; providing supportive supervision; and ensuring the quality of reports.



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