

## USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity Finding Hope After Living with Fistula

Obstetric fistula is linked to one of the major causes of maternal death in Ethiopia. Women who have obstetric fistula live with birth injuries that cause life-long disabilities, psychological trauma, and social isolation. In Ethiopia, obstetric fistula is common among women who marry before the age of 15 and reside in rural areas with little access to maternal health services. Obstetric fistula often occurs after prolonged labor.

USAID Transform: Primary Health Care, in partnership with Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and Healing Hands of Joy, supports the Ministry of Health to eliminate obstetric fistula in Ethiopia. To prevent and treat obstetric fistula cases, health workers are trained to identify, diagnose, and refer patients from lower health facilities to higher health facilities for treatment.

Sixty-year-old Mulu Gesesse, from Afafi Village, South Gonder, in Amhara region has lived with obstetric fistula for over 22 years because of prolonged labor that resulted in a stillbirth and incontinence. "I was pregnant, I went into labor, and I gave birth to a dead child," Mulu said. Since then, she suffers from urine and fecal incontinence. "For many years, I sat alone in one room," she said. Mulu relied on her late mother for personal hygiene care. After her mother's death, her brother, Gebire Chekol looked after her.



Mulu Gesese, obstetric fistula survivor. Photo: USAID Transform Primary Health Care Activity

Three years ago, health extension workers took note of Mulu's condition, and she was referred nearby to Hamlin Fistula Treatment Center based in Bahir-Dar for surgery. USAID Transform: Primary Health Care supported the Center to treat and repair many patients with obstetric fistula, including Mulu.

Today, Mulu is happy with the treatment she has received. Mulu has seen substantial improvements after surgery. "Thanks to those who helped me to get the treatment without me paying a single cent. Now, I can go to church and attend weddings. And I can drink coffee with my neighbors," she said.