



PANEL 7 HOPE AND HEALING

The social support of other fistula survivors is healing.

After making a typically long journey for treatment, many women meet other fistula survivors for the first time. Realizing that other women suffer from the same problem is life changing; they are not alone.

Joining a fistula survivor support group after treatment is one way to continue emotional healing, end isolation, and find solidarity with other women. All of the women participating in Quilts for Empowerment belong to a support group that meet monthly.

ABOUT THIS EXHIBIT

“Let Us Tell You About Fistula” was designed and created by fistula survivors in Kenya. Fistula is a devastating injury that leaves women incontinent, socially stigmatized, and in great suffering. The exhibit’s quilt panels vividly show the causes of fistula, the emotional and physical suffering it creates, and the joy of healing.

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN



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LET US TELL YOU ABOUT FISTULA



Where there was once silence, stigmatization and suffering, there is now a voice. Quilts for Empowerment fistula survivors are telling their stories at last through the art of quilting.

The women the world forgot are beckoning us to come closer so we may know them at last.



PANEL 1 IN LABOR FOR DAYS

This woman has been in labor for days.

Long labors are the leading cause of obstetric fistulas, which result in uncontrolled leaking of urine and/or stool from the birth canal.

Grinding poverty, the low status of women, malnutrition, childhood marriage, and lack of access to emergency maternity care all contribute to long labors.



PANEL 2 THE DEATH OF AN INFANT

This woman is grieving the death of her newborn infant.

Over 90% of infants born to mothers with obstetric fistulas are stillborn or die shortly after birth. The infants are put in a cardboard box and buried without the mother's presence. She may never know where her infant is buried. Mothers are often considered "hexed" for having a dead infant and are shunned from their families and villages.



PANEL 3 ATTEMPTED RAPE

This girl is fighting off an attacker while fetching water at the river.

Other causes of fistula that result in leaking urine and/or stool, are sexual assault and gynecological surgery.

Sexual assault at any age, from very young girls to older women, can result in a fistula. Unskillful gynecological surgeries, such as hysterectomies and cesarean sections, can also cause fistulas. The surgical repair is basically the same for all causes of fistula.



PANEL 4 EMOTIONAL SUFFERING

This woman is an outcast.

All fistula survivors experience severe emotional suffering because of the isolation and shame caused by their leaking. Husbands abandon them, they can't go to market or church, and most are forced to live alone. Older women are often left with children to support without any source of income.



PANEL 5 PHYSICAL SUFFERING

This woman is experiencing physical suffering because of leaking urine.

The constant leaking of urine and/or stool is an unending source of physical distress as few women can afford, or even have access to, feminine hygiene products. Rags may help a little but won't stop the leaking. Soap and Vaseline are the treasured products used to prevent and treat skin irritation. Some women develop foot drop and permanent nerve damage as a result of their fistulas.



PANEL 6 FISTULA IS TREATABLE

Everyone needs to know that fistula can be treated.

A primary reason over one million women worldwide suffer from fistula is because they do not know that surgical treatment is an option. Fistula Foundation, Quilts for Empowerment, and many other organizations have outreach campaigns to educate the public, identify survivors, and facilitate referrals for treatment.