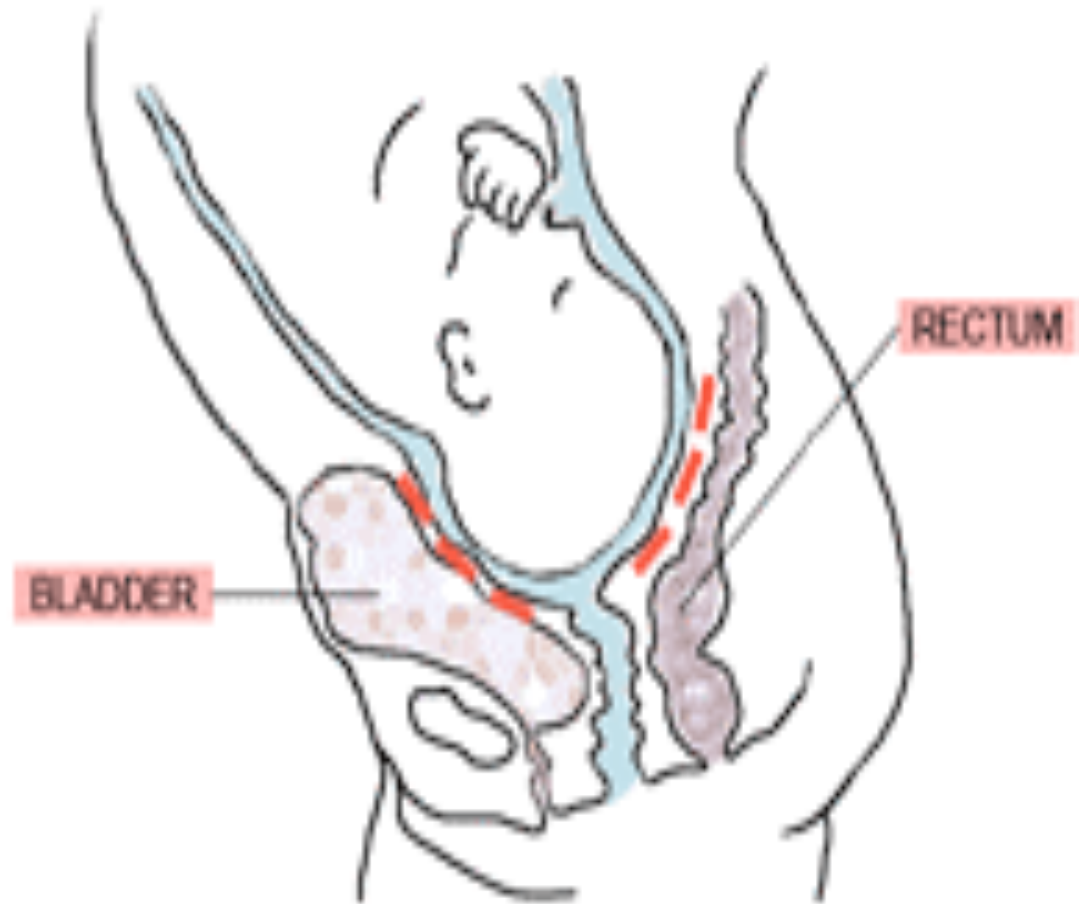


# **Social Immersion Strategy for Reintegration and Empowerment of Obstetric Fistula Survivors**

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# What is Obstetric Fistula?

**Obstetric fistula is an injury usually caused by several days of obstructed labor, without timely medical intervention**



# Root Causes of Obstetric Fistula



- **Unavailability of quality health services**
- **The burden of transportation**
- **Early childbearing**
- **Poverty**
- **Gender inequality**
- **Poor governance**

# The Consequences of Obstetric Fistula are life shattering

- **The baby usually dies, and the woman is left with chronic incontinence.**
- **Women with incontinence are abandoned, neglected by her husband and family and suffer the ostracism of the community.**
- **While surgical repair can physically heal, the psychological trauma of fistula may persist.**

# Reintegration of fistula survivors

## The Social Immersion Approach

- **Qualitative interviews were done with clients at Kissidougou District Hospital in July 2007 to assess their social status before the repair (ie: married or abandoned/living in isolation/poverty issues etc) and how they felt after repair.**
- **The interviews showed that after repair, many women who had undergone profound emotional distress still faced many social challenges. More than physical treatment was needed.**
- **EH partnered with the Urban Development Commune of Kissidougou to find families willing to host repaired clients in their homes to address some of the social issues confronting these women.**

# Reintegration of fistula survivors

## The Social Immersion Approach

- After discharge, women live on a voluntary basis with local host families for 2 to 3 weeks
- The host families provide the clients with
  - *Social support: welcoming women in the homes as a member of the family*
  - *Convalescence (the women are allowed to rest, although many participate in small tasks with the other women in the household because they enjoy it, such as cooking)*
  - *Social acceptance (including the women in their family events such as weddings and baptisms, ceremonies in the mosque)*

# Reintegration of fistula survivor

## The Social Immersion Approach

- **Ninety-six (96) women (out of 214) have benefitted from the social immersion (July 2008- June 2009)**
- **Some clients have stayed with their host families more than once (i.e. if they required multiple surgeries)**
- **Some families hosted clients before they became integrated into the program-- true grassroots initiative**

# Reintegration of fistula survivors

**In addition to the support provided by the host family, women are reinforced in knowledge and behavior change during the social immersion period by program staff**

- **Women gain knowledge on causes and prevention of fistula, what to do if they get pregnant and where treatment is available**
- **Women receive orientation in interpersonal communication skills to share their new knowledge**
- **Selected women volunteer to provide awareness raising sessions at community social events (baptism, wedding ceremonies)**

# *The Social Immersion Approach*

## **The Client as an Agent of Change**

- **When they return to their home communities, many women have conducted awareness raising sessions in their communities to advocate for those without a voice**
  
- **From July 2008-June 2009**
  - **Approximately 39% women who have participated in social immersion have conducted an awareness raising session (n=37)**
  - **Most of these women have conducted more than 1 session (sessions=53)**
  - **1230 people have attended these sessions**

# *The Social Immersion Approach*

## **The Community as Agent of Change**

**Host families are thanked by government officials during field visits covered by local rural radio**

- **25 health talks have been emitted by the local radio of Kissidougou reinforcing the clients advocating in the community and raising community awareness. The local radio:**
  - **Reinforces community sense of humanitarianism**
  - **Raises visibility of fistula and community involvement**
- **Recognition in the community is an incentive to host families**
  - ***Host families are not paid or compensated in any way for their participation***
  - ***Most have hosted clients more than once and all said they would do it again. In doing so, they fulfill religious obligations***

# *The Social Immersion Approach*



The Deputy Mayor of Kissidougou, accompanied by a rural radio broadcaster, visits fistula clients and their host families.

# Lessons Learned

- 1. Fistula survivors who participate in the social immersion program demonstrate improved confidence and regain their self-esteem: speaking out publically; reaching out to other women; acting as community agents of change.**
- 2. The social immersion approach improves links between the fistula repair facility and the surrounding community : community members act as agents of change, reduce stigma; refer to the hospital; reduce burden of prolonged hospitalization.**
- 3. An effective fistula care program should go beyond urinary continence to address emotional and psychosocial problems**
- 4. Strategic alliances with the community have been critical to making this approach work: coordination through the Urban Development Commune; use of local radio**
- 5. The provision with IEC materials on fistula causes and prevention to host families has been instrumental to the success of the approach.**
- 6. Local radio intervention was critical to raise awareness and get more families involved in the program**

**THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR ATTENTION**