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A midwife (center) and gynecologist (left) conduct direct observation of a pregnant woman for intermittent treatment against malaria during pregnancy at the district hospital (Banikoara). Photo Credit: Christelle Azanhoué

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USAID INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES ACTIVITY

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH IN BENIN

The availability of maternal, newborn, and child health services across Benin varies significantly. The Service Availability and Readiness Assessment of 2018 showed that more than 70% facilities offer services such as family planning and preventative care for children. However, the assessment also highlights key gaps across the country, including the availability of comprehensive obstetric care, with only 7% of facilities offering these services. To address these gaps, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA), implemented by Management Sciences for Health with its partner CERRHUD, is supporting the Ministry of Health in strengthening the skills and knowledge of health care providers to deliver quality health care services. In addition, IHSA supports regular strengthening of the health zone supervision system for health workers to ensure that the care provided meets Ministry of Health standards and is respectful, efficient, and high quality.

DATA-DRIVEN MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

To strengthen the quality of maternal, newborn, and child health in Benin, IHSA is working with several health care actors to assess and strengthen the delivery of obstetric and neonatal services at the decentralized level.

- Health Zone Management Teams (HZMTs) are trained and supported by IHSA in coaching and formative supervision techniques and their role in the Health Zone Quality Assurance Councils (*Conseil d'Assurance Qualité des Zones Sanitaires* [CAQZSs]). The CAQZSs share data from their zones to prepare and monitor performance assessments, organize coaching visits for health care workers in their zones, and improve the functioning of the quality improvement teams (*équipes d'amélioration de la qualité* [EAQs]) in the health care facilities in their respective zones. Since 2018, 309 EAQs have been trained.
- The project uses a combination of Leadership, Management, and Governance approaches to guide the HZMTs in building their capacity and motivation to conduct scheduled formative supervision visits to health care facilities based on monthly EAQ meetings, identify key challenges, assess trends and opportunities, set a strategic direction to achieve priority objectives in a sustainable manner, and strengthen the functionality of the EAQs in the health care facilities.
- As part of the EAQ support, coaching is provided to health workers in health facilities using the On-Site Training Supportive Supervision (OTSS) tool, which was designed for use by health zones and approved by the Ministry of Health. The OTSS approach allows health management teams to train clinical providers and provide ongoing mentoring to health care workers. This approach aims to build team capacity for constructive mentoring with ongoing feedback to supervisors and providers.

HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY

- To reduce maternal and child mortality, IHSA supports the functionality of 11 maternal and neonatal death surveillance and response (MDSR) committees at the health zone level, eight of which were trained by the project. At the departmental university hospital of Ouémé and Plateau, which has a higher volume of maternal and neonatal deaths than at the national level, the audit was conducted using the audit of criteria-based cases (ACBC) methodology, which requires the identification of a minimum of 10 cases of death from the same condition for which an analysis identifies the root causes. MDSR and ACBC audit outcomes and subsequent corrective actions inform the root causes of death to reduce factors related to maternal and neonatal deaths.
- The project supports the Ministry of Health of Benin in updating the training modules of the implementation strategy of the emergency triage, assessment, and treatment (ETAT) approach, which is important for the appropriate and urgent management of emergency admissions of children to hospitals or those referred from health centers to hospitals. Special emphasis is placed on interventions for newborns and children under five, including emergency obstetric and newborn care (EmONC) and helping babies breathe. The project supports the implementation of ETAT in all hospitals in the departments and implementation areas.
- To ensure the quality of maternal and neonatal care, the functionality of EmONC is assessed during supervision and coaching visits in health facilities according to the performance of each facility's indicator in the area. The assessment is based on seven key criteria that must be met to be considered fully functional to provide vital care to mothers and newborns. During these assessments, a lack of essential equipment, such as neonatal resuscitation equipment and vacuum cups, was noted. The project is working with the Ministry of Health to acquire this equipment.
- Some encouraging results suggest that, combined, these efforts have helped improve the quality of maternal, newborn, and child care. The project is working on a more in-depth analysis of the effect of these activities on quality of care and outcomes in reducing maternal, neonatal, and child morbidity and mortality.



25% to 34%

The increase in the percentage of pregnant women attending four prenatal consultations between the first year of the project (October 2018–September 2019) and the first half of the fourth year (October 2021–March 2022).



45% to 56%

The increase in the percentage of newborns receiving postnatal care within two days of delivery between the first year of the project and the first half of the fourth year.



26% to 44%

The increase in the percentage of pregnant women who received three doses of intermittent preventive treatment during pregnancy between the first year of the project and the first half of the

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The five-year Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA) (2018-2023), funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is implemented in four departments (Ouémé, Plateau, Atacora, and Alibori) in Benin. Its objective is to strengthen local expertise in delivering high-impact malaria, family planning (FP), maternal and child health (MCH), gender-based violence (GBV), and prevention and control of COVID-19 services with strong citizen engagement, to reduce maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent girls' mortality and morbidity. IHSA is implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH) in collaboration with four local and one international NGO partners.

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Le Centre de Réflexions et d'Actions pour le Développement Intégré et la Solidarité (CeRADIS)
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