Introduction

From time immemorial, the Assa community remained glued to crude healthcare systems - Pregnant women still made use of the services of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA), while the sick rested at the feet and mercy of Traditional Doctors (TD). Apart from being ignorant of their dangers; these people also suffered from certain aspects of their customs and traditions prohibited pregnant women from certain activities in the community. For instance, breastfeeding mothers were not allowed to go out for a period of two weeks after delivery. Meanwhile, the new born babies are not cloth until after one month during a clothing and naming ceremony organized by the child’s parents.

Due to the crude manner home deliveries are conducted; HIV transmission in this part of the country remained on the increase. Apart from HIV, the fragile new born were left vulnerable to infectious diseases for a period of one month prior to the clothing ceremony. This also increased other diseases prevalence; leading to an increase in maternal and infant mortality rate.
The LCI Intervention Strategy and the Paradigm Shift

Against this backdrop, the Local Capacity Initiative (LCI) project did careful analyses and investigations of things plaguing service uptake in this community. Following the findings;

- Its advocacy team paid several visits to the Fon of Assa and his Traditional Council for a communication for behavioral change.
- The LCI organized a training session for Traditional Leaders including the Fon of Assa. The training was geared at causing the TL to understand their role in health system strengthening and to own health services in their communities.

The training further exposed them to certain customs and traditions which contributed significantly in increasing the high maternal and infant mortality rates in their communities.

Transformed Custodian Effects Changes on Tradition

Barely one year after the training of Traditional Leaders in Bamenda; the Fon of Assa, HRH Fon Meboh A. William went an extra mile in the implementation of modules taught. He spearheaded the abolition of some harsh traditional practices which for decades acted against the community. For instance, the Fon of Assa consulted with the gods of the land after which a ritual was performed to abolish the tradition.

"Continuing with all the old laws that were passed down to us by our ancestors will only stand to spoil the sacrosanctity of our village. That is why, we decided to go tell our forefathers that some of the laws which they took for the good of the community, is no longer applicable today. That is why we slaughtered a goat as the item of sacrifice."

HRH Fon Meboh William A. the Fon of Assa explained.

Service Uptake by the Assa Community

Few months after the abolition of the old customs and traditions which prohibited pregnant women from giving birth in the hospital and in other modern health facilities; the Assa community has now
owned healthcare. This could be seen in the light of high/increase service uptake in the Akwaja Integrated Health Center and in Ako Integrated Health Center. Today, ANC statistics for Akwaja has increased tremendously since the year 2016.

The actions exhibited by the Fon of Assa is just one of the various steps that the traditional authorities of the five health districts of project implementation have made in order to abolish bad practices that hinders the uptake of health services.