

The Promise of an AIDS-Free Generation, One Child at a Time



An urban health extension professional who is supported by Strengthening Ethiopia's Urban Health Program with a child born HIV free as a result of her efforts.

Hidija Ebrahim, 32, is mother of two who lives in Dire Dawa in Eastern Ethiopia. Hidija and her husband moved to the urban center two years ago. Soon after, Hidija became pregnant. Her unfamiliarity to the area coupled with lack of awareness about health care services limited her from accessing health care services including testing for HIV. According to the 2014 Ethiopia Mini Demographic and Health Survey, 18% of women residing in urban areas do not receive antenatal care.

Hilina Abebe is one of the two urban health extension professionals (UHE-ps) working to provide health education and health care services in Hidija's neighborhood (*kebele*) of 376 households. The *kebele* is known for its large concentration of migrants with disposable income, as many work in construction sites. Through her regular outreach work, Hilina discovered Hidija during her seventh month of pregnancy, and linked her to the nearby health facility- Abubekir Health Center. This was first time Hidija tested for HIV, and she learned that she is HIV positive. Prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV is dependent on mothers' timing of possible transmission periods. In Ethiopia, there are an estimated 3,886 new infections each year due to mother-to-child transmission. Timely interventions can reduce the incidence of mother-to-child transmission.

According to Hilina, tracking and linking the pregnant mother to the health center is not enough by itself. UHE-p follow-up visits are equally important to ensure that pregnant women are following-up on antenatal care and PMTCT services properly. "Hidija was in denial about her status. I had to make frequent visits and provide intensive advice to make sure that Hidija understood the risks on her passing the virus to her unborn child if she defaults from PMTCT follow-ups. This is how I helped one child to be born HIV free," describes Hilina.

As indicated in the Government of Ethiopia's 2012 "Accelerated Plan for Scaling Up PMTCT Services in Ethiopia," 60% of women identified to be HIV positive at antenatal care clinics are not provided PMTCT services.

Although UHE-ps identify pregnant women in their catchment areas, absence of documentation of pregnant women presents a significant challenge to ensuring access to antenatal care, PMTCT, institutional delivery, postnatal care, and vaccination for pregnant women and children under the age of one. This challenge also hinders UHE-ps from providing consistent follow-up to pregnant women on whether they are properly following their antenatal care or PMTCT services once they are linked with health facilities.

In order to address challenges, the USAID-funded Strengthening Ethiopia's Urban Health Program (SEUHP) provides technical support to UHE-ps in identifying and linking pregnant women to health facilities for antenatal care and PMTCT services through its supportive supervision and onsite monitoring and coaching strategy.

Strengthening Ethiopia's Urban Health Program provides UHE-ps with guidance to keep records of pregnant women and children under the age of one within their catchment area for follow-up services. A registration format for pregnant women was developed in collaboration with respective city/town health offices and distributed to UHE-ps. According to Hilina, the guidance and techniques she acquired from supportive supervision sessions have encouraged her to adequately track and reach mothers in the community. "We (UHE-ps) are more cautious about our maternal and child health work after it was communicated to us that we should document every pregnant mother and child under one in catchment area. I have to track every pregnant mother as I am expected to update the data every three months." Currently Hilina is currently tracking eight mothers who she linked to Abubekir Health Centre for antenatal care services.

The Program's initiative to strengthen the linkage between UHE-ps and health facilities is also enabling UHE-ps to make efficient referrals and ensure the continuum care for pregnant mothers. The Program produced a standardized referral tool and offered on-site coaching on proper utilization of the tool that enable UHE-ps like Hilina to receive feedback from the health centers which usually highlight follow-up needs for the mother. "The referral format that we are currently utilizing facilitated feedback exchange with health centers. It is a way for us to know the health status of the mother after we link her to the nearby health center."

Strengthening Ethiopia's Urban Health Program works to build the capacity of UHE-ps in 40 city/towns in health need and risk assessment *and* service provision skills to enable them with the skills of building rapport with beneficiaries, prioritizing vulnerable individuals and making efficient referrals to health services.

Sources: Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and control Office, HIV/AIDS Estimates and Projections in Ethiopia, 2011–2016, Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and control Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2014; Accelerated Plan for Scaling Up Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) Services in Ethiopia.