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EARLY CHILDHOOD STIMULATION INTERVENTION FOR HIV POSITIVE MOTHERS REDUCES MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION RATES AT 6 WEEKS, 12 MONTHS, AND 24 MONTHS

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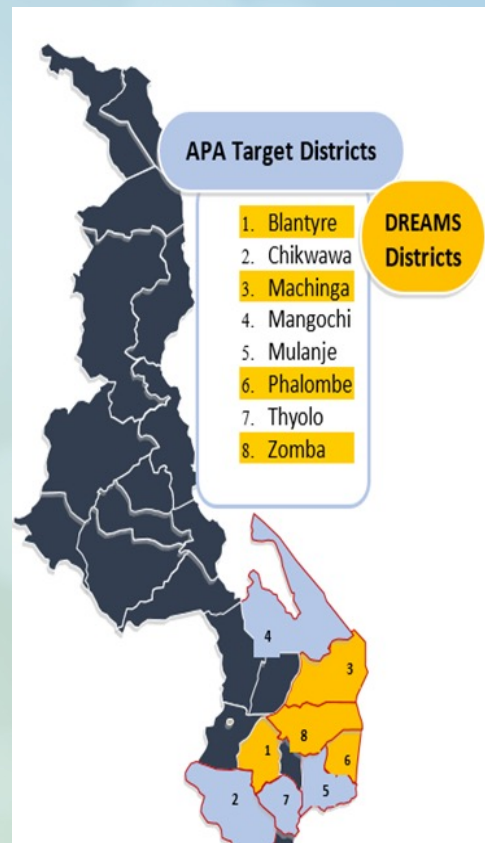
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Introduction

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- Though Mother-to-Child Transmission is preventable, 7.55% of HIV positive women vertically transmit HIV to their infants in Malawi (UNAIDS, 2021)
- World Education Inc./Bantwana's integrated clinic and community based **early childhood stimulation (ECS) for HIV positive mother-baby pairs** seeks to prevent mother-to-child transmission and foster stimulating environments where HIV exposed infants are supported to achieve childhood development milestones
- APA is a 5-year project funded by USAID/PEPFAR, implemented in 117 high-HIV burden facilities in 8 districts of southern Malawi with the goal of reducing vulnerability to HIV for OVC and AGYW

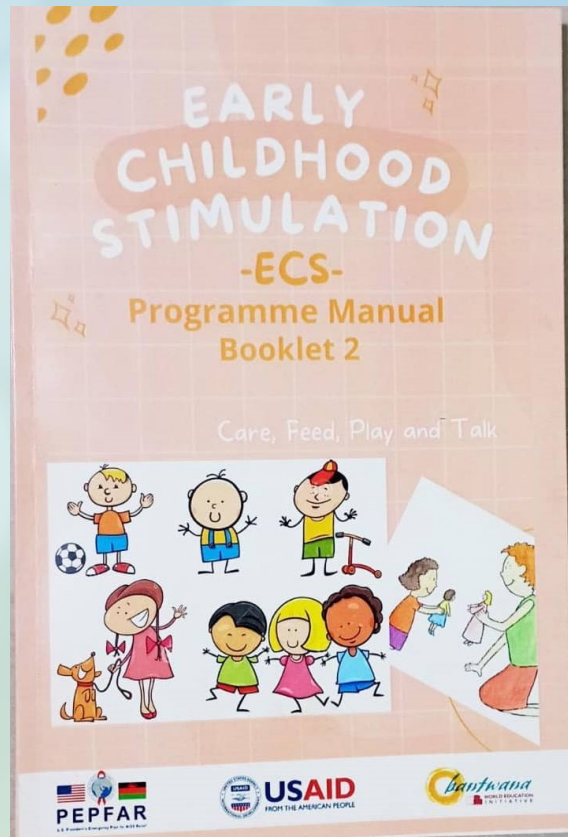


Description of ECS

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- ECS is an evidence-based 12 session curriculum delivered to mother-infant pairs as part of the OVC comprehensive program
- Topics include:
 - Early childhood stimulation
 - Early infant diagnosis
 - Feeding practices, nutrition, & hygiene education
 - Responsive parenting
 - Childhood immunization
 - ART adherence
 - Psychosocial support for mothers



ECS Facilitators and Entry Points

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- ECS is delivered by 234 trained Health Surveillance Assistants (HSA) & Community Linkage Facilitators (CLFs) who work in pairs
- HSAs are government employees assigned to a health facility, and CLFs are OVC project staff based in health facilities
- Most ECS sessions are conducted at health facilities when mothers come for:
 - Antenatal clinics
 - Postnatal clinics
 - Under five clinics
 - ART clinics
- Some groups meet in the community



Enrollment in ECS

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- Leveraging of multiple service delivery points within health facilities to access data to identify HIV positive women with children aged 0-2:
 - Antenatal clinics and wards;
 - Postnatal Wards;
 - HIV Care Clinics;
 - ART registers;
 - Under-five Clinics
- Enrollment is offered to all identified mother-baby pairs



Results

Exposed Infants testing milestones Oct-2021 – Sept-2022

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- **10,616** mother/ baby pairs were enrolled in and completed ECS. This represents **91%** of eligible mothers.
- **10,153** HIV-Exposed Infants were tested (**3,727** @ 6 WKs, **3,638** @12 months & **2,788** @ 24 months)
- MTC transmission was **0.78%** at 6 weeks, **1.03%** at 12 months, and **1.2%** at 24 months





Lessons Learned

- ECS provides a safe environment where mothers can access psychosocial and peer support and milestone testing at 6 weeks, 12 months, and 24 months
- ECS provides a platform for layering of other OVC services including economic strengthening
 - (VSL Methodology, Financial Literacy, Business Management, ESPM and Market linkage)
- ECS promotes retention in PMTCT program for the teen mothers



Lessons Learned

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- The ECS provides safe environment and provides psychological relief to HIV positive mothers and promotes treatment adherence.
 - “I greatly appreciate the lesson about prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. I have always had the fear of passing on the virus to my baby. But now my confidence is regained knowing that, if I follow the stated protocol, my baby will be HIV free at the confirmatory test at 24 months.” **Rabecca, 18 years old.**
 - Rabecca was one of the 300 teen mums that were reached with ECS





Lessons Learned

- Successful strategies to address long distances to the facility & access challenges during the rainy season include:
 - Align ECS sessions with clinical and ART appointment dates for mothers and children to eliminate extra trips to the health facility
 - Facilitators deliver individualized “catch up sessions” in homes





Recommendations

- APA should continue to promote strong community-clinic collaboration in the delivery of ECS interventions within OVC programs to close critical gaps in prevention of mother to child transmission.
- Government should integrate the early childhood stimulation programs within existing health centers and community structures/cadres to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to reduce MTCT rates.
- APA should explore opportunities to engage fathers in ECS.
- APA should scale up the delivery of ECS to target more teen mothers.
- NGOs should train more government employees through Training of Trainers for ECS to promote sustainability in integration within the health system and community structures.



THANK YOU

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS



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