WEEMA MEDICAL PROGRAMS

As part of our work in the healthcare field, WEEMA International strengthens health systems through education, medical equipment, physician support, innovative technologies and more with the goal to increase maternal, neonatal and child health and safety. We have implemented annual cataract surgery campaigns to decrease preventable blindness and low vision for three consecutive years. This issue of our newsletter focuses on our medical projects and their impact.

mHEALTH: HOW SMARTPHONES ARE SAVING LIVES

Imagine a world where a smartphone helps keep children in rural Ethiopian communities healthy. This idea is becoming a reality through WEEMA’s collaboration with D-tree International (www.d-tree.org). The two organizations are partnering to develop an integrated community case management application (iCCM). iCCM is a protocol used in multiple countries to provide community health workers guidance for accurate diagnoses, treatment and follow-up for childhood illnesses, including pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria. We call our program mHealth, the term commonly used to describe mobile health technologies. WEEMA piloted this project with nine Health Extension Workers (HEWs) at five Health Posts in Tembaro district in early 2017, and has since expanded to 20 Health Extension Workers in 11 Health Posts total.

Sigezo Health Post was piloting this program when a young boy came in with flu-like symptoms. Instead of dismissing this as a passing illness, the HEW followed the simple routine: ask the patient for their symptoms, plug them into the app, and follow the instructions. The app returned a diagnosis of malaria, a treatable disease that is widespread in Ethiopia and caused more than 429,000 deaths just two years ago.1 Thanks to the mHealth app, the child was sent to the hospital for immediate treatment that the HEW could not provide herself, saving valuable time and possibly his life.

In an average month Sigezo HEWs treat 13 children through the program. They credit the new application with reducing mistakes they previously made in prescribing drugs or dosages. The app also saves the health extension workers time, as it eliminates the need to refer to medical texts while a patient sits in the Health Post with a line of other patients waiting.

To date, the nearly 100 patients treated through this program have had very positive outcomes. We are continuing to pilot the program with the anticipation of rolling out to additional sites in 2018 thanks to support from the IZUMI Foundation. By end of 2019, the project will reach 80 Health Extension Workers total in Tembaro and a neighboring district.

1 https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/facts.html
SOLAR SUITCASES SHINE LIGHT ON 8,600 DELIVERIES

Health Workers display lights made possible by Solar Suitcases.

WEEMA’s 40 Solar Suitcases installed in three zones between May 2013 and April 2017 have shed light on births across southwestern Ethiopia. In one zone alone, they have generated electricity for lights from solar power for more than 8,600 deliveries within a year, to ensure midwives and nurses are able to safely manage deliveries at any time, day or night. We Care Solar (wecaresolar.org) has partnered on the entire project, providing additional funding and technical support.

Hodo Health Center in Tembaro woreda was the final center to receive a Solar Suitcase, meaning that every health center now has a reliable primary or secondary source of power in the labor and delivery rooms in the three targeted zones. Solar Suitcases allow health facilities off the grid to have medical lighting 24 hours a day, preventing babies from being delivered in the dark or by the dull glow of a cell phone light. They also provide power for health workers to charge mobile phones and batteries for headlamps and fetal dopplers, allowing them to detect when a fetal heartbeat is in distress and call for an ambulance if a mother needs to be transported to the hospital for C-section or other emergency care.

WEEMA imported and installed 23 Solar Suitcases in Hadiya Zone in 2015 and 2016. Each installation provided an opportunity for WEEMA staff to collect baseline data so we are able to track changes in health services over time. WEEMA staff also provided training to those working in the health facilities on how to operate and maintain the Solar Suitcase and accessories, such as the fetal doppler. The WEEMA team returned twice to answer questions, collect data and provide follow up trainings throughout the next months.

Interviews with health workers at every facility during follow-up visits yielded inspiring results; the Solar Suitcases improved quality of care, facilitated management of normal deliveries, and reduced complications. The number of mothers who had to be sent from the rural health centers to a hospital to receive services decreased, as worker morale and confidence increased.

Keeping moms and babies safe is one of the Solar Suitcase project’s main goals, and WEEMA is happy to report that there were more than 8,600 deliveries in the health facilities in the 12 months following the Solar Suitcase installations. In addition, there were several instances where midwives believed that serious complications or deaths were prevented due to care provided with the assistance of the Solar Suitcase. Given that between 50–75 percent of clinic deliveries occurred at night, lighting the health clinics was of great value to mothers and health workers. Hanicha Health Center stated that finally, “delivering during the nighttime is like delivering during the daytime since we can see everything clearly. It also avoids risk of contamination for both mothers and health professionals.”

A worker at Fugeja Health Center said, “patients can clearly see the professional who is working with them through their delivery and it has given them faith in our facility. This gives community members the confidence to bring more pregnant mothers to us than they did before.”

WEEMA staff will continue to help health workers address any issues with the Solar Suitcases. Six of the oldest Suitcases received battery upgrades and are still working well. Thanks to the durability of the Solar Suitcase and the follow-up support by WEEMA, these health centers will continue to benefit for years to come.

WEEMA has installed Solar Suitcases to allow health centers to function at night across the region. This map is an approximation of our work to date.
Equipping Hospitals for Success

It is challenging to get any job done without the proper tools. This sentiment is shared by many Ethiopian medical professionals who wait years to obtain medical equipment needed to perform life-saving surgeries and everyday procedures.

In February, WEEMA staff and IMEC Project Coordinator Sue Crawford visited three new primary hospitals in the KT Zone: Mudula Primary Hospital, Doyagena Primary Hospital, and Shinshicho Primary Hospital, as well as Durame General Hospital. IMEC is an organization that provides equipment, tools, and supplies to advance medical services (in addition to agricultural and education services) in developing countries.

The team ventured through operating rooms, spoke with surgeons and other health workers, and took note of the lack of supplies. Medical care in these hospitals had advanced to include C-sections and operations, but updated equipment and sometimes just equipment that they had never had, remained elusive. Overwhelmingly, conversations with staff centered around the need for additional supplies and new equipment.

Simple tools like devices for performing skin grafts that can be found in abundance in U.S. hospitals are often in short supply in Ethiopia. The medical staff at Durame Hospital has waited three years for these instruments; everyone is trained and skilled in their use, but they are not easily found in country.

WEEMA and IMEC have teamed up to solve this dilemma; the two organizations are working together to collect requested equipment for all four hospitals in the zone. They will equip four full exam rooms, and provide the instruments needed to support laboratory diagnostics, general care, surgeries, infant critical care, infant resuscitation and much more. Thanks to this partnership, healthcare workers and patients across the KT Zone will have access to the right tools to get the job done in the next few months.

WEEMA Sponsored Health Center Wins Award

The Gaecha Health Center, located a few kilometers from Mudula, has recently been recognized as the best in the region by the Regional Health Office. The services of the midwives and the delivery room facilities were acknowledged specifically. WEEMA has contributed to the success of the health center through our midwifery scholarship program, by installing a Solar Suitcase in the delivery room, providing equipment and training of physicians. Hospital administration is thrilled with WEEMA’s support and reference WEEMA’s contributions as integral to the success of the health center.

Congratulations to WEEMA in-country director Teddy and his new bride Gelila on their October 15th wedding!
GETTING TO KNOW WHERE WE WORK

THE SOUTHERN NATION NATIONALITIES AND PEOPLE’S REGION OF ETHIOPIA, (SNNPR)

In Ethiopia, locations are divided from largest to smallest, like country to state to town. Here’s how that division works:

Country ➔ Region ➔ Zone ➔ Woreda ➔ Kebele
Ethiopia ➔ SNNPR ➔ Kembata Tembaro (KT) ➔ Tembaro ➔ Hodo

FRIENDS OF WEEMA RUN TO RAISE AT THE FALMOUTH ROAD RACE

Seventeen runners in bright orange shirts crossed the finish line on August 20th after running 7 miles in support of WEEMA. The beautiful weather added to the excitement of our runners who raised a collective total of nearly $27,000 to support WEEMA programs. The top two fundraisers, Kristen Fudge and Abaynesh O’Connor, were awarded flights to Ethiopia, courtesy of Ethiopian Airlines. Next year’s race will be held on August 19, 2018 and Team-a WEEMA will grow to 25 runners. To don the WEEMA colors and run with us next year, email liz@weema.org.