

# Underserved Women Reached Through Community Based Health Volunteer Program in Sokoto State

In many parts of Nigeria, a shortage of skilled health workers (doctors, nurses, and midwives) has severely constrained the delivery of timely, high-quality health care, especially in rural communities. Community health extension workers (CHEWs), who are trained to provide community outreach—not medical—services, have replaced nurses and doctors in primary health care centers. Links between communities and health providers have eroded, and with it, community distrust of health services. In 2008, only 14% of pregnant women in Sokoto State received antenatal services and 95% delivered at home.

TSHIP established a functional community-based health program that promoted healthy household practices and expanded access to and use of facility-based services, and trained a new cadre of skilled community-based health volunteers (CBHVs) to implement it. With support from TSHIP, Sokoto worked with ward development committees to identify,

train, and support 2,440 CBHV—10 each from the state's 244 wards—to promote positive health-seeking behaviors and extend basic health services in resource-poor areas of the state. These trusted CBHVs, all of whom are women, are the only ones who can treat women of reproductive age who observe purdah, which secludes women from public sight. TSHIP provided customized training and refreshers to all CBHVs in the state. After training,

Community-based health volunteers **PROMOTE POSITIVE HEALTH-SEEKING BEHAVIORS** and **EXTEND BASIC HEALTH SERVICES** in resource-poor areas of Sokoto

each CBHV received job aids for a range of topics that include counseling, antenatal care, nutrition, birth preparedness, danger signs in pregnancy, preventing post-partum

hemorrhage, umbilical cord care, exclusive breastfeeding, growth monitoring, common childhood illness management, hygiene, birth spacing, and referrals. Every month, CBHVs report to their supervisors, who are facility-based service providers.

Since TSHIP began collecting this data in 2013, CBHVs in Sokoto have conducted more than 600,000 household visits. Furthermore approximately 350,000 pregnant women and their families heard messages about the benefits of antenatal attendance; more than 250,000 heard messages about danger signs in pregnancy; 340,000 were counseled on malaria in pregnancy; and more than 250,000 were counseled on child spacing. CBHVs spoke with 215,000 people about home management of malaria and with 210,000 about childhood diarrhea treatment. Discussions with the Sokoto State government to sustain the CBHV program are ongoing.

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