

GENDER INCLUSION AT THE HEART OF A HEALTHCARE COMPANY

HEMEN MATERNAL AND
CHILDREN'S SPECIALTY
MEDICAL CENTER IN
ETHIOPIA



In partnership with the
Government of Norway





PROJECT LOCATION

Ethiopia



CLIENT

Hemen Maternal and Children's Specialty Medical Center (Hemen) was founded in 2008 by four female physicians to offer high-quality women's reproductive and children's healthcare services in Ethiopia. Hemen is one of the largest specialty women's healthcare providers in Addis Ababa. In 2021, Hemen employed about 150 permanent staff and served 95,000 patients.



IFC'S ROLE

Hemen is a member of IFC's Women's Leadership in Private Health Global Working Group, an initiative within IFC's Global Health Platform. As part of Hemen's commitments to the Working Group, in 2021 IFC conducted a Cor-

porate Gender and Inclusion Assessment and Action Plan to identify and address operational gaps influenced by gender dynamics.



OPPORTUNITY

Better capture the women's healthcare market by strengthening the value proposition and market differentiator of *Care for women by women*.



IMPACT

Between 2021 and 2022, Hemen built an architecture of gender-inclusive policies and practices. Its management introduced a new gender policy, established a Gender Policy Committee, adjusted job descriptions and salary scales, re-assessed its performance evaluations and promotions processes, and delivered training on safe and respectful workplaces to all staff.

From September 2020 to December 2021, IFC's Women's Employment Program led the [Women's Leadership in Private Healthcare Global Working Group](#) to strengthen women's leadership roles in the healthcare sector. The working group brought together 17 leading healthcare organizations in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia to identify and address gender barriers in this sector.

We acknowledge and appreciate the generous support provided by the Government of Norway, which made these advisory initiatives possible on women's employment.

HEALTHCARE FOR WOMEN, BY WOMEN

In 2008, four trailblazing women had the vision to contribute to women and children's well-being by providing high-level medical care in Ethiopia. Hemen Maternal and Children's Specialty Medical Center (Hemen) was co-founded by Dr. Zufan Lakew, a senior OB-GYN specialist and the first woman Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Addis Ababa University; Dr. Ambaye W/Michael and Dr. Mulu Muletta, senior OB-GYN specialists and world-known fistula surgeons; and Dr. Adanech Belay, senior OB-GYN specialist.

It was not an easy endeavor. Launching a medical practice comprised primarily of women doctors for the benefit of women patients was rare in Ethiopia, particularly in a country where only 18 percent¹ of all physicians are women.

In 14 years, Hemen expanded into a four-story full-service medical center equipped to accommodate 50 in-patients and more than 200 out-patients at any given time.

As a women-led healthcare provider of which close to 80 percent of the workforce is female, the company's gender profile is a unique differentiator that attracts patients and employees. Hemen has earned a reputation in the market for providing quality care, attracting a diverse clientele of local and foreign nationals.



IFC'S GENDER-SMART BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

The International Finance Corporation's (IFC's) [Women's Employment Program](#) provides gender-smart business solutions to IFC clients in Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services such as Health and Education. Through the program, IFC partners with private sector businesses globally to assess their practices on gender inclusion and advise them on advancing women's employment in their workplace.

IFC'S CORPORATE GENDER AND INCLUSION ASSESSMENT

As a Women's Leadership in Private Healthcare Global Working Group member, Hemen partnered with IFC in 2021 to conduct a Corporate Gender and Inclusion Assessment to gain insights into how workforce composition and gender dynamics impacted its operations. The diagnostic used IFC's quantitative and qualitative tools to analyze Hemen's employment and financial data, Human Resources policies, workforce composition, career progression, and worker remuneration and operations.

IFC conducted interviews with the management team to grasp the company's strategy and operations, as well as focus group discussions with female and male doctors, nurses, and administrative staff to understand their experience as Hemen employees. IFC also conducted a literature review on the country and social context and corporate legal requirements.

The diagnostic provided Hemen with a framework for developing a comprehensive gender and inclusion strategy. By creating policies that embed the company's core values, Hemen can continue attracting highly skilled talent of all genders, position the company regionally, and fulfill its mission.

"We have proven that exemplary women in leadership can successfully lead a quality institution. The IFC diagnostic helped us to identify strengths and weaknesses and will help us to institutionalize our gender values in our company values."

Dr. Zufan Lakew
Co-founder and CEO, Hemen

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVING GENDER-INCLUSION

Care for women by women is a market differentiator for Hemen, considering the demand for female doctors in the male-dominated field of reproductive and women's health. The company's culture, support for professional women, high quality care, and leadership style were cited as an incentive for patients and the main reasons employees are proud to work in this hospital.

During the diagnostic, IFC identified the need to institutionalize and formalize gender inclusion practices in the company to ensure the consistency and sustainability of gender equality as the market differentiator for Hemen's business. "The diagnostics showed us that concepts we believed were implemented in our center were not institutionalized," said Dr. Lakew.

The assessment found that almost 80 percent of Hemen's workforce are women, including an all-female

Board of Directors. Yet, the data showed a tendency that men were more likely to be hired at greater levels of responsibility. Moreover, while the company has a salary scale and pay equity is required by law, data revealed the existence of a gender pay gap, and there are no equal compensation policy to mitigate inconsistencies.

In 2020, despite the acute impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hemen's employee turnover was low (11 percent), but the lack of practices to ensure career progression and succession planning affected employee engagement. According to the analysis, high performance did not necessarily align with promotion opportunities. Staff interviews revealed that employees, particularly physicians, desired formal training, mentoring, or sponsorship programs. During the assessment period, men were twice as likely as women to leave the company. The reasons cited included better salaries and professional development opportunities. For women, although Hemen offers some flexible-work options, the main challenge was maintaining a work-life balance.

Another matter affecting employee retention was disrespectful behavior and aggression from patients, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The diagnostic found that Hemen did not have policies or training in place to prevent or address sexual harassment and ensure workplace safety, which could impact productivity and employee satisfaction.

Based on the assessment findings, IFC delivered a customized Gender Action Plan to help Hemen align its operations to its core values and continue to attract and retain top talent.



INTEGRATING RECOMMENDATIONS INTO WORKPLACE POLICIES

As part of the Gender Action Plan, IFC proposed 13 recommendations to enhance employee career development and staff retention, increase employee engagement, and create safe (and respectful) workplace policies. During 2021 and 2022, Hemen's Board and CEO took swift action to integrate them into their operational framework:

1. Creating a Gender Policy

Hemen developed a comprehensive Gender Policy to ensure its core mission and values are permanent. The Gender Policy was shared with all staff and management and incorporated into the company Human Resources Manual.

2. Ensuring Equal Pay

Hemen benchmarked pay scales at private and public institutions with comparable services and revised its salary scale to make it more competitive. To align with the market, Hemen also revised job descriptions and grades for different levels of responsibility. In January 2022, they announced new salary scales and remuneration structures. Employees were reclassified and their salaries adjusted

3. Talent retention: Performance evaluations and promotions

In December 2021, Hemen revised its performance evaluation tool to make it more robust, transparent, and objective. Now, employees are evaluated twice a

year to assess their performance, and new hires are assessed after two and after six months into the job.

4. Establishing Gender Leadership Targets

Hemen established gender targets for critical positions. In the next five to ten years, the organization intends to maintain targets of at least 50 percent of women in all leadership, including the Board, senior, and middle management positions. In the year after IFC's Corporate Gender and Inclusion Assessment, Hemen created new managerial positions to support their growing business that are held by women.

5. Work-life integration

Fostering a supportive work-life balance, Hemen implemented flexible work schedules and leave options to empower employees with the autonomy to manage their time off effectively.

6. Respectful Workplace

Internally, Hemen set up a Gender Committee to address workplace incidents and continues building safe and respectful workplace awareness through regular training, ensuring employees are aware of their rights and internal grievance mechanisms.

Hemen established an administrative office to ensure a respectful work environment for its staff. They installed signs in public areas advising patients about Hemen's zero-tolerance policy towards violence and harassment, and patients also received forms about their rights and responsibilities.

"The training made us aware of stereotypes and opportunities. It helped to identify internal feelings we did not know we had and how to avoid this. I have been training my colleagues too."

Kidist Bunde

Chief Nurse and Head of Clinical Services, Hemen

7. Human Resources Data

Since the assessment, the company launched an effort to collect and track gender-disaggregated data to analyze trends and design new policies to address employees' needs, as well as the potential costs associated with turnover and absenteeism.

8. Gender Sensitization Training

Hemen conducted gender sensitization and unconscious bias training for more than 25 female and male managers, team leaders of clinical departments, and administrators.



HEMEN'S WAY FORWARD

IFC's Corporate Gender and Inclusion Assessment provided Hemen with evidence-based insights to institutionalize gender-inclusive practices and policies. At the same time, the Women's Leadership in Private Healthcare Global Working Group connected the company to a community of practice to address gender gaps in the sector. Since then, Hemen has actively implemented several strategies from its Gender Action Plan and publicly declared its commitment to creating inclusive workplaces and ensuring

the well-being of its employees, positioning the business as a pioneer in their region.

For Hemen, it is critical to ensure that gender inclusion remains a competitive advantage to foster patient loyalty, make employees feel valued, and enhance overall business performance. "We have proven that having exemplary women in leadership can successfully lead a quality institution. IFC's assessment helped us to identify strengths and weaknesses and will help us to institutionalize our gender values in our company values," explained Dr. Lakew.

ENDNOTES

- 1. World Health Organization. "A Universal Truth: No Health without a Workforce". November 2014. https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/hrh_universal_truth
- 2. Turnover Rate = 100 times the (Turnover/Average Number of Employees in the Reporting Period).

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