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PROMOT

Year One success story

No pregnant mother wishes to pass on HIV to their unborn child, and Unoma, an unskilled farm worker who had little understanding of what HIV is, is no different.

That's why, after trained health workers from Pact partner HEALIN visited her at her home, Unoma followed up on their encouragement to visit a primary health clinic, where she could be tested for HIV and, if testing positive, get access to antiretroviral medicine and antenatal education to drastically reduce the odds of transmitting the virus to her child.

Unoma is one of thousands of pregnant women in Nigeria's Bayelsa state who are for the first time learning that they can and should be tested for HIV and what they can do to prevent transmission of the disease to their babies.

Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Bayelsa state, which has more than double the prevalence of HIV than Nigeria as a whole, is the goal of PROMOT, a partnership funded by Chevron and managed by Pact. Chevron carries out oil and gas operations in the Nigerian Delta state, while Pact, an international NGO, works in Bayelsa and elsewhere in the country helping to combat corruption, promote democracy and improve health.

PROMOT aims to increase the number of women who are tested for HIV during their pregnancy to 50 percent and to

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increase the percentage of HIV-exposed infants who are tested to 80 percent. More importantly, Pact is building the capacity of community organizations like HEALIN to carry on the work of PMTCT beyond the life of PROMOT.

In its first year, the project helped test 7,382 pregnant women for HIV, more than 20 percent more women than had been tested the previous year. While an improvement, the figure is expected include significantly more women in the project's second year, said PROMOT program manager Dr. Adetayo Banjo.

Unoma is the 25-year-old mother of two boys from previous pregnancies unsupported by antenatal care, her last delivery under unsafe conditions on a farm at the hands of other farmworkers like herself.

Unoma is taking no chances with her current pregnancy. Although she is unsure how many months she has been carrying her baby, she has the peace of mind that he or she is likely to be born free of HIV, since she tested her HIV status at the clinic and is following appropriate antenatal practices she learned from the community health extension workers (CHEWs) at HEALIN.

HEALIN, one of four local partners receiving training and other assistance from Pact to more combat HIV with evidence-based interventions in Bayelsa state, is conducting community meetings and home visits in Tombia village, where Unoma lives, and five other communities.

Not only are HEALIN's efforts resulting in more HIV testing and improved antenatal care among pregnant women, but they're also paying off in improved pediatric health in general.

"Women who were formerly not accessing antenatal care are now doing so on a regular basis" said Gift Godwin, HEALIN's project manager. "But they are even bringing their older babies for post-natal care, especially routine immunizations."

Unoma and other pregnant women are the only demographic PROMOT is reaching. In the year ending August 2013, HEALIN and Pact's other partners reached a total of 6,561 individuals in Bayelsa with their information about HIV, PMTCT and antenatal care, nearly 2,000 of whom were men.

"No woman wants her baby to be HIV infected, even if she is HIV positive," Godwin said. "By the time we comb through the length and breadth of all these communities, all the pregnant women will be attending antenatal care regularly and be tested for HIV."

Just like Unoma.

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