

Investigating a Paradigm Shift after 10 Years: An Evaluation of the Transitioning of Essential Sexual and Reproductive Health Services to the Government of Ethiopia

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Significance / Background

- EngenderHealth's **Access to Better Reproductive Health Initiative (ABRI) project in Ethiopia** employs a **rights-based approach** that centers the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs, interests, and priorities of women and girls.
- Over the 12-year life of project, ABRI supported the Federal Ministry of Health in six regions and two city administrations to **improve service delivery, develop and adopt relevant policies and standards, and strengthen systems-related capabilities**.
- The **last phase of the project** shifted from focusing technical assistance on service delivery to **focusing on health system strengthening to build a more resilient public health system** capable of delivering uninterrupted essential services.

Program Intervention / Activity Tested

- During the final transition phase of the project, we shifted key roles and functions that we previously led to the ministry and its subsidiary structures, ensuring **local ownership and accountability** for delivering uninterrupted, high-quality **comprehensive contraception (CC)** and **comprehensive abortion care (CAC)** services across public health facilities.
- We implemented a **site graduation and transition strategy** and conducted a final evaluation in support of project learning.
- The aim of the evaluation was to determine **the effectiveness of the interventions, identify challenges, and ensure the project's sustainability and government ownership**.

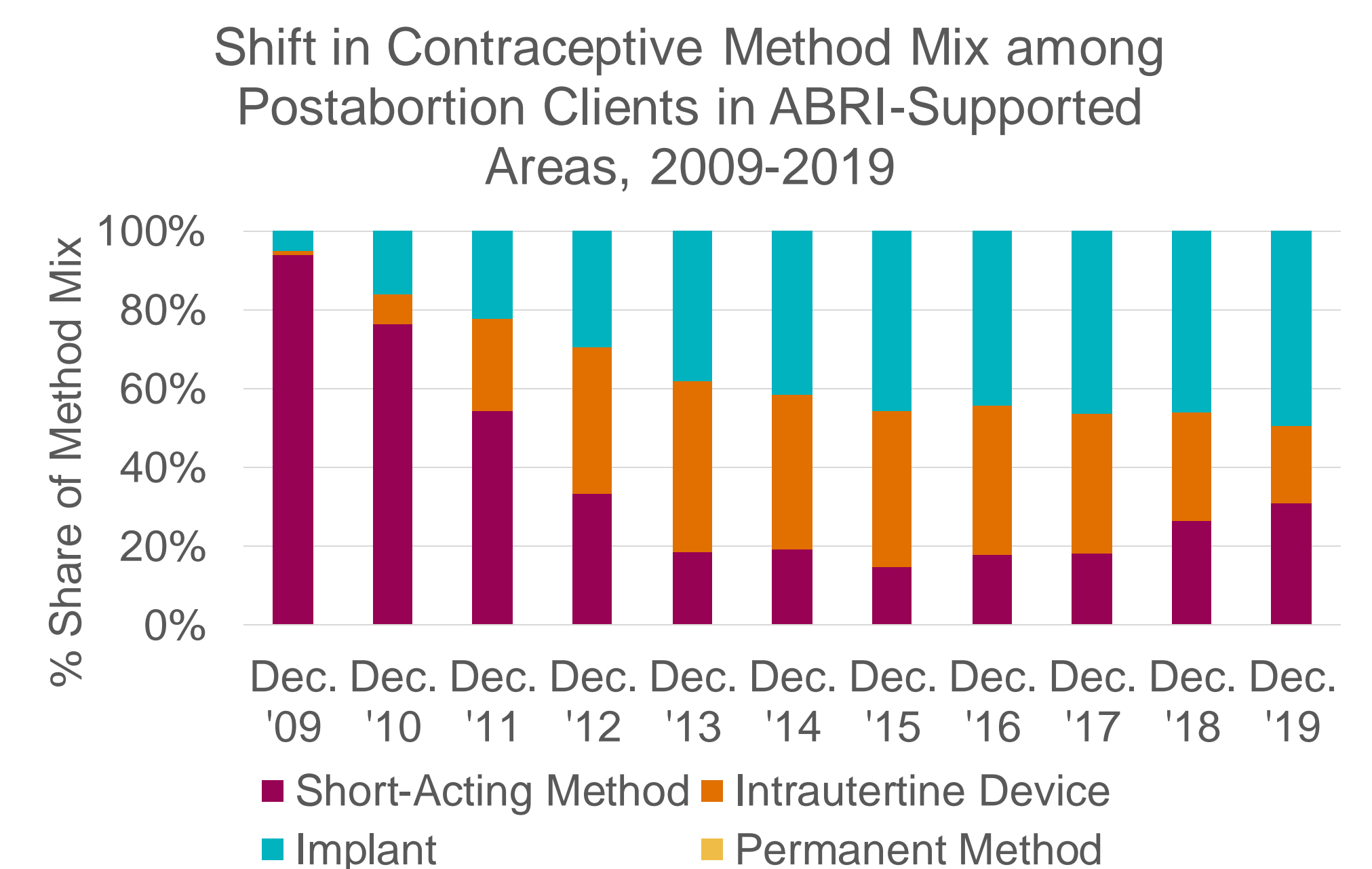
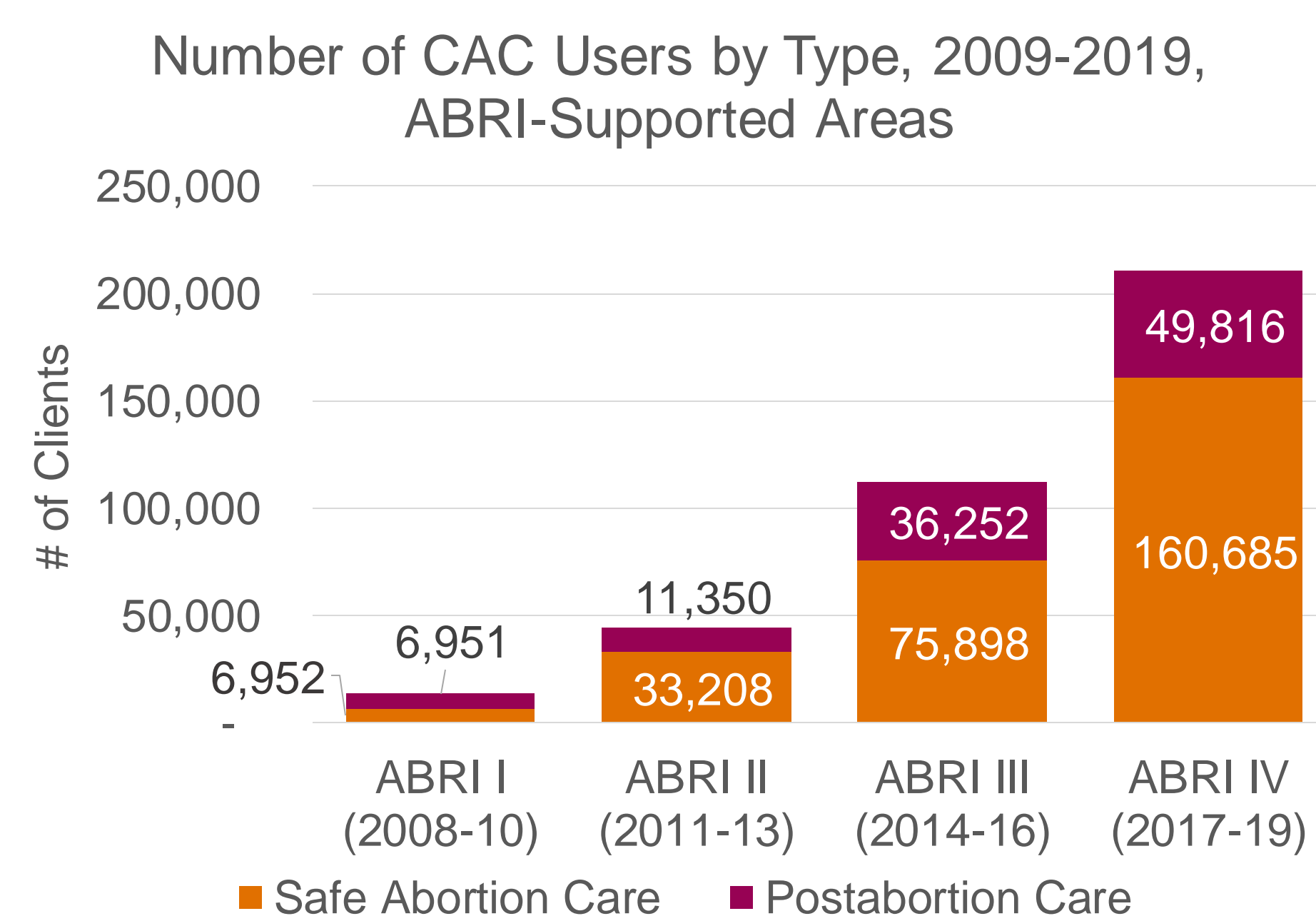
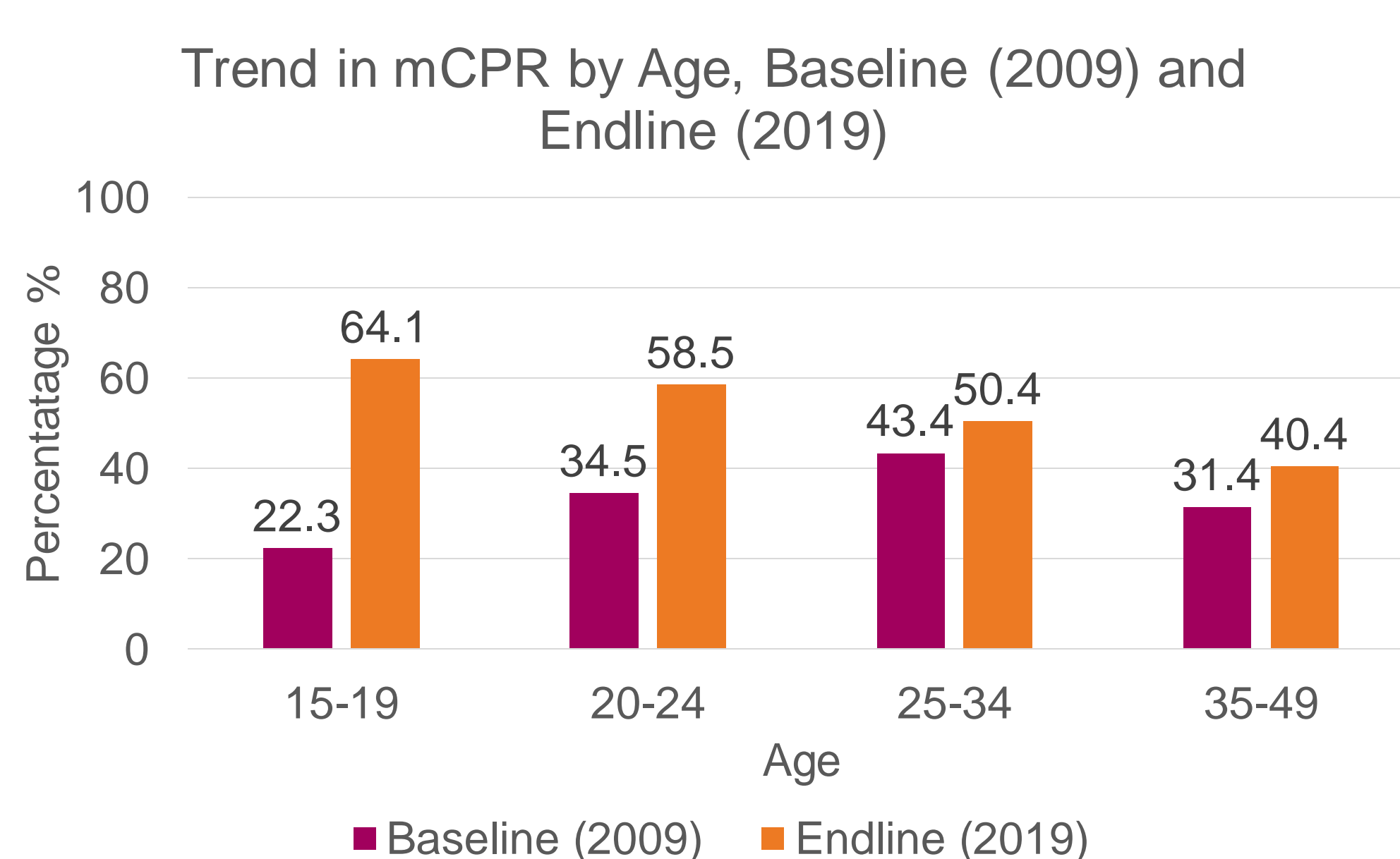


Methodology

- The evaluation team implemented a **mixed method study, beginning with a desk review** of documents, including baseline and end-line research reports, project indicators, donor reports, and other knowledge management products.
- We supplemented the desk review with primary data collected from **key informant interviews** with project staff, health managers, and healthcare providers who currently support the project, have experience with CC and CAC, and are involved with the project transition.
- We used a semi-structured questionnaire to ask key informants a series of questions related to ABRI's **successes, challenges, and sustainability strategies**.
- We coded the data and implemented a **thematic-based analysis** with NVIVO v. 12.
- We identified themes based on the interview guide and organized findings according to project **effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and impact**.

Results / Key Findings

Results regarding the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability showcase several promising findings. We **supported 632 public health facilities and catchment communities** and **trained 17,419 healthcare providers** (including 11,943 community-level providers) in CC and CAC information and service delivery. To date, the project has **served more than eight million girls, women, and families** with CC and CAC (7,786,362 with CC and 342,175 with CAC). The **modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) has increased from 37.1% in 2009 to 48.9% in 2019**. **Unmet need for contraception fell from 22% to 15%**, while awareness of places of where to access abortion care doubled.



We also identified key elements to ensuring successful transitioning and sustainability: (1) strengthening the technical and program management capacity of government partners, (2) strengthening supply chain management, (3) introducing a structured on-the-job training mechanism, and (4) implementing catchment-based mentoring. Despite the impressive results achieved, we also identified **several challenges** to ensuring sustainable access to and utilization of SRHR information and services. Most importantly, while the project worked with the Federal Ministry of Health to initiate domestic finance allocation for family planning, **progress has been slow and uncertain** and the ministry remains heavily **reliant on external aid** to finance public health services, including SRHR programs.

Program Implications / Lessons

We documented several key lessons learned from the transition phase that can inform future project design to ensure local ownership and sustainability.

- Central to ABRI's success was **positioning the government as the owner of project objectives and outcomes**; this was deemed critical to sustainability.
- Government leadership and ownership of the transition process was essential to the project's success and **strong collaboration between the government and implementing partners was essential** to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency. Such partnerships, where all parties discuss and determine priority interventions and agree to provide the required resources, were critical to enhancing planning and reducing duplication of efforts among stakeholders.
- Establishing coordination mechanisms** at the subnational level, such as technical working groups, was also key.
- Intensifying support to strengthen the **supervisory, monitoring, and leadership capacity** of the zonal health departments and *woreda* health offices was also critical.

