

Ethiopian Steel teams-up with 'Women for Life'

Women for Life is an organisation committed to bringing healthcare and wellness to millions of women and children in the country. Ethiopia has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates

Women for Life have ambitious plans to expand their facilities from 6,000m² to 10,000m², and to offer services that range from primary healthcare to diagnostic services and curative care.

Using satellite clinics it hopes to reach up to five million women and girls in rural and urban areas, at the peak of the planned 'Gandhi 2020' project. It is the largest NGO to fund and implement healthcare systems in Ethiopia and its goal is to supplement the government's efforts in healthcare

The organisation works in partnership with Ethiopian Steel, local communities and the government to create awareness around women's health and harmful traditional practices

Ethiopia is a country with a long history of dependence. The Axumite, Lalibela and other early civilizations have declined over the centuries, followed by hundreds of years of isolation, introversion and stagnation that has persisted to this day. This once great country and its peoples missed out on most of the changes of modern civilization, including the numerous benefits of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Ethiopia found itself among the world's 'backward'

nations, without access to the benefits of modern medical amenities.

Women's health, including their sexual and reproductive health (SRH), is still poor, often compounded by gender bias and harmful traditional practices. This has led to a high rate of maternal mortality and morbidity that has persisted to the present day.

Modern nation building initiated during the reign of Emperor Theodros and intensified at the turn of the twentieth century, gradually led to the introduction of modern medicine—a process that has yet to reach the whole of the country.

Life-giving aid for women

Ethiopia Steel donated roofing sheets to Gandhi Memorial Hospital, the only specialised maternity centre in the country.

Globally, over 500,000 women and young girls die of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth each year. Over 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries such as Ethiopia. One out of 16 women in Sub-Saharan Africa die as a result of childbirth or pregnancy. In developed countries, the figure is about 1 in 2,800. According to studies done in 2008, six countries accounted for nearly half of all maternal mortality cases. Three of these countries are in Africa—Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 25,000 women die every year in Ethiopia as a result of obstetric complications, with most of these deaths occurring among the rural poor. Moreover, around half a million Ethiopian women and girls suffer from disabilities such as *obstetric fistula*. The maternal mortality ratio remains high in Ethiopia as skilled institutional delivery is low

The establishment in 1958 of the only maternity hospital in Ethiopia—Gandhi Memorial Hospital—was significant, as was the establishment in 1980 of the Graduate Program of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine, Addis Ababa University.

The graduate programme was a turning point in the provision of specialised maternity care in Ethiopia, and led to an increase in the number of gynecologists in Ethiopia who work in the capital and various parts of the country. [Source: *Ethiopian Journal of Reproductive Health May 2007 (1), 54-74*]

The Gandhi Memorial Hospital has only 110 beds and delivers 25 neonates each day; an average of 170 women in labour are referred to other facilities due to a lack of beds in the hospital. The condition of the Gandhi Memorial Hospital is still very inadequate and lacks modern technology and equipment.

Ethiopian Steel was proud to be able to assist in its improvement

Image: Pratik Holiz for UNICEF