“It’s the Work of the Heart”
Repairing Bodies, Restoring Spirits in the Congo

At a small hospital on the eastern border of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Cristophe Kimona and Dr. Esanga Lifokata work with some of the most disenfranchised members of Congolese society—women who suffer from fistula, a devastating but treatable condition.

Dr. Lifokata remembers one in particular. Decades-old damage from a difficult childbirth had left a woman in such pain that “she could not even sit in a chair,” recalls Dr. Lifokata. At HEAL Africa hospital, supported by EngenderHealth’s Fistula Care project, Dr. Lifokata’s team did more than repair the woman’s body; they restored her spirit. “The woman was healed, learned sewing, and left with a sewing machine,” remembers Dr. Lifokata. “This was a woman who was stigmatized and without society, but she left with joy, and that gave me a lot of satisfaction.”

A woman “without society” is an apt description of a woman with fistula. Usually, during a prolonged, obstructed labor of a stillborn child, trauma opens a hole between the woman’s birth canal and her bladder or rectum, leaving her leaking urine or feces constantly. Such trauma can also be caused during rape or as a result of a poorly done cesarean section. She is often ostracized.

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from her community because she smells or has survived rape. Abandoned by her husband, housed apart from her family, and prone to multiple illnesses, she lives a solitary and painful life. Many women choose to eat and drink very little to stem the leakage, leaving them thirsty and weak.

Fistula often happens when a pregnant woman does not receive timely or quality medical care. In the eastern Congo, where women face the threat of attack from rebel groups that destabilize the countryside, traveling to a facility to give birth may also be treacherous. At home without trained support, laboring for too long, with the baby’s head cutting off blood supply to delicate genital tissue. If and when women do reach medical care, it is often too late.

Fistula Care has supported nearly 2,000 fistula repair surgeries in eastern Congo.

To prevent fistula, Fistula Care also trains providers to offer family planning counseling so that women can space births, which gives their bodies time to heal following surgery and allows women to perform better during delivery.

Looking to understand how best to meet the needs of Congolese women as the program expands over the next three years, EngenderHealth recently brought together surgeons from around the country. Many said it was their first time being in the same room with so many others working on fistula.

“Fistula surgeons and health care providers working in the Democratic Republic of Congo are incredibly dedicated,” Bethany said. “Many work in remote, low-resource settings and provide care to women who are often unable to pay for health care services.”

But for these doctors and nurses, welcoming women back into the world of health and acceptance is reward enough. “I get paid when I help a woman with fistula get better and she greets me, ‘Bonjour, Doctor,’ and smiles,” says Dr. Kimona, a surgical trainer at HEAL Africa. “It makes me happy inside.”

Dr. Lifokata agrees. “It is the work of the heart.”

Learn more at www.fistulacare.org.

Welcome, New Board Members

EngenderHealth welcomes Ms. Elizabeth Ebi and Dr. Mehret Mandefro to its Board of Directors.

Elizabeth Ngozi Ebi is a seasoned Nigerian businesswoman with in-depth knowledge of finance and investment management, based on years of experience in both the Nigerian and U.S. money and capital markets. Ebi is the first female stockbroker licensed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange.

Dr. Mehret Mandefro is an Ethiopian-American physician, researcher, and filmmaker, who recently served as a White House Fellow under the Obama Administration. Mandefro has worked extensively with HIV-affected communities across Sub-Saharan Africa and in the United States for more than a decade.

EngenderHealth Addresses Teenage Pregnancy in the U.S.

EngenderHealth has launched an initiative to help prevent teenage pregnancy in the United States by addressing a critical gap in existing programs: how gender norms impact sexual and reproductive health behavior. Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, EngenderHealth has embarked on a five-year program to address gender relations among adolescent girls and boys in Austin, Texas, where teenage pregnancy rates are among the highest in the nation.

Applying our extensive international experience from our Gender and Men As Partners® (MAP) program, EngenderHealth will use innovative approaches such as educational workshops, social media strategies, and community-based events. By fostering open discussions with boys as well as girls, EngenderHealth seeks to encourage young people to avoid pregnancy by delaying sex, increasing their use of contraception, and adopting healthy behaviors. Project partners include the Travis County Summer Youth Employment Program; SafePlace, a youth-serving organization; and Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. For more information, visit www.engenderhealth.org/gendermatters.

20,000 Fistula repair surgeries supported to date by EngenderHealth.

26 Number of countries where EngenderHealth’s Gender and MAP program has worked since 1996.
Donor Spotlight: When Seeing Is Believing

Last year, the Tarico-Arbogast family took the five-month world tour they had been talking about for years. Three stops on their trip included EngenderHealth-supported sites: Snehaadan and Pragati in Bangalore, India, and the Kigamboni Health Center in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

For each family member, seeing was believing. During their travels to the EngenderHealth sites, Valerie Tarico and Brian Arbogast saw firsthand the challenges couples face in considering family size. “There are so many issues that simply don’t affect us at home: transportation breakdowns, lack of private examining rooms, even shortages of contraceptives,” Valerie said. “In parts of Africa, a woman can travel half a day by bus with two toddlers to get her contraceptives, only to find that the clinic has run out. It was great to see EngenderHealth tackling these matters,” including transforming men’s attitudes and engaging them as partners to improve the health of their wives, mothers, and sisters.

Brian concurred. “During our travels, EngenderHealth was the only organization we saw involving men in a dialogue around reproductive health and family planning.” he said. “EngenderHealth is smart about partnering with local organizations to bring tangible changes to communities, large and small. As donors, there’s no better feeling than seeing that your contributions have an impact.”

Valerie’s daughter, Brynn, 15, and Marley, 13, were fascinated by the courage and creativity they witnessed at Snehaadan, where orphans living with or affected by HIV receive schooling, treatment, and nurturing provided by warm, kind adults. Their mother, Valerie, also touted the lifesaving impact of a new surgical room at Kigamboni Health Center.

These diverse points of interest within the family of four reflect the comprehensive nature of EngenderHealth’s work, which applies innovative, crosscutting approaches to family planning, maternal health, and HIV and AIDS. Brian and Valerie came to support EngenderHealth for different reasons. As a psychologist, Valerie had seen the effects of unwanted pregnancies on women and their children. Being able to decide when to get pregnant allows women to protect their health and give their children the attention and care they need. Brian’s interest was rooted in his concern about population growth and poverty.

For Valerie, the reason for supporting EngenderHealth is simple: “EngenderHealth is incredible at what they do. They apply cutting-edge science, smart business practices, and respectful relationships to give men and women around the planet the power to create healthy families. What could be more important?”

Become a Partner for a Better Life

EngenderHealth’s success is built on partnerships around the world with women, men, health care professionals, local organizations, and governments. So much is possible through strong partnerships!

When you become a Partner for a Better Life by making automatic monthly gifts, you will help provide a steady and dependable stream of funding for EngenderHealth.

Joining is easy. Find out more at www.engenderhealth.org/partner or call 1-800-564-2872, ext. 8021.

“As donors, there’s no better feeling than seeing that your contributions have an impact.”

—Brian Arbogast

29% The increase in the number of Tanzanian women and men choosing long-acting or permanent family planning methods from 2008 to 2009.
Feddy Mwanga has come full circle. As a young woman, she worked as a midwife and a bedside nurse, treating patients, caring for pregnant women, and delivering babies in maternity and pediatric wards. After earning advanced degrees in nursing and sociology, she pursued a career in social science, teaching public health at universities in Tanzania. Her credentials eventually landed her a position at the World Health Organization, as well as the title of President of the Tanzanian Midwives Association.

Today, as technical director of the ACQUIRE Tanzania Project (ATP), Feddy finds herself back in the trenches of health care, working in her home country, where she strives every day to ensure that women are fully informed about their options for family planning, postabortion care, HIV testing, care, and support, and other reproductive health services.

“Working with and being close to the people I am serving—that is what brings me the greatest satisfaction,” Feddy said.

It is Feddy’s commitment, shared by the team she helps lead, that has helped make a measurable impact: According to the latest Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey, contraceptive use countrywide rose from 20% to 27% in just five years. ATP is the U.S. Agency for International Development’s flagship family planning program in Tanzania. Feddy oversees the project’s four field offices across the country. Under the five-year program, EngenderHealth partners with the Tanzanian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to improve women’s access to contraception, HIV treatment, and postabortion care services.

The project focuses on expanding women’s contraceptive options, particularly long-acting and permanent methods of family planning, including intrauterine devices, hormonal implants, and sterilization. From 2008 to 2009, more than 200,000 clients received these vital services, an almost 30% increase over the previous year.

EngenderHealth’s ATP project also seeks to reduce the transmission of HIV from mothers to children and has helped to expand access in rural areas to comprehensive postabortion care (cPAC).

Complications from abortion are one of the leading causes of maternal death in Tanzania. Previously, cPAC was only available at regional hospitals, which were often so far away that women living in villages could not receive timely emergency medical care. By making such care locally available, EngenderHealth helped contribute to the recent decline in maternal mortality in Tanzania—454 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2008 (from 578 deaths per 100,000 in 2004).

Clearly, Feddy is seeing the results of her work. “Today, I feel I am more directly contributing to improving women’s and children’s lives every day,” she said. “It is a great feeling.”

Leave a Legacy of Hope

We invite you to build a legacy at EngenderHealth through a Charitable Gift Annuity, which offers you the opportunity to help future generations lead better lives, while providing you with financial benefits today.

With a Charitable Gift Annuity, EngenderHealth will issue fixed payments for life in exchange for your charitable contribution. Payout rates depend on your age and can range from 5.2% (age 60) to 9.5% (90 and older) of the amount gifted. Regardless of fluctuations in the economy, your payout will never be reduced after the annuity is established.

To learn more about the advantages of Charitable Gift Annuities, please contact Danielle Fitzgerald, Planned Giving Officer, at 1-800-564-2872, ext. 8006, or dfitzgerald@engenderhealth.org.
Through our Samastha Project in India, EngenderHealth is improving the health and lives of mothers and children living with HIV. Watch our audio portraits on www.engenderhealth.org/samastha-video.