

# CASE STUDY

## PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION

Sharing knowledge and best practices to end childhood AIDS in Africa and keep mothers healthy



Madam Rebecca Naa Okaikor Akufo-Addo,  
First Lady of the Republic of Ghana



Ghana  
Volta and Northern Regions



**FREE  
TO  
SHINE**

AFRICA UNITED AGAINST CHILDHOOD AIDS

### THE ISSUES

In Ghana, significant advances have been made to eliminate mother-to-child transmission (eMTCT) of HIV following concerted efforts to roll out prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) interventions across the country. To achieve the goal of eMTCT, further progress is needed.

- HIV prevalence in the Volta Region in 2017 was 2.7% compared to a national prevalence of 1.6%.
- Women make up around 60% of the total number of people living with HIV.
- Mother-to-child transmission of HIV accounts for over 90% of new HIV infections among children.
- The HIV mother-to-child transmission rate is 15.97%, including during breast feeding.

Barriers impeding the uptake of PMTCT services include inadequate information on HIV and PMTCT services, pregnant women not knowing their HIV status, HIV-related stigma and discrimination and minimal involvement of men in the reproductive health of their female partners.

### THE OBJECTIVES

- To inform and educate community members on HIV and the adverse effects of HIV related stigma and discrimination.
- To galvanize community support for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV.
- To provide HIV and syphilis testing services, particularly for women of reproductive age.
- To address the reproductive health needs of women living with HIV.

### THE INITIATIVE

Two large HIV health education events were held in Ghana, for the local communities in the Volta and Northern Regions. Both events were held over a 2-day period. The event in the Volta Region targeted regional market day whilst that in the Northern Region was held to coincide with the Northern Regional Tourism Awards night to take advantage of large numbers of people visiting the communities for these functions. Events in both regions included a durbar (a public reception).

To attract a wide audience the events also offered breast examination, blood pressure and body mass index assessments. In advance of the events 'information vans' equipped with loudspeakers travelled to remote areas, broadcasting details of the event, the health services on offer and communicating public health messages.

During the events, HIV health education messages were communicated using 'edutainment' with drama. The performance told the story of two pregnant women living with HIV, one was supported by her partner and the other was not. Their contrasted experiences highlighted the impact partner support can have on outcomes for both mother and child. The 'edutainment' was delivered in the local language to ensure the audience could identify with the characters. This format was particularly successful at reaching men.



# HEART TO HEART AMBASSADORS



'Heart to Heart Ambassadors', people living with HIV who have been open about their status, shared their personal experiences. Their stories addressed stigma, couples counselling, the role of partners during pregnancy and the PMTCT. They helped to expel people's fears and reinforce that people living with HIV can be treated and can live normal lives and have healthy children. This message was made even more impactful by the presence of one of the Ambassador's ten-month-old baby who was HIV-negative despite her mother being HIV-positive.



**FREE  
TO  
SHINE**

AFRICA UNITED AGAINST CHILDHOOD AIDS

The durbars were attended by the First Lady, Regional Ministers, the Director General of the Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC), representatives from the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ghana Health Service (GHS), traditional and religious leaders, Heart to Heart Ambassadors, representatives of other influential organisations and groups within the community and healthcare personnel delivering HIV services. The First Lady met with healthcare personnel to reinforce the Government's gratitude and commitment to their work, and met with community leaders including Chiefs, Queen Mothers and religious leaders to inform them of their role as agents of change to address HIV stigma and discrimination.

## KEY LEARNINGS

A range of approaches were identified that increased communities' attendance and engagement at health education events and enhanced their understanding of the health education messages by communicating in formats that resonated with them.

- Secure attendance of people from rural areas through advanced promotion of the event.
- Link initiatives to existing events that are well-attended by the target audience, to increase attendance and reduce advertising costs.
- Involve and engage the community to support programme success and ongoing sustainability.
- Use 'edutainment' as an effective tool for health education.
- Involve people living with HIV whose personal stories provide reassurance.
- Educational materials in the local languages are more effective and explanatory illustrations assist understanding.
- Incorporate broader health issues to de-stigmatise the event, encourage wider attendance and make the services more sustainable in the long-term.

## THE OUTCOMES

- 8,500 people reached in total (Volta region 4,500 people, Northern Region 4,000 people).
- 5,300 health education materials distributed.
- 2,500 women provided with sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS).
- 1,345 women tested for HIV and received results.
- All women who tested HIV positive were referred to a nearby health facility and assigned a peer educator to prevent loss to follow-up.
- Overall, women's reproductive health was improved, particularly for women living with HIV.
- Men were better informed of the need to assist their partners in accessing PMTCT services.
- Community members were better informed about the modes of transmission, the services that are available, the humanrights of people living with HIV and the stigma they experience.

This programme was led by H.E. Madam Rebecca Naa Okaikor Akufo-Addo, First Lady of the Republic of Ghana and delivered in collaboration with Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC) with financial support from Abbott. The programme supports the goals of the Free to Shine campaign, a campaign to end childhood AIDS in Africa by 2030 and keep mothers healthy, which is led by the Organisation of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) and the African Union (AU).