



REAL Awards Presentation

Remarks by

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I am very pleased to be here today at the 2014 REAL Award ceremony to honor four exceptional mother mentors from the Korem health center in Tigray. In solidarity with all Ethiopians living with HIV, mother mentors enable HIV-positive mothers to take care of themselves and their families.

Women account for more than half of those living with HIV in Ethiopia, and over 90 percent of childhood HIV infections are estimated to result from transmission of the virus from mothers to their children during, and soon after, birth. Although the Government of Ethiopia has prioritized prevention of mother-to-child transmission activities—also known as PMTCT—and though improvements have been made in the coverage and quality of PMTCT services, utilization still remains low.

Limited studies and anecdotal reports have shown that the major barriers for use of PMTCT services in Ethiopia can include:

- low institutional delivery,
- inadequacy of PMTCT service delivery sites,
- missed opportunities when the women enter the health facilities,
- weak referral linkages,
- overstretched staff in health facilities,
- HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and
- low male involvement in the PMTCT program.

To curb some of these barriers, the Government of Ethiopia launched the mother support group activity as part of the overall PMTCT program in 2005. USAID is supporting 189 facility-based, and five

community-based, mother support group sites through our implementing partners IntraHealth and Management Sciences for Health, and with funding from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Having a facility, as well as a community-based support group reduces mother-to-child transmission by empowering HIV-positive mothers and mothers-to-be to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and the health of their babies. At its core, the mother support group intervention is peer support that is led by mothers who are also living with HIV, and have gone through many of the same experiences and worries.

Our experience in the past years, including publications from other countries, and a recent in country analysis of secondary data, has shown the positive impact mother mentors have on many aspects of care and support such as:

- place of delivery,
- maternal antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis,
- uptake and completion of ARV treatment among HIV-exposed infants,
- infant feeding practice,
- partner testing, and
- family planning use

Nevertheless, mother mentors are yet to be recognized as a part of the formal health structure, despite their pivotal role in helping HIV-positive peers to address many unmet psychosocial and medical needs.

Today, we are honoring four mother mentors—Teberih Tsegay, Almaz Haile, Jember Alemayehu, and Yeshi Derebew—but they represent the numerous brave mothers throughout the nation who are devoting their life to help other women bring HIV-free babies into the world. These mothers show us the real possibility of an AIDS-free generation, and are truly deserving of the REAL award—which is dedicated to celebrate the work of often unrecognized health care workers who save lives in isolated and difficult settings.

On behalf of my colleagues at USAID and PEPFAR, and as a mother myself, I congratulate these four mother mentors for their exceptional work. You inspire us all.

I would also like to congratulate the Korem health center management and health care professionals, the Tigray regional health bureau, and the ENHAT-CS activity for your commitment and continuous

support to the mother mentors. Finally, I would like to thank the Government of Ethiopia as well as, local and international partners, who have contributed to the success of this intervention, and for your endless efforts to achieve an AIDS-free generation in Ethiopia.

Thank you