

# Community Engagement to Explore Mothering and Infant Feeding Practices Among Black Women Living With HIV

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## Introduction

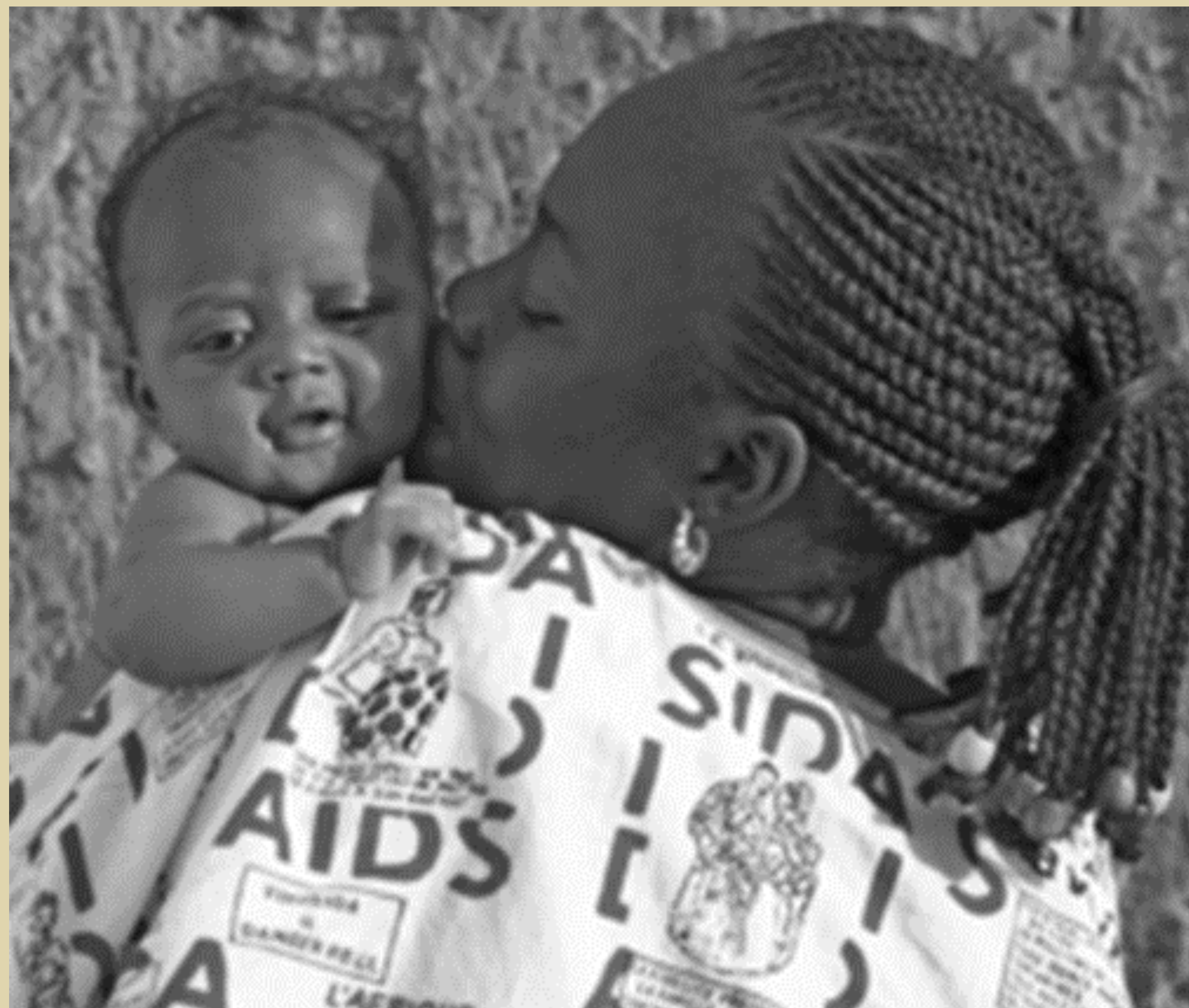
- Women of childbearing age account for nearly half of the world's HIV cases. Black women are disproportionately affected. Evidence indicates that breastfeeding presents a 20% risk of HIV transmission to infants.
- Black women in the African diaspora share socio-cultural perceptions of motherhood, vulnerability to HIV infection through heterosexual contact, and socio-economic barriers to needed health and social services.
- Meaningful community engagement is an effective framework for studying a complex topic such as this.

## Research Purpose

- To examine the ethno-cultural context of infant feeding practices among childbearing HIV positive Black women.
- To build individual, community, and organizational capacity and leadership to optimize HIV and infant feeding care for Black women.
- To develop a successful approach to infant feeding that is grounded in the experiential knowledge of Black women living with HIV.

## Objectives

1. Identify the principles of community based participatory research (CBPR) for meaningful community engagement.
2. Describe key strategies .



## Theoretical Framework

- Community based participatory Research (fosters community engagement and Capacity building.
- It is not only an approach to studying phenomena from the perspectives of those being studied; it is also a means of mobilizing for collective social action to address the community needs and for creating change at multiple levels.
- Goals are: Research, Education & Action
- Values: what people know and believe by using their present reality as a starting point and building on it.
- Creates critical awareness and subsequent transformation
- Fosters empowerment through the process of engaging in experiential learning and collective action.

## Research Design

- We use a multi-phase, multi-site, mixed methods research approach that is guided by the tenets of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and post-colonialism.
- Community engagement and participation are integrated throughout the research and includes the formation of advisory groups, consultation meetings, and data analysis.

## References

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## CBPR Strategies

- Strategic composition of the research team with researchers of diverse backgrounds.
- Community-based analysis of the key issues/Social Determinants of Health.
- Adopting the principle of valuing people's capacity to think and work together for better living and healthier choices.
- Meaningful community engagement e.g. The use of CAG (Community Advisory Group) was a lever for transformation.
- In Ottawa: empowered women are self-advocating for visibility from local researchers and better services from clinicians.
- In Miami: CAG is raising awareness and mobilizing community members for more actions to educate the public.
- In Port Harcourt: leveraging on community-based support groups, women mobilized to identify with research and promote policy change.

## Looking Ahead

- While project is ongoing, the research process is already creating impact in the communities in the study sites.
- It is already increasing awareness and generating knowledge to improve cultural competence and cultural safety.
- Innovative use of CBPR mechanisms is helping our team to:
  - employ the most effective and acceptable means of collecting relevant and valid information.
  - ensure the clinical relevance and cultural suitability of recommendations.
  - inform the development of policy and health actions that will improve the health and healthcare of Black women living with HIV and their infants.

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