

SMILE TRAIN AFRICA QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

January - March 2025

Smile Train provides free cleft surgeries and comprehensive cleft care across 42 countries in Africa, with 230+ active partners and 390+ treatment centres. Since 2002, Smile Train's local medical partners have provided more than 170,000 life-changing cleft surgeries across the continent.

Our Comprehensive Cleft Care (CCC) services include psychosocial support, nutrition, surgery, speech therapy, orthodontics, ENT and dental care.

We elevate local medical capacity, raising the safety and quality of surgical and anaesthesia care by offering curriculum-based educational scholarship programs.

Smile Train leverages strategic and innovative partnerships at the local and international level to anchor advocacy, the capacity of our partners and programs to strengthen surgical systems, and research infrastructure on global health priorities and policies.

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SMILE TRAIN AT THE WEST AFRICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS CONFERENCE.

From February 16-20, Smile Train participated in the 65th Annual Conference of the West African College of Surgeons (WACS) in Bamako, Mali. This event showcased our commitment to advancing cleft care in Africa through various impactful activities.

Symposium Highlights

A Smile Train Symposium, chaired by Prof. Bernard Jiburum and co-chaired by Prof. Raphiou Diallo, featured panels on strengthening cleft care interlinkages and multi-disciplinary approaches to cleft management. Smile Train moderators Mrs. Nkeiruka "NK" Obi, Vice President and Regional Director for Africa, and Dr. Nicole Bouba, Program Director for West and Central Africa, led discussions with experts from across the continent.

Simulare Medical Training

Led by Drs. Solomon Obiri, Oben Sammy, and Allaye Garango, the Simulare Medical workshop provided high-quality surgical education and training on some of the most advanced cleft surgery training tools available today.



Graduation of Scholars

Scholar Award

Dr. Manuella Timo Talla from Cameroon was honored as Smile Train's Cleft Surgery Scholar of the Year! Her dedication to improving cleft care is inspiring.

We celebrated the graduation of 21 Smile Train Scholars, including:

WACS Post Fellowship in Cleft Care:

- Dr. Bardi Martins, Nigeria
- Dr. Manuella T. Talla, Cameroon
- Dr. Bilyaminu I. Liman, Nigeria
- Dr. Benoi Kamate, Mali
- Dr. Chima C. Ibeneme, Nigeria
- Dr. Janet Pereko, Ghana
- Dr. Isaac S. Chukwu, Nigeria
- Dr. Ndjian N. Kalki, Chad
- Dr. Vicky M. Sasapu, DR-Congo
- Dr. Tah Bi Boli, Ivory Coast
- Dr. Moradeke O. Alonge, Nigeria
- Dr. Kouame S. Agbara, Ivory Coast
- Dr. Rosetta Archibong, Nigeria
- Dr. Bertin Allatombaye, Chad
- Dr. Ugochukwu Ngozi Nkeiru, Nigeria

Certificate in Cleft Anesthesia:

- Dr. Hajara A. Galadima, Nigeria

Diploma in Cleft Care:

- Dr. Vladmir A. Blata, Guinea-Bissau
- Dr. Stella N. Ngwu, Nigeria
- Dr. Lamega Bembo, Chad
- Dr. Junior Gbelesso, Central African Republic
- Dr. Mumbere M. Olivier, DR-Congo

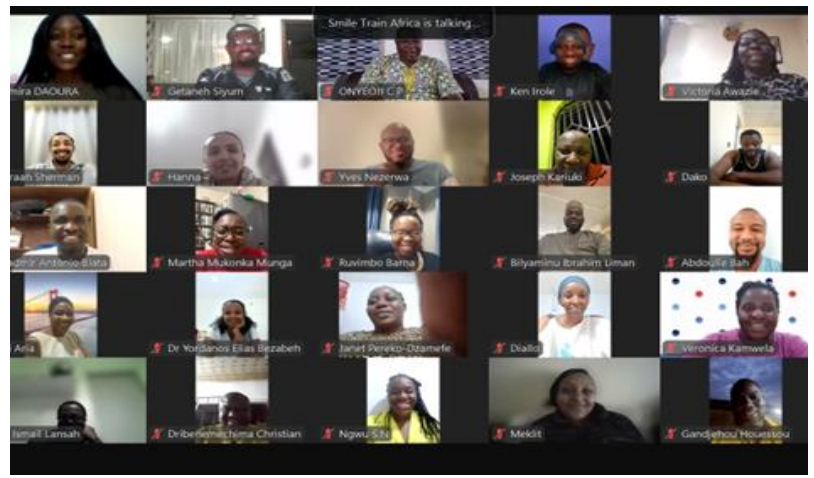


Partner Visits

NK Obi and her team had the fulfilling experience of witnessing firsthand the transformative impact our dedicated partners in Bamako — Sourire Ensemble, ONG Horizon Vert, and Association Humanitaire Sos Face Mali (Ahussoma) — make in patients' lives every day.

Smile Train and WACS

Since 2019, Smile Train and WACS have collaborated to enhance education and training for cleft surgeons in the West Africa region. Smile Train is also preparing to open Africa's first Cleft Leadership Center, in Ghana, which will leverage the latest technology to enhance education and training for medical professionals in the cleft ecosystem across all of Africa.



INAUGURAL SMILE TRAIN AFRICA ALUMNI NETWORK MEETING

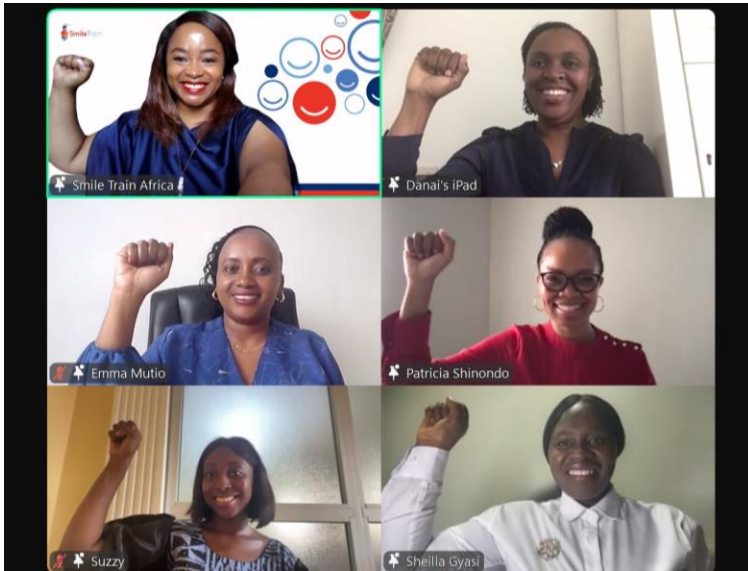
On January 18, 2025, Smile Train Africa hosted the inaugural Smile Train Africa Alumni Network (STAAN) meeting, bringing together an incredible community of cleft professionals dedicated to transforming lives across the continent.

The meeting saw an impressive turnout of 90 participants, all eager to connect with fellow alumni and expand our network of passionate Smile Makers. Attendees shared their insights and stories and discussed ways to strengthen and raise awareness of the cleft programs in their countries and build more resilient health systems.

Participants emphasized the need for e-learning opportunities, peer-to-peer mentorship, and multimedia awareness campaigns to enhance cleft care. They also highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary education, training, infrastructure improvement, and cleft research to support their work and improve patient outcomes.

STAAN was born from Smile Train-supported scholarships with reputable institutions such as the West African College of Surgeons (WACS); the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA); the College of Anesthesiologists of East Central and Southern Africa (CANECSA); Ecole Nationale des Auxiliaires Médicaux de Lomé (ENAM); and the University of Nairobi (UoN).

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all participants for their engagement and to our partner institutions for their unwavering support in nurturing a skilled cleft surgical workforce across Africa.



CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025 WITH SMILE TRAIN

On **Friday, March 12, 2025**, Smile Train Africa hosted a one-hour Facebook Live session titled "Transforming Cleft Care in Africa: A Collaborative Approach to Surgery, Nutrition, and Community Support." The event was hosted by Smile Train's Senior Manager, PR and Communications for Africa, Emily Manjeru, and featured a distinguished panel of experts:

- Dr. Patricia Shinondo**, Pediatric Surgeon and Vice-Chairperson of Women in Surgery Africa (WiSA), Zambia
- Ms. Sheilla Gyasi**, Principal Nursing Officer, Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Ghana
- Suzy Ann**, Nutritionist, WECCARE Foundation, Cameroon
- Danai Magandi**, NGO Founder and Psychosocial Advocate, Zimbabwe
- Dr. Emma Mutio**, Pediatric Anesthesiologist and Treasurer of the Pan African Association of Cleft Lip and Palate (PAACLIP), Kenya

The panel discussed the barriers women in healthcare can overcome, the support cleft-affected families need, and how collaboration within cleft teams can improve holistic treatment outcomes, especially for children.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this insightful discussion and supported our work creating smiles and changing lives.

[Catch the chat here](#)

IWD SPOTLIGHT: DR. OTI NIMI ARIA FROM NIGERIA

This International Women's Day, Smile Train spotlighted Dr. Oti Nimi Aria, a Smile Train scholar and partner surgeon who has devoted her life to treating children with clefts in Nigeria. Through her unwavering commitment and the support of Smile Train, she is transforming lives by providing free surgeries and care.

From breaking barriers in medicine to supporting mothers and children, Dr. Oti's message is clear: No goal is too big, and gender should never stand in the way of your dreams. We deeply appreciate Dr. Oti and other female health professionals for their steadfast dedication and transformative impact. Smile Train remains committed to providing the education and training that are empowering more women to make a difference through healthcare than ever before.

[Read More](#)



ADVOCATING FOR SAFE SURGERY AND ANESTHESIA

Nkeiruka Obi attended the 74th Health Ministers Conference (HMC) of the East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC), which took place from February 10-12, 2025, at the Umodzi Park Hotel in Lilongwe, Malawi. The conference theme was "Looking Ahead Post the Golden Jubilee."

This platform created an opportunity for regional dialogue, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices, emphasizing advancing universal health coverage, strengthening health systems, promoting health equity, and enhancing resilience to future health challenges.

Smile Train joined the Pan African Surgical Healthcare Forum (PASHeF) in 2023 to support African governments' efforts to build surgical capacity. Our partnership has already contributed to strengthening surgical systems and research infrastructure on global health priorities and policy.



NURSING CARE SAVES LIVES TRAINING IN TANZANIA AND ZIMBABWE

From February 10 – 12, 2025, Smile Train conducted the Nursing Care Saves Lives (NCSL) training at Kahama District Hospital, Tanzania. A total of 15 dedicated participants attended, gaining invaluable skills for providing high-quality nursing care to children undergoing cleft surgery. Participants expressed their gratitude for the training and hoped for more sessions in the future.

Smile Train also successfully delivered the NCSL training at Mazowe, Harare, Zimbabwe, from February 17 – 19, 2025. Fifteen dedicated nurses from 12 government hospitals participated, enhancing their skills as part of the National Surgical Obstetric and Anaesthesia Strategy (NSOAS) for Zimbabwe. This initiative is crucial for building capacity in provincial hospitals to provide essential surgical, obstetric, and anesthesia services. Smile Train is supporting the NSOAS strategy through three key courses:

Nursing Care Saves Lives

SAFE Paediatrics

BLS PALS

Recognizing the key role nurses play in patient care and safety, Smile Train developed the NCSL curriculum to equip them with the essential skills they need to ensure the best patient outcomes.





SMILE TRAIN AND LIFEBOX HOST FIRST-EVER CAPNOGRAPHY TRAININGS IN NIGERIA AND MADAGASCAR

Smile Train and Lifebox recently achieved a significant milestone by organizing the first-ever capnography trainings in Nigeria and Madagascar. These initiatives are part of their ongoing efforts to enhance anesthesia safety and improve surgical outcomes in these regions.

In Nigeria, the trainings were held from February 27-28, 2025, across three states: Abuja, Kano, and Owerri. Medical and nurse anesthetists from Smile Train partner hospitals left equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to use the capnography device, ensuring patient safety during surgery. The new Smile Train-Lifebox Capnograph, known for its affordability, user-friendliness, and durability, addresses a major gap in anesthesia safety.

On March 18 in Madagascar, Smile Train and Lifebox hosted the first-ever capnography training in Antananarivo. Led by Dr. Hery Randrianirina and Dr. Mamitiana Andrianirina, 12 participants embraced the benefits of capnography, integrating this vital device into their daily practice. All Smile Train treatment partners in Madagascar received capnograph donations, ensuring widespread access to this lifesaving technology.

These efforts are part of our Smile Train-Lifebox Safe Surgery and Anesthesia Initiative, a multi-year strategic partnership aimed at elevating the quality and safety of cleft and pediatric surgery worldwide. Through innovations and training, the initiative is already strengthening surgical systems globally.

Dr. Maryrose Osazuwa, a pediatric anesthetist at National Hospital Abuja, expressed her gratitude: *"I want to say a big thank you to Smile Train and Lifebox for all that they are doing. They are making a big difference — they are making anesthesia safer, they are saving lives, and they are training anesthesia providers along the way. All these lead to better, safer anesthesia, which we all need."*



SPECIALIZED NUTRITION TRAINING IN MADAGASCAR

Smile Train recently organized a specialized nutrition training for cleft care professionals in Antananarivo, Madagascar. The training, facilitated by Barbara Delage, Smile Train's Director of Global Nutrition Programs, took place from February 24 to 28, 2025.

This comprehensive training brought together 10 participants from three different treatment centers to explore strategies for optimizing breastfeeding for infants with clefts. The sessions covered alternatives to maternal milk and the introduction of appropriate food choices for children post-surgery to ensure proper nutritional support for their recovery and growth.

Designed to enhance both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, the training equipped healthcare professionals, including nutritionists, surgeons, and nurses, with evidence-based approaches to addressing feeding challenges in children with clefts. Through expert guidance and interactive discussions, participants gained valuable insights into improving infant nutrition and overall well-being.

According to *A Generation Lost: The Devastating Effect of Malnutrition on Children with Clefts*, a report published by Smile Train in 2022, children with clefts under the age of five are more than twice as likely to be malnourished as other children. As of 2020, nearly 200,000 children with clefts were malnourished, and most of them live in low- and middle-income countries.





SMILE TRAIN HONORED BY THE ETHIOPIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH

We are thrilled to announce that Smile Train received recognition from the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health during National Birth Defect Week from March 3-9, 2025, for our significant contribution to and effective coordination of cleft treatment activities. That whole week, we actively engaged in creating awareness, advocating for inclusive care, and supporting cleft treatment. Our team, led by Senior Program Manager for East Africa Getaneh Siyum, participated in two separate panels: one that he moderated during the opening ceremony, and the other a media discussion broadcast on national television.

As a member of the National Core Team, Smile Train ensured comprehensive care and support for patients with clefts, emphasizing prevention, care, and inclusion.

Since 2007, Smile Train has supported 38,000+ cleft surgeries at more than 20 healthcare partners in Ethiopia, making free surgery and other comprehensive cleft care possible for those in need in every corner of the country.



PROF. AZEEZ BUTALI, RECEIVES THE PRESTIGIOUS US PRESIDENTIAL PECASE AWARD.

Congratulations to our amazing Smile Train partner Prof. Azeez Butali, who received the prestigious US Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE) in mid-January.

Prof. Butali's dedication to improving the lives of those with clefts is truly inspiring. We are incredibly proud to have him as a Smile Train's Research & Innovation Advisory Council (STRIAC) member and, most importantly, as a valued member of our Smile Train family.

Join us in celebrating his well-deserved award!



UNVEILING NEWLY REVAMPED PEDIATRIC THEATRE IN MAURITANIA AND ANGOLA

We are excited to announce that Smile Train has unveiled two new pediatric theatres in Mauritania and Angola.



On January 17, 2025 Smile Train and Kids Operating Room (KidsOR) opened doors to the newly refurbished dedicated paediatric operating room at the Hôpital Mère-Enfant in Nouakchott which will certainly improve the quality of life of the children and the teams who work there.

On February 21, 2025, another newly refurbished theatre was unveiled at Lubango Central Hospital (Hospital Central do Lubango) in Angola that will greatly expand the hospital's capacity to treat children with clefts.

Since its inception in 2020, Smile Train and KidsOR's collaboration has significantly strengthened surgical and anesthesia care in underserved areas. Together, we have refurbished over 30 theatres in 21 countries, reducing pre-operative anxiety and ensuring more positive surgical outcomes. In an effort to tackle the dual challenges of unsustainable power supply to theatres in Africa and their high greenhouse gas emissions, we are leveraging innovation to implement stand-alone solar battery support systems in pediatric operating rooms across Africa.

Through these efforts, we will continue to make a meaningful impact not only on the lives of children and their families, but the entire planet.



SMILE TRAIN'S ORAL HEALTH THROUGH PREVENTION (STOP) TOOLKIT

Healthy smiles start with good oral care! On March 20, World Oral Health Day, Smile Train unveiled a new toolkit meant to empower children with clefts to maintain strong, healthy smiles for life, because every smile deserves the best care! Download our [Smile Train Oral Health Through Prevention \(STOP\) Toolkit!](#)

At the launch event, we were also proud to feature [Dr. Omolola Orenuga](#) on oral healthcare as well as [Dr. Jean Bosco Lotonga](#), who shared about the need for quality oral health.

DID YOU KNOW?

Oral health challenges like misaligned teeth, gum issues, and an increased risk of cavities are more common in individuals with clefts

At Smile Train, we believe every child deserves access to the care they need for a healthy, confident smile.

Learn more about the steps we are taking to support life-changing oral health care for our cleft community. Together, we can transform lives one smile at a time

Oral Health

and its Impact on
Cleft-Affected People



Tooth Development

Teeth may develop improperly or be missing near the cleft site.



Gum Health Issues

Missalignment of the upper jaw affects bite and oral hygiene.



Cavities and Decay

Difficulty maintaining oral hygiene due to misalignment leads to higher risk for tooth decay.



MALI



The 2,600+ cleft surgeries Smile Train has sponsored in Mali since 2009 have not only touched thousands of lives, they've infused an extra \$27,812,752 USD into the local economy?

The credit largely goes to our partner doctors, who not only share our belief that every person has a right to free, safe, cleft care but live it with passion and commitment.

NIGERIA



The 40,000+ cleft surgeries Smile Train has sponsored in Nigeria since 2002 have not only touched thousands of lives, they've infused an extra \$993,735,134 USD into the local economy?

Together with our local partners, we are dedicated to providing cleft care for every Nigerian in need.