**Barriers in accessing prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (pMTCT) services around Iba Health Centre in T.A. Jalasi, Mangochi**

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**Introduction**

The prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV (pMTCT) seeks to achieve an HIV-free generation. In this regard, all pregnant women in Malawi are encouraged to get tested for HIV during the antenatal clinic visits. Those testing positive, the HIV treatment guideline, promotes that they should be started on ART immediately. This is done to prevent the transmission of HIV to the child that can occur either during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding stages respectively. Infants of HIV positive mothers are started on drugs and tested at scheduled intervals

**Major Objective**

* To identify barriers of accessing pMTCT services

**Specific Objectives**

* Identify people’s knowledge on pMTCT among pregnant women, breast feeding mothers, community members and health care workers.
* To identify factors preventing pregnant and lactating mothers from accessing pMTCT services.

**Methodology**

The learning included paying a courtesy call to the Village Chief informing him the purpose of our visit. This assisted in creating a good rapport that worked to our advantage during the focus group discussions that involved key informants including the Chief himself, his advisors and health care workers. In addition, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers (both Iba and Jalasi Health Centre respectively) and Iba village members were involved.

**Results and Discussion**

The participants around Iba showed knowledge on pMTCT services. All demonstrated that the virus can be contracted during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding stages. However, access to pMTCT services is hampered by distance, lack of maternity and ART services. Other challenges were shortage of health care workers, lack of test kits, and fear of stigma and family breakdown when found positive. Participants suggested that maternity and ART services be started at Iba and increasing number of health care workers as some of the solutions to the challenges preventing people from accessing PMTCT services. In addition, creation of support groups and the use of expert clients could assist in reducing stigma.

**Recommendation**

* Start the provision of maternity and ART services at Iba Health Centre
* Increase number of staff at the health centre

**Conclusion**

The residents of Iba area understand the importance of pMTCT. However, access to pMTCT services is hampered by shortage of pMTCT providers and could not offer maternity and ART services. As a result, people are required to travel long distances to access these services.

**Reflection**

The team was hosted by a happy family of Mr. and Mrs Juma. Through this family the team had easy access to the village chief. It was great to note that many community members participated in focus group discussions. However, we noted some reservations among community members.