Sharing stories of impact

Ethiopia-Canada Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Project (Ethiopia-Canada MNCH Project)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY
The Ethiopia-Canada MNCH Project is a Global Affairs Canada-funded collaboration of Canadian and Ethiopian partners to support skilled local birth attendance and strengthen referral procedures for cases with complications for mothers or their babies.

Cover photo: Dr. Khalid Aziz, neonatologist and the project’s Associate Director, provides instruction on Helping Babies Breathe to students at St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
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It has been my pleasure to serve as the Project Director of the Ethiopia-Canada Maternal Newborn Child Health Project. Having been involved since its earliest stage, I can tell you it has been an exceptional journey - with the original project conception beginning well before being awarded funding from Global Affairs Canada.

During the course of the project, Ethiopia has become a second home to me. It always felt right to arrive to the warm reception from project staff, project partners and Ethiopian citizens. We have become more than members of a project with deliverables to report on; our team has become a family, united by a commitment for serving others and advocating for maternal, newborn and child health.

Thank you to Global Affairs Canada for supporting our efforts to improve outcomes for mothers and newborns in Ethiopia. Thank you also to our Canadian, Ethiopian and international partners who supported this journey. We hope you enjoy our story. We’re proud to share the impact of our work with you.
Project Milestones

Working with key partners in Ethiopia and Canada, a team from the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry is leading a project to reduce maternal and child mortality in Ethiopia. The project, financed by Global Affairs Canada, has two focuses: 1) helping midwife educators become better at passing on their skills to newer colleagues and 2) enhancing health facilities’ capacity to effectively treat laboring mothers and their children when complications arise.

In line with our second aim, the project set out to provide a wide range of training to health care workers and professionals from St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC) and 27 health facilities in North Shoa zone.

Training included: Health Management Information Systems, Helping Mothers Survive-Bleeding after Birth, Helping Mothers Survive-Pre-Eclampsia/Eclampsia, Helping Babies Breathe, Essential Care for Every Baby and Essential Care for Small Babies, and Basic Emergency Obstetric & Newborn Care. We further enhanced the capacity of Ethiopian health care professionals by equipping them with skills in MicroResearch and continuous Quality Improvement using the EPIQ Model.
Giving Birth to Skilled Birth Attendants

Up to 25,000 Ethiopian women die during childbirth each year and nearly three times as many newborns won’t survive their first 28 days. Rates in rural communities are the worst. Only 30 per cent of Ethiopian women give birth in health facilities. To address these needless deaths, the Ethiopia-Canada MNCH Project has been working since 2013 to boost the clinical and teaching skills of the country’s growing population of midwifery instructors. The project, funded by Global Affairs Canada and with large in-kind contributions from the University of Alberta and Mount Royal University, provides critical training to midwifery educators so they can share their skills with new midwives.

Muna H/Ibrahim, a graduate of the project’s 2017 Senior Midwife Tutor Training Program (SMTTP), felt unprepared to teach prior to completing the SMTTP. She explained, “As a new instructor, I had insufficient knowledge; a lack of skill; a lack of confidence.” The program provides training in effective adult education, best practices in maternal and newborn care, and clinical midwifery skills using hands-on simulation dolls and clinical placements. To round out their skills, graduates also complete courses on community assessment and research so they may continuously improve service delivery. After completing the program, Muna asserted, “I am competent enough to produce midwifery students of quality skills and knowledge—and also confidence.” The program is expected to make an impact long after it ends because it builds the capacity of current midwifery educators to give birth to future generations of skilled birth attendants. As Muna explains, “It makes a big change. We are going forward; working hard; sharing all this knowledge, experience, encouragement and confidence.”
2017 SMTTP Graduates
Project Director Dr. Roger Turnell poses with graduates from the 2017 cohort of SMTTP students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on May 26, 2017.

Hands-on training
An SMTTP student practices vacuum extraction skills using pelvis simulation mannequins. In addition to providing instruction on the use of simulation teaching materials, the project donated 212 sets of MamaNatalie and NeoNatalie simulation dolls to 51 midwifery training institutions across Ethiopia. SMTTP students and healthcare workers trained in the use of these dolls will be able to share their skills with others long after the project is completed.
Music Making a Difference

Thomas Gobena, bassist, producer and UNICEF National Ambassador to Ethiopia, and Dr. Michael Frishkopf, Director of the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology and Adjunct Professor of Medicine and Dentistry here at the University of Alberta, collaborated to produce “If You Have Heart.” The song shares the message of a grief-stricken father who’s lost both his wife and newborn child to complications that could easily have been managed by a skilled birth attendant. The song, which is expected to be released in Ethiopia this May on the EMwA radio broadcast in conjunction with the Ethiopian celebration of International Day of the Midwife, is expected to encourage more women to give birth in local health facilities with the support of skilled health care workers.

Zeritu Kebede performing “If You Have Heart” during the production of the accompanying video.

Building Partnerships

Ethiopian Midwives Association (EMwA) Communications Advisor Daniel Shitaye, EMwA Director Sr. Tachawat, and 2016 SMTTP graduate and EMwA midwife educator Sr. Zinabua pictured in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
Building Capacity through Communication

Ethiopia has some of the highest rates of maternal and newborn deaths in the world; with a maternal death rate of 676 per 100,000 live births, a newborn death rate of 85 per 1,000 live births and an under-5 death rate of 104 per 1,000 live births. The project aims to address this by increasing the availability, access to and use of skilled birth attendants across the country. In addition to rolling out a national program to increase the capacity of midwifery educators, the project has strengthened the Ethiopian Midwives Association (EMwA) by hiring a communications advisor.

Daniel Shitaye, EMwA Communications Advisor, said the involvement has been a “transformation for the organization” allowing it to “enter a new horizon”. The creation of the association’s website alone has created an “information platform” for its over 3,500 members, allowing them to access research, publications, e-learning and other professional development opportunities. They’ve also created a massive archive of training documents to ensure smooth succession for the organization. In addition to distributing a newsletter to over 3,000 subscribers, the EMwA has developed a radio program and is working to develop television programs that will reach areas of Ethiopia poorly serviced with internet, expanding their reach to a projected audience of 100 million people. The EMwA’s first official radio broadcast was held on February 10, 2018 on the Radio Fana National Airwave and is expected to expand by linking to six additional regional radio stations. Undoubtedly, support from the Ethiopia-Canada MNCH project combined with the talent of the EMwA’s growing membership and staff will help the association realize its vision to see that every woman, newborn and their family have access to quality midwifery care.
Resources to Support QI interventions

Project Manager Abrham Getachew introduces neonatal log books to track admission temperatures and other vital signs to health professionals in Fiche, North Shoa zone. The project donated materials such as these to ensure the success of QI interventions.

QI Training in Fiche, North Shoa Zone

A team of multi-disciplinary health care workers pose with Associate Director Dr. Khalid Aziz and project staff at C-Lale International Hotel in December 2015.
Saving Lives by Committing to Quality Improvement

Improving outcomes for birthing mothers and infants requires interventions at many different levels. The Ethiopia-Canada MNCH project staff have been building the capacity of midwives, health care workers and administrators through training such as Helping Babies Breathe and Respectful Maternity Care. Likewise, the project’s financial support has been pivotal in securing an Obstetrician at Fiche Hospital and other needed resources, such as room warmers and logbooks.

In efforts to strengthen the referral health system for pregnant and delivering mothers in North Shoa zone, the project also provides Quality Improvement (QI) training to multidisciplinary work teams. Canadian neonatal health care workers have been completing this training since 2003 because it has been shown to greatly improve their ability to deliver quality care. EPIQ (Evidence-based Practice for Improving Quality) training is more than just quality control. It empowers staff to better identify the root cause of problems that result in reduced quality of care and make improvements, even in low resource settings. EPIQ reinforces a ten-step process resulting in Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) action plans or cycles which measurably improve care.

Following EPIQ training, staff at Fiche Hospital recognized the role hypothermia was playing in poor outcomes for infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). According to Dr. Delessa, Director of the North Shoa Zonal Health Office, the impact of QI has been nothing short of a “miraculous outcome”. Because of a firm commitment by staff to manage hypothermia through recording admission temperatures and using skin-to-skin care, and the project’s donation of critical resources, including heaters, blankets and thermometers, they have recorded a reduction in neonatal deaths from 19% to 6.7% since May 2016. With additional time and resources, the impact of QI and its effect on maternal and neonatal outcomes is potentially limitless in its application.
Observership, September 2015
Health care professionals from St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College visit the simulation laboratory at Lois Hole Hospital for Women during an observership in September 2015.

Pediatrics Observership, February 2018
Project staff and visiting physicians from St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College at the Faculty of Medicine, Division of Community Engagement Office at the University of Alberta.

Pictured from left to right: Project Assistant Teena Hughson, SPHMMC Chief of Pediatrics Dr. Solomie Deribessa, Project Director Dr. Roger Turnell, SPHMMC NICU Director and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics Dr. Sara Haimanot, Project Manager Ashton James and Associate Director Dr. Khalid Aziz.
The Ethiopia-Canada MNCH project is a partnership between the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Medicine and St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC) in Ethiopia. The project aims to improve outcomes for birthing mothers and newborns through a number of interventions at community and institutional levels. As a partner, SPHMMC has been both a contributor to and beneficiary of project successes.

Professional development provided by the project, such as Helping Babies Breathe, Helping Mothers Survive, Health Management Information Systems and MicroResearch have increased the capacity of midwives, health care workers and administrators of this institution. Likewise, Quality Improvement (QI) training has empowered SPHMMC to identify and follow through on institutional changes resulting in improvements in the quality of care and outcomes of patients.

In addition to benefitting from training and resources, SPHMMC indirectly benefits from the project’s successes elsewhere in Ethiopia. Since the project’s inception, referrals from Fiche and the surrounding areas have been declining dramatically. In fact, according to Dr. Balkachew, Vice-Provost of Academics and Research at SPHMMC, “We used to see one to two cases per week. Now, it’s very rare to see complicated cases from Fiche or the surrounding areas and it’s because of their interventions.” By building the skills and capacity of health care professionals at SPHMMC through international exchanges, the institution also has higher capacity to handle complicated cases.

Most recently, the project provided funding for Dr. Sara Haimanot, NICU Director and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, and Dr. Solomie Deribessa, Chief of Pediatrics, from SPHMMC to join colleagues in Edmonton as they made daily rounds in many pediatrics divisions, including neonatal-perinatal care and pediatrics infectious diseases. The tour, which was part of ongoing efforts to enhance institutional environments supporting maternal, neonatal and child health services in Ethiopia, concluded at the 2018 EPIQ conference in Banff. The conference brought together leading neonatologists and other health professionals to network, share knowledge and identify best practices for improving outcomes for preterm infants. When speaking of her experience here in Canada, Dr. Deribessa explained, “I want to take what I have learned back home; to meet with the Minster of Health and Hospital Director; to share ideas about how we can improve our health system with our level of resources.”
The Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry values educating medical students, residents and graduate students on the challenges of global health. International and intercultural projects and partnerships, such as the Ethiopia-Canada MNCH Project, contribute to sustainable development for improved health, international education, and research and community service for each learner, including faculty members.

St. Paul’s Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC) is a leading public hospital and medical college in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. SPHMMC’s mission is to provide comprehensive health care services, teach high quality medical education and meet the needs of the communities we serve through our advanced and affordable health care system.

The Mission of the Federal Ministry of Health in Ethiopia is to reduce morbidity, mortality and disability as well as improve the health status of people by providing a comprehensive package of preventive, rehabilitative and basic curative health service via a decentralized and democratized health system in collaboration with all stakeholders.
Project Partners

The Ethiopian Midwives Association (EMwA) is the professional association of Ethiopian midwives. EMwA aims to be a center of excellence in promoting quality of midwifery education, empowering midwives and ensuring that every woman, newborn, and their family have access to quality midwifery care.

The Ethiopian-North America Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA) aims to increase the capacity of the Ethiopian health care system by building medical centers and hospitals that will serve as sustainable resource hubs in the areas of medical research, training and on-site care for eastern Africa.

The Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) is a health professionals association established in 1991 G.C. that envisions the attainment of an optimal standard of health for the people of Ethiopia. It promotes better health services to the public and high professional standards through advocacy, professional competence, relevant policies and effective networking.

Mount Royal University’s School of Nursing and Midwifery is a leader in innovative teaching strategies and outstanding practical instruction. Faculty from this program designed and helped deliver the Senior Midwives Tutor Training Program (SMTTP) curriculum. Their student-centered approach to learning inspires midwives to make a difference.

The North Shoa Zonal Health Office (NSZHO) supported project implementation in North Shoa zone, Oromia region, with the Director of the NSZHO as an active member of the QI team at Fiche Hospital.