Liberia Fistula Project Rescues More Women and Girls From Isolation

The campaign to end obstetric fistula in Liberia continues, with more women and girls receiving free fistula repair and rehabilitation services.

With funding from Zonta International, the Liberia Fistula Project—implemented by the Ministry of Health with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)—surgically managed more than 100 fistula survivors in 2017.

One of these fistula survivors is 28-year-old Maima Molubah. Maima, a resident of a Monrovia suburb, developed obstetric fistula in March 2017 as a result of prolonged labor.

Maima’s account of how she acquired obstetric fistula is similar to most accounts of women who suffer from the demeaning condition across Liberia.

According to Maima, she was pregnant with her second child. When labor came, there was no transportation to get her to the clinic on time.

“By the time my family took me to the John F. Kennedy Medical Center, the child was already dead in me,” she said.

“I received operation (C-section) to get the dead baby out. Few days after, I realized that I was continually leaking urine uncontrollably,” the fistula survivor recounted.

Between March and September, Maima underwent surgery twice before her fistula could be repaired.

“I cannot describe how happy I am. I can’t believe that I am completely healed. I feel sorry for some of my friends who have had more than two surgeries and without success,” Maima said as she broke down in tears.

Like Maima, Hawa Kerkula, 24, went to give birth to her first child in April 2017 when she developed complications which led to obstetric fistula.

“Though there was a health facility nearby in Kingsville, Lower Montserrado County where I lived, my mother-in-law decided to take me to a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA) when I got in pain. I remained at the home of the TBA for three days without any success. On the fourth day, after realizing that she could not assist me to deliver, the TBA requested my family to transfer me to the nearby referral hospital, C.H. Rennie Hospital in Kakata, Margibi County,” Hawa recounted.

Hawa Kerkula awaits surgery at Phebe Hospital in June 2017.

Hawa Kerkula leads a group of fistula survivors in dramatizing some of the cultural and social factors contributing to the prevalence of obstetric fistula in Liberia.

WWW.ZONTA.ORG
“Upon arrival at C.H. Rennie Hospital, I was admitted and was given an operation (C-section). But it was late for the baby. My baby boy was already dead by that time,” she said.

A week later, Hawa would soon discover something unusual happening to her.

“I could not hold my urine anymore. At the time, I was still admitted at the hospital. After examination, the doctor discovered that I have a fistula. He immediately referred me to the Liberia Fistula Project. Luckily for me, there was an ongoing fistula repair campaign in Phebe Bong County,” Hawa explained.

Hawa’s fistula was repaired spontaneously with Foley Catheter insertion due to the fresh and tiny nature of her fistula.

Now, both Hawa and Maima are among fistula survivors currently enrolled in the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program. Hawa is being trained in hairdressing while Maima is undertaking tailoring.

“I am happy that I am healed. After my graduation from the skills training program, I want to go back to school to complete high school. I only have a year left to be out of high school. I am currently in Grade 12,” Hawa said.

As for Maima, the training program has offered her a pathway to begin a new life.

“I feel good being here. I feel happy here because I know at the end of the training cycle, I will have some skills to live by. Since I have little academic training, I am taking this skills training seriously,” she said.

Since it was launched in 2008, the Liberia Fistula Project has surgically managed more than 1,500 women and girls with a third of them receiving psychosocial support and skills training.