

## Findings from an Access Improvement Project for Antiretroviral Therapy Uptake through Traditional Birth Attendants at Mother Theresa Hospital, Lagos, Nigeria

**Authors :** Daniel Afolayan, Christina Olawepo, Francis Olowookanga, Nguhemmen Tingir, Olawale Fadare, John Oko

**Abstract :** In Nigeria, traditional birth attendants (TBAs) can play an important role in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. However, their role in improving access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) is unclear. Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (Caritas Nigeria) is an implementing agency supporting increased access to HIV testing and treatment services in Lagos state through health facilities including Mother Theresa Hospital. Despite intra-facility testing and community outreaches, ART uptake at Mother Theresa Hospital, Lagos was low with 6 individuals on antiretroviral drugs 3 months post-activation. This study explored improving access to ART through linkages with TBAs for ART uptake at the facility. Plan-Do-Study-Act model was used. The goal was to improve uptake of ART from 6 to 80 in 5 months (end of project year). Scanning revealed a network of 15 TBAs with potential as satellites for HIV testing. Caritas Nigeria linked the facility with 15 TBAs who were provided with HIV test kits and trained on HIV testing services for provider-initiated testing and outreaches. Weekly reports and referrals of positives were received, tracked and feedback given on testing yield. These TBAs serve individuals of various age and gender at their trade-medical centres. At the end of 5 months, HIV testing increased by 10,575 (78% from TBAs) and HIV positives obtained improved by 77 (44.2% from TBAs). 55 new individuals were enrolled and commenced on ART (61.8% from TBAs). There was a successful linkage of all clients with escort services due to incentives. Total uptake of ART was 61 (76.3% of target). Structured partnerships between TBAs and HIV care and treatment centers should be strengthened to improve access to ART.

**Keywords :** access improvement, antiretroviral therapy, traditional birth attendants, uptake

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