



Success Story

Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon Ethiopia Partnership

Turning Tragedy into Triumph

To meet Tsega Debebe, it is difficult to imagine the tragic circumstances that led her to become a peer mentor supporting cervical cancer prevention. Behind her warm bright smile, is a woman who contracted HIV through rape at the age of 17. Her journey as a person living with HIV (PLHIV) helped her understand the importance of access to timely health care information, as she married and welcomed two HIV negative children.

In her role as a community peer educator in the small town of Fiche in Oromia, Tsega educates women about cervical cancer. She – and many others in her community – benefit from the Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon (PRRR) Partnership in Ethiopia, which aims to increase demand and access to quality cervical cancer screening and prevention services to women, especially those living with HIV/AIDS in target regions (Oromia Region, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, Harari Region, and Addis Ababa).

The PRRR Ethiopia Partnership is a collaboration among the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Health Diplomacy, implementing partners, Pathfinder and Grounds for Health, and managed by Cardno. The Federal Ministry of Health is the host government agency. These

organizations work together to serve as a catalyst in the fight toward ending cervical cancer and saving lives in a country where cervical cancer is the second leading cause of female cancer.

"The [PRRR training] program empowered me not to fear cervical cancer and energizes me to encourage other women to get screened."

– Tsega Debebe, PLHIV
Community Peer
Educator

In early 2018, PEPFAR reassessed its cervical cancer prevention strategy in collaboration with PRRR, evaluating progress made over the past five years and assessing the gaps. HIV-positive women were identified as the highest risk, so PEPFAR has developed an age-band appropriate, comprehensive strategy to reduce cervical cancer risk by 95% in HIV-positive women by every-other-year cervical cancer screening for HIV-positive women over age 30 and human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccination in younger girls and women living with HIV. This strategy creates a pathway to ending cervical cancer in HIV-positive women at scale.

The PRRR Partnership provided training to 250 community and clinical health workers in the target regions to build capacity on cervical cancer prevention and treatment, and the impact was clear. As of June 2018, Pathfinder and Grounds for Health screened 8,846 women, of which 5,329 were HIV-positive. In addition, 838 women were treated for precancerous lesions, 493 of whom were HIV-positive.

Tsega recalls two women she knew who lost the fight against cervical cancer, and whose stories may have had different endings if these services were available then. "I regret this service wasn't available to them. This motivates me to make a difference and help prevent this cancer from reaching others in my community," said Tsega. "The [PRRR training] program empowered me not to fear cervical cancer and energizes me to encourage other women to get screened."

It is women like Tsega who turn tragedy into triumph that play a critical role in ending cervical cancer around the globe.