

Hamlin Fistula NZ



DECEMBER 2021



After Over 30 Years, Bijige is Finally Dry

Imagine discovering that you are pregnant with your second child: the anticipation as you and your loved ones prepare to welcome a new addition to your family.

Imagine waiting for days in excruciating pain as you suffer an obstructed labour without the help of a midwife.

Imagine travelling, almost unconscious, on a homemade stretcher for hours as you are carried to the nearest medical clinic, where your child is heartbreakingly stillborn.

Imagine waking up and realising the ordeal is not over, and that you constantly leak urine now because of an injury, called obstetric fistula, that you suffered in childbirth.

This was Bijige's reality. In the small, isolated village in southern Ethiopia which Bijige called home, a midwife and medical clinic was too far away. So, when Bijige experienced a complicated labour, there wasn't a midwife who could help her. After two agonising days of obstructed labour, Bijige was carried, unconscious, to the closest medical clinic.

Bijige was lucky to be alive. Heartbreakingly, her baby was stillborn. When she awoke at the hospital, Bijige realised that her ordeal was not over; she was incontinent. "When I woke up, I found myself lying on a soaked bed and asked the nurses what happened," says Bijige. The local clinic assured her that her condition would stop after a while.

It never did.



Preventing fistula, a devastating childbirth injury

Obstetric fistula is one of the worst things that can happen to a woman or girl. It is a hole between the birth canal and the bladder or rectum and leaves the patient leaking urine or faeces - sometimes both. This internal injury is caused when a woman experiences a difficult or obstructed labour without any medical help. In places like Ethiopia, over 70% of rural women end up giving birth without a medical professional's help - as a result, an estimated 31,000 women in Ethiopia are currently suffering from the indignity and trauma of fistula.

Still, there is hope for millions of women in Ethiopia: the devastation of fistula is preventable. A skilled midwife is able to detect any abnormalities, escalate care in a timely manner, and drastically minimise the likelihood of obstructed labour. Dr Catherine Hamlin understood that the key to eradicating fistula lay in prevention; that's why she established the Hamlin College of Midwives in 2007.

Hamlin Midwives are delivering thousands of babies and preventing the same childbirth injuries that Bijige needlessly suffered.

The reality of fistula

For almost 40 excruciating years, Bijige was incontinent. "I returned home with a heavy heart and grief. Day in, day out, my situation never changed at all. Urine flows uncontrollably while I walk, sit and sleep," says Bijige. The impact of her fistula went beyond her physical injury; her husband left her, and she had to move back to her father's home and raise her daughter alone. Because of her incontinence, Bijige was cut off from her community.





“I felt ashamed of myself and wished I could die, rather than live in such agony,” recalls Bijige.

“Because of this injury, I never even attended my daughter’s wedding properly. I was completely dependent on my father and my daughter. Throughout that time, I started to believe that I would live with it forever and became completely hopeless.”

A cure for Bijige

Depressed and isolated, Bijige had given up hope of a cure for her fistula injury after three decades of suffering - until she learnt of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia. When she arrived at Hamlin’s Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, Bijige was embraced with open arms and respect.

“I am inside this beautiful hospital with loveable staff who give unconditional love and care for every one of us. I just regret that I didn’t know about the hospital earlier,” reflects Bijige.

The surgery to repair the fistula injury that had grieved Bijige for decades, took only a few hours. One week after her fistula-repair surgery, Bijige was ready to be discharged.

For the first time in nearly 40 years, Bijige was dry.

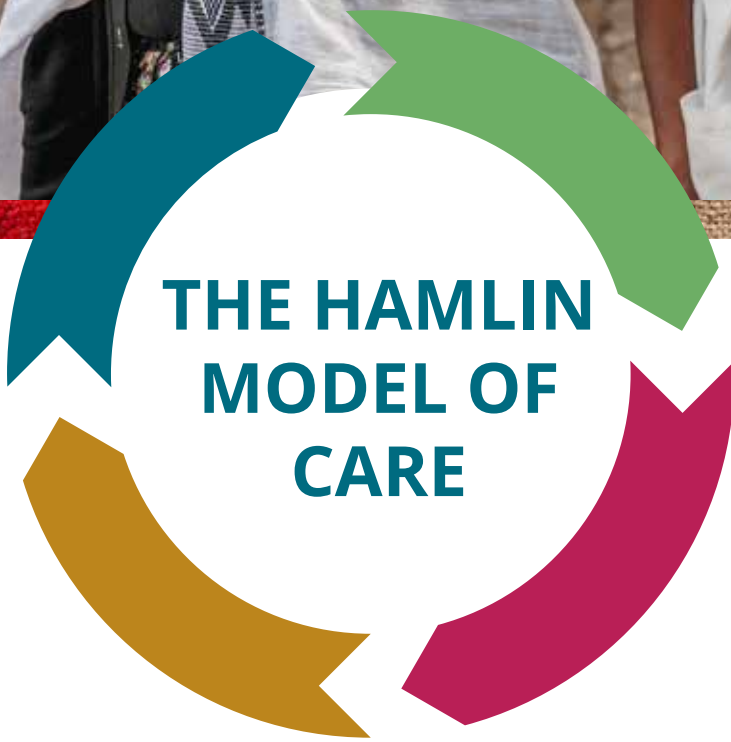
“Although I am an old woman and close to my grave, my cure means a lot to me. I will live the rest of my life without being anguished, ashamed and depressed. I thank God and every single one of you here at the hospital for letting me see the impossible become possible. You are life givers,” exclaims Bijige.



We can prevent fistula

“Midwifery I believe is the answer - to put a well-trained midwife in every village would soon eradicate obstetric fistula.”

- Dr Catherine Hamlin



THE HAMLIN MODEL OF CARE

Hamlin Fistula - Celebrating a Year of Impact

Thank you to all of our regular supporters. YOU are amazing!

You are helping to change lives every day. Donors like you ensure surgeons and midwives are equipped to offer life changing services and support free of charge to any patient in need, to ensure a safe labour and birth.

You are part of a committed community of people who are all determined to prevent obstetric fistula and restore women's dignity.



Prevent

To really prevent fistula requires one main thing - the education and deployment of midwives, making quality maternity care accessible for every woman in Ethiopia.

Because of your support, Hamlin midwives provided safe, fistula-free birth for 22,344 mothers and babies.

Together, we equipped 52 Hamlin Midwifery Centres in remote rural areas this last year, enabling Hamlin midwives to provide expert antenatal, labour, post-natal care, well-child care and family planning to women in rural Ethiopia.

Since 2007, the Hamlin College of Midwives has graduated 195 midwives who are making a significant impact in rural communities, reducing fistulas and providing quality maternal health care. There are another 95 women currently completing their Bachelor of Science in Midwifery degree at the College.

Prevention is cornerstone of our vision: ensuring that women in Ethiopia have access to qualified midwives so they no longer suffer for days on end with an obstructed labour that could end in a life-altering fistula.





Treat

Record treatment impact at Hamlin fistula hospitals, made possible by you.

The Hamlin clinical team is globally renowned for its treatment technique. Surgeons from all over the world have trained at Hamlin to learn this acclaimed best practice for fistula surgery.

In addition to Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, Hamlin has five regional fistula hospitals across Ethiopia to ensure access for women in remote areas.

Treatment results so far this year are very encouraging. Hamlin's medical team continues to meet and exceed all treatment targets as momentum to reach all women with fistula gains pace.

Hamlin's Patient Identification Program to find women living with historical fistula injuries recommenced at the end of January - as a result, outpatient numbers and surgeries increased. Hamlin's surgical team operated on 1,508 women in the twelve months from July 2020 to June 2021.

We are extremely proud of the significant progress made this year, especially given the impact of COVID-19 on patient flow. The Hamlin clinical team's unwavering determination to continue Dr Catherine Hamlin's work is an inspiration.

Patient treatment at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is only possible thanks to you, our supporters. Thank you.



Rehabilitate

For so many women, the damage done by fistula requires treatment beyond the first fistula surgery. The physical and mental scars can only be healed in a supportive environment close to medical supervision.

Surgery is just the beginning of the long road to recovery from this childbirth injury.

The Hamlin Model of Care ensures the treatment for women with a fistula is also focused on restoring dignity. Patients coming to Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia receive a customised program that includes physiotherapy, counselling, and socialisation to rebuild trust in people and positive integration into community.

Thanks to your support, 698 women received psychological therapy, helping to restore self-esteem and a sense of belonging. A further 318 women received physiotherapy pre and post operation, and 23 women received intensive rehabilitation for nerve damage causing drop foot.



Equip

Because of supporters like you, women are equipped with the opportunity to have a happy future full of family, societal inclusion, the ability to earn a living, without enduring the indignity of a lifelong fistula injury.

All patients have access to numeracy and literacy classes, to help them thrive in their new life after treatment. For women at Hamlin's Desta Mender, the training extends to a range of agriculture and animal husbandry skills, child-care qualifications and business management training. In some cases, this also includes start up grants to establish their own business, enabling these women to generate an income. It enables them not only to survive but to thrive.

This year you helped 516 women achieve vocational skills in market gardening, poultry farming, pottery, hospitality and catering, entrepreneurship - empowering them to become independent and self-sufficient through being provided with the support and resources to generate income for themselves and their families.





Hamlin Midwife Tizita: **Saving lives and preventing fistula**

Tizita is a proud graduate of the Hamlin College of Midwives. Now in her third year as a Hamlin Midwife, her work is saving the lives of women and babies. Tizita's degree from the Hamlin College of Midwives is helping to eradicate obstetric fistula in Ethiopia - and it was only made possible thanks to the generosity of Hamlin supporters.

A first-class education in midwifery

Nestled near the towering rock formations of the Valley of Marvels in eastern Ethiopia is Babile, Tizita's hometown. It was in Babile where Tizita went to high school and first began to dream of becoming a midwife. After completing her secondary education and achieving high marks, Tizita was awarded a full scholarship to study midwifery at the Hamlin College of Midwives in Addis Ababa.

In the first year of her four-year Bachelor of Science in Midwifery degree, Tizita and her peers studied the foundations of midwifery and basic nursing

training at Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. From her second year onwards, Tizita started going on clinical placement to get invaluable first-hand experience of providing maternal health care. Her practical education was bolstered with theoretical work in newborn care, pregnancy complications, ultrasound training and advanced diagnostic skill

Inspired to care for mothers

Dr Catherine Hamlin saw prevention as the key to eradicating fistula. That's why, in 2007, she opened the Hamlin College of Midwives. Since then, 195 Hamlin Midwives - including Tizita - have graduated from the College and are now making a significant impact in rural communities by reducing fistulas and providing quality maternal health care.

"When I was a first-year student at the College, I incidentally met with Dr Catherine. She greeted me and my classmates warmly, asked us about our study and told us how our profession is very crucial to rural mothers and the effort to

stop fistula. Ever since then, I've loved being a midwife and I share the commitment and love she [Catherine] had for mothers. She is my inspiration," says Tizita.

Equipped to handle the hardest challenges

By the time that Tizita had graduated with her midwifery degree from the Hamlin College of Midwives in 2018, she had safely attended well over 100 deliveries in various clinical placements. This experience was instrumental in her transition from her studies to working full time in a rural midwifery clinic. After graduation, Tizita was deployed to a Hamlin-supported midwifery clinic in Kurfa Chele, near her hometown of Babile, where she has been working for the past three years.

In rural Ethiopia, long-held misconceptions about medical intervention and a lack of access to resources have proved significant barriers to women accessing maternal health care. Working at the Kurfa Chele Midwifery Clinic posed various challenges, but her extensive



training at the Hamlin College of Midwives stood Tizita in good stead, and soon she had the trust of the local community. “We Hamlin graduates are different compared to similar professionals trained in other institutions.

The high-quality training we received at the College and the exceptional clinical placements we took made us proud and confident professionals. Wherever we go, we can easily win the trust of the community and take a leading position in the community’s maternal health care.

Here in our community, we are making progress in supporting pregnant women and healthy children and are also preventing fistula - so it’s very important!” explains Tizita.

Hamlin Midwives save lives

As Tizita is the only professional midwife in her community, she is often called upon to manage life-threatening childbirth complications. In those moments, the fundamental love and respect for each patient which was the cornerstone of her education at Hamlin, comes to the fore.

“I remember a mother who came to me late at night for delivery and accidentally started with a postpartum haemorrhage. She needed to be referred to a hospital immediately, otherwise she could have died. At that time, however, there was no ambulance or transport available. Then I decided to implement all the necessary steps needed and saved her life. I accompanied her to the nearby hospital on public transport to assist her. Now both her baby and she are well and healthy.

Whenever she meets me, she hugs me with love and thanks me for saving her life. We have become almost like family after the delivery,” Tizita recalls.

Tizita believes that it is essential to keep training Hamlin Midwives well into the future, explaining that “It’s important because Hamlin Midwives are trained and use their skill and knowledge to support the community, preventing injuries like fistula. Starting from the training to the deployment, we are given the quality education that we need to support the community and help the mothers.”

Her job is complex but Tizita’s message to the people supporting the work of Hamlin Midwives is simple: “Thank you for supporting our training in the work against fistula!”



Meet our Clinical Team: Dr Bitew

Dr Bitew Abebe is the Medical Director at Hamlin's Bahir Dar Fistula Hospital. His work as a urogynaecologist and obstetric fistula surgeon has transformed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian women.

A vital member of Hamlin's Clinical Team, with a commitment to helping those in need, Dr Bitew joined Hamlin in 2009, where he was trained by Dr Catherine Hamlin and Mamitu Gashe. His rationale for working with Hamlin was simple.

"I was interested in working for Hamlin because of the dedication and passion of the staff, and the free, holistic services given to patients. I feel great working here; I feel Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia is leading the world in fistula surgery and holistic care services," explains Dr Bitew.

Dr Bitew's commitment to curing fistula

As a fistula surgeon, Dr Bitew performs approximately 300 fistula repair surgeries each year. He estimates that he has performed a total of 3,900 surgeries during his time at Hamlin. That's 3,900 lives transformed thanks to Dr Bitew's dedication and hard work.

Dr Bitew is determined to help finish the work that Drs Catherine

and Reg Hamlin started and eradicate fistula. As a part of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) Surgeon Training Program, Dr Bitew is training the next generation of fistula surgeons from around the world to provide best-practice care to women with childbirth injuries. "I provide the standard knowledge and skills for fistula repair surgery to FIGO-recruited fistula surgery trainees. My priority is to see Africa eliminate obstetric fistula from the continent," he declares.

In January, Dr Bitew graduated from Hamlin's Urogynaecology Fellowship as a urogynaecologist specialist in pelvic floor and bladder injuries. The Fellowship has been incredibly beneficial for Dr Bitew: "The program allows career progression and accomplishments, and enables me to provide updated, best-practice surgical care for patients," says Dr Bitew.

Having learned first-hand from pioneering fistula surgeon, Dr Catherine Hamlin, Dr Bitew is proud to be following in the Hamlins' footsteps: "I am very grateful and honoured to work at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia. [Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin] have left a legacy of dedication, commitment, and passion to serve mothers with birth injuries - irrespective

of their language, colour, religion, ethnicity, political view and economic status, so I am very much proud to continue their tradition."



Dr Bitew's passion and enthusiasm for his work is obvious.

"My favourite thing is perform a standard fistula repair surgery," he declares. The satisfaction of changing a woman's life and seeing her recover from her fistula injury drives Dr Bitew's work.

"After a woman recovers, I feel honoured and blessed. Having the skill and knowledge to repair and give happiness to women with childbirth injuries is great," he says.

Your support is creating change and saving lives!



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