

EXPANDING ACCESS TO DAYCARE CENTERS FOR WOMEN IN THE HEALTH WORKFORCE IN ETHIOPIA

Lessons Learned from the USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity

May 2022



Mena Terrell/USAID Ethiopia

BACKGROUND

Care is an integral component of child development and well-being; however, because of prevailing gender norms, a majority of the responsibility for childcare falls on women, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. This unequal distribution of care limits women's time to pursue educational and employment opportunities and can hold women and girls back from advancing in their career and other areas of their lives.ⁱ In 2018, 606 million women of working age were unavailable for employment because of their childcare responsibilities, compared to just 41 million men.ⁱⁱ The COVID-19 pandemic has taken this crisis to unprecedented levels, and school closures and other pandemic restrictions are causing women to leave the workforce, mainly in the informal sector, to care for their children.ⁱⁱⁱ When women can balance their career and household activities better, their health improves along with their children and family. Studies have found a link between women finding balance in their career and improved maternal and child health outcomes.^{iv} Over the last decade, the Government of Ethiopia has taken steps to improve maternal and child health by designing and implementing cost-effective and lifesaving interventions like adequate maternity leave and caregiving support. The Constitution allots 120 days of parental leave to working women and 10 days to men.^v The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs^{vi} developed

guidelines for establishing daycare centers and supporting workplace breastfeeding at public service institutions to promote women's re-integration at work and infant health following the return from maternity leave. Despite these policies, implementation gaps still exist. The 2018 USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity gender analysis found that female healthcare workers struggle to continue with their career after maternity leave because of a lack of childcare facilities.^{vii}

Ethiopian Context

In Ethiopia, most women are engaged in the informal work sector, but because of improved access to education, increasing numbers of women are seeking employment in the formal work sector. In the health sector, most of the workforce is women, but they disproportionately occupy lower and middle-level positions within communities and facilities and make up the overwhelming majority of health extension workers. A large part of the government's intervention on maternal health focuses on improving access to maternal and child health clinical services at the primary health care level. While raising community awareness of maternity leave and caregiving support policies has improved in rural areas, not much has been done beyond enacting the policies. Though all women need access to childcare, Transform: Primary Health Care's particular focus for this activity was on women in the formal sector at health institutions.

Many Ethiopian women working in the formal sector face challenges balancing care responsibilities for a newborn and work life. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in the absence of a close family member to support them or the inability to afford a babysitter, many choose between quitting their job to accommodate breastfeeding and childcare or returning to their career, which often necessitates discontinuing breastfeeding and other essential infant care earlier than is recommended.^{viii} Daycare centers are an essential step to addressing the needs of working women who share the majority of care-taking tasks, especially in the first six months.^{ix} In an effort to address this gap, the Ministry of Health Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Directorate launched the first-ever daycare center on Ministry premises, supported by the Transform: Primary

Health Care Activity. Building on the success of this center, the Activity administered subgrants to support additional daycare centers at the Regional Health Bureaus (RHBs) in Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). This brief outlines the Activity's process for adapting daycare center technical standards, procuring critical items for setup, and managing day-to-day functions as guidance and lessons learned for entities establishing daycare centers in their own facilities.

STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING A DAYCARE CENTER

1. **Conduct advocacy with key decision makers.** The Activity gender officers met with representatives from RHB management, regional managers, regional and federal level government advisors, and RHB gender experts to discuss the needs and benefits of a daycare center. RHB leadership was impressed by the Activity staff's willingness to address their concerns and support the establishment of the daycare center which is in line with the federal proclamation supporting the establishment of daycare centers.^x In addition to meeting with key decision makers, the Activity's gender officers consulted with women healthcare workers who recently returned from maternity leave to better understand what they would like to see at the daycare center.
2. **Develop a plan.** Once stakeholders were on board, the RHB staff, with technical support from the Activity's gender officers, developed an implementation plan that detailed staffing needs, materials to procure, and budget. The implementation plan also included a justification that highlighted how a daycare center would address the childcare needs of the healthcare workforce and allow women healthcare workers to continue to breastfeed and find balance between their career and family commitments. The Activity supported the cost of procuring the essential items needed for the center (an average of 150,000 ETB), which was supplemented by additional resources from the institution where the daycare would be located.

3. **Apply for funding.** The Activity staff worked with the RHBs to develop and submit Transform: Primary Health Care subgrant applications to the Federal Ministry of Health. The applications outlined the purpose of the daycare center, the childcare need of women healthcare workers returning from maternity leave, the implementation plan, required materials, and a budget.
4. **Gain buy-in from regional health office staff.** Before establishing the daycare center, the regional gender experts conducted advocacy and educational sessions to inform staff about the center, its purpose, and its benefits. Advocacy messages included how daycare centers help caregivers be more effective in their work, reduce absences at work due to childcare needs, ensure the health and safety of their children while they are away, and enable the continuation of breastfeeding after returning to work. Through these sessions, the regional gender experts were able to address regional health office staff members' biases and misconceptions, which allowed them to feel more comfortable using the onsite daycare facility.
5. **Procure basic items for the daycare centers.** After receiving the Transform: Primary Health Care subgrant funds, RHB staff procured and purchased materials for each center. Exhibit 1 lists key supplies to consider.

6. **Decide on a location.** Activity staff worked with RHB leadership to secure a location. For example, the regional gender experts in Oromia and SNNPR explored securing rooms at the RHB offices with management in their regions. In Amhara, Activity staff first considered establishing the daycare center at the RHB compound building. However, because of construction delays, RHB management is looking to establish the center at a different location.
7. **Open daycare center.** After securing a location and procuring the basic materials, the Activity staff worked with the RHB's gender expert to open each center. The Activity supported the launch and ribbon cutting ceremony of the daycare center at the federal level and in SNNPR. While there is no blueprint for success, following these straightforward steps will help get you off to a great start. The key is to stay motivated and remember why you're doing it.

“USAID TRANSFORM: PRIMARY HEALTH CARE ACTIVITY IS THE BACKBONE OF THE HEALTH SECTOR AND HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE SUPPORT, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAY CARE CENTER MIGHT NEVER COME TRUE.”

– WOSSEN GIZACHEW, DIRECTOR OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
SNNP REGIONAL HEALTH BUREAU

Exhibit 1. Key supplies for stocking daycare centers

Items Purchased
Baby bed and mattress
Small chairs and tables
Feeding utensils
Basket for clothes
Floor carpet
Toys/dolls
Televisions
Cleaning supplies (e.g., dust pan, broom)
Waste basket
Fridge
Water filtering machine
Microwave
Boiler

Exhibit 2. Daycare Center at SNNP Regional Health Bureau



CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS




Exhibit 3 presents key challenges that the USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity encountered and some potential solutions for each one.

Exhibit 3. Challenges and potential solutions

CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Finding adequate space and a location for the daycare center	It is imperative to conduct systematic and targeted advocacy with leadership and network with key decision makers to ensure that space is allocated for the daycare center. During the Activity's work on daycare centers, advocacy and networking meetings ensured that space was allocated for the center. If you are allocated two separate room spaces, you can explore how to merge the rooms into one large space.
Recruitment of daycare center staff	Support the human resources department to create job solicitations for open positions and ensure that they are posted online, applications are reviewed, and interviews are scheduled. This could be done by sending follow-up emails to the HR department to ensure that this process is taking place and respects your hiring timeline.
Procurement of materials	Procurement can often be a lengthy and time-consuming process. One strategy to overcome this challenge is to meet with individuals handling the procurement process to determine the bottlenecks that may be slowing down the procurement process. Additionally, it is imperative to have invoices from suppliers and ensure that all procurement forms are completed in their entirety.
COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing restrictions	When establishing your daycare center, you must develop strong COVID-19 safety procedures and mitigation efforts to ensure that young children and their parents are safe when using the center. This can include sanitizing, physical distancing, and screening protocols. This protocol also emphasizes prevention of other communicable diseases that might be related to hygiene and sanitation.
Maintenance of daycare center	Develop a standard operating procedure for furnishing and upkeep of the daycare center. This will ensure that you are providing high-quality daycare facilities.

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

Since the establishment of daycare centers in the regions, the Transform: Primary Health Care Activity continues to monitor and document the work at the daycare centers to capture results, lessons to inform future work in Ethiopia, and tips for establishing a daycare center at an institution. Some of the lessons and tips captured so far are:

-  **Conduct a needs assessment.** Before establishing a daycare center, it is imperative to assess the needs of women healthcare workers. Activity staff conducted a needs assessment to analyze the needs and gaps of women healthcare workers related to childcare and balancing career responsibilities. The needs assessment was pivotal in establishing the daycare centers because it presented data demonstrating the centers' importance and potential impact.
-  **Commitment, involvement, and buy-in from leadership are important.** Throughout this process, Transform: Primary Health Care Activity staff advocated to and worked in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Health, the RPO management team, RHB management, regional managers, regional and federal government advisers, and regional gender experts. This ensured that leadership was aware and supportive of establishing daycare center from the beginning. Employees should also be aware of the process. The responsibility of advocating for establishing the daycare center should not be left to the gender department; hearing RHB leadership's commitment to the center and its use helps better promote the center and its benefits. We recommend engaging all the departments and employees at your institution in the process to share the responsibility of addressing issues as they arise.
-  **Resource mobilization.** When working with limited resources, it is essential to map out potential partners and identify opportunities for furnishing the daycare center through existing funds, grants, donations, or other funding opportunities. The Federal Ministry of Health, RHBs, and other administrative entities should be

aware of the funding needs and allocate appropriately. Implementing partners working in the field of maternal, newborn, and child health may be good resources for funding or other resources because they are often familiar with the health sector donor and implementing partner landscape. Government agencies can also advocate for donors to include provisions for daycare centers as part of future or ongoing projects.

✔ **Linkages with early childhood care and education initiatives.** There are ongoing efforts to expand access to early childhood care and education centers across the country. The Ministry of Health and The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs should explore linkages between these efforts and efforts to build daycare centers and frameworks and standards for better integration of health and development outcomes.

LOOKING AHEAD

Testimonials from women who used the daycare center said that having access to these facilities

allowed them to be more effective in their work duties, keep their children safe and healthy, build close relationships with their infants, and continue to breastfeed. Building on these positive experiences, there is an emerging focus on establishing daycare centers for other government institutions and stakeholders. The demand for daycare centers across Ethiopia is growing as more women join the formal sector, and there is a need to accelerate efforts in gaining leaders' commitment, coordinating efforts, and mobilizing resources to establish more daycare centers to meet this need. To facilitate women's participation and empowerment in the health workforce and improve infant and child health, Transform: Primary Health Care recommends establishing daycare centers in offices and facilities across all levels of the health system. This will prevent other women from having to choose between continuing their career and taking care of their children and preventing early discontinuation of breastfeeding, with its strong implications for infants' healthy growth.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Jones, Nicola, Presler-Marshall, E., Samman, E., “[Women’s Work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis](#),” Overseas Development Institute 2016.

ⁱⁱ UNICEF, “[Early childhood development – home environment](#),” UNICEF web page.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grantham, K., Rouhani, L., Gupta, N., Melesse, M., Dhar, D., et al., “[Evidence Review of the Global Childcare Crisis and the Road for Post COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience](#),” International Development Research Centre, 2021.

^{iv} Lucia-Casademunt AM, García-Cabrera AM, Padilla-Angulo L and Cuéllar-Molina D., “[Returning to Work after Childbirth in Europe: Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, and the Interplay of Supervisor Support](#),” *Front. Psychol.* 9 (2018):68.

^v Article 35 of the Constitution of Ethiopia and Labor proclamation No. 1156/2019.

^{vi} Formerly the Women, Children, and Youth Ministry.

^{vii} USAID, “Transform: Primary Health Care Project Gender Analysis,” prepared by EnCompass LLC for the United States Agency for International Development, 2018.

^{viii} Jones, Nicola, Presler-Marshall, E., Samman, E., Women’s Work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis.

^{ix} UNICEF, “[Childcare and Working Families: New Opportunity or Missing Link? An evidence brief](#),” UNICEF, 2019.

^x [Ethiopia Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019](#), September 5, 2019.

Recommended citation: Williams, Lanice and Heran Abebe Tadesse. 2022. *Expanding Access to Daycare Centers for Women in the Health Workforce in Ethiopia: Lessons Learned from the USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity*. Rockville, MD: EnCompass, LLC.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Diana Santillán for her overall technical guidance and Dr. Luwam Teshome, Dr. Patricia Morris, and Elizabeth Stones for their technical review. Additionally, the authors thank those that contributed to the Transform: Primary Health Care Gender Assessment including Lyn Messner, Meseret Bejiga Biftu, Yidnekachew Legesse Jimma, Yonas Terefe, Karmjeet Kaur, Shailee Ghelani, Ashley Guy, Ted Rizzo, Simon Hildebeitel, Gayatri Malhotra, and Natalie Petrulla.

The [Transform: Primary Health Care Gender Assessment](#) is available on EnCompass’ website.

The USAID Transform: Primary Health Care project is a 5-year activity funded by the United States Agency for International Development, which provides technical assistance to the Government of Ethiopia to support its implementation of the Health Sector Transformation Plan, with the ultimate goal of preventing child and maternal deaths. The project focuses primarily on the areas of reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition within four regions of Ethiopia—Amhara; Oromia; Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region; and Tigray.

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the United States Government.