This is a problem Gumuz girl’s and women have to face every now and then in the Metekel zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State.

**Case 1:** Wudu is a 14 year old girl who suffered from early marriage and fistula. She was married at the age of 13 and developed fistula at delivery. Her life is spared after seven days of painful labor delivering a dead baby. But unable to control her urine and excreta her husband sent her back to her family. Her husband insisted for a replacement and her younger sister is offered to spare the family from embracement and possible abduction.

A family carries manifold consequences as a result of traditional practices. In Wudu’s case she was married at an adolescent age too young to know the responsibilities attached to marriage. Her body was not ready either. And now, her youngest sister and the whole family have to suffer again.

**Case 2:** Belaynesh suffered from fistula for 4 years. Her age is about 23. She became pregnant 4 times under fistula and aborted 4 times. She wouldn’t know what to do and started to alienate herself from social activities staying back at festivities and funerals.

**Case 3:** Yadem is about the same age to Belaynesh. She has been a victim of fistula for 7 years. Similar to Belaynesh, Yadem couldn’t hold several pregnancies. Her husband unhappy with the situation brought another wife on top of her. He constructed a separate hut and literally damped her. Unable to help herself and ignorant to find out the cause, she has been suffering for years wondering why this has happened to her.

**Case 4:** Gebeyanesh has three children and became fistula on her 4th delivery. She is a traditional health practitioner and works with MLWDO as a community advocate. At meetings and training programs with other community advocates she used to sit at the back. Her social activity was significantly reduced. To no avail, she tried to treat herself with all possibilities she knows. Too shy, she approached our staff for assistance 10 years after the incident wanting to know if there is a cure anyway.

With the help of MLWDO, 3 of them are at the fistula hospital since October 2, 2006 while Gebeyanesh was treated last year. To add to the pain though, Gebeyanesh is now raped and pregnant about a year after her treatment. Elders have settled the issue traditionally where 7 goats are provided as compensation. More sad story to the nightmare, 6 of the goats paid for arbitration leaving Gebeyanesh with one goat. This is no match at all to the crime. She is denouncing the practice worried about her health and what comes next. She was happy with her life after treated with fistula and no traditional compensation can bring her health back.

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1 Gebeyanesh’s photo not attached.
The message is getting across to the community that fistula can be cured after treating some patients and more fistula cases are coming forward. About 20 fistula patients are known to us and for obvious reasons many more will be everywhere in our zone. Fistula operation is free, thanks to Dr. Catherine Hamlin, but we are short handed to transport them back and forth to the fistula hospital. MLWDO now is trying hard to alleviate Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) and a number of outstanding achievements are recorded. But our effort alone is not enough. Early marriage and abduction are illegal and more fistula cases are coming forward. About 20 fistula patients are known to us and for obvious changes.

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