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**Improving access of poor women:
The role of institutions regarding pregnant women's access to and use of malaria and maternal health services in the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania**

PhD Thesis, Swiss Tropical Institute

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Each year approximately 23 million women worldwide become pregnant in malaria-endemic areas in Africa. Infections with malaria during pregnancy might result in adverse consequences, or even death, not only for the pregnant women, but also for the developing fetus or the newborn. Nonetheless, issues surrounding malaria in pregnancy have remained neglected in international health as well as in social science research for a long time.

Insufficient access to prevention and health care can crucially contribute to an individual's persisting vulnerability. On the other hand, having access to resources and services might help someone to maintain health and overcome illness, thus fostering resilience. Concerning access and utilization of malaria treatment and prevention services among women little is known. Literature on how (pregnant) women seek malaria treatment for themselves is scarce, and only few studies examine the use of Intermittent Preventive Treatment (IPTp) by pregnant women. Studies relate poor IPTp coverage mostly with late initiation and the irregular attendance of ANC services, thus blaming the women. However, little is known about other influencing factors.

The overall goal of this PhD project is to understand what institutions, that is rules, norms and regulations, facilitate or constrain access to livelihood resources and to health services in the management of disease. As part of this PhD project we currently examine how pregnant women in the Kilombero Valley of Southern Tanzania have access to health services in order to treat or prevent malaria. The study aims at contributing to a deeper understanding of how institutions like gender influence women's access to and use of malaria and maternal health services positively or negatively.