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Fostering Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV&AIDS (PLWHA) in Health Care Service Delivery: A Case Study of Utilizing Volunteer 'Expert Clients' at Health Facility Level in East Central Uganda

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Background

Close to 1.3 million people are estimated to be living with HIV&AIDS in Uganda (PLWHAs). By engaging PLWHAs in HIV prevention, care and treatment efforts, STAR-EC, a USAID-funded program implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) and World Education, Inc. (WEI)/Bantwana, has fostered a rapid increase in service uptake in the 42 accredited antiretroviral treatment (ART) facilities in East Central Uganda serving 8,182 clients. However, increased access and enrollment of PLWHAs into care and treatment services has overstretched health workers and congested facilities, weakening overall service quality. To address these issues, STAR-EC engaged PLWHAs as 'Expert Clients' who were placed at facilities and trained to handle non-clinical tasks.

Methods

STAR-EC identified, trained, and placed 120 PLWHA 'Expert Client' volunteers in adherence counseling, psychosocial support, referrals and networking, and records management at the 42 high-volume health facilities. 'Expert Clients' act as support agents and mentor mothers for clients and support health workers by sharing tasks such as managing client records, conducting health education classes (including condom promotion), packing drugs, assisting health workers to triage clients, establishing linkages with community support agents for referrals to follow up support and care services, and community sensitization for uptake of HIV services.



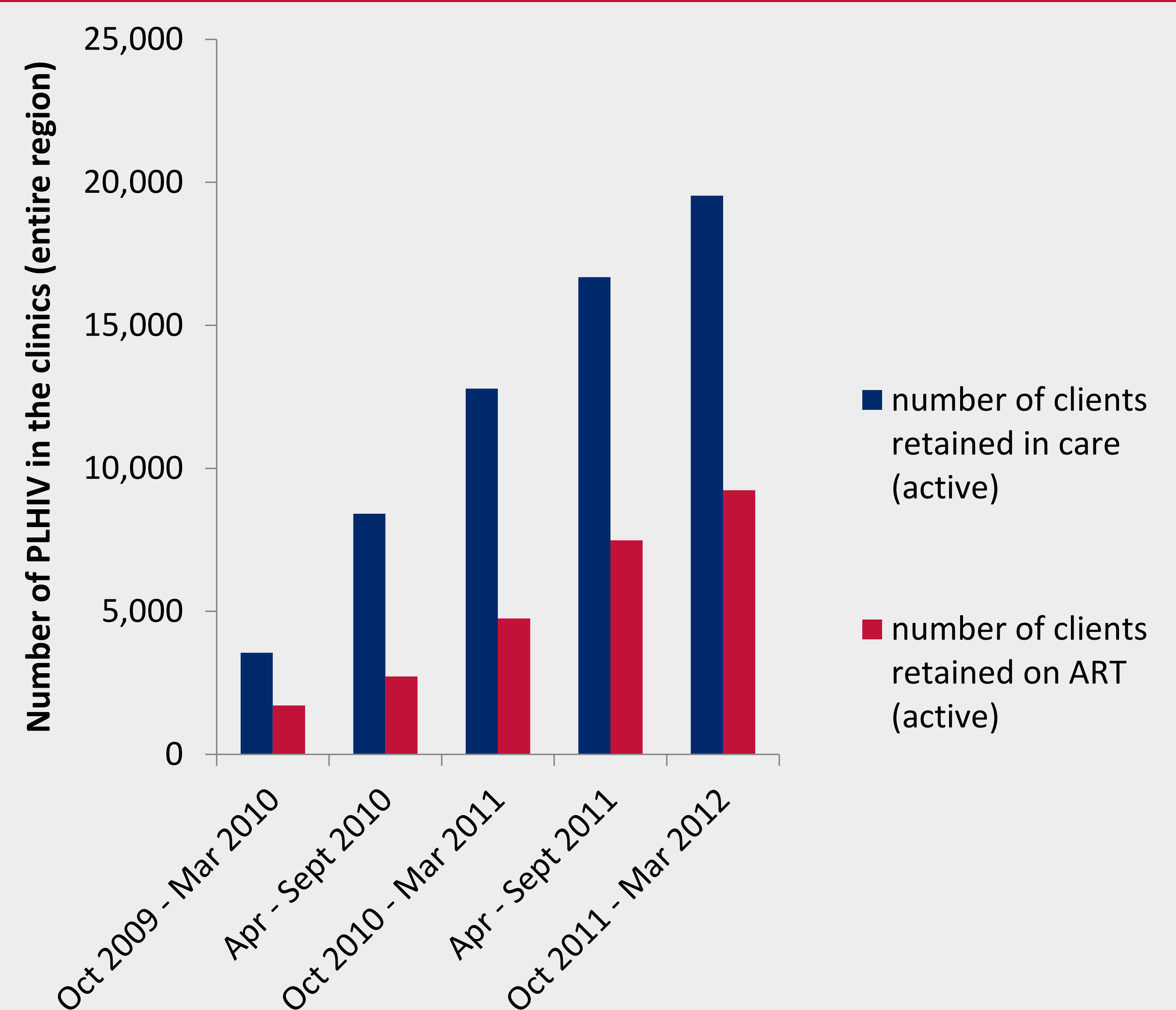
Expert clients checking PLWHA records during an ART outreach clinic at one of the islands in Lake Victoria



Results

- ➔ **Greatly reduced client waiting time** – in some cases from 3 hours to 45 minutes – which includes removing bottlenecks, and increasing time with health workers
- ➔ **Increased uptake of HIV services by community members:** between September 2010 – October 2011 enrollment of PLWHAs on ART increased from 1,776 to 5,083 at 23 STAR-EC supported facilities
- ➔ **Client retention increased three-fold** at the same 23 facilities between October 2009 – March 2012
- ➔ **Increased access in community-based wrap around services:** through referrals to food and nutrition, economic strengthening, PSS, legal, and child protection services.

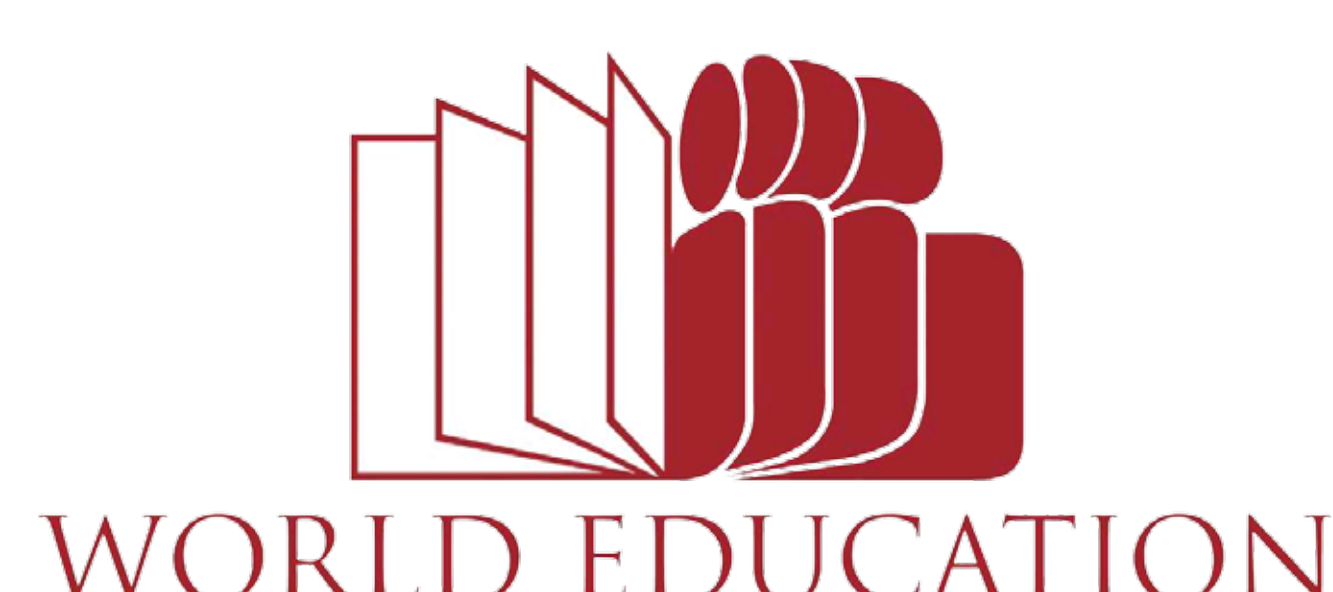
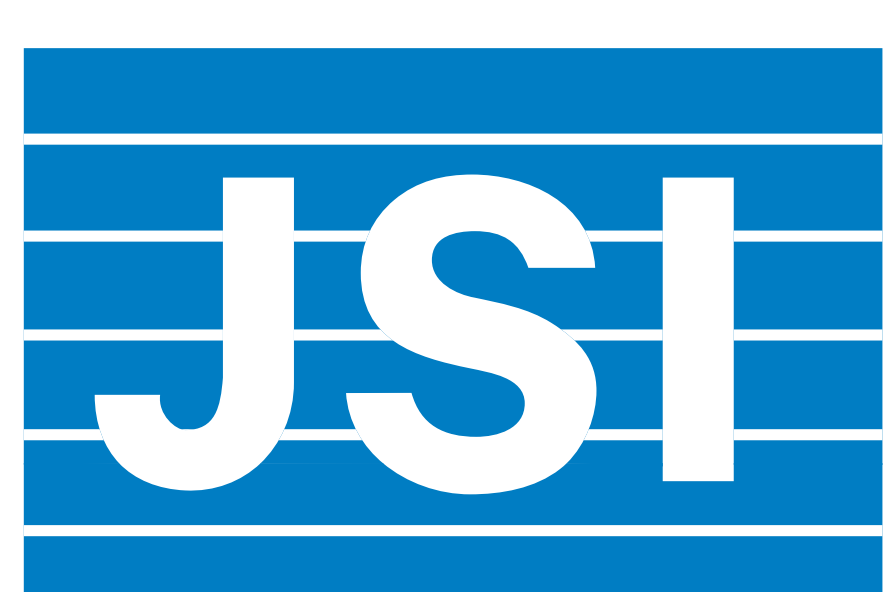
Trend of client retention - contribution of task shifting



Conclusion

The 'Expert Client' model is a cost-effective way to engage PLWHAs in their own care and support them to make meaningful contributions to improving access to and uptake of HIV and TB services in their communities. 'Expert Clients' enable health workers to give more time to clients, reduce patient waiting time, and act as an effective link between the health facility and the community. The model is especially appropriate in resource-limited settings and can be scaled up and replicated around the globe.

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