USAID ASSIST PROJECT: UGANDA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Background

With funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project is supporting the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development of Uganda to provide high quality, integrated care at the community, primary care, and referral levels. ASSIST activities in Uganda build on previous technical assistance to the Ministry of Health’s HIV and maternal health care improvement initiatives through the USAID Health Care Improvement and Quality Assurance projects.

Project Objectives

In 2013, ASSIST support to the Government of Uganda and to implementing partners is focused on building their capacity to deliver quality services for men, women, youth, children, and newborns. Specific areas of technical assistance are:

- Build the quality improvement capacity of the Ministry of Health and selected districts and health facilities in the areas of integrated HIV prevention, treatment, care and support
- Work with the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development and implementing partners to increase the wellbeing of orphans and vulnerable children

The USAID ASSIST Project supports improvement efforts in 61 out of Uganda’s 112 districts.

ASSIST support to the Government of Uganda and to implementing partners is focused on building their capacity to deliver quality services for men, women, youth, children, and newborns.
• Apply improvement methods to expand the availability of essential maternal, newborn and child health services (including use of the partogram to monitor labor for early detection of obstruction, active management of third stage of labor to prevent bleeding, provision of essential newborn care, resuscitation of the asphyxiated newborn, and strengthening of the referral system) in primary and referral health facilities

• Increase community ownership and participation in decision making at the local level, patient involvement in care, and leadership and management engagement in improving quality of health care

• Disseminate the Ministry of Health’s Quality Improvement Framework and institutionalize the use of improvement methods in all departments of the Ministry of Health and all districts

The USAID ASSIST Project also works to strengthen the performance of the health workforce as well as community-based services and community linkages with facility-based care.

Focus Areas
Improving HIV and Tuberculosis Care and Treatment

ASSIST is working intensively in 47 sites (roughly 10 sites in each of the four regions of Uganda) to improve the quality of HIV care, including working with communities served by the sites to strengthen community-facility linkages to increase retention in care and improve care outcomes. Sites are also being supported to improve the management of patients with tuberculosis (TB)-HIV co-infection by intensified screening of HIV patients for TB and support for TB treatment adherence. ASSIST is supporting implementing partners to introduce quality improvement activities in line with the Ministry of Health’s quality improvement framework, providing training and mentoring as well as joint coaching visits. In 10 sites in three districts, the work also includes active engagement of the health facility leadership in directing improvement activities to strengthen their capacity to lead improvement activities.

ASSIST is implementing a refined chronic care model in a new district and undertaking a robust impact evaluation to quantify the effects of the chronic care intervention on HIV care and treatment process and outcome measures.

Chronic Care of HIV

Drawing on the HCI experience of piloting a chronic care model in one district of Uganda, ASSIST is implementing a refined chronic care model in a new district and undertaking a robust impact evaluation to quantify the effects of the chronic care intervention on HIV care and treatment process and outcome measures. The impact evaluation also includes an economic analysis to show the costs inputs needed to implement changes necessary to achieve improved clinical outcomes for HIV and other ancillary chronic disease such as hypertension or diabetes. As patient self-management is an important component of this activity, this will also help provide more information on the costs and benefits of community involvement in the continuum of care to improve chronic disease programs (like HIV treatment).

Safe Male Circumcision

ASSIST is working with the Ministry of Health and stakeholders to apply improvement methods to enhance the roll-out of the national Safe Male Circumcision strategy. ASSIST is providing intensive support to 30 sites and technical assistance to USAID implementing partners to improve the safety and quality of medical male circumcision in Uganda. To date, sites have been supported to conduct self-assessments of facilities’ adherence to the Ministry of Health...
Safe Male Circumcision policy and minimum standards and to put in place strategies to address gaps in care. ASSIST is also supporting the Ministry to address gender considerations in the promotion of male circumcision.

**Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV**

As part of the Partnership for HIV Free Survival, ASSIST is working with the Ministry of Health and other implementing partners to support 22 health facilities in improving prenatal and postnatal provision of antiretroviral therapy to HIV-infected mothers and in integrating nutrition assessment, counseling, and support into PMTCT services.

**Maternal and Newborn Health: Saving Mothers Giving Life**

Building on the Saving Mothers Giving Life (SMGL) work with 10 high-volume delivery facilities in Kyenjojo and Kamwenge districts under HCI, ASSIST is working with partners and 20 facilities in four districts to reduce maternal and perinatal mortality. ASSIST is also supporting the Ministry of Health to expand training and coaching in Helping Babies Breathe-plus.

**Family Planning Integration**

In the same four districts that ASSIST is supporting under Saving Mothers Giving Life initiative, the project is supporting community teams and implementing partners to integrate post-partum family planning services into maternal health services. Sites are being supported to offer the full range of modern contraceptive methods, including long-acting methods.

**Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children**

A new activity for ASSIST in Uganda in 2013 is to support the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development and orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) partners to incorporate improvement methods into OVC needs assessments, care, referral, follow-up and measurement of wellbeing. ASSIST’s focus is on building the capacity of civil society organizations to apply national OVC standards and tools for identification, selection, care, and follow-up of vulnerable children.

**Community Health**

ASSIST is supporting a demonstration project to improve the performance of Village Health Teams (VHTs) in locating HIV patients in the village, determining if patients on ART comply with treatment regimens, identifying physical functionality and medical complaints, and strengthening the existing network of community organizations to support VHTs. Health facility teams are supporting community teams by linking patients to the community and developing a schedule to engage encourage VHT visits at the facility.
Strengthening Pharmaceutical Human Resources

This activity seeks to improve the quality of drug dispensing for patients with HIV and TB, working in three districts of Uganda. ASSIST is building the capacity of districts coaches to support sites in analyzing their process for dispensing drugs to HIV clients and improve drug ordering and stock management as well as adherence counseling.

Institutionalizing Quality Improvement in the Health Sector

ASSIST is supporting the Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Health to roll out the national quality improvement framework and strategic plan. In 2012, with HCI assistance, the Ministry of Health formed regional, district and facility quality improvement committees in all seven districts of Rwenzori Region. During 2013, ASSIST is continuing to support the Ministry to learn how best to operationalize the framework and the strategy in these seven districts, involving at least one facility from every health sub-district in the region.

Knowledge Management

In all activities, ASSIST is applying knowledge management principles and techniques to gather learning from improvement work and develop knowledge products that enable government ministries, implementing partners and health care providers to apply successful changes in new sites. In this way, the project contributes to both national and global learning about how to improve HIV care for vulnerable children and families, maternal, newborn, and child health, non-communicable diseases and chronic conditions care, and family planning services.

A team of community volunteers and health workers visit a patient at home to provide palliative care. URC supported the Ministry of Health to integrate palliative care for patients with HIV in Mayuge and Namutumba districts. Photo by Juliana Nabwire, URC.