

LCI Train Traditional Authorities: Informed Custodians Take Steps to Stampede Home Deliveries in Communities

Introduction

Until the year 2014, several communities in the South West Region such as Ileh Mbonge, Illor, Fontang, Muanenguba and many others were notorious for the practice of home deliveries. The practice of subsistence farming is the most common form of agriculture in these communities. For instance, in Ileh Mbonge Community, women in this locality deliver at home and after birth offer local liquor 'afofo', salt and soap to the Traditional Birth Attendant for the job. Such practice has been embedded in the culture of this community. Mbakwa Supe Integrated Health Centre is the nearest health centre to Ileh Mbonge community which is about 5km away. This is just to say the least for all the communities that practiced home deliveries at the time as many of such communities suffer from long distances to health facilities which are usually through foot paths. Such long distances made the women reluctant to trek to attend ANC talk less of delivering at the provided health facility given the trauma involved in labour.

LCI Interventions

In a bid to improve ANC and PMTCT uptake in various communities, the Local Capacity Initiative (LCI) Project recognised the role played by some community stakeholders in effecting changes in behaviour and practice. Amongst those recognised were the traditional authorities of the various communities of project implementation; given their level of influence on the population coupled with their being the custodians of the community's customs and traditions. In this light, the LCI intervened in the following areas:

- ❖ The traditional leaders were orientated the meaning of health system; and how they can contribute to the health care welfare of their subjects in the community. This orientation was during a training session organised by the LCI Project whereby the chiefs were made to



Enthusiastic Chief Show Interest in Modules Taught through Questions

understand that they too have a role to play in the health affairs of their community.

- ❖ Through guidance, the chiefs were made to understand the various kinds of laws that can favour their community positively in health welfare and were exposed to some success stories recorded by chiefs in other countries for their communities in health. This boosted their morale to see how much they had neglected the health welfare of their communities.
- ❖ The LCI caused the chiefs to take action plans; with activities to address factors affecting low ANC and PMTCT uptake in their communities. Included amongst the action plans

taken was that of stampeding home deliveries in communities noted for the practice.

- ❖ The LCI constantly supervised and made follow-up calls with the traditional rulers as a way of ensuring that the way forward adopted at the training has been well implemented especially in the communities with high home delivery practice.



Cross Section of the Traditional Leaders Present at the Training

Chief's Intervention in his Community

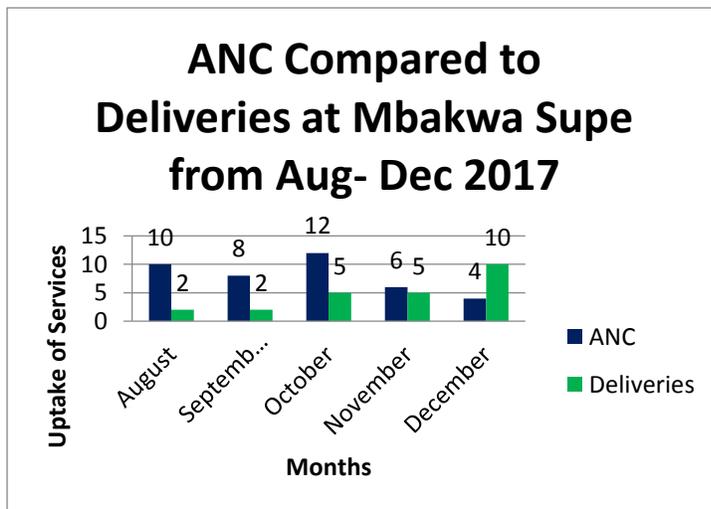
Spurting from the LCI training of Traditional Authorities on their involvement in the health welfare of their communities and ways of erasing bad cultural and traditional practices which prohibited women from attending ANC and giving birth in conventional health facilities are enormous. Part of the training was that of intentionally causing the chiefs to take decisions that will positively boost ANC attendance and health facility based deliveries in their communities. In each of their communities, many of the chiefs have done quite a lot in the abolition of the bad cultural and traditional practices of their people while instituting favourable laws. Prominent among them all are the following:

Ileh Mgongwe Interventions

The Chief of Ileh Mbonge, HRH Chief Mokube Timothy on return to his village mapped out a plan to stamp out home deliveries in his community. After one year of the orientation, the chief could not also stay silent as the topic of home delivery whenever a story is told of another child

been born of at home by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA). This kept ringing the bell of various commitments taken to stampede home deliveries during meetings with the LCI. In prelude to such commitments, the chief took the following steps in stampeding home deliveries:

- ❖ The chief started by calling his traditional council within which his crusade against Home Deliveries was preached. Due to his passion and manner of approach, he together with the traditional council enacted the laws which prohibit pregnant women from giving birth at home and attending ANC early.
- ❖ In November 2017, the chief summoned the community and schooled on the importance of Early ANC and also reiterated on the risk involved in giving birth at home. Stating the facilitation of HIV transmission, infections and other complications as the major effects of home deliveries since there are no equipment that TBAs use for prevention of transmissible infections.
- ❖ Clinging on the disadvantages of home deliveries, the Chief Mokube passed an order prohibiting any native or inhabitant of Ileh Mbonge from delivering at home. The law passed entered the annals of the village that any woman who delivers at home will pay a fine of six crates of beer, and a goat. The COC of Mbakwa Supe was informed of the Ileh Mbonge Traditional Council's Agreement with their chief's decree.
- ❖ All social groups including njangi groups were asked to remind themselves in other local gatherings of the decree as well as the disadvantages of home deliveries.



❖ The Chief of Ileh, His Royal Highness (HRH) Chief Mokube Timothy is a member of the DS of Mbakwa Supe Health Area. His membership alone has given him the opportunity to be a participant at several LCI trainings including trainings on health system strengthening, co-financing and co-management, hygiene and sanitation and more.

Illor Interventions

The Chief of Illor HRH Upka Motiti Daniel II was one of those who attended the training organised for traditional leaders. Like the Chief of Ileh Mbonge, the Chief of Illor instituted robust regulations to ensure that home deliveries become a thing of the past. The chief commented that they were pushed to the wall by high maternal and infant mortality in their community. After deliberating with the traditional council, the chief instituted the following

decisions:

- ❖ The chief ordered that all men should accompany their wives to health facilities during ANC and that no woman should deliver at home or any in facility out of Illor village without a referral note from the health centre. Anyone who fails to comply will be sanctioned according to the gravity of the offence. The information was circulated by the village town crier and during village meetings.
- ❖ 2 hectares of land was handed to Illor Integrated Health Centre in 2017 on which they can carry out Income Generating Activities (IGA) to raise income for the health centre in future
- ❖ A pit was dug to construct a toilet for health facility users.
- ❖ 5 plastic chairs bought and carpenter working on two benches for the facility.

We wish to clear the doubt of witchcraft because natural factors and negligence can cause death. The will is there to do more for the health centre. We are just limited financially. Chief Ukpa

Konye Intervention

The Paramount Chief of Konye donated 2.5 hectares of land to the ministry of health to construct a District Hospital so that the integrated Health Centre can operate like an entity. District Hospital Konye is currently operating at the Konye IHC structure there by reducing the HC to vaccination activities. At the dissemination of LCI activities in January 2018, the statistics for all five districts were project and again Konye Health District as a whole had a fluctuating graph. It was then that he announced that he is given 2.5 hectares of land for the construction of the district hospital.



Group photograph by Traditional Authorities and Facilitators after the Training

Improved Uptake of Services

After several educational talks on the importance of the chiefs' decree, the fear to pay the fines or become a violator of the chiefs' decree has been ignited in the hearts of many. Pregnant Women now surmount the pain of walking long distances even though with difficult terrain to deliver at in Health Centre. This marked improvement has been recorded in most communities where such laws were passed. For instance, in Ileh Mbonge since November 2017, no home delivery has been recorded. Counsellors of Ileh Mbonge have been following up in the community members to track any defaulter of the chief orders.

“There is much improvement in delivery, ANC and general health services. This is because of the people's fear to pay the fine.” Mrs. Rosaline Manka, COC Mbakwa Supe Health Centre.

From the Graph above, ANC from August-December was fluctuating but mostly witnessed a dropped. With the order passed in November 2017, there was a marked improvement in deliveries at the health centre in December. Mbakwa Supe Health Area has 5 communities and of the 10 deliveries, 03 came from Ileh Mbonge Village. Meanwhile, in 2014 statistics for Illor Integrated Health Center increased from 7 in 2013 to 44 while health facility deliveries increased from 1 in 2013 to 17 in 2014.

Conclusion

All women, both in urban and rural council need to access health care so as to handle causes of maternal mortality which is preventable when the causes are known during ANC. Whether health facilities are far from communities or not; it is of prime importance that all births be handled or attended to by trained health professionals. The more traditional leaders educate and influence their communities to end home deliveries; then we are on the right path to reduce maternal and infant mortality and eliminate mother to child transmission of HIV. Hence, the impact of the LCI Project in the various communities of the South West Region is a tale to be told for generations by beneficiaries.