



Training Human Resources to Improve Maternal Health

A Case Study of Pastoralist Health Extension Workers in Afar and South Omo, Ethiopia

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Background

Ethiopia suffers from an acute shortage of health workers at every level. The rural areas, where 84 per cent of the population lives, are chronically under-served. The Government of Ethiopia is tackling these challenges head-on with an ambitious national plan that prioritises the health of mothers and children. Launched in 2004, the Health Extension Programme (HEP) trains and deploys female health extension workers (HEWs) to serve rural villages. A total of 31,000 HEWs with one-year training on basic health services such as antenatal care, safe childbirth, essential newborn care, diarrhea treatment, malaria prevention and treatment, and health education have been deployed. Already, improvements have been documented in immunisation rates, contraceptive use and standards of hygiene.

AMREF's Role in Training Pastoralist HEWs

Although pastoralists in Ethiopia account for a significant proportion of the total population, there is no appropriate health delivery package for them. In particular, the health care delivery system in Emerging Regions such as Afar and South Omo is highly jeopardised, rendering mothers in such areas out of reach.

Through training of pastoralist HEWs, AMREF has played a crucial role in supporting local authorities in Afar to improve the health care delivery system. Working together with the regional health bureau, AMREF has so far trained 344 of a targeted 500 pastoralist HEWs in Afar. The plan is to ensure that each *kebele* (village) in the region has at least two health extension workers so as to reach communities, particularly mothers and children, in those remote areas. At the HEWs training college in Aba'ala, AMREF provides infrastructural support, including electronic teaching equipment such as computers, printers and projectors. AMREF monitors and supervises training to ensure quality, and provides financial support for tuition of trainees, as well as incentives for instructors.



In charge of the community: Tiramed's story

Tiramed Adinew is a Health Extension Worker based at the Erbo Health Post in Malle District, South Omo. There are 887 households in the village, with 5,378 people. Tiramed visits all the households to teach them how to prevent diseases and stay healthy. She attended the Government's health extension training programme, which incorporates 16 packages, with five months of classroom teaching, and one month of practical field practice. She received additional training from AMREF on reproductive health, malaria, sexually transmitted illnesses, environmental health and sanitation. "What I learnt from AMREF was very helpful because it refreshed my knowledge and gave me additional skills. The people in the community trust me. Many women come to me for ante-natal checks, and when it is time to have their babies, they call me. I help those who have normal deliveries, but if I detect a complication, I refer them to Gongode Health Centre, which has better facilities and more qualified staff."