Mothers help mothers to prevent paediatric AIDS

mothers2mothers (m2m) believes in the power of women to eliminate paediatric AIDS and create health and hope for themselves and their babies, families and communities. m2m trains and employs HIV-positive mothers to help other women infected with the virus, educating and supporting them throughout pregnancy to birth and into the first 18 months of each child’s life. Women’s health, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and combatting stigma are at the core of this mentoring programme. Working alongside local doctors and nurses in severely understaffed health centres and within communities, these women – Mentor Mothers - are able to forge trusted relationships with HIV-positive women because they have experienced first-hand the same hardships in their local communities. We are supporting mothers2mothers to implement its Mentor Mother model in seven health facilities and surrounding communities in East Central Uganda, training 119 women so as to reach 44,700 women, 35,306 children and 6,500 adolescent girls and young women.

**DURATION:** 2017-2019  
**FOCUS AREA:** Women’s Social and Economic Development Access to Basic Services  
**COUNTRY:** Uganda  
**PARTNER:** mothers2mothers

**CONTEXT**

Women and girls suffer disproportionally from the burden of extreme poverty. In societies that often dictate women’s subordination and economic reliance on men for survival, they also experience high rates of gender violence and abuse. In Africa, AIDS is the leading cause of death among adolescents (10-19) and young women are the face of the epidemic. In Uganda, according to UNAIDS data (2016), 360 new HIV infections occur each week among adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 years.
Although effective medical treatment can keep both mothers and babies healthy, often stigma, understaffed hospitals and inaccessible roads prevent women from seeking life-saving, antiretroviral therapy. A positive test can cost a woman her marriage, financial support, friends and family. Without medical support, up to 40% of children born to HIV-positive mothers will contract the virus. With medical treatment, the figure is reduced to 2%.

**ACTION**

mothers2mothers empowers women to live healthy and productive lives. It trains, employs and empowers mothers living with HIV to act as “Mentor Mothers” – frontline healthcare workers in health centres and within communities. Having first-hand knowledge of HIV, these women provide essential health information and support, helping other women to deal with diagnosis, access critical medical care and protect their babies from HIV. They are also trained to engage with women and couples on issues such as safe sex, family planning, malaria and tuberculosis, nutrition, cervical cancer and gender violence.

Mentor Mothers are initially among the most vulnerable and disempowered members of their communities. Yet, once trained and formally employed to work alongside doctors, nurses and community health workers, these women become highly effective and reliable peer mentors. Their intimate understanding of the social and cultural challenges of living with HIV gives them a unique ability to form trusted relationships with other women, which prove vital in helping them overcome their fears and make lifesaving decisions. Because Mentor Mothers are employed and gain financial security, they become respected role models in their communities, reducing the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV.

mothers2mothers’ programme plans to implement its Mentor Mother Model in seven health facilities and the surrounding communities in Iganga, Bugiri and Namayingo districts in East Central Uganda, reaching 44,700 women, 35,306 children and 6,500 adolescent girls and young women. Over 3 years the programme intends to:

- Train and employ 84 Mentor Mothers to provide services in health facilities and in communities to promote the uptake of family planning and nutrition information, along with HIV-focused services (i.e. pre-test education for HIV-positive and -negative women, health education talks, individual peer education and support, and adherence monitoring and support).
- Identify and deploy 35 Adolescent Peer Educators to specifically address the critical needs of this age group. Peer Educators are young women – both HIV-positive and -negative – who have become mothers at a young age. They go out into communities, schools and homes to teach adolescent girls and young women about the importance of protecting themselves from HIV and teen pregnancy, and they link them to health centres for medical care.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

- 84 Mentor Mothers are trained, employed and empowered and 35 Adolescent Peer Educators have been deployed to address health challenges critical for their age group.
• 44,700 women and 35,306 children under 5 years old have increased access to reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health services.
• 6,500 adolescent girls and young women have a better knowledge of reproductive health services and use them more frequently.
• 39,721 households increase their knowledge of and participation in reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health services and adolescent health services.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY
Through this Mentor Mother Model, mothers2mothers works with governments, local partners, and communities to eliminate HIV infections in children, reduce maternal and child mortality, and improve the health of women, their partners and families while promoting gender equality and supporting livelihood development for families and communities.