Private sector collaboration

Marie Stopes International is working in innovative ways with the private sector to connect some of the most under-served people with vital sexual and reproductive health services.

- One in four married women in Ethiopia has an unmet need for family planning.
- To help meet that need, MSI Ethiopia has a network of 31 centres offering sexual and reproductive health services in Ethiopia.
- MSI Ethiopia also collaborates with more than 500 private healthcare providers – as well as private companies and medical colleges – to reach under-served people.

What is social franchising?
A social franchise encompasses a network of private health practitioners linked through contracts to provide socially beneficial services under a common brand. It is one of the innovative ways that we leverage the reach of private health providers for the delivery of family planning and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.

A large proportion of people in developing countries use private healthcare providers for most of their health needs, especially people in remote regions or young patients that prefer the privacy that many of the private clinics offer. Social franchising is a mechanism to engage private providers and complement the state run clinics in the delivery of SRH services to attain universal access to family planning.

About Marie Stopes International Ethiopia
Marie Stopes International’s programme in Ethiopia has been providing a range of sexual and reproductive healthcare for more than 20 years.

Today, we provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services through a network of 31 centres. These facilities offer a wide range of services including: general medical consultation; comprehensive family planning; pre- and post-natal care; child health checks; voluntary counselling and testing on HIV; and screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infection and cervical cancer.

We collaborate with more than 500 private healthcare providers through our BlueStar social franchise network to deliver quality sexual and reproductive healthcare. We also collaborate with the private sector in other innovative ways to help meet the unmet need for family planning services across the country – for example, through work-place programmes and partnerships with private medical colleges – to deliver essential sexual and reproductive health information and services to those who need them.

We provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services through a network of 31 centres.
Working with existing providers

Our social franchise network works in much the same way as a commercial franchising operation. Franchisees – clinics, midwives and pharmacies – pay a small fee to join the network.

They receive extensive capacity building trainings on a range of sexual and reproductive health services, infection prevention, counselling, and, importantly, how to put their clients’ needs at the heart of what they do.

Once they have completed the initial training and meet the expected quality standards, they are provided with branded signage and materials, usually bearing the logo of the BlueStar network. We also provide them with affordable high quality medicines and other products, which they sell to clients using an agreed pricing structure.

Ensuring quality

As part of the franchise agreement, providers must commit to our franchising membership standards, including regular quality assurance monitoring and reporting. We closely monitor the quality of their services to make sure they meet MSI’s international standards.

Many franchisees already offer a range of short term family planning services before joining the network. We work with them to make sure clients have a wider choice of family planning options, including long-acting methods of contraception, as well as access to post-abortion care and safe abortion services, where permitted.

Rolling out workplace partnerships

In June 2012, we rolled out a workplace programme in partnership with Maranque Flower plc, which is located 40 km south of Adama town. The farm employs around 1,000 daily labourers, the majority of whom are migrants from the surrounding rural areas. 88% of the workers are women of reproductive age. Most of them have very little knowledge of sexual and reproductive health services, as well as a low level of literacy and income.

Since launching the workplace programme, our outreach teams have delivered family planning services to over 400 female workers at Maranque. MSI Ethiopia has also run 30 sensitisation sessions for the workforce and members of the local community, and trained 19 peer educators and two heathcare providers who are employed at Maranque’s own clinic.

As a result of the successful pilot project, we have just invited Maranque’s health facility to join the BlueStar Health Network. We have developed a brand called “Fit-For-Work” to promote the workplace programme and to encourage other factories, such as flower plantations or industrial estates with large workforces to follow suit.

Collaborating with private medical colleges

MSI Ethiopia is collaborating with private medical colleges to improve access to sexual and reproductive health information and services through the private sector. In 2012, the team identified three private colleges in Addis Ababa to implement the “Fit for Learning” pilot project.

The colleges are supported by guest lecturers from public universities. Students receive training in practical skills to deliver quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to young people and under-served populations after they graduate. So far, 62 students have been attached to short term internships at our network of private providers, and many more are taking part in our “SRH Clubs”.

Through the initiative, we will continue to support the private medical colleges to mainstream sexual and reproductive healthcare as part of their education system. We are also using the partnership to promote self-reported health seeking behaviour among medical students out of college.