

## Profile:

Dr. Kunuz Abdella  
Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon secondee  
Ministry of Health, Ethiopia

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Since 2015, Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon has successfully employed a unique strategy for ensuring coordination and synergy with Ministries of Health in the countries where our partnership operates: in addition to supplying funds, technical expertise, equipment and supplies, and services, the partnership has monetarily supported embedding non-governmental cancer experts within ministries' staff in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia. Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon will also use this strategy as it expands operations to other countries.

Dr. Kunuz Abdella is a Technical Advisor for the Prevention and Control of Cancer in the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, and a Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon secondee, thanks to support from Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon partners GlaxoSmithKline and the Mathiwos Wondu-YeEthiopia Cancer Society. His achievements in this embedded position illustrate the benefits of secondments to both the government and a sponsoring NGO that shares the government's priorities. With Dr. Abdella's input, Ethiopia has instituted and begun implementing an ambitious National Cancer Control Plan (NCCP), and women's cancers have become an increasing priority at the highest levels.

He was brought into the Ministry specifically to lead the development of the country's first NCCP. The NCCP was a priority at the highest levels of the Ethiopian government, and Dr. Abdella's efforts had the support of the Minister of Health and Ethiopia's First Lady, but it was a new priority, and the ministry welcomed his expertise as they did not have cancer experts on staff. "I'm happy that the country has its first well-defined, costed, national plan of action for cancer," he said in January 2017. "That is a very remarkable breakthrough, as far as I'm concerned."

He commended Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon for starting its work in Ethiopia by supporting the NCCP's development, because the plan has since facilitated all the government's efforts against cancer. He also had praise for Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon's approach of scaling up women's cancer activities in the context of the existing health systems in the country. "Trying to strengthen existing systems is a very sustainable approach," he said, and his own position within the Ministry is an example of Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon's commitment to it. He described the PRRR model as "extremely commendable" because it is not creating parallel or "vertical" programs that only offer very limited, health-issue-specific services.



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A Global Partnership Fighting Women's Cancers

Dr. Abdella is one of many external technical experts working on a range of health issues in the Ministry of Health who are sponsored by various NGO partners. These secondees are requested by the Ministry, which takes full advantage of their presence to back up the efforts of the ministry staff and fill any gaps in expertise. Among the ministry staff, the secondees “are highly respected, and their need is well-recognized,” according to Dr. Abdella. The ministry representatives “value this position and rely on you. They listen to you, and try to benefit from your expertise.”

An advantage of being a secondee is that one may avoid spending time on some mundane, routine activities, because “the ministry wants to get something more out of you,” Dr. Abdella explained. “They keep you for the very tough jobs and I really like that.”

When he began the secondment, neither he nor Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon nor the Ministry recognized the extent to which all partners would rely on him for implementation of the NCCP following its completion in 2015. Since then, he has spearheaded the implementation of multisectoral cancer-control activities outlined in the NCCP, including those undertaken by Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon and its partners. He plays a pivotal role in sensitization, resource mobilization, communication, program management, implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of the NCCP. “The role will continue to change,” he noted.

His activities on the job are determined by the priorities of the ministry leaders, and for any organization seeking to embed staff within a ministry using this model, he emphasized the importance of flexibility in the type of assistance provided. Organizations like Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon must listen to the ministry’s stated needs, and adjust to its changing priorities. “We started with a particular issue – cervical cancer – and slowly moved toward addressing the national fight against cancer broadly and considering enabling factors like strategy, partnership, and coordination,” he said. “This is a crucial lesson for anyone doing technical assistance: flexibility and aligning as you go are important.”

Dr. Abdella’s role involves connecting cancer control priorities to other government priorities in logical ways, which is challenging. He counsels the Ministry to recognize that their ambitious goals for cancer control must be approached step-wise; it is not possible to change systems and processes all at once. He provides the ministry staff with the information to make decisions based on need, evidence, and best practices.

Dr. Abdella feels the challenges of his position are far outweighed by the advantages. He appreciates the opportunity afforded by his secondment to incorporate global innovations and standards into Ethiopia’s cancer control efforts (adapted to Ethiopia’s context). He is also grateful for the commitment of the Ministry of Health’s leadership to the issue of cancer control. “They identified this priority themselves, so my efforts to advise on the best way forward are well-received,” he explained. Thanks to what he described as a conducive political and policy environment for cancer control efforts, he feels comfortable “that everything is moving as it should be.”