














-  Editorial Message... 01
-  5th Annual RH Conference...03
-  Advocacy Pillar: Nurses and Midwives Recognition Program...03
-  Research Pillar: SPIRHR Electronic Data Collection Training...04
-  Clinical Service...05
-  SPIRHR attended FIGO World Congress 2023 in Paris...05
-  ECSACOG leadership team visit Ethiopia and signed MOU with SPIRHR...06
-  SRHR Services and Youth ...07
-  SRHR and Technology...08
-  SRHR and Policy...09
-  SRHR and Maternal Health...11



**P.05 SPIRHR attended FIGO World Congress 2023 in Paris**

The FIGO World Congress 2023 Paris was a remarkable event that brought together experts, researchers, practitioners, and advocates from the field of obstetrics and gynecology....

**P.07 Enhancing Maternal Critical Care in Africa**

Maternal mortality is often preventable, and timely access to maternal critical care plays a pivotal role in reducing maternal deaths. Critical care facilities provide life-saving interventions and specialized medical expertise, addressing complications that may arise during pregnancy, childbirth, or the postpartum period...



## Editorial Message

### Redesigning Primary health care system for Maternal Healthcare: The Crucial Role of Comprehensive Obstetric care



In the intricate system of public health, the pivotal role played by a robust and accessible primary healthcare system cannot be emphasized enough. A nation's well-being hinges on the strength of its foundational healthcare structure, ensuring that communities are empowered with the essential tools to lead healthy lives. While primary healthcare serves as the bedrock of public health, a pressing need emerges for the revitalization and redesign of this critical system. In particular, the focus must be directed towards expanding Comprehensive Obstetric Care (CMOC) to ensure safe motherhood.

CMOC stands as an innovative strategy within the realm of primary healthcare, where the emphasis is on providing operative delivery, including cesarean sections and blood transfusions. This approach addresses a significant gap in maternal healthcare by embedding comprehensive obstetric services directly within the primary health care unit. The impact of this integration cannot be overstated, as it serves to bolster maternal health outcomes and diminish the burden of complications associated with referrals.

The expansion of CMOC within the primary healthcare system is a multifaceted solution that promises a myriad of benefits for both expectant mothers and the broader community. One of the key advantages lies in the increased utilization of primary health facilities for obstetric services. By offering a comprehensive range of services, including operative delivery, these facilities become more attractive and accessible for expectant mothers, thereby reducing the barriers to seeking essential care.

Furthermore, the incorporation of CMOC directly into primary healthcare units contributes to a substantial reduction in complications by minimizing the need for referrals. Timely access to operative delivery and blood transfusions is paramount in ensuring safe motherhood, and the integration of these services at the primary level is a proactive step towards achieving this goal. The domino effect of reduced complications extends beyond the immediate health of the mother, positively influencing the overall well-being of the community.

However, for the successful implementation of CMOC within primary healthcare systems, concerted efforts are needed in terms of infrastructure, training, and resource allocation. Governments and healthcare authorities must invest in strengthening primary healthcare facilities, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary medical personnel, equipment, and

technology. Training programs should be implemented to enhance the skills of healthcare professionals working in these units, enabling them to provide comprehensive obstetric care.

In general, the revitalization and redesign of our primary healthcare system are imperative for the well-being of our communities. The incorporation of Comprehensive Obstetric Care (CMOC) into primary health facilities emerges as a transformative strategy, offering a holistic approach to maternal healthcare. By bolstering the utilization of primary healthcare units, reducing complications, and ensuring safe motherhood, CMOC becomes a cornerstone in the edifice of public health. It is time for nations to prioritize and invest in this innovative approach, recognizing its potential to reshape and elevate the standard of maternal healthcare for generations to come.

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Editor in Chief of the Bulletin

# SPIRHR Updates

## 5th Annual RH Conference

The 5th RH conference of St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR) and St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College was held with the theme of "Advancing Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Bridging the Gaps" from November 8-10, 2023. A pre-conference continuous medical education (CME) took place at SPIRHR CPD hall on the topics Advanced Contraception: Management of Deep Implants and Second Trimester Surgical Abortion followed by a practical session. A program was held simultaneously at EPHI to honor and thank the nurses and midwives, to highlight their contributions and dedication to reproductive care.



The conference commenced on November 9th at Skylight Hotel with high level governmental officials, local and international non-governmental organizations, and professionals from across Ethiopia and Africa in attendance. During the opening speech Dr. Ayele Teshome, state minister of the Ministry of Health, mentioned the need for addressing gaps that exist in adolescent and youth SRHR. A panel

discussion was held, and poster and oral presentations were presented that same day. On the following and closing day a roundtable discussion was held on the programmatic experience by civil service organizations and government organizations working on adolescent and youth health.

The 5th Reproductive Health conference showcased various studies from different disciplines and organizations, covering different African countries and regions. The need for collaboration among different sectors, especially education, to address the gaps in youth and adolescents SRHR was emphasized. The conference also involved young people and disabled individuals in the conversation, ensuring that their voices and needs were considered in developing interventions.

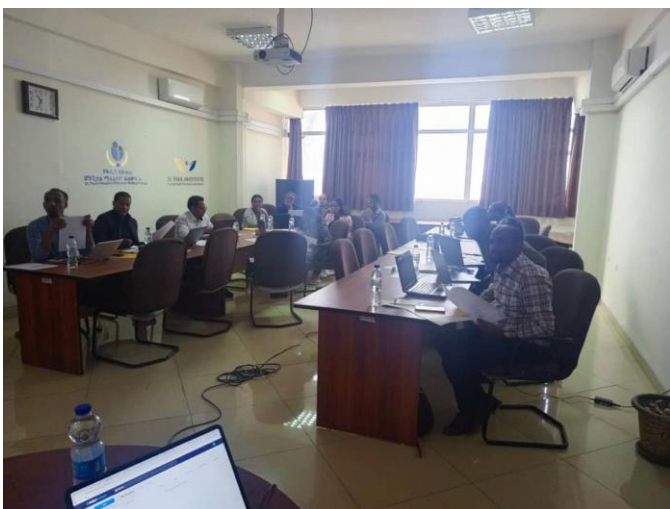
## Advocacy Pillar: Nurses and Midwives Recognition Program

During a preconference session for the 5th Annual RH conference a program was held at EPHI to honor and thank the nurses and midwives, underlining their work and commitment to reproductive health, and to recognize exceptional nurses and midwives who have worked hard and diligently to promote reproductive health. During the program nurses and midwives presented projects on how to improve maternal health through critical care and on the importance of providing mental healthcare while providing safe abortion services. This in turn will improve the overall performance of the case teams and will also create champion advocates of SRHR.

## Research Pillar: **SPIRHR** **Electronic Data Collection** **Training**

### *“Introduction to KoboToolbox: An Electronic Data Collection and Management Platform”*

The St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR) organized and conducted a training workshop on "Introduction to KoboToolbox: an electronic data capturing and management platform" from November 30 to December 1, 2023, at the CPD hall. The participants were OBGYN faculty, fellows, and residents from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology of St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College. The workshop aimed to equip the participants with the skills and knowledge to use KoboToolbox, a free and open-source tool for electronic data collection and management.



Electronic data collection and management has several advantages over paper-based methods, such as being eco-friendly, cost-efficient, easy

to export data to statistical softwares, easy to share with other collaborators or co-investigators, and enhancing data quality through real-time monitoring and analysis. Among others creating forms, deploying forms, collecting data, managing data, and analyzing data using KoboToolbox were the topics covered.

Following the training, participants gained a comprehensive understanding of KoboToolbox's features and functionalities with an increased awareness regarding the advantages of electronic data collection and management. They also improved skills in creating forms, collecting, managing, and sharing data using the platform.

In all, the participants were engaged in hands-on exercises and group discussions throughout the workshop. The feedback from the participants was positive and they expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn about KoboToolbox and showed enthusiasm about incorporating KoboToolbox into their research projects for enhanced data collection and management efficiency.

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## Clinical Service

The quality improvement initiative being undertaken by SPIRHR has shown significant strides in improving RH services at different levels of healthcare. A QI initiative aimed at improving the capacity of healthcare providers and health centers in the provision of quality abortion care and family planning services was

implemented at SPHMMC catchment health centers. Prior to the implementation of the initiative a baseline assessment at the catchment health centers was done and it showed a significant gap in the availability and accessibility of quality abortion care.

The gaps and challenges in quality abortion care provision were addressed by giving training to health workers on CAC and by having clinical supervision and mentoring. The teams at the respective health centers were also made to report monthly about CAC/FP services at their facility. And any healthcare worker faced with challenges during service provision was able to have a consultation with senior physicians every month. Monthly catchment meetings also had clinical case presentations and theoretical presentations to help bolster integration of FP counseling and to boost postpartum FP uptake.

Moreover, the initiative has brought a significant improvement in CAC/FP service especially on the number of CAC & post abortion family planning services provided. However, postpartum family planning service is still lagging behind. Most health centers are still requesting training of CAC/FP because they understand that the number of people providing the service is not enough and in this regards SPIRHR is working on having more trainings in the upcoming period. In addition, shortage of supplies noted during the initiative period have been channeled to the respective stakeholders.

## SPIRHR attended FIGO World Congress 2023 in Paris

The FIGO World Congress 2023 Paris was a remarkable event that brought together experts, researchers, practitioners, and advocates from the field of obstetrics and gynecology. SPIRHR had the privilege of attending this prestigious conference and presenting our work on improving sexual and reproductive health in low-resource settings. We learned a lot from the inspiring keynote speakers, the informative sessions, the interactive workshops, and the networking opportunities. We also had the chance to network and exchange ideas with other delegates from around the world. The FIGO World Congress 2023 Paris was a valuable experience that enhanced our knowledge, skills, and partnerships in advancing women's health and rights.



## **ECSACOG leadership team visit Ethiopia and signed MOU with SPIRHR**

A leadership team from East, Central and Southern Africa College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ECSACOG) attended the 5th Annual Reproductive Health conference and had a working visit at the SPIRHR office and SPHMMC. The leadership team included Professor Belington Vwalika Secretary General, Professor Stephen Rulisa, Chair of Education, Scientific and Research Committee, Dr Malede Birara, Consultant and Director for Postgraduate Studies and Ms Judith Andrew, Senior Program Officer at ECSACOG.



At the 5th annual reproductive health conference, Professor Vwalika made an opening remark, in which he introduced the various activities being done by ECSACOG. The team also had a meeting with the

department chair of OBGYN at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College.

The team also discussed with the leadership of SPIRHR on potential areas of collaborations which later culminated in a signing of memorandum of understanding to work together. This South-South collaboration aims to benefit both ECSACOG and SPIRHR, by enhancing their capacity to provide better service, training, and relevant research in Obstetrics and Gynecology and Sexual and Reproductive health. It will also help in enhancing experiences in Family planning and Comprehensive Abortion Care services for ECSACOG residents and trainers, sharing valuable alternative practices, increasing the competency of OB/Gyn residents, and providing training and mentorship.



# Article Section

## SRHR Services and Youth

### Meaningful Youth Participation: Bridging Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Gap

By Yabsira Endale, EngenderHealth Youth Advocate

Today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 percent of the global population. Ethiopia, as part of this demographic surge, has a youth population of 33.8%, making up a substantial portion of its 120 million estimated total population. Adolescence and youth represent a crucial stage in which individuals make decisions regarding their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

As a young high school student, I was navigating the complexities of my sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and the gap in our education system became evident and also a clarion call for comprehensive learning. I was consistently seeking information and access points for reproductive health from my teachers, gender club leaders, and other students. Fortunately, I came across a short course given by our gender club teachers in collaboration with an international NGO that circles reproductive health, decision-making, financial literacy, and personal development. This experience made me realize the lack of sufficient information on SRH in classrooms across the nation and that in return has left many, including myself and my peers, ill-equipped to make informed decisions about our well-being. The consequences of this educational gap, from unintended pregnancies to STIs, underscore the urgent need for change. Comprehensive sexual education is not

just a shield against misinformation; it is a vital tool for empowering young minds.

As a student, I faced self-development challenges until discovering organizations promoting Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) in SRHR. MYP transcends a checkbox; it's the heartbeat vital to inclusive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights initiatives. Youth voices, integral to decision-making, create a symphony of change, addressing diverse needs. MYP acts as a bridge, connecting authentic representation, tailored solutions, and breaking societal stigmas. Empowering youth to own their SRHR journey, MYP champions a future where every young person actively shapes policies and fosters a universal right to sexual and reproductive health. In championing MYP, we illuminate a path towards a world understood and championed by all.

Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) ensures SRHR programs cater to young individuals' needs, making interventions relevant and reflective of their experiences. Actively involving youth in SRHR discussions breaks down societal stigmas, fostering an inclusive environment for open dialogues. MYP advocates tailored sexual education addressing consent, healthy relationships, and diverse orientations, fostering a more informed and accepting community. Empowering young advocates, MYP raises SRHR awareness, creating informed communities and positive attitudes. This collaboration is vital for an empowering environment where youth exercise rights, access accurate information, and shape the sexual and reproductive health

landscape, committing to a healthier, informed, and inclusive future.

## SRHR and Technology

### Introducing Fem-Tech to Ethiopia: How YeneHealth is leveraging AI and technology to support women manage their Sexual and Reproductive Health

By. Kidist Tesfaye, Founder & CEO of YeneHealth (Femtech) For inquiries: [kidist@yenehealth.com](mailto:kidist@yenehealth.com)

In an era where technology is driving revolutionary changes in healthcare globally, YeneHealth is pioneering digital Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and family planning (FP) services through bringing “Femtech ” to Ethiopia. Femtech is an umbrella term used to describe technology (software, hardware, digital solutions etc.) focused on women's health. It is a term coined by the Danish co-founder of the renowned period tracking app called “Clue”, Ida Tin. While it's still emerging in Africa, Femtech is transforming women's healthcare worldwide.

Discussing SRH & FP topics remain a taboo in Ethiopia, which can hinder access to accurate information and judgment-free services. YeneHealth, is an early stage Femtech startup that recognizes the immense need and potential of addressing the pressing challenges faced by Ethiopian women on a daily basis through the power of technology, data and Artificial intelligence(AI). More than one in five Ethiopian women have unmet family planning needs due to a lack of awareness and access to product and services. To bridge this gap, YeneHealth has developed homegrown, and culturally-responsive mobile and web-application that is integrated

with a localized learning portal, online pharmacy and telehealth services.

Awareness and knowledge are vital to addressing this gap however other barriers exist, such as access to reliable and authentic SRH products and services. YeneHealth believes education is the start of addressing these unmet needs and has made access to accurate and judgment free information a core of the digital platform. Ultimately providing end-to-end access to service providers by allowing women to consult healthcare professionals, order products, and track their menstrual cycles conveniently and privately.

YeneHealth recognizes that to be an inclusive digital platform, the challenges in accessing SRH/FP digitally, also come with the barriers associated with the use of technology and digital apps. The digital divide in Ethiopia is a challenge, but Ethiopia's digital transformation plan is improving internet connectivity and affordability. Furthermore, YeneHealth is committed to inclusivity by integrating features like USSD and call-lines for those without smartphones or internet access for the time being.

It must be clearly understood that the technology is not the solution but it is an enabler to improve women’s experience in receiving standardized care. Women across Sub-Saharan Africa disproportionately die or are in life-threatening health conditions due to the inability to get to a facility in time or due to the lack of options for care delivery. This is where technology solutions like YeneHealth’s digital platform become a very powerful and lifesaving resource. Typically, having to visit a clinic or hospital comes with high costs and long wait times. YeneHealth offers an

alternative to this pricey inconvenience and makes healthcare services more affordable and accessible. Within minutes, women can receive basic primary care services at a significantly reduced cost and less wait time by using the telehealth feature. The platform facilitates remote access to healthcare professionals and discreet delivery of health products at any time.

A full national uptake and use of digital healthcare services will not be achieved overnight and is a collective responsibility of the multi-level stakeholders and various ecosystem players. Technology is the future and the healthcare sector must take advantage of this opportunity to take better care of patients and offer them resources easier than before. Yenehealth is committed to transforming women's reproductive health in Ethiopia by harnessing the power of technology. Understanding the unique

challenges that women face in their reproductive health journeys, YeneHealth is leveraging the benefits of innovative and tech solutions to offer an alternative for women.

YeneHealth is more than just a healthcare provider; it's a beacon of hope and empowerment for Ethiopian women. By combining scientific data, personalized technology, and real-world impact, YeneHealth is not only enhancing women's health but also paving the way for a future where quality healthcare is accessible to all, regardless of location or socio-economic status.

Visit [www.yenehealth.com](http://www.yenehealth.com) to learn more.

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## SRHR and Policy

### Why is the implementation of school-based Sexuality Education crucial for enhancing adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)?

By Siyane Aniley (PhD) and Tamrat Endale (PhD)

Center for International Reproductive Health Training (CIRHT)

Adolescents constitute the largest portion of the population in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 23% of the region's inhabitants aged between 10 and 19 years. In Ethiopia, as is common in many African nations, Sexuality Education is not obligatory, and is not provided as an independent subject in the curriculum, rather, it is integrated into other subjects. The contents integrated into various subjects is often inadequate, and rarely addresses the life experience and needs of adolescents. Therefore, the following are some of the reasons why Sexuality Education should be implemented at school level.

*Adolescents remain at risk and unprotected.*

One primary factor contributing to this vulnerability is the unmet Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) needs of adolescents in various contexts. It is imperative to acknowledge the adolescents, moving beyond childhood innocence, often experience early sexual debuts, with median age of 16.5 years for their first sexual encounter (EDHS, 2016). Without receiving sufficient and comprehensive Sexuality Education, adolescents are unable to safeguard themselves from the risks associated with unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and diseases such as HIV. The lived experience of adolescents

underscores the necessity for school-based Sexuality Education, which can empower them with information about sexual and reproductive health services, their right to access such services, and the right to live free from Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

#### *Increased factors exacerbating adolescents vulnerability*

In the Ethiopian context, where conflict and displacement are increasingly commonplace, adolescents, particularly girls, find themselves in the most unprotected and vulnerable positions. In situations where SGBV is a prevalent challenge among adolescents, the significance of Sexuality Education becomes an even more crucial resource.

Additionally, as the country grapples with economic crisis and inflation, households struggle to meet basic needs, including providing for their children. These challenges may lead to adolescent's dropping out of school for child labor, engaging in early marriages for financial reasons, and resorting to certain sexual practices for economic purposes. In such circumstances, Sexuality Education plays a vital role for adolescents, enabling them to report and protect themselves from exploitation, abuse, and diseases.

#### *Adolescents face restricted access to SRHR information*

Engaging in discussions about SRHR is often considered a taboo subject, deemed as an "adult matter" both within households and in broader societal contexts. Due to cultural norms that discourage open dialogue at home and parents being less equipped to address such

topics, it becomes challenging to broach the subject within families. With the cultural context contributing to limited discussions and the increasing prevalence of disinformation and misinformation on SRHR, efforts to empower adolescents with accurate and relevant information are constrained. In the era of globalization where the rapid spread of Internet use is particularly evident in urban areas, adolescents often turn to sources like pornography and mobile phone technology for information due to the prevailing silence from parents/ guardians and schools. This underscores the importance of school-based Sexuality Education in breaking the taboo and providing adolescents with essential access to accurate information.

#### *School serves as the optimal platform to address the needs of adolescents*

Designed as a catalyst for change and a space for learning, schools are intended to be a sanctuary for vulnerable adolescents. Given that adolescents from diverse backgrounds are predominantly enrolled in the formal school system, leveraging this structure as a viable avenue to provide SRHR information can effectively equip all adolescents for their present and future lives. School-based Sexuality Education serves as a life skills education covering crucial topics such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, consent, body image, and gender equality (UNESCO, 2018). This education is tailored to the age of the child, as well as the cultural and legal context of the society. Considering that adolescents are already in school; it emerges as the most advantageous channel for any comprehensive intervention targeting generations.

Thus, advocating for school-based Sexuality Education, which goes beyond providing more information or facts, becomes imperative. Focused on life skills and responsive to the specific needs of adolescents, such education plays a critical role in educating and sensitizing them, addressing both their current and future lives.

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## SRHR and Maternal Health

### Enhancing Maternal Critical Care in Africa

By Dr. Aida Tilahun Assistant Professor of ObGyn and MFM subspecialist

Maternal mortality is often preventable, and timely access to maternal critical care plays a pivotal role in reducing maternal deaths. Critical care facilities provide life-saving interventions and specialized medical expertise, addressing complications that may arise during pregnancy, childbirth, or the postpartum period. The availability and accessibility of maternal critical care services are essential for ensuring that women receive the necessary medical attention when complications occur.

Critical care in the obstetric population is an expanding area of medicine that until recently has had less focus than other parts of obstetric and critical care practice. The maternal intensive care-service is considered as a section of the maternity department. This section is dedicated to the intensive observation of high-risk pregnancies.

There is increasing evidence that more women are presenting with severe comorbidities. Given the high maternal mortality that still exists globally, with a limited resource allocation, the role of maternal critical care

needs to be reviewed in less economically developed countries to decrease maternal mortality.

Besides the established general ward and Intensive Care Unit (ICU), the intermediate care level was introduced in the nineties. These intermediate care units (also termed high-dependency unit- HDU) have generally a higher nurse/patient ratio and more facilities for intensive monitoring than a general ward, but fewer staff and less invasive equipment than on an ICU. This facility is required for patients who have a condition that warrants more intensive care or monitoring than can be provided on a general ward. When developing an Obstetrics critical care unit, it is important to have an intensivist, anesthesiologists and Maternal-Fetal Medicine Obstetricians with trained nurses and midwives as it is crucial to know how to manage invasive monitoring devices, and be familiar with obstetric and emergency medications.

To cite experience of maternal critical care as an exemplary work in Ethiopia, let's mention the work of St Paul Hospital maternity center located in the capital. The obstetrics HDU of St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College was the first obstetric critical care unit in the country established in September 2021 G.C. Since then it has served about one thousand mothers. With its establishment significant maternal health care improvements were seen as described on a one-year data analysis report.

Taking these evidences into account, Health care organizations in the country need to cope with the rising demand for care, scientific evolutions, increasing costs, limited budgets, limited beds and insufficient medical personnel since these restrictions should stimulate health

care managers and policy makers to reorganize healthcare services more efficiently in a finite resource setting for improvement of the healthcare system.

Enhancing maternal critical care in Africa requires a multi-pronged approach:

- ✓ **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in healthcare infrastructure is essential. This includes constructing and equipping healthcare facilities with the necessary critical care units and medical equipment.
- ✓ **Training and Recruitment:** The government should invest in training and recruiting healthcare professionals, especially obstetricians, anesthetists, and critical care specialists, to ensure that there is a sufficient workforce capable of providing maternal critical care.
- ✓ **Government Commitment:** The government's commitment to maternal health is vital. Policies, funding, and advocacy at the highest level of government can drive change and support scaling up maternal critical care.

In conclusion, scaling up maternal critical care is crucial for reducing maternal mortality and improving the overall well-being of women. The challenges facing Africa in this endeavor are complex, but with concerted efforts, adequate resources, and a commitment to maternal health, progress can be achieved. It is essential for Africa to prioritize maternal critical care and work towards equitable access for all its pregnant women, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status. By doing so, significant strides can be made in improving maternal health and contributing to the global effort to reduce maternal mortality.



## THE NEW SRH BUILDING



### **About St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR)**

*SPIRHR was established and registered by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Agency for Civil Society in September 2019 as a local non-governmental organization with the vision of strengthening and facilitating effective and quality sexual and reproductive health and rights programs at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC). SPIRHR is an independent institution targeting to ensure the project's implementation in the most efficient and effective way while ensuring accountability and transparency. Since its inception, SPIRHR has continued supporting the implementation of major program activities that were jointly planned with SPHMMC Ob/GYN faculties while taking the lead in the administration and coordination of RH infrastructure development as per a collaborative framework outlined by a memorandum of understanding. Through the collaborative effort of SPHMMC and SPIRHR, SPIRHR will continue to invest in four key priority areas of intervention: training, research, advocacy, and clinical services. SPIRHR aim to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity through coordinated sexual reproductive health and rights and enable girls and women to reach their full potential.*