



## Fight Fistula

### Educating and Empowering Women in Ethiopia

Many girls in Ethiopia become pregnant in their teens. As their bodies are not fully mature and because health care is inadequate, especially in rural areas, these girls often suffer childbirth-related injuries such as fistula. An obstetric fistula is a hole, caused by prolonged obstructed labour, causing damage to the tissues of the vagina, the bladder and rectum, leaving women incontinent, ashamed and ostracised from society. Around 9,000 new cases occur every year in Ethiopia, representing the highest prevalence of fistula world-wide. The condition occurs disproportionately among impoverished girls and women, especially those that live far from medical services.

The overall goal of Fight Fistula is to contribute to the eradication of this debilitating condition among women and girls in Ethiopia. Prevention is critical to fighting fistula; therefore, education and family planning services form the main strategies of this project, which began as part of DSW's Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) programme in Ethiopia. Fight Fistula also addresses gender inequalities and harmful cultural practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation. Activities focus on several key results:

**Empowering women and girls:** DSW establishes and supports youth clubs that focus on young women, providing them with training and mentoring to become role models for their peers. The girls are provided with sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and trained as peer educators, and they then conduct group dialogues and outreach events to inform their peers about fistula. In addition, leaders of the clubs receive financial management, leadership and entrepreneurship training and

### Fight Fistula: at a Glance

**Project Duration:** 2006 – 2013

**Donor:**

Bingo Environmental Foundation  
Catholic German Women's Association  
Renate-Dommasch Foundation  
Else Kroener-Fresenius-Stiftung  
and other private donors

**Budget:** EUR 376,000

**Location:**

Ethiopia (Amhara Region)

**Partners:**

Bahir Dar Hamlin Fistula Hospital  
Amhara Development Association



**DSW**

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are supported with seed capital to establish income-generating projects. Education not only helps young women understand the need for appropriate care during pregnancy and childbirth, but it also empowers them and gives them the resources to make informed choices regarding their sexuality.

**Increasing awareness and reducing stigma:** Fight Fistula educates communities about the causes of fistula, treatment and prevention options. The project has fostered a new understanding through intense dialogue with key political and religious leaders, as well as parents and teachers. The project also trains local nurses and former fistula sufferers, who conduct home visits and play a key role as advocates, educating others on the importance of prenatal care and seeking medical intervention in time to avoid injury. Edutainment activities led by the youth clubs reach a wide and diverse audience using music, dance, and drama to promote social values, raise awareness, disseminate information, provide role models, and encourage positive attitudes and behaviour change.

**Increasing access to services:** The project has established a referral system between the youth clubs and health facilities, including the Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Bahir Dar, where those already suffering from fistula receive surgical treatment. Local nurses are also trained to treat fistula, provide youth-friendly services and liaise with the youth clubs, offer counselling services, and educate the community – including parents and religious leaders – about topics linked to the prevention and treatment of fistula.

Fight Fistula includes procurement of an „EFA-Mobile“ (EFA = Emergency Female Ambulance), an off road vehicle with special equipment, to drive the women from the villages to the Bahir Dar fistula hospital. At the same time, the truck serves as a medium for awareness raising on HTPs to support fistula prevention and sustainably and effectively decrease the Mother and Infant Mortality rate

*April 2011*



**DSW**